

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS

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# The Wilt Alternative

Tom Sharpe

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## About the Author

Tom Sharpe was born in 1928 and educated at Lancing College and Pembroke College, Cambridge. He did his national service in the Marines before going to South Africa in 1951, where he did social work before teaching in Natal. He had a photographic studio in Pietermaritzburg from 1957 until 1961, and from 1963 to 1972 he was a lecturer in History at the Cambridge College of Arts and Technology.

He is the author of sixteen novels, including *Porterhouse Blue* and *Blott on the Landscape* which were serialised on television, and *Wilt* which was made into a film. In 1986 he was awarded the XXIIIème Grand Prix de l'Humour Noir Xavier Forneret and in 2010 he received the inaugural BBK La Risa de Bilbao Prize. Tom Sharpe died in 2013.

*Also by Tom Sharpe*

Riotous Assembly  
Indecent Exposure  
Porterhouse Blue  
Blott on the Landscape  
Wilt  
The Great Pursuit  
The Throwback  
Ancestral Vices  
Vintage Stuff  
Wilt on High  
Grantchester Grind  
The Midden  
Wilt in Nowhere  
The Gropes  
The Wilt Inheritance

# The Wilt Alternative

Tom Sharpe



arrow books

to Bill and Tina Baker

# 1

It was Enrolment Week at the Tech. Henry Wilt sat at a table in Room 467 and stared into the face of the earnest woman opposite him and tried to look interested.

‘Well, there is a vacancy in Rapid Reading on Monday evenings,’ he said. ‘If you’ll just fill in the form over there ...’ He waved vaguely in the direction of the window but the woman was not to be fobbed off.

‘I would like to know a little more about it. I mean it does help, doesn’t it?’

‘Help?’ said Wilt, refusing to be drawn into sharing her enthusiasm for self-improvement. ‘It depends what you mean by help.’

‘My problem has always been that I’m such a slow reader I can’t remember what the beginning of a book was about by the time I’ve finished it,’ said the woman. ‘My husband says I’m practically illiterate.’

She smiled forlornly and implied a breaking marriage which Wilt could save by encouraging her to spend her Monday evenings away from home and the rest of the week reading books rapidly. Wilt doubted the therapy and tried to shift the burden of counselling somewhere else.

‘Perhaps you would be better off taking Literary Appreciation,’ he suggested.

‘I did that last year and Mr Fogerty was wonderful. He said I had potential.’

Stifling the impulse to tell her that Mr Fogerty’s notion of potential had nothing to do with literature and was more



physical in its emphasis – though what the hell he could see in this earnest creature was a mystery – Wilt surrendered.

‘The purpose of Rapid Reading,’ he said, going into the patter, ‘is to improve your reading skills both in speed and retention of what you have read. You will find that you concentrate more the faster you go and that ...’

He went on for five minutes delivering the set speech he had learnt by heart over four years of enrolling potential Rapid Readers. In front of him the woman changed visibly. This was what she had come to hear, the gospel of evening-class improvement. By the time Wilt had finished and she had filled in the form there was a new buoyancy about her.

There was less about Wilt. He sat on for the rest of the two hours listening to other similar conversations at other tables and wondering how the devil Bill Paschendaele managed to maintain his proselytizing fervour for An Introduction to Fenland Sub-Culture after twenty years. The fellow positively glowed with enthusiasm. Wilt shuddered and enrolled six more Rapid Readers with a lack of interest that was calculated to dishearten all but the most fanatical. In the intervals he thanked God he didn’t have to teach the subject any longer and was simply there to lead the sheep into the fold. As Head of Liberal Studies Wilt had passed beyond the Evening Classes into the realm of timetables, committees, memoranda, wondering which of his staff was going to have a nervous breakdown next, and the occasional lecture to Foreign Students. He had Mayfield to thank for the latter. While the rest of the Tech had been badly affected by financial cuts the Foreign Students paid for themselves and Dr Mayfield, now Head of Academic Development, had created an empire of Arabs, Swedes, Germans, South Americans and even several Japanese who marched from one lecture room to another pursuing an understanding of the English language and, more impossibly, English Culture and Customs, a hodge-podge of lectures which came under the heading of

Advanced English for Foreigners. Wilt's contribution was a weekly discourse on British Family Life which afforded him the opportunity to discuss his own family life with a freedom and frankness which would have infuriated Eva and embarrassed Wilt himself had he not known that his students lacked the insight to understand what he was telling them. The discrepancy between Wilt's appearance and the facts had baffled even his closest friends. In front of eighty foreigners he was assured of anonymity. He was assured of anonymity, period. Sitting in Room 467 Wilt could while away the time speculating on the ironies of life.

