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John Morris at Keio University 1938–1942^{*}

William Snell

The two best known of the private universities [in Tokyo] are Waseda and Keio. It was to Keio that I got myself transferred when I could no longer stand the prison-like atmosphere of my first university. Keio, which was founded earlier than any of the government institutions, is the oldest university in Japan, and in my opinion the finest in the country. Its founder was a man of extremely liberal views, and it used to be known as “The English University”, because most of the instruction there was formerly given in that language.

Traveller from Tokyo (1943), p.45.

Introduction

Probably the most interesting British lecturer to have taught at Keio is John Morris (C. J. Morris, 1895–1980), C.B.E., adventurer, intellectual and music lover, participant in two Everest expeditions, and Controller of the BBC classical music Third Programme (later Radio 3) from 1952 until his

* I would like to thank my mother, Ellen Snell, for introducing me to *Traveller from Tokyo* and thereby to John Morris; also the Royal Geographical Society and the BBC Photo Library for permission to publish illustrations figs 1 and 2.

retirement in 1958.

Morris was born in Gravesend, Kent, in August 1895, and early on considered a career as a pianist, although the First World War intervened. Morris went to King's College, Cambridge, but his studies were interrupted by the advent of the war. Despite poor eyesight, he joined the Leicestershire Regiment in 1915, seeing active duty as a commissioned officer in the war in France and Belgium.¹ Later in 1917 he became a regular in the Indian Army serving with the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles from 1918 until 1934 in Palestine, Afghanistan (the Third Afghan War in 1919), Waziristan (the mountainous region of northwest Pakistan bordering Afghanistan) and the north West Frontier of India.² In his frank autobiography *Hired to Kill* (1960) Morris writes about coming to terms with his homosexuality during his army career, one which ended in 1934 supposedly after he contracted tuberculosis, although, according to his 1943 book *Traveller from Tokyo*, in actuality Morris decided to leave India as a reaction against the seduction of the European life there, which he rejected in order to "remain a civilized being".³ His association with the Far East, particularly India and service in the Great War link him with two of his predecessors at Keio, namely James Cousins and Walter Sherard Vines, neither of whom it is likely he ever met.⁴ Morris was close friends with the novelist E. M. Forster,

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- 1 He went through the battle of the Somme "and experiences which haunted him for the rest of his life" (*The Times*, Obituary, by P.H.N., Dec. 13, 1980; pg. 12; Issue 60809; col G); Morris writes both vividly and movingly of his time in the trenches in *Hired to Kill*, chapters 3, 4 and 5.
 - 2 *Who Was Who*, Vol. 7 (1971–1980) (London: Adam & Charles Black), p.560.
 - 3 *Traveller from Tokyo* (London: Cresset Press, 1943; rpt. New York: Sheridan House, 1944), p. 10.
 - 4 See William Snell, "James Cousins and Sherard Vines at Keio University: 1919–20; 1923–28" Parts One and Two in *The Hiyoshi Review of English Studies*, Nos. 49 (2006): 129–46, and 50 (2007): 43–67.

to whom he dedicated his second book about Japan *The Phoenix Cup* (1947; see also Appendix) and the poet William Plomer.⁵

Morris lived a colourful and adventurous life. His connection with the Gurkhas led to him being invited to become a member of two Mount Everest Expeditions, in 1922 and 1936, in both of which he acted as transport officer and interpreter. From 1929 prompted by Sir Aurel Stein⁶ on a grant from the Royal Geographical Society led an expedition to Chinese Turkestan (Xinjiang) to do pioneer survey work, for which he received the Murcheson Memorial of the Royal Geographical Society. After leaving the army Morris returned to Cambridge University, from 1934 to 1937, where he held the William Wyse Studentship in Social Anthropology and gained his MA and MSc.

However, it was his Everest experience which serendipitously brought Morris to teach in Japan, first at Tokyo University of Literature and Science (Tokyo bunrika daigaku)⁷ and at the Tokyo Imperial University, concurrently working as an advisor on English language to the Japanese Department of Foreign Affairs, and later as Professor of English Literature at Keio University.⁸

5 Plomer, incidentally, provided the illustration for the dust-cover of *Hired to Kill* (1960).

6 Sir Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943), born in Budapest, was a Hungarian Jewish archaeologist who became a British citizen. He was also a professor at various Indian universities.

7 Founded in 1929, later to become Tokyo kyouiku daigaku and then the University of Tsukuba we know today, situated in Ibaraki, Japan.

8 *Who Was Who*, Vol. 7 (1971–1980), p. 560.



Fig 1. (John Morris at the 1936 Base Camp dining table, surrounded by familiar British brands including Huntley & Palmers ginger nut biscuits, Heinz tomato ketchup and sardines from Sainsbury's; © Royal Geographical Society)

The Everest Expeditions

... mountain travel has always appealed to aesthetes and intellectuals, perhaps because it lacks the element of competition.

Hired to Kill, p.142.

