

# **A BOOK CIRCLE**

**Compiled  
by  
J. L. Herrera**

**With special thanks to**  
Peter Jones, Penny Parrish,  
Anita Clarkson, Rose Brown,  
Marie-France Sagot, Liz Field,  
Dawn Gregory, Margaret Burkett,  
Ken Herrera and Santi Mariso

## **Introduction**

This book began as an overflow of ideas from *A Writer's Calendar* and it uses the same format though I've reduced the number of names. But as it grew I realised it was not so much the result of recording in reasonably readable form the bits and pieces I'd been saving, chaotically, in exercise-books for years but an excuse to explore areas in which I might not have dared to tread a few years ago.

My mother once said she hated receiving criticism but that upon reflection it was always worth having. I agree. But it also means that where once I would have hesitated to criticise anyone, unless they'd been dead for many years, I now feel I have an equal right to weigh into contemporary questions and debates and my thoughts, even if timid rather than profound, have the advantage of coming from a source that is often ignored except in those brief snippets where someone with a camera or a microphone goes out into the street and asks people what they are reading (and if anyone *should* happen to push a microphone under my nose it would be just my luck to be reading something terribly dull like my bus timetable or last week's *Mercury*—).

So here are not only more little mouthfuls but also some op-ed style pieces on which to browse. And, in passing, isn't browse a lovely word? Like a cross between brunch and drowse. For me it suggests a cow moving to and fro in the sunshine, her tongue swiping here a dandelion, there a green mouthful of 'sugardrip', then back to a flowering head of milkweed or the bee-sweet clover, till temporarily satiated she folds her knees and sinks to rest and chew her cud.

So,  
Happy Browsing!

J. L. Herrera.  
1998.

## A BOOK CIRCLE

\* \* \* \* \*

January 1st: J. D. Salinger  
Maria Edgeworth  
E. M. Forster

\* \* \* \* \*

On the 1st January 1953 a remarkable woman set out on a remarkable pilgrimage, not to a place, but to a people, the American people. Though *The Milwaukee Journal* dubbed her 'An Ageless Pilgrim' and the *Los Angeles Times* 'Little Old Lady in Tennies', she called herself simply Peace Pilgrim. She died on her travels in 1981 when she was believed to be over 80 and had already walked more than 25,000 miles; "She has given us an example of a person who lived in inner peace" her friends wrote, and prepared a little book *Peace Pilgrim* to celebrate her life.

She walked alone, penniless, with only the clothes she had on, along with a comb, a folding toothbrush, a ballpoint pen, copies of her message and letters received from around the world to be replied to. "And all of these years when many of us were increasingly afraid to go out on our streets, she walked the rough 'dangerous' parts of cities and slept beside the road, on beaches and in bus stations, when no bed was offered." She slept in cemeteries, barns, fields, abandoned houses, by the road, under bridges—and in jail, after various arrests for vagrancy. She walked through all the mainland states of the USA, all the provinces of Canada, she went to Alaska and Mexico.

Her peace message was underpinned by a simple yet difficult philosophy—"This is the way of peace—overcome evil with good, and falsehood with truth, and hatred with love"—and "Intellectually I touched God many times as truth and emotionally I touched God as love. I touched God as goodness. I touched God as kindness. It came to me that God is a creative force, a motivating power, an over-all intelligence, an ever-present, all pervading spirit—which binds everything in the universe together and gives life to everything. That brought God close. I could not be where God is not. *You are within God. God is within you.*"

And in her little poems ...

In days long past, when men were mere barbarians:

They chose a man or maybe two, to die

As sacrifices to the storm god, Thor.

But now that they are civilized and Christian:

They choose a million men or two to die

As sacrifices to the stern god, War.

And ...

He said, "Of course I may be wrong,

But I wouldn't be surprised

If this were the greatest Christian church

That ever man devised.

Our organ is the very best

Our choir stays on key.

Our stained glass windows—priceless

Our pulpit—the best you'll see."

But only the wealthy were welcome there,

I heard slanderous gossip galore,

And from that pulpit so highly prized  
The preacher glorified war.

“Is there anything more you could want in church?”  
In pride, he said to me.  
“Just one thing,” I made reply—  
“Christianity!”

\* \* \* \* \*

In *This Quiet Dust* William Styron tells how he came to write his novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the story of the man at the heart of a famous slave revolt, and the controversy the book aroused. Though thousands of slaves escaped, revolts were rare. He says “There were three exceptions: a conspiracy by the slave Gabriel Prosser and his followers near Richmond in the year 1800, the plot betrayed; the conspirators hanged; a similar conspiracy in 1822, in Charleston, South Carolina, led by a free Negro named Denmark Vesey, who also was betrayed before he could carry out his plans, and who was executed along with other members of the plot.

The last exception, of course, was Nat Turner, and he alone in the entire annals of American slavery—alone among all those ‘many thousand gone’—achieved a kind of triumph.”

This was 1831 and “Virginia had been edging close to emancipation, and it seems reasonable to believe that the example of Nat’s rebellion, stampeding many moderates in the legislature into a conviction that the Negroes could not be safely freed, was a decisive factor in the ultimate victory of the pro-slavery forces. Had Virginia, with its enormous prestige among the states, emancipated its slaves, the effect upon our history would be awesome to contemplate.

Nat brought cold, paralysing fear to the South, a fear that never departed. If white men had sown the wind with chattel slavery, in Nat Turner they had reaped the whirlwind for white and black alike.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1831 a young Quaker, Prudence Crandell, decided to start a school in the little town of Canterbury. Daisy Newman in *A Procession of Friends* writes—“While she was opening the Female Seminary in Connecticut, Nat Turner and nineteen other slaves were being hanged in Virginia, and in Boston William Lloyd Garrison was publishing the first issues of the *Liberator*, a paper dedicated to the abolition of slavery.”

The *Liberator* was not the first abolitionist paper, that honour probably belonging to the *Emancipator*, Elihu Embree’s monthly. As the first number of the *Liberator* appeared “pro-slavery sentiment was at fever pitch. Twenty slaves had murdered their masters in Virginia. More repressive laws were enacted. Georgia offered a reward of five thousand dollars for Garrison’s arrest and conviction. South Carolina asked the Mayor of Boston to “ferret him out” but the Mayor refused to interfere with publication of the *Liberator*.”

These days Garrison is best remembered for his work in running the “Underground Railroad” by which escaping slaves were smuggled north to Canada. At the same time a debate was raging as to what to do with emancipated rather than escaping slaves—should they be returned to Africa, should they be encouraged to stay in America and, if so, what rights if any should they enjoy.

Meanwhile Prudence Crandall was approached by a young Black woman, Sarah Harris. She would like the opportunity to get an education so she could teach other Black women. Would Prudence accept her into her genteel school. Prudence said yes. Not only that but she began actively seeking out other potential Black students.

There was outrage in town!

The town’s selectmen invoked its vagrancy law. Anyone not leaving town when ordered to do so could be “stripped to the waist and whipped”; the first arriving Black

student said she would take the whipping rather than leave town—and the selectmen found themselves reluctant to carry out a public whipping on a woman. A Unitarian minister, Mr May, posted a bond for the girl and the 16 others who arrived. The selectmen then managed to get a law through in April 1833, the Connecticut Black Law, which would prevent schools accepting Black students from outside the state. Prudence was then jailed. Her sister Almira kept the school going. But stones and rotten eggs were thrown, the windows broken, shopkeepers refused to supply the school, the doctor refused to come, the well was poisoned and people refused to supply water. Mr Crandall carried buckets of water from his farm outside town to the school.

Prudence was tried twice; but the jury failed to agree. The case was referred to the State Supreme Court. Was the Black Law constitutional? Did emancipated slaves enjoy the rights of citizens or not? They evaded the question by refusing to try Prudence on a technicality.

The school was then burned down.

Prudence had failed. She married a Baptist minister and went to live in Kansas. In 1866 the Connecticut State Legislature “prodded by a group of leading citizens that included Mark Twain” apologised and granted Prudence, now a widow of 84, a pension of \$400 a year.

But in the fear, anger, and confusion of the 1830s a wonderful opportunity to provide good education for Black girls (and to refute for ever the stupid claim that Africans were “uneducable”) had been lost.

\* \* \* \* \*

Perhaps Peace Pilgrim had in mind another wonderful woman when she chose her name—Sojourner Truth. Sojourner had been a slave; she is described as being “very tall, with piercing eyes” and a deep voice, and is said to have lived to be 110. Throughout her public ‘career’ she spoke out against the twin oppressions of white against black and men against women, and raised the need for universal suffrage. She never let up, pointing out that it is “easier to vote than dig stumps”.

“I have borne thirteen children, and seen ’em mos’ all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me!” She told her own story in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: a Northern Slave*, but being illiterate had it written for her.

Frederick Douglass in his book *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave* had taught himself to read and write (though this did not stop people claiming he could not have done so) and it is a moving account of being born into a life of servitude—“I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being *a slave for life* began to bear heavily upon my heart.”

When I was young my grandfather talked my father into growing a paddock of cotton. No one else in the district grew cotton so there were no cotton-picking machines and we all had to go out with our bags and pick that cotton. Cotton, I discovered, had to be picked in hot dry weather; the ground under us was cracked and crumbly, the cotton stems harsh and scratchy, I was always thirsty, and it seemed to take for ever to fill a tiny little bag with cotton. It’s not that my father stood over us with a whip but neither could we say “Dad, I don’t feel like picking cotton today”; in a way children are the slaves of their parents, to be ordered about, to be paid or not paid (we used to get 6d. a week pocket money); but there was one thing in which we could always take refuge—the knowledge that we would grow up and be free to live where and how we wished. Slaves did not have that comfort.

Where Sojourner moved people with her powerful oratory, Douglass, though he often spoke, used his writing to reach people. His book sold 30,000 copies in the US in 5 years and went through 9 English editions; it was translated into French and Dutch; he became president of the Freedmen’s Savings Bank, marshal of the District of Columbia, minister-resident and consul-general for the Republic of Haiti and chargé d’affaires for Santo

Domingo. He died in 1895.

His writing still comes across with great power and vigour—"If the lineal descendants of Ham are alone to be scripturally enslaved, it is certain that slavery at the South must soon become unscriptural; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who, like myself, owe their existence to white fathers, and those fathers most frequently their masters ... I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday. They seldom come nearer to it than planting-time, harvest-time, cherry-time, spring-time, or fall-time. A want of information concerning my own was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege. I was not allowed to make any inquiries of my master concerning it. He deemed all such inquiries on the part of a slave improper and impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit."

But he retained his fiercest criticisms for the Christian Church, both in his hymns such as 'A Parody'—

"Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell  
How pious priests whip Jack and Nell,  
And women buy and children sell,  
And preach all sinners down to hell,  
And sing of heavenly union"—

and in his writings—"Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels. Never was there a clearer case of "stealing the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in"."

\* \* \* \* \*

January 2nd: Isaac Asimov

January 3rd: J. R. Tolkien

Henry Handel Richardson

Blanche d'Alpuget

January 4th: Jacob Grimm

Casimiro de Abreu

January 5th: Umberto Eco

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Veronica Brady

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I had a copy of *Foucault's Pendulum* on a market stall and a woman came along and bought it and said she thought the Knights Templars were going to become *the* big thing ... and the funny thing was, almost immediately I seemed to start noticing them 'everywhere'; only that week I borrowed a book called *The Cross Bearer* which has Templar treasure hidden in Scotland ... then *The Last Templar* by Michael Jecks ... then I lost interest in fictional Templars ...

*Foucault's Pendulum* is a kind of dash through history in which several people, and I 'tips me lid' to their brilliant memories, never manage to say "er" or "um" or "can't just think of his name—it's on the tip of my tongue"—quite dazzling—and, yet, oddly forgettable. For the life of me I can't remember the names of any of the main characters.

Edward Burman did a careful study of the trial of the Templars in mediaeval France which certainly lays to rest some of the misconceptions about this period. Of more than 15,000 Templars existing in France, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, the Papal States, Germany, Ireland and Britain, less than 1,000 actually went on trial in France (if 'trial' is not a misnomer) and of these less than a hundred were burned to death or disappeared, presumed murdered. Elsewhere they were disbanded or absorbed into other religious orders such as the Hospitallers, Franciscans and Dominicans or, as in Portugal, King Diniz simply changed their name to the Order of Christ. Edward II did not persecute the Templars but

helped himself to their wealth and largely spent it on himself and his court.

But King Philip's motives remain obscure. He simply transferred their wealth to the Order of the Hospital of St John so greed was not his reason. (Claims of continuing secret Templar wealth have never been proved.) Did he genuinely believe in the indictments of heresy, blasphemy, sodomy, idolatry, secrecy, fraud and avarice? Were any of the claims true? Probably. A large and powerful order of celibate men must have contained some examples of all the charges. But why were the Templars pursued with such vigour only in France? Why was their leader, Jacques de Molay, who died with courage and serenity, so inept when it came to providing leadership and support for his men? And why did the Pope, to whom the Templars were solely accountable, virtually abdicate all responsibility? And why had the Pope allowed the Order to operate with such secrecy in the first place?

So was it really that Philip II was afraid of their power at a time when their purpose—to win back Jerusalem from the Saracens—was declining in importance. Would they become a powerful but unruly political force, accountable to no one? The image of the 'Cross Militant' is to my mind an un-Christian one and I cannot find it in me to feel great sympathy for their trials and tribulations at a time when the lives of most ordinary people were nasty, short, and brutish. The overwhelming sense Burman's book leaves is that the verdict on the Templars must be non-proven. But my last question is: why do the Templars still excite such a degree of interest and fascination?

The Templars are an important element but not the real focus of Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln in *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and *The Messianic Legacy*. They say "Professor Eco clearly discerned the extent to which our research had constituted a species of 'semiotic exercise'. In *Foucault's Pendulum*, he ingeniously adapted aspects of it to a fictitious 'semiotic exercise' of his own." They also set out the main thrust of their arguments in the Introduction (so I'm not giving anything away). There are three strands:

1. Jesus was married with children.
2. Jesus did not die on the cross.
3. His bloodline survives and may have rights to the throne of France.

Strictly speaking, I have no objection to Jesus as a husband, a father, or a survivor. But I could find nothing in their argument, or anywhere in the Bible, which seems to provide any real basis for the idea. (And when they speak of 'reliable sources' from the 12th century I, as someone who has written *A Writer's Calendar*, am tempted to respond 'please pull the other one'; but the ease with which they leap whole centuries at a single bound is rather beguiling and exciting.)

There are two problems with their talk of 'bloodline' and the idea of *the* descendant, rather than *a* descendant, of Jesus. For instance, Gordon M. Browne wrote "all of Thomas Jefferson's direct descendants living today are black, though he was not." And A.G. Puttock in *Tracing Your Family Tree* says "Ruvigny's *Blood Royal of the Plantagenets* contains the names of some 40,000 persons having legitimate descent from Edward III. In fact, the 40,000 represent only those whose ancestry had been traced at the date of publication, some seventy years ago. Today there would be an estimated 100,000 descendants." And Edward III lived more than a thousand years after Jesus.) If there are people able to trace themselves back to Jesus they are just as likely to be peasant women living in Syria—which, come to think of it, is a rather nice idea. But still unlikely.

I remember reading a book which claimed the KGB had information that Jesus survived the cross and they would use this to destroy Christianity. Twenty years later I'm still waiting. But it is Thomas who has always intrigued me. If you will excuse the irreverence—imagine the scenario: Thomas, believing Jesus to have died, meets him on the road.

"Jesus!" he says in amazement, "I thought you were dead!"

"No. I only fainted," says Jesus, "I'm still feeling pretty crook but I'll be okay in a

few days. So don't go worrying." (Alternative comment: "No, as a matter of fact, that wasn't me. Peter insisted on taking my place. Poor bloke but very brave of him.")

"Oh well, that's a relief," says Thomas. "So will the old gang be getting back together again, once you're feeling up to it?"

"No. Afraid not," says Jesus. "I seem to have made this place too hot to hold me. I thought I might go up north for a while. But don't forget me in the meantime and I'll be in touch."

"I see," says Thomas. "Well, in that case, I suppose I might as well go on home for a while. I've rather been neglecting the wife and kiddies."

"Yes, well, cheerio—and God Bless." They part.

So does Thomas, the most sceptical of them all, go quietly home? No. He leaves everything, home, family, work, safety, and eventually reaches India or somewhere near. He travels furthest, takes the most risks, gives up the most. When the Portuguese reached India they found the "St Thomas Christians" already there. It doesn't mean he reached Cochin although the continuing belief in his martyrdom near Madras would seem to raise many relevant questions. Questions which the gnostic and misogynistic Gospel of St Thomas, probably written in Egypt in the 2nd century, does not answer.

The book by Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln deals with a parish priest in a remote area of France who is supposed to have found a 'treasure' and become immensely rich. Was it the treasure taken from the Temple of Solomon (which they say the Prieuré de Sion in Paris has under lock and key), was it Templar treasure, was it pirate gold, stolen Inca gold, belongings left behind by those who fled the guillotine ... I love treasure stories; I can think up dozens of possibilities ... but their idea is that the priest found written information on the three questions they raise—and blackmailed the Catholic Church. I find this hard to swallow. The Catholic Church is very hard to blackmail and a parish priest who tried to do so would rapidly find himself removed to a parish where he would be surrounded by 'minders', if he didn't find himself behind monastery walls.

Woven in there is the idea that the Templars had information which might suggest that Phillip II was not the rightful heir to the French throne, which might explain his zeal to destroy the Templars, and the Templars become entwined with another evergreen and fascinating idea—the Holy Grail and its fate.

This was a subject dear to the heart of novelist John Cowper Powys who wrote in *Glastonbury Romance*: 'The Grail has its counterpart in the mythology of Greece and in the oldest heathen legends of Wales and Ireland. There are intimate correspondences between it and the traditions that reach us from both the extreme East and the extreme West. It changes its shape. It changes its contents. It changes its aura. It changes its atmosphere. But its essential nature remains unchanged; and even that nature is only the nature of a symbol. It refers us to things beyond itself and to things beyond words. Only those who have caught the secret which Rabelais more than anyone else reveals to us, the secret of the conjunction of the particular and extreme grossness of our excremental functions in connection with our sexual functions are on the right track to encompass this receding horizon where beyond-thought loses itself in the beyond-words.'

The Grail is older than Christianity as it is older than Glastonbury Tor. Whether we shall find the beyond-life of which it is a symbol when we perish, or whether we shall vanish with it into oblivion, we know not and perhaps will never know ... Whether death is a waking from one dream to another, or a total snuffing-out and entire oblivion, we simply do not know. In either case the symbolism of the Grail represents a lapping up of one perfect drop of noon-day happiness as Nietzsche in his poignant words would say, or as Nature herself, according to the hint given us by Goethe whispers to us in more voices than at present we are able to hear, or to understand when we do hear.'

And if that is not a potent enough mixture, they add in the Freemasons and Opus Dei. I borrowed W. J. West's book *Opus Dei* which suggests this is a wonderful organisation

and any criticism *quite* unwarranted but as the book doesn't engage with anything specific, such as the criticisms by Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln, I came away none the wiser as to how the various criticisms have gained currency.

\* \* \* \* \*

Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln take the line that Jesus was of Royal blood; the other popular belief has been that Jesus came from one of the austere desert-living sects such as the Nazarenes or the Essenes. The Nazarenes were simple-living, celibate, didn't eat grapes in any shape or form and didn't cut their hair. The Essenes are gradually coming alive as a community as the Dead Sea Scrolls are deciphered, interpreted, and made public.

But I would like to explore a different idea. Jesus was Jewish by religion but he may have been a Gentile, possibly a Galilean mixture of Assyrian, Jewish and Greek blood.

The three Assyrian kings—Tiglath Pileser III (745-728BC), Shalmaneser V (727-722BC) and Sargon II (721-705BC)—changed Palestine for ever. As Werner Keller writes in *The Bible as History*: “People of the lands, prisoners my hand had captured, I settled there. My officials I placed over them as governors. I imposed tribute and tax upon them, as upon the Assyrians.” So reads the account of the conquest of Samaria in the annals. The Old Testament describes the uprooting tactics employed in this case too by ruthless dictators, the first large scale experiment of its kind in the world made by the Assyrians: “And the king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof” (2 Kings 17:24).

Tens of thousands of human beings were violently driven from their homeland, deported to foreign lands, and their places filled by others dragged from different areas.

The aim of this was clear: National consciousness, and with it the will to resist, was to be broken. The “Fertile Crescent” was ploughed up, its peoples tossed hither and thither. Instead of a varied range of races and religions existing side by side the result was a jumble.

Samaria shared this fate. Its motley collection of inhabitants became known as “Samaritans”. “Samaritans” became a term of abuse, an expression of abhorrence. They were despised not only on religious grounds but also as individuals: “For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). It was only when Jesus told the story of the “Good Samaritan” that he turned this term of abuse into a byword for practical Christian charity (Luke 10:30ff).

The people of the Northern Kingdom and their kings with them disappeared, were absorbed into the population of these foreign lands, and never emerged again in history. All investigation into what became of the tribes who had their home there has so far come to nothing.’

Galilee, like Samaria, suffered from these mass movements of people. But many of the people moved into Galilee are believed to have come from the area around Edessa, now the city of Sanliurfa in southern Turkey. In Hebrew this area was called *Galil-ha-goyim* which means “land of the heathen” or “land of the gentiles”. In Aramaic “the word Galilee is derived from the Aramaic word *gal* to take captive; *galutha* in Aramaic means captivity.”

Once I started noticing, comments on Galilee as a very different place from Judaea began to strike me from every direction—eg. “The Galilæans Josephus describes as industrious and brave; they were held in a certain contempt by other Jews, partly as less pure in blood, many heathens being mingled among them, whence their country is called ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ ... and partly as less strictly orthodox ... and departing in many observances from the tradition of Jerusalem. They spoke a harsh broad dialect ... characterized by a confusion of gutturals, and not always intelligible to a native of Jerusalem.” (Archbishop Trench, *Notes on the Parables*.)

Edessa is a curious thread; the Eastern churches take the passage in John (12:20), sometimes translated as “Greeks”, sometimes as “pagans”, as referring to people from

Edessa. If this is so, then Jesus' teaching had already travelled through Syria north into Turkey (then the kingdom of Ur-Hai) during his lifetime. (Patrick Feeny in *The Fight Against Leprosy* tells of a legend: "A king at Edessa contracted leprosy and was at his wits' end to know what to do about it. Hearing of the miracles that Jesus was performing at that time, he wrote to Him asking that He should come and cure him. Jesus replied that He was unable to make the journey Himself but that He would send one of His disciples after the Resurrection. Sure enough, St Thomas despatched St Addici to effect the cure; the leprosy disappeared; and the king became a Christian." This was King Abgarus, and there seems no real reason to doubt the truth of the letter even if people might wish to doubt the cure.)

Edessa had a turbulent history. After the Assyrians came the Persians and the Romans. But it was by culture predominantly Greek, many of its merchants coming in the wake of the campaigns of the 'God-King' Alexander. And it is perhaps no surprise that Edessa became the centre of the "Arian heresy". Charles Norris Cochrane writes "Arianism has been described as a common-sense heresy, and it has been suggested that the real trouble with the heresiarch was that 'he could not understand a metaphor.' This is doubtless true, but the difficulty goes even further. Arius appears to have supposed that his problem was one of 'composition'; that is to say, he started with the notion of two worlds which it was his duty to bring together. This he attempted to do in the orthodox scientific fashion by inventing a hypothetical connexion between them in the shape of the *logos*. But the solution was not wholly successful. For the *logos*, conceived as a link between the temporal and the eternal, was nevertheless regarded as subject to time, which was thus conceded a status independent of the 'second' or 'demiurgic' God. This was to deny all finality to the revelation of the Word of the historic Christ."

John R. Yungblutt in *Rediscovering the Christ* delves into this question. The life and times of Jesus are set in history; there may be new materials which will give us new insights but we cannot take him out of his time and place. But what he calls the Christ 'myth', or the essence of Christ, is an evolving aspect, born anew in each generation. *Jesus* can be found through study, imagination, culture; the *Christ* lives in the unconscious. And when the two, the ethical and the spiritual, meld in perfect harmony, life is truly whole. This is the question that John, the last of the Gospel writers, struggled with: how to meld the life and teachings of Jesus with evolving ideas about the Christ. For the people who had encountered Jesus, either personally or through his teachings, in his lifetime, this was a particularly problematic question. And the more we understand the life and background of Jesus, the better we can understand the conflicts and problems the early churches faced.

The use of parables throughout the Gospels is presented as the Jewish way of teaching religion and ethics; it is implied in most commentaries as an extremely common method. But was it? The Old Testament and the Apocrypha abound in history and legend, fables, allegories, lists, rules, stories, prayers, poems, pleas, prophecies, dreams and demands—but parables are hard to find. This may be partly that 'parable' and 'proverb' were used interchangeably. But it is not sufficient for the dearth. And it is this difference which helps to give a radically different feel and tone to the Gospels.

But why? I could not find anyone who seems to have asked this precise question. Was it simply that the nature, prevalence and use of the parable in a society that was to a considerable extent non-Jewish was different and Jesus naturally attuned his way of teaching and preaching to that difference?

Within the synagogues (and a synagogue could be built once assured of ten male members), Hebrew was the language used. The readings from the prophets, the exhortations to obey the rules and carry out the rituals were accepted without question by the Jewish worshippers. But many of the people of Galilee were not Jewish by race or culture. They accepted it as the religion of the land into which they had entered, and perhaps were glad to accept it for its clarity and accessibility, but they were excluded from Jewish history and culture by their background; nor were they encouraged to surmount this barrier. Many of

the unsophisticated Aramaic-speaking peasants probably saw the Hebrew services much as later peoples around the world saw services in Latin, gaining only a very limited understanding of the teaching and ideas and morality being offered and taking their cue more from the behaviour of the church and its priests and nuns.

(Hugh J. Schonfield, looking at the question of whether the name Panther, Pandera or Panthera can be found in Jesus' lineage, says, "It may, however, be argued that the Syrian surname Pantera indicates some Gentile blood in the ancestry of Jesus. The family came from the north, from country which had been conquered by John Hyrcanus (the father of Alexander Jannaeus), who had insisted that the native inhabitants should adopt Judaism as a condition of remaining. Thousands submitted to this change of faith, and it may be that an ancestress of Jesus married one of the forced converts of Syria, who bore the surname of Pantera. This would not invalidate the Davidic descent of Jesus, reckoned through the maternal side, though it might create some prejudice—")

Jesus spoke Northern or Edessan Aramaic. There were various Aramaic dialects—Northern, Western, Chaldean, Hebrew; Northern being the language of both the Assyrian emperors and the people of the Edessa region. Agnes Smith Lewis (1894) wrote, "Aramaic was once popularly supposed to be a corrupt form of Hebrew; but that is a mistake. It is a language quite as regularly formed, and with a grammar quite as distinct, as either Hebrew or Arabic. Almost our first record of its use is from the lips of Laban. In Gen. xxxi. 47 we read that when Laban and Jacob set up a heap of stones as a witness of the covenant between them, Jacob called it, in good Hebrew, Galeed; and Laban, in equally good Aramaic, Jegar-sahadutha. We therefore conclude that Aramaic was the vernacular of Mesopotamia, the cradle of Abraham's family."

I have read several reminders that Jesus' words translated back into Aramaic have a rhythm, along with an admixture of layered meanings, puns and plays on words, which would make oral transmission easy and enjoyable. One day I came across the reminder, too, that the parables as well as their combined use of everyday objects and situations with a sense of deeper meaning and mystery, were also designed to arouse people's minds, tickle their curiosity, make them think and discuss and compare when they walked home. Jesus wasn't there to talk with the mentally inert. Religion required the active involvement of all that mind and heart and soul could bring. But there was another factor that concerns language. "Dr. E.V. Rieu 'reminds the reader that Galilee in the days of our Lord was largely Greek-speaking as well as Aramaic-speaking, because the population had a large pagan admixture'."

It is widely accepted that Greek was the language of the Gospel writers; but the Gospel in its separate parts circulated in Aramaic, both orally and no doubt as letters and notes, well before-hand. Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew not only are different languages, they also use different alphabets and scripts. (And when we add the Latin of the occupying forces we add a further language and a further script.) This has encouraged writers and commentators to make the Gospel writers better and better educated so they can move with ease between 3 languages and 3 scripts—but this has the effect of removing us ever further from those who listened to Jesus and who would, predominantly, have been illiterate or nearly so in two and quite often the three languages. These were people hungry for beliefs that they could accept, understand and live out in their daily lives. In a complex and turbulent society, place and time, they turned to Jesus for a faith that would give them security, hope, and inspiration.