In room after room, on floor above floor, in departments all over the Tech, lecturers sat at tables, people asked questions, received concerned answers and finally filled in the forms that ensured that lecturers would keep their jobs for at least another year. Wilt would keep his for ever. Liberal Studies couldn't fail for lack of students. The Education Act saw to that. Day Release Apprentices had to have their weekly hour of progressive opinions whether they liked it or not. Wilt was safe, and if it hadn't been for the boredom he would have been a happy man. The boredom and Eva.

Not that Eva was boring. Now that she had the quads to look after, Eva Wilt's enthusiasms had widened to include every 'Alternative' under the sun. Alternative Medicine alternated with Alternative Gardening and Alternative Nutrition and even various Alternative Religions so that Wilt, coming home from each day's lack of choice at the Tech, could never be sure what was in store for him except that it was not what it had been the night before. About the only constant was the din made by the quads. Wilt's four daughters had taken after their mother. Where Eva was enthusiastic and energetic they were inexhaustible and quadrupled her multiple enthusiasms. To avoid arriving home before they were in bed Wilt had taken to walking to and from the Tech and was resolutely unselfish about using

the car. To add to his problems, Eva had inherited a legacy from an aunt and since Wilt's salary had doubled they had moved from Parkview Avenue to Willington Road and a large house in a large garden. The Wilts had moved up the social scale. It was not an improvement, in Wilt's opinion, and there were days when he hankered for the old times when Eva's enthusiasms had been slightly muted by what the neighbours might think. Now, as the mother of four and the matron of a mansion, she no longer cared. A dreadful self-confidence had been born.

And so at the end of his two hours Wilt took his register of new students to the office and wandered along the corridor of the Administration Block towards the stairs. He was going down when Peter Braintree joined him.

'I've just enrolled fifteen landlubbers for Nautical Navigation. What about that to start the year off with a bang?'

'The bang starts tomorrow with Mayfield's bloody course board meeting,' said Wilt. 'Tonight was as nothing. I tried to dissuade several insistent women and four pimply youths from taking Rapid Reading and failed. I wonder we don't run a course on how to solve *The Times* crossword puzzle in fifteen minutes flat. It would probably boost their confidence more than beating the track record for *Paradise Lost*.'

They went downstairs and crossed the hall where Miss Pansak was still recruiting for Beginners' Badminton.

'Makes me feel like a beer,' said Braintree. Wilt nodded. Anything to delay going home. Outside, stragglers were still coming in and cars were parked densely along Post Road.

'What sort of time did you have in France?' asked Braintree.

'The sort of time you would expect with Eva and the brood in a tent. We were asked to leave the first camp site after Samantha had let down the guy ropes on two tents. It

wouldn't have been so bad if the woman inside one hadn't had asthma. That was on the Loire. In La Vendée we were stuck next to a German who had fought on the Russian front and was suffering from shell-shock. I don't know if you've ever been woken in the night by a man screaming about *Flammenwerfern* but I can tell you it's unnerving. That time we moved on without being asked.'

'I thought you were going down to the Dordogne. Eva told Betty she'd been reading a book about three rivers and it was simply enthralling.'

'The reading may have been but the rivers weren't,' said Wilt, 'not the one we were next to. It rained and of course Eva had to have the tent in what amounted to a tributary. It was bad enough putting the thing up dry. Weighed a ton then, but moving it out of a flashflood up a hundred yards of bramble banks at twelve o'clock at night when the damned thing was sodden ...' Wilt stopped. The memory was too much for him.

