

# Gavin Lyall: Celebration of Liberty of Expression in Literature and Fiction

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (August 2023)



*De Havilland DHC-2 Beaver brochure cover*

*Flez just couldn't believe there was that much wickedness in this big, beautiful, coloured postcard of a world.—Gavin Lyall, Midnight Plus One*

**There's hardly a point in reading a story solely for its**

plotline. It is true that stories with vivid and engaging plots capture the imagination of readers. Beyond the initial discovery that a reader makes about what is taking place in a story, plot becomes intriguing, especially when it relates to someone or something, including animals. This enables readers to view themselves as protagonists in the story through what I refer to as situational imagination.

## **The Ideological Corruption of Literature and Fiction**

In postmodern literary circles—if that even makes sense given that few people read today—plot has become runner-up to other extrinsic, nonliterary factors. Today nothing can be written, read, and said without being filtered through the cancer of our insipid age: radicalized social/political ideology. This includes texts and reading material that circulate in universities, whether read by students or academics. Might as well read the contents of a cereal box for enlightenment.

The spread of the vile pathology of radical ideology has vanquished the imagination and turned people into willing automatons who substitute free will (agency) with alleged participation in a myriad of social/political collectives. This is the sorry legacy of imagination in a censorial, totalitarian milieu.

It is criminal to turn works of literature and fiction into ideological fodder for the stunted imagination of moral Lilliputians. In our time, literature and fiction are vehicles for something other than reading enjoyment and old-fashioned fun. Invariably, postmodern moral aberrations and social/political statements about this or that cause, take precedence over literature and fiction. To claim otherwise is intellectually dishonest and hypocritical.

However, this lamentable state of affairs has not always been

the case. Including the time-proven works of the Western canon, literature and fiction have enjoyed a golden-age, when writers explored the thrill of writing in a spontaneous manner, often saying, "I go wherever the story takes me."

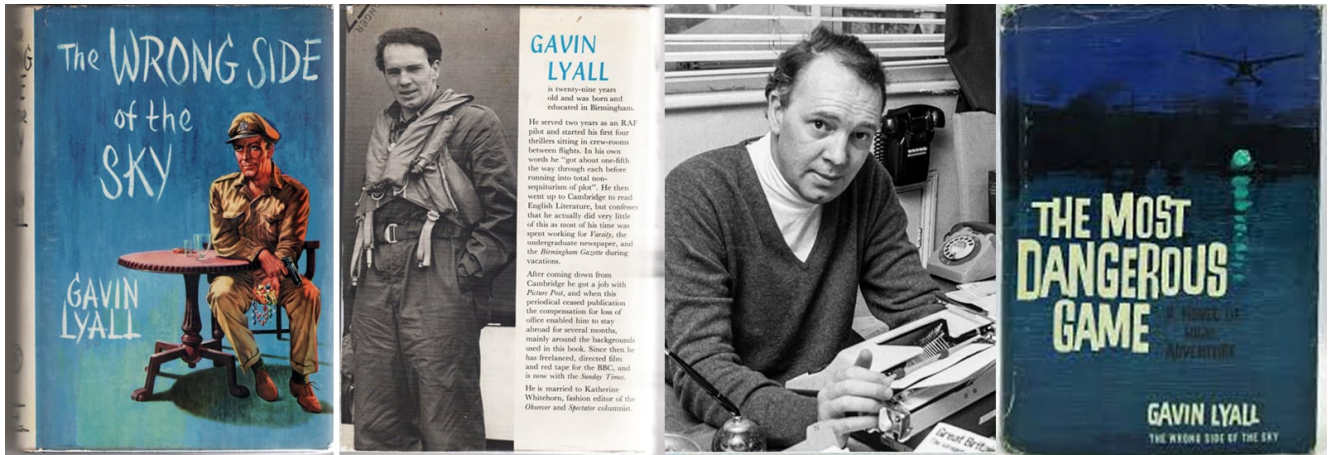
## **Celebrating Liberty Through Literature and Fiction**

Throughout the world, literature and fiction experienced a golden age, before the literary arts became the handmaiden of radicalized, 'world-changing' programs. The same is true with cinema, television, and music.

Connoisseurs of literature and fiction—that is, serious readers—are dinosaurs that keep the flame of cultural literacy burning. Life-long readers lament that they need several lifetimes of study and reading to savor the literary fruits of the golden age of literature and fiction.

Spontaneity was the fuel of the golden age of literature and fiction. Whether in science fiction, the detective novel, suspense, adventure and other genres, readers were free to make up their mind about the enjoyment value of the works they read.

Writers enjoyed free rein to explore diverse aspects of the human psyche, imagination, life and death, and man's place in the great scheme of reality as we know it without sinister censorship breathing down their neck. Only talent mattered. While some works were more effective than others, a body of work was created that was animated by genuine diversity of literary, cultural, moral, spiritual vision, and talent. Whether in literature and fiction, music or cinema, liberty of expression was celebrated.



