

## THE CORRIDOR OF CP SNOW

“If you don’t sell a book before Easter, I’ll leave you,” Martin’s wife called up the stairs.

How did it come to this? He dreamt once of a miraculous facility which enabled him to shower a voracious readership with fast-selling novels. But this old word processor held no literary genie. Having written a book which sold well, he’d been mortified by the rejection of his second which ‘needed major surgery’ (though they didn’t say where he should make the first incision). Now, to fill the winter days, he wrote short stories; they dragged him into Stygian depths of introspection — and no one wanted stories which lacked a happy ending.

“Nought out of ten again,” he muttered. “Never count your bloody chickens.”

He stared out of his attic workroom window. The view was not one to stimulate the imagination: unkempt turf and a decaying football stand. It was hard not to be negative in this environment. To convince Miranda that he was a real writer, Martin started work at nine. On this Monday, however, he was late. The cursor flashed. His story’s title appeared on the genie-less screen.

*The Corridor*, he had typed, *by Lewis Eliot*.

Days had passed since he scribbled the outline of this story. Its theme was ‘power corrupts’; it told of feuding politicians and was aimed at a left-wing magazine which liked his work, paid peanuts but came to the notice of influential people. Martin’s characters came alive in the early hours as he lay awake beside Miranda’s warm body. In his first book, he’d given his wife’s dark good looks to an adorable heroine; more recently, however, Miranda was the model for a cynical dictator: the Maggie Thatcher of a menacing regime. His latest characters had become increasingly abstract: disembodied voices from a dismal future.

But all weekend those voices had been drowned by Miranda’s complaints.

She thumped about downstairs on her half-term holiday, unused to household chores. A full-time teacher again, she left such things to Martin in term-time. That was the deal. He prided himself in completing them at top speed. Women, he’d once told her, are poor organisers. On Saturday he’d made the mistake of saying that it was her turn to do the cleaning. As soon as the words left his mouth he knew he’d lit a fuse. The explosion came at nine when the urge to work on his story was at its height. Miranda drew her husband into a bitter argument over money. He fled to the attic pursued by a fireball of abuse.

*I stopped the taxi in Street Seven. My wife and I had the habit of being obsessively punctual.*

Martin stared at the cursor which begged him to go on. Miranda repeated her threat from the landing. Moments later came the drone of the Dyson.

“Do you want coffee?” she shouted over it. She knew he hated his voices to be disturbed but it seemed that — as had happened several times in the past month — she’d thought twice about the implications of a divorce from a penniless man.

Martin stamped furiously from the room, attack being the best form of defence.

“How can I work with that racket going on?” he bawled. “I’ve a deadline to meet, for God’s sake.” Nevertheless, he went to the kitchen and made the coffee.

Argument resumed from where it left off. Miranda gulped down half her coffee as she prepared to go shopping. After the front door had slammed, Martin recovered by doing the crossword. An hour passed before he returned to the word processor.

For a second time he slumped at his desk staring at the rotting stadium, the cursor flashing in the corner of his eye. The house was silent but for the hiss of the radio.

It was his habit to set the alarm on his transistor so that the news came on at eleven: his usual coffee time. Unlike his wife, Martin was a methodical person — mechanical, a critic once wrote. After working on Sunday, he’d keyed in a vacant short-wave frequency: he didn’t want Miranda to think he spent the day listening to the radio. The alarm had activated while he was downstairs. When he reached out to press the off button, the cursor caught his eye again.

It had moved.

*Eliot stopped the taxi in Great North Street not Street Seven*, Martin read.

Had Miranda tampered with his word processor during the time he thought she was in the bathroom? What a childish way to vent her anger!

He deleted the line but the cursor didn’t stop when he released the key.

*You cannot be Lewis Eliot because I am*, it wrote.

Martin deleted the words but they reappeared in a flash.

The word processor had failed before. Gobbledegook was not uncommon. Sometimes in cold weather, the text froze. Once, Martin lost half a story. This fault, however, was different.

The cursor moved again.

*I am Charles Percy Snow. I based my fictional character Lewis Eliot upon myself. Many of my characters are based on real people. Why do you write in my name?*

No, Martin told himself, this isn't a supernatural experience. The author C.P.Snow died years ago and the dead can't contact the living; there's no such thing as a ghost nor is there a literary genie in this word processor. Extra-sensory perception isn't practicable even through the internet; what is possible, however, is the addition of hallucinogenic drugs to coffee — especially if the coffee comes from the staff room of a school targeted by dealers in Angel Dust. Yes, that was the answer: Snow's name had been dragged up from his subconscious — *The Corridor* was reminiscent of Snow's book title *The Corridors of Power*.

*C.P.SNOW IS DEAD*, he typed.

