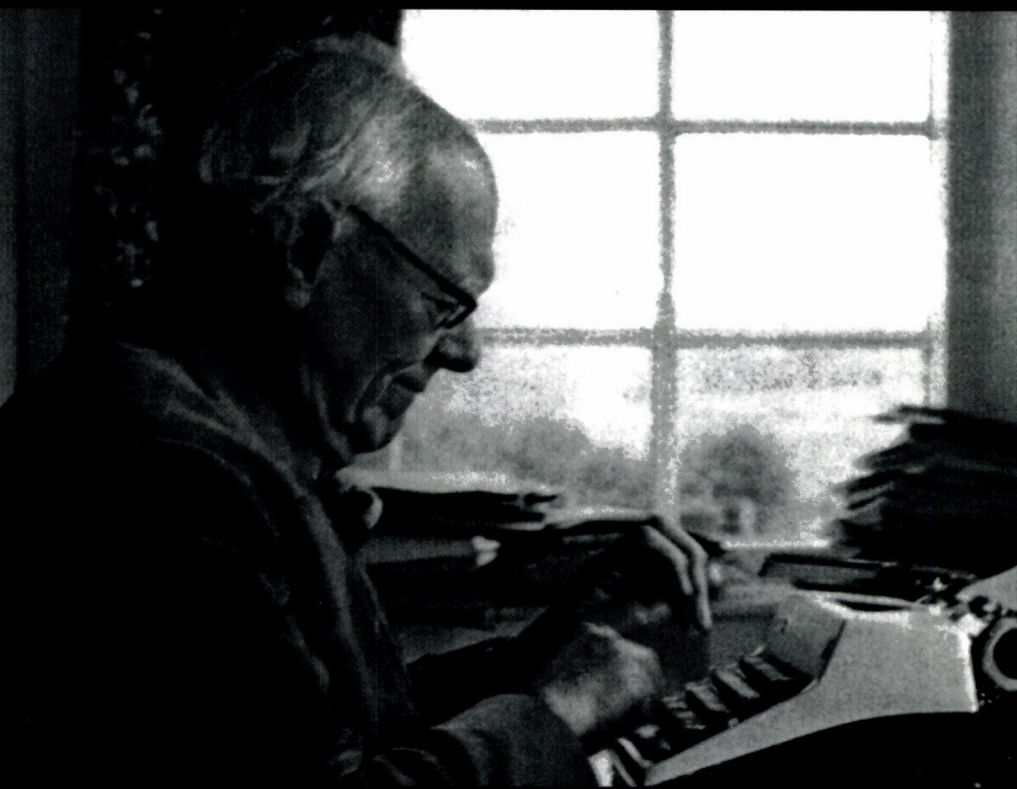


MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

# CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME

*An Autobiography*



“One of the great memoirs of our time”  
—Paul Johnson, *New York Times Book Review*



CHRONICLES  
OF WASTED TIME

## THE MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE SOCIETY

The Malcolm Muggeridge Society was founded on the 100th anniversary of the birth of Malcolm Muggeridge and some thirteen years after his death. This coincided with a successful two-day seminar entitled 'Muggeridge Rediscovered' held at Wheaton College, Illinois in May 2003, bringing together people from many parts of the world with an interest in the work of Malcolm Muggeridge – his life and his times.

The aims of the Society can be summarised as follows:

- Providing information for those researching the life and work of Malcolm Muggeridge
- Keeping writings in print and to encourage the publication of new critiques and scholarship
- Providing fellowship and virtual forum for admirers to discuss Muggeridge's work
- Publishing a regular newsletter
- Facilitating republication of his books and publication of unpublished material
- Providing linkage with other societies where mutual interest exists
- Increasing awareness of papers, writings and other memorabilia held in Special Collections at Wheaton College, Illinois
- Developing a web presence
- Organising social, dramatic and literary events
- Encouraging new writing about Muggeridge

In preserving and utilising the literary and broadcast legacy, the Society provides a focus for those wishing to learn more about this famous author, journalist, soldier-spy, broadcaster, and Christian apologist. The Society publishes a quarterly literary journal called *The Gargoyle*, distributed to members.

