

## POSTSCRIPT I

Giulio Chiavetta (ex-stationary engineer by trade and self-styled freelance circus mime by inclination) became visibly agitated after unfolding the newspaper that had been placed on his lawn chair. This was the chair—"Prop. of G.A. Chiavetta" scratched with a rusty nail across its back—on which he liked to sun himself every chance he got. Even when there was no sun. Even in the most impenetrable fog. Even after the first permanent snow had arrived and he had to huddle beneath several blankets just to keep from shivering to death.

Normally, he would peruse the day's news without allowing it to cause the slightest blip in his behavioural patterns. No telltale raising of an eyebrow or sneerish curling of a lip. And definitely no angry diatribes at the sorry state of world affairs or on the local hockey team's inability to score. In fact, it was impossible to ascertain if he actually read the paper or only stared for hours on end at the inkblot patterns formed by the headlines, articles, photos, photo captions and advertising come-ons. And then turned the pages only when some mysterious internal clock gave the signal.

But, on this particular afternoon in late October, he barely looked at the front section before he tossed the paper aside, stood up abruptly from the chair (so abruptly, in fact, it tipped over sideways) and headed with a stiff gait towards the Victorian-style building where he'd been a reclusive resident for the past two years.

A few moments after entering the building, he re-emerged with a key clutched tightly in his left hand and

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began to walk across the expanse of recently mowed grass. He walked as if on a tightrope, placing one foot directly in front of the other. He walked past his upside-down chair and the newspaper slapping against its leg in the wind. Past the white-vested players on the cricket pitch practicing their overhead tosses and batsmanship. Past the handyman in the flowerbed turning the earth for one last time in preparation for spring planting. Past several Sisters of Charity coming up the road for their daily round of volunteer work.

He walked until he bounced against the barbed-wire fence, installed more to keep pesky kids, nosy neighbours and angry ex-residents out than any of the patients in. He bounced once . . . twice . . . a third time. And then, ignoring the ever-increasing shouts and instructions from those behind him, he proceeded to attempt to scale the eight-foot obstruction. Even for a self-described freelance circus performer, this proved difficult as he could only use his right hand (the key being clutched in his left). As well, he was barefoot and the fence cut into the soft soles of his feet.

Nevertheless, Chiavetta would have made it over (feeling no pain) if his loose hospital robe hadn't become badly entangled on the barbed wire strung across the top. Because of this, he was left dangling and flapping his arms while school children below him snickered at the fact he had no underwear on and adults crossed to the other side of the street just to put more distance between them and him. The staff had to position several ladders against the fence to hold him steady while the handyman cut the snagged cloth away with her gardening shears.

But that wasn't the end of it. The moment he'd been lowered back on solid ground, Chiavetta, robe now in tatters, resumed his straight-ahead walking. Tick tock. This made him resemble very much one of those windup toys

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that can be deterred, deflected and derailed but not completely defeated until the spring . . . the battery . . . the locomotive force . . . has wound down to zero.

When Doctor Wilhelm (“Billy”) Ryle, the psychiatrist who’d been treating Chiavetta during his stay at the clinic, came alongside and asked him where he planned on going, Chiavetta answered without hesitation: “I have to get back. It’s important I get back. Now!”

Ryle, after having recovered from the shock of hearing him utter a clear and complete sentence for the first time in two years, then inquired exactly where it was he had to get back to. Chiavetta answered, with a hint of impatience: “Berlin, of course! Where else is there?”

And he continued to walk away. To bang once more into the fence. To attempt to scabble up the obstacle—even if his fingers were scraped and bleeding. At this point, Ryle decided that, much as he hated to dispense them on principle, the only short-term solution was to inject Chiavetta with a mild tranquillizer.

After several orderlies and nurses—the same ones who’d held him down for the injection—had carried the semiconscious Chiavetta to the hospital infirmary, Ryle paid a visit to his room. He hoped to uncover clues to what had caused this sudden deviation from almost two years of placidity, hibernation and utter silence.

