

She brushed back the hair from my forehead with her fingers. "Darling, darling," she said. "I can see I'm going to have to keep you a little closer to home in future. Haven't you realised that, to these people, the difference isn't as important as we might prefer to think it is?"

I thought about that as I watched the manager gesture to the invisible *policía* over the telephone. I couldn't remember if Francine retreated, of her own accord, to wait in the safety of the Volkswagen, or if I told her to, fearing sirens, handcuffs - even bloodshed. However, I *did* see a doorman, who'd been whispering with the manager since he'd finished his call for reinforcements, hobble after Francine and then swing the great iron gates behind after her, securing the lock.

In the humid silence that followed, I felt the same mixture of pride and shame I imagined Davy Crockett must have felt gazing down at the Santa Ana's bayonets from the walls of the Alamo.

STEPHEN HALL

A WONDER OF THE MODERN WORLD

Behind Aswan the river piles
seasons of silt and turning flood.
Salvinia crawls across the lake
like a spreading slick.
A man in a uniform sprays from a boat,
herbicide from iron pipes and drums,
his mist falling silently on the weed.
To the east, brown, disconnected islands.
The barren dusty shore with its few
dusty people cringes in the distance.
The owners of a truck have driven it,
like an elephant, into the Nile,
washing it with rags and fingers.