## Gavin Lyall: *The Wrong Side of the Sky*

Gavin Lyall (1932-2003), the prolific British writer and RAF pilot, wrote novels of action and suspense. Like other pilot-writers, Antonine de St. Exupery, French writer of *The Little Prince* and other tales of flying, Nevil Shute and Ernest Gann, Lyall's early novels revolve around pilots who become involved in unsavory situations.

Lyall's debut novel, *The Wrong Side of the Sky* (1961) was followed by *The Most Dangerous Game*. Then came *Midnight Plus One*. His other novels about flying are *Shooting Script* and *Judas Country*. Lyall wrote fifteen novels in total. He also wrote two nonfiction books: *Freedom's Battle: The War in the Air 1939-1945* (1971) and *Operation Warboard: How to Fight World War II Battles in Miniature* (1976).

Lyall's characters are worldly, shrewd, and sophisticated agents of free will. In *The Wrong Side of the Sky*, pilot Jack Clay flies a WWII Dakota, a Douglas DC-3 that has been converted to cargo, on chartered cargo flights between Athens, the Middle East and North Africa. Clay dreams of purchasing a newer airplane, even starting a cargo airline with his own fleet of airplanes. This is Clay's justification for flying dangerous missions with dubious cargo. He has learned to tolerate objectionable clients.

Flying is Clay's passion. The problem is earning enough of a living to keep his beloved Dakota flying. Like anyone who has the need to earn a living doing unsatisfying or dangerous work, pride and idealism often take a back seat to practicality. Clay does so, but keeps his dignity.

## ***The Most Dangerous Game***

*The Most Dangerous Game* is Lyall's second novel. Len Deighton, writer of *The Ipcress Files*, *Horse Under Water*, *Funeral in Berlin* and many other novels, has said that writing dialogue in fiction is the most difficult aspect of writing novels. Lyall is a master of dialogue. His protagonist, Bill Cary, is practical and experienced in the ways of the crafty characters that he encounters.

Lyall's novels bring together people who have little in common. Their attraction to Cary is to charter his de Havilland Canada DHC-2 Beaver to fly the rugged terrain of northern Finland.

Part of the glue that binds the characters in his stories together is Lyall's cohesive dialogue. At first, characters appear as unsuspecting people who need a service or favor from Cary. Needing to work for a living, Cary can't afford to say no or address many questions to his potential clients, even when he suspects their illegal motives.

Describing the plot entanglement in the novels of the best writers of adventure-suspense, Len Deighton and Eric Ambler among these, is not easy given their complexity. What matters is the interaction between the characters and how the situations, contingencies that make demands on them, play out in their lives.

Deighton's novels expose hypocrisy, especially of elites who have graduated from Oxford and Cambridge, what their self-serving values mean to national security during the Cold War.

Ambler's strength is in employing well-meaning amateurs who find themselves embroiled in the world of sinister people. Lyall puts on display the contradictions that his characters embrace; he is an archaeologist of the human psyche.

The plot of *The Most Dangerous Game* is a test of Cary's moral/rational resolve. The flying is challenging. Cary operates out of Finland's remote Rovaniemi airport, a small town in Lapland that is situated right on the Arctic Circle, where airplanes are essential for transportation. Rugged airplanes like Cary's DHC-2 Beaver are still indispensable for travel into isolated parts of the world. Lapland is not as isolated today as it was in 1963, when the novel was published.

Ironically, Cary minds his own business, a form of discretion that often gets him into situations he could avoid if his need to earn a living was not so dire.

### ***Shooting Script and Judas Country***

*Shooting Script* (1966) and *Judas Country* (1975) also employ pilots as protagonists. In *Shooting Script*, ex-RAF fighter pilot, Keith Carr, who saw action in the Korean War, flies cargo in the Caribbean in a de Havilland DH.104 Dove. The sinister villains and situations in *Shooting Script* involve the corrupt government of a small Central-American nation.

In *Judas Country*, the protagonist is Roy Case, ex-RAF military transport pilot. The airplane is a Beechcraft Queen Air. Case flies charter cargo flights in the Mediterranean. Case's age and financial situation are quickly eroding his ambition of owning his own cargo airline.

The corrosive degradation that is postmodernity has vanquished reading as a way of life, form of self-reflection, and the enjoyment of solitude. Novelists like Gavin Lyall take readers

on intelligent flights of fancy, imagination and adventure that no visual media, whether television, cinema, computer games, tablets or cellular telephones can match. Numbers tell a daunting tale of the massive decline in reading. Even 'bestselling' novels today are shorter by about one hundred pages.

Miguel de Cervantes suggests in *Don Quixote* that imagination informs our actions. What is lost in the destruction of reading and cultural-historical literacy can be measured in the dearth of imagination, and the vapid awe and wonder displayed by people who, like mindless, chic zombies, flock to and venerate the aforementioned mind and soul-numbing forms of entertainment that are the staple of a dead culture.

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Pedro Blas González** is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [\*Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay\*](#), [\*Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man\*](#), [\*Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy\*](#) and [\*Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity\*](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, "Medio siglo de Filosofía" (1951) in [\*Philosophy Today\*](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [\*Philosophical Perspective on Cinema\*](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)