The legalism that had become perhaps *the* fundamental aspect of 1st century Judaism was understandable; it could be followed with reasonable facility and care by city dwellers or nomadic herders. But the people of Galilee were smallholders, small farmers, orchardists, owners of small flocks, owners of vineyards, combinations of some or all of these (Galilee was the most fertile of the 3 provinces—Judaea, Samaria and Galilee—which made up Palestine) and anyone who lives by the sale of milk or cheese, who must feed

domestic animals in the winter, who must bring in the crops before the storms, would have grave difficulty, for example, in abiding by the more than 300 rules which had come to govern the correct observance of the Sabbath.

And why should they follow and promote this exactitude? It does not surprise me that Jesus simplifies the rules, draws out the essence of right conduct, and lays upon his hearers the Mosaic law and two more points. He draws attention to the good conduct the prophets exhort upon people in their daily lives; but largely ignores those which deal with Jewish history. Both the Galileans and the Samaritans had no reason to be enamoured of Jewish history. It was not their history, it did not necessarily treat them with respect let alone kindness.

But the sense of exclusion in orthodox Jewish life and teachings went beyond differing histories and attitudes. The Jewish desire to retain racial purity was profound and all-encompassing. It runs through the Old Testament and remains vigorous after the canon has been closed. For example, 1. Esdras in the Apocrypha: "So Esdras arose up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed the law in marrying strange wives, thereby to increase the sins of Israel ... And the priests that were come together, and had strange wives there were found—" a long, long list follows, then "All these had taken strange wives, and they put them away with their children." This was followed by "great cheer" but what the fate of the "strange wives" and children were is not recorded. (I assume they remained 'Jewish' in their beliefs; but this desire to keep a racially pure 'core' was seen as sufficient reason to end a marriage and break up families.) The desire to keep the tribes of Judah and Benjamin racially and religiously pure is understandable—but it must have caused great suffering and it undoubtedly led to other people, particularly the forcibly mixed people of the old Assyrian empire, and therefore the people of Samaria and Galilee, to be looked down on as inferior, despised, and to be avoided. The question "Can anything good come out of Nazareth" did not refer only to the smallness and unimportance of Nazareth (El Nasira); it would probably, if it can be seen as a typical Galilean village, have contained a majority of Gentiles.

The century leading up to the birth of Jesus was a time of extraordinary turmoil. Palestine was invaded by Parthians, Nabataeans and Romans; it was a time of revolt, riot, natural disasters and internal tyranny. W. H. Oldaker says "More than 100,000 Jews, the strength of the nation, had died fighting in those years 67 to 37." But, intriguingly, there is a gap between the Old Testament and the New. Even allowing the Apocrypha and other writings, there is still a gap of around a century and a half. This is minimally recorded in terms of changing ideas and attitudes. R. H. Charles in *Between the Old and New Testaments* looked at this gap, not least in terms of changing ideas about the 'Messiah' and the role of prophecy. "Old Testament prophecy looked forward to an eternal Messianic kingdom on the present earth, which should be initiated by the final judgment, but in apocalyptic this underwent a gradual transformation from a kingdom of material blessedness to a spiritual kingdom ... all Jewish apocalypses, therefore, from 200 B.C. onward were of necessity pseudonymous, if they sought to exercise any real influence on the nation; for the Law was everything, belief in inspiration was dead amongst them, and the Canon was closed."

Equally the traditional idea of the Messiah coming from the house of David in the tribe of Judah was questioned at the time of the Maccabees and the nationalist pride they aroused. Perhaps therefore the Messiah would come from the tribe of Levi? And the idea of a "Prince of Peace" was subtly realigned to that of a great warrior who would deliver people from all their "enemies". But the Maccabean dynasty declined into Sadducean corruption and confusion; there was no longer a clear-cut view of who the Messiah would be, where he would come from, or exactly what he should be expected to do. But for the people of Galilee, less attuned to changing ideas in Jerusalem and less willing, perhaps, to be swayed by every wind of Jewish religious politics, the original ideas probably remained

much more comforting and powerful.

Charles mentions “two lines of prophetic succession in Israel. The first is that which frankly accepts monotheism with the universalism that naturally flows from it, that is, the inclusion of the Gentiles within the sphere of divine judgment and divine blessing. The second is that which accepts monotheism yet illogically excludes either wholly or in part the Gentiles from God’s care and love, and limits His gracious purposes to Israel alone.

Of the former attitude Jeremiah may be taken as the typical exponent—of the latter, Ezekiel; and thus these two great prophets of the exile may be regarded respectively as the spiritual forerunners of Christianity and Judaism.”

Marcello Craveri in his *The Life of Jesus* writes, “Joseph is a genuine Hebrew name. Mary (Miriam), however, is of Egyptian origin” and “Only the necessity of making Jesus seem a national messiah who would establish a new kingdom for Israel could finally bring Joseph out of his obscurity and grow him a royal family tree to show the descent of Jesus from no less a personage than King David. In fact, by this time, the dynasty of David was extinct, and the groups that could properly have vied for the throne of Judea, had the country been liberated from Rome, were the Herodian and Hasmonean families and the sect of the Boethusians. But the laudatory prophecies that in David’s time had foretold to him and his successors their eternal rule of the Hebrew people aroused the hope among the preservers of the tradition that now, in the days of servitude, an unknown descendant of the ancient king would rise to liberate the country and restore the ancestral glory.”

The explanation Barbara Thiering gives in *Jesus the Man* as to his birth is intriguing and may prove correct (I must leave that to the Qumran scholars, carbon-dating, continuing archeological search and research, to decide) but I was interested in George Lamsa’s far simpler comment, “Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph. In doing this he used the Aramaic word *awled* which means begat or caused to be born. When he deals with Joseph in his genealogy he changes *awled* which is masculine gender into *etteled*, feminine gender. “Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus.” The reference to Mary is to show that Jesus was born of her and not of the other wives of Joseph ... If Joseph had no other wives except Mary, the word *awled* would have been used in the case of Joseph ... ”

Orthodox Judaism and some of the austere sects such as the Essenes were mainly monogamous by that time; but Galilee was still frequently a polygamous society. This might explain the strange unimportance of Joseph in the Gospels despite the patriarchal nature of that society. If he had other wives he may simply have been too busy, too financially preoccupied, or even too diverted by a younger wife to have given very much attention to Jesus.

(I found myself hoping that, even if the Dead Sea Scrolls do change some of the traditional interpretations of the New Testament, the *tenor* of the Scrolls does not infiltrate. The sense of a cold strict monastic, excessively legalistic sect, obsessed by numbers and dates, I find off-putting. Qumran is in the hills near the Dead Sea; a sea devoid of fish, and hills which, except for some small oases, are barren and eroded. Yet the Gospels abound with warm and lively agricultural metaphors and backgrounds; sheep, but also sowing and harvesting, the culture of vines, the making of wine, olive oil and bread, fruit, fish, even pigs. Though the very casual attitude to time and chronology has given rise to complaints about some seasonal oddities there is the continual sense that most of the people Jesus spoke to and spoke about were farmers or fishermen. So if Jesus grew up in Qumran and spoke mainly to people living in and around Qumran it must be asked why he, if coming from such a non-farming background, would constantly couch his words in farming metaphors and symbols to present them to people who equally came from non-farming backgrounds? Equally, the Gospels provide a sense of spontaneity, of emotion, of excitement, which seems so totally alien to Thiering’s interpretation.)

I’ve read suggestions that Jesus went here, there and everywhere—Egypt, Rome,

Jerusalem, even Mesopotamia and India—in the ‘lost’ years. I think it is far more likely that he spent time with sheep and himself; these two aspects, sheep and a deep sense of the importance of solitude, permeate the Gospels. Nor is it strange that he began preaching at 30 which was the age in Aramaic society in which a young man was accepted on to an equal footing with his elders.

Down through history solitude has been a vital prerequisite for moments of great insight—from the Gautama Buddha to Moses to John the Baptist, from Martin Luther to George Fox to Sir Isaac Newton ... I have no difficulty in seeing Jesus as a growing boy dwelling upon that turbulent society with its differing attitudes to power, to wealth, to the divine; did he ask himself how Judaism could become inclusive rather than exclusive; how the maze of rules and dogmas could be distilled into the essence of wisdom and beauty, of warmth and loving kindness; did he ask himself about the nature of that God who spoke in ancient times out of burning bushes and on the summit of desert mountains; did he ponder on how he could reach the poor, the uneducated, the simple, women and children; did he ask himself how religion could form the binding thread between people of vastly different histories and cultures ...

And sheep? You might think the sheep are unimportant except as ‘tools’ but, although many Australians out of necessity see sheep in terms of unidentifiable forms in flocks, I have noticed that people who keep small flocks for hand-weaving, for example, come to a deep affection for their individual natures, their relative gentleness and vulnerability. Re-reading the Gospels I had a sense that this was the underlying aspect of sheep that Jesus drew into his parables.

Pigs, too, are mentioned. Not once but three times. I have read that this is a mistaken translation because of the profound Jewish antipathy to pigs. I do not find this compelling. I doubt that there were many pigs in orthodox Judaea—but Jesus in Gadaria (which is in Syria) and in Galilee was dealing with a very different society. (St Barnabas wrote on Moses’ injunction against eating swine, “The meaning of his allusion to swine is this: what he is really saying is, ‘you are not to consort with the class of people who are like swine, inasmuch as they forget all about the Lord while they are living in affluence, but remember Him when they are in want—just as a swine, so long as it is eating, ignores its master, but starts to squeal the moment it feels hungry, and then falls silent again when it is given food’; he also offers some reasons for the injunctions which would give a zoologist pause!) But for smallholders, of Greek or Assyrian background, not burdened by a profound cultural antipathy to pigs, though they may not all have kept pigs would probably have seen nothing odd about Jesus using pigs to illustrate a point or visiting places where herds of pigs were kept.

In 1927, Abraham Rihbany in *The Syrian Christ* wrote “I know that the conditions of life in Syria of to-day are essentially as they were in the time of Christ, not from the study of the mutilated tablets of the archæologist and the antiquarian, precious as such discoveries are, but from the simple fact that, as a sojourner in this Western world, whenever I open my Bible it reads like a letter from home.

Its unrestrained effusiveness of expression; its vivid, almost flashy and fantastic imagery; its naive narrations; the rugged unstudied simplicity of its parables; its unconventional (and to the more modest West rather unseemly) portrayal of certain human relations; as well as its all-permeating spiritual mysticism—so far as these qualities are concerned the Bible might all have been written in my primitive village home, on the western slopes of Mount Lebanon some thirty years ago.”

\* \* \* \* \*

But it is the Crucifixion which is the most contentious aspect of modern Christianity; if it can be ‘proved’ not to have occurred then there is a widespread assumption that Christianity will fall apart, becoming merely another ethical sect. Jesus does not *need* a Virgin Birth to be Jesus. If it is shown to be a lovely myth it will remain a lovely myth with

something profound to say about goodness, simplicity, humility, kindness, the value of children, and the love of God.

I don't think that can also be applied to the Crucifixion. The uses it has been put to are both much darker and much lighter. So if Jesus was a product of Galilean society, Galilean history, anti-Galilean prejudices—then what might that tell us about his death?

This little poem was inspired partly by curiosity—why was Pilate such a cavilling sit-on-the-fence sort of man—and partly the thought that we have perhaps never given sufficient consideration to the economics of the situation represented by Jesus' open air preaching and popularity; and the two may overlap. As Joachim Jeremias puts it “A special currency, the Tyrian, was required for all payments made in the Temple, particularly for the Temple tax, which all Jews throughout the world had to pay, and which brought in enormous sums every year. Thus Jerusalem was one of the chief banking centres in the Near East, and business was at its height when the pilgrims came up for the three great feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles).”

There were large Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean though not all wealthy—in Rome and Greece, Asia Minor, Egypt (Philo of Alexandria says there were a million Jews in Egypt), and east to the Euphrates. Josephus talks of there being 20,000 priests associated with the Temple in Jerusalem; though as he also mentions three million people coming to the city for Passover it does not seem an overlarge number. So a lot of people depended on the continuing wealth of the Temple for their livelihood. Jesus may have been seen to threaten this by his method of preaching and by the fact that the focus of religious ritual and renewal could not afford to move from Jerusalem; the simple fact that he was Galilean was a threat in itself ...

## SOLILOQUY

*(expression sarcastic)*

Herod Antipas was here, his business,  
but would he take it on—No, shrugged and  
returned the man. Your problem, procurator, he said.

*(hand to forehead)*

Why mine? Three troublesome provinces  
—Judaea, Samaria, Galilee—and the  
latter is his domain. Leave me  
Jerusalem, strictest orthodoxy. My  
mind half approves. That sense of order.  
But Samaria—rites without script—  
and Galilee—religion on their lips and assyrian  
gods in their hearts ... speak neither Latin nor ...

*(watches approach of high priest, lips tighten)*

His soft weak body, well-nourished face,  
unworked hands ... has he ever held a weapon  
... foolish question, his tongue is his weapon.

‘The charge?’

‘He says he is the ‘King of the Jews’—

‘Delusion merely. Leave me in peace.’

*(closes his eyes briefly, as if he sees a more pleasant vision)*

Why should I care.

‘You are asking me to try him for a religious offence? Surely ... ’

But the unleashed crowd shouts—‘Crucify him!’

Don't they understand. I have power only to crucify

a gentile ... who would not claim their throne ... or does he put on masks

*(a weary look of distaste)*

They think to manipulate me but I see,  
oh yes, I see. This man gathers people to him,  
on the plains, by the wells, under mud roofs, in their markets.  
What does it matter what he says. They come. They won't need—  
strange to think—they might not need Caiaphas any more, nor his  
priests. Revenues will lessen, fewer pilgrims ... temple expenses  
are exorbitant ... all that glitter and marble ...

*(grim look about his mouth)*

'What say you then, High Priest?'

'It is blasphemy—'

'A crime against your religion, not mine.'

The crowd is restive. What enticement into this hall  
of justice, their pushing frenzy. A meal offered?  
Or the scent of blood.

*(shrugs)*

What is one man less? And they may be better, quieter,  
more amenable given ... a return to peace, to proven ways,  
unchallenged words ...

Oh, I understand! Go back to reading your profound Hebrew words  
to Aramaic peasants and ploughmen ...

see them round-eyed in respect, tell them to burn their doves  
for the sake of the temple, the funds must flow, do they think I  
am blind to the power of Caesar's coin ...

*(looks round the crowded room, a suddenly vulnerable look)*

'Bring me a basin'—

My hands. Well shaped hands. Virile. Still young.

Within them I enclose ambition. I fear for my future

if I step beyond the codex, accept the flattering power they wish to grant  
... the water droplets clinging to my hair,

Cascading through my spread fingers,

glistening in my palms, my world washed away.

'A towel.'

But in the end I felt economics wasn't the heart of the issue. Herod Antipas was exiled to Gaul in about AD 37 while Pontius Pilate, according to W. H. Oldaker in *Background of the Life of Jesus*, "was finally turned out of office by the proconsul of Syria, who was in some sense Pilate's superior. A false prophet had risen in Samaria, and gained a considerable following by promising to reveal the whereabouts of sacred vessels which had been hidden, he said, by Moses. Pilate set his soldiers on this man's followers, and killed many. The governor of Syria sent Pilate to Rome to stand trial for these murders; and appointed a successor."

Vitellius, the Roman Legate of Syria, not only gave Pilate his marching orders, but ended the 'fruit tax', restored to the Jews 'the custody of the priestly vestments' and deprived Caiaphas of the high priesthood; at one stroke he removed the two men responsible for the execution of Jesus ... but whether he was motivated by this death is unclear. Probably not.

D. E. Nineham wrote "Barabbas is, in fact, almost impossibly odd as a semitic name, which only adds to the obscurity of the whole matter." It is easy when faced with puzzles to assume someone got it wrong, it got changed along the way, it was copied incorrectly and so on. Maybe that *is* the answer quite often—I appear to be incapable of copying anything correctly—but this can be an over-simple answer. I must admit I find the story of the Crucifixion extremely puzzling but I wonder—is the reason it is puzzling the simplest

reason of all? Because the people who tried to record it were also puzzled and confused.

The massive and bewildering crowds (those 3 million of Josephus) in Jerusalem for Passover must have bewildered the simple men from Galilee, they were ‘country bumpkins’, they knew little of church and state politics, religious hierarchies, overweening ambitions, they spoke a different dialect ...

And now, suddenly, they were not simply anonymous faces but pulled into the centre of something they did not really understand: who *were* the rows of dignitaries (they had no newspapers or television to familiarise them with Roman and Jewish leaders); what had been said and done behind the scenes, what were the thoughts and the motives of those important men; we don’t even know for certain if they understood all that was said that day. It is often claimed that the accounts were altered later to avoid too stringent a criticism of Rome—but stories of the Crucifixion began circulating from the day it happened. By the time they achieved final form they’d been in circulation for decades. To make radical changes to accepted versions was probably not possible, just a little tinkering. But the stories do not explain the central puzzle.

If Jesus was on trial for blasphemy, that was the business of the Sanhedrin and the death penalty, if the case was proven, was by stoning. (It seems unlikely Jesus would’ve claimed a title such as ‘King of the Jews’. Herod the Great had claimed it and he was remembered by many people with fear and loathing. His son Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and could, but didn’t, claim the title; partly because of competing family claims, partly because he does not seem to have wanted to be involved in Jewish ‘business’; he had already turned down Pilate’s request to conduct the trial of Jesus; did he believe it would damage his standing in Galilee; did he want Pilate to have the dealing with any resulting opprobrium ... did Pilate neatly slide that opprobrium on to the men of the Sanhedrin?)

Judaism had depended, throughout its history, on strange uncomfortable eccentric solitary mavericks to maintain and carry its message—Moses, Daniel, Elijah, Jonah ... all were uncomfortable to live with, all were critical, angry, rude, all believed God had spoken directly to them; if Jesus had lived several centuries earlier he would have been accepted, I’m sure, but the tradition had gradually been regularised, sanitised, dogmatised, made respectable, turned into rules; the whole tenor of the faith (as with other faiths) was no longer easily shaken up, startled, gripped by inspiration, sufficiently open to change. The accretion was becoming too heavy. It was a Settled Faith. Jesus was like a buzzing mosquito. And he had begun to move the centre of excitement, of renewal, away from Jerusalem to the north of Palestine. The Pharisees and Sadducees had considerable vested interests in keeping the economic, political, and religious centre of the Jewish world in Jerusalem. Their careers, their lifestyles, their incomes, their influence and importance depended on it. Challenging Jerusalem, no matter how modestly, was like challenging Rome; the most exciting and visionary aspects of Catholicism are not occurring in Rome but those who challenge the Vatican are more likely to find themselves excommunicated rather than for Rome to devolve its power ...

*But none of this explains why Jesus was crucified which was a Roman punishment for a Gentile crime.*

As I pondered on this I found myself coming back to Edessa. If the teachings of Jesus had already reached that far north then something remarkable had happened. We can’t be absolutely sure they had, but it seems likely they’d already reached Damascus in Syria, they’d reached Tyre and Sidon in what is now Lebanon, so it is quite possible.

It is easy to say that we can’t enter the mind set of first century Palestine; it’s true, we can’t. But in fact virtually every empire the world has ever seen falls into one of two basic categories, with only variations on the main theme.

1) Assimilationist—(as in the Assyrian and Incan models) where people were mixed up and absorbed into a homogenous mass, which gradually imposed one central language and religion.

2) Divide and Rule—this was essentially the Roman model. Tribes, regions, ethnic groups, kept their religious and cultural identities to a large extent. Roman structures, Roman laws, the Latin language, floated like leaves on a pond. There was no real attempt to unify people, instead there were petty local disputes and fomentations which prevented people making common cause against their Roman overlords.

Judaism, by and large, was an exclusive faith; Rome did not need to fear it as a vehicle by which non-Jews and Jews would come together in numbers sufficient to challenge their colonial status. But Jesus was another matter. Though he presented his priority as the ‘lost sheep’ of Israel (which was a group with no boundaries; many of the people who came to listen or who heard his teachings second-hand, third-hand or more, were the people of Galilee hungry for a simple inclusive link with their sense of the Divine, however they might previously have heard this formulated—as Jehovah, as Baal, as Zeus—equally Jesus seems to have had in mind the ‘lost tribes’ dispersed to the north and east) ... as Jesus spoke of ‘my father’, ‘your father’, ‘our father’ it gave meaning and connection to the lives of simple peasants ... how strange, how exciting, that their lives might matter beyond the provision of sacrifices and the attempt to live reasonably decent lives ... and the encapsulation of ideas in simple easy-to-remember forms—The Lord’s Prayer, The Sermon on the Mount, ‘Do unto others’, easily transportable, expressing hope, peace, charity, love, easily translatable, exciting ... ‘Love thy neighbour’ is surely the most delightfully subversive instruction ever given out ... tyrants of all persuasions fear ideas more than they fear zealots and insurgents, a kingdom where people are enjoined to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies, to go an extra mile, a kingdom without identifiable boundaries ... to send centurions and legions against ideas and beliefs is to risk those legions listening, thinking, changing ...

Did Pilate manipulate events in Jerusalem because he believed the only way to prevent the spread of such ideas was to destroy their source before they became entrenched? Did he believe that killing Jesus was to end the problem? And did Pilate believe that Jesus was a Gentile and therefore able to cross the religious, cultural, social and racial boundaries that the Romans depended upon to maintain their hegemony in the eastern end of the Mediterranean? Was Jesus crucified because his teachings had already reached Edessa?

I set out on this road with the vague idea of looking more closely at Jesus’ parents but as I travelled I realised it was his environment rather than his family which probably mattered most. I feel a sense of sympathy and kindness towards Joseph and Mary—Jesus cannot have been an easy son to understand; his short life and horrible death would break any mother’s heart—but I do not believe they are crucial to an understanding of his life and teachings, his miracles or his death.

The Emperor Julian, more than 300 years later, would call Christianity a “Galilean superstition’. I would of course question the use of ‘superstition’ but I wonder if Christians by focussing so carefully on Jerusalem, the nature of first century Judaism, Jewish customs and rites, the house of David, the words of the prophets, have failed to see how important Galilee was to Jesus, to his followers, to the development of Christianity ... and what might we learn if we look more carefully? ...

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I was in the library and ran into a young friend I hadn’t seen for ages. The conversation, naturally, got round to books. She’d just been reading *The Name of the Rose*. She described the setting in great enthusiasm, the plot, the clues, the ending ... people around us stopped what they were doing and started to listen, trying not to be too obvious about it ... perhaps they found her enthusiasm infectious, perhaps her précis was saving them the bother of reading a book they felt they *should* read ...

Recently I’ve been reading it too. And I must admit that if Mandy’s outline was not enough, Eco is also kind enough to provide a summary at the beginning of each chapter to

save me time—thus—

- *In which a bloodstained cloth is found in the cell of Berengar, who has disappeared; and that is all*

- *In which Adso, in the scriptorium, reflects on the history of his order and on the destiny of books*

But

- *In which Adso receives the confidences of Salvatore, which cannot be summarized in a few words, but which cause him long and concerned meditation*

So the lazy reader has to read it after all.

It is a kind of mediaeval Sherlock Holmes with Brother William playing Sherlock and the young Adso of Melk playing Dr Watson in his youth, though certainly much longer and more complex than anything Doyle wrote.

Several themes run underground through the book: the vexed question of Property versus Poverty. *Was Jesus poor?* Property, of course, wins. Even those orders with an individual vow of poverty become wealthy in terms of communal belongings.

Along with the ever-green question of the Anti-Christ, and the pernicious attraction of both lone and communal men to ‘Revelations’. As Hugh Miller says in *Unquiet Minds: The World of Forensic Psychiatry*—“The Bible and Nostradamus seem to exert a particular magnetism on disturbed individuals, Dr Kane said. ‘The Book of Revelation is popular with all kinds of degenerates, because it talks about the ascendancy of beasts, it hints at the power of cabbalism and other occult hocus-pocus, and of course it’s nice and ambiguous—emotionally deformed and dangerous characters like Geoffrey (who murdered a nine-year-old girl) tend to love high-sounding ambiguity, to them it’s a lot like profundity. The Book of Revelation has a lot to answer for. It gives the repulsive fancies of perverts a hint of black-clad respectability.’ ” Strong stuff.

In fact and in fiction this strange stream continually attracts new devotees. Yet it says, specifically, ‘What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea’. What did they draw from it, what should we draw from it, and why is it in the *Bible* at all? Was it simply that as some of Paul’s letters had been included, this sneaked through that gateway too? It is as though doctrines founded in love, grace, salvation, forgiveness and hope were not enough for the early Christian fathers. They didn’t have sufficient faith in people’s inherent goodness. They regressed and took out the big stick again. It is a prophecy of fear and doom. Death is treated in a calm common-sense way in the Gospels; now, it becomes a thing of terror. What if you are not one of the ‘chosen’, the one-hundred-and-forty-four thousand, what if your name is *not* in the ‘book of life’—and after making its readers afraid, it then condemns the ‘fearful’ to a horrible death! It would not matter if it was surrounded, a kind of novelty, but its place at the end means that it is what many new readers take away with them. But it is also a message of failure. Jesus wasn’t enough.

More than not enough, it seems to go directly against the whole *tenor* of Christ’s life. It is filled with gold and precious stones, angels, sounding trumpets—as well, of course, as an apparent fascination with cannibalism, brimstone, filth etc—which is the opposite of the simplicity, the humility, the *ordinariness* of most of Christ’s life and teaching. It is a reminder that the church has always been terrified of any suggestion that Jesus might have been ‘ordinary’—yet it is this *ordinariness* which is at the heart of his specialness. He was a manifestation of the beauty, the hope, the potential, the grace and goodness, which is at the heart of every ‘ordinary’ person. Made in God’s image.

I do not know who insisted that it be included, was it a unanimous decision that it become part of the Canon—but I would like to be part of the movement to suggest that it be taken out. Magnificence of language is admirable. But if that is the main criteria keeping it in then I do not think it is sufficient reason ...

\* \* \* \* \*

January 6th: Kahlil Gibran  
January 7th: Lolo Houbein  
January 8th: Wilkie Collins  
Storm Jameson  
Dennis Wheatley  
January 9th: Simone de Beauvoir  
Robert Drewe  
Wilbur Smith  
Karel Capek  
January 10th: Peter Barnes  
January 11th: Alan Paton  
January 12th: Jack London  
Dorothy Wall  
January 13th: Michael Bond  
January 14th: Yukio Mishima  
John Dos Passos  
Hugh Lofting  
January 15th: Kate Llewellyn  
Hugh Trevor-Roper  
Mazo De la Roche  
January 16th: Susan Sontag  
Robert Service  
January 17th: Anton Chekhov  
May Gibbs  
Ita Buttrose  
January 18th: A. A. Milne  
Sally Morgan  
Rubén Darío  
January 19th: Edgar Allan Poe  
Patricia Highsmith  
Julian Barnes  
Bernardin de Saint-Pierre  
January 20th: Nancy Kress  
January 21st: Emma Gad  
January 22nd: Lord Byron  
Francis Bacon  
Beatrice Webb  
January 23rd: Stendhal  
Derek Walcott  
January 24th: Ethel Turner  
Edith Wharton  
Helen Demidenko  
E.T.A. Hoffmann  
January 25th: Virginia Woolf  
Robert Burns  
Somerset Maugham  
Rufus M. Jones  
Constância Pinto

\* \* \* \* \*

Stephen Trombley put Virginia Woolf's mental condition under the microscope in *All*

*That Summer She Was Mad: Virginia Woolf: Female Victim of Male Medicine* and, one by one, undermines the various aspects of what has been seen as Virginia's 'madness'.

Leonard Woolf wrote 'there was something in Virginia they found ridiculous ... the crowd would go into fits of laughter at the sight of Virginia'; if this was so Virginia was right to feel upset for, as Ruby Ferguson put it in a children's book 'the most shattering thing in the world is being laughed at'. Virginia also had what has been described as a morbid fear of traffic accidents. I think she was right to be worried. Agatha Christie has Poirot say in her 1936 book *The ABC Murders* 'And there are, what is it—about 120—road deaths every week' and in 1928 an Australian group called the Cripples Club pointed out that over 1,000 people were dying on Australia's roads each year; we forget the carnage that was wrought upon the roads, especially of pedestrians and cyclists, in the early years of mass motoring.

But it is Virginia's doctors who should be made to carry much of the blame. Her first doctor was Dr George Savage who in *Insanity and Allied Neuroses* said: 'A strong and healthy girl of a nervous family is encouraged to read for examinations and having distinguished herself, is, perhaps, sent to some fashionable forcing house, where useless book learning is crammed into her. She is exposed, like Strasbourgh geese, to stuffing of mental food in overheated rooms, and disorder of functions results. Or if a similarly promising girl is allowed to educate herself at home, the danger of solitary work and want of social friction may be seen in conceit developing into insanity. It is in this manner that the results of defective education become often apparent in the case of the weaker sex now-a-days.'