He knew already about the front-page newspaper article announcing the imminent union of the two Germans and the pictures of students smashing holes in the Berlin Wall. But that, in itself, might only explain the trigger, not the cause. And Ryle was a firm believer in cause and effect—even on a psychological level. *Especially* on a psychological level. Explanations of this sort were very important to him. In fact, he held them to be the glue that prevented the world from coming apart at the seams. If psychological

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cause and effect could be unraveled, then everything else fell into place.

Chiavetta's room was the same as all the others in the hospital—with the largest objects being a small cot in one corner and a desk beneath the shatterproof window. The only difference was the computer on Chiavetta's desk which had been part of the patient's personal effects. Some of the administrators had questioned the allowing of this privilege but Ryle had overruled them, saying he could see no harm in it. In fact, he felt it might speed up Chiavetta's recovery if he kept himself intellectually active—or even if all he did was play computer games day in and day out.

Chiavetta had installed himself in front of its amber screen every day for the two years he'd been there. Those looking in could see him hunched over with arms spread across the face of the monitor, as if jealously protecting what he was doing from the outside world. And no one, to date, had been able to even catch a glimpse of that work, let alone examine it with any notion of trying to make sense of it.

But, in keeping with his belief in cause and effect, that's precisely what Ryle was now determined to do. Thus, in deliberate imitation, he sat down in front of the computer himself and switched it on. He quickly found the word processing software but, to his surprise, there were no document files. That's not possible, he said to himself. Chiavetta had hammered away at this computer keyboard practically 365 days of the year for two years straight. Surely there had to be something there to show for it. Some tangible result. But, search as he might, he could find nothing. Aha, hidden files! Of course, Chiavetta must have known how to create hidden files, the kind only he could access through some special code or password.

Ryle put in a call to another of his patients, the facility's resident computer whiz. The whiz had been invited

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to spend some time at the hospital after insisting that his programming was all wrong and that he needed new wiring (which he tried to install himself by plugging into the nearest electrical socket). The word was that if he couldn't decode a computer program or get a machine to work properly then you'd better go directly to the maker himself (the Prime Digitalizer, that is).

After half an hour, the whiz leaned back and declared: "There's nothin' in here. No hidden files, that's for sure. My guess is that, if there was anything here in the first place, your friend erased it all." "What!" Ryle exclaimed. "Shit! Now, why would he go and do that?" The whiz was about to say something else when Ryle waved his hand: "Never mind. It was a rhetorical question."

But the whiz had no intention of answering that particular rhetorical question. What he wanted to say was that there still might be a chance of getting back what Chiavetta had so maliciously killed—as long as no new files had been processed on the computer since that act. The whiz explained it as some sort of afterimage, the files remaining in the hard disk's various addresses—or clusters—until some more recent information was stored there.

That's more like it! Ryle said. If deleting is the last thing he did, then they're still in there. Now, how do we get them out? No problemo, the whiz said, pulling a diskette out of his back pocket. With my "UnErase" utilities program. It's like bringing back the dead—only a little bit easier. If you know how. Ryle smiled and rubbed his hands together. Let's do it then. And to himself: I might find the key to a cure for this guy after all. Hey, I might even be able to write him up in the *Psychiatric Digest*. And wouldn't that be a feather in my cap. Might even lead to a promotion out of this place. A job at one of those private clinics where the patients are only genteelly mad.

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In the infirmary, Chiavetta, still clutching that key in his left hand, stirred from a restless half sleep. He dreamt badly every time they gave him tranquilizers—which fortunately hadn't happened very often. In fact, the only other time had been the day they'd brought him to the hospital—when he'd reacted poorly to the threat of having his recently bought computer confiscated.

As on that previous occasion, the dream disturbing his sleep was one of very large family gatherings, unending parties down unending tables, loud banquets verging on orgies, of drinking, singing and dancing under white-blossomed apple trees and bursting grape trellises. And a murky vision of Chiavetta somehow floating above it all. Or perhaps hiding in the branches of the nearest tree, afraid to partake fully. To “lower himself to that level,” as it were.