*That is the case*, the word processor agreed, *but we have established a corridor of communication. Who is 'we'?* Martin asked.

*My friend Ben Stromstein late of Monterey, California, a lady researcher from Girton, Cambridge and myself. Who are you?*

Martin keyed in his name and added the word 'Author'.

*A literary man: excellent*, Snow replied.

Martin re-read the exchanges in amazement. What had been in the coffee? Was Miranda at this moment dodging blissfully between cars on the ring road, high as a kite? The radio continued to hiss. Martin switched it off.

There was no addition to Snow's last remark. Martin typed in several questions but there was no response. He printed out the adulterated first page of his story, cleared the file and opened a new one then sat for a long time mulling over the phenomenon. The paper in his hand bore witness to it.

"A corridor of communication," he muttered.

The radio must have been the means. He switched it on and turned up the volume. The hiss was unmodulated.

*Ben asks what frequency you have.*

Drugs were responsible. There were precedents: *Kubla Khan* had been conceived by Coleridge under the influence of opium so why should there not be a short story by the imaginary Lewis Eliot? Martin decided to play this fantastic arcade game as if it were real life.

First, he must answer the question. He checked the frequency display of his radio, typed in '21405KHz' and queried why Ben couldn't ask for himself. The response filled the screen.

*Do not change the setting on your radio*, Snow warned, *we might lose you forever. I hope you are technically capable of conducting this experiment.*

*No problem*, Martin replied flippantly. *My radio is a Sony ICF 7600D. I can key in any frequency precisely. What is Ben on?* — meaning a drug. Martin smiled cockily to himself.

*A nearby frequency, otherwise he and I would not be in contact*, Snow replied drily. *Retune your set if you are sure you can get back to me.*

Several minutes passed before the name Benjamin J. Stromstein was repeated across the screen. Martin punched the air. This was fun.

*Sorry about the delay*, he typed, *you're very close to Snow.*

*There was no delay*, Ben replied. *Is he higher or lower?*

*Higher.*

*That figures*, Ben wrote. *I died three hours before Chuck on July First 1980 so I figure that less than a day's worth of us can communicate. There's a whole lot of noise here — all languages. Must have been a disaster that day — earthquake maybe. If Chuck wasn't so tough we'd never have hacked it. He says it takes him back to his student days. Did you know he was a spectroscopist?*

*Were you a scientist too?* Martin keyed in.

*Sure. I was a software geek at Digital Research Monterey. Gotten hit by a truck. I reckon the software you're using must be mine. I lived that stuff — thought in machine code. It was a neat idea of Chuck's to try sending in code. He knows about rapid data transmission from his radar days. And there's some chick he can hear who's into radio propagation. She'll need the exact frequency I'm on. We've no hardware this end. Can you hack it?*

*Sorry. This Sony works in 5KHz steps. I used fine tune.*

*Take a guesstimate.*

*Around a twentieth of a step.*

*Not accurate enough.*

The front door banged; the fun was over. Miranda called up to ask if he wanted soup for lunch.

It was quite usual for her to calm rapidly and even to say sorry after a row — but he never did. He resented the interruption to his stream of consciousness: the effect of the drug would soon fade. With a sigh, he switched off the radio and printed out the exchanges. Miranda called again.

They brooded in the kitchen until Martin complained that she'd interrupted his contact with the late C.P.Snow. She ignored his hint that there'd been something in his coffee, seeming to think he'd referred to a scene from his novel. She humoured him.

"Ah yes, C.P. — that is Lord — Snow. He was Minister of Technology in Harold Wilson's government," she told him in her teacher-voice. "He was neither fish nor fowl: a scientist but successful as a novelist. God knows why he was, there's no accounting for taste. He was a Civil Service Commissioner too — responsible in the Second World War for putting together the teams which developed radar. Afterwards he got involved with nuclear weapons. He's not my idea of a literary figure."

"What does my new pen-name Lewis Eliot mean to you?"

"Did university teach you nothing? He's Snow's chief character in the novel cycle *Strangers and Brothers*. Eliot is based on Snow himself. Bad writers tend to use autobiography in place of creativity. You oughtn't use Eliot as a pen name. Publishers will think you're making a role model of Snow — a sure way to rejection. Or, worse: they might think you want people to believe that your book is by Snow himself."

"There's an idea," Martin interrupted. "What if a new book by him turned up?"

"Haven't you been listening? It wouldn't sell: his style's out of the ark."

She shook her head pityingly at his smile.

"Don't ape dead authors' styles," she pleaded, "you can't be that desperate."

Miranda had always been her husband's sternest critic. She had a better degree than his — from the days when creative writing was not a proper university subject. They'd met as English teachers but Martin couldn't take the hassle of the blackboard jungle. He couldn't help disliking children.