(I had always been under the impression that schools are invariably *under*-heated. And he might have given some thought to the vigorous reading program carried out by Mary Shelley as a young woman—at the age of 16 she read "two hundred volumes of the works of a wide array of such demanding authors as Shakespeare, Goethe, Ovid (in Latin), Milton, Pope, Swift, Plutarch, Voltaire, and Rousseau. Henry H. Harper, editor of *Letters of Mary W. Shelley* (1918), writes (pp.12-13), "For a girl of sixteen to read and intelligently study such a prodigious mass of learning in the space of twelve months shows a degree of application and mental precocity almost beyond human comprehension. This was followed by the reading of more than a hundred other volumes in English, Latin and Greek languages. Her ambition to keep pace with the mental development of the erudite Shelley never flagged.")

More importantly, Savage was a liberal user of hyoscyamine with his mental patients. The side-effects include: 'inability to read or concentrate; depression; feelings of dread, as if death were imminent; confusion; hallucinations; failure of appetite; a 'dry unpleasant feeling in the throat which drinking did not relieve'; and loss of power in the limbs.'

She was also under the care of Dr Maurice Craig who maintained that 'The girl who in health is reserved and maidenly in her attitude, frequently becomes forward and immodest when insane.' He also pressured Virginia to eat and eat and eat—urging her to maintain a weight of 11 stone (70 kgs) which for a slightly-built woman must have been distinctly uncomfortable.

She also went to Dr Theophilus Hyslop who wrote 'the removal of woman from her natural sphere of domesticity to that of mental labour not only renders her less fit to maintain the virility of the race, but it renders her prone to degenerate and initiate a downward tendency which gathers impetus in her progeny ... It is true that the more our women aspire to exercising their nervous and mental functions so they become not only less virile, but also less capable of generating healthy stock.'

Dear me!

Behind the scientific jargon these men employed was a very unscientific agenda: a fear of the breakdown of class barriers, of gender-based changes, of suffragism, of trade unionism, of universal education and its challenges to privilege and position.

Only one doctor stands out, Dr Henry Head, who had acquired a great deal of practical experience and compassion through his work with mental victims of the First World War. Trombly writes: 'We remember that Virginia did not see Head by herself, but with Leonard, and that they both put their view of her case to him. We can be certain that Virginia would not bring herself to disclose the true sources of her disorder to a man she had never met before (though in time she might have, if the conditions were suitable), and she could never do it, no matter who the doctor was, while Leonard hovered over her. Given the enlightened and sympathetic view of Head, the fact that their meeting bore no fruit and was never repeated may be seen as a tragic event in the life of Virginia Woolf.' It also raises a number of questions about Leonard.

The 'true sources' were undoubtedly the prolonged sexual molestation Virginia suffered as a child at the hands of her half-brothers.

\* \* \* \* \*

If Caroline Stephen is remembered today it is quite likely because she was Virginia Woolf's aunt and Virginia referred to her as 'the Quaker' as in: 'But the Quaker has a well worn semi religious vocabulary; left her by the late Sir James, I think; and when she talks of chaff and grain and gold and ore, and winnowing feelings, and upward tending lives, and yielding to the light, and bearings of fruit, I slip and slide and read no more.'

Yet she is read by Quakers around the world who may never have read Virginia's books. Her paragraphs: 'I first found myself within reach of a Friends' meeting (1872), and, somewhat to my surprise, cordially made welcome to attend it. The invitation came at a moment of need, for I was beginning to feel with dismay that I might not much longer be able conscientiously to continue to join in the Church of England service; not for want of appreciation of its unrivalled richness and beauty, but from doubts of the truth of its doctrines, combined with a growing recognition that to me it was as the armour of Saul in its elaboration, and in the sustained pitch of religious fervour for which it was meant to provide an utterance ... ' and 'The amount of solitude which is attainable or would be wholesome in the case of any individual life is a matter which of us must judge for himself ... A due proportion of solitude is one of the most important conditions of mental health ... The loneliness which we rightly dread is not the absence of human faces and voices—it is the absence of love ... Our wisdom therefore must lie in learning not to shrink from anything that may lie in store for us, but so to grasp the master key of life as to be able to turn everything to good and fruitful account' are often quoted.

Her father Sir James began as Counsel to the Colonial Department and rose to be Under-Secretary of State and played a major role in the 1833 act to abolish slavery in the British colonies; after retirement he became a Privy Councillor, then was appointed Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge. Her mother, Jane Venn, came from a clerical family which largely inspired and founded the evangelical Clapham Sect. Much of Caroline's study was at home with governesses where she studied German, Latin, French, Italian and shorthand—all proving useful as she helped her father with his writing, such as his *Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography*.

Her first trip abroad was to Italy where she especially admired Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' and found the country bitterly cold with the Arno river in Florence frozen seven feet thick.

She lived at home and, after the death of her father, became her mother's main support—but like many young women of her time and circumstances she longed for something more; 'young women, susceptible from education, living in almost compulsory leisure, and more or less consciously hungering after fuller exercise for their affections' was her description of her state. Her own affection for a young man who went out to India came to nothing and she began a program of visiting elderly people in the workhouse, teaching in a night school, and enrolling as a 'district visitor' through which she met

Octavia Hill with her ideas for affordable community housing. She also began writing with 'First Steps' appearing in the *Saturday Review* and 'Thoughtfulness in Dress' in the *Cornhill* magazine. She became friends with Anny and Minny Thackeray, and possibly was responsible for introducing Minny to her brother Leslie. She met Florence Nightingale and brought out her first book, *The Service of the Poor*. But middle age seemed to her a slightly dull time, restricted as she was by the needs of her ailing mother and a lack of direction in her own life. On a visit to Falmouth in Cornwall she went into a Quaker Meeting and the rather lacklustre faith of her childhood was over-turned and re-vitalised. After the death of her mother she went to live in Cheyne Walk with her cousin Sara and several maids who inspired them to found the Metropolitan Association for Befriending Young Servants. Then Minny died leaving Leslie with their retarded daughter Laura and Caroline did what she could to help, though her brother was often over-critical of his gentle sister.

She had a block of flats built in Old Church Street, Chelsea, to provide pleasant low cost accommodation, and placed them in charge of Octavia Hill. (The flats are still there; and Octavia Hill inspired other women such as Ellen Collins in New York, Cornelia Hancock and Edith Wright in Pennsylvania, as well as town-planners in Amsterdam.) She continued her charitable work, though she felt she wasn't very good at it, and she is probably the inspiration for Virginia's character of Aunt Lucy in *The Voyage Out*.

(In actual fact there are "two aunts" and "They visit the poor a good deal—old charwomen with bad legs, women who want tickets for hospitals"; but as the other aunt begins as Aunt Eleanor, then becomes Aunt Katie and finally turns up as Aunt Clara, it is hard to say what her inspiration was.)

She continued with articles, reviews, an occasional précis (such as her summary of Albert Dicey's book in which he maintained that agrarian grievances were at the bottom of Irish disaffection and if these were remedied then Home Rule would die a natural death—and if they weren't then only complete separation would satisfy the Irish). She visited Ireland herself and began giving short lectures on, mostly, Quaker subjects which eventually resulted in her book *Quaker Strongholds*. She moved to Cambridge where her niece Katherine had become Vice-Principal of Newnham College—and she seems to have enjoyed the visits of undergraduates and older tutors, Friends and not. During this period a young Quaker, Sibille Ford, wrote of her: 'She was so full of sympathy. Whether it had to do with the many Quaker topics so dear to her heart, or with everyday work and life, or with such commonplace details as the welfare and upbringing of a homeless mongrel picked up in the streets of Barnwell, to all things she gave a real and unfeigned interest—unfeigned and real, for she never seemed to forget. She had an endless fund of stories and experiences, and of these the ones she told with the greatest zest were those in which the laugh was against herself.'

Leslie Stephen had written a book about their father but Caroline, who had spent so much more time with him, felt the book was unduly dismissive of his most deeply-held beliefs—and after a great deal of inner anguish and pondering she had privately printed *The First Sir James Stephen* which draws on his letters and private life, rather than his public career.

She also continued her own writings with articles such as 'A Consultative Chamber for Women'—in which, perhaps concerned that women's suffrage wouldn't necessarily make men listen to women, she proposed a separate body of women experienced in various fields to offer advice and wisdom; she also wrote 'Women and Politics', 'Quakerism and Free Thought', 'Pain', 'What Does Silence Mean' and 'Signs and Wonders in Divine Guidance'. She died in 1909 aged 75.

Robert Tod in his unpublished biography of Caroline Stephen presents a picture of a quiet, shy, kind-hearted woman who nevertheless remained to the end somewhat unfulfilled when it came to the use of her intelligence and her talents; she was a product of the Victorian age and although she accepted its constraints she also understood them very

clearly as constraints.

So what does Virginia's mocking and rather unsympathetic view of her aunt (who obviously held her in real affection) say about Virginia, about Caroline, about Leslie Stephen. Perhaps only that the aggressive agnosticism of the Stephen household was always fated to mock this gentle semi-mystical aunt of theirs. But I cannot help wondering if what Virginia really absorbed was her father's suppressed guilt that Caroline had borne the brunt of care for her parents, and that her position as the only girl in the family had always denied her certain freedoms he could take for granted. Was Virginia writing *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, as she believed, for the New Woman—or was she unwittingly writing for the Old Woman whose affection and wish for her success she had failed to understand until it was too late?

\* \* \* \* \*

*Quaker Strongholds* was a brave book for a Victorian spinster and relative newcomer to the 'Quaker world' to write because it involved her in coming to terms with a group of people who had been barred from universities and other professions and who had frequently spent more time in jail than their numbers or their message would seem to warrant. As she points out, within 32 years of the beginning of George Fox's ministry the number of Quakers had reached about 40,000 of which "there were seldom less than 1,000 in prison; and it has been asserted that, between 1661 and 1697, 13,562 Quakers were imprisoned, 152 were transported, and 338 died in prison or of their wounds." It also required her to try and define ideas, such as 'mysticism/mystic', which have given far better educated writers pause.

She describes early Friends as "fiery, dogmatic, pugnacious, and intensely practical and sober-minded. But they were assuredly mystics in what I take to be the more accurate sense of that word—people, that is, with a vivid consciousness of the inwardness of the light of truth" and "Mystics are naturally independent, not only of ecclesiastical authority, but of each other" and "no true mystic would hold himself bound by the thoughts of others." She also asks "How, if God is everywhere, does the practical result differ from His being nowhere?"

On ministry: "The free admission of the ministry of women, of course, greatly enriches this harmony. I have often wondered whether some of the motherly counsels I have listened to in our meeting would not reach some hearts that might be closed to the masculine preacher"

On silence: "Wise passiveness".

On inspiration: "How can you distinguish between a message from above and the suggestions of your own imagination?" or "How do you in practice distinguish between a true and a false message?" and even more difficult, "How do you in theory distinguish between the human faculty of imagination and the Divine action signified by the word "inspiration"?"

On fashion: "It is a waste of time and money for which Christian women can hardly fail to find better employment, to condescend to be perpetually changing the fashion of one's garments in obedience to the caprice or the restlessness of the multitude."

On war: she "cannot regard all war as wholly and unmitigatedly blamable, although I can hardly imagine any war which does not both come from evil and lead to evil." "It is, I believe, notorious that many of the panics which often actually lead to war, and which tend to keep up the enormous and demoralizing burden of an "armed peace", are largely brought about by those who have a pecuniary interest in them, either for stock-jobbing or for newspaper-selling interests."

I had recently been reading a little pamphlet by Quaker Jim Platts in which he says "All Christians are familiar with the story of the last supper when Jesus broke bread and gave out wine saying "this is my body and this is my blood" ... The Church has developed the mystical element of this symbolism until we have today a highly abstract ritual—

abstracted from its place in everyday life. Jesus may have intended this. But as I try to picture the culture in which he grew up and try to imagine the kind of imagery that would have struck fire into the hearts of his listeners I find it hard to believe. To my mind he was saying something of direct, practical significance and it is this mundane side of Jesus' comments at that meal that I wish to develop ... ” He goes on to remind us of the vital nature of the harvest. “But let me return to my starting point to reinforce the line that I am taking. We all know how effectively Jesus used the images of the sower and the seed, and how frequently he talked of vineyards and husbandry. These provided the staple food supply for life in Jesus' time—not just the quality of life but the very question of survival, was seen to be directly dependent on God's hand. Thus when Jesus said that bread and wine would remind his disciples of him, what he was really implying was “This bread and wine, the growing of the corn and the grapes, above all others bind you to the cycle of nature. Pay careful attention to them. In growing your corn and grapes you will come face to face with the cycles of life that are the cycles of eternity. In eternity there am I.”

So I was interested to read Caroline Stephen on Holy Communion: “Left to myself and to Scripture, the Gospel narratives would never have suggested the idea of any intention to institute a ceremony at all, far less to invest its observance with possibilities so awful both for good and for evil, not only in case of omission, but even in case of inadequate observance. To my own mind, the narratives of the Last Supper in Matthew and Mark, which contain no allusion to any possible repetition of the feast, appeared quite as complete, quite as significant, as that of Luke, which gives the addition, “Do this in remembrance of Me”.” She saw each time of eating and drinking as a link with Jesus, a sacred act to be done with reverence and thanks.

\* \* \* \* \*

- January 26th: Ruby Langford Ginibi  
Brian Garfield  
Flora Kickmann
- January 27th: Lewis Carroll  
Mordecai Richler
- January 28th: Colette  
Percy Trezise
- January 29th: Germaine Greer
- January 30th: Angela Thirkell  
Shirley Hazzard  
Richard Brautigan
- January 31st: Norman Mailer  
Zane Grey  
Kenzaburo Oe
- February 1st: Muriel Spark
- February 2nd: James Joyce
- February 3rd: Simone Weil  
James Michener
- February 4th: Jean Bedford  
Rabelais  
Sheila Kaye-Smith
- February 5th: Susan Hill  
William Burroughs
- February 6th: Pramoedya Ananta Toer  
Ugo Foscolo
- February 7th: Charles Dickens  
Sinclair Lewis  
Frederick Douglass

February 8th: Nigel Krauth  
Jules Verne  
February 9th: Brendan Behan  
Alice Walker  
February 10th: Bertolt Brecht  
Boris Pasternak  
Beth Yahp

\* \* \* \* \*

Lewis Carroll has Humpty Dumpty say “When *I* use a word it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less ... The question is, which is to be master—that’s all” but Brecht was far less sanguine about making words fall ‘into line’. “Words have their own kind of intelligence. They can be greedy, vain, crafty, pig-headed or vulgar. One should start up a Salvation Army to ‘save’ them, they are so degenerate. They need to be converted one by one in the sight of everybody, then forced to join the procession and be shown to the populace.

“They don’t want to be made too pleased with themselves, that’s the beginning of the end, it isn’t the first time; they just need to be given a sense of responsibility and loaded with burdens, after which they can find their four feet and start to revive. They are not like screens put around the beds in which life is engendered. They don’t serve as flunkeys to ideas but as lovers, their ironic lovers. There are also one or two that are mere impresarios. Some need to be shot, summarily, outlawed, mown down in their places: specially those that embark on mixed marriages or frequent bad company or refuse to be buried as long as they can still be the centre of attraction. Let’s have law courts for words.”

Words and expressions keep entering the language; sometimes almost by magic. One day we’ve never heard a particular expression, the next day everyone seems to be using it. R. F. Stewart in *And Always a Detective* says “One offers one’s knuckles for gratuitous rapping in nominating a candidate as the first user of a particular word or phrase. A prior claimant, it seems, always manages to appear.” John Brophy in 1966 (*The Meaning of Murder*) used the term ‘serial murder’; in 1978 an FBI agent, Robert Ressler, turned this into ‘serial killer’. The USA also gave us the term ‘white collar crime’ in 1939 but the term “muckrake” had been coined by Arthur Dent, a Puritan clergyman, in his devotional guide *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven*, written in 1601. “This book was one of the pitifully few possessions brought to her marriage by John Bunyan’s first wife. Subsequently imprisoned for his feisty unwillingness to abandon nonconformist preaching, Bunyan, while confined in prison, wrote *The Pilgrims’ Progress* (1678), an allegorical treatise that would become one of the two or three most widely read prose works in the world. In it Bunyan told of the man so preoccupied with his muckrake, gathering up the world’s filth, that he failed to look upward at celestial glories.” Cornelius Reiger in *The Era of the Muckrakers* said “Muckraking, however necessary and however valuable it might have been for the time being, was essentially a superficial attack upon a problem which demanded, and demands, fundamental analysis and treatment.” Reis, Meier and Salinger in *White Collar Crime* remind us that “fundamental analysis and treatment” are as likely to be lacking at the end of the century as they were at the beginning—“We still haven’t grasped that the man who assaults women from an office chair is as grave a sinner as the man who assaults a woman in an alley.” (They were referring to the Dalkon Shield case.)

And, not content with entering the language, words keep changing their meaning. A bimbo these days seems to mean a young woman with impressive bust measurements, blond hair, and not a very high IQ. But in the Depression years in Australia a bimbo was a young male swaggie travelling in the company of an older man. And Peter Maas in *King of the Gypsies* says: ‘Steve Tene’s clan, the Bimbos, was once called Bimbai, the meaning of which has been lost in time. When gypsies today are asked what “Bimbo” stands for, however, the response is always “tough” or “feared”, and since bimbo is an American slang

word that was in vogue several decades ago and meant a tough guy, the likelihood is that either Steve's grandfather King Tene Bimbo himself, who was born George Tene, adopted it as the tribe's name, or else a cop, sizing up the old man and having trouble spelling Bimbai, wrote down Bimbo instead, and the grandfather, in line with his terrorist tactics, decided to keep it just so everyone would get the message.'

On the lighter side there was that popular 1950s song which went something like this:  
Bimbo, Bimbo, what you going to do-e-oh,

Bimbo, Bimbo, where you going to go-e-oh,

Bimbo, Bimbo, do your mummy know

That you're going down the road to see a little girl-e-oh—

and there was a children's book about a boy called Bimbo, I think by Malcolm Saville, and then there is a card game called Bimbo which is described as 2H High Low Poker ... which I hope will mean a lot to you ... but probably won't if you're a latter day bimbo ... and just to add to the final confusion, David Dale in *An Australian In America* says: "A bimbo may be loosely defined as an attractive woman who is preoccupied with pleasing her man. But according to the *Wall Street Journal*, men can be bimbos too: 'assorted male models, certain actors,—a bunch of rich guys with famous last names but fluff for brains—all have been referred to as bimbos.' Sometimes, it seems, bimbos marry bimbos (and produce a bambino)." Though Joseph Furphy in *Such is Life* uses bimbo to mean a baby. And then there was the famous 1927 film *Chang* in which the pet monkey, which I assume was male, was called Bimbo ...

So for the last word I popped into the library to check the Oxford Dictionary — "Bimbo" it pronounced "A kind of punch." Like arrack punch, it seems, but with cognac replacing the arrack. I'm so glad to have that little confusion sorted out.

Then there are expressions, phrases, excuses. I was surprised to learn it was Kaiser Wilhelm who coined the term 'Yellow Peril' in 1895. It did not prevent a German-Japanese alliance forty years later. Nor did it prevent us taking over the term despite the perception that the Kaiser was Evil Incarnate ... And Dr Sun Yat Sen indignantly pointed out that there were no Yellow Peril ships in European waters but a lot of White Peril ships in Chinese waters ...

And there are those expressions which are misused. Think of the current popularity of "a black armband view of history" which implies guilt and morbidity. Yet a black armband was traditionally worn simply as a mark of respect (as in "At her third start, Wakeful won the Oakleigh Plate in a canter. In this race, all the jockeys wore black armbands out of respect to the memory of Queen Victoria whose long reign had ended on 21st January, 1901") so a black armband view of history must surely be one in which we truly respect our dead and we should therefore ask ourselves: can we be truly Australian until we respect Aboriginal dead not as 'their' dead but as 'our' dead. (Though Voltaire said 'To the living we owe our respect; to the dead we owe nothing but the truth'.)

We might take this further. Wars in Aboriginal Australia were mere skirmishes. After sunrise the men gathered to fight, equally armed with their spears and clubs; at sunset, they gathered up their wounded and, more rarely, their dead, and went home. It did not involve orgies of rape and pillage, nor generations of intrigue, nor was it fought for private or national gain. It did not involve the powerless poor of one country or region being pitted against the powerless poor of another region to increase the power or prestige of kings or cardinals. Long before Henri Dunant was saying there must be rules of war, Aboriginal people by and large accepted and mutually respected certain rules of war. The imported idea of war in which it could go on for decades, centuries even, with rivers running with blood, with mass graves, (is it of particular significance that in a continent inhabited for a hundred thousand years or more no mass graves have ever been found?), with the rape of women, the misery of children, the sack of cities, is alien to our continent. A key factor in Aboriginal wars was the recognition of the need for young men to work off energy and

aggression, to prove their courage and manhood, in ways that were sanctioned by tradition and law. In all the debate over multiculturalism, for and against, we have overlooked a crucial point and that is that we are a multi-*history* society. That is the base on which we have built up varying kinds of multiculturalism. It doesn't matter whether that history is English or Russian or Chinese or Spanish, it is still imported, and I think we must begin to grapple with the knowledge that we have needed to import our individual and collective histories not only because our behaviours have precluded us from entering Australia's history but because we have needed our histories to make sense of ourselves and our behaviours. We cannot become truly Australian until we can set aside our histories, except as matters of curiosity and passing interest, and enter into the true nature of Australian history, the *peace* of Australian history before 1788.

\* \* \* \* \*

The other day I heard Sister Veronica Brady say that it wasn't an option for most of us to go home and leave Australia to its true owners. Now this is a statement which I have heard from all sorts of people and at first glance it sounds eminently reasonable.

(We know that we can echo Billy Keogh in O. Henry's story 'Cabbages and Kings' when he calls his Indian friend, Henry Horsecollar, "a member of a race to which we owe nothing except the land on which the United States is situated." We took legal refuge behind the doctrine of *terra nullius* for two centuries but I wonder if that was less damaging than the imprecision with which we continue to use 'home', 'land', 'love of country', 'national identity' and a whole host of similar vague constructs ... )

But the more I think about it the more I realise the only reason 'going home' isn't an option is simply because most of us have never made it an option. If we put the sort of effort into 'going home' that we put into finding a house and paying off a 25-year mortgage, then obviously it *would* be an option. There are only a small number of people in Australia who genuinely do not know where they came from (because of adoption, loss of papers, etc) or for whom going home involves real danger.

So the glibness with which most of us say this begins to seem, to me, like a form of emotional blackmail directed at Aboriginal people. "Poor little me, I can't go home. So you'll just have to put up with me living on your land, using up your resources, telling you to behave more like me—not because I'm an imperial chauvinist (of course not!) but so that I'll feel more at home, seeing that I can't go home."

You might like to say "What about the convicts—they didn't choose to come here". True—but there are two points germane to the idea of going home.

Firstly, Australia was a reprieve. People did come here who had stolen a handkerchief—but we tend to forget that people back in Britain were hanged for stealing a handkerchief.

In mediaeval times petty offences were more likely to be dealt with by means of such things as the stocks, by 1700 there were 50 capital offences on the books, by 1800 there were around 230 capital offences. As Bryan Loughrey and T.O. Treadwell write: "The law's most effective instrument was considered to be terror of the gallows. Between about 1680 and 1722, the number of offences punishable by death was increased from eighty or so to over three hundred and fifty. Thefts became capital when the amount stolen was one shilling or more from a person, five shillings or more from a shop, or forty shillings or more from a house, but smaller thefts became hanging offences if they were carried out with menaces; breaking and entering was always capital, as was any theft committed between sunset and dawn." Hanging was the penalty for "stealing of turnips, associating with gypsies, damaging a fishpond, writing threatening letters, impersonating out-pensioners at Greenwich Hospital, being found armed or disguised in a forest, park, or rabbit warren, cutting down a tree" and so on *ad infinitum*. In 1801 a boy of 13 was hanged for breaking into a house and stealing a spoon, in 1808 a girl aged 7 was hanged (for stealing a petticoat; and William Tallack in his biography of Peter Bedford says 'At the Old

Bailey Sessions on Wednesday, February 16, 1814, five children of from eight to fourteen years of age were condemned to death—viz. Fowler, age 12, and Wolfe, age 12, for burglary in a dwelling; Morris, age 8, Solomons, age 9, and Burrell, age 11, for burglary and stealing a pair of shoes!) a boy of 9 in 1831; another boy of 9 was sentenced to hang in 1833 for “pushing a stick through a cracked shop-window and pulling out printer’s colour to the value of twopence”—but attitudes were changing and a public outcry brought a reprieve. Tough, harsh, cruel and lonely Australia undoubtedly was—but it was still a second chance. And as Manning Clark points out, “The advantages of transportation to New South Wales or Van Diemen’s Land was estimated so highly amongst the lower orders of society that some soldiers and others committed crimes to ensure transportation. In May 1828 some soldiers of the 46th Regiment, who had served in New South Wales, and then transferred to Madras, had committed the crime of coining in that latter place to ensure transportation” ...

And secondly, at the end of their sentences, ex-convicts could either receive a grant of land or return home. George III gave Phillip the instruction before leaving England, “To every male shall be granted 30 acres of land, and in case he shall be married, 20 acres more; and for every child who may be with them at the settlement at the time of making said grant, a further quantity of 10 acres, free of all taxes, quit rents, or other acknowledgements whatsoever, for the space of ten years: Provided that the person to whom the said land shall have been granted shall reside within the same and proceed to the cultivation and improvement thereof”. (April 1787) Manning Clark points out that this was open to emancipists and ex-convicts, as well as free settlers, and that “They were to be victualled for twelve months from the government stores, supplied with an assortment of tools and utensils and such proper proportion of seed, cattle, sheep, and hogs as could be spared from the general stock of the settlement.”

R. J. Ryan in *Land Grants 1788-1809* notes that “Demand for land continued to grow and by 1809 it is estimated that something of the order of 200,000 acres had been alienated. After the overthrow of Governor Bligh in the ‘Rum Rebellion’ of January 1808 many grants were made which became the subject of a revocation order as soon as Lachlan Macquarie took office in January 1810. The grants surrendered to Macquarie were, in most cases, re-issued.” Even when land was sold, usually at 5 shillings an acre, which brought howls of outrage from intending farmers, (though this was much less than William Penn had paid North American Indians 150 years earlier), the funds so raised did not go to provide land or medical care for Aborigines dying of newly-imported diseases but, by and large, to fund the arrival of more immigrants.

The convict ships had ample space for returning passengers and passages were free or very cheap. But many ex-convicts chose to stay. There were opportunities for employment or small businesses and, most enticing of all, those land grants. If people stayed it was because they wanted to stay not because it was difficult to return home.

(A friend, researching some family history, came upon an ancestor who steadfastly maintained his innocence. At the end of his sentence he returned to England and eventually succeeded in gaining a pardon. This raises the intriguing question: how many convicts were innocent of the crime for which they’d been transported? If the American figure—that about 12.5% of prisoners are innocent of the crime for which they’ve been charged—is in any way applicable to 19th century Australia then many thousands of men, woman and children (because children as young as 8 were transported) were innocent. Which raises the further intriguing question—were those who returned home most likely to be in this category, either to try and clear their name or because they knew their families accepted their innocence?)

Arthur Koestler, who looked at capital punishment in two books *Reflections on Hanging* and *Hanged by the Neck* (with C. H. Rolph) attributes the massive rise in capital punishment in Britain to fear generated by the industrial revolution, Enclosure Acts, and so

on. No longer was there anyone precisely responsible for the poor as the old relationship between land-owners and land tenants and labourers broke down and the poor flocked to the factories. It took the gradual growth of new kinds of relationships between capital and labour, between the state and labour to create a new sense of responsibility. The poor, in both their poverty and their proximity, were seen as dangerous. “This process went on for over a hundred years, and was only brought to an end when Robert Peel, in 1829, created the modern police force. Had that been done a century earlier, the whole shame and terror could have been avoided. The reason why it was not done was, paradoxically, the Englishman’s love of freedom, and his dislike of regimentation: the fear that a regular police force, once established, would be used to curtail his individual and political freedom” so that “Faced by the choice between the cop and the hangman, England chose the hangman”—or the transport. It is curious to think what Australia’s history might have been if England had made different choices.

I do not envisage a mass exodus ever happening—but, please, let us be honest. Most of us are here not because returning home is an utter impossibility but because we *like* it here. There’s more space, often more opportunities, it is easier to buy land, to purchase a home, there’s less crime, fewer religious tensions—and the beaches are marvellous!