The odd thing about all this was that Chiavetta couldn't recollect any such feasts in his own family history. All he could remember was being an only child. Spoiled and doted upon but nevertheless alone. As for relatives, they were kept at a respectable distance, to be visited on certain holidays more as an obligation than out of any pleasure. Everything prim and proper. Everything in its place. Nothing done on the spur of the moment. In that way, the Chiavetta family had always seemed more upper-class British than peasant Italian.

Well then, it's obviously your subconscious speaking out, Ryle would have said if he'd known about the dreams. Trying to compensate for an impoverished childhood. Or a genetic memory of sunny afternoons along Mediterranean seascapes, balancing on a cliffside as the waves crashed below. In any case, the dream always ended in a sudden fall from the tree and served to wake Chiavetta up.

He looked around and realized it was early evening—

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and he was in the rundown infirmary in a rundown psychiatric hospital in a rundown Montreal suburb. Which was strange in itself because, since being admitted to the hospital, he hadn't understood his surroundings in those terms. Only as certain blockages and colours, certain angles of sunlight and shade, certain limitations to his movements. And voices. Voices that spit out portions of something that may have been sensible at some other time and place. But not at that particular time and place.

Immediately, he arose and, once again, tried to head out of the building, following a green line painted on the floor so that patients wouldn't lose their way. But the doors to the outside were locked and the key in his hands wouldn't work. Normally, he would have simply continued trying the key again and again until one of the orderlies spotted him and led him gently—or not so gently—back to his room. But not this time. This time he whirled suddenly, stood for a moment scratching his head, and then descended on tiptoe into the ramshackle basement.

Why the basement? From somewhere came the knowledge there was a way out from the basement that no one else knew about, that no one would have thought to lock or bolt. This was an old coal chute from the time when the furnace still had to be fed by hand. How did Chiavetta know that? Perhaps 20 years as a stationary engineer and automaton tours of the grounds might help explain it. Or he might have simply sensed as much as he groped around in the dark, fearful that switching on a light might attract a bat-like flock of orderlies.

A few moments later, a figure pushed open a trap door, looked from side to side and then emerged cautiously from the defoliated, pre-winter shrubs at the edge of the building. One had to strain to see him, covered as he was in ancient coal dust and recently descended darkness. And even

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straining brought only a dim outline into focus. But who else could it be save Chiavetta, making his trapeze-artist, high-stepping way across the lawn? There were more surprises to come. Suddenly, out of the blue, he remembered a small rip in the fence where he'd seen boys wiggle onto the grounds to retrieve their street hockey balls—and to poke fun at the patients spread out on the lawn for their daily constitutional. So, this time, he didn't impale himself or further tear his hospital clothing as he slipped easily out of the compound and onto the street.

The whiz had managed to pull back and put into readable files a good portion of Chiavetta's work by the time an orderly discovered he was missing and rushed to inform Ryle. But that's not possible, Ryle exclaimed. Everything was locked up? That's right, the orderly said—and it's still locked up. He'd double-checked. No doors forced; no windows broken. No way out. Yet Chiavetta was nowhere to be found. What about the grounds? Yes, it was possible he was hiding somewhere on the grounds. But it would be hard to check those until morning.

Ryle didn't think Chiavetta had the ability to understand the mechanism of escape but, in light of what had happened earlier in the day, he told the orderly he'd better give Chiavetta's description to the police right away. "My poor Chiavetta has never posed a threat to anyone but himself," Ryle said, thinking out loud. "But it wouldn't do to have someone like him roaming the streets. Now would it? The good citizens might do him some harm."

After the orderly had left and the whiz was led back to his own socket-free room, Ryle sat down and, with quite a bit of nervous anticipation, opened *Friday.doc*, the first of the recovered files, under a sub-directory labeled *Berlin*.  
nov.

The opening screen of the document was titled: *Berlin*:

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*A Novel in Three Parts*, by Giulio A. Chiavetta, Freelance Circus Performer. Ryle began to scroll the document, reading as he went along.