"I'm not desperate," he lied. "Take a hypothetical case: what if I found a new work by a dead author who still sells. How would I handle it?"

"Are you thinking of the lost Shakespeare sonnet they wrote about in *The Observer*?"

"No, I have in mind a popular author who died in the past fifty years."

"Like Dylan Thomas?" Miranda smiled grimly. Recently, she'd given a lecture on the incidence of alcoholism amongst authors. She disapproved of wasted talent.

"Remind me: when did he die?" Martin asked.

"In November 1953. Why do you need to know?"

Martin ignored the question.

"Which popular authors died in 1980?" he demanded.

"Barbara Pym is the only one I know of off-hand. What's this about, Martin?"

"I think I've found a way to make a lot of money. Could you jot down the death dates of some authors whose unpublished work would sell?"

"I suppose I could," she replied. "I need a break from this house. I'll go to the library and look up Dickens and Trollope ..."

"No, stick to post-1950. While you're out, I'll check the Yellow Pages: I need a technician — the radio's on the blink."

As he left the room, she sighed in the way she did to mark his receipt of yet another rejection slip. While he sat in the hall, flicking through the directory, it occurred to Martin that he'd not asked Miranda if she'd hallucinated after drinking school coffee. It was too late: Miranda banged the back door behind her.

A man in Clifton advised Martin to put the Sony in a Jiffy bag and bring it to his workshop. The technician's business was run from a lock-up garage, a chapel of rest for dead computers.

"The name's Jim, I fix most things," the man smiled, "but there's little I can do with a phase-locked loop radio like your Sony. Expensive bit of kit, that Sony."

"From palmier days," Martin explained. "I need to know the exact frequency it's set to."

"That I can do," Jim assured him.

In minutes, his test equipment gave a figure which Martin wrote down.

"That'll be half an hour at forty quid — no VAT for cash," Jim said.

Martin suppressed his horror and paid up.

Miranda hadn't returned. Martin made himself a large mug of strong coffee, waited for it to take effect then went confidently to his workroom. On the word processor screen, Ben expressed his thanks for the frequency details but said he also needed Snow's. Dutifully, Martin reset his receiver and spent an hour

bringing the late author up to date on the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe. Hoping that he was fit to drive, he returned to Jim's workshop clutching the Sony.

The second frequency measurement cost only a fiver. Jim was curious to know what was going on but Martin laid a finger beside his nose and told him he was conducting an experiment.

"I was in radio research once ..." Jim began — but Martin hurried out.

Once more dosed with coffee, he climbed to the attic.

Ben was boyishly enthusiastic. Martin was told to fetch a calculator and key in the difference between his and Snow's frequency: 6.8Hz.

*Wow, infra that really is special, Ben wrote. Next we find if the relationship is linear. Chuck must think up some guy who died a while back. He's got a photographic memory — useful in the afterlife. You calculate this third guy's frequency, set a transmitter to it and link your receiver output to the transmitter's input. We'll need a return path: another transceiver. I'll act as relay and say when to scan. With luck we'll hit him first time. When he comes in loud and clear, I'll put his signal out in machine code. OK?*

Martin shook his head. Machine code? Wasn't that something to do with how computers passed information to each other? Ben must assume he worked in a computer lab with limitless resources. Martin typed in an apologetic explanation and asked for Snow to think up a more practical scheme, one suitable for a man who had dropped Maths at school in favour of Sociology. The result was a screenful of supernatural abuse.

*Chuck says you've to get a grip on yourself, Ben wrote. This is the greatest breakthrough in history and you whine about a few minor technical details. Up to now the only ghosts the living got to meet were tortured souls in limbo — no use at all. He also says that something must have gone very wrong with education in England if a man who claims to be a writer has little more than a five-year old's knowledge of the sciences. You can't ignore fifty per cent of the sum of human experience merely because you dropped Math at school. He says that in his day only the most pathetically arrogant bigots failed to recognise the importance of science to humanity. This is a serious scientific experiment not a time to relax over pen and ink. By training he is a scientist but by vocation, a writer like you. He moves between the two cultures — and now between the living and the dead. Neither is an unmoveable pole: there is a continuum which the living refuse to acknowledge. You have the means and opportunity to explore and explain these continua. You disappoint us, man.*

Martin re-read the admonition in wonder. Was this, perhaps, his conscience speaking — a kind of drug-induced Jiminy Cricket?

When Miranda returned from the library, she was unsympathetic. *The Corridor* must be sent off before Easter, she reminded him.

"Research is all very well, but you don't know when to stop. Be practical."

Martin retired to the attic and sulked.

It seemed that making contact with ghosts (Martin had no better term to use) would be a costly business. There was money in the building society account but most of it was Miranda's. All Martin had available to explore a mind-boggling concept was a dwindling supply of adulterated coffee, a Sony radio, an elderly Amstrad 9512 word processor, a calculator and a helpful if expensive technician.

