

Fly on the wall

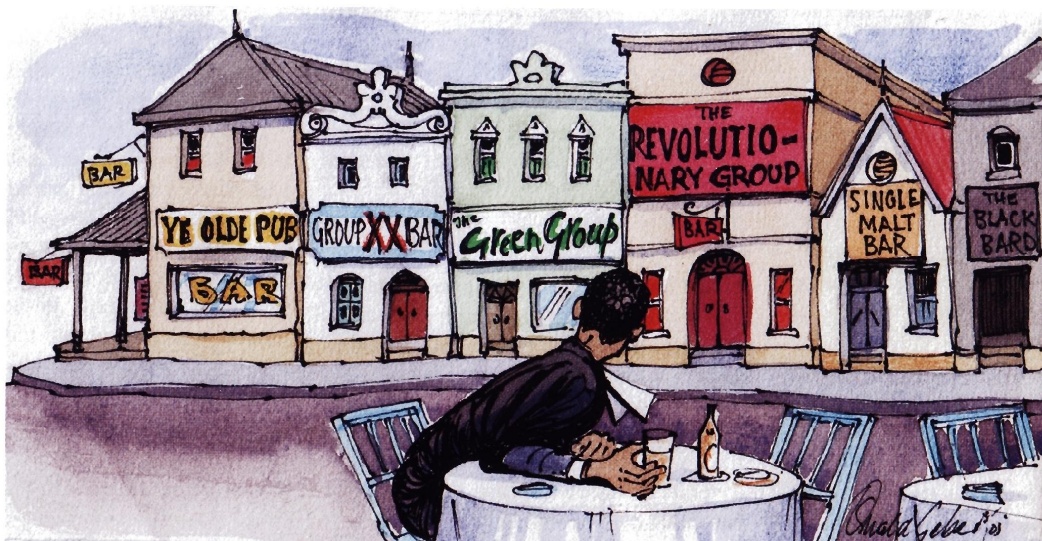
It's difficult for Fly these days to ruminate on his profession without deep pain. Whisky, particularly good whisky, helps, of course, as it always does, but then only up to a point. Thereafter, these days, the room simply starts spinning and the pleadings start moving before the eyes in funny and disconcerting ways while staggering insights into the weaknesses of the opponent's case desert Fly in his hour of need. And still things look glum. Fly's club, his band of brothers (and sisters), is in crisis. Everybody is angry at everybody and it's got precious little to do with where the books should be and what it will or should cost to put them there. Nor, it seems, with who's going to be paying rent to which colleagues and whether Fly himself should start looking into the property game when the government tells him it's now time he became an attorney. Some regard it as churlish to have any qualms about negotiating with oneself about the fate of somebody else's money while others seem with thinly veiled menace to suggest perhaps they had a good thing going in apartheid and to fear the final burial of that beast. Pretending to have a trial next week is becoming less fun when pretty soon it may be that there are more Bars in town than on a decent street in Dublin. Should those Bars also happen to be colour-coded or categorised, say, into the Progressives and the Counter-revolutionaries, or any other similar

dichotomy of Us and Them, with official matters reduced to being dealt with on an Own Affairs and General Affairs basis, then all the single malt in the world will not help to lift the gloom (save to the extent that ultimate oblivion is less than gloomy, but on that one judgment is still reserved and the authorities quite starkly divided). Even in the most propitious of circumstances, it's not always easy to answer the questions 'what is this black cape I don?' and 'why exactly is the chap opposite my learned friend?' But if there are three committees vying for the honour of custodian of the Red Book, and three versions of same, while all the while Big Brother is telling you that you might as well burn it and join the firm, then an awful sense of unreality will become almost impossible to ignore. Fly realises that the most effective way of killing one who is not yet dead is often to start mourning him prematurely. But he also knows the platitude of the song that goes 'Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got till it's gone (they paved paradise and put up a parking lot).'

One of the difficulties that is hearteningly perennial is that Fly and his colleagues are singularly incapable of conducting a debate. This, Fly must immediately owe, might strike the outsider as an oddish truth, given what we all get paid to do most of the

time. But there is an immense difference between presenting one side of the story competently (something the majority of learned friends seem perfectly capable of) and engaging in a dialogue. A debate in these circles tends to be a concatenation of dramatic monologues, each with variations on the theme 'why, without question, the Berlin Philharmonic and all the heavenly host are but a sad match for the music that you will hear issue from these lips of mine, if you but deign to hang on them'. And there is no audience as unreceptive to such monologues as one comprising those who yearn themselves to quit their hearts of similar stuff. Which is also precisely why it seems strange that any such audience could take offence, or suffer anything approximating real indignation, while the monologues of colleagues are a mere distant din intruding upon the intense preparation of more of the same. But somehow it does sometimes happen. And when it does, Sophocles and Cicero yield to something fully Dionysian but sadly lacking in the charms of the grape. As it did this time, in Johannesburg. More of the grape, says Fly. But this time, there might just not be enough.

PS: Fly says these lines were composed during the interregnum between two fateful meetings. After the second, on Thursday 21 July 2005, Fly believes he might just have enough whisky after all. □



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