The inimitable Clive James has produced the next instalment of his life story, covering the beginnings of his professional career as a critic and TV presenter up to the publication of *Unreliable Memoirs* in 1980.

As always, James exaggerates his few failures and plays down his many successes, and, he says, ‘the self-deprecation is still sincerely meant.’ He doesn’t deny that he has unusual talents, but he realises the huge part that luck plays in having the opportunities to do something with them, and also in being saddled with an over-achieving personality – necessary for someone who, crazily, could think it possible to make a living as a critic.

He is very reticent about his family. It is possible to discover his wife’s name, but you won’t find it between the covers of this book. He is almost unfailing in his courtesy to others (the Sex Pistols being a notable exception). The embarrassing revelations – and there are many – are mostly about himself and his blossoming career. Not everyone will share my intense interest in his discussion of the art of literary criticism, but most will be seduced by the flow of humorous stories in seemingly effortless prose.