'And I suppose it went on raining,' said Braintree sympathetically. 'That's been our experience, anyway.'

'It did,' said Wilt. 'For five whole days. After that we moved into a hotel.'

'Best thing to do. You can eat decent meals and sleep in comfort.'

'You can perhaps. We couldn't. Not after Samantha shat in the bidet. I wondered what the stench was sometime around 2 a.m. Anyway let's talk about something civilized.'

They went into The Pig In A Poke and ordered pints.

\*

'Of course all men are selfish,' said Mavis Mottram as she and Eva sat in the kitchen at Willington Road. 'Patrick hardly ever gets home until after eight and he always has an excuse about the Open University. It's nothing of the sort, or if it is it's some divorcee student who wants extra

coition. Not that I mind any longer. I said to him the other night, "If you want to make a fool of yourself running after other women that's your affair, but don't think I'm going to take it lying down. You can go your way and I'll go mine.""

'What did he say to that?' Eva asked, testing the steam iron and starting on the quads' dresses.

'Oh, just something stupid about not wanting it standing up anyway. Men are so coarse. I can't think why we bother with them.'

'I sometimes wish Henry was a bit coarser,' said Eva pensively. 'He always was lethargic but now he claims he's too tired because he walks to the Tech every day. It's six miles so I suppose he could be.'

'I can think of another reason,' said Mavis bitterly. 'Still waters etcetera ...'

'Not with Henry. I'd know. Besides, ever since the quads were born he's been very thoughtful.'

'Yes, but what's he been thoughtful about? That's what you have to ask yourself, Eva.'

'I meant he's been considerate to me. He gets up at seven and brings me tea in bed and at night he always makes me Horlicks.'

'If Patrick started acting like that I'd be very suspicious,' said Mavis. 'It doesn't sound natural.'

'It doesn't, does it, but that's Henry all over. He's really kind. The only thing is he isn't very masterful. He says it's because he's surrounded by five women and he knows when he's beaten.'

'If you go ahead with this au pair girl plan that will make six,' said Mavis.

'Irmgard isn't a proper au pair girl. She's renting the top-floor flat and says she'll help around the house whenever she can.'

'Which, if the Everards' experience with their Finn is anything to go by, will be never. She stayed in bed till twelve and practically ate them out of house and home.'

'Finns are different,' said Eva. 'Irmgard is German. I met her at the Van Donkens' World Cup Protest Party. You know they raised nearly a hundred and twenty pounds for the Tortured Tupamaros.'

'I didn't think there were any Tupamaros in Argentina any more. I thought they had all been killed off by the army.'

'These are the ones who escaped,' said Eva. 'Anyway I met Miss Mueller and mentioned that we had this top flat and she was ever so eager to have it. She'll do all her own cooking and things.'

'Things? Did you ask her what things she had in mind?'

'Well, not exactly, but she says she wants to study a lot and she's very keen on physical fitness.'

'And what does Henry have to say about her?' asked Mavis, moving closer to her real concern.

'I haven't told him yet. You know what he's like about having other people in the house, but I thought if she stays in the flat in the evenings and keeps out of his way ...'

'Eva dear,' said Mavis with advanced sincerity, 'I know this is none of my business but aren't you tempting fate just a little?'

'I can't see how. I mean it's such a good arrangement. She can baby-sit when we want to go out, and the house is far too big for us and nobody ever goes up to the flat.'

'They will with her up there. You'll have all sorts of people coming through the house and she's bound to have a record player. They all do.'

'Even if she does we won't hear it. I've ordered rush matting from Soales and I went up the other day with the transistor and you can hardly hear a thing.'

'Well, it's your affair, dear, but if I had an au pair girl in the house with Patrick around I'd want to be able to hear some things.'

'I thought you said you'd told Patrick he could do what he liked?'

'I didn't say in my house,' said Mavis. 'He can do what he likes elsewhere but if I ever caught him playing Casanova at home he'd live to regret it.'

'Well, Henry is different. I don't suppose he will even notice her,' said Eva complacently. 'I've told her he's very quiet and home-loving and she says all she wants is peace and quiet herself.'