Morris was greatly attached to Nepal, Sikim and Tibet, where he felt very much at home with the people. He learned to speak Nepali fluently which led to an invitation to join two attempts to conquer Mount Everest. The first was the Second British Expedition lasting 41 days from May to

June of 1922 when he was 27 years old, in a team which included George Leigh Mallory (then aged 36) who would later be killed on his own, still controversial attempt to reach the summit in 1924.⁹ The team made three assault missions, all of which failed, mainly due to the fact that they did not use oxygen, and the mission was finally abandoned after an avalanche tragically killed seven of the Sherpas.¹⁰

The 1922 team was lead by Brigadier-General Charles Granville Bruce.¹¹ Bruce would provide the foreword to the 1928 recruitment manual Morris co-wrote with Major William Brook Northey, *The Gurkhas: their manners, customs and country*. Invalided out of the Army at the end of the war, he was nearly 56 when he carried out his ambition of organizing a leading expedition to climb to the summit of Everest and alas too old to make the final assault himself.

Mallory later wrote of the expedition:

Bruce was a splendid leader. His organization was perfect. He worked hard. We were a mixed party of 13 and thanks to Bruce there was never a hot word among us the whole time. ...we required 350 transport animals. He delivered every single scrap at the Base Camp on

9 On June 8, 1924, George Mallory and Andrew Irvine, both British, made an attempt on the summit via the north route from which they never returned. Mallory's body was discovered in 1999.

10 See Tom Holzel and Audrey Salkeld, *First on Everest: The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine* (Henry Holt and Co., 1986; NY: Paragon House, 1988), p.124.

11 Brigadier-General Charles Granville Bruce, CB, MVO (1866–1939) was a Himalayan veteran. Educated at Harrow School and Repton School and served in several regiments before 1889 when he joined the 5th Gurkha rifles, the unit he was in for most of his career, including at Gallipoli in World War I. Bruce was, like Morris, a fluent speaker of Nepali. He wrote about his expeditions in several books, including his autobiography, *Himalayan Wanderer* (1934).

May 1st. You and I expected most of it to remain at Darjeeling or Phari. Of course Geoffrey Bruce [General Bruce's nephew and transportation officer] and John Morris did the driving work, but it was with Charlie Bruce's organization.¹²

Forty four years after the second expedition of 1922, in 1966, Morris, then in his seventies ("By then Morris was a well-known travel writer and something of a heavyweight in literary circles because he had been the Controller of the BBC's Third Programme") was houseguest for several weeks with Indian English language author Manohar Malgonkar (b.1913) to whom he gave a first hand account of the expedition which "revealed how schoolboyishly amateurish and classbound that enterprise had been."¹³

Morris's own credentials were suspect. He was neither a sportsman nor an athlete, and wore thick glasses. Oh, yes, he had "seen the Alps as a boy," and had also served in a military campaign in the high hills of the Afghan border. He himself saw his role as "a general helper and transport officer." Not a climber. The fact is that he loathed discipline, uniforms, military routine, and had been busy pulling strings to get himself an extra-curricular posting. Now he had hit the bull's eye. He was an officer of the Gurkha Brigade, and therefore of the right caste, in the eyes of the man who was to lead the expedition: Brigadier [-General] Stanley [sic.] Bruce, who commanded the Brigade and had now retired. Too old for military service, at 57, he was too old for

12 Holzel and Salkeld, p.124.

13 Manohar Malgonkar, "Empire's most emblematic adventure" in *The Tribune* (Chandigarh, India) Online edition, Sunday, June 23, 2002
<<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20020623/spectrum/time.htm>>

Everest-climbing. He of course, spoke Gurkhali ‘Like a Native’, which was his special asset. ... In 1933 [sic.], George Mallory, then aged 47, lost his life within a few hundred yards of the summit, and no one to this day knows whether he died on the way up, or way down having reached the peak. And in 1953, 32 years later, one of the members of the expedition did actually climb Mount Everest. In 1921, he was a teenager [sic.], recruited in Nepal to act as a personal servant to John Morris. In 1966, before he came to stay with me, Morris had gone to Darjeeling to meet his one-time valet who had since become world-famous Tensing Norkay.¹⁴

Bruce wrote of the 1922 expedition in his book *The Assault on Everest, 1922* (1923). Morris himself recorded his mountaineering memories in *Hired to Kill*, recalling Mallory (“George”) with affection: “He was thirty-six but looked much younger...” commenting that he was also “the most absent-minded man I have ever known ...”

He was by nature an idealist; he believed passionately in the good life and wanted to see it brought within the reach of everybody. We never discussed politics, but it was obvious that, like so many who were educated at Winchester, his views were decidedly socialist. Yet he was too intelligent ever to have become what is nowadays known as a left-wing intellectual... unlike some who labour in the cause of international understanding, he was incapable of cynicism and did not seem to know the meaning of frustration. At any rate, that is how he seemed to me when he was thirty-six. If he were alive today he would be approaching

14 Tenzing Norgay (1914–1986) the Nepalese born Himalayan Sherpa guide who accompanied Sir Edmund Hillary on his conquest of Everest in 1953.

seventy-five, and it is idle to speculate on what he might have done with his life. I suppose it is normal for those who die young to remain youthful in the memories of their friends. Certainly I am incapable of visualizing George as an elderly man and shall always remember him as a young athlete, striding up the Rongbuk glacier and leaving trails of untidiness everywhere he went.”

Hired to Kill, p.144.