It took courage to tackle Miranda when she was in her bread-winning mood. It would help if he could produce even a small royalties cheque but he had nothing with which to pacify her.

"The coffee," he began hesitantly, "I felt a bit woozy this morning after having some. I wondered if it was all right. Have you been ... er ... a bit delirious?"

"No. But there was flu going round at school. I hope you'll not come down with it." She adopted her plaintive mode again. "But you must produce something publishable soon, Martin. You can't keep dipping into my savings."

Taking a deep breath, Martin described the day's events, fetched the printouts and showed her what Snow had said. Miranda shook her head slowly.

"You'd better stay in bed tomorrow," she sighed. "It's flu all right."

But it wasn't. Until Miranda was safely back at school, Martin worked on his story with the radio banished to the kitchen. As soon as she'd left the house, he phoned Jim for advice about Ben's requirements.

"I could track down some ex-Army gear," the technician offered. "I could bring it across in the van at the call-out charge rate providing I've no urgent jobs."

Martin gritted his teeth and made a decision. The building society account must bear the cost. He would tell Miranda that the Amstrad needed urgent repair.

Jim smiled as he leafed through the printouts next evening.

“You reckon these came from dead people?” he asked doubtfully. “Someone’s pulling your whatsit — or are you working up a spoof for a telly programme?”

Martin insisted that they should follow Ben’s instructions. Jim shook his head but fetched the equipment.

“So,” he said as he set up the transmitters, “these ghosts of yours each work on a discrete frequency which is modulated by a signal from their minds — and these two jokers Charles and Ben have learnt to transmit in machine code so they can output through this screen without a modem or nothing. OK, let’s see them do it.”

Ben was jubilant. He and Charles conversed for the first time on screen. Jim gaped as the dialogue unfolded. It was then that Martin remembered the coffee: Jim hadn’t drunk any. There must be a literary genie of sorts in that word processor.

Miranda appeared in the doorway and scowled at the litter of equipment. Martin tried his lie about repair but Jim interrupted and told her what had happened.

“Now watch,” Jim told her. “Ask the ghost a question.”

Martin cringed at his use of the word ‘ghost’.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Miranda snapped. “There are no ghosts. You’ve listed answers on that thing so that when you press a key the right one comes up.”

“If you say so. Come along, madam, type in a question and stand well back.”

Reluctantly, Miranda did so.

*I’ve already answered you, Martin,* came the peeved reply.

*This is Miranda,* she responded.

*Ah, Prospero’s lovely daughter. Tell me about yourself’.*

Miranda gaped. Sheepishly, Martin urged her to reply in her own words to prove it was no trick. Snow was courteous; he spoke of his own wife and his sadness that they were parted by death. The astonished Miranda shook her head.

The time had come for enthusiasm.

“The trouble is,” Martin told her earnestly, “that while Snow and Ben can communicate their ideas on screen because they can work in code, there’s no way Dylan Thomas (for example) could do it. He couldn’t even learn Welsh. And there’s no way Shakespeare could: the technology would be way beyond his comprehension.”

“But how?...” Miranda gasped, pointing at the screen.

“Never mind how,” Martin countered. “Just accept what you see. Watch this: I’ll ask Snow to write us an unpublished story.”

She watched open-mouthed as it scrolled up the screen immediately. It seemed that ghosts existed in a timeless void.

Miranda peered at it then frowned.

“It looks like a clever parody done by a first year student as an exercise,” she sniffed. “You’ll not sell it, Martin. It’s all very convincing but you’re wasting your time — and our money. You must think up a better way to use this thing.”

She had regained her composure; she grimaced as she re-read the text.

“I mean to say — *‘He seemed nervous, drawn, tense’* — if Leavis saw this he’d have apoplexy.”

Jim asked what she meant. Miranda described the vituperative critique which the eminent Doctor F.R. Leavis published after Snow’s infamous lecture to Cambridge in 1959.

“Two Cultures,” she told him, “Snow and Leavis were at the two extremes. Leavis — who edited the review *Scrutiny*, organ of the Cambridge Critics — never explained his literary judgements; Snow insisted on a utilitarian approach and logical argument. The classic Literati versus Scientists conflict. I suspect that we’ll have a similar struggle over this equipment you’ve set up.”

Jim looked blankly at her.

“You want to know more? Ask Snow about Leavis,” she added.

The result was a lengthy diatribe.

*He hurt me deeply,* Snow confessed. *At the time, I was forced to make light of it; I wish I had published a stronger reply. The man was an idiot — basking in the glory that similar idiots showered on him. They made him a Companion of Honour, you know. He claimed that literature was central to civilisation but he approved of nothing but the narrowest of forms. He dismissed scientific discovery, technology and the inventions of a millennium with a click of his fingers — he made no effort to understand them. He was a bigot of medieval tradition ...*

“Anger survives death,” Miranda murmured, “interesting.”