With the private thought that Miss Irmgard Mueller was going to find living in the same house as Eva and the quads neither peaceful nor quiet, Mavis finished her coffee and got up to go. 'All the same I would keep an eye on Henry,' she said. 'He may be different but I wouldn't trust a man further than I could throw him. And my experience of foreign students is that they come over here to do a lot more than learn the English language.'

She went out to her car and drove home wondering what there was about Eva's simplicity that was so sinister. The Wilts were an odd couple, but since their move to Willington Road Mavis Mottram's dominance had diminished. The days when Eva had been her protégée in flower-arranging were over and Mavis was frankly jealous. On the other hand Willington Road was definitely in one of the best neighbourhoods in Ipsford and there were social advantages to be gained from knowing the Wilts.

At the corner of Regal Gardens her headlights picked Wilt out as he walked slowly home and she called out to him. But he was deep in thought and didn't hear her.

\*

As usual, Wilt's thoughts were dark and mysterious and made the more so by the fact that he didn't understand why he had them. They had to do with strange violent fantasies that welled up inside him, with dissatisfactions which could only be partly explained by his job, his marriage to a human dynamo, the dislike he felt for the atmosphere of Willington

Road where everyone else was something important in high-energy physics or low-temperature conductivity and made more money than he did. And after all these explicable grounds for grumbling there was the feeling that his life was largely meaningless and that beyond the personal there was a universe which was random, chaotic and yet had some weird coherence about it which he would never fathom. Wilt speculated on the paradox of material progress and spiritual decadence and as usual came to no conclusion except that beer on an empty stomach didn't agree with him. One consolation was that now Eva was into Alternative Gardening he was likely to get a good supper and the quads would be fast asleep. If only the little buggers didn't wake in the night. Wilt had had his fill of broken sleep in the early years of breast-feeding and bottle-warming. Those days were largely over now and, apart from Samantha's occasional bout of sleepwalking and Penelope's bladder problem, his nights were undisturbed. And so he made his way along the trees that lined Willington Road and was greeted by the smell of casserole from the kitchen. Wilt felt relatively cheerful.



## 2

He left the house next morning in a far more despondent mood. 'I should have been warned by that casserole that she had some bloody ominous message to impart,' he muttered as he set off for the Tech. And Eva's announcement that she had found a lodger for the top flat had been ominous indeed. Wilt had been alert to the possibility ever since they had bought the house but Eva's immediate enthusiasms - gardening, herbalism, progressive play-grouping for the quads, redecorating the house and designing the ultimate kitchen - had postponed any decision about the top flat. Wilt had hoped that the matter would be forgotten. Now she had let the rooms without even bothering to tell him Wilt felt distinctly aggrieved. Worse still, he had been outwitted by the decoy of that splendid stew. When Eva wanted to cook she could, and Wilt had finished his second helping and a bottle of his better Spanish burgundy before she had announced this latest disaster. It had taken Wilt several seconds before he could focus on the problem.

'You've done what?' he said.

'Let it to a very nice young German girl,' said Eva. 'She's paying fifteen pounds a week and promises to be very quiet. You won't even know she's there.'

'I bloody well will. She'll have lovers fumbling their lascivious way up and down stairs all night and the house will reek of sauerkraut.'

'It won't. There's an extractor fan in the kitchenette up there and she's entitled to have boyfriends so long as they

behave themselves nicely.'

'Nicely! Show me some loutish lover behaving nicely and I'll show you a camel with four humps ...'

'They're called dromedaries,' said Eva, using the tactic of muddled information that usually distracted Wilt and lured him into correcting her. But Wilt was too distracted already to bother.

'They're not. They're called fucking foreigners and I'm using fucking properly for once and if you think I want to lie in bed every night listening to some ruddy Latin prove his virility by imitating Popocatepetl in eruption on an inner sprung mattress eight feet above my head -'

'Dunlopillo,' said Eva. 'You never get things right.'

'Oh yes I do,' snarled Wilt. 'I knew this was in the wind ever since your bloody aunt had to die and leave you a legacy and you had to buy this miniature hotel. I knew then that you would turn it into some foul commune.'