Morris notes on General Bruce that his “somewhat juvenile sense of humour and boisterous high spirits were at times a source of irritation” but that it was “impossible not to love him,” concluding that he was “the very finest type of paternal Indian Army officer. He knew the name of every man in his regiment, together with the intimate details of most of their private lives, and it was upon men such as he that the high reputation of the old Indian Army had been built.”¹⁵

Morris was Transportation Officer again when he participated in the Sixth British Expedition from April 25 to June 17, 1936, for 54 days, which also ended in failure, this time due to bad weather.

John Morris at Keio

I became a soldier by chance; it was purely by accident that I later became a university lecturer in Japan, and certainly I never thought to end my career as Controller of the B.B.C. Third Programme.

Hired to Kill, p.268.

15 *Hired to Kill: Some chapters of autobiography* (London: Hart-Davis; Cresset Press, 1960), p.147.

Morris originally went to Japan in the autumn of 1937 having decided to stop off while on his way home from India after 15 years there, having spent the previous six months in a Himalayan village with nothing to read except Arthur Waley's translation of *The Tale of Genji*, his first introduction to Japan ("... I had so steeped my mind in this book that before going to Japan that it may account for the feeling of familiarity that I everywhere had."¹⁶ Now aged 42, having arrived in Kobe, he was asked to give a talk in Tokyo on the two Everest exhibitions he participated in to several university mountaineering clubs. Subsequent to his return to England in the early summer of 1938, Morris received an invitation to a reception at the Japanese Embassy in London, where he was told that a telegram had been received asking him to work for the Japanese Foreign Office as advisor. He was also invited to take up a lectureship at "one of the Tokyo Universities" (Tokyo Bunri University) while also teaching part-time at the Imperial university, as Morris appears to have been friendly with Sanki Ichikawa, Professor of English there.¹⁷ "Emboldened by the Embassy champagne, I accepted on the spot."¹⁸

Before he commenced lecturing Morris settled into a house in Shibuya, which would later be destroyed in one of the B52 air raids on Tokyo. He was obviously regarded as a privileged individual given that his connection with

16 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.12. Ichikawa Sanki (1886–1970). Internationally renowned Japanese philologist and scholar of English letters was for many years head of the department of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University.

17 On the numbering of houses in Tokyo ("The system of numbering houses in Japan is quite peculiar...), Morris writes in particular of how when a house is built on a site formerly occupied by several houses it retains the numbers assigned to them "Thus, my friend, Dr. Sanki Ichikawa, Professor of English at the Tokyo Imperial University, lived in a house that was numbered officially as 25 to 30." *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.17.

18 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.14.

the Japanese Foreign Office allowed him to be provided with a telephone.¹⁹ After a period, Morris evidently had himself transferred to Keio:

It was to Keio that I got myself transferred when I could no longer stand the prison-like atmosphere of my first university. Keio, which was founded earlier than any of the government institutions, is the oldest university in Japan, and in my opinion the finest in the country. Its founder [Yukichi Fukuzawa] was a man of extremely liberal views, and it used to be known as “The English University”, because most of the instruction there was formerly given in that language. It has, moreover, kept up its tradition for liberal-mindedness, perhaps because the majority of its professors and senior lecturers are men who have been educated abroad. Following a curriculum of its own, it is not looked upon with favour either by the Department of Education, the Police, or the Army. But this makes it less of a “forcing house” than any other university in Japan.

Traveller from Tokyo, p.45.

It is interesting to note that Morris refers to Keio as “The English University”, as a less-reputable former instructor at Keio also referred to it as the “Oxford of Japan”.²⁰ He adds that “Most of the industrial leaders of the country were educated at Keio. Many of these are millionaires, and consequently men of influence, and this makes it difficult for the government

19 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p. 21.

20 Taid O’Conroy; see in the introduction to his book *The Menace of Japan* (London: The Paternoster Library, 1936); also Peter O’Connor, “Timothy or Taid or Taig Conroy or O’Conroy, 1883–1935: ‘The “Best Authority, East and West” on Anything concerning Japan” in *Britain & Japan: biographical portraits* vol. 4 (London: Japan Library, 2002) edited by Hugh Cortazzi: 334–37.

to interfere in the internal affairs of the university. There is such competition to get into Keio as into the Imperial universities since its graduates are assured of obtaining good business appointments.”²¹

Initially, Morris suffered the frustration of several of his predecessors: “It appeared to me that what was required was not lectures on literature but lessons in English”; but he was told that “a certain number of incomprehensible lectures were salutary: they kept the students from overestimating their ability to understand spoken English.”²² Despite Morris’s admiration for Keio, he came to lament that there was very little contact between faculty and students, and also the fact that classes were sometimes so large that teachers found it impossible to know the names of all their students. To an attempt to rectify this, he unsuccessfully tried to implement the system of tutorials he had known at Cambridge into Keio. He also observed that the syllabi students had to cover was so massive that they were overloaded and stayed away from tutorials to catch up on other studies.

The Sino-Japanese War in 1937 had resulted in general restrictions on commodities such as fuel, which meant that classrooms could not be heated in winter, resulting in turn to about 10% of students leaving their studies due to ill health. Compulsory military training also impeded on study, classes often being cancelled in favour of field training or route marches, as well as special lectures on discipline.²³ Two of Morris’s students committed suicide by throwing themselves under a train to avoid reporting for military service, an action which he interpreted as a protest against the army’s domination of affairs in the country (“the army controls everything in Japan and there

21 *Traveller from Tokyo*, pp.45–46.