They watched Snow’s continued lament scroll up the screen.

*Naturally he hated my books, he wrote. He described them as a recital of trivial episodes and thinly disguised personal experiences. But what did he produce himself apart from sycophantic disciples?*

*Only the best work on literary criticism ever written,* Miranda typed in.

*A child’s guide to subjective thinking,* Snow sneered. *And don’t forget the couple of paeans for D.H.Lawrence and history which any fool could trot out. If I met him again I’d make his life hell.*

Martin laughed. For a dead author to threaten another with hell was too much. But a mischievous thought came to him.

“Miranda,” he said, “what if Snow made contact with Leavis but the poor bugger couldn’t answer back? That would be hell, surely.”

She agreed. Was it Snow’s intention to torment Leavis? In life, the former government minister had worked on a grand scale; he applied his intellect to problems which he saw far away in the future. Now, in this cramped attic, there was machinery which could satisfy Snow’s desire for vengeance.

When did Leavis die? Martin asked Snow.

*On 14th April 1978 at 5.32am precisely,* was the immediate, unguarded reply.

“He’s using us,” Martin accused. “He probably knows on what frequency Leavis can be reached. I bet he’ll ask us to reset the transmitter to it. What do we do?”

“Refuse,” Jim replied.

“No, he might stop communicating altogether if we don’t co-operate,” Miranda objected. “Put him through to another ghost he’d like to speak to — his wife Queenie Dorothy, perhaps. She died after Charles, on 19th June 1981, but he won’t know that ...

“Hang on, this is all good fun,” Jim interrupted, “but I’ve money to earn. It’s late and I’ve got to get up in the morning. Do you want to buy this stuff or shall I call up *The Sun* and sell them a story?”

Miranda looked at her husband solemnly.

“Martin,” she said, “this is too big a thing to let drop but we can’t afford to go on alone — and we can’t have reporters all over the house.”

“Tell you what,” the technician offered, “hire the kit for fifty quid a day. I’ll drop by in three days to see how you’re getting on. It’s no bother setting new frequencies if there’s a linear relationship between them and time of death. When you’ve made a few contacts we’ll talk about telling the Press. Have we a deal?”

Reluctantly, Martin nodded. Miranda could raise a loan once their savings were exhausted. The Press would be handy later when he’d a story ready to print.

Miranda proposed that they should use their precious time to contact Shakespeare. A rediscovered sonnet would be sure to hit the headlines.

Snow was enthusiastic. Carefully, Martin set the second set to 14120.8KHz — 23rd April 1616. After three hours, they gave up.

A worrying thought came to him. He keyed in a question to Snow who said they must consult his adviser on propagation. The reply confirmed Martin’s fears.

The relationship can’t be linear, she had said. If it were, then at roughly 20KHz per year zero frequency would represent March 910AD. The twentieth century curve may be look straight; but it could do anything in earlier years.

“We’ll have to step back through our ancestors, charting the frequencies as we go,” Martin told his wife. “Their death dates will be easy to look up. We’ll need Snow’s help to contact them.”

“No,” Miranda said, “I’ve listed the death dates of some nineteenth century authors who died young: Keats and Shelley, the Brontës and Byron. We’ll step back through them. Snow can ask each for some unpublished work — it’s bound to sell.”

They told Snow what was decided.

*There’s a quicker way: try a few settings at random and ask people when they died,* Snow advised. *We must be scientific about this. You’ll need some graph paper to plot the curve.*

Martin groaned. He wished he hadn’t been drawn into Snow’s world of technology. He simply wanted something he could sell.

Dawn broke over the football stand before they had gathered a dozen points over two centuries. Martin drew a curve and extrapolated it to 1700AD.

“I’m not going to school today,” Miranda announced. “I’m half asleep. I’ll phone in to say I’ve caught the flu.” She stumbled from the workroom.

The cursor traced out a message from Snow.

*Ben wishes to speak to Isaac Newton. He died some time in 1727. Before that though, it would be nice to speak to Einstein — 18th April 1955 should be easy to reach.*

Martin frowned at the screen. Valuable hours had been wasted. He told Snow that, while time might not mean much to ghosts, it was costing more than he could afford.

Snow commiserated and said that experts should be called in to do the donkey work. He advised Martin to contact the Signals Research Establishment at Christchurch; Directory Enquiries said that it didn't exist.

At breakfast, Miranda insisted that they should concentrate on Shakespeare. There was another article about a rediscovered sonnet in the paper. The author was a fellow of St Hilda's College, Oxford.

"I shall ring her," Miranda called as Martin retreated upstairs.

