

A conversion to gas

IS a friendly, inoffensive medium, and the BBC (as people say) does its best to keep it that way: you don't want to stumble across sheer nonsense on Radio 4 of a spring day.

You especially don't expect to find it in a documentary introduced by a man as gentle as Colin Semper: so *Indian* (Thursday) was a bit of a surprise. Canon Semper described initially the story of a family, but it is clear that he did not intend to judge; but it emerged as a story of Robin Mouldsdales, and his judgement was not hubristic.

In 1979, Mouldsdales' eldest son, Katy converted to the religion of the Baghwan Shree Raj. He wore orange clothes and had a tape set with a picture of the Baghwan's name adopted by the son. Soon after, Mouldsdales' eldest daughter, Shrewsbury, converted to Osho's ashram religion and also converted. So did his other children following the eldest child, Jonathan, and so did his wife, Julie, who had multiple sclerosis.

Mouldsdales didn't seem particularly shocked — it was just that, in the end, for the spiritual, he had to have abandoned anything that might, in a normal, rational human being, pass for sanity. Leaving Julie, he said, "I went through all the agonies of a conventional schoolmaster leaving his wife and children." It was not apparent in the end — curious, when he was so free with his emotions.

Talking of his final conversion to the way of the Baghwan, how he felt his heart melt, and how he burst somewhat

At this point, Canon Semper's interviewing style seemed at fault. The obvious thing to do was to tell Mouldsdales to pull himself together and stop being such a self-indulgent ninny, but Canon Semper reassured him that it was all right. Perhaps this treatment was more productive in the end, persuading Mouldsdales to moon about blithely on, cataloguing more and more childish excesses of egotism; but Canon Semper's tolerance took the edge off his selfishness.

Really, apart from the orange clothes, the way of Osho seemed to be mostly about vocabulary, and one word in particular: Yes. The first time Mouldsdales heard a tape of the Baghwan's voice he thought, Yes. Katy echoed his experience: reading the Baghwan's name for the first time, "I just remember very clearly seeing the words, 'Baghwan', and everything inside me just went, Yes." Quite what they were so busy affirming was unclear, but still. Julie, on the other hand, didn't say Yes. "I longed for her to say Yes to life a little more obviously," Mouldsdales said. "No was really her word."

Love was another important word. Mouldsdales explained that once he had accepted Osho, he was able to love Julie far more, because "when I met Osho I met Love. That's who he is." Bearing in mind that Mouldsdales left Julie alone to die, placing the burden of caring for her on his children, what do you think he understands by Love? Just what language was he speaking?

James Naughtie experienced an entirely dissimilar class of translation problems with Luciano Pavarotti in an, at times, lucid and incisive conversation for *Third Ear*,

(Radio 3). There will always be some difficulties when one of the participants in an interview has trouble with the language; this was an especially fine example. Asked how he saw the style of tenors changing, Pavarotti said that, "The tenors today are all the other singers. In the past can be that some of them they were a little crazy. So for some little crazy they make the story then everybody are crazy." Naughtie sidled up to this one warily: in what sense crazy? "My friend, crazy, points, I mean we can ask the moon or something like that. Who knows what crazy ... never know what crazy means."

Sensibly, Naughtie didn't struggle with exegesis, but ploughed on. Nevertheless, there was a constant sense that he was trapped in a thorny hedge of etymology and bad translation, and not enjoying the experience. At one particularly poignant moment the frustration was almost tangible: if, Naughtie asked, there were one surprising role that the director of an opera house were to suggest to Pavarotti, what would he want it to be? Pavarotti indicated that he had already accepted such a role. What was it, Naughtie wondered eagerly. Pavarotti seemed puzzled that he should ask: "I can't tell you: it's surprising."

But whatever the frustrations, Pavarotti got across his essential belief in opera as a plain art, one in which you achieve the best result by being as faithful to the composer's genius as possible. And, unlike Robin Mouldsdales, he emerged as a three-dimensional personality rather than a self-created cipher. "Thank you very much," he said at the end. "A big