



Look Back in Laughter: : Oxford's Postwar Golden Age

R. W. Johnson

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In 2009, while swimming down the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast Bill Johnson lost his left leg and very nearly his life. While recovering from this accident he began to write this insider's memoir of the Oxford he knew. The result is a wildly entertaining mixture of acute (and often hilarious) personal observation mixed with history, some major revelations (the real story of the Thatcher degree debacle and of tear gas bombs thrown into the House of Commons), and the whole laced with innumerable anecdotes, both humorous and telling. The result is an unparalleled picture of postwar Oxford. This book is bound to be a classic of its kind.

R. W. Johnson arrived at Magdalen College, Oxford as a South African Rhodes scholar in 1964 and left Magdalen in 1995 after 26 years as a Fellow, teaching Politics in the PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics) School. Johnson has written widely on British, French and African politics and his books included six with South African themes, most notably South Africa's Brave New World – The Beloved Country Since the End of Apartheid; a major study of the French Left; an investigation of the shooting down of the Korean airliner KAL 007, and several books of essays.

In addition he has been a prolific contributor to the London Review of Books and a great variety of other journals and papers including the London Times and Sunday Times, for both of which he has been a foreign correspondent. From 1995 to 2001 he was director of the Helen Suzman Foundation in Johannesburg.

Reviews:

John Lanchester recalling Karl Miller's editorship of The London Review of Books wrote:

• ...R. W. Johnson was in those days writing a series of super-forthright, abrasive pieces that often featured glancing dismissals of all sorts of senior Labour Party figures. One of these pieces had come in and been edited ... and Karl was reading it in proof.

'Johnson is like some beast from the pampas,' Karl said, admiringly and amusedly, 'who's brought in, and immediately rushes around butting everybody.'

No such animal is known to zoology, and Bill Johnson has no known connection with Argentina, but more than a quarter of a century later, whenever I read a piece in that combative vein, I still think of the beast from the pampas.⁹

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David Dugas:

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Heather Bencomo:

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Leslie Jasso:

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Ann Lang:

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