'It's not a commune, and anyway Mavis says the extended family was one of the good things about the old days.'

'She'd know all about extended families, Mavis would. Patrick has been extending his family for as long as I can remember, and into other people's.'

'Mavis has given him an ultimatum,' said Eva. 'She's not putting up with his carryings on any longer.'

'And I'm giving you an ultimatum,' said Wilt. 'One squeak out of those bedsprings up there, one whiff of pot, one twang of a guitar, one giggle on the stairs and I'll extend this family by finding digs in town until Miss Schickelgruber has moved out.'

'Her name isn't Schickelwhatchamacallit. It's Mueller. Irmgard Mueller.'

'So was one of Hitler's nastier *Obergruppenführers*, and all I'm saying is -'

'You're just jealous,' said Eva. 'If you were a proper man and hadn't got hang-ups about sex from your parents you

wouldn't get so hot under the collar about what other people do.'

Wilt regarded her balefully. Whenever Eva wanted to subdue him she launched a sexual offensive. Wilt retired to bed defeated. Discussions of his sexual inadequacies tended to result in his having to prove Eva wrong practically, and after that stew he didn't feel up to it.

\*

He didn't feel up to much by the time he reached the Tech next morning. The quads had fought their usual intersororial war about who was going to wear what dress before being dragged off to playgroup and there had been another letter in *The Times* from Lord Longford demanding the release of Myra Hindley, the Moors murderess, from prison on the grounds that she was now thoroughly reformed, a convinced Christian and a socially valuable citizen. 'In which case she can prove her social value and Christian charity by staying in prison and helping her fellow-convicts,' had been Wilt's infuriated reaction. The other news was just as depressing. Inflation was up again. Sterling down. North Sea gas would run out in five years. All in all the world was in its usual filthy mess and now he had to listen to Dr Mayfield extol the virtues of the Advanced English for Foreigners course for several intolerably boring hours before dealing with complaints from his Liberal Studies lecturers about the way he had done the timetable.

One of the worst things about being Head of Liberal Studies was that he had to spend a large part of his summer vacation fitting classes into rooms and lecturers into classes, and when he had finished and had defeated the Head of Art who wanted Room 607 for Life Studies while Wilt needed it for Meat Three, he was still faced with a hassle at the beginning of the year and had to readjust

the timetable because Mrs Fyfe couldn't make Tuesday at two with DMT One because her husband ... It was on such occasions that Wilt wished he was back teaching *Lord of the Flies* to Gasfitters instead of running the department. But his salary was good, the rates on Willington Road were exorbitant, and for the rest of the year he could spend much of his time sitting in his office dreaming.

He could sit through most committee meetings in a coma too, but Dr Mayfield's course board was the one exception. Wilt had to stay awake to prevent Mayfield lumbering him with several more lectures in his relative absence. Besides, Dr Board would start the term off with a row.

He did. Mayfield had only just begun to stress the need for a more student-oriented curriculum with special emphasis on socio-economic awareness when Dr Board intervened.

'Codswallop,' he said. 'The business of my department is to teach English students how to speak German, French, Spanish and Italian, not to explain the origins of their own languages to a whole lot of aliens, and as for socio-economic awareness, I suggest that Dr Mayfield has his priorities wrong. If the Arabs I had last year were anything to go by they were economically aware to the  $n$ th degree about the purchasing power of oil and so socially backward that it will take more than a three-year course to persuade the sods that stoning women to death for being unfaithful isn't cricket. Perhaps if we had three hundred years ...'

'Dr Board, this meeting may well last as long if you keep interrupting,' said the Vice-Principal. 'Now if Dr Mayfield will just continue ...'

The Head of Academic Development continued for another hour, and was all set for the entire morning when the Head of Engineering objected.

'I see that several of my staff are scheduled to deliver lectures on British Engineering Achievements in the

Nineteenth Century. Now I would like to inform Dr Mayfield and this board that my department consists of engineers, not historians, and quite frankly they see no reason why they should be asked to lecture on topics outside their field.'

'Hear, hear,' said Dr Board.