22 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.42.

23 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.47.

is nothing anyone can do...”²⁴ rather than due to fear of military training. As his book *Traveller from Tokyo* (1943) reveals, Morris was constantly monitoring what was going on in Japanese life and its institutions. Part I contains often quite detailed observations and comments on such topics as “Japanese food”, “Japanese dress”, “The Japanese language” (Morris wryly comments, “The Japanese language is about as hard to conquer as Mount Everest I must freely admit.”²⁵), “Engaging a servant”, “Education”, “The Japanese Press”, “Literature in Japan” and subjects closer to his heart such as “Mountaineering”, “Radio broadcasting”, and “Western music in Japan”; Part II (After Pearl Harbour (7th December 1941 to 29th July 1942)) is concerned with the downside of his experience in Japan: “Japanese police methods”, “Rationing”, “Air Raid Precautions: the American air raid”, “Austerity measures: the ban on amusements; changes in education” and finally he describes his forced departure from Japan.

Morris records that the onset of the Pacific war “did not, as one might have expected, make much difference to the number of students entering the English literature faculty; the proportion remained the same. Nor did the number of students who took German markedly increase.”²⁶ However, the importation of English books declined and an official ban was placed on a number of authors: “this interference by the police has already had a paralyzing effect upon the study of English literature.

Divisions inevitably arose between the Allied ex-pat community and the Germans. Censorship was imposed on the English-language publications, one of which, the *Japan News Week*, for which Morris wrote a weekly book review column, run by an American, W.R. Wills, was finally forced to close.

24 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.51.

25 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.34.

26 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.61.

Morris was fortunate in that he was working for the Japanese Foreign Office and could therefore criticize with impunity the Nazi regime through his choice of books to review. This had the result that his name was added, as he subsequently found out, to the Gestapo “Black List”.

Because he was employed by Keio and through his affiliation with the Foreign Office, Morris experienced little discrimination; however, Sunday December 7th, 1941, a day “much the same as any other” marked a turning point for Morris and many of his Western acquaintances and friends. In the afternoon he had been writing an article for the *Japan News Week* on Virginia Woolf, who had recently committed suicide.²⁷ That evening Morris was present at the home of Paul Rush, an educational missionary who is attributed with having introduced American football to Japan, along with the aforementioned editor W.R Wills, his managing editor of the paper and Air-Commodore Bryant, the British Air Attaché:

After dinner we all sat round the fire. Most of us had realized for some time that Japan’s entry into the war was now inevitable, but no one thought the moment was yet at hand I think that if anyone had told us that, as we sat enjoying our quiet chat, the Japanese fleet was already in position in front of Pearl Harbour, we should have laughed at the idea.²⁸

The following morning Morris heard the announcer on the radio saying that a state of war now existed between Japan and the United States.

Initially Morris was allowed to continue his lectures at Keio and noted that “there was nothing abnormal about the behaviour of the students.”

27 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.95.

28 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.96.

However, “At the end of the lecture... I was told that I had better do no further teaching pending the receipt of instructions from the Department of Education.” He then went to the Foreign Office, which had originally invited him to Japan, to verify his position now and whether he had diplomatic immunity, to be informed that he would not be arrested but should remain home and wait “until it was possible to see hoe the situation was developing.” Other ex-pats were not so well treated. The same day he went to visit his close friend Frank Hawley (1906–1961), who was Managing Director of the British Library of Information and Culture in Tokyo at the time the Pacific War started. Morris wrote a letter for Hawley’s Japanese wife to send to the Swiss Legation asking them to protect the books. Apart from being imprisoned at Sugamo from December 1941 to July 1942 (a fate that Morris avoided due to his affiliation to Keio and the loyalty of his Japanese friends²⁹) when he was repatriated to England. The Library had accumulated a vast collection of books (something like 21, 000 volumes) which were confiscated by the authorities under the Enemy Property Administration Law, bought by the Mitsui Trust Company, which in turn handed them over to Keio University Library for around 60,000 yen in May of 1943.³⁰

Morris was able to return to lecturing a few hours every week while remaining on the payroll of the Foreign Office although he was relieved of any duties there. Over the months that followed, Morris was able to observe at first hand the daily lives of the people in Tokyo, the austerity measures imposed, and even experiencing one of the first “Doolittle” bombing raids

29 “Not one [Japanese friend] ceased to visit me, and I even made a few new friends. Some of them went to great personal trouble to keep me supplied with food, and others denied themselves such luxuries as eggs in order that I should not go short. I shall never forget their kindness, nor the risks they took...” (*Traveller from Tokyo*, Chapter 7, p.122.)

30 See <<http://www.hawaii.edu/asiaref/japan/special/sakamaki/hwarticle1.htm>>

by the U.S. Air Force on Tokyo (“...it was an odd experience to be bombed by one’s one side, but my sentiment at the time was one of satisfaction, for I had been feeling ill at ease. It seemed wrong that, after five months of war, life in Japan should be so near to normal.”³¹

In the post declaration of war period, Morris “After a while I ceased to play the gramophone. I am affected more by music than any other form of art, and during these months I reached a stage when the emotional effect of hearing great music was so overpowering that I could no longer bear it”³² he adds.