[www.malcolmmuggeridge.org](http://www.malcolmmuggeridge.org)

# CHRONICLES OF WASTED TIME

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

FOREWORD BY IAN HUNTER

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*For my ever-dear children:  
Leonard, John and Valentine,  
And the other three that have  
come to us through them:  
Sylvia, Anne and Gerrit-Jan*

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## Foreword

THE RE-ISSUANCE of Malcolm Muggeridge's autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, including, for the first time, the fragment with which he intended to begin his oft-contemplated third volume, will be welcomed by readers familiar with the compulsively-readable Muggeridge and, one hopes, will serve to introduce a new generation to a journalist and author whose life spanned the 20th century and who chronicled its turbulent ups and downs in matchless prose.

Volume I, *The Green Stick* – the title drawn from a saying of Leo Tolstoy's that somewhere there was buried a green stick inscribed with words that would destroy evil in the hearts of men and bring them happiness – was first published by William Collins in 1972. *The Sunday Times* hailed it as '... one of the greatest autobiographies of our time.' Volume II, *The Infernal Grove*, a chastened title taken from William Blake's 'Songs of Experience', appeared a year later (1973).

These two volumes carry Muggeridge's life story only to the end of the second World War. For the next two decades, autobiographical silence. So much of Muggeridge's career, including his dominance of the early years of BBC television, lay ahead; so why no third volume?

In part, it may have been due to mental exhaustion; Muggeridge was nearly 70 when he completed *The Infernal Grove*. In part, it was because many of the people who would populate his third volume were still alive, sensitive to criticism, and not beyond a threat of libel. Malcolm told me once that he could never write about his once close friendship with novelist Anthony Powell as long as Powell was alive; as it happened Powell was to outlive Muggeridge by a decade. Then, too, it is clear that Malcolm wanted to switch the tone and substance of his memoirs; from events to their significance, from the ways of the world to his vision of God. Indeed, his highly autobiographical 1969 bestseller, *Jesus Rediscovered*, had already begun the process.

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In the last years of his life, writing was simply beyond him. Muggeridge's eyesight failed and his memory, once so acute, began to fail. The spirit may have been willing but the flesh was weak. So the fragmentary, rather tentative opening of *The Right Eye* – a title intended to remind us that while the left eye sees only time and man, the right eye sees eternity – is all we shall have. What is most remarkable is that Malcolm's prophetic instincts never left him. In my last visit to him, a couple of years before his death in 1990, he was still following world events and very shrewd about their direction and eventual outcome. If Muggeridge was sometimes mocked and seldom heeded – well, that is the fate of prophets, as Jeremiah discovered when, for his insights, he got himself chucked down a well. Prophets unsettle our preconceptions and disturb our complacency. Muggeridge never claimed to be a prophet. When others, like Cardinal Manning of Los Angeles, applied that label to him, he demurred: 'I am no prophet, no, nor prophet's son', he said, then adapting Amos; 'I was a journalist and the Lord took me as I sat at my typewriter.' Yet no perceptive reader of the ensuing pages will fail to be struck by Muggeridge's prophetic genius.

His instincts were on display in the winter months of 1932-33 when he served as stand-in correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian* in Moscow. He did a daring thing: he had his Russian interpreter buy him a railway ticket to the Ukraine and North Caucasus. What Muggeridge saw on that extended rail trip he never forgot; years later he wrote that it 'remained in my mind as a nightmare memory.' And he did his best to make sure the world did not forget.

He saw the richest wheat lands of Europe turned into a wilderness. He saw famine – 'planned and deliberate; not due to any natural catastrophe like failure of rain or cyclone or flooding. An administrative famine brought about by the forced collectivization of agriculture . . . abandoned villages, the absence of livestock, neglected fields: everywhere, famished, frightened people.'

In a German settlement, a little oasis of prosperity in the collectivized wilderness, he saw peasants kneeling down in the snow, weeping, and asking for bread. In his diary he wrote: "Whatever else I may do or think in the future, I must never pretend that I haven't seen this. Ideas will come and go; but this is more than an idea. It is peasants kneeling down in the snow and asking for bread. Something that I have seen and understood."