'What is more, I would like to be informed why so much emphasis is being placed on a course for foreigners at the expense of our own British students.'

'I think I can answer that,' said the Vice-Principal. 'Thanks to the cuts that have been imposed on us by the local authority we have been forced to subsidize our existing non-paying courses and staff numbers by expanding the foreign sector where students pay substantial fees. If you want the figures of the profit we made last year ...'

But no one took up the invitation. Even Dr Board was momentarily silenced.

'Until such time as the economy improves,' continued the Vice-Principal, 'a great many lecturers are only going to keep their jobs because we are running this course. What is more, it may well be possible to expand Advanced English for Foreigners into a degree course approved by the CNAA. I think you will all agree that anything which increases our chances of becoming a polytechnic is to everyone's advantage.' The Vice-Principal stopped and looked round the room but nobody demurred. 'In which case all that remains is for Dr Mayfield to allocate the new lectures to the various departmental heads.'

Dr Mayfield distributed xeroxed lists. Wilt studied his new burden and found that it included The Development of Liberal and Progressive Social Attitudes in English Society, 1688 to 1978, and was just about to protest when the Head of Zoology got in first.

'I see here that I am down for Animal Husbandry and Agriculture with special reference to Intensive Farming of

Pigs, Hens, and Stock-Rearing.'

'The subject has ecological significance -'

'And is student-oriented,' said Dr Board. 'Battery Education or possibly Hog Raising by Continuous Assessment. Perhaps we could even run a course on Composting.'

'Don't,' said Wilt with a shudder. Dr Board looked at him with interest.

'Your magnificent wife?' he enquired.

Wilt nodded dolefully. 'Yes, she has taken up -'

'If I may just get back to my original objection instead of hearing about Mr Wilt's matrimonial problems,' said the Head of Zoology. 'I want to make it absolutely clear now that I am not qualified to lecture on Animal Husbandry. I am a zoologist, not a farmer, and what I know about Stock-Rearing is zero.'

'We must all extend ourselves,' said Dr Board. 'After all, if we are to acquire the doubtful privilege of calling ourselves a polytechnic we must put the College before personal interest.'

'Perhaps you haven't seen what you're down to teach, Board,' Zoology continued. 'Sementic Influences ... shouldn't that be Semantic, Mayfield?'

'Must be the typist's error,' said Mayfield. 'Yes it should read Semantic Influences on Current Sociological Theories. The bibliography includes Wittgenstein, Chomsky and Wilkes ...'

'It doesn't include me,' said Board. 'You can count me out. I don't care if we descend to the level of a primary school but I am not going to mug up Wittgenstein or Chomsky for the benefit of anyone.'

'Well then, don't talk about my having to extend myself,' said the Head of Zoology. 'I am not going into a lecture room filled with Moslems to explain, even with my limited knowledge of the subject, the advantages of raising pigs in the Persian Gulf.'

‘Gentlemen, while recognizing that there are one or two minor amendments necessary to the lecture titles, I think they can be ironed out –’

‘Wiped out more likely,’ said Dr Board.

The Vice-Principal ignored his interruption. ‘– and the main thing is to keep the lectures in their present format while presenting them at a level suitable for the individual students.’

‘I’m still not mentioning pigs,’ said Zoology.

‘You don’t have to. You can do an elementary series of talks on plants,’ said the Vice-Principal wearily.

‘Great. And will someone tell me how in God’s name I can even begin to talk in an elementary way about Wittgenstein? I had an Iraqi last year who couldn’t even spell his own name, so what’s the poor bugger going to do with Wittgenstein?’ said Dr Board.

‘And if I may just bring another subject up,’ said a lecturer from the English Department rather diffidently, ‘I think we are going to have something of a communications problem with the eighteen Japanese and the young man from Tibet.’

‘Oh really,’ said Dr Mayfield. ‘A communications problem. You know, it might be as well to add a lecture or two on Intercommunicational Discourse. It’s the sort of subject which is likely to appeal to the Council for National Academic Awards.’

‘It may appeal to them but it certainly doesn’t appeal to me,’ said Board. ‘I’ve always said they were the scourings of the Academic world.’

