

The Uncertain *Midnight*

by Shaun

I cannot help wondering why midnight was so important to Edmund, and what it might have meant for him. Quite a few of his poems mention midnight, and some even have the word in their titles: *Midnight*, *Midnight My Morality*, *Midnight Metaphysics*.

This piece is just a few quotes from letters, between my parents, concerning the time it took for Edmund to write *The Uncertain Midnight*, and the time it took to get published.

Edmund and Valerie first met in January 1957, though they had been writing to each other before this. Shortly afterwards, he began writing the novel that was to be *The Uncertain Midnight* and some of the places where the story takes place are where he and Valerie went to in their early courting days of 1957.

1. In a letter from Edmund, August 1957, he wrote that he had just finished writing Chapter 4. 'Hope to type it out today and start Chapter 5 tomorrow. It seems to be coming on wonderfully'.

2. But Chapter 5 got delayed. In a letter from later in August 1957, Edmund wrote:

'It's now 17 days since we last saw each other, and I don't think I've ever known a longer 17 days - except when we were being chased by a U-boat for precisely that period... I am about to start Chapter 5. Always a nerve-shaking sensation, starting a new chapter: you never know whether you'll get off on the right foot.'

3. And from mid-September 1957:

'You and I are so necessary to each others existence that a lifetime of odd weekends is quite unthinkable. It's amusing that I, the disreputable pagan, am a great believer in miracles while you, a slightly unorthodox Christian, are sceptical... I shall have to convert you to a life of sin and faith... I am sending you Chapters 7 and 8. Let me have them back as soon as you've read them, because I use the carbon for reference... I think I rather care for Vivain - possibly not as much as for Valerie. But she definitely has something. The question is - What? Seriously, you must tell me exactly what you think of the chapters. It's important.'

4. On November 18th 1957, Valerie wrote:

'I enclose the British Museum pamphlet, also an underground map..... I don't know how the B.M. comes into the story, but if it's of any use to you the Reading Room has another book gallery running completely round it and to get up to it you have to go through doors which are concealed by false bookshelves on the ground floor. I thought maybe if the B.M. was being used for any dastardly purposes in the novel this might be useful!'

5. Letter from Edmund dated Christmas Eve 1957; Ballantine had agreed to take the novel before it was complete:

'The contracts have arrived from the States. Fantastically good terms - but not quite so much in advance. Royalties of 4% on the first 10,000 paperbacks, and of

10% on the first 10,000 hardcovers - rising to 12½% thereafter...We really are going to be rich!

6. Letter from Edmund, dated Boxing Day 1957:

'I've had time to study the Ballantine contract; and the terms are excellent. I'm already playing about with ideas for the next novel. Don't want to do *The Seed* yet if I can help it... Incidentally, the nominal values of the Ballantine contracts are just under £900 so you see, we are almost rich - on paper!'

7. Undated letter from Edmund, February or March 1958:

'I heard from Hutchinson today. Quote: "We are most interested in your exceedingly intelligent and alarming novel. But it would be most useful for us to know something of your future plans. Can you tell us the theme of your next novel? I may as well tell you that at the moment we are rather in favour of *The Uncertain Midnight* but I am sure you can see how essential it is for us to know something of your future intentions. Sincerely, Ian Hamilton, Editor in Chief." So it looks as if it's in the bag. I told them about "*A Touch of the Sun*" over the 'phone, and said that I might come up to town on Monday to see them..... I'm going to work hard. I want the first chapter complete and typed.... They are already keen on the idea as I told it to them...'

8. Spring, 1958: Edmund to Valerie:

'Yesterday I wrote the blurb for *The Uncertain Midnight*. Today I'm writing my brief biography. Tomorrow, I'll do the corrections and on Tuesday I'll finish Chapter One of *A Touch of the Sun*. During the next fortnight I'll do a couple of W.D. stories. Then I'll have just 10 weeks left for the novel.'

9. But, the next day:

'I heard from Moorepark (*his American agent*) that Ballantine want *The Seed* next. Blast their eyebrows! I enclose the biography for Hutchinson which may amuse you. I left out the important things!'

10. August, 1958: Edmund to Valerie:

'Hutchinsons want to put my portrait on the book jacket of "*The Uncertain Midnight*". I don't have any suitable snaps, but I have sent them one or two unsuitable ones. Can't make up my mind whether my picture would help to flog the book or kill it stone dead!'

11. Early March 1959, Edmund wrote:

'Moorepark has sold the French Rights of *Deadly Image*. Ballantine collect 25% and a further 20% goes in agents fees. So, out of 225,000 francs (£160) I shall receive about £90. Isn't it a nice surprise?'

12. 18th March 1959:

'Recovering from my fluey cold and the French sale. Wasn't it exciting? Moorepark thinks they will take all my subsequent novels! It's going to look quite impressive "*L'Image Mortelle*" par Edmund Cooper. How the devil do we get the French reviews?'

13. May 1959, Edmund to Valerie:

'Heard from Hutch that Panther Books have offered £150 for *The Uncertain Midnight*. They want to call it *Deadly Image*, though. Hutch want 50% of the proceeds, but I'm trying to beat them down to 40%.'