The arrests and internment of friends and fellow non-Japanese inevitably led to pangs of conscience:

Strange though it may seem, I would myself much have preferred to have been interned. Although no restrictions were placed upon my movements, and I was even permitted after a time to continue my lectures, I suffered from severe mental strain, as I felt sure it was merely a matter of time before I, too, should be arrested. Not that I was suffering from a guilty conscience; but so many people I knew to be perfectly harmless had been arrested that there seemed to be no reason why I should be left at liberty.

Traveller from Tokyo, p. 121.

Morris’s *Times* obituary states that “he was held in such regard by the Japanese that they repatriated him.” Undoubtedly Morris’s affiliation with both the Japanese Foreign Office and Keio protected him from the treatment meted out to other foreigners in Japan at the time. In April of 1942, Morris

31 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.120.

32 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.130.

was summoned to the Foreign Office and offered the chance to work for the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, which he refused as he did not wish to become “Japan’s ‘Lord Haw-Haw’.”³³ “Loyalty to one’s country is something that every Japanese understands, and had I accepted their offer I think they would have despised me.”³⁴ Add further injury to Morris’s spirit was the fact that before leaving Japan on July 26 1942 by ship from Yokohama, he had to relinquish his furniture in lieu of income tax.

Morris’s second book on Japan, *The Phoenix Cup*, published in 1947, is a record of his six-month return visit to the country after the war. At the behest of the BBC as a special correspondent Morris made a trip to Tokyo in January of 1946, traveling by American Army Transport Command from Calcutta. His aim was to survey the devastation that the country had suffered as a consequence of defeat; “the greatest disaster that had ever overtaken their country” as he referred to it. He was shocked by the destruction and lamented the extreme Americanization of the country, urging for British cultural links as quickly as possible, and for the allies to remain “not as conquerors, but as teachers”. The discovery of an undamaged saké cup (the “phoenix cup” of his title) in the burnt-out ruins of his former house in Shibuya was a sign of a return to some kind of friendship between Britain and Japan: “It is for me a symbol of all that is best in Japan; both a symbol and a reminder that the best will survive.”³⁵

Among other things, Morris was able to accompany the emperor Hirohito on the first tour he made after the surrender, to interview prominent politicians such as the leader of the Japanese Communist Party, Sanzo

33 William Joyce (1906–46), British radio broadcaster of Nazi propaganda to Britain, later executed for treason.

34 *Traveller from Tokyo*, p.141.

35 *The Phoenix Cup*, p.221.

Nozaka (“He was educated at Keio University in Tokyo, where I was myself teaching before the war...”*The Phoenix Cup*, p.66) and also General MacArthur. Morris was, in addition, provided with an opportunity to see Crown Prince Akihito being educated at the Peers’ School (“The Japanese are fond of comparing the Peer’s School with Eton, but the preparatory department...seemed more like a rural English school in the days of Dickens”. He relates that

I was wearing British correspondent’s uniform, but in order to avoid my being mistaken or a military officer Admiral Yamanashi [president of the school] was careful to introduce me in my former capacity as a lecturer in English literature at Keio University...³⁶

Morris witnessed the repatriation of some of the 6.5 million Japanese soldiers at Otake port, the condition of the men, their dejection, the trauma of having survived and of having to return, vanquished, to their families. He was also privileged to be present at the International War Crimes Tribunal, and observed the first democratic elections in the country, in April 1946. In addition, Morris visited Hiroshima in the aftermath of the atomic bombing, an act which he views as having been one without moral justification given that the war was “for all practical purposes, already won and would have ended in a matter of weeks” adding that “the official report of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey has made it quite clear that the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima has no effect whatever on the military progress of the war. In no circumstances is it possible to justify the further use of this weapon, only three days later, on the part of Nagasaki.”³⁷ On a lighter note,

36 *The Phoenix Cup*, p.87.

37 *The Phoenix Cup*, p.58.

Morris admits that while living in Japan before the war “it used to amuse me to collect examples of that curious form of English which is peculiar to the country... with the arrival of the Occupation Army, they have become more popular than they ever were before.” He goes on to cite two examples, one intended to show that a shop in Karuizawa “specialized in curios from the Japanese hinterland. What the notice stated was: ‘HERE IS CURIOUS OBJECTS FROM THE BACKSIDE OF JAPAN’.”³⁸

At one point earlier in *The Phoenix Cup*, Morris quotes from a letter received from a former Japanese colleague which contains, although the place is not identified, what must surely be a description of Keio’s Mita campus after the incendiary bombing:

“I am still alive. ...Our university lost two-thirds of its buildings, but fortunately the building in which our rooms are has survived the fires, and your books are safe in my room. I have kept your money in the bank, and I believe it is safe also, though the bank itself was twice burned, if what I hear is true. Your notebooks and manuscripts are still safe in my private room, untouched since you left then when you came there for the last time in 1942.

“We carried on the teaching of English literature as usual until May of 1945; until the 25th May to be exact, when the university was badly damaged. Since then we have had no regular classes, but we continued our seminar right through the raids, and even on the day of surrender. You will be interested to hear that for the past twelve months our weekly meeting of post-graduate students has been devoted to the study of *Tristram Shandy*, which I remember you once told me was

38 *The Phoenix Cup*, pp. 137–38.

your favourite novel.”