Tracing Albert Einstein was easy. Martin left Snow happy and willing to search for the Bard. The next task was to determine Newton's time of death.

Jim phoned late in the afternoon. He sounded sheepish when he confessed that he had made up a replica of the equipment in the attic but hadn't been able to contact the ghosts.

"I phoned a pal who was with me at Marconi," he admitted. "He says your set-up's impossible: at the frequency intervals you're detecting, the bandwidth isn't wide enough even for coded modulation. He thinks the corridor's a hoax."

Martin ignored the suggestion and told Jim of the day's work.

"Snow chatted with Einstein. Miranda phoned the Shakespeare Society at Oxford but they think she's a crank: they've had plenty ringing about the lost sonnet."

"For what it's worth I believe you," Jim assured him. "I could come over tomorrow and give a hand. I've got a graph plotter here — better than pencil and paper."

Snow's ghost requested — on Einstein's behalf — that they should make contact with Newton as a matter of urgency. Sadly, after two hours of enquiry amongst the startled dead of 1727, they were unsuccessful.

There's a kink in the curve, Martin complained. What if the whole thing is a series of bumps? We'll never be able to predict dates earlier than 1900.

*The answer is simple*, Snow replied at once. *You are using the Gregorian calendar; Newton died before the Julian calendar was dropped in September 1752. The date jumped from the second to the fourteenth — eleven full days.*

By putting Newton in touch with Einstein, Martin lost contact with Snow. Another receiver was needed. Miranda put her foot down. The Corridor was costing money they could ill afford and producing nothing saleable. It was even stopping Martin from using the word processor for work on an article about the phenomenon.

Miranda insisted that, once Jim had produced an accurate curve on his plotter, Shakespeare would take priority over all other targets.

"Work by modern popular authors would be easier to authenticate than a sonnet," Martin objected. "Let's contact Agatha Christie."

Jim, however, had other ideas.

"With due respect, it's mostly my kit," he said. "I've uses for it myself. For example: what would people pay to be put in touch with their dear departed? Let's charge a tenner for a one-minute call."

"No," Miranda shouted, "don't be such philistines. The corridor is of world-wide importance. We must produce something really significant. Go for Shakespeare."

She had that look in her eye which Martin knew well. Her mind was made up.

"OK," he sighed, "the Bard it is."

The plotter indicated a possible frequency of 17005KHz for April 1616 but there was heavy interference noise from the radio's loudspeaker. At first, Jim thought it was a short-wave radio station but it appeared to be generated by the word processor itself. They consulted Snow.

*My expert thinks your aerial is the problem*, he replied. *She says you must screen off your computer and wiring from it. Ben is worried that you're transmitting at high power on a frequency which will corrupt the software. Also, remember the flatter the curve gets, the more time is covered by each frequency step. Even allowing for lower global population — and the opposite effect of reduced life expectancy — you will have problems isolating one voice from 1616. I suggest you concentrate on the more receptive minds: those of scientists. Chasing dead poets is the sort of thing Leavis would favour.*

Miranda was furious.

“How dare he,” she exploded. “Tell Snow we must go on looking into the seventeenth century — otherwise no more Einstein. Jim, you must do the screening work immediately. We’ll concentrate on finding Shakespeare.”

The two men murmured compliance. Jim went down to the van to fetch tools. Martin set the transmitter to a frequency at which the interference attenuated. Snow reported that he had spoken to a most interesting American colonist who thought he had starved to death in mid-March 1616. The plotter gave a new figure for 23rd April.

It was midnight when they contacted John Chandler, a butcher from York. The ghost was confused by the thoughts which Snow passed to him. Chandler confirmed that he had died on St George’s Day but he knew nothing of Shakespeare. Snow found it difficult to understand the man’s dialect.

“We need someone familiar with Jacobean English,” Miranda observed. She smiled grimly. “Of course,” she added, snapping her fingers, “Doctor Leavis.”

Snow responded tersely. How was he to explain to a Luddite that, by modern technology, the living could communicate with the dead? Leavis would be bitterly sceptical, he predicted. Worse: the great man was to be asked to negotiate with an illiterate shopkeeper who had never heard of The Swan of Avon.

Miranda insisted — and there was success.

*Leavis has spoken to the Bard but wishes no further interruption, the cursor spelt out. Remember that the old fool died at 83 and is deaf.*

“I thought ghosts existed outside time,” Martin complained. “Why does Leavis need to be left alone? And what does hearing have to do with communication between entities with no physical form?”

“Snow was famous for his dry wit,” Miranda told him, “he’s pulling your leg. Let him have his fun. It’s thanks to him we’re getting somewhere at last.”