\* \* \* \* \*

And then there is H.R. Chisholm’s amusing story on the origin of the term ‘wowser’. “The origin of the term remains uncertain. It is possible, as Grattan states, that John Norton of *Truth* was the inventor; and indeed he himself used to claim parentage of the word, saying that at a meeting of the Sydney City Council a sanctimonious councillor was stutteringly trying to utter a word beginning with a W, whereupon he (Norton) shouted mockingly “Wow! Wow! you’re nothing but an old wowser!” After that, Norton said, *he* thought the “new” word would be a good one to use, and he used it till it became common. But another story, no less plausible, has it that “Wowser” was born in the 1870’s at Clunes (Victoria), where hot-gospellers of the streets were then known as “Rousers”. A member of the town council, who could not pronounce his r’s, is said to have arrived late at a meeting and apologised to the mayor by saying that he had been detained by the “Wowsters”; and after that “Wowser” was applied to everything human in the nature of a killjoy”. He says C. J. Dennis described it as “Wowser: an ineffably pious person who mistakes this world for a penitentiary and himself for a warder”.

Chisholm was the biographer of C. J. Dennis and Dennis was the author, not only of *The Sentimental Bloke*, but also of that delightful little satiric fantasy *The Glugs of Gosh*. When I was young I remember a minister saying we should not use the exclamation Gosh! because it was a corruption of God. Perhaps it was—but I cannot help thinking that, in Australia at least, C. J. Dennis with his—

Ask of the old grey wallaby there—

Him prick-eared by a woollybutt tree—

How to encounter a Glug, and where

The country of Gosh, famed Gosh, may be.

—had done more than his share to promote Gosh as a popular and non-religious word.

And perhaps to end with words on a slightly higher plane—I came across this explanation of secular which intrigued me: ‘The English word *secular* drives from the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning “this age”. The history of this word’s career in Western thought is itself a parable of the degree to which the biblical message has been misunderstood and misappropriated over the years. Basically *saeculum* is one of the two Latin words denoting “world” (the other is *mundus*). The very existence of two different Latin words for “world” foreshadowed serious theological problems since it betrayed a certain dualism very foreign to the Bible. The relationship between the two words is a complex one. *Saeculum* is a time-word, used frequently to translate the Greek word *aeon*, which also means age or epoch.

*Mundus*, on the other hand, is a space-word, used most frequently to translate the Greek word *cosmos*, meaning the universe or the created order. The ambiguity in the Latin reveals a deeper theological problem. It traces back to the crucial difference between the Greek spatial view of reality and the Hebrew view. For the Greeks, the world was a place, a location. Happenings of interest could occur *within* the world, but nothing significant ever happened *to* the world. There was no such thing as world history. For the Hebrews, on the other hand, the world was *essentially* history, a series of events beginning with Creation and heading toward a Consummation. Thus the Greeks perceived existence spatially; the Hebrews perceived it temporally. The tension between the two has plagued Christian theology since its outset.

The impact of Hebrew faith on the Hellenistic world, mediated through the early Christians, was to “temporalize” the dominant perception of reality. The world *became* history. *Cosmos* became *aeon*; *mundus* became *saeculum*. But the victory was not complete. The whole history of Christian theology from the apologists of the second century onward can be understood in part as a continuing attempt to resist and dilute the radical Hebrew impulse, to absorb historical in to spatial categories. There have always been counter-pressures and counter-tendencies. But only in our own time, thanks largely to the massive rediscovery of the Hebrew contribution through renewed Old Testament studies, have theologians begun to notice the basic mistake they had been making. Only recently has the task of restoring the historical and temporal tenor to theology begun in earnest. The world *secular* was an early victim of the Greek unwillingness to accept the full brunt of Hebrew historicity.’

(*The Secular City* by Harvey Cox)

And Clifton Wolters introducing the mediaeval *The Book of Prive Counseling*: ‘The New Testament uses three words for which the English translation is ‘love’. *Agape* means the unemotional kind of love which is primarily a matter of mind and will—it is the great word for love, being used more than 250 times; *philia* is the love that cherishes; and *storge* represents family affection. There is a fourth word, *eros*, which is never used by New Testament writers because of the degenerate and corrupt significance that then attached to it. It means sexual love. It is this word that Christian mysticism has rescued and redeemed. And now the word bears this fourfold meaning, and alongside the New Testament usage there is associated human, erotic love, purged of all beastliness, but recognizable, and symbolic of the warm, embracing, possessing love of God for the soul who, as it yields to him its all, loses all awareness of selfhood in the wonder of union.’

\* \* \* \* \*

- February 11th: Jane Yolen
- February 12th: Sidney Sheldon  
Judy Blume
- February 13th: Simenon  
Judith Rodriguez
- February 14th: Bruce Beaver
- February 15th: Bruce Dawe  
Jeremy Bentham
- February 16th: Hal Porter  
Peter Porter
- February 17th: Ruth Rendell  
Banjo Paterson
- February 18th: Len Deighton  
Toni Morrison
- February 19th: Carson McCullers
- February 20th: Dame Mary Durack
- February 21st: Anais Nin

\* \* \* \* \*

Should I ever be consigned to that proverbial desert island and allowed the equally proverbial three books I strongly suspect I would take as one of them the writings of Myles na Gopaleen from his column in the *Irish Times*.

For instance, take the time he was invited to become a member of WAAMA: “At one of the preliminary meetings of this organisation, I bought a few minor novelists at five bob a skull and persuaded them to propose me for the presidency. Then I rose myself and said that if it was the unanimous wish of the company, etc., quite unworthy, etc., signal honour, etc., serve to the best of my ability, etc., prior claims of other persons, etc., if humble talents of any service, etc., delighted to place knowledge of literary world at disposal of, etc., undoubted need for organisation, etc.,

To my astonishment, instead of accepting my offer with loud and sustained applause, the wretched intellectuals broke up into frightened groups and started whispering together in great agitation. From where I sat in my mood of Homeric detachment I could distinctly hear snatches of talk like ‘never sober’, ‘literary corner-boy’, ‘pay nobody’, ‘Stubbs every week’, ‘running round with a TD’s wife’, ‘skip with the Association’s assets’, ‘great man for going to Paris’, ‘sell his mother for sixpence’, ‘belly full of brandy and unfortunate children without a rag’, ‘summoned for putting in plate glass window in Santry’, ‘pity unfortunate wife’, ‘half the stuff cogged from other people’, ‘sneer at us behind our backs’, ‘use Association’s name’, ‘what would people think’, ‘only inviting attention of Guards’, ‘who asked him here’, ‘believe he was born in Manchester’, ‘probably fly-boy’, ‘cool calculated cheek’: and so on, I regret to say. Subsequently a man with glasses got up and mumbled something about best thanks of all concerned, proposal somewhat premature, society not yet wholly formed, bring proposal forward at later date, certain that choice would be a popular one, with permission of company pass on to next business, disgraceful sweat rates paid by broadcasting station ... I thought this was fair enough, but think of my feelings a few days afterwards on hearing that Mr Sean O Faoláin had been elevated to the same Presidency.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I hate to admit it but I always get Seán O’Faoláin and Seán O’Casey mixed up. So excuse me a moment while I nip off and look them up.

Back again. Yes, it’s O’Faoláin I have on my shelf—in the guise of probably the dullest book he ever wrote: *De Valera*.

Seán O’Faoláin lived a most respectable life and his plays such as *She Had to do Something* have largely been archived, while we remember him, *if* we remember him, for his short story collections such as *A Nest of Simple Folk*. Seán O’Casey also lived a respectable personal life—quite at odds with the stormy life of his writing. In fact, he must nearly qualify as the most banned writer of his time.

He was born in Dublin in 1880 into a very poor Protestant family and he suffered from trachoma as a child, which also affected his schooling. It was Irish theatre which brightened his childhood, Ireland’s great labour leader, Jim Larkin, who inspired his politics, and the Irish language, music and culture which nurtured his writing, even long after he’d left Ireland. (He preferred to be called O’Cathasaigh; that I haven’t done so is laziness not lack of respect.) All three strands influenced his early enthusiasm to become a writer of some kind.

The Abbey Theatre in Dublin rejected his first four manuscripts then took *The Shadow of a Gunman* in 1923, followed by *Juno and the Paycock* (1924) and *The Plough and the Stars* in 1926. But his troubles were just beginning. The Plough provoked a riot in the audience, a threatened back-stage rebellion and a threat by the theatre board that the play wasn’t to be accepted without changes. It was W. B. Yeats who came to his support then—and W. B. Yeats who turned down his next play *The Silver Tassie*. It finally got a

showing in London where its audience did not appreciate its ‘Irishness’ and his London producer, C. B. Cochran, turned down his next play *Within the Gates* as likely to be uneconomical. O’Casey refused Yeats’ invitation of membership in the newly-formed Irish Academy of Letters (and years later refused an honorary doctorate from Trinity College, Dublin).

His short story ‘I Wanna Woman’ was rejected because the printer refused to set his ‘immoral’ words in type; several of his articles on theatre were rejected as being too provocative; his collection of articles *The Flying Wasp* was regarded by publisher Harold Macmillan as being too ‘combative’; his play *The Star Turns Red* was turned down in New York as being too ‘red’; and the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin’s displeasure led to the unofficial banning of his play *The Drums of Father Ned*. In the meantime he had turned to autobiography as a way of keeping the wolf from the family’s door. But of the 6 volumes of his autobiography, two—*Pictures in the Hallway* and *Knock at the Door*—were banned by the Irish Censorship Board, as was his book of essays *The Green Crow*.

It was J. M. Synge who wrote of a symbolic Irish ‘Mrs Grundy’—

Lord, confound this surly sister,  
Blight her brow with blotch and blister,  
Cramp her larynx, lung, and liver,  
In her guts a galling give her.

Let her live to earn her dinners  
In Mountjoy with seedy sinners:  
Lord, this judgement quickly bring,  
And I’m your servant, J. M. Synge

—but O’Casey could be equally blistering ‘Eire is, of course, now little more than an enlarged sacristy with Christ outside and all the doors locked’, and ‘In Ireland they wear the fig leaf on the mouth’. It could be argued that Ireland by requiring its women to be symbols of purity, virgins and mothers, had created the climate in which O’Casey’s robust language and earthy humour would always raise female eyebrows. But it was usually men who did the criticising and the censoring (and women like Lady Gregory and Shaw’s wife, Charlotte, who were his firmest supporters) and it is debatable if their sole reason was to protect the delicate sensibilities of Irish Womanhood. Yet O’Casey’s work has won through not only to respectability but also to enduring recognition.

\* \* \* \* \*

Myles was fond of dwelling on the advantages if not the delights of illiteracy. Strange for a man who wrote his column in Irish, English and Latin, with the odd skirl of French and German. And yet, now I come to ponder upon the thought, I think he was right. Illiteracy is a burden in a literate society but it is not a burden in an oral society. The usefulness is not automatically in the literacy; it is dependent upon the type of society we have created. And there are actually benefits in being non-literate.

The first one to occur to me is memory. If you do not have encyclopaedias and year-books, diaries, journals and frig memos you tend to cherish and nurture your memory. Non-literate people are more likely to have brilliant memories.

(Alberto Manguel put it: “I work in fear of losing a “memorized” text—a fear which for my ancestors came only with the dilapidations of age, but which for me is always present: fear of a power surge, a misdirected key, a glitch in the system, a virus, a defective disk, any of which might erase from my memory everything for ever.”)

“The salaried heads of the system—the Native Magistrate and Chief Kaubure—were men who had qualified for appointment by many years of service as village Kaubure. In the early days, most of them could neither read nor write. Some of the old sort were still in office when I got to the group (the Gilbert Islands, now Kiribati), and I was in a state of

continual astonishment at their powers of memory. They were word-perfect in the native laws and regulations, and two readings aloud by the Island Scribe of any letter or record in Gilbertese were enough to store the whole text of it in their minds forever. The spread of Mission education brought with it in the long run a natural demand for literacy, even among the village kaubure. That was all to the good as time marched on, for it widened horizons; yet, excellent as it was, it certainly produced no finer breed of justices or administrators than those unlettered and, more often than not, pagan Native Magistrates of old.”

(*A Pattern of Islands*, Arthur Grimble)

“As is the custom in northern Scotland and the Hebrides, occult information is passed down from father to daughter and mother to son. So it was with him; he was instructed by his mother, and his sister by her father. Apart from the practice of healing and spell-binding, both he and his sister learnt from their parents by word of mouth 376 stories, some of which, he informed me, took over an hour in the telling. For, besides being a wise man, Mr. Fraser was one of the last traditional story-tellers.”

(*Seal Morning*, Rowena Farre)

Then there is what we tend to learn in a literate society. James McAuley, looking at the West, said, “Its education, for example is mere literacy, and the illiterates of the traditional East have a higher standard of education because they *hear* epic literature and music of profound spiritual value.” It is not precisely the fault of literacy but rather the fault of a society which has made literacy an unquestioned good without asking enough questions about what is being read; Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan wrote, “it is hard to understand why textbook publishers during the last half century have successively restricted the vocabulary of their basic readers ever more, thus making them even less interesting to children; and why educators have used these ever more boring readers in preference to more challenging ones. One possible explanation (which tallies with the progressive decline in reading ability among American students) is that as the readers became more boring, children learned to read less well. The conclusion drawn from this fact was not the obvious one that as the textbooks became more boring to children and teachers alike, children would have a harder time working up any interest in learning to read. Instead, it was concluded that the books were too *difficult* for the children and that things would be made easier for them, asking them to learn fewer words! So each new edition of a primer contains fewer words in ever more frequent repetition, and in consequence is more boring than that which preceded it. With this, children are progressively less interested in what they are made to read and find learning ever less rewarding; their reading scores go down, and more of them develop serious reading difficulties. As this cycle continues up to the present day, things have gone from bad to worse.”

Then there is the simple fact that oral societies require more effort to be put into social interaction. If people are predominantly communicating by talk then they are more likely to put more effort into being together, in making times when people can talk; the image of the family or clan around the campfire, everyone listening and sharing their stories, their histories, their wisdom, remains a very powerful one. The richness, vivid metaphors, and lively images of Irish peasant talk, of people who were rarely literate, has enriched the written language and style of writing. Douglas Hyde once wrote of “schoolmasters who knew no Irish being appointed to teach pupils who knew no English .... Intelligent children endowed with a vocabulary in every day use of about three thousand words enter the Schools of the Chief Commissioner, to come out at the end with their natural vivacity gone, their intelligence almost completely sapped, their splendid command of their native language lost forever, and a vocabulary of five or six hundred English words, badly pronounced and barbarously employed, substituted for it. ... Story, lay, poem, song, aphorism, proverb, and the unique stock in trade of an Irish speaker’s mind, is gone forever, *and replaced by nothing* .... The children are taught, if nothing else, to be ashamed of their own parents, ashamed of their own nationality, ashamed of their own names .... It is a

remarkable system of ‘education’ ”.

Peter Verigin of the Dukhobor community in Canada said early this century, “We educate our children orally; we believe in oral testimony, as Christ did.” He said education prepared children for military service, and went on “Back to the land—is it not a universal cry? Do not educated children go to the cities?”

Whether they go *for* education or *because* of education, they tend to be educated into the dominant culture which may actively distance them from their own unique culture, language and way of life. (The Dukhobors were a Russian sect which believed in pacifism and the communal ownership of land.) The contempt they may be encouraged to feel for the differences of their parents and grandparents as being ‘backward’ and ‘illiterate’ is hard to overcome.

Oral societies, almost invariably, respected, even revered, the old. Because the old were the repositories of wisdom, culture, tradition, history and experience. We look to libraries, archives, data bases, tapes and written materials as our repositories for wisdom and experience—our old have become expendable.

Simon Ortiz, of the Acoma people of New Mexico, said, “Indian oral history is a recognition of what has moral value. Passing that oral history to another generation of people is an affirmation of that value.” Our children are bombarded from every side—we call it a communication or an information revolution—and we hope they will somehow struggle through the sheer volume of material and pick out that nugget we like to call ‘core values’. If they get lost or fail to do so or break under the pressure, we are more likely to blame them than the immense amount of spoken and written material being dumped on them every day. Oral cultures are limited in the amounts that can be passed on. So such societies tend to choose the most important things to pass on—“what has moral value”—and make them central to the process of sharing and educating.

Literacy places rules on language. We insist on rules of spelling, rules of grammar, rules of punctuation, forgetting that almost all languages (except a few like Esperanto) were developed by illiterate peoples for whom, not only words and meanings but sounds and rhythms were an essential part of the pleasures of language. We go on creating words, many of them needed to name new technology, but as soon as they are created they become subject to the demands of literacy such as a set spelling—instead of being allowed to grow and develop organically. Does it matter? I’m not sure but I wonder if we are not promoting the utility of language at the expense of the joy of language.

Literacy is closely linked to the economics of printing; languages with a small number of speakers are seen as having insufficient ‘economies of scale’ to warrant the printing of a range of titles—but instead of this being seen as a good reason for promoting a lively oral culture there is instead intense pressure to absorb the smallest language groups into slightly larger groups and so on; like a matryoshka doll in which the smallest doll is constantly gobbled up by the next one, until only the largest one survives. If the richness of the smallest language (and all it has to say about a peoples’ history and past and way of seeing the world) becomes an integral part of the next smallest language it might not matter but that is rarely the way it works. The smallest group is more likely to be treated as being the most backward, the most primitive, the least dynamic.

Then there are the environmental impacts of literacy; the most obvious being the paper that we are drowning under. The clearfelling of huge tracts of forest, monoculture, chlorine bleaching and consequent pollution that comes out of paper mills, damage to our roads, congestion of our ports, litter on roads and beaches—are we getting sufficient benefit from our reading to offset the damage done?

While I was pondering on this subject I came upon a book with the fascinating title *The Bugbear of Literacy* by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. He adds several interesting ideas. “All serious students of human societies are agreed that agriculture and handicraft are essential foundations of any civilization; the primary meaning of the word being that of

making a *home* for oneself. But, as Albert Schweitzer says, “we proceed as if not agriculture and handicraft, but reading and writing were the beginning of civilization,” and, “from schools which are mere copies of those of Europe they (“natives”) are turned out as ‘educated’ persons, that is, who think themselves superior to manual work, and want to follow only commercial or intellectual callings ... those who go through the schools are mostly lost to agriculture and handicraft.” As that great missionary, Charles Johnson of Zululand, also said, “the central idea (of the mission schools) was to prize individuals off the mass of the national life”.

He ends up saying his “real concern is with the fallacy involved in the attachment of an absolute value to literacy, and the very dangerous consequences that are involved in the setting up of “literacy” as a standard by which to measure the cultures of unlettered peoples. Our blind faith in literacy not only obscures for us the significance of other skills, so that we care not under what subhuman conditions a man may have to earn his living, if only he can read, no matter what, in his hours of leisure; it is also one of the fundamental grounds of inter-racial prejudice and becomes a prime factor in the spiritual impoverishment of all the “backward” people whom we propose to “civilize”.”

\* \* \* \* \*

February 23rd: Samuel Pepys  
Norman Lindsay

\* \* \* \* \*

Pepys, not surprisingly, used shorthand in his diary; partly his own concoction and partly based on the system or ‘characterie’ Thomas Shelton had popularised in his book *Tachygraphy*. He had brought out *Short Writing* in 1626 and followed it with a refined system in *Tachygraphy* in 1638. But the earliest printed work on shorthand in English is said to be Timothy Bright’s *Characterie or The Art of Short, Swift and Secret Writing by Character* which appeared in 1588.

The idea of shorthand was expressed in a poem by an anonymous student:

What! write as fast as speak? what man can do it?

What! hand as swift as tongue? persuade me to it.

Unlikely tale! Tush, tush, it cannot be,

May some man say that hath not heard of thee.

I suspect, though, that people have been devising various kinds of ‘short hands’ ever since writing began, even if only for a few common words. Roderic Dunkerley says “Dr Emery Barnes speaks of a manuscript which records the trial of the Scillitan martyrs at Carthage about (A.D.) 200 as ‘probably preserving the actual shorthand notes taken at the trial’. And as stated earlier there is plenty of other evidence of the use of shorthand in those days.”

Savonarola, the strange monk who ruled Florence in the 1490s, (in between the D’Medicis and while Leonardo da Vinci was painting Florentine matron Mona Lisa) and came to a sticky end, was much given to sermonising; apparently all his sermons were taken down in shorthand by a fellow monk so they could be collected and ‘published’.

Greek historian Xenophon is said to have used “an ancient form of Greek shorthand” but the first widely accepted system was that of Marcus Tullius Tiro in about 60 BC. He was a friend and secretary to Cicero and used his shorthand to take down the speeches in the Roman Senate.

Timothy Bright’s system sparked off a variety of other systems but it wasn’t until Isaac Pitman published his phonetic shorthand in 1837 that one system virtually took over. John Robert Gregg produced a popular system in 1888 and the twentieth century has produced dozens more.

It was Pitman’s system which I tried to learn.

There is an assumption that there was no unemployment in the 1960s; but for teenage girls in country towns this certainly wasn’t the case. Agriculture and all its related

activities—selling tractors, working in abattoirs, loading grain etc—tend to make jobs for boys. I spent three months unemployed and used that time to start a commercial course which meant that I got \$3-50 a week on the dole, spent \$6 for 5 days' board in town and hitch-hiked the 26kms home each weekend. Then a job came up somewhere else (which then involved me in hitch-hiking 15kms home on my days' off; which, as it wasn't a busy road, often meant walking the 15kms home). I never did get the hang of double-entry book-keeping, I've since been glad of the reasonable typing ability I acquired, and I'm afraid I've forgotten all my Pitman's.

Before Pitman probably the most popular system was Gurney's, and Vance Palmer tells this little story of his grandfather ... "What he brought with him when he arrived, a young man in his early twenties, was an enterprising spirit, a knowledge of Gurney's shorthand, and experience of the Press Gallery in the House of Commons, where he had sat, we believed, with Charles Dickens. He may have been encouraged to migrate by Gurney & Sons, on whose staff he had worked as parliamentary reporter; this famous firm whose system of stenography had held the field in England for nearly a century was beginning to feel the competition of other systems on the home front and wanted to extend its influence overseas. My grandfather introduced it to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, being the first journalist to use shorthand on that paper. He remained there until he was appointed shorthand-writer to the new Legislative Council; after that he was connected with the New South Wales Parliament—first as Clerk of the Assembly, later as chief of the *Hansard* staff.

Perhaps he really had, as we believed, worked in the Press Gallery with Charles Dickens, but it is more likely to have been with the novelist's father, John."

His career as a parliamentary stenographer began with a rather painful hiccup. Robert Lowe was making a "long and important speech" speaking fast and emphatically; Mr Palmer had a headache and was struggling to keep up. Next morning he looked at his notes of the speech and to his horror found he couldn't decipher his own symbols. "What was he to do? Confess the truth? But he had just been appointed to the position, and this would be an admission of his incapacity for it; as well, perhaps, as treachery to the whole system of what Gurney called brachygraphy! Coming across in the Balmain ferry he brooded over the matter until he was forced to a decision. As they neared the Quay he tore up his notes and scattered them on the water. It would be easier, he felt, to insist that they had been lost or stolen than to admit he couldn't read them."

I often had that feeling.

\* \* \* \* \*

February 24th: George Moore  
                  David Williamson  
February 25th: Anthony Burgess  
February 26th: Gabrielle Lord  
February 27th: John Steinbeck  
February 28th: Stephen Spender  
                  Robin Klein  
February 29th: Liu Shaotang  
March 1st:     Lytton Strachey  
                  F. Tennyson Jesse  
March 2nd:    Sholom Aleichim  
                  Janine Burke

\* \* \* \* \*

Jonathon Swift, who was understandably interested in the problem of good and evil, drew the attention of his friend Jonathon Gay to the career of arch-thief turned informer Jonathon Wild, suggesting "what an odd sort of pretty thing a Newgate pastoral might make". Wild had dobbed in many of his friends and fellow-thieves but it was his unwillingness to give up his own life of crime which finally brought him to the gallows.

Gay took his story and turned it into the much less sordid *Beggar's Opera*. Though the poor suffer along the way it is the better off who are the villain's main target; not quite an eighteenth century version of Robin Hood.

When the opera came to Edinburgh it found itself a new devotee, a young man named William Brodie who sat entranced performance after performance. He was a cabinet-maker and as leader of this particular craft guild entitled to the honorific of Deacon. Some years later Edinburgh was startled to learn that the supposed pillar of respectability was the leader of a criminal gang which had pulled off several daring robberies. Brodie who was hanged in 1776 would undoubtedly have pointed to Gay's opera as the formative influence in his career but it was seen by many thousands of people who didn't turn to crime. Brodie just happened to provide fertile ground for a fascination with this type of swashbuckling amorality.

This question of influence lives on—from the time when the Earl of Essex used Christopher Marlowe's play in his campaign to destroy the Portuguese Jewish physician to Elizabeth I, Dr Lopez, "London theatregoers saw in *The Jew of Malta* the Portuguese Jew getting his deserved punishment"—to be brought up in every trial where the offender has been fond of reading pornography, has a room full of X- and R-rated videos, or shelves crowded with 'nasty' comics.

(Dickens, faced with criticism of *Oliver Twist*, was at pains to stress that he hadn't tried to make the 'criminal' life interesting or desirable as other writers had done: "Even in the *Beggar's Opera*, the thieves are represented as leading a life which is rather to be envied than otherwise; while Macheath, with all the captivations of command, and the devotion of the most beautiful girl and only pure character in the piece, is as much to be admired and emulated by weak beholders as any fine gentleman in a red coat who has purchased, as Voltaire says, the right to command a couple of thousand men or so and to affront death at their head.")

Robert Louis Stevenson claimed that the idea for *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* came to him in a nightmare. But John Gibson, in *Deacon Brodie Father to Jekyll & Hyde*, suggests that Brodie was the catalyst for the idea—and as Stevenson had begun his writing career with *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* and in 1875 began (but didn't finish) a play about Deacon Brodie, with W. E. Henley, he was deeply familiar with the Deacon's career. In his novel it is by chemical means that the doctor releases his dark side and his motive is curiosity. "I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately," he says, "on that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of the day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. And it chanced that the direction of my scientific studies, which led wholly towards the mystic and the transcendental, reacted and shed a strong light on this consciousness of the perennial war among my members. With every day, and from both sides of my intelligence; the moral and the intellectual, I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth, by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two."

Informing the Old Testament is the belief that God created good and evil. But Stevenson's story is informed by the understanding that it takes a specific decision on the part of the character's good side to let the evil out of the cabinet. And the cabinet itself becomes an intriguing symbol for an inner sanctum where profound moral choices are made. This idea finds renewed expression in the 1919 film *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* based on the story by Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz. "The story of the persecution of a young man of unstable mind by his psychiatrist was intended by them as an indictment of all authority; (Erich) Pommer, however, had the story changed into a psychological melodrama in which the persecution becomes a delusion in the mind of the young madman,

who sees his kindly psychiatrist as a homicidal maniac, a fairground showman using a hypnotical somnabulist to commit his murders for him.”

Muriel Spark turned back to the deacon when she wrote *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. The real Jean was William’s sister and she demonstrated the same unwillingness to face the possibility that the situation isn’t the way she would like to represent it to herself. Spark has Miss Brodie say: “I am a descendant, do not forget, of Willie Brodie, a man of substance, a cabinet maker and designer of gibbets, a member of the Town council of Edinburgh and a keeper of two mistresses who bore him five children between them. Blood tells. He played much dice and fighting cocks. Eventually he was a wanted man for having robbed the Excise Office—not that he needed the money, he was a night burglar only for the sake of the danger in it. Of course, he was arrested abroad and was brought back to the Tolbooth prison, but that was mere chance. He died cheerfully on a gibbet of his own designing in seventeen-eighty-eight—” and her Miss Brodie sees only what she would like to see in Mussolini’s *fascisti*. It is not innocence but a kind of determined ignorance. The door of the cabinet remains shut as a simple way of avoiding difficult choices.

Bertolt Brecht, on the other hand, was fascinated by the amoral qualities of Gay’s original script and turned it into *The Threepenny Opera* which in the shifting sands of Twenties’ Germany found an appreciative audience. Though Brecht’s political understandings may have been fine-tuned he demonstrated a certain amorality particularly when it came to plagiarism or as James K. Lyons put it: “In 1942 Brecht, who all his life admitted to the same “laxity in matters of intellectual property” characteristic of many of the world’s greatest writers, uttered a similar cry when someone pilfered one of his ideas for a film story.”