In a series of articles, Muggeridge wrote of what he had seen; on February 26, 1933: '... to say there is a famine in some of the most fertile parts of Russia is to say much less than the truth; there is not only famine ... but a state of war, a military occupation ... the grain collection has been carried out with such thoroughness and brutality that the peasants are now quite without bread.' The next month he wrote a three part series tracing how the 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat' had become the Dictatorship of Joseph Stalin; then how the Dictatorship of Stalin became the 'Dictatorship of the General Idea'.

His reporting produced a chorus of denunciation. The policy of the British government, and the inclination of the chattering classes, was wholehearted support for what was then called 'the Soviet experiment'. Muggeridge was denounced as 'an hysterical liar' by such eminent personages as the Very Rev. Hewlett Johnson, Dean of Canterbury, who, from his pulpit had praised Stalin's '... steady purpose and kindly generosity'; by Harold Laski, who assured all who would listen that the show trials of the Old Bolsheviks were models of judicial fairness. George Bernard Shaw, who had just returned from a visit to Russia, contradicted Muggeridge's accounts of famine by describing granaries full to overflowing, attended by apple-cheeked granary maids. Even Malcolm's aunt by marriage, Beatrice Webb, joined the chorus, repudiating Muggeridge's assertion that forced labour existed in the Soviet Union; though when pressed in private conversation, she did acknowledge, almost wistfully Malcolm noted, 'In Russia, people disappear.'

Within Russia, Muggeridge's reporting was contradicted pre-eminently by Walter Duranty, Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times*, a man whom Muggeridge later called 'the greatest liar I have ever met' – a reporter who nonetheless was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for journalism.

If vindication was a long time coming, it came when Susan Taylor, in her 1990 biography of Duranty, *Stalin's Apologist* (Oxford University Press), wrote this: 'But for Muggeridge's eyewitness accounts of the famine in the spring of 1933 and his stubborn chronicle of the event, the effects of the crime upon those who suffered it might well have remained as hidden from scrutiny as its perpetrators intended. Little thanks he has received for it over the years, although there is a growing number who realize what a singular act of honesty and



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courage his reportage constituted.' Alas, by the time Susan Taylor wrote that, Muggeridge was dead.

Vindication came again from Alexander Solzhenitsyn; when Joseph Pearce interviewed Solzhenitsyn for his biography (*Solzhenitsyn: a Soul in Exile*, Baker Books, 2001) Solzhenitsyn commended Muggeridge as '... a man able to travel that difficult path of freeing himself from socialist lies and attaining spiritual heights.'

It was Malcolm's Russian experience that first prompted a re-evaluation of Christianity. As Muggeridge put it four decades later: 'My disillusionment with the notion of a predestined progress towards a kingdom of heaven on earth led me inexorably back to the kingdom not of this world proclaimed in the Christian revelation.'

Malcolm made a prophetic remark to me in 1978 when I happened to be staying with him at the time a conclave in Rome chose Karol Wojtyla to become Pope John Paul II. 'It is the end of the Soviet Union,' Muggeridge said, 'they will not be able to withstand the moral authority of a Pope from the Communist bloc.' Another prophecy that he did not live to see fully vindicated.

Nothing in Muggeridge's controversial journalistic career ever rivaled his 'Royal Soap Opera' article that appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* on October 19, 1957. His theme was that materialist societies like ours are especially prone to hero-worship; having by and large ceased to believe in God, they pay increasing obeisance to a Queen or Royal family, making of a symbol ('no bad thing in itself') a kind of substitute or ersatz religion.

The Queen happened to be touring America when the article appeared (it had been written nearly two years before) and the British press smelled blood. Muggeridge's article was described as '... treasonous ... ruthless ... shocking ... patronizing ... gruesome' to quote only a few epithets. Muggeridge received death threats and his home was vandalized. As he walked along the seafront in Brighton, a passer-by spat in his face. He was banned from the BBC, and his newspaper column dropped.

We who have lived to watch the authority of the Monarchy reduced to a ribald joke – soap opera indeed – can but marvel at Muggeridge's prescience and courage. If even he could not have imagined a character quite so ludicrous as Princess Di, he could nevertheless say, paraphrasing Kipling, 'I saw the sunset ere most men saw the dawn.'