## I: FILE—FRIDAY.DOC

Antonio G. Serratura: “When my father died, among the things the family found in the basement hideaway, where—as the end approached—he’d spent more and more of his time, was a crude wooden box with a sloped, hinged top. It was painted in the dull brown varnish that was my father’s favourite finish and was slapped on everything from bathroom doors to bedroom closets to picture frames. An eye-and-hook latch, of the type used to keep gates and screens in place, held it shut. The box, about two feet long, a foot wide and half a foot in height, had obviously been homemade and of the same species as the outsized wooden spoons he liked to give out in lieu of Christmas presents.

“Inside this box were assorted mementos—an expired Italian passport with the photo excised, a ticket stamped ‘S.S. Cristoforo Colombo: Greek United Steamship Lines—Pre-Pade Rome to Montreal, 05/03/55’; a ‘*Croce al Merito di Guerra (Soldato di sanita, n. 4202)*’ medal and ribbon dated more than 20 years after the end of the Second World War; honourable discharge papers from the Italian army; smudged, yellowed pictures of several young men in uniform, arm in arm, standing cockily before a military motorcycle and smiling into the camera; and, right at the bottom, a thin four-by-eight-inch soft-covered and pebbled black book containing some 20 pages in all.

“Judging from the alphabetical tabs still attached to its sides, it had originally been intended for phone numbers or addresses. Addresses, most likely, as there wouldn’t have been too many phones in the Southern Apennine mountain

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village where my father had been born and had lived the first 20 years of his life—excluding, of course, the five spent as a soldier. The pages, each line and column squared off into individual compartments like graph paper, had been worn bare and dog-eared. A good number were bent in half, a now permanent crease that had lasted almost 50 years, and some were missing altogether (tabs ‘A’ and ‘B,’ for example, as well as ‘Q’).

“However, instead of the names and addresses of friends, let alone phone numbers, the book was filled with my father’s self-learned script, a fine Italianate hand that combined block lettering and stylish calligraphy and gave the lie to his barely completed third-grade education. Much of the writing had faded away and there were whole sections where the pages had stuck together due to sweat or perhaps the effect of moisture. But some of it was still legible, in particular a sizable stretch near the beginning (labeled ‘C’ to ‘F’ for convenience) and the final few pages (‘X,’ ‘Y’ and ‘Z’).

“I took this book home with me after the funeral (actually a little before for fear it would vanish in the turmoil and heat of partition). But, once it was in my possession, I immediately put it away and, several years later, I hadn’t yet summoned up the courage to make an attempt at deciphering it. At first, I used a heavy study load, work on a doctoral thesis and deplorable Italian as an excuse. Then the fact that my father’s memory was still too fresh for objective prying. Finally my own approaching wedding and preparations for the start of a career as a lecturer in the philosophy department of the local university—with the hope of a full professorship and tenure-track security when the opportunity arose.

“Now, all that had come to pass and I was both married and permanently ensconced at the university, with in fact

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a minor following in the insular world of logical theory. But somehow, even though I'd never completely forgotten about it and kept it at the top of my papers (or rather it seemed to float occasionally to the surface as if of its own accord), the deciphering had been left benevolently undone. Should it have been kept that way for all these years? Who am I to say? For the longest time, I considered myself merely the carrier of the message, the Platonic form perhaps. Whatever that message would eventually turn out to be could be left for others to uncover."

The fact that Serratura chose that very moment—as the plane wheeled for its final descent into West Berlin's Tegel Airport (aha! Ryle could be heard exclaiming back in the hospital, now, it's beginning to make some sense)—to bring his father's address booklet to mind was, much as he would've preferred it to be, no serendipity. Nor, despite the destination, was there anything subconscious or Judaeo-Freud-Germanic about it.

The truth of the matter was that he'd deliberately slipped the book into his jacket pocket before leaving Montreal—in the hope that he might have some time, between seminars, conferences and lectures at the Wittgenstein World Symposium on the Realism/Anti-Realism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, to unravel its mystery. The word "mystery," too, is a bit of an overstatement. Serratura knew the general import without having had to look at the actual text. The book was a diary of the period his father had spent in a German prisoner-of-war camp from Mussolini's fall in 1943 to the time of the American liberation.