The ex-colleague adds:

“During the war I read in a newspaper that you had written a book about Japan. Somebody had smuggled a copy in through Russia and I was told that you believed the Japanese people did not like to make war with England and America; you were quite free and you felt the Japanese people were kind to you. Such things were told to me and I thanked you very much.”³⁹

Morris at the BBC and George Orwell

George Orwell always reminded me of one of those figures on the front of Chartres Cathedral; there was a sort of pinched Gothic quality about his tall thin frame. He laughed often, but in repose his lined face suggested the grey asceticism of a medieval saint carved in stone and very weathered.⁴⁰

Following his repatriation by sea in the summer of 1942, Morris was employed by the BBC (from February 1943) as a “talks producer” for the Far Eastern Service (South and East Asia) broadcasting service from 1943–52, working alongside the poet and critic William Empson (1906–84), the then Chinese Editor, himself a veteran of Japan in the early 1930s before

39 *The Phoenix Cup*, p.40.

40 John Morris, “Some are More Equal Than Others: A note on George Orwell” in *The Penguin New Writing* ed. John Lehmann, Vol. 40 (July, 1950) (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books Ltd), p.90–97; p. 90.

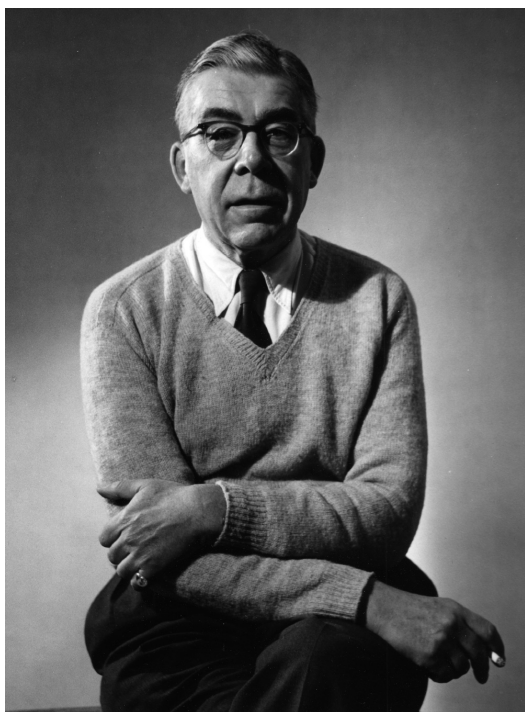


Fig 2. (John Morris as Controller of the Third Programme (1953–58); © BBC)

going to China,⁴¹ and the novelist and journalist George Orwell, famous for his work *1984*, who had joined the Service in 1941. Alas, Morris did not get on with either of the two.

Just after Orwell's death in January 1950 Morris published an essay on his impressions of the author at the BBC ironically entitled "Some are More Equal Than Others" in which he scathingly described how Orwell would castigate him for his upper-class background. Empson had "an unreasonable

41 Ironically and also at the invitation of Sanki Ishikawa, Empson lectured at Tokyo University of Literature and Science (Tokyo bunrika daigaku) and the Imperial University at Tokyo, from 1931 to 1934, both of which had employed Morris.

dislike for everything Japanese” and because Morris expressed the fact that he had enjoyed his time in that country “quite unfairly I think, regarded me as some sort of enemy.” In addition, Empson was an intimate friend of Orwell which “undoubtedly affected the latter’s attitude towards me.”⁴²

“Nothing was ever said, but I think my inability to enjoy [Orwell’s] filthy cigarettes was symbolic; it represented other things which made any sort of intimacy between us quite impossible.”⁴³

Whereas Orwell was ashamed of his social background and class, for Morris it was of no importance, but he observed “in recent years, in certain literary circles, it seems to have become a matter of pride to be able to display at least some sort of working-class origin.” Working in close proximity (they occupied adjacent cubicles) Orwell complained when Morris used the phone, mocked him when he took him for a drink in a pub (“I suppose most people have their oddities, and one of mine is an intense dislike of the English public house”), and for asking for a “beer” in stead of a “pint of bitter”; and annoyed Morris in the staff canteen by slurping tea from a saucer: “with a loud, sucking noise. He [Orwell] said nothing but looked at me with a slightly defiant expression when I continued to drink my own tea in the normal fashion. The two doorkeepers who were occupying our table looked somewhat scandalized, and after a few minutes got up and left.”⁴⁴ Orwell’s biographer Bernard Crick, however, comments that his “provocative and embarrassing proletarian affectations” could be “construed differently: either that Orwell was pulling Morris’s leg, or being deliberately rude.”

Later, after Orwell had left the BBC he sent Morris, out of the blue,

42 “Some are More Equal Than Others ...”, p.92.

43 “Some are More Equal Than Others ...”, p.91.