They sat in silence for a long time. After Martin had fetched coffee, they smiled at each other and tuned the Sony to Snow. He reported immediately that the Bard had recited *Cardenio* from memory but Leavis hadn’t finalised the draft.

“What’s *Cardenio*?” Jim asked Miranda.

“It was a play said to have been written by Fletcher in collaboration with Shakespeare just before his death. No copy has survived. I take it that Snow will have to put the whole thing into code. What we’ll get is his translation of Leavis’s version of what Shakespeare tells him. I’m not sure this will work,” she added.

“Let’s leave them to it and get some sleep,” Martin said. “I’m knackered.”

They were woken by a phone call at ten. Jim sounded buoyant. He’d spoken to his old boss at Marconi, explained the need for calibrated duplex transceivers and had been promised experimental equipment. In exchange, four engineers must be allowed a look at the attic workroom.

Martin groaned.

After breakfast, they went together to the attic. The sun reflected from the roof of the stand. A tower crane was under construction nearby. Martin tuned to Snow.

*Shakespeare was most cooperative. I imagine Leavis buttered him up as he did D.H.Lawrence. The Bard insisted on sending us Act 2 first because he said Fletcher had destroyed his draft and substituted one of his own. Here goes:*

*Act 2 Scene 1. A palace in Granada.*

*Don Ferdinand: How like you our demesne, Cardenio?*

*Cardenio: Well. Thy father, Don Ricardo, made me most welcome.*

*Don Ferdinand: And his heir, my brother? Hath his melancholy bated now thou art his escort?*

*Cardenio: I fear he is not yet past the worst. To lose a love so cruelly is cruelty itself.*

*Don Ferdinand: I found a love: her name is Dorothea, daughter of Cleonardo who this day comes to my father’s court. And thou, Cardenio, hast left a love behind in Ubeda?*

*Cardenio: Marry I have. Her name Lucinda means more to me than all the world.*

*Don Ferdinand: I’faith, it is a light name, one of joy and innocence ...*

Page after page scrolled up the screen. Miranda mouthed the words, pausing to remark on the similarity with some other Shakespearean work. When the whole act had been transmitted, Martin thanked Snow and printed out the result.

“The next job is to get the egg-heads at Oxford to accept this as genuine,” he murmured. “How do we tackle it, Miranda?”

“We could ask Leavis ...”

The reply from the former Reader in English was peremptory: when Doctor F.R.Leavis CH of Downing College Cambridge states that a play is genuine everyone without exception must agree.

*Leavis has no concept of scientific method, Snow continued. The only undertaking he made was to comment on the stylistic pointers in the text. He named a Cambridge don who must discover his notes — a mathematician who is also a critic and poet: William Empson. I believe we once met.*

Miranda groaned.

*Empson died years ago, she keyed in.*

*I find the depredations of death most frustrating, Snow replied. It is surely time to form a committee to deal with these problems. Leavis and I will propose members and you must contact them by telephone. I propose that it be chaired by Doctor John Halperin of the University of South California.*

*He'll never believe us, Miranda objected dismally.*

*Nonsense. We had long discussions shortly before I died — he tape recorded them. Certain material was confidential. To convince him that our corridor exists, tell him you know of my fathering Sheila's son George — that will bring him hot-foot.*

Martin shook his head at his wife. The whole project was rapidly slipping from his grasp. He foresaw a time when the attic would be crammed with academics and engineers squabbling over the tenuous link which Lord Snow had formed. It would be a hellish manifestation of Snow's *Two Cultures*. And it would become impossible to keep the Press away. Something, however, had to be published in order to recoup the hire charges for the equipment.

"I'll phone the States," Miranda decided. "You get the rest of *Cardenio* printed out. And another thing," she said as she paused at the door, "ask Snow to find out if Shakespeare can remember his missing play *Love's Labours Won*. We must get our money's worth."

An hour passed before Miranda returned to the attic. Her eyes were still wide after her long conversation with Halperin. Snow had been right: the American was spurred into action and would leave at once for the airport.

Jim followed Miranda into the room. The equipment was mostly his, he pointed out, yet his own suggestions for its use had been vetoed. Jim insisted that, before the Marconi engineers arrived, Snow should contact his mother — he held out a piece of paper on which he had written her time and date of death.

When the phone rang, Martin went down to answer it, leaving Jim alone to adjust the frequencies on the transceivers.

The man from Marconi asked to speak to Jim. Martin explained that he was unavailable; he prepared to take a message.

"Just say that a representative from the Government Communications HQ Cheltenham will be with us tomorrow. He'll bring some direction finding kit."

"Tomorrow?" Martin roared into the phone. "That's out of the question. My wife will go berserk. Jim had no right to arrange things without telling us. No — not this week. Next Monday — OK?" He slammed down the phone.

Snow was also angry. Jim stood shame-faced in a corner.