‘Yes, and we’ve already heard you on the subject,’ said the Vice-Principal. ‘And now to get back to the Japanese and the young man from Tibet. You did say Tibet, didn’t you?’

‘Well, I said it, but I can’t be too sure,’ answered the English lecturer. ‘That’s what I meant about a communications problem. He doesn’t speak a word of

English and my Tibetanese isn't exactly fluent. It's the same with the Japanese.'

The Vice-Principal looked round the room. 'I suppose it is too much to expect anyone here to have a smattering of Japanese?'

'I've got a bit,' said the Head of Art, 'but I'm damned if I'm going to use it. When you've spent four years in a Nip prisoner-of-war camp the last thing you want is to have to talk to the bastards in later life. My digestive system is still in a hell of a mess.'

'Perhaps you could tutor our Chinese student instead. Tibet is part of China now and if we include him with the four girls from Hong Kong ...'

'We'll be able to advertise Take-Away Degrees,' said Dr Board and provoked another acrimonious exchange which lasted until lunchtime.

Wilt returned to his office to find that Mrs Fyfe couldn't take Mechanical Technicians at two on Tuesday because her husband had ... It was exactly as he had anticipated. The Tech's year had begun as it always did. It continued in the same trying vein for the next four days. Wilt attended meetings on Interdepartmental Course Collaboration, gave a seminar to student teachers from the local training college on The Meaning of Liberal Studies, which was a contradiction in terms as far as he was concerned, was lectured by a sergeant from the Drug Squad on Pot Plant Recognition and Heroin Addiction and finally managed to fit Mrs Fyfe into Room 29 with Bread Two on Monday at 10 a.m. And all the time he brooded over Eva and her wretched lodger.

\*

While Wilt busied himself lethargically at the Tech, Eva put her own plans implacably into operation. Miss Mueller arrived two mornings later and installed herself



inconspicuously in the flat; so inconspicuously that it took Wilt two more days to realize she was there, and then only the delivery of nine milk bottles where there were usually eight gave him the clue. Wilt said nothing but waited for the first hint of gaiety upstairs before launching his counter-offensive of complaints.

But Miss Mueller lived up to Eva's promise. She was exceedingly quiet, came in unobtrusively when Wilt was still at the Tech and left in the morning after he had begun his daily walk. By the end of a fortnight he was beginning to think his worst fears were unjustified. In any case, he had his lectures to foreign students to prepare and the teaching term had finally started. The question of the lodger receded into the background as he tried to think what the hell to tell Mayfield's Empire, as Dr Board called it, about Progressive Social Attitudes in English Society since 1688. If Gasfitters were any indication there had been a regression, not a progressive development. The bastards had graduated to queer-bashing.

### 3

But if Wilt's fears were premature they were not long being realized. He was sitting one Saturday evening in the Piagetory, the purpose-built summerhouse at the bottom of the garden in which Eva had originally tried to play conceptual games with the 'wee ones', a phrase Wilt particularly detested, when the first blow fell.

It was less a blow than a revelation. The summerhouse was nicely secluded, set back among old apple trees with an arbour of clematis and climbing roses to hide it from the world and Wilt's consumption of homemade beer from Eva. Inside, it was hung with dried herbs. Wilt didn't approve of the herbs but he preferred them in their hung form rather than in the frightful infusions Eva sometimes tried to inflict on him, and they seemed to have the added advantage of keeping the flies from the compost heap at bay. He could sit there with the sun dappling the grass around and feel at relative peace with the world, and the more beer he drank the greater that peace became. Wilt prided himself on the effect of his beer. He brewed it in a plastic dustbin and occasionally fortified it with vodka before bottling it in the garage. After three bottles even the quads' din somehow receded and became almost natural, a chorus of whines, squeals and laughter, usually malicious when someone fell off the swing, but at least distant. And even that distraction was absent this evening. Eva had taken them to the ballet in the hope that early exposure to Stravinsky would turn Samantha into a second Margot Fonteyn. Wilt had his doubts about Samantha and Stravinsky. As far as he was