Why he felt this might be a good occasion to begin a line-by-line translation, he couldn't rightly say. Not with any certainty. He didn't think it was the obvious reason—Berlin and all that such a city might have brought to mind at

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the time. Perhaps he was counting on it having some literary merit, something that would allow him to boast: “Well, well, look at that. The old man might have passed himself off as a peasant gardener and amateur wine-maker who worked nights in a foam factory. But deep down he was an embryonic intellectual. He had the makings of a writer. His emotional stoicism, bordering at times on cold-heartedness towards his family and a stony reticence when it came to anything that smacked of sentiment, was a result of deeply held secrets and the knowledge that comes from having to dig your own grave—day after day—and not knowing when you’ll be dumped into it.”

And perhaps that might have lent legitimacy to Serratura’s own nascent claims, his own belief in manifest destiny and the call to scholastic greatness. After all, hadn’t he been chosen to read a paper at a prestigious conference, while his colleagues at the university—many with much more seniority and, to tell the truth, expertise than he had—stewed in the juices of their own jealousy?

Anyway, for whatever motives, Serratura had the diary safely in his breast pocket and it gave him a warm feeling to know it was there, a little pebble-embossed black book, a little subversive black book ready to point its smudged, impolitic fingers: the *je t’accuse* of the common man caught up in uncommon times. See, he already had a title for it. *Je T’Accuse*. All he needed now was a suitable target. Or sharp hook on which to hang it.

Serratura leaned back in his seat and slipped on the Walkman earphones, starting up, at the same time, the travel tape he’d picked up prior to departure at a Mirabel Airport gift shop. A woman with a mellifluous, almost hypnotic, voice was intoning a brief history of the city coming up quickly below:

“Isn’t it a crying shame about poor old Berlin? Split in

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two. Isolated. Schizophrenic. Surrounded by hostile forces that can't be reconciled. Caught in a vicious tug-of-war between the two snapping, snarling superpowers. In short, a paradigm of all that's wrong and hellish in this Cold War world. Well, weep no more. The trumpets are blowing; the wall is coming down. It's long past time to bury that popular—and probably wishful thinking—image. Simply put, Berlin—at least on the western side—is one of the most vibrant and hotly alive cities in Europe, a city as paradoxical as the Wall—*die Mauer*—that runs down its middle, itself a hideous reminder of the disease that threatens to toss all of us over the brink into annihilation. The city's not only a symbol of what can be achieved under the most strained circumstances, but living proof that adversity can open up new avenues for those with the luck, strength and flexibility to survive. And Berliners are, above all, adept at surviving. Witness the fact the city is celebrating its 750th birthday this year with a broad spectrum of cultural activities and exchange programs from world-famous operas in 'Berlin Hosts the World' to Japanese fireworks at Tempelhof airport to walking tours of the city's historic Bohemian Village. For those with an interest in the early history of the area, one of the most interesting displays is the Citizens, Farmers, Noblemen exhibit at Spandau Citadel which runs all summer long. . . .”

The sweet, syrupy prose of the ad man, Serratura said to himself, to be taken in small doses. He stopped the tape to look out the window, hoping for a symbolic breath of fresh air—if not the actual headwind of reality. They'd broken, at last, through the cloud cover that had dogged them across Europe, giving Serratura the impression they were floating in a world of their own that was completely removed from the supposedly solid one below. But, as the plane banked and prepared for its final descent, he could see to one side

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the famed Broadcasting Tower (from which Radio Free Berlin sent out its messages on behalf of democracy and unfettered entrepreneurship); then a tight group of white sails turning as if in formation on a glinting lake; and finally the slender hexagonal shapes of street-front apartment blocks lining broad boulevards. From the air they reminded him of strait-laced and well-educated old ladies who put up their most conservative fronts to hide the riot of passion and emotion still bubbling and seething within them.

Serratura was busy trying to figure out where the image had popped up from—(the grandmother in *The Tin Drum* perhaps, a movie he'd recently seen?)—when the balding, middle-aged man in the seat beside him suddenly tapped his arm and said something in German. Serratura was surprised as the man, boarding at Frankfurt, hadn't spoken a word till then, preoccupied as he seemed to be with bills of lading and balance sheets.