Perhaps it was Brecht’s awareness of his propensity which allowed him to escape unscathed? As he put it: When I was robbed in Los Angeles, the city

of merchandisable dreams, I noticed  
How I kept the theft, performed  
By a refugee like me, a reader  
of all my poems,  
Secret, as though I feared  
My shame might become known,  
Let’s say, in the animal world.

The twin criticisms of amorality and plagiarism fell upon D. M Thomas’ Booker short-listed novel *The White Hotel*. Patricia Waugh writes of it, ‘To admirers, the novel represented a virtuous and responsibly honest fictional exposé of the depths of the human soul, but for critics it was the worst sort of amoral and sensationalist voyeurism ... Further ethical issues arose in the plagiarism debate which followed publication, for it was realized that the description of the massacre included a more or less verbatim reproduction of four pages from a documentary eyewitness account by a survivor Dina Pronicheva. Thomas claimed in 1982 that the four pages were aesthetically and therefore morally justifiable as marking the need to signal at this point in the narrative a departure from fiction and a step into the brutality of history. However, from the initial inclusion of Freud’s correspondence and throughout, the novel conflates fiction and fact in order that they be subsumed into the rhythm of what is presented as a final and historically transcendent mythopoeic truth about human desire. The historical specificity of the outrage which was Babi Yar is preserved by the inclusion of the eyewitness account, but then cancelled by an aesthetic strategy morally justified by an appeal to Freud’s theory of the drives: all human experience is seen to be propelled by the universal instincts of sex and violence. Only in art can they be satisfactorily sublimated and so, at the end of the novel, all is redeemed in the aestheticized life hereafter which brings it to a close. In a travesty of humanism, Thomas lets Nazism utterly off the hook by claiming to have exposed the Nazi in each one of us. He updates the religious and pre-modern concept of original sin in the modern and post-Enlightenment

language of psychoanalysis, presenting as a sickness without cure a condition in which we are both victim and victimizer” ...

Whether Helen Demidenko was influenced by this novel (or its success) I cannot say. But the somewhat psychopathic quality of *The Hand That Signed The Paper* is rooted in the fact that her characters don't look inward to the divided self for an understanding of their actions; the blame, where blame must finally be apportioned by the development of an historical imperative, is always firmly placed in the evil Other, whether that other be the greed and oppression of the Bolshevik or the complicity of the Jew.

Sholom Aleichim, whose Tevyeh stories formed the basis for *Fiddler on the Roof*, is probably the Ukrainian writer best-known in the West and he understood the role of the scapegoat the Jew had been made to play down through centuries of history (such as in his Tevyeh story *Get Thee Out*). His daughter Marie writing of the terrible pogroms of 1905 designed to divert people's attention from the loss of the Russo-Japanese war, the misery and violence of Czarism and the rise of Bolshevism, says “we had met anti-Semitism at every stage—in the classroom, on the school grounds, among our playmates. Born to it, living with it since birth, we had got used to it, as people do to foul air. As for the pogrom, that meant to us killing—but always somewhere else, anywhere, everywhere except where we were.” But this time it came to Kiev as well. “The Kiev pogrom lasted three days, three terrible days and nights during which we were unable to eat or sleep, walking in silence and fear that our fortress, the Imperial, might be broken into at any moment.”

But is the scapegoat mentality a sufficient explanation? A conversation from *Old Postcards* goes like this:

“It is more than a different outside, *mon ami*, this fear of Jews. It does not make sense because—who will bring it forth and examine it rationally? It is an article of faith for those with secret inferiorities—therefore is always waiting for a Dreyfus incident, waiting to flood out and sweep away your good kind people. It is only when we examine our subconscious and ask ‘of what are we afraid?’ that we begin to understand the oddities lie within our own perceptions.”

“Yes and no. You're not allowing for the power of this pseudo-science. I remember researching it years ago. I followed it back and back, finding more and more tentacles—Lanz and the Anti-Semitic League and de Lagarde and the Christian Socialist Workers and Stoecker, von Treitschke, Jahn, Arndt, the Christian Germanic Circle—and I kept thinking someday I'll come to the beast, I'll confront him, I'll understand him—the source of his power—and I suppose I'll wonder why no one has yet slain him.”

“You can't, you know, Marcel is right. He doesn't exist. He can only materialise where people hate or doubt themselves, doubt the value of their culture and history”—

But perhaps this too doesn't go far enough. Nazism stands out because it nurtured the dark side of its people as a specific policy rather than as a side issue or on an *ad hoc* basis of convenience. If it is true that “If we deny the concept of God, then we deny the concept of an inherent value in human life” then through the overt atheism of Bolshevism and the more complex ways in which God was denied by Hitler and Himmler we can see how legislation took the place of conscience, and legislation could be used, on the one hand, to remove certain groups of people and, on the other, people could still the promptings of what they had retained by way of decency and conscience with the knowledge that they *were* abiding by the law. It could also be argued that those best able to stand outside those edicts were those in whom the belief in an ‘inherent value’ went beyond a surface compliance with ritual.

It is an uncomfortable thought but how we see good and evil in the world is always mediated through the identity of victim and victimizer, through political, economic and military priorities; even by such things as the ease of filming one atrocity compared to another. Moises da Costa Amaral, a deeply humane man and leader of the conservative Timorese refugee community in Portugal until his death some years ago, wrote in 1987:

“My family comprising 35 members in 1975 was reduced to 9 members only by 1979. In less than 3 years I lost my parents, 7 brothers and sisters, 4 brothers- and sisters-in-law, and 15 nephews and nieces. My clan made up of 600 people, has been reduced to less than 100 and this surviving number is being prevented from living in its own localities for obvious reasons. Today my tribe originally made up of a population of 25,000 comprises only a few hundred people who have been taken from their habitat to inhospitable areas where they are kept under close supervision.”

But the victimizers are our ‘good friends and neighbours’ in Indonesia, welcome on training exercises, invited to become our business partners. Each time there is a report of a killing in West Papua it is referred to as the ‘remote province of Irian Jaya’—but as it is only a couple of hundred kilometres from the Australian mainland they cannot mean remote in a geographical sense. Remote then from our consciences, from our historical perspectives, from what the media wishes to promote as the legitimate concerns of the Australian public? By such small and seemingly innocuous words our understanding of good and evil is constantly shaped.

Our secular age has determinedly removed God from our art, our political and economic life, our entertainment. But is the price we pay a diminished sense of good and evil as a personal morality whilst retaining it as the legitimate concern of our courts and police? If so, our courts can only become busier and busier. If we are determined not to bring God back as a personal concept then perhaps we would be wise to cultivate what Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus presents as a plea for a greater generosity of heart and mind in our private and public lives:

Blessed is he who knows how to spend,  
when comes a time of loss,  
so that hope would remain  
and grow a hundred fold.  
A white world is always white  
and always a good white world,  
even though within it you are a timid son,  
who is shivering all over.  
For your entire life is in flight  
and in this is your salvation.  
Only a poet is your entire essence,  
and the rest is only humus,  
that nourishes the root. Come autumn  
and apple orchard turns to gold.  
Blessed is he who knows how to spend  
when comes a time of loss.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Julius Streicher came up for trial at Nuremberg there was deep discomfort among the panel of judges; were they trying him on his actions or were they trying him for the sense of repugnance he aroused? Streicher had never killed anyone—but had his racist, pornographic, violence-glorifying publications incited other people to violence? Ann and John Tusa said of his trial, “The judges’ verdict on Streicher was reached without much difficulty, though there was some debate over which counts he should be convicted on. Biddle argued indignantly that it was ‘preposterous’ to call Streicher a conspirator just because he was ‘a little Jew-baiter’ and a temporary friend of Hitler. Lawrence accused Biddle of bad manners and Parker had to soothe everyone down. What the judges failed to debate, however, was the fundamental question of whether Streicher’s words could be linked directly with other’s deeds. This issue worried one of the American aides. He remembered finding the case troublesome—Streicher might be a beastly man, but he had never actually killed anyone himself. This issue has bothered others since. There is a

suspicion that Streicher was not judged strictly on the law but on the physical and moral revulsion he evoked.” Streicher was hanged.

When the book *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis was accepted for publication by Simon & Schuster then dropped because the publishers had got ‘cold feet’ about the material (though allowing Ellis to keep his advance of three hundred thousand dollars), then picked up and published by Random House, the *Writer’s Digest* asked various leading writers for their opinions.

Tony Hillerman said: That’s an editor’s job. Discriminating between what’s good enough to make the public print and what isn’t. You can call it editing. You can call it censoring. It’s done on all sorts of subjective bases. Is it interesting? Is it important? Will many people want to read it? Is it offensive to the taste of your audience? Will it harm the public interest? Is it libelous? Will it invade privacy? Will it cause a change of venue in a trial?

Phyllis Whitney said: Like many people I have been confused by the excited pros and cons concerning the publication of *American Psycho*. An article by Roger Rosenblatt, which appeared recently in *The New York Times Book Review*, clarified the issue for me. The thesis of the piece is that we are forgetting what writing and publishing are all about. The question is not one of morality or censorship, but of excellence that deserves publication. From what I’ve heard this book is badly written and executed and doesn’t deserve to be published by anyone.

But no one really engaged with the question: why had Ellis written this material and what legal liability should the writer hold for material which may encourage people, not to act out of character perhaps, but to be a little more violent, a little less compassionate than they might otherwise have been?

We continue to debate endlessly questions of availability, censorship, access, distribution—but should we not go further and ask tough questions of the writer?

If we maintain that the writer should be free to write and publish whatever he wishes—then where were the writers ready to uphold this freedom as Julius Streicher walked to the scaffold?

\* \* \* \* \*

The world of the ‘Helen Demidenko debate’ was a fascinating one for those of us who stood outside the literary community, that anonymous mass ‘the reading public’, and watched and listened to strange things drawn from this slight little book. As an ordinary reader I might perhaps be permitted to intrude a few thoughts:

At the heart of the debate was the suggestion that readers must be ‘advised’, ‘led’, ‘instructed’, as to what they should think. It is acceptable to take the victimizer as a main character only if the writer writes from the perspective of judge and jury, only if an authorial voice intrudes to remind the hoi-polloi that this person is doing wrong. Taken to its extreme the Ripley books would become unfit for our library shelves unless Patricia Highsmith intrudes upon her stories to constantly remind us that Ripley is a cad and a crook. The discomfort that the reader feels with these stories is the fact that there is *no* relief from Ripley’s psychopathic world, *no* intrusion of the author.

But she accepts that her readers have an understanding of right and wrong, good and evil, and are capable of forming their own judgements. The Demidenko debate was predicated on the view that we have lost this capacity (or perhaps never had it) and must be told what we have a right to draw from her book and her behaviour; we as ordinary readers are all latently anti-Semitic and the encouragement her book might give to our deepest impulses must be offset by careful scholarly criticism. We are not capable of doing our own criticising.

I read somewhere, years ago, that more than 50,000 books had been written about Hitler since WW2. Now I’m sure many of those books were written by scholars who believed their historical study or belief in psychological research was perfectly legitimate in

that we need to understand if we are never to go down the same route again. They would see themselves as worlds away from the motorcycle gang wearing black with SS insignia. But, uncomfortable thought or not, I think we should be honest and admit that we are all fascinated with Hitler. And even such a careful commentator as William Shirer admitted that the mind, censored and bludgeoned by constant propaganda and distortion, became less able to judge clearly and draw conclusions after years of living in Hitler's Germany. The behaviour of poorly educated peasant boys must be set within the *milieu* in which they made their decisions—or more correctly were carried along without seeing a need to make decisions. Did Helen Demidenko capture this sense of placing the individual conscience in the keeping of society? What G. K. Chesterton, writing during WW1, said should be the primacy of the public conscience. I don't think so. But that may have more to do with the format in which she chose to present her story.

Some of the things said in the aftermath disturbed me.

I heard one commentator suggest it was only necessary to be a woman with an ethnic name to get a book published. Dear me! I wonder why in fifteen years I have not been able to find a publisher kind enough (or foolish enough) to follow that policy? So I suspect talent *does* come into it.

And someone else said that if you are an anti-Semite at twenty-five then you will always be an anti-Semite. Is there no such thing as growth, maturity, potential? Surely the one advantage of ageing as set against its physical disadvantages is the growth in wisdom, tolerance, understanding, compassion. I would like to think that at fifty I will be a better person than I was at twenty-five. If not, life acquires a kind of pointlessness.

And it was suggested that the judges should have had a better knowledge of Eastern European history. But, given a competition attracting fifty to a hundred entries or more, each set in a different era, culture or *milieu* (anything from a love story within the court of Charles V to a mystery in the Kingdom of Bhutan to novels of suburban life anywhere from Calama to Calabar), what level of background knowledge do we have a right to expect from the judges? If I were to walk into a prestigious literary gathering and ask everyone there to name ten Aboriginal languages what sort of response ought I to expect? If judges are judging manuscripts they are going to assume the material will undergo further fine-tuning before publication; if they are judging published novels they are going to assume the publisher has already dealt with everything from typos to libellous material to basic errors of fact. Are they right to make these assumptions?

Helen Demidenko said she wrote her book because she felt that Ukrainians were getting unfairly treated during the war crimes debate. This is a perfectly legitimate reason for writing a book. Yet she did not really engage with the debate—at what point does a possible war criminal become a 'nice old man' hounded by the justice system *et al*—taking the easy way out with Vitaly's heart attack. Nor has the Australian community, literary and otherwise, really engaged with this debate.

And if the 'Demidenko Debate' is to have an on-going value it is surely in reminding us of the need to grapple with the questions raised by the way in which known and possible war criminals entered this country, how debate was suppressed, how they were absorbed (and occasionally not absorbed), what influence they have had on Australian thinking about WW2, about eastern Europe, about Communism, about justice, about forgiveness ... what we as a community are willing to spend on justice, are there other ways besides the courts by which we can seek justice, are we seeking justice on behalf of the Australian community as a whole or on behalf of a particular segment, are we seeking to redress the anomalies we created in the criteria for immigration in the late 1940s ... are we grappling with the important result of the War Crimes legislation, which grew out of Mark Aarons' book *Sanctuary*, by which the only war crimes relevant to the Australian community are seen as those occurring in the European 'theatre' between 1939 and 1945—a specific restriction built in to the legislation so as to avoid the thorny issue of whether Australian service

personnel could be charged with war crimes ... and, equally importantly, avoiding the very topical issue of the continuing entry into Australia of people (from Indonesia, China, Burma, Indo-China, Bangladesh etc) for whom sufficient evidence exists to bring the charge of involvement in war crimes.

Under the Geneva Conventions we have responsibilities to both help to ensure that humanitarian law is abided by and to bring charges against those who have violated humanitarian law. But the Australian War Crimes Act was designed to circumvent this responsibility; a situation which is largely unknown and undebated in the community. A recent High Court case determined that international law must be taken into account where relevant but that it does not over-ride Australian law. Yet I did not really see any aspect of this vitally important area touched upon during the Demidenko furore. Is it that it was easier to accuse her of anti-Semitism than to engage with a profoundly difficult ethical debate?

(David Cesarini, writing of the situation in Britain in *Justice Delayed*, raises a disconcerting question—"Substantial efforts had been made to win over trades unionists and public opinion to the idea of settling these people in Britain; awkward questions concerning their war time record were carefully circumvented or swept under the carpet. In considering why East Europeans were deemed worth this exertion, but Jews, Blacks and Asians were not, it is all but impossible to avoid the conclusion that racism was at work. At the time, it would have been dressed in the rhetoric of eugenics and even regarded as a progressive position; today it just looks ugly."

Australians hid behind the White Australia Policy; in fact, it could be suggested that in the late 1940s they hid a lot behind this policy ... and the debate could have been used to prise wider this door. In a 4 year period, immediately post-war, 640,000 people entered Australia (and "Between 1947 and 1971, 320,000 refugees, displaced persons and voluntary immigrants passed through the Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre" alone\*); clearly Australia could not have adequately vetted such numbers but neither should it have blandly accepted British and American assurances that there were no war criminals among these immigrants.)

And I do have one more quibble. I'm not sure *The Hand That Signed The Paper* should qualify as a novel presenting Australia in 'any of its aspects'. If the story had been set in the courtroom, perhaps with evidence and flashbacks, if it had been written through Vitaly's experience in Australia gradually changing the way he views his youth, if it had been his life lived with the constant fear of the past intruding and destroying his present prosperity, or the way in which post-war Australian attitudes allowed men with dubious backgrounds to settle and deliberately quashed any discussion of the selection and immigration procedure—in fact there are many ways in which it might have become 'Australian'—but I could never feel the very superficial figure of Fiona made it sufficiently 'Australian' to please Miles Franklin.

On the other hand judging is both a privilege and a tough job. And entrants do enter on the grounds that the judges' decision will be accepted and respected ...

\* \* \* \* \*

\* The post-war migration scheme is widely-praised in the belief it provided work, assimilation, and a new start—but there *were* problems. I recently came on this little news report—July 17, 1961—"More than 1,000 migrants rioted at the Bonegilla camp in northern Victoria today. Spokesman for migrant groups in Australia said the recent arrivals were 'discontented' because they had not been given work as promised before leaving their homelands.

Police used batons to quell the riot and one officer was injured. The camp's employment office was wrecked during the demonstration. Some of the migrants have been waiting in the camp for months, where, apart from some instruction in English, they have little to do. Unemployment in Australia is now 110,000." (The country's population had

recently reached 10 million.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Judah Waten once described Sholom Aleichim as “the funniest and saddest” of Europe’s Yiddish writers.

In *Alien Son* he writes:

“They must have a theatre here,” said Mother.

“No,” said Father emphatically.

“Why not?” said Mother.

“Believe me, Mr McGonty didn’t even know the world ‘theatre’, I had to tell him all about it. The people here don’t know anything about plays.”

“What are you talking about?” said Mother. “Why I saw *King Lear* back home not so many years ago. That was by the Englishman Shakespeare.”

“That’s different. That’s England,” Father replied with satisfaction.

“I can’t see the difference,” Mother said “Shakespeare is to them what Tolstoy and Sholom Aleichim are to us.”

Father made no reply but he smiled knowingly into his vest as though to say, “A lot Mother knows about this country.”

Waten had been born in Odessa in the Ukraine in 1911 and he would have shared many of the attitudes and ideas of Aleichim. David Carter writes: ‘Aleichim’s stories retain, or re-create, a strong sense of *orality*, of oral narratives received communally. As the products of a self-conscious literary milieu they create the sense of a community by the use of an anecdotal style of narration, for example, or of a narrator from within a family. These aspects bear on our reading of *Alien Son*.’ They might bear more widely on our reading of Ukrainian literature and history also.

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I picked up a little book on a stall, called *Stories of the Soviet Ukraine*. None of the writers—Ivanichuk, Pervomaisky, Tomchani, Zbanatsky *et al*—were known to me and I half expected the stories to be drab grabs of Soviet-style realism, not least because of the earnestly ‘correct’ backgrounds of the authors. Instead I found myself enjoying the book.

The stories move from the happy to the tragic, from Dovzhenko’s “I loved the creaking of the wheels of the hay-wagon in the stubble. I loved the chirping of the birds in the garden and in the field. I loved the swallows in the shed, the cranes and quails in the meadow. I loved the lapping of the spring waters ...” to his “I swung on the gallows; I blew away in ashes and smoke from the catastrophic explosions. Soap was boiled from my muscles and shattered bones in Western Europe in the middle of the twentieth century ...”; from Gutsalo’s story ‘Bathed in Lovage’ (“The cow stood very still, listening intently, turning her spotted red head to look at Vustya with gentle concern as she might have looked at her calf”) to Zhurakhovich’s story of Babi Yar ‘The Hundredth Day of the War’; the stories touch on floods and snow, gypsies, Lenin, Revolution, collective farms, hunger, poverty, war—and yet the collection has a folk-tale quality. Senchenko says “You felt as if you were bathed in the sun and the smells of all the grasses. It was like a fairy-tale”.

Yet neither individual characters nor the nature of politics and society are determining factors; not even subjects for exploration. Instead I found myself remembering the stories of Frances Browne. It is the landscape that matters and the little tale that happens across it. At the end of the book you close up the tales. They have ended. They have no life beyond the tale.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 3rd: Edward Thomas

March 4th: Dr Seuss

March 5th: Evan Whitton

Mem Fox

March 6th: Elizabeth Barrett Browning  
           Gabriel García Márquez  
 March 7th: Eflis Dillon  
 March 8th: Kenneth Grahame  
 March 9th: Keri Hulme  
 March 10th: Frances Trollope  
 March 11th: Jack Davis  
 March 12th: Kylie Tennant  
           Jack Kerouac  
 March 13th: Alberto Manguel  
 March 14th: Maxim Gorki  
 March 15th: Hesba Brinsmead  
 March 16th: Sully-Prudhomme  
           César Vallejo  
 March 17th: Penelope Lively  
 March 18th: Wilfred Owen  
           Christa Wolf  
 March 19th: Tobias Smollett (chr)  
 March 20th: David Malouf  
           Henrik Ibsen  
 March 21st: Thomas Shapcott  
 March 22nd: Rosie Scott  
           Louis L'Amour  
 March 23rd: Joseph Quincy Adams  
 March 24th: Olive Schreiner  
 March 25th: Harry Butler  
           Anne Brontë  
 March 26th: Richard Church  
           Robert Frost  
           Erica Jong  
 March 27th: Rosa Praed  
           Kenneth Slessor  
 March 28th: Joyce Porter  
           Mario Vargas Llosa  
 March 29th: Sigurdur Magnusson  
 March 30th: Sean O'Casey  
           Anna Sewell  
           D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson

\* \* \* \* \*

Geoffrey Dutton wrote “The first book of poetry published by a poet born in Australia, W. C. Wentworth’s *Australasia*, is gloriously inappropriate to its subject. How many of our graziers or station hands would recognize themselves in this portrait?

Theirs too on flow’ry mead, or thymy steep  
 To tend with watchful dog the timid sheep;  
 And, as their fleecy charge are lying round,  
 To wake the woodlands with their pipe’s soft sound,  
 While the charm’d Fauns and Dryads skulking near,  
 Leave their lone haunts, and list with raptur’d ear.

Apart from the subject matter, this is just bad eighteenth-century verse. Published in 1823, a year after Shelley’s death and a year before that of Byron, it establishes the good old Australian tradition of being fifty years behind the times. It is doubly bad because it violates decorum, it misinterprets its subject. It is worth noting that Wentworth was a

practical man and an explorer who ought to have known what he was talking about; however, he was no poet.”

But William Wilde was much kinder—“Wentworth was the first of our poets who could be said to be more Australian than English in origin, having been born on a ship between Sydney and Norfolk Island in 1790. Later a newspaper publisher, landowner and politician, Wentworth first studied law in England. While at Cambridge, he submitted a poem, ‘Australasia’, in the Chancellor’s 1823 poetry competition. The opening words, ‘Land of my birth!’, marked the first occasion that an Australian writer had laid claim publicly to that special relationship. Although ‘Australasia’ was, like Robinson’s odes, filled with the traditional poetic flourishes of the day, it did convey a real sense of its author’s pride in his confidence in its prospects of future greatness. The poem concludes with the well-known lines,

May this—thy new born infant—then arise  
To glad thy heart, and greet thy parent eyes;  
And Australasia float, with flag unfurl’d  
A new Britannia in another world.”

But Wentworth was probably more at home with his scurrilous, and anonymous, poems directed at both Colonel Molle and Governor Macquarie. Yet it is hard to pigeon-hole him. He is taught to schoolchildren as one of the famous three who found a way across the Blue Mountains; equally his story of Governor Bligh hiding under a bed when the soldiers of the ‘Rum Corps’ came for him, in his 1819 book *Statistical, Historical, and Political Description of the Colony of New South Wales*, was still being taught when I was at school—even though the story was so at odds with the magnificent physical courage Bligh had displayed throughout his turbulent career. As a young man he promoted the idea of Australia as a republic, as an older man he was keen to see the development of an Australian-style aristocracy. He helped found the newspaper *The Australian* so as to have a medium for criticising Governor Darling. He founded Australia’s first university because he believed that those who ruled should be both men of property and men of intellect—though as he grew older the man of property increasingly dominated.

Wentworth epitomises the conflict inherent in the lives of the first white generation born in Australia. But an equal conflict existed for his father.

D’Arcy Wentworth was a publican at Portadown in Co. Armagh in Ireland and he called his son D’Arcy. But the son, training to become a doctor, seems to have got in with a ‘fast set’ and was accused of highway robbery. A distant relative, Lord Fitzwilliam, came to the rescue and young D’Arcy was shipped off to Australia as Assistant Surgeon on the Second Fleet. He formed a liaison with a convict woman, Catherine Crowley, who had come from Fitzwilliam’s estates where she’d been convicted of stealing clothing, and he had four children with her.

D’Arcy Wentworth occupied a confusing place in the young colony. He mixed with Captain MacArthur and the increasingly greedy and lawless men who formed the ‘Rum Corps’ but he retained a sympathy with the convicts; he had so nearly been convicted himself. He ran foul of Governor Bligh over his use of convalescent convicts as free labour for himself; his excuse being not that he hadn’t done so but that ‘everyone was doing it’. He survived and gained a monopoly on the import of liquor in return for building a new hospital, the so-called ‘Rum Hospital’, and when he died in 1828 he was regarded as the richest man in the colony.

The old rhyme ... ‘very strange tales

Are told of gentlemen of New South Wales’ ... must include D’Arcy Wentworth. But he was described as “a handsome tall man with blue eyes who was invariably popular with all classes and both sexes” who was more honest than most of his contemporaries in his acquisition of his wealth.

He had many liaisons and many children but he officially recognised three sons—

William Charles, D'Arcy, and John who was drowned in 1820. With both his father and brother such larger-than-life characters, D'Arcy Wentworth has faded into the background. He chose a military career, he had no children, and he died in 1861 at the age of 65.

But in 1829 a ship docked in Hobart. It was the *Georgiana*. *The Hobart-Town Courier* wrote "We hear that the Great Seal for the Territory has arrived by the *Georgiana*, a circumstance which we have great pleasure in communicating to our readers"; it had less pleasure in reporting the ships 'cargo', 169 male convicts. "We regret to observe so many of the prisoners by the *Georgiana*, consisting of mere boys, on an average not more than 10 or 12 years of age. Their youth is certainly a fault that time will improve, but in the mean time it must be very distressing to the Government to know how to dispose of them with propriety. Some of the elder may indeed soon learn to officiate as bullock drivers along with the ploughman, or even as hut keepers and cooks at the stock runs, but the majority are we fear incapable of even such service. The great scarcity of labourers at present in the island, however, must in a great measure speedily relieve the government from the care of them, for we can conceive no plan worse than allowing them to remain in the barracks at Hobart town where the very worst examples must be incessantly before their eyes. We remarked one little fellow among them not much more than 4 feet high and about 10 years old, who has been in prison nearly 4 years under conviction. When asked by the Principle Superintendent how old he was, the little urchin answered "he was so young when he was born that he could not tell." His name we believe is William Edwards, but he is generally known by the appellation of King John. He is one of those unfortunate instruments of the old thieves with which London, notwithstanding all our weeding, still super-abounds, that used to be carried in trunks or boxes and left at houses, or covered up in a basket with cabbages, &c. and placed in a convenient corner until night, when it was his duty to open the street door for his confederates to enter or sometimes he was thrust in at a cut out pane of a shop window, which he would afterwards strip. Not more than 3 of all the three-score boys on board the *Georgiana* could repeat even the Lord's prayer at the departure of the vessel from England, but now we have much pleasure in stating owing to the persevering and praiseworthy exertions of the Surgeon Superintendent Dr. Conway, they can not only all repeat their prayers but most of them their catechism. It is to be hoped that the work of reformation which has been so well begun will advance and be perfected in these boys by their removal to this island".

Also on board was a new-born baby boy. His father was the captain, John Skelton Thompson, his mother, Mary Thompson (née Mitchell), both from Cumberland.

The *Georgiana* then took on 15 tons of potatoes, 666 bags of wheat, and some passengers for Sydney. One of these was the young and lively D'Arcy Wentworth. He must have inherited something of his father's good nature and popularity—because Captain and Mrs Thompson gave his name to their baby son.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the 2nd August, 1867, the House of Commons in London tabled correspondence between Sir Thomas Larcom (Under-Secretary for Ireland), Edward Berwick (President of Queen's College Galway), Lord Naas (Chief Secretary for Ireland) and an obscure Professor of Greek, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson.

So how did that baby born off the rugged coasts of Van Diemen's Land come to be of interest to the British Parliament?

I might never have learned this fascinating story but for a lucky accident. My Aunt Ellen, who has been researching family history for many years, asked if I'd help by following up on a family connection who, she understood, had lived and taught at Queen's College in Galway.