44 “Some are More Equal Than Others ...”, p.93.

some books to review for *Tribune* — a left-wing weekly then edited by Aneurin Bevan and Jon Kimche, the socialist policy of which Morris was opposed to — where he had become literary editor. Bumping into each other later on a London street Morris reminded Orwell that he hadn't been paid for the reviews. Morris records "'Oh' he said, smiling rather sardonically, 'we don't pay for reviews you know; it's all for the Cause.' It was the last time I saw him." Again Crick comments:

A political confidence trick? Perhaps, or another incident showing that Orwell simply thought Morris pompous and was teasing him — "ragging him" is almost the word, just as young Eric [Eric Arthur Blair — his real name] had reacted to authority at Eton. He probably saw the whole B.B.C. in a rather similar light as part of the establishment, tolerant but none the less authoritarian.⁴⁵

However, a simpler answer poses itself: Orwell was disapproving of homosexuals and his intense loathing of "fairies" is well known.⁴⁶ As mentioned earlier, Morris was quite candid about his homosexuality in his 1960 autobiographical book *Hired to Kill*, a rather brave confession given that until 1967 homosexuality in any circumstances was illegal. In the work he writes about confronting his sexual predilections in Northern India:

It was some years before I faced the truth, and if asked I would in those days have denied it; I could not admit it even to myself. I suppose most homosexuals go through a phase in which they imagine themselves

45 Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*. (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p.286.

46 He notoriously referred to homosexuals as "nancy boys" in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (Chapter 29, p.158).

to be unique. The feeling passes as one grows older, but with me it persisted for a long time and is probably one reason for my inability to manage human relationships. In India I was an alien in a double sense. I could never be more than a stranger in the Gurkha world, which I was to find increasingly attractive; nor with my brother-officers, who would at the least have despised me if they had known the truth, was I ever quite at ease. I learnt to dissemble with skill, but my inner life was something that I could share with nobody.

Hired to Kill, p. 15.

To what extent he pursued a homosexual life after his return to England we will probably never know, although Morris was later to become an inner member of the gay circle of London literati, becoming close friends with such figures as E.M. Forster and Joe Ackerley.⁴⁷ But we can speculate that Orwell may well have guessed that Morris was gay and thus his animosity is akin to that dislike which he showed toward Stephen Spender and W.H. Auden (“the nancy boys of literature”), who made no secret of being gay, and hence Orwell’s caustic attacks on the latter’s poetry. One other factor, suggested by Neil Pedlar, is that Orwell may have been jealous of the fact that Morris’s *Traveller from Tokyo* apparently sold over a million copies in paperback.⁴⁸

Whatever the truth of the matter, Orwell’s attitude towards Morris is regrettable given that the BBC colleague who wrote Morris’s *Times* obituary

47 J.R. (Joe Randolph) Ackerley, 1896–1967, writer and editor of *The Listener*, a magazine to which Morris contributed articles from time to time.

48 Neil Pedlar, “John Morris, George Orwell, the BBC and Wartime Japan” in *Britain & Japan: biographical portraits* vol. 3 (Folkestone: Japan Library, 1999) edited by J.E. Hoare: 257– 270.

states about his period as Controller of Radio 3 that “His musicality, wide reading, and receptivity to other people’s enthusiasms made him a congenial administrator, certainly one very easy to work with.”⁴⁹ Toward the end of his essay on Orwell, Morris states “I wish I could have known him better, for I greatly admire his work, but we always seemed to irritate each other. When we were alone together he always tried to behave in an aggressively working-class manner, and the effect of that was to make me talk like an unrepentant reactionary.” And he again self-deprecatingly concludes with the remark “But I am sure the fault was mostly mine.”⁵⁰

Ever a lover of classical music, John Morris went on to become Controller of the BBC Third Programme (later and still known as Radio 3) from 1952 until his retirement in 1958. He was instrumental in bringing about playwright and later Nobel laureate Samuel Beckett’s first contribution to radio, the drama *All That Fall*, in 1956. Morris was made a CBE in 1957 for his services to broadcasting. In September of 1973 Morris’s close friend of 30 years, the poet William Plomer, died at the age of 69. They first met after Morris was repatriated in 1942 and as Plomer relates in his second autobiographical book *At Home*, were “drawn together by the fact that for each of us living in Japan had been an important and delightful experience, and before long we were all but blown to glory together by the same flying bomb.”⁵¹

Plomer was in Japan from 1926 to 1929. “He had not intended to stay, but like so many other Englishmen in those days, having arrived there he

49 P.H.N. [?] “MR JOHN MORRIS” Obituaries, *The Times*, Dec. 23, 1980; pg. 12; Issue 60809; col G..

50 “Some are More Equal Than Others ...”, p.97.

51 William Plomer, *At Home: memoirs* (London: J. Cape, 1958), p.222.

found it impossible to tear himself away.”⁵² Through the poet Edmund Blunden, that catalyst for many British scholars who came to Japan, he secured a job at a high school in Tokyo. His stay in the country resulted in a volume of short stories (*Paper Houses*, 1929) and a novel (*Sado*, 1931) as well as a number of poems on Japanese themes. The influence Japan had on him remained throughout his life and manifest itself in the libretto he wrote for the composer Benjamin Britten’s canticle *Curlew River* (based on the Japanese classical Noh drama *Sumida Gawa*) which Morris evaluated as “in my opinion, an outstanding example of real cultural contact”. Morris goes on,

When I returned to England in 1942 I joined the BBC as its first Japanese Programme Organiser. Because of staff difficulties we were only able to operate in a very modest way, but I was glad that Plomer was willing to help us by writing material for translation. Years later, when I became Controller of the BBC Third Programme I always called upon him to talk

Plomer broadcast for the BBC during the war mostly on literary topics, and through this experience met John Morris