"Sorry, I don't understand." Serratura struggled with his bit of German, the few words he'd learned from travel brochures and the very antithesis of understanding: "*Bitte, ich verstehe nicht.*"

"My apologies," the man beside him said smiling and with only the slightest trace of an accent, one which Serratura couldn't immediately place. Brooklyn? "I was just asking if this is your first time coming to West Berlin."

"Yes, yes," Serratura said as he glanced out the window. "It's definitely the first time. Never had the opportunity before. And you?"

"Me? Oh no, I practically live here. Or it seems that way sometimes. Fly in every month or so from the States on business. Restaurant supplies: grills and deep fryers are my specialty. I think you'll like Berlin."

"I hope so. It certainly isn't anything like I expected—at least not so far. A lot more . . . normal."

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The man nodded and looked at Serratura, then past him to the window. Below them, the golden Victory Column swung into view at the intersection of five massive highways. Serratura could make out long lines of buses down the tree-bordered boulevard where both Frederick the Great and Hitler staged their military reviews and triumphal marches. Surrounding it was what looked like a portable barbed-wire barrier. It ran along the countryside in a semicircle and finished up against the Wall on either side of the Brandenburg Gates.

“Yes, that is the usual reaction,” the man said finally, removing his bifocals and rubbing his eyes. “One of my American business associates says there’s too much light—and green space. Too much commercial activity and general busy-ness. Not enough of that sense of being trapped, of being surrounded by the relentless pincers of the enemy, the grasshopper’s spurt of brown in the grasp of the praying mantis. He feels that it’s shameful in a way. Sometimes, he almost wishes that the fires and bomb craters would suddenly spring up again—eternal punishment, as it were. Some sort of grim reminder. Or at least a perennial memorial, a ghost city dedicated to the millions of dead, undulating as the methane gas seeps to the surface from the bodies—and souls—rotting below.”

“Well, I can understand his point but I wouldn’t go that far,” Serratura said, laughing uneasily as the word “palimpsest” popped unbidden into his mind. The thought of some ferocious memory remover stripping away the protective layers to reveal the raw images beneath it. Mental Varsol. Inquisitorial flaying of brain cells. But what if there weren’t any images beneath? What if all was nothing but energy and flux? Eternal change for the sake of change? Heraclitus revisited. He laughed again.

“Did I say something funny?” The man cocked a thick eyebrow in Serratura’s direction.

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“Oh no. Not at all. Just following an amusing train of thought to its conclusion.” He rubbed his hands together. Sweaty. And slightly cool. “A curious habit of mine.”

The plane’s “Fasten Seat Belt” lights blinked on; the landing gear clicked into place with a whine.

“Almost there,” the man said, struggling with the straps. “My colleague thinks I’m crazy for coming here so often. He says it’s like returning to the heart of the evil kingdom itself. Me, I say forgive and forget. That’s the only way to live. In the present, you know. Don’t you agree?”

“I don’t know.” Serratura settled back. “Yes and no. Sometimes, it’s necessary to forget and sometimes it’s just as important to remember, don’t you think? To have events before you and to keep the past alive in some form or other.”

“To keep the past alive?” The man shut his eyes and leaned back in his seat. “Do you really believe that?”

“I hope so. It’s all part of the historical process, is it not? A way to structure the past so that it can be analyzed — if not made sense of?”

“I gather you’re an historian, yes? You certainly speak like one.”

“No. Not at all. Although I do dabble in it occasionally.” Serratura couldn’t hold back. He wanted to tell people. To let the world know of his semi-notoriety. “Actually, I’m a philosopher. I’ve been invited to Berlin to read a paper at a conference.”

“A philosopher!” the man exclaimed, momentarily placing a hand on Serratura’s knee. “That’s fantastic! I’ve always wanted to meet a philosopher. A seeker after the truth, eh? Socrates and Aristotle and all those highbrow fellows with their thinking caps screwed permanently on, questioning, doubting, standing on principle. Right?”

“Umm. I suppose that’s one way of putting it.”