Séamus MacMathúna from the College, now University College, wrote back immediately to say that Dr Tadhg Foley and Mr Joe O'Halloran were researching D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson. I am always grateful when other people have done the hard work,

not least because I feel sure they will have done it much better than I ever could, and I am indebted to their research for my brief account.

John Skelton Thompson died of sunstroke in the West Indies when his son was only two; the little boy received a 'free admission' to Christ's Hospital in London for twelve years, then a scholarship to Cambridge; his first teaching post was in Edinburgh where one of his pupils was the young Robert Louis Stevenson—though as the little boy was hardly ever in class it is not surprising that Thompson had no memory of him later. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson then moved to Ireland to take up the Professorship of Greek at Queen's College, Galway.

The first incumbent was William Hearn; "at the age of 23 he was selected as the first professor of Greek at the newly-opened Queen's College, Galway. In 1854 he was appointed to the chair of Modern History and Literature, Political Economy and Logic at the University of Melbourne". He went on to become Professor of Modern History and Political Economy there, as well as a Victorian MP, and, temporarily, Chancellor of the University. He also wrote four books: *Plutology, or the Theory of Efforts to Satisfy Human Wants* (1863), *The Government of England, its Structure and Development* (1867), *Aryan Household, its Structure and Development* (1878) and *Theory of Legal Duties & Rights* (1883).

Thompson also published a variety of books, including *Day Dreams of a Schoolmaster* (1864), in which he advocated an end to corporal punishment in schools and which his son described as "Interwoven with a thread of autobiography, the book is a plea for the sympathetic teaching of the ancient languages, a protest against the narrow education of women, and a passionate defence of the dignity of the schoolmaster's calling"), *Wayside Thoughts, Latin Grammar for Elementary Classes, Translations and Paraphrases from Poets of Greece and Rome, Scalae Novae, or, A Ladder of Latin, Sales Attici; The Maxims Witty and Wise of Athenian Tragic Drama; Collected, Arranged, and Paraphrased*. To offset his serious pieces he wrote 3 books of nursery rhymes—*Nursery Nonsense; or, Rhymes without Reason, Fun and Earnest; or, Rhymes with Reason and Rhymes Witty and Whymiscal*—for his son D'Arcy (and I hope he enjoyed their light and lively tone:

Who's that ringing at our door-bell?

'I'm a little black cat, and I'm not very well.'

'Then rub your little nose with a little mutton-fat,

And that's the best cure for a little pussy cat') and together they translated Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*. He also gave lectures such as the Lowell Lectures in Boston in 1867 where he met the American writers, Longfellow, Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes.

But there was nothing in his quiet, mildly eccentric, scholarly life that could have predicted the storm which broke about his head in 1867 when two Fenians, General Thomas F. Burke and Patrick Doran, were sentenced to death for 'treason' and he wrote letters advocating clemency for them to newspapers in Ireland, Scotland and England.

He pointed out that "I have travelled in this country, north, south, east, and west. I have endeavoured in all quarters to draw from friends, acquaintances, relations, and even from casual talkers, opinions regarding the condition of this country, the causes of its misery, and the remedies possible of that same misery. My residence is fixed in a city which is full of pauperism, and which is the capital of a province wherein is a fearful amount of suffering. In Connemara, a district as beautiful as Argyleshire, famine is imminent. My doorway is daily thronged with poor women and children. The majority of them are actually in want of food for the day. As I sit at meals, my window is tapped by poor creatures who ask no money, but only a piece of bread. My income is very limited. I would willingly sell the little that I have and the less that I am to relieve this amount of suffering. But, alas! I feel that day after day I am becoming hardened by the continual

spectacle of distress. Before my sympathies are thoroughly deadened, I hasten to write an appeal to the common sense and humanity of Englishmen in favour of the lovable and maligned people of this island.” He points out that a million people do not quit a well-governed happy country in the space of a mere 3 years and he points out that “Your knowledge of history, ancient and modern, will have taught you that there has never been a rising, small or great, and at all events, never a succession of risings, against a constituted Government, without there having been great cause given by the undue pressure of laws and customs, unfair or foolish, or both.” The rise of Fenianism, he points out, is in response to 800 years of unfair laws and, more particularly, the “bad landlords” which have created “an oppressed tenantry”.

He ended his letters with pleas, “I once more beg most earnestly of you to plead the cause of Burke and Doran, as those two poor fellows have in reality been led into nine-tenths of their folly by men whose selfish exactions have been and are legalised and enforced by the cruel and unjust laws of the land” and “I cannot conclude without reiterating an entreaty that you will, for the sake of common sense and justice, not to speak of humanity or Christian feeling, aid me in my appeal against blood being shed now or henceforward upon any charge, however serious, of a political nature.”

A spate of letters, for and against, followed his appeals. His students and a number of staff members appear to have been sympathetic. The Government was not and he was threatened with dismissal. His responses to officialdom are, in fact, masterpieces of evasion. He apologises for his intemperate language and for writing in his official role rather than as a private citizen, he expresses warm understanding of those who do not agree with him, but ... his central position remains unchanged: “The truth is, sir, that I hold it as an article of religious faith that a Christian society under no imaginable circumstances has the right to take away life by judicial process.” Was the threat of dismissal withdrawn because of his ‘apology’ or because dismissal would have drawn more attention to Fenianism and the two men at the centre of the uproar? Whichever way it was, the College backed down and left him in his Chair ... and the Government backed down and commuted the death sentences.

D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson died in 1902.

\* \* \* \* \*

Do you remember Jeffrey Archer’s story ‘Old Love’ where the clue in the crossword is “Skelton reported that this landed in the soup” but the lovers quarrel—is there such a word as “whym-wham”? It’s not in the Oxford Shorter—ah, but it is almost certain to be in the O.E.D. ... the problem drives the wife to a heart attack and the husband to suicide still holding a copy of the Collected Works of John Skelton in his hand ...

It wasn’t until I came on the story of D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson and his father John Skelton Thompson who was proud of his descent from Skelton that I ever asked myself just who was Skelton and what exactly did he write.

I knew, vaguely, that he’d been tutor to Henry VIII—as per Garrett Mattingley “Even the jolly poet John Skelton, who had taught the infant Henry to spell, had been packed off to a rural parsonage lest he teach his pupil less seemly things”—but now I set out on an intriguing voyage of discovery. But could John Skelton Thompson have been a descendant of the ‘jolly poet’ seeing he was a priest and therefore, at least in theory, celibate. Yes, indeed. He did not take Holy Orders until he was thirty-eight. It would be surprising if he, in the middle of Court life, had remained celibate for thirty-eight years ... And he is said to have confessed to a secret marriage and several children on his deathbed ...

Robert Graves wrote of Skelton:

What could be dafter  
Than John Skelton’s laughter?  
What sound more tenderly  
Than his pretty poetry? ...

But angrily, wittily,  
Tenderly, prettily,  
Laughingly, learnedly,  
Sadly, madly,  
Helter-skelter John

Rhymes serenely on,  
As English poets should.  
Old John, you do me good!

But did John Skelton do Henry VIII good? Professor Scarisbrick wrote: “Details of his education are sparse. The poet-laureate John Skelton seems to have been his first tutor probably beginning his work in the mid-1490s and ending it in 1502. It was he who taught Henry, so he claimed, ‘his learning primordial’, that is, the rudiments. After this

The honour of England I learned to spell  
I gave him drink of the sugared well  
Of Helicon’s waters crystalline,  
Acquainting him with the muses nine,

he wrote. Whether the bitter-tongued Skelton was an entirely wholesome influence on his pupil may be debated, though it is true that in 1501 he wrote for him a *Speculum Principis*, a ponderous (if highly virtuous) handbook of princely perfection of a kind which was a familiar literary exercise, full of earnest advice which his charge was to show little sign of having taken to heart—including the recommendation to keep all power in his hands and entrust little to his servants, and to ‘choose a wife for yourself; prize her always and uniquely’. Skelton’s intentions were doubtless admirable; his pedagogy, however, seems to have been defective.”

And Skelton’s prejudices would have been little help to Henry when it came later to his forays into foreign policy—

“Gup, Scot,/Ye blot:/Laudate/Caudate,/Set in better/Thy pentamenter./This Dundas,/This Scottishe as,/He rymes and railes/That Englishmen have tailes./.../Skelton laureat/After this rate/Defendeth with his pen/All Englysh men/Agayn Dundas,/That Scottishe asse./Shake thy taylor, Scot, lyke a cur,/For thou beggest at every mannes dur:/Tut, Scot, I sey,/Go shake thy dog, hey!”

—while Sir Ifor Evans said of Skelton that he “wrote a ragged, uncouth line, broken, irregular, but compact with meaning, and brutal in its directness:

Though my rime be ragged,  
Tatter’d and jagged,  
Rudely rain-beaten,  
Rusty and moth-eaten,  
If ye take well therewith,  
It hath in it some pith.”

I would say quite a lot of pith! And Evans went on “In satire he is pungent, foul-mouthed, but he employed his irregular verse in another way in *The Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe*, a lament on a pet sparrow killed by a cat. The poem has speed and liveliness, and this and much else in Skelton’s verse has survived in the memories of poets even to the twentieth century.”

His distinctive rhyme scheme has been named Skeltonics after him but I’m not sure that he actually invented it. The anonymous writer of the mediaeval *The Cloud of Unknowing* introduces it with “I do not mind at all if the loud-mouthed, or flatterers, or the mock-modest, or fault-finders, gossips, tittle-tattlers, talebearers, or any sort of grumbler, never see this book.” Nor I’m sure did it end with Skelton. I couldn’t help feeling that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* owed quite a lot to him. As does Shakespeare’s poem *Sonnets to Sundry Notes of Music ...*

My flocks feed not,  
My ewes breed not,

My rams speed not,  
All is amiss:  
Love is dying,  
Faith's defying,  
Heart's denying,  
Causer of this ....

But he also wrote the expected Court lyrics such as 'To Mistress Margaret Hussey'—

Gentle as falcon  
Or hawk of the tower.  
As patient and still  
And as full of good will  
As fair Isaphill,  
Coriander,  
Sweet pomander  
Good Cassander  
Steadfast of thought,  
Well made, well wrought,  
Far may be sought  
Ere that you can find  
So courteous, so kind

and the moral lament 'The Manner of the World Nowadays'—

... So many good lessons,  
So many good sermons,  
And so few devotions  
Saw I never.  
So many good works,  
So few well-learnèd clerks,  
And so few that goodness marks,  
Saw I never;  
Such pranked coats and sleeves,  
So few young men that preves,  
And such increase of thieves,  
Saw I never.  
So boasters and braggers,  
So new-fashioned daggers,  
And so many beggars,  
Saw I never. ...

Which sounds rather modern in this time of 'tax debates' and growing gaps between rich and poor.

But it was Cardinal Wolsey who spurred Skelton into action—with his play *Magnificence* which is described as England's first secular morality play and which called its characters 'Counterfeit Countenance', 'Crafty Conveyance' and 'Courtly Abusion' and made Wolsey 'Magnificence' which upset Wolsey so much he had Skelton imprisoned briefly but Skelton was a hard man to squash. And Wolsey lent himself to his ferocious pen—as in 'Speak, Parrot'—

So many complaintes, and so smalle redress;  
So much calling on, and so small taking heed;  
So much loss of merchandise, and so remediless;  
So little care for the common weal, and so much need;  
So much doubtful danger, and so little drede;  
So much pride of prelates, so cruel and so keen—  
Since Deucalion's flood, I trow, was never seen.

So many thieves hangèd, and thieves never the less;  
 So much 'prisonment for matters not worth an haw;  
 So much papers wering for right a small excess;  
 So much pillory-pageants under colour of good law;  
 So much turning on the cuck-stool for every gee-gaw;  
 So much mockish making of statutes of array—  
 Since Deucalion's flood was never, I dare say.

Yet the two men were not enemies; there seems to have been a degree of mutual respect, even liking.

But it is the bawdy poem 'The Tunning of Elinour Rumming' which gets mentioned most often—and was based on a real Elinour who owned a pub near Leatherhead in Surrey in the early 16th century—

Some wenches come unlaced,  
 Some housewives come unbraced,  
 With their naked pappes,  
 That flippes and flappes,  
 That wigges and waggess,  
 Like tawny saffron bagges;  
 A sort of foul drabbes.  
 All scurvy with scabbes.  
 Some be flybitten,  
 Some skewed as a kitten;  
 Some with shoe-clout  
 Bind their heades about;  
 Some have no hair-lace,  
 Their locks about their face,  
 Their tresses untrussed  
 All full of unlust;  
 Some look strawry,  
 Some cawry-mawry;  
 Full untidy tegges,  
 Like rotten egges.  
 Such a lewd sort  
 To Elinour resort  
 From tide to tide ...

With his works reprinted, his life written, and his poems continuing to turn up regularly in anthologies it seems likely John Skelton will find new admirers into the 21st century. After all, I am sure it was Skelton's *Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe* who inspired some of Australia's best-known poets (including A. D. Hope and James McAuley) to produce *The First Boke of Fowle Ayres* in 1944 which is described as "a collection of unattributed scurrilous and bawdy verse". And perhaps it is important that we, along with modern writers such as Robert Graves, Richard Hughes, Peter Porter and E. O. Parrott, remember the man whom Erasmus called "the incomparable light and glory of English letters".

\* \* \* \* \*

Some years ago I was given two little hand-painted cards done by my great-grandmother, very sweet and sentimental, one of them carrying a 'view' and the lines—  
 'For thee may Love's warm sun for ever shine

May every gem of life's fair crown be thine'—and they seemed the sort of things young woman of the Victorian era would paint. But on the back of one of them someone had, later, written: "This painting was painted by Constance Allman near her grand-parents' home. Corballis, Laytown, Drogheda. M.P. Sir Robert Taylure's Irish Home. His wife was Lady Bridges. Her father The Earl of Surrey, England. Father and

Mother of 18 children. Youngest Louisa Taylure. etc.”

I was very surprised. So far as I knew my great-great-grandmother was simply Louisa Taylor and I'd never given the matter much thought. But this all seemed most unlikely—someone, I felt sure, would've just happened to mention an earl—and if there was a choice (of course, strictly speaking, ancestors just *are*—but an element of choice does come into it) I would not particularly want the powerful Howard family as ancestors. When they pop up in history it isn't in the role of a William Wilberforce or a Florence Nightingale, not inspiring or heart-warming you might say, (as S. Reed Brett puts it in *The Stuart Century* “The Howards were a Roman Catholic family, but they had felt no compunction in accepting Protestantism so as to qualify for royal honours. But they were also in the pay of Spain—”) though there was Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the poet who is credited with introducing blank verse to England (no doubt Shakespeare was suitably grateful) and writing not very marvellous poems himself—such as his ‘Sonnet on Spring’—

Summer is come, for every spray now springs.

The hart hath hung his old head on the pale;

The buck in brake his winter coat he flings;

—but he has another claim to fame—“Surrey himself was the last of Henry VIII's victims; he went to the block in the month the king died, January 1547.”

Henry was not a great hand with the pen, other than signing things such as death warrants, but he is the author of one book *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* (the Defence of the Seven Sacraments) which was his protest against Martin Luther's *De Captivitate Babylonica*, which came out in 1520, and which Henry dedicated to the Pope.

Professor Scarisbrick says of it “it's erudition is unremarkable (though it makes telling use of the Old Testament in particular), its grasp of Lutheranism defective, its exposition of Catholic teaching on the Sacraments sometimes unimpressive and undoubtedly shot through with that semi or crypto-Pelagianism against which, essentially, Protestantism protested ... Reading its rather conventional discourse ... one pines for the sweep and fire of the Babylonish captivity to which it was intended to reply.”

But the question remains—did Henry write it? Well, he certainly didn't call Skelton back to do it for him—and Skelton was having enough problems weighing up where his loyalties should lie, torn between the King and Cardinal Wolsey, between the powerful Howard family in the person of the sadistic Duke of Norfolk and his own strong sense of self-preservation; not to mention the conflict between his religious duties and his Muse.

Luther responded with his *Answer to King Henry of England* which Jasper Ridley says “shocked most of his readers by the disrespectful language which he used about a King”, then Sir Thomas More (disguised as William Rosse) responded on Henry's behalf with an *Answer to Luther* which “for abuse and obscenity has no parrallel even in the field of sixteenth-century theological controversy”. Luther eventually sent an apology to Henry, apparently on the misunderstanding that England right up to and including the King was becoming more sympathetic to Lutheranism. Henry treated the apology with contempt.

But it is the ‘War of the Tracts’ for which Henry is more likely to be remembered. Yet his book is linked to the question Scarisbrick raises—how close did England come to becoming a Lutheran country?

Henry's attempt to divorce Queen Catherine was based on the verse in Leviticus “And if a man shall take his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing: he hath uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless”—while Catherine's lawyers responded with the verse from Deutoronomy “If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not marry without unto a stranger; her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her.” (That the first clearly refers to adultery, the second duty to a bloodline did not worry Henry, even if it bothered some of his lawyers.) Letters, tracts, pamphlets, sermons, scholarly and not so scholarly works appeared. After 7 years of procrastination

the Pope handed down in Catherine's favour. But it was too late. Henry had already made the decision to split the English Church away from Rome's authority and marry Anne Boleyn. Yet it is strange that these two ancient verses, applicable to nomadic Jewish tribes, should have come to have such extraordinary consequences for 16th century England.

Henry's decision was a windfall for those who enjoyed his favour. The dissolution of the monasteries made the rich richer but provided no help for the poor. Holinshed, writing 25 years after Henry's death, said Henry had hung 72,000 people during his reign for theft and vagabondage (out of a population of less than 3 million); many of whom had been left without employment, almshouses or the limited medical care the monasteries had provided. Many of the religious houses were bad landlords; Henry's nobles were no better—and saw themselves as having no responsibility towards the people they made destitute. Equally the dissolution was not simply a change of landlords; it was wholesale pillage and destruction of many wonderful works of art and hundreds of beautiful churches, monasteries and other buildings.

What was lost? What was gained? Eric Colledge in *The Mediaeval Mystics of England* writes "The Middle Ages were drawing to their close and probably no one event contributed more towards ending the whole mediaeval way of life than the dissolution of the religious houses, the total destruction in England of the organized life of prayer and contemplation and solitude in which mediaeval mysticism had flourished. The Church had known many centuries of peace and protection, and we shall do well to remember, as the historians arraign its members for their crimes, and count up the slothful and indifferent pastors, the worldly and rapacious prelates, that still there were such parish priests as Caister, such solitaries as Godric and Julian, religious like Hilton and bishops of the stamp of Grosseteste, *hominis Deiformi* whose godliness is mediaeval England's greatest glory." But was it enough?

The tragedy for England was perhaps that the Reformation, which predominantly meant Lutheranism, filtering into England, was short-circuited by Henry's actions. Henry as the new head of the Church of England burnt at the stake both Catholics and Lutherans with equal zeal. But the new state church incorporated much of the greed, corruption, rigid hierarchy, pomp, circumstance, and exclusion of women, which had marked Catholicism—so that England's Reformation came instead with the suppressed and delayed bitterness of Puritanism rather than with the gradual growth of Protestant ideas and learning as occurred in parts of Europe.

But Henry and his successors could no more keep their subjects' thoughts rigidly confined to the teachings of the new church than could the Soviet Union keep Bibles out. Jasper Ridley writes "The authorities in Church and State thought that the Bible in English was subversive. If, as the Church itself admitted, the Bible was the Word of God, it was a higher authority than the word of the Pope or the word of the King. If the common people could understand the Bible and read it for themselves, or have it read aloud to them by those of their friends who could read, they would interpret the Bible for themselves, and appeal to the Word of God, as they interpreted it, against the orders of the Pope and the King. The fears of the authorities were well justified, as the history of the next hundred and fifty years was to show; for nothing has done more than the publication of the English Bible to encourage freedom of thought and political democracy."

And then there are the unmentioned reasons behind Henry's desire to put Catherine away—

The much touted explanation was his desire for a son and heir and his love for Anne Boleyn. But Henry knew that no matter how many sons he had *no one* could guarantee their survival. His father had 8 children of whom 3 survived to adulthood; Catherine had 6 children (including 3 sons) of which only Mary survived. And Henry's illegitimate son, the Duke of Richmond, also failed to reach manhood.

Did Henry spend his 7 years of struggle to divorce Catherine fervently in love with

Anne? I doubt it. But having nailed his colours to the mast he had to go ahead with the marriage or set himself at odds with the powerful Howard family.

But what is rarely mentioned is that Catherine, unlike any of her successors, was Henry's equal. She was a highly intelligent, highly educated woman, the daughter of a king and queen, trained from childhood for her role as queen, gracious, admired, and even loved.

Garrett Mattingley says of her upbringing "As a matter of course, the princesses were taught the feminine accomplishments appropriate to their station: dancing, drawing, music, sewing and embroidery. Queen Isabella also insisted that they learn the homely, old-fashioned skills of their ancestors: to weave and spin and bake like country wives, and to perform all the services of the great households which later they must direct. They studied heraldry and genealogy and what passed for history (since a great lady must know something of the families she will meet), and (since she must share the interests and amusements of her class) they were drilled in horsemanship and falconry and the voluminous theory and exacting practice of the chase. From Isabella's own inclinations, and from the books in her library, we may judge that her daughters conned the Bible and the Missal, the lives of the saints, and other popular books of devotion. All this, while exceptionally thorough, was usual enough. In addition, however, Isabella engaged for her daughters tutors in the classics from among the leading humanists available, first Antonio Geraldini, and then, after the poet's death, his no less learned brother Alessandro. With them the girls read the Christian poets, Prudentius and Juvenecus and their fellows, the Latin fathers Ambrose and Augustine, Gregory and Jerome, the pagan sages, chiefly Seneca, and (because they were to be the wives of rulers and Isabella had a high notion of the duties of a queen) not a little Latin history, and something of the civil and the canon law. They were so well grounded in the classics that later all three of them were able to reply to the speeches of ambassadors in extempore Latin, fluent, classical, and correct, and Catherine appeared to Erasmus and to Luis Vives a miracle of feminine learning."

Professor Scarisbrook points out "Henry had proclaimed Catherine governor of the realm and captain-general of the forces, and given her a handful of councillors to manage the kingdom while he was away." Not only did she have to make sure that provisions flowed to Henry's large army campaigning in France but she had to tackle the invading Scots, under James V, who had taken advantage of Henry's absence and the absence of the bulk of the English forces. "On 9 September the two armies met at Flodden in a painful, bloody encounter which ended after about three hours with the English absolute masters of the field. Most of the Scottish aristocracy, including twelve earls, the archbishop of St Andrews, two bishops, two abbots and, finally, the King himself, were killed. This was a shattering defeat. Beside so immense and consequential a victory, Henry's exploits on the continent and the Battle of the Spurs seemed slender indeed." Henry could not tolerate anyone, or anything, which took the limelight from him.

And she had known Henry since he was a boy. She loved him, and she may have been his only wife to do so with a clear and unambivalent affection, but she had no illusions about his ego, his ambition, his many faults and failings, his extreme selfishness and callousness.

It must have been a comfort in his youth; but after 25 years her clear-sighted knowledge of his limitations as king, as general, as scholar, as man, was another matter ...

I wrote off to my aunt to find out the details of Louisa and family. That wasn't correct, my aunt wrote back. In fact, the reality is interesting but not so grand. Ellen Bridge married a Waterford-born merchant John Smith Taylor (or Taylour) and had 13 children. A very much later family story of them said, "One day, while standing with a friend, sheltering from the rain, under the portico of the Bank of Ireland (opposite College Green) he watched a young and beautiful lady, carefully picking her steps through the mud, from near where he was standing towards Grafton St. He turned to his companion and said—"If I ever marry, there's my wife"! Later he saw and got an introduction to the lady at an

Embassy Ball, and that same night he proposed, and she accepted. Incidentally, she, a London lady, had been toasted as the most beautiful lady in Dublin". (I cannot vouch for its truth—and beauty of course is ‘in the eye’ ... )

Their daughter Louisa was the aunt of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wife of D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, Agnes Drury, and Agnes became the stepmother of D’Arcy’s son, the writer, zoologist and scientist, Sir D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson. Louisa is my gr-gr-grandmother and her husband George Johnston Allman was a close friend and colleague of Professor Thompson.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 31st: Octavio Paz  
Gogol  
April 1st: Paul Hasluck  
Milan Kundera  
April 2nd: Hans Christian Andersen  
April 3rd: Washington Irving  
Reginald Hill  
April 4th: Mrs Oliphant  
Maya Angelou  
April 5th: Algernon Charles Swinburne  
Arthur Hailey  
April 6th: Graeme Base  
Furnley Maurice  
April 7th: William Wordsworth  
Gabriela Mistral  
April 8th: Ursula Curtiss  
April 9th: Janice Bostok  
Lord David Cecil  
April 10th: Paul Theroux  
A. E.  
April 11th: R. Austin Freeman  
April 12th: Alan Ayckbourn  
Jack Hibberd  
April 13th: Amanda Lohrey  
Samuel Beckett  
Seamus Heaney  
Eudora Welty  
April 14th: Arnold Toynbee  
April 15th: Jeffrey Archer  
April 16th: Dewi Anggraeni  
J. M. Synge  
April 17th: Isak Dinesen  
Thornton Wilder  
April 18th: Henry Clarence Kendall  
April 19th: Richard Hughes  
April 20th: Dinah Craik  
April 21st: Charlotte Brontë  
John Mortimer  
Alistair MacLean  
April 22nd: Madame De Staël  
Henry Fielding  
April 23rd: William Shakespeare  
Halldór Laxness

\* \* \* \* \*

Shakespeare's *Richard III* is done year in, year out, by schoolchildren, by amateur and professional theatre companies, filmed in modernised versions, committed to memory, parsed and analysed ...

Should it be?

Elizabeth Peters, in a rollicking mystery called *The Murders of Richard III*, says, 'Shakespeare's version is great theatre, but it isn't history.'

Horace Walpole known for *The Castle of Otranto* also wrote *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of King Richard the Third* and Josephine Tey wrote her very readable *The Daughter of Time*. But an even more intriguing query comes in *Ghosthunter: Investigating the World of Ghosts and Spirits*: Visiting the Tower of London, 'ghosthunter' Eddie Burks received a 'communication': It was from the young princes, Edward and his younger brother, the sons of Edward IV, who had been lodged in the Tower following their father's death in 1483, under the protection of their uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Although preparations were made to crown Edward, his uncle eventually succeeded to the throne as Richard III. The two boys were imprisoned for some time and then disappeared. History has drawn its own grim conclusion about their fate, but even today it remains something of a mystery. Eddie was sure that this was the final secret the Tower had to release ... 'They did foully murder us, buried our bodies in the Tower,' they said. 'They brought a man to us who purported to be a physician. He asked after our health and we were each asked to drink a vial of physic which he told us would help guard against the miasma in the Tower. After that, we could not—and did not—struggle.'

'Our uncle, Richard, had already died in battle, so 'twas not he that ordered this. We later met our uncle and he was much distressed that his name had been besmirched, in history for the deed he did not commit. But it suited the King who followed Richard (Henry VII) to lay the blame on him. It seems that history is sometimes what a powerful king would make of it.'

'Mercifully, our suffering was not great and at this late time our simple wish is to tell the truth of the event; otherwise, we are well beyond earth's cares and find much happiness. This is all we have come to say.'

(In the 1930s two bodies, purported to be those of the young princes, were examined and stated to have died during the reign of Richard III; the certainty with which this was stated seems to be a question in itself.)

Of course there is no reason why great theatre should pay even lip service to history (though I notice we're always ready to cry 'Foul!' when history relating to more recent murders is tampered with). Nobody turns to theatre to learn history—or do they? A 17th century entry in *The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*—"The Duke of Marlborough talking over some point of English history with Bishop Burnet, and advancing some anachronisms and strange matters of fact, his Lordship, in a great astonishment at this new history, inquired of his Grace where he had met with it. The Duke, equally surprised on his side to be asked that question by so knowing a man in history as the Bishop, replied, 'Why, don't you ever remember? It is in the only English history of those times that I ever read, in Shakespeare's plays.' "

And it is easy to forgive Shakespeare for writing—

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept

A hellhound that doth hunt us all to death (Queen Margaret)

—and—

If I did take the kingdom from your sons

To make amends I'll give it to your daughter; (King Richard)

—remembering that he lived within the era of the Tudors—and the sanctity of heads on shoulders was not their strong point—and equally that he made no claim to being an historian.