*Are you seriously interested in this lady's thoughts?* he asked. *Must we descend from sublime Einstein to the ridiculous?*

*Halperin is on his way, Martin typed, hoping to mollify the former Minister. Please send the lady's message.*

Very well. It reads: Hope you take care of dear Sooty, he's a good mouser ???f ?8? Ÿ• 'á>|§ ' ' ...  
The screen was filled with meaningless symbols.

"You've upset him," Martin accused Jim. "I hope this won't delay Shakespeare's play."

They stared at the immobile cursor.

"And another thing," Martin added, "I've told your friend from Marconi that tomorrow is not on for his visit ..."

"Hey," Jim protested, "if it wasn't for me there wouldn't be a corridor ..."

"Calm down you two," Miranda interjected. "Let's be sensible. Jim, make your peace with Snow then ask what you like about your mother. It may be trivial to us but it must mean a lot to you — but please be quick."

Martin turned to the window, furious. It had begun to rain. The workmen on the roof of the old football stand had ceased their demolition work.

"This Amstrad of yours is on its last legs," Jim growled from the keyboard. He indicated the page number which had reverted to zero. "It can't be too cold, it must have dirty connector pins."

Before Martin could protest, Jim switched off the word processor and yanked the plug from the screen. He sat muttering to himself, cleaning it, whilst Martin and his wife looked on helplessly.

“Right,” he said, after ten minutes work, “let’s reload.”

It was a relief to see Snow’s message spelt out on the screen. Miranda dictated her request to transmit the remainder of *Cardenio* which Snow agreed to cheerfully. Halperin would be with them within forty-eight hours, Martin promised.

They worked all night. The lost Shakespeare play was placed in a box file with Leavis’s notes before breakfast. As a reward, Snow was put in touch with Sigmund Freud whose work he had read avidly in his youth. There had been agreement with Jim. In return for his maintenance work on the Amstrad, he was allocated times during which he could contact the dead of his choice.

“I’m going to phone St Hilda’s again,” Miranda announced wearily. “The sooner we get some money for all this the better. I’ll ask them for a grant to tide us over. I shall have to tell a white lie: I’ll say that *Cardenio* was found in a tomb and examined by Leavis shortly before he died.”

“How will that convince them?” her husband asked, staring with red-rimmed eyes at the demolition men who had recommenced work.

“While you were dozing, I checked what’s known of the play. *Cardenio* was first performed by John Heminges, Leader of the King’s Men, in 1613. He was buried in the crypt of St John Baptist in Bristol. I’ve said the play was found there and that Leavis was taken ill in Bristol while he was staying with a clergyman friend — my father — with whom he left his notes. Wish me luck.”

She left the room carrying the box file.

“What are they doing out there?” Jim asked, indicating the football stand.

“Getting rid of it at long last,” Martin told him. “Tesco are building a superstore on the site.”

Snow agreed to set down a short story whilst they were having breakfast. They left the word processor scrolling out the text.

Miranda put down the phone and joined the men, grinned broadly.

“We’ve hooked them,” she said. “There’s someone coming down hot foot from Oxford this afternoon to see our copy of the script. I told them that the manuscript is at the bank but we have Leavis’s critique which authenticates the copy. God, I’m tired. I shall have a bath and go to bed. If you want a snooze, Jim, use the back bedroom.”

Martin sat alone in the attic workroom lulled by the buzz of the printer which was transferring Snow’s posthumous short story to paper.

*The Corridor*, it began, by *Lewis Eliot*.

*Do you know what happens in the afterlife? I once thought that nothing happens ...*

Martin felt himself overcome by fatigue. The workmen on the grandstand roof had made good progress. Where the rusty roof covering had gone, a skeleton of girders was revealed. Already, a welder was cutting through one with oxy-acetylene. The printer stopped.

“I’d better warn Snow about the woman from Oxford,” Martin murmured to himself. The transceivers must be retuned to put Snow back into contact with Leavis. It would be amusing to hear what the present-day literature scholar had to say to the irascible Doctor.

But Snow was not there.

There was no reply to Martin’s questions. Adjusting the Sony’s frequency had no effect either.

Exhausted, Martin gave up. He took the printed pages from the tray and shuffled through them. There were corruptions in the text of the first page; the second was worse; the rest were gobbleddegook.

When, after a late lunch, Jim examined the Amstrad he had to admit defeat. Nothing he did brought C.P.Snow back to the screen.

Much of the football stand’s roof had disappeared. Half a dozen points of light marked the workmen who were dismantling the frame of what had been a giant reflector of radio waves.

The Corridor of CP Snow had ceased to exist — but not before it had provided a sceptical world with an unpublished play by William Shakespeare.

“Remember what I said about publishing a book before Easter?” Miranda murmured to her husband that night. “The play will do.”