... athletic and enquiring, [Morris] had been a professional soldier before the war, and had traveled widely in south-east Asia and climbed the Himalayas. In India he had fallen in love with his batman, and had realized that he was a homosexual; this discovery had persuaded him to resign his commission and return to England, where he presently found

52 John Morris, “William Plomer 1903–1973” in *Eigo seinen* [The Rising Generation: Kenkyusha: Tokyo] 119 No. 12 (March, 1974): 820–21; 820.

a post at the BBC. He was a burly, round-faced man, and he and Plomer struck up a friendship that, like all Plomer's friendships... proved lasting, and which over the years became increasingly close.⁵³

Plomer describes Morris in his memoirs as a "solid and unemotional-looking man, a kinsman of William Morris, he had developed an Asian look, the protective mimicry that unconsciously moulds the facial expression, and almost the bones, of some Europeans who lie, in a sympathetic frame of mind, among Asians in Asia." He notes that years in Asia living among the Lepchas and traveling in the "Himalayan solitudes" had "arched the eyebrows above the spectacles, behind which the eyes were watchful rather than expressive, and the mouth, especially in uncongenial company, could be as immobile as the beak of the reputedly wise old owl who sat in the oak."⁵⁴

Plomer introduced Morris to Laurence Van der Post, who had survived three years as a prisoner of the Japanese, Morris having just returned from his post-war visit to the country. Biographer of Plomer, Peter Alexander writes:

Plomer had resumed his correspondence with several of his Japanese friends as soon as the war was over, and he, Van der Post, and Morris retained a sympathy for the Japanese, a willingness to help them get over the shame of what they had done during the war, and a keenness to see Japan join the United Nations as an equal and responsible power. In this the three of them were in a minority at this time; returned British prisoners of war brought home with them stories of the atrocities of the Japanese against the Allied prisoners, and anti-Japanese feeling was

53 Alexander, pp.243–44

54 *At Home: memoirs*, p.222.

so strong that Morris, as producer of several of Plomer's radio talks on Japan, had to fight hard to prevent them from being rejected on the grounds that they were too 'soft' on the Japanese.⁵⁵

Morris was also introduced to the poet James Kirkup through J. R. Ackerley,⁵⁶ Kirkup soon himself to leave for Japan.⁵⁷ Morris published "in pride of place" (a quote by Kirkup) in his anthology of Radio 3 readings,⁵⁸ the poet's long radio adventure-poem on caving in the Mendips, 'The Descent into the Cave', which brought him a great deal of criticism at the time.⁵⁹

Conclusion

I have felt true contentment only when surrounded by people of an alien culture.

Hired to Kill (1960), p.11.

55 Alexander, p.263

56 See Footnote 38 above.

57 See James Kirkup, *I, of all People: An Autobiography of Youth* (London: Weldenfeld and Nicholson, 1988), p. 198

58 See Bibliography: John Morris, ed. *From the Third Programme. A Ten-Years Anthology: Imagination, Argument, Experience, Exposition* (1956). Published to celebrate the tenth anniversary of broadcasting by the BBC's Third Programme, and edited by the controller, who writes: "I decided to make a purely personal choice, and to place the emphasis not upon contributions to knowledge ... but upon pleasure". Included are pieces by James Kirkup, William Plomer, V.S. Pritchett, Stevie Smith, Graham Greene, Maxim Gorky, Elizabeth Bowen, Bertrand Russell, E.M. Forster, André Gide, Edward Sackville-West, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Mann, and a talk entitled "Some Far Eastern Dreams" by Arthur Waley.

59 Kirkup, p. 202.

Morris himself died on December 13th, 1980, in Henley-on-Thames. Perhaps his best epitaph is provided by the final paragraph of his *London Times* obituary, written by someone who only wished to be acknowledged as *P.H.N.*:

The style of John Morris's autobiographical writing such as *Hired to Kill* (1960) is vivid, plain-spoken, and honest. The books were the man. He liked to remain detached and look at life from the outside; and he gave the impression that, expecting to move on, he never properly unpacked.⁶⁰

Appendix

E. M. Forster died in the summer of 1970. In October of that year, I was again in England and had gone to see John Morris who lived in Henley-on-Thames. Morris had been a lifelong friend of Forster's and over lunch, he told me with an air of pride how he had turned down an offer of eight thousand pounds from an American University for the letters Forster had written to him over the years and which he had preserved. Instead, Morris was going to leave those letters in his will to the Forster papers at King's College Cambridge.

I didn't ask Morris how many letters there were, but, since he had not been all that close to Forster, I doubt that there could have been more than two or three dozen—and worth eight thousand pounds!

This [Sic.] were all hand-written letters—I don't think Forster ever

⁶⁰ Cf. *Hired to Kill*, p. 200: "When I returned from living abroad I could not make up my mind completely to unpack; it was inconceivable that I should not before long be moving on again. Increasingly age has done nothing to weaken this feeling and I shall, I suppose, always remain a man without roots."

learnt how to type; and in any case, if the letters had been typed, they might have lost half their value. As it was, each of those letters was like a two-hundred pound note—not that there are two-hundred pound notes!

Excerpt from “Letters for sale” by Manohar Malgonkar, *The Tribune* (Chandigarh, India) Online edition, Sunday, July 30, 2000

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