But forgiving Shakespeare is one thing; perpetuating a possible distortion of history

is another.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shakespeare also played fast and loose with the historical character of Macbeth—

Gordon Donaldson in *Scottish Kings* writes: “It was later believed that Malcolm II’s father, Kenneth II, had tried to ensure his son’s succession by altering the old system, but if he made such an attempt it met with opposition, for on Kenneth’s death two kinsmen excluded Malcolm from the throne for a time; Malcolm, however, succeeded in bringing about the installation after him of his grandson Duncan—Shakespeare’s Duncan—contrary to the old rules, but Duncan’s position was challenged by Macbeth, who, by the native principles, had a dual claim to the throne, both in his own right and in that of his wife. Macbeth’s success against Duncan, whom he defeated and killed in battle, thus represented a native, or celtic, reaction against the new southern ways, and it is significant of the prevailing distrust of those ways that he was able to rule with evident acceptance for seventeen years. He was finally ousted not because of rising among his own people but because Malcolm Canmore, son of Duncan, had taken refuge in England and found an English, or at least Northumbrian, army to support his claims. Macbeth was defeated and killed, and Duncan’s son became King Malcolm III. Macbeth, who had represented the old ways, was buried in Iona like his predecessors, but Malcolm III and his English wife, Margaret, when they died in 1093, were buried at Dunfermline. Malcolm had made that place his headquarters in preference to the earlier Scots of Scottish and Pictish royalty at Dunkeld, Scone and Abernathy, and Margaret had introduced Benedictine monks to the church there, under the influence of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury.”

It becomes understandable that the Stuart kings went to see *Macbeth* and applauded it. They would not have been on the throne if the ‘new southern ways’ had not triumphed.

Of course Shakespeare was not alone. Sir Walter Scott rearranged the life and character of Rob Roy to suit his purposes—which were not particularly sympathetic to the Highland Scots. As W. H. Murray says in his fascinating book *Rob Roy MacGregor: his life and times*, “In righting the wrong done to Rob Roy’s name by Scott, and by the historians whom he and others followed, I have found Rob Roy to be of stronger character than the early writers had imagined. Their works on Rob Roy require so much correction and refutation that few readers would wish to plough a way through the quagmire.”

(Murray draws attention to the Letters of Fire and Sword taken out against the clan MacGregor in 1563, which were regularly renewed for more than a century; their aim being the total destruction of the clan ... “The hunt was on and prosecuted with extraordinary venom. Hounds were used to track the Gregarach and no mercy was shown. Warrants for their extermination were put on public sale as though they were game to be killed for sport.” It is against this background that Rob Roy becomes both understandable and heroic.)

Alan Massie in his ‘memoir’ of Scott, *The Ragged Lion*, has Scott say: “I have been censured for historical inaccuracies, and admit myself guilty. *Ivanhoe* is not to be compared with a novel like *Old Mortality* which I took great pains to make historically accurate. It is Romance, and, if Shakespeare could give Bohemia a sea-coast, I did not see why I should not still have a Saxon landowner in the reign of Coeur de Lion”.

\* \* \* \* \*

But writers can also ‘reclaim’ lesser persons from the obscurity of the past and allow them to shine, perhaps even more so than they did in life.

Frank Jones in *White Collar Killers* says: ‘Meanwhile Commissaire George Massu—the policeman on whom George Simenon based his immortal pipe-puffing detective Maigret—assigned to the case late on the evening of the discoveries, had to make what he could of the charnel house at rue Le Sueur.’ Though Simenon said he based Maigret on his father and grandfather and, to some extent, made him an idealised version of himself.

G. K. Chesterton was walking across the Yorkshire moors in 1903 when he met a

friend, Fr John O'Connor, who was curate at St Anne's Roman Catholic church at Keighley and had his inspiration for his equally immortal character of Father Brown.

\* \* \* \* \*

And then there is the real-life character of Sweeney Todd whose stage and film life probably does not truly convey the repulsiveness of the man and his accomplice Mrs Lovett. Sex crimes, mutilation, massacre can be shown in graphic detail—but we still feel a squeamishness when the subject is cannibalism. We can understand the people on the airliner that crashed in the Andes eating their dead comrades to stay alive; we can see the ways in which some people practised cannibalism in the ritual belief that the dead person's courage and strength could be absorbed into the body of the living. But it becomes much harder to explain Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett, or their 'descendants' who have chosen to link murder to cannibalism, such as Jeffrey Dahmer. I found Colin Wilson's summing-up in *A Plague of Murder* helpful.

"We can *focus* the mind in the way that a magnifying glass can focus a beam of sunlight, until we experience a curious sense of inner warmth. It demands the total focus of *attention*. Most of us 'leak' half the time, so never learn to focus our energies. Yet the sheer intensity of these moments of 'focus' makes us aware that the human mind possesses powers that suggest that we are not 'merely human'. In some strange sense, we are gods in disguise.

Experiences we enjoy have the effect of focusing our emotions and energies, and producing a sense of being 'more alive'. But we fail to grasp the fact that the magnifying glass that focuses the energy is *the mind itself*. So we are inclined to go out looking for the experience instead of teaching our selves to use the magnifying glass. And since the modern world has developed a whole 'substitute experience' industry, from romantic novels to pornographic videos, we are in a far more fortunate position than our ancestors of a mere century ago, who expected life to be fairly dreary and repetitive. Most modern teenagers have had a wider range of experience—imaginative and actual—than most Victorian patriarchs. And when we take into account the loss of inhibition induced by alcohol and drugs, it suddenly becomes clear why an increasing number of young people are willing to risk breaking the law in pursuit of 'experiences they enjoy' and of what they feel to be individual self-development.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Rashkolnikov remarks that if he had to stand on a narrow ledge for ever and ever, he would prefer to do that rather than die at once. What would he *do* on the ledge? In practice, probably jump off. Yet we can all *see* why he felt he would prefer to do *anything* rather than die at once. He has an intuition that *the mind itself* contains the answers, and that if he could learn the trick of 'focusing' its energies, a narrow ledge would afford as much freedom as a ski slope in Switzerland or a beach on the Riviera.

Our everyday consciousness is concerned with 'coping' with problems, and this is the basic source of criminality. If we compare consciousness to a spectrum, then modern man lives almost entirely at the 'red end', preoccupied with purpose, activity, survival. When this need for activity vanishes—as when my psychiatrist friend was left alone in the house—we experience a kind of panic. The blue end of the spectrum seems to threaten us with stagnation. And crime—like alcoholism or drug abuse or any other form of over-indulgence—is a protest against stagnation.

Yet when Rashkolnikov says that he would prefer to be confined on a narrow ledge rather than die at once, he has suddenly recognized that he could live just as happily at the blue end of the spectrum—that far from representing stagnation, the 'blue area' represents control, insight, exploration of one's own possibilities. Far from being a kind of blank that threatens us with boredom, exhaustion and nervous breakdown, it seethes with its own inner vitality, like some alchemical crucible that contains the elixir of life.

Regrettably, the human race remains trapped at the red end of the spectrum. It is only

in moments of crisis that we glimpse the answer to our problems—the answer Dr Johnson saw so clearly when he remarked that ‘the knowledge that he is to be hanged in a fortnight concentrates a man’s mind wonderfully’. In the meantime, we find ourselves in the highly dangerous position in which the ‘philosophy of freedom’ has created one of the worst outbreaks of crime in the history of civilization.

The serial murderer is one of the most interesting—if frightening—symptoms of this melting-pot of moral attitudes. Whether they thought about it or not, Ted Bundy, Gerald Gallego, Leonard Lake believed that enough sex could concentrate the mind into a permanent state of intensity. Of course, it failed to work because what they were seeking—‘the essence of sex’—is an illusion. Sex is a biological urge whose purpose is to persuade us to reproduce the species. To this end, it allures us in exactly the same way that the scent of a flower allures the bee. But if the bee were intelligent, it would realize that most flowers promise far more than they can fulfil; the scent is exquisite, but you cannot eat it or take it home with you. This explains why so many sex killers have ended with a curious sense of moral exhaustion and vacuity, a feeling of having been the victim of a confidence trick.

Dahmer expressed the essence of the problem when he said: ‘I couldn’t find any meaning for my life when I was out there. I’m sure as hell not going to find it in here.’ And in saying that, he makes it clear why it is impossible to draw a clear and sharp dividing line between murderers and the rest of us. We *all* suffer, to some extent, from the ‘Dahmer syndrome’. Gurdjieff once explained that what is wrong with human beings is that the gods had implanted in us an organ called ‘kundabuffer’, which makes us hopelessly confused about illusion and reality, and which prevents us from learning too much about our own stupidity. The only things—says Gurdjieff—that could awaken us from this illusion of meaninglessness is another organ which would show us *the exact hour of our own death and the death of everyone we see*. This would shock us into recognition of how we waste our lives.

But every time we study a murder case, with its moronic waste of life, we are momentarily traumatized out of our confusion and stupidity, our tendency to vegetate in a meaningless present. A few days ago I received a letter from a correspondent who remarked that reading Ann West’s *For the Love of Lesley*, a book by the mother of Moors murder victim Lesley Ann Downey, had suddenly made him aware of the reality of murder, and of what it feels like to be the parent of a child who has disappeared. The book had the same impact on me. And after re-living the experiences of Lesley’s parents, I came back to my own life with a sigh of relief, like awakening from a nightmare. Suddenly I recognized that life without such a burden of misery was full of infinite possibility and potentiality and freedom. Yet we normally live it with a kind of bored casualness, as if fate were to blame for not making the world more interesting. The truth is that if we could use the imagination to grasp the reality of *any* murder, we would suddenly see life as a kind of unending holiday.

This is the ultimate justification of the study of murder: that there is something about its sheer nastiness that can galvanize us out of the ‘Dahmer syndrome’ that causes human beings to waste their lives.”

Does it explain Sweeney Todd and Mrs Lovett? Did they need that sudden burst of excitement which came not only with death and dismemberment of their victims—but with the sight of people queueing up to eat their pies?

And I think cultures that have Sweeney Todd, Mrs Lovett and Jeffrey Dahmer among others in their glasshouses should not throw stones.

\* \* \* \* \*

Writers, researchers, academics, continue to come up with suggestions as to who might have written Shakespeare’s plays—on the grounds that he lacked the education, the knowledge and the skill to write them himself. (This, of course, raises the thorny question: what is the best education for a writer? Walt Whitman left school at 11, Charles Dickens

and Steele Rudd at 12. There are writers who had little formal education at all, such as John Clare and a host of women writers such as Agatha Christie who never went to school, as well as writers with PhDs such as Justine Ettler.)

But Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman in *The Shakespeare Conspiracy* question a very different aspect of the Shakespeare ‘myth’. The man himself. They ask whether the accepted image of him tranquilly going about his life of writing, producing his plays, and popping back to Stratford-upon-Avon every so often to mind his grain business and see the family, can be the full story—when all around him his world seethed with plot and counter-plot, where Catholics struggled with Protestants, when Mary, Queen of Scots was losing her head on the chopping-block and the Spanish Armada was getting a drubbing and the Guy Fawkes plotters were getting hanged, drawn and quartered for their ineptness as plotters; when Sir Walter Raleigh was being banished to the Tower and Shakespeare’s good mates such as Marlowe and Jonson were getting murdered or implicated in espionage. Is this Shakespeare believable? Their answer is no. Their Will Shakespeare was also up to his neck in plots and secrets.

But—does it all matter now? The plays no longer need the playwright, the playwright has gone beyond needing the plays. They exist. There is only one potential loser if Shakespeare’s life ever needs to be radically re-written. The tourist industry of Stratford-upon-Avon. And perhaps they are now too intertwined with Shakespeare for Shakespeare to exist apart from them.

\* \* \* \* \*

April 24th: Sue Grafton

Marcus Clarke

April 25th: Walter de la Mare

Eric Rolls

April 26th: Morris West

Bernard Malamud

\* \* \* \* \*

Morris West is best known for his religio/political novels such as *The Shoes of the Fisherman* and *The Devil’s Advocate*. But I was interested to see that he had turned his critical eye on the Catholic church from a legal point of view. In *Scandal in the Assembly: A Bill of Complaints and a Proposal for Reform in the Matrimonial Laws and Tribunals of the Roman Catholic Church* (with Robert Francis) he writes, “A scandal exists today in the Roman Catholic Church. It is a scandal of large dimensions—a scandal of injustice which affects, in one fashion or another, five hundred million people, the statistical membership of the Catholic Church.

It affects whole nations like Italy and Spain where divorce has been abrogated by Concordat, and even non-Catholics are denied recourse to it ...

In the Roman Catholic Church, as it is constituted today, the communicating member or the non-communicant who falls under its laws has no legal recourse against the law or the law maker.”

They go on to quote a Brazilian canonist, Monsignor Moss Tapajos: ‘We have suffered in Latin America throughout our entire history from laws imposed on us by Europe, laws made with a European mentality for European conditions, but utterly unsuited to our conditions and mentality. We are not prepared to have this process repeated once more; and if it is, the laws will not be observed, because our totally different cultural and social situations and needs make the observance of European laws impossible. We can consequently never again accept a law in the preparation of which we have not been vitally involved—and the law itself should simply be a fundamental constitutional law covering general principles, with everything else left to the local Churches.’

And they make the indictment—“He (Pius X) appointed a small group of canonists—mostly Italian—to devise a Roman code for the Roman Church, whether its members lived

in Greenland, Hong Kong, or the Molucca Archipelago. It was the old idea of imperial Rome translated into a modern context. Wherever you are, Caesar's law applies with all its prescriptions, procedures, criteria and determining definitions. Once you have this it takes only some careful and persistent propaganda to identify Caesar's law with God's law—and that is exactly what happened.”

\* \* \* \* \*

David Rice looked at a different problem in *Shattered Vows: Exodus From The Priesthood* but again drew on the Brazilian experience. “It was Brazilian Eduardo Hoornaert who made me realise that clericalism is a wholly European phenomenon, and quite out of place, even offensive, in certain cultures.

‘It's a Roman import,’ he told me. ‘As a clerical structure the Church is purely European. For Europeans, the Church is principally the clerical institution. But for us, especially for the Indians, the Church is the *Povo*—the People. The People of God.’

In trying to force clerical structures on Brazilians—structures such as celibacy, Roman legalism, European-style hierarchy—the Vatican is committing the same crime as any colonial power in forcing its customs and mores on the natives. And it will fail, as the colonial powers did.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Although pigeon-holing books has its usefulness—for publishers, booksellers, book-buyers, reviewers—the lines drawn sometimes seem rather arbitrary. Some thrillers, for instance, are marketed as thrillers, some as popular fiction, some as literary fiction; the same could be said for romances, whodunnits, spy stories *et al*—but who draws the line and what is the criteria: the excellence of the writing?

Morris West has always been categorised as popular fiction but many of his books would go in a number of pigeon-holes quite satisfactorily. So I have prepared a little quiz. You don't have to know the writer or the book, just put it in its right category. But I'll give you one clue—there are two Morris West's in the list.

1. The stewardess was tapping him gently on the shoulder. When he lifted his eyeshades, she handed him a hot towel, informed him that they were just passing over the Maritime Alps en route to Rome and asked would he prefer an American breakfast or coffee and croissants.

Awake, shaved and modestly refreshed, he sipped coffee and toyed with the tasteless croissants and looked down upon the changes that forty years had wrought along the Mediterranean littoral. The shoreline was an uninterrupted ribbon of urban sprawl. The hinterland was dotted ever more closely with ugly townlets where once the serried vineyards had marched, with the green pike-men of the cypresses towering over them.

2. He went on lamenting the decline of the West and, at one point, dropped the name Ludwig.

‘Mad Ludwig?’

‘The King? Mad? You call the King mad? In my house? No!’

I had to think fast.

‘Some people call him mad,’ I said, ‘but, of course, he was a great genius.’

Anton Hahn was hard to pacify. He stood up and lifted his tankard.

‘You will join me,’ he said.

I stood.

‘To the King! To the last genius of Europe! With him died the greatness of my race!’

The old man offered me dinner, but I refused, having eaten with the soprano two hours before.

‘You will not leave my house until you have eaten with us. After that you may go where you will!’

So I ate his ham and pickles and sun-coloured eggs and drank his apple *chicha* which went to my head.

3. I stuck a fork into a bit of pork, almost closing my eyes to do so, and raised it to my lips. It was delicious, it had the subtlest of flavours. Tadeus saw this and looked delighted, his eyes shining. It's wonderful, I said, you're right, it's one of the most delicious things I've eaten in my whole life. Just as well! croaked the parrot. I second the parrot, said Tadeus, and poured me a glass of Reguengos.

4. In the kitchen Sean looked down at his handiwork with satisfaction. He had skinned the cat and stewed it gently for hours in a rich wine sauce embellished with mushrooms and herbs. Before it, he planned to serve only a thin consommé, not wanting to spoil the glutton's appetite.

Peta drank the soup and eagerly waited for this special main course. The waitress brought it in in a large casserole. Peta's eyes gleamed. 'Leave it,' she said. 'I'll serve myself.'

She got through the lot, along with a mountain of sautéed potatoes and a dish of cauliflower and cheese and then leaned back and wiped her mouth with her napkin and gave a satisfied belch. 'Bring the cook here,' she said grandly to the waitress. 'I wish to compliment him.'

As Sean entered the dining-room, he whispered to the waitress, 'Run along. I've left a glass of wine for you in the kitchen.'

Then he approached Peta and smiled in triumph as he saw the empty casserole.

'That was excellent,' said Peta. 'But what was it?'

5. We go into Eduard Knobloch's restaurant. 'Look over there,' I say, stopping as though I had run into a tree. 'Life seems to be up to its tricks here too! I should have guessed it!'

Gerda is sitting at a table in the wine room with a vase of tiger lilies in front of her. She is alone and is hacking away at a venison steak that is almost as big as the table. 'What do you say to that?' I ask Georg. 'Doesn't it smell of betrayal?'

6. "Mrs. Drew asked him to carve the roast goose—for Jacob Drew never did or could carve. Well, Mr Meredith tackled it, and in the process he knocked it clean off the platter into Mrs. Reece's lap, who was sitting next to him. And he just said dreamily, 'Mrs. Reece, will you kindly return me that goose?' Mrs. Reece 'returned' it, as meek as Moses, but she must have been furious, for she had on her new silk dress."

7. The lady's steady and critical inspection of his style of carving a chicken completed his downfall. His previous experience of carving had been limited to those entertainments which went by the name of "study-gorges," where, if you wanted to help a chicken, you took hold of one leg, invited an accomplice to attach himself to the other, and pulled.

But, though unskilful, he was plucky and energetic. He lofted the bird out of the dish on to the tablecloth twice in the first minute. Stifling a mad inclination to call out "Fore!" or something to that effect, he laughed a hollow, mirthless laugh, and replaced the errant fowl.

8. But no—it is too painful to describe some of these fiends in detail. You have met *The Man Who Can Carve*? No matter if the dish be a solitary roast pigeon, the coat is taken off, two square yards of table cleared, several inoffensive diners compelled to leave the room to give the ruffian 'a bit of freedom'. By some miracle everything carved by this person is transformed into scrag-ends, so that *nobody* gets anything that is eatable.

9. "We live on mince and on weeks when we have more bills we live on less mince. We know a lot about lower-than-low budget cooking. I kept bees once and we still have a supply of honey. We make pickles and jams. The butcher is the biggest hurt. There are too many people now going after the cheap cuts of meat. Food is the only thing you can cut down on, there is nothing else. Our luxury is the meat most people give to their dog or cat; that would be our good meal for the week—a bit of gravy beef."

10. His Excellency was very kind to me, so that I sat down to dinner with a small group of men; they were insistent that I take the most food on to my plate. We began with

what His Excellency said was *sopa de pedra* which is made with dried beans, not stones, but “these days stones are the one thing that remains plentiful to us, stones and air” and it was true that the soup did not taste of anything much so, perhaps, the cook *had* put stones in the pot.

11. At dusk, Penny and Jack would go inside and drink a beer in the kitchen while she prepared the food—steak or fish and salad, and the local fresh bread, ice cream, tinned pears and chocolate sauce—nothing fancy. She had made him get a television set for his solitary evenings. A huge aerial was erected to pick up the transmission from Adelaide. But Jack seldom settled to stare at world events through the black-and-white snow. Penny wanted to discuss politics. From her school debating, she was full of the communist threat—a new worry for Jack Tregenza. She introduced instant coffee after dinner and he allowed himself a nightcap of port.

12. As he drank the toast he understood with stark clarity the nature of damnation: that it was self-inflicted and irreversible. You ate the meal you had cooked though it turned to fire in your gullet. You drank the traitor’s cup to the dregs, but before you set it down it was filled again with gall and wormwood. The lies you told were graven on stone and you carried them at arm’s length above your head as a sign of infamy.

(1. Popular fiction. 2. Travel book. 3. Literary fiction. 4. Mystery fiction. 5. Literary fiction. 6. Schoolgirl fiction. 7. Schoolboy fiction. 8. Newspaper column. 9. Oral history. 10. Coming-of-age novel. 11. Literary fiction. 12. Popular fiction.)

\* \* \* \* \*

April 27th: Edward Gibbon

Mary Wollstonecraft

April 28th: Anna Clarke

April 29th: John Tranter

Rafael Sabatini

April 30th: Paul Jennings

May 1st: Joseph Heller

Stephen Dando-Collins

May 2nd: Alan Marshall

Sir D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson

\* \* \* \* \*

When the news came that James Herriot had died I felt bereft. Yet why should it matter that a Yorkshire vet whom I’d never met, living in a place I’d never visited, matter particularly to me?

But I and, I think, many other people felt we *had* met James Herriot and *had* travelled across the “wide clean-blown face of Yorkshire” with him in his rickety little Morris.

He attributed his success very modestly to the fact that “everyone likes animal stories”. Quite likely they do but it is only a partial explanation. People’s reasons for liking his books are many and various: “they’re always interesting”, “I always thought I’d like to visit Yorkshire”, “I learnt a lot about looking after animals”, “they’re well-written”, “it gives you an idea of what it was like back in the thirties”, and, from a retired farmer and peace activist, “such a warm, *wise* man”.

His books are about living life with kindness, courage and good humour. He records both his triumphs and his failures. But unlike many public figures, who when they come to write their memoirs are charmingly selective or coolly detached, James Herriot also records the times when he simply didn’t know what was wrong, when he gave the wrong treatment, when he learnt from farmers and even a postman, and when he felt he’d made an awful fool of himself. He’s always right *there* in the story not standing back as the dispassionate observer.

(Grahame Lord in his biography points out that not all the events occurred personally

to Herriot but by choosing to write in the first person he fostered the idea they did—and therefore that they were *his* failures and *his* mistakes.)

His best-seller status was hard-won but there were also moments of serendipity and old-fashioned good-luck. He often said it was his wife (whose real name was Joan) who got him started by pointing out that he had been *talking* about writing a book for twenty-five years.

It took trial and error before he found his own style and way of presenting his material. As he put it: “When I first started writing I tried to create beautiful, balanced sentences like something out of *Macaulay’s Essays*. But I soon realized that was no good. So I got rid of most of my adjectives and high-blown prose and thought how I would tell the story if I were in a country pub.”

His success in America also owed something to chance. In 1971 St Martin’s Press was a small house in New York publishing reference books. Its new president, Tom McCormack, visited London to seek out some commercial titles. An agent gave him a copy of *If Only They Could Talk* which he took home and put beside his bed. Then in the pressure of other things it got forgotten. “Three months later,” the story goes, “his wife, Sandra, picked it up and started reading. When she finished, she reportedly shook her husband awake, exclaiming, ‘You gotta read this, and if you don’t publish it, I’ll kill you’.

“That book went on to become *All Creatures Great and Small* by James Herriot, the first of five volumes the Yorkshire vet would publish with St. Martin’s, each one outselling the one before it. Herriot became the first of many big names the house would publish.”

Wives were certainly important in his success but the books sell themselves. The intertwining of history, human drama, medical puzzles and advances presented in lay language, romance, humour, tragedy, hardship and his delightful little pen portraits of people and animals, were going to be a winning and, I suspect, a timeless combination. I remember recommending to a friend who was having great difficulty with characterisation that she read and analyse a couple of segments from any of his books.

In a few lines he can draw a character such as Isaac Cranford. “Mr Cranford was standing motionless in the middle of the yard and I was struck, not for the first time, by the man’s resemblance to a big hungry bird. The hunched narrow shoulders, the forward-thrust, sharp-beaked face, the dark overcoat hanging loosely on the bony frame” and “He farmed some of the best land in the lower Dale, his Shorthorns won prizes regularly at the shows but he was nobody’s friend. Mr Bateson, his neighbour to the North, summed it up: ‘That feller’ud skin a flea for its hide.’ Mr Dickon, his neighbour to the South, put it differently: ‘If he gets haud on a pound note, by gaw it’s a prisoner.’”

But most of his portraits, such as his presentation of the tramp, Roddy Travers, are deeply sympathetic. “He gave me his gentle smile and again I had the impression of physical and mental purity. No drinking, no smoking, a life of constant movement in the open air without material possessions or ambitions—it all showed in the unclouded eyes, the fresh skin and the hard muscular frame.”

And it might’ve been Roddy’s philosophy which influenced James Herriot when he became a household name.

“Ye can’t take it with you and any road, as long as a man can pay ’is way, he’s got enough,” Roddy says when asked about his lack of financial security. Herriot continued to work as a vet until severe arthritis brought about his retirement. The surgery became a focus for fans from around the world and, so as not to disappoint those who came, he would slowly and painfully sign books each night to have them ready when people called in wanting not the help of a vet but a glimpse of a famous writer. All the while he continued to live quietly. For as he said, “You can only eat so many meals a day and wear so many clothes.”

James Alfred Wight enclosed the words of Roddy Travers and all those who troop across his pages presenting their ideas and philosophies about life, about caring, about

finding joy in small things, in a kind of glowing amber for the readers who will someday casually pick up one of his books and enter his world.

But I shall miss you, James Herriot.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dorian Williams tells this little story in *Master of One*: When Harry Faudel-Phillips was staying with us at Greens Norton in about 1927, he came down to breakfast one morning and found us with our heads buried in the *Daily Graphic*. Being a stickler for good manners, ‘Don’t you know that it is very rude for children to read the papers before the grown-ups?’ he asked. ‘Anyway, I’ve never seen you read a paper before; what is it that you find so absorbing?’ We explained that it was Tuesday and that on Tuesdays there was a ‘Tailwaggers’ page.

‘Tailwaggers? What on earth’s that?’

‘A club for children who have dogs or puppies. We are all members of the Tailwaggers’ club.’

‘What rubbish!’ he expostulated, continuing to grumble when my parents came into the room. Then quite suddenly, as the idea struck him, he turned to my parents and suggested, quite seriously, that they should start a Pony Club. ‘Much better than a puppy-dog Club,’ he said. Within a year the Pony Club, a junior branch of the then Institute of the Horse of which my parents, Harry Faudel-Phillips and Colonel Guy Cubitt were all council members, was founded. Three branches came into being in 1928, the Crawley and Horsham run by Guy Cubitt, the Grafton, run by my parents, and one in Shropshire run by Mrs Corbett. Within three years there were a hundred branches—and the rest is history.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘We come now to the last of these problem passages, the lovely little story of Jesus healing a wounded animal. There is, unfortunately, considerable mystery surrounding it. It was included some years ago by a German writer, Julius Boehmer, in a collection of Early Christian parallels to the New Testament. He drew it from an earlier writer, but failed to trace its history, owing to the latter’s death. The only account of it he could find was a statement that it had been found in a Coptic Bible manuscript in the Paris Library. Search there however proved unsuccessful, and there the matter rests. It is usually considered to be an extract from some Coptic apocryphal work, of which there are many in existence.’

‘It happened that the Lord went forth from the city and walked with his disciples over the mountains. And they came to a mountain, and the road which led to it was steep. There they found a man with a sumpter-mule. But the animal had fallen for the burden was too heavy, and he beat it that it bled. And Jesus came to him and said, Man, why dost thou beat thine animal? Seest thou not that it is too weak for its burden, and knowest thou not that it suffers pains? But the man answered and said, What is that to you? I can beat it as much as I please, since it is my property, and I bought it for a good sum of money. Ask those that are with thee, for they know me and know thereof. And some of the disciples said, Yea Lord, it is as he says. We have seen how he bought it. But the Lord said, Do you not notice how it bleeds, and hear you not how it laments and cries? But they answered and said, Nay Lord, we hear not how it laments and cries. And the Lord was sad and exclaimed, Woe to you, that ye hear not how it complains to the Creator in heaven, and cries for mercy. But three times woe to him of whom it complains and cries in its distress. And he came forth and touched the animal. And it arose and its wounds were healed. And Jesus said to the man, Now go on and beat it no more, that you also may find mercy.’

