

Semidetached observation

W. C. McGrew

Through a Window. My Thirty years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe. By Jane Goodall. Weidenfeld and Nicolson: 1990. Pp. 229. £15.00, \$21.95.

SUCH is the appeal of field primatology that its better-known practitioners have been able to establish a pattern of parallel publication. That is, while producing the obligatory scholarly books and journal articles, they also often write handsome and engrossing counterparts for the wider audience of the educated public. The benchmarks for this dual-channel communication were George Schaller's *The Mountain Gorilla* and *The Year of the Gorilla*, respectively. Now, after giving us her scientific opus, *The Chimpanzees of Gombe* (1986), Jane Goodall has taken the process a step further with *Through a Window*. The key is in the subtitle, which identifies it as the sequel to her earlier *In the Shadow of Man* (1971, reissued, 1989). The resulting volume matches the high quality of its predecessor and should prove to be just as popular. (Remarkably, *Shadow* has been translated into 48 languages. Can any other book of natural history match this?)

In the Shadow of Man recounted the first ten years of Jane Goodall's study of the behaviour of a small population of wild chimpanzees living on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. It chronicled the foundation and rapid rise of the Gombe Stream Research Centre through the 1960s. *Through a Window* carries on for the next 20 years, through the 1970s and 1980s. The formats of the two books are virtually identical: around 100,000 words of text divided into 20 punchy chapters, illustrated by about 100 excellent photographs, of which roughly a fifth are in colour. Each book is good value for money. Each has a compulsively engaging opening chapter, and a conscience-rousing closing chapter. (In *Shadow* the latter was called "Man's Inhumanity", whereas in *Window* it is called "Our Shame".) The linkages between chapters are tight, so that they unfold episodically, like a serial.

But there are differences between *Shadow* and *Window*, both in format and content. Neither has tables or graphs, but the sequel abandons pedagogy altogether: references, systematic appendices and the useful genealogical chart are omitted from *Window*, as are David Bygott's splendid drawings. Two aspects reflect the personalized focus of the newer book: the index uses helpful codes to distinguish human from ape characters, thus making clear that David Greybeard is a Gombe chimpanzee subject, whereas David Riss is a human student. Similarly, a third

of *Window*'s chapters are individual case histories and are labelled as such, whereas none of *Shadow*'s chapters are so constructed.

So, what have 20 further years of field-work at Gombe revealed about chimpanzees? As Goodall has repeatedly stressed, life-long study of a long-lived creature continues to yield new findings. The 1970s showed a darker side of chimpanzee nature that counter-balanced the idealized positive picture from earlier years.



Monkey see, monkey do — Young chimpanzees learn much of their social behaviour by watching adults. This one is fascinated by his mother being groomed. (Reproduced from *Through a Window*.)

The males of Gombe's larger, Kasakela community relentlessly exterminated the smaller, neighbouring Kahama community, and in the process usurped its territory and females. The details of this "four-year war" make gruesome reading. Equally surprising and sobering was the appearance of the killing and eating of infant chimpanzees. Whether these are effective strategies that enhance the reproductive success of their perpetrators, or are pathological responses to overcrowding cannot yet be determined, but similar events have occurred in the other, bigger population of chimpanzees in Tanzania, as studied in the Mahale Mountains, by Toshisada Nishida and his colleagues.

In contrast, one of *Window*'s most uplifting chapters documents several cases of successful adoptions of orphaned youngsters, either by a relative or a 'family friend'. These foster care-givers may invest much time and effort that make a life-and-death difference to the recipients. Only continuing longitudinal study will

show if this apparent altruism is eventually rewarded or not.

Goodall devotes less space to Gombe's history, but one event stands out as crucial. In May 1975, guerillas from neighbouring Zaire kidnapped four expatriate researchers and held them for ransom. Eventually their release was achieved, but the implications for security were grave enough to alter the norms for research at Gombe. Tanzanian field assistants took on the burden of behavioural observation, replacing Western students. Continuity of data collection was thus maintained, but exceptional research efforts such as the marathon watch on Gombe's dominant male were lost. (In 1974, two Stanford undergraduates, Curt Busse and David Riss, did 50 days of consecutive dawn-to-dusk follows of Figan, the alpha male of the Kasakela community. This is arguably

the single most impressive feat of field observation ever.)

It is inevitable that 30 years of research raises some question marks of methodology. "Provisioning" of the chimpanzees with prized but unnatural goods like bananas long ago dropped to trivial levels, but intervention continues. Sometimes, this has shifted from reactive to preventive: when twins were born, their mother Melissa "... was followed every day, for we all feared that Passion and Pom [the main infant-killers] would strike again and we planned to intervene if they did". Such management of the lives of wild subjects is bound to be controversial for scientific purists, but Goodall has never shrunk from her stated position as more than a detached observer. This accords with the greater emphasis in the sequel given over to chimpanzee welfare in captivity. Goodall squares up to this theme in an appendix on the exploitation of animals by laboratory scientists. Her use of terms like "brainwashing", "self-serving" and

"torture" will guarantee that these topical issues will be scrutinized by readers.

In a word, *Window* is a very personal account, on all fronts. The personalities of individual apes are as carefully presented as any cast of characters in a play. Conversations with colleagues, quoted verbatim, convey the excitement of collaborative research in the bush. Again and again, telling vignettes make the point more compellingly than any judiciously qualified generalization could do.

Most importantly, Jane Goodall's viewpoint (and so her personality) have virtually defined our impressions of chimpanzee nature, at least in the English-speaking world. This is an awesome responsibility for any scientist.

When Louis Leakey arranged for Jane Goodall to begin studies of the chimpanzees at Gombe, he predicted that it would take ten years to understand them. This seemed excessively cautious at the time. Now, after 30 years, one can only look forward to the next decade of continuing research, and to Goodall's next account of it. □

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It's a jungle

Tim Lincoln

Brazzaville Beach. By William Boyd. *Sinclair-Stevenson, London: 1990. £13.95. To be published in the United States early next summer by Morrow.*

IN this, his fifth novel, William Boyd has returned to home ground, to Africa, for one of the two intertwined stories that make up the narrative. But otherwise the book is a daring and imaginative departure from his previous works. The principal character is a woman, the young and self-assured Hope Clearwater, a botanist turned ethologist, into whose skin Boyd has convincingly written himself (convincingly, that is, as far as a male reader can tell). And the subject matter is mathematics and primatology, with at the bottom of it all the moral that in intellectual endeavours winning, or being seen to win, is everything.

The first story centres on the shadowy figure of John Clearwater, said to be a brilliant mathematician. After four years at Caltech working on game theory, he has returned to Britain, to Imperial College in London, to meet and marry Hope, and to match his brains against the challenge of discovering a simple formulation for turbulence. The second story (chronologically the later) is set in a vaguely defined, war-ravaged part of Africa, at the Grosso Arvore primate research centre. It

is there that Hope has gone, after the mental battering unwittingly meted out by her husband, to work under Eugene Mallabar, who has devoted the best part of his life to the study of chimpanzees. Interspersed between the two are brief ruminations, which veer close to the extremes of pretentiousness and profundity, and which in large part come from the present, from Brazzaville Beach, where Hope has eventually washed up. From the



Jane Goodall — inspiration for Hope? (Reproduced from *Through a Window**)

beach she examines her life and muses on why her marriage to John Clearwater, and the research at Grosso Arvore, went so badly awry.

Both episodes are narrated in spare and beautifully controlled style. John Clearwater slides into insanity, inch by inch, by way of the fevered digging of holes in search of inspiration, an affair with the wife of an acned physicist, and (towards the end) treatment by electroconvulsive therapy. His agony is to have been on the verge of, but to have been beaten to, what would have been a claim to mathematical immortality in the form of the Clearwater set — a simple algorithm "that would reproduce the magical, infinite variety of the natural world". Life amongst some of the bit players is none too happy either. There is for example Hope's gruesome sister, married to a solicitor and "sinking in the quicksand of prudence, moderation and propriety" in the stuffy respectability of the English home counties.

But it is in Africa, among the chimpanzees, that the starkest of horrors (and the best joke) lie. To followers of the career of Jane Goodall* the chain of events will be

* Jane Goodall's most recent book, *Through a Window. My Thirty Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe*, is reviewed on page 371 of this issue.

uncannily familiar. Boyd has founded his fiction curiously close to fact, in that for Grosso Arvore one could well read Gombe — not only in the background (research students not merely from the United States but explicitly from Stanford, the evening chore of writing up field notes, the controversial existence of an artificial feeding area, the round of lecture tours), but in the two main occurrences. Of these one is a kidnapping of researchers; the other is a north-south rift in the chimpanzee community, subsequent brutal attacks by the northerners upon the break-away group, and the shattering observation that chimps are capable of infanticide and cannibalism.

At this point, Boyd parts company with Goodall. In discovering the 'chimpanzee wars', Hope threatens Mallabar's cherished theories, his sources of money and his celebrity status, built in part through his books *The Peaceful Primate* and *Primate's Progress*. But experienced operator that he is, the shocking revelations are deftly appropriated as his own. When the third book appears, Hope, like her former husband, has become a loser, literally a footnote to history.

Brazzaville Beach is probably best taken as no more and no less than a compelling novel. Yet, together with other straws in the wind, it is tempting to see in it a sign that one of the two cultures (a matter now widely and wrongly considered *passé*) is taking the other seriously. That hope is no doubt unfounded. There is, though, the other Hope — William Boyd should persuade himself to get his splendid literary creation off the beach and back into the scientific jungle where she belongs. □

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Original lingo?

John C. Marshall

Language and Species. by Derek Bickerton. *Chicago University Press: 1990. Pp. 297. \$24.95.*

BY the close of 1832, the *Beagle* had reached Tierra del Fuego and was anchored in Good Success Bay. Captain Fitzroy sent a party ashore, and the young Charles Darwin met his first Fuegians in their native habitat. In his diary for 18 December, Darwin wrote: "Their language does not deserve to be called articulate. Capt. Cook says it is like a man clearing his throat; to which may be added another very hoarse man trying to shout and a third encouraging a horse with that peculiar noise which is made in one side of the mouth." Some forty years later, Darwin had the insight (and the courage)