In the 1960s and 70s Muggeridge operated as a sort-of freelance

world correspondent; as he put it, he had taken up the hazards of street-walking in preference to the security of being an inmate of a licensed house. He wrote for papers and magazines in the U.K., the U.S., Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. His television programs were broadcast through the English-speaking world. Even to summarize his utterances in this hectic period is to shortchange his prophetic gifts. Nevertheless, here, without comment, are a few delicious Muggeridgisms:

In our time the genius of man has gone into science, where it has achieved the most astounding results – far, far greater in my lifetime than in the whole of the rest of recorded time. In literature and the arts, in mysticism and religion, nothing has been done that will be of any major interest to posterity, and a good deal that will invite derision and even contempt. (1967)

The twentieth century's version of Descartes' famous dictum is, 'I screw, therefore I am.' (1969)

Man is a fugitive from reality who must somehow be persuaded to confront his own imperfection and despair (1976)

The State, in fact, is the greatest of all tyrants, the ultimate tyrant. Kings can be executed, oligarchies can be broken up, millionaires can be despoiled of their money, Popes can be defied and heresies persisted in, but the State is, in principle, ourselves, and how can we put down ourselves? We who are the Leviathan cannot slay it. (1954)

The most highly educated society in Western Europe elected Hitler and the highest density of Universities per acre and per person is to be found in California. Need I say more? (1978)

A key to our present discontents is simply that the burden of being free has come to seem too heavy to be borne, and that, consciously or unconsciously, willfully or under duress, the prevailing disposition is to lay it down. In a famous scene in Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, the Chief Inquisitor turns away the returned Christ because he brings with him the dreaded gift of freedom. Governments, as it seems to me, whatever their ideology, are going to show themselves of a like mind with the Grand Inquisitor. (1978)

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When Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1978, Muggeridge wrote a supportive letter to *The Times*: 'I do not doubt that in the history books, when our squalid moral decline is recounted, with the final breakdown in law and order that must follow (for without a moral order, there can be no order) the Pope's courageous and just, though I fear in the event largely ineffectual, stand will be accorded the respect and admiration it deserves.'

Four years after he wrote this, Muggeridge was received into the Roman Catholic church.

Death was a topic about which Malcolm frequently thought and wrote. At the age of 76, he wrote: 'Like a prisoner awaiting his release, like a schoolboy when the end of term is near, like a migrant bird ready to fly south . . . I long to be gone. Extricating myself from the flesh I have too long inhabited, hearing the key turn in the lock of time so that the great doors of eternity swing open, disengaging my tired mind from its interminable conundrums, and my tired ego from its wearisome insistencies. Such is the prospect of death.'

Alas, Malcolm's death was not to be the easeful passage from time to eternity that he had hoped for; at the end his mind disintegrated, he grew suspicious and quarrelsome, at the last he was confined to a nursing home.

He died on November 14, 1990 at the age of 87. He was buried in the village cemetery at Whatlington in Sussex and on his gravestone was incised the epitaph VALIANT FOR TRUTH. It is an apt inscription; Malcolm Muggeridge had earned the right to echo the words of Bunyan's Mr. Valiant-For-Truth:

Though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive at where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder. And so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

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Dr. Ian Hunter is Professor Emeritus in the Faculty of Law at the University of Western Ontario; he is the author of the first biography of Malcolm Muggeridge [*Malcolm Muggeridge, A Life*], and editor of two Muggeridge anthologies: *Things Past* (1978) and *The Very Best of Malcolm Muggeridge* (1998).

LONG AGO I copied out from a Life of the French sculptor, Rodin, a letter he addressed to his wife, Rose, dated 24 August, 1913. It occurs to me now that in it he says to her exactly what I should wish to say to my wife, Kitty, and that there could be no better place for saying it than here. So, transposing the names:

My dear Kitty,

This letter is just to tell you that my mind is full of the greatness of God's gift to me when He put you at my side. Keep this thought of mine in your generous heart.

Your,  
M.





# *Chronicle I:*

## THE GREEN STICK

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I used to believe that there was a green stick, buried on the edge of a ravine in the old Zakaz forest at Yasnaya Polyana, on which words were carved that would destroy all the evil in the hearts of men and bring them everything good.

—Leo Tolstoy