(Roderic Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels*)

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Marshall is remembered for *I Can Jump Puddles*, his childhood struggle with polio and disability; he is remembered for his vivid stories and sketches of life in Australia during the Depression years; he is remembered for his sympathetic writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islands people in books such as *These Were My Tribesmen*—

but he is not especially remembered for his animal stories. Yet one of the most memorable pieces I know is a little sketch he titled ‘The Thoughtful Dog’—

‘You often hear men argue that dogs can’t reason, that they are creatures of instinct and habit, and only display intelligence under direction. I don’t believe it.

I spent the weekend at Tanjil Bren at the foot of the Baw Baws in Victoria and while there I was talking to a bushman about dogs, especially about the wild dogs and the dingoes that roam the mountain country behind that settlement.

There was a farmer up there had a collie, he told me. It was a long-haired, alert dog with average intelligence and was well looked after. Some time ago it began to wander away and they would not see it for two or three days. When it returned he would always feed it well and it would hang around contented for a while till some impulse sent it off again.

He would have been justified in concluding that it was a sheep killer but he felt, somehow, that this wasn’t the reason for it clearing off into the bush.

He did notice, however, that when he fed it on its inevitable arrival home it never ate all the meat that was given it but always carried off a bone or some special piece and disappeared with it into the bush. This intrigued the farmer who, at first, imagined that the dog must be taking parts of his meal away with the object of burying it.

One day when the dog had set off with a particularly large bone in its mouth, the farmer followed, anxious to clear up the mystery.

The dog followed a narrow bush track over a ridge, then down the side of a valley thick with scrub until it came to the creek that ran along the floor of this quiet place between the mountains. It pushed its way through musk and dogwood till it came to an open space where it laid the bone in front of a female dingo that lay crouched there upon the ground. She rose to her feet and took it hungrily and the farmer saw that one of her feet was held fast in the jaws of a dog trap. The drag, a log, to which the chain of the trap had been fastened, was wedged between two trees. She had pulled it this far but could go no further.

Around her were numerous dried bones, remains from other meals supplied her by the collie who now sat watching her eat.

I would like to be able to finish this story by relating how the farmer took the dingo home and kept it as a companion for his dog, but in real life things never turn out that way. The farmer killed the dingo, an incurable enemy of his flocks, and went home with his dog for which he now had a new respect.

But you can’t tell me that dog couldn’t reason.’

\* \* \* \* \*

May 3rd: Norman Thelwell

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I thought I would choose from the library books whose titles intrigued me—so I took *The Last Tango of Dolores Delgado* by Marele Day, *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* by Yukio Mishima, and *The Girl Who Trod on a Loaf* by Kathryn Davis. I don’t think it was a brilliant idea. The Marele Day was a good solid mystery but the other two didn’t seem to live up to their promise. Davis has her heroine say ‘Why *wouldn’t* it be a mistake, I thought, to step on a loaf of bread? Certainly not merely because an old Danish lesbian decided that bread was a symbol of female oppression.’ But even wanting to know the answer didn’t grip me. I must admit I had something of the same feeling when I read Donleavy’s *The Beastly Beatitudes of Balthazar B*. It starts with a splash, “And there in a godmother’s arms with salt pressed on his lips and a cold dash of water on the skull, he was christened Balthazar”, but apart from the regulation sexual peccadilloes and a sense that here is a young man with possibilities it seemed to become duller as I went along. Perhaps Shakespeare got it right when he gave most of his plays extremely prosy names—*The Tempest*, *A Winter’s Tale*, *Julius Caesar*, *Henry V Part One*

and *Part Two*—only allowing himself to become a little more frolicsome with some of his comedies ...

\* \* \* \* \*

In actual fact I took out another book with a good title but as I'd read it before it doesn't count. Norman Thelwell's *Some Damn Fool's Signed the Rubens Again*. I first came across Thelwell when I was fifteen; I used to work occasionally for a neighbour who had very bad asthma, just doing housework and around the farm, and one day I went with her to visit her mother. They settled down to talk 'family' but before doing so she handed me a little book to browse in, saying "You might enjoy him". It was Thelwell's *A Leg at Each Corner*—and I went home determined to save up and buy myself a copy. In fact, I think it was the first book I bought for myself.

Thelwell deals with the antics of the English at the opposite end to the Andy Capp world; and the foibles and eccentricities of his world provide fertile ground for poking fun. Yet, strangely, the occasional criticisms levelled at his work have been prompted by his horses rather than his humans. No one, I suppose, would doubt that Graham of *Fred Basset* fame loved Basset hounds. It is harder to say that Thelwell loved Shetland ponies. His buck, bite, and kick with an enthusiasm and vigour few real-life ponies could match. If I was breeding Shetland ponies I suppose I might be worrying about the effects on potential buyers. But—my great-uncle came to Australia in 1912 bringing with him a *Bible* and *The Standard Cyclopedia of Modern Agriculture and Rural Economy* which says unequivocally of the Shetland pony "He is absolutely without the taint of a vicious trait", a widespread view, so I think it'll take more than a few Thelwell cartoons to dent the enduring popularity of the Shetland pony.

My brothers used to buy tatty old comics at the Book Exchange in Toowoomba but to have a nice clean new book of cartoons was very exciting—and I still have a special fondness for books of cartoons. Unfortunately, somewhere, I lost my Thelwell but in the happy way that things can happen the other day someone rang and said would I like some second-hand books for a stall. I said most definitely! and she popped round with a couple of boxes—and in the boxes were Thelwells! Thelwells in profusion—*Penelope, The Riding Academy, This Desirable Plot, A Leg at Each Corner* and *Some Damned Fool's*—

Shirley Glubok in *The Art of the Comic Strip* says 'In 1895 the *New York World*, published by Joseph Pulitzer, featured a cartoon called "Down in Hogan's Alley," by Richard F. Outcault. All of the action was shown within a single picture, which took up a full page.' And from there on it was go, go, go—and change. The strip "Barney Google" gave us the word 'heebie-jeebies', "Blondie" inspired the Dagwood Sandwich, while "Buck Rogers" launched in 1929 foresaw many things which have become reality—monorail trains, walkie-talkies, jet planes, spaceships, space suits and the atom bomb, while "Popeye" gave us words such as 'goon' and 'jeep'; other comics popularized a great many exclamations—bonk, zoom, wham, pow, vroom, and zap. It could be argued that we could manage quite well without them. Still, they are colourful and simple.

But if you are a parent worrying about the low literary quality of many offerings, you may have steered your children towards the works of Uderzo and Goscinny. As Peter Kessler points out in *The Complete Guide to Asterix* it has achieved world-wide popularity being translated into languages as various as Mandarin, Thai, Indonesian, Icelandic and Esperanto. Yet Asterix had one of those delightfully coincidental beginnings.

The family of Albert Uderzo came from northern Italy though he was born in France; René Goscinny was also born in France of a French father and a Ukrainian Jewish mother but his family moved to Argentina when he was two. During WW2 Uderzo's family moved to Brittany thus laying the ground for Asterix. From Argentina Goscinny went to New York where he worked as an interpreter for a Moroccan import-export firm—and, fortunately, "met a group of cartoonists who would later go on to create *MAD Magazine*". One of their guiding beliefs was that cartoons should not simply be the domain of children. Goscinny

met Belgian comics publisher, Georges Troisfontaines, who invited him to show his work if he should ever come to Brussels. Uderzo, meanwhile, was working as an artist in Paris where he'd created a comic character, Clopinard. He met Troisfontaines in Paris (he was setting up an office there) and this brought Uderzo and Goscinny together in what was to become a remarkably long and happy partnership. An early strip of theirs was Oumpah-Pah, "the story of a native American tribe". The two men set up their own small publisher, Edifrance, which took off when Radio Luxembourg sponsored their new kind of comic book, a book for all ages. But—last minute panic!—they discovered their character, Reynard the Fox, had already been used. They had to come up with something completely new in a hurry.

Asterix, like Yeatman and Sellars' *1066 And All That*, uses not history but the way in which history is taught to children. (Asterix draws on authors as varied as Horace, Ovid, Livy, the Gospel writers and Thomas à Kempis.) But after its first success sales went down as the new publisher, Georges Dargaud, saw comics as being strictly for children. But he gave way, not surprisingly, and sales began to climb again. In 1966 *Asterix and the Normans* sold more than a million copies. Asterix was ceasing to be merely a comic and was becoming both a household name and a commodity. The first French satellite was named after him, his name was appropriated for products from tomato sauce to detergents, he began to travel in translation, he was turned into a film. He became a theme park, *Parc Astérix*, though he has to struggle against the might and razzamatazz of Disneyland for customers. As Kessler says "The Gauls have kept the Roman Empire at bay for over two thousand years with their undisciplined but good-natured attitude. It remains to be seen whether the same tactics will work against the fixed smile of Mickey Mouse".

Claims are sometimes made suggesting Asterix was, and should be seen as a subversive figure. Perhaps he is. A Gaul subverting the mighty Roman empire translates as a Breton subverting the French republic ... doesn't it ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I must admit to an enduring fondness for the gentle cartoon—without violence, cruelty, or crudity—and a book I retain a fondness for is Daniel Petteward's *Money for Jam* or 'anyone can be a non-artist' ... As he says 'Non-artists are necessarily restricted to the kind of picture that they can manage. One picture that every non-artist ought to be able to manage is the All-Black Rectangle' which can have a caption such as 'But my good man, I came all this way on the strict understanding that there was *always* moonlight on the Taj Mahal', then moving on to the grey rectangle 'Yes, Mr Chatworthy certainly seems to have got the hang of his meerschaum at last', and finally reaching the more complex antics of the two little Mexican minnow-flies, Monty and Minnie. I was very fond of Monty and Minnie when I was young and longed to be able to think up captions such as 'Do come down this end Minnie, in case there's a photo finish', 'Oh no, Monty, my antennae are much too untidy'—and I'll leave you to guess what came in the middle.

\* \* \* \* \*

Good titles *are* difficult to come up with. Gerald Durrell tells how he found one, though I'm not sure I'd call it *good* ...

'What are you working on now?' Larry inquired.

I looked at him in surprise. We had an unspoken and unwritten law that we never discussed what we called our Art with each other, lest it lead to dissension and vulgar abuse.

'I'm not working on anything at the moment, but I've got a sort of vague idea of something. As a matter of fact, I got the idea from reading *Spirit of Place*.'

Larry snorted derisively. *Spirit of Place* was a compilation of his letters to his friends, painstakingly amassed and edited by our old friend Alan Thomas.

'I'm surprised that it gave you any ideas at all,' said Larry.

'Well, it did. I thought of doing a kind of compilation thing. I've got a lot of material

that I haven't been able to use in a book. I thought of putting it all together and making a book out of it.'

'Good idea,' said Larry, pouring himself out another glass of retsina. 'Never waste good material.'

He held his glass up to the light and admired the colour. Then he looked at me and his eyes twinkled mischievously.

'I tell you what,' he said. 'You could call it *Filletts of Plaice*.'

And that is exactly what I have done.

\* \* \* \* \*

May 4th: Marele Day  
May 5th: Karl Marx  
May 6th: Debra Adelaide  
May 7th: Peter Carey  
May 8th: Rose Zwi  
May 9th: Nene Gare  
May 10th: Ric Throssell  
May 11th: Stanley Elkin  
May 12th: Edward Lear  
May 13th: Daphne du Maurier  
May 14th: María Irene Fornés  
May 15th: Xavier Herbert  
Candida Baker  
David Foster  
May 16th: Sigmund Freud  
May 17th: Dorothy Richardson  
May 18th: Bertrand Russell  
May 19th: Lorraine Hansberry  
May 20th: Kate Jennings  
May 21st: Dorothy Hewett  
May 22nd: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
May 23rd: Margaret Wise Brown  
May 24th: Mary Grant Bruce  
May 25th: Jamaica Kincaid  
May 26th: Denis Florence Macarthy  
May 27th: Tony Hillerman  
May 28th: Patrick White  
May 29th: André Brink  
May 30th: Julian Symons  
May 31st: Patsy Adam-Smith  
Judith Wright  
June 1st: John Masefield  
June 2nd: Barbara Pym  
Thomas Hardy

\* \* \* \* \*

I *like* Barbara Pym. It is true she is not as witty as Elizabeth Bowen nor as savage as modern English writers like Fay Weldon; nor do her stories of English village life have the lurking evil of Agatha Christie or the controlled zaniness of Angela Thirkell. There is a detachment which is never the coldness of distance. And there is a nice down-to-earth good sense. Now, I'm not sure that people look for good sense in writing; it may even send shudders down the spine. But I like it.

And there are always those little felicities of memory, personality, or conversation—such as a woman walking through the blackout with a torch, "The bulb was swathed in

tissue paper and tied as on a pot of jam, so that she wanted to write on it ‘Raspberry 1911’, as their mother used to.” (*Goodbye Balkan Capital*) or her description of overweight in *Flora and Gervaise* “A gentlewoman was a gentlewoman whatever her dimensions.” (I say that one to myself when my trousers don’t want to do up.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Hazel Holt was Barbara Pym’s literary executor and wrote her biography *A Lot to Ask* (and has done more than anyone to help keep her in the public ‘eye’); she also writes pleasant low-key mysteries herself. In *The Shortest Journey* she has a character say “I always watch the Australian serials on the telly. Well, it shows you what it’s like there, doesn’t it?”—to which my son responded “Well, they might get the idea we’re all neurotic” but Jenny Randles in *Phantoms of the Soap Operas* writes: “If you listen to the TV pundits, they will tell you that there are two really terrible kinds of programme: endless American game shows and Australian soap operas. Nevertheless, both keep the audiences watching, and afternoons would be unthinkable for many viewers in Great Britain without regular excursions into family life *Down Under*.” It might also be said that soap operas are the ‘Colonies’ Revenge’. Portuguese viewers watch Brazilian soap operas, Spanish viewers watch Mexican soap operas, and Dutch viewers are only saved from Indonesian soap operas by the language difference. (Although I must admit my friend Brenda in England never misses ‘Home and Away’ and she is a Falkland Islander married to a Frenchman; I wonder if she’d feel at home here if she were to come, using ‘Home and Away’ as her introduction and guide?) And then there are soap operas and soap operas ...

An interesting insight into the world of the soap opera comes in Henry Slesar’s *Murder at Heartbreak Hospital*: “The headwriter does the long-term story. Then there are three breakdown writers who do the daily outlines. Then there are three more writers who actually write scripts from those outlines. Of course, every now and then the producers get someone else to contribute a long-term and sometimes other people write the outlines, and the breakdown writers occasionally write scripts ...”

She saw his befuddled expression and laughed. “I’m confusing you again. The truth is, most soaps these days are hardly models of efficient operation. The lines of responsibility have got pretty muddled, especially in the last five or ten years. Probably because the stakes have got bigger.”

“What stakes?”

“Money, of course. Soaps are big business. Did you hear the capital letters. BIG BUSINESS. Most of the network profit comes from day parts, because the production is relatively cheap compared to prime time. It’s all those weepy women and unwanted babies who are paying for those helicopters and car chases on prime time.”

But it was different in the days of the radio serial. Think of Gwen Meredith who still holds the world record for single-handedly writing the longest running serial ... 5,795 episodes of *Blue Hills*.

Gwen Meredith was born in Orange, gained her B.A. from Sydney University and started a central city book club and dramatic society. Her plays such as *Wives Have Their Uses* (about a man marrying to avoid emotional attachments), *These Positions Vacant*, and *Ask No Questions*, which used an all-female cast as hospital patients, appeared at the Independent.

In 1955 in a competition where first prize was shared by Oriel Gray’s *The Torrents* and Ray Lawler’s *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* she was Highly Commended with *Cornerstone*, a play about family entanglements, which also appeared at the Independent. But it is *Blue Hills* which turned her into a household name. It was begun with the laudable aim of spreading information on new ideas and advances in agriculture in a pleasant way.

She had already made a name in this area with works such as her radio play *Great Inheritance* which was broadcast during WW2 and begins with two diggers, Jim and Joe, contending with the Italian forces in Libya and the sand. The sand gets into everything and

Jim is amazed to be told this was once fertile farmland. The play uses flashbacks—CASSIUS. Do you think you are wise, Titus, having all this pasture land put to grain? TITUS. Why should you question my wisdom?—and in the background are the contending voices of wind and water. But as Joe says “It’s not much use winnin’ a war for liberty or settin’ up a first-rate social system or expandin’ your secondary industries until every one over ten’s got a refrigerator—unless you look after your soil. Because if you don’t there won’t be anything to put in the refrigerators” ...

Jim comes home with new eyes, burning to change things even though his wife says, “we’ve got to farm pretty solidly to meet the bank interest.” But Jim is determined. A scientist says to him, “we can’t afford to lose trees. They’re the life of our catchment areas.” By the end of the play Jim has become a model farmer, committed to contour-ploughing, mulching, reforestation etc. Unfortunately, the banks walk away scot-free; I would suggest an ‘erosion tax’ to be levied on all bank profits. Gwen Meredith was not a great playwright but she was an inspired choice to present new farming ideas in an entertaining format.

Leslie Rees says “By 1972 *Blue Hills* had reached its 5,000th episode”; he described it as the equivalent of writing “two hundred and fifty full-length stage plays” and it contained “fourteen and a half million words”. It finally finished up on the 30th September 1976. Did people learn new ideas about farming from it? I don’t know. But, at heart, it presented rural people as fundamentally kind, forgiving, generous and good-humoured. Perhaps it’s time for a new serial in the tradition of *Blue Hills*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Angela Thirkell is a much lighter writer, lighter-hearted, lighter in her subject matter, existing somewhere on the journey between Anthony Trollope and P.G. Wodehouse; but she had a liking for those young people who were most in danger of being picked upon, young curates, young schoolmasters, girls in danger of being left as wallflowers by their shyness or lack of accomplishments. And her world too is in some way an enchanted one where politics, economics and other problems enter only marginally, where people have a very English sense of privilege and prejudice and an untiring love of picnics.

I’ve just been reading her 1937 book *Summer Half* set in a boys’ school—

‘Is it partly being with young people that makes schoolmastering attractive?’

‘No,’ said Everard. ‘It is being perpetually with the young that turns us into boneheads and fossils. Imagine a life in which you rarely talk to people on your own intellectual level. We may sharpen our wits on them, it is one of our few weapons, and an unfair one at that; it is not until they are in their last year that we can sharpen our wits against them. And by that time they are usually so earnest.

Age and crabbed youth simply cannot live together for very long, without age either going under or assuming a protective coat of cynicism, and when it comes to cynicism they can beat us at our own game now.’

But it is 1937.

‘I’ll tell you another funny thing about those blackshirts,’ said Lydia. ‘No one knows who they are, or where they go. I mean, have you ever seen one, except standing on the pavement in waders, looking a bit seedy? You meet quite a lot of Communists and things in people’s houses, like Philip,’ she said, pointing at him, but quite kindly, ‘he’s a Communist. But you never go to tea with someone and find them sitting there in their boots.’

‘I expect they have a secret cupboard in the hall of their houses,’ said Swan, ‘and the minute they come in they take off their boots in a jiffy and chuck them into a sliding panel and they go down to a hiding-place in the cellar, and then they take off their detachable polo collars and look just like us, only nastier.’

‘That’s a jolly good idea,’ said Fairweather Senior, ‘but you don’t get long boots off in a jiffy like that. It needs a batman, or anyway a strong bootjack.’

‘The Black Batman would be a good name for a film,’ said Morland. ‘Or else they have boots that zip all the way up.’

But despite her sense of being a quintessential English writer Angela Thirkell spent quite a few years in Hobart. And despite the Wodehousian quality to much of her writing, she came in for a good deal of criticism with her book *Trooper To the Southern Cross*, about the behaviour of Australian soldiers returning on board ship from the Great War. This came out in 1934 under the pseudonym Leslie Parker and many people assumed the author was a man. ‘Major Bowen’, an army surgeon, is returning from the Great War in 1919 on the ‘Rudolstadt’—“It seems that this ‘Rudolstadt’ used to do the South Atlantic run from Hamburg before the War. After the Armistice the Germans had to hand her over to the British, but before they left her the engineers had connected every pipe up wrong. Hot was cold, cold was waste, waste was boiling, you didn’t know where you were”—and there *are* good times aboard such as the fancy-dress party—“The success of the evening were Jerry and Mrs Jerry as Dad and Mum, with two or three young officers as Joe and the rest of the family out of ‘On Our Selection’. Where Jerry had raised the togs he wore, you can search me, but I suppose he got the diggers to contribute. He had got some false whiskers and a filthy old pair of slacks all patched, and a seedy old coat and a real cocky farmer’s hat, all greasy with a broken brim. Mrs Jerry had a black skirt and an apron and a blouse with checks and a kind of bonnet. Joe and the others were champion too, and they all had the real back-block drawl, till we all got quite homesick. It was donkey’s years since I’d heard the word ‘cow’ said the way those boys said it—‘keaw’ is the nearest I can get, but you can’t make it long enough in print.”

But tensions rise on board ship; on shore leave in Colombo the men run riot, smashing windows, turning rickshaws over, fighting in the streets—from there on, the voyage is punctuated by frequent ‘stoushs’ on board. The violence and lack of order was not something people wanted to read about. They needed their heroes to go on being heroes, not a disorderly disobedient rabble ...

Thirkell was related to Rudyard Kipling, Sir Edward Burne-Jones and Sir Stanley Baldwin and her father had been a Professor of Poetry at Oxford; while her son, Colin MacInnes, had something of a cult success with his novel *Absolute Beginners* though it now seems rather dated. She grew up in a happy and comfortable home in London, of which she says “On Sunday my grandparents, the Burne-Joneses, kept open house. Two or three extra places were laid at lunch for any friends who might drop in, but whoever came, I sat next to my grandfather. I was allowed to blow into the froth of his beer ‘to make a bird’s nest’, or to have all the delicious outside from the mashed potatoes when they had been browned in the oven. If, disregarding truth, I said that my toast was always buttered on both sides, my statement was gravely accepted and the toast buttered accordingly. There can have been few granddaughters who were so systematically spoiled as I was and it is a legend that the only serious difference of opinion which ever arose between Gladstone and Burne-Jones was as to which of them spoiled an adored grandchild the more.”

She was a lively intelligent strong-minded woman who certainly didn’t ‘spoil’ her characters, giving and taking with a firm hand, but she has been described as looking on her characters with ‘sardonic kindness’; I find that a delightful way of describing her work and possibly it might describe her own character.

She lived in North Hobart for some years and the other day I went out to see if her old home at 405 Elizabeth Street is still there—

\* \* \* \* \*

“A nice little book” as a description of a novel would be seen by many writers, I’m sure, as the death knell. Yet there are a great many readers out there who are genuinely looking for “a nice little book”. About nine years ago I started noticing just how often people say things like “I hardly ever buy novels these days” or “I’m sorry but I don’t usually read modern fiction”; if I had the opportunity to press them for reasons, the answers

were various: “too sordid”, “too American”, “too much violence”, “the awful language” but most often people would say vaguely “I can’t seem to find the sort of stories I like”.

It was only gradually that I started to notice that the people most likely to make this gentle complaint were middle-aged to elderly women. It makes sense when you think about it. My mother, for example, finally had the time and the money in her old age to indulge herself a little; she was totally lost with such things as videos and computers but had always loved books. But she simply couldn’t find modern fiction or poetry which she liked. So the books she bought were reprints of old favourites, books bought in hope that her grandchildren would like them, occasional non-fiction, such as local histories or biographies of writers she found interesting—or, much the largest source, second-hand books. I asked a publisher once why there was so little fiction available with older women as the central characters. He said booksellers weren’t interested. Yet I think my mother would have bought books which had positive interesting older women as characters. I don’t know, though, if she would’ve wanted the ones that treat old women as either victims or monsters.

I had a novel returned once with the comment that the female character was unrealistic because she never swore. Now I am not in the habit of turning the air blue while my mother managed to live through two world wars, the great depression, the death of a baby and a husband, sundry droughts and other problems—without ever feeling the need to swear about things. Are we unrealistic? Is our money tainted and therefore unwanted by booksellers? (And possibly publishers?) Surely there are thousands of women, out there, who would agree with Georgette Heyer who did a great deal of research into the colourful language of the Regency era and earlier so she could be realistic without being sordid.

(This has been on my mind since reading Richard Todd’s *Consuming Fictions: The Booker Prize and Fiction in Britain Today*—because the questions asked of people do not necessarily reveal the true nature of book buying/reading. Interviewer: Have you read a book in the last 4 weeks? Me: Lots. Interviewer: Have you bought a book in the last 4 weeks? Me: Lots. But unless that interviewer thought to specify ‘new’ and ‘novel’ or ‘modern literary novel’ it would be quite misleading.)

Kate Grenville once said she started writing because she couldn’t find the sort of fiction she wanted to read. Obviously that isn’t always an option. And the new women’s fiction (excuse the generalisation) has women who have careers in advertising, the arts, the university, executive positions; they have affairs; they have money; they drink; they travel regularly—particularly to the USA or certain parts of Europe such as Tuscany and Paris; their lives tend to be more self-centred; they never seem to go to church or the CWA or do old-fashioned ‘charity-work’; they tend to vote Labor ... but there are lots of women readers who don’t fit this profile and who is writing for them?

\* \* \* \* \*

In a BBC talk in 1978 Barbara Pym said: “In the early 1960s I sent my seventh novel to my publishers. And to my horror they wrote back saying they didn’t feel they wanted it. I offered it to several others but the manuscript still came thudding back through the letterbox. One publisher said, ‘We think it’s very well written but there’s an old-fashioned air about it.’ Another thought that it wasn’t the kind of book to which people were turning—I wasn’t quite sure what he meant by that—while a third said curtly that their fiction list was full up for the next two years. I had never made my living as a writer so I still had my job, but my books had been published regularly and now it seemed that nobody wanted them. It was an awful and humiliating sensation to be totally rejected after all those years, and I didn’t know what to do about it. I did seriously consider trying to write something different—perhaps a thriller or a historical novel—but I never got very far with the idea.

Maybe it was too late to change my voice. I wrote two more novels in my own style and sent them round, but they still came back with the same kind of comments. Then, when

I was on the verge of retiring from my job at the African Institute, the idea for my last novel, *Quartet in Autumn*, came to me. And again, I started writing it with no real hope of getting it published. It's about four people in their early sixties—two men and two women—working in a London office. During the course of the story, the women retire and one of them dies. I wanted to write about the problems and difficulties of this stage in one's life and also to show its comedy and irony—in fact I'd rather put it all the other way round: my main concern was with the comedy and irony, the problems and difficulties having been dealt with almost excessively, one might say, elsewhere. I think some readers have been disappointed in this novel because it seems less light-hearted than some of my earlier ones, yet I enjoyed the writing of it almost more than any of the others, perhaps because I felt that I was writing for my own pleasure with no certain hope of publication at that time.

But then, at the beginning of 1977, both Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil wrote of me as 'an under-rated writer' in *The Times Literary Supplement*. As a result of this, *Quartet in Autumn* was accepted for publication, and two of my earlier books were re-issued. It was marvellously encouraging to be brought back from the wilderness. But it was disquieting too. I wonder how many other novelists have suddenly been told their work is not fashionable or saleable any more, and never been lucky enough to have the generous praise I had from the right people in the right place."

\* \* \* \* \*

June 3rd: Paul Grover  
 June 4th: Elizabeth Jolley  
 June 5th: Christy Brown  
 June 6th: Alan Seymour  
 June 7th: Elizabeth Bowen  
 June 8th: Jocelynne Scutt  
 June 9th: Brian Friel  
 June 10th: Saul Bellow  
 June 11th: Ben Jonson  
           Athol Fugard  
           Anna Akhmatova  
 June 12th: Charles Kingsley  
           Johanna Spyri  
 June 13th: Dorothy Sayers  
           Fanny Burney  
           W. B. Yeats  
 June 14th: Jerzy Kosinski  
           Harriet Beecher Stowe  
 June 15th: Thomas Randolph  
 June 16th: Joyce Carol Oates  
           Isabelle Carmody  
 June 17th: Henry Lawson  
           Kerry Greenwood  
 June 18th: Gail Godwin  
           Robyn Archer  
           Michel Quoist  
 June 19th: Salman Rushdie  
           Blaise Pascal  
 June 20th: Vikram Seth  
           Dorothy Simpson  
 June 21st: Jean-Paul Sartre  
           Clive Sansom  
 June 22nd: Erich Maria Remarque

H. Rider Haggard  
 June 23rd: Frank Dalby Davison  
           Winifred Holtby  
           Jean Anouilh  
 June 24th: Anita Desai  
 June 25th: George Orwell  
           Wendy Lowenstein  
 June 26th: Pearl Buck  
 June 27th: João Guimarães Rosa  
 June 28th: Luigi Pirandello  
           Henry VIII  
 June 29th: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry  
 June 30th: Czeslaw Milosz  
 July 1st: Dorothea MacKellar  
 July 2nd: Hermann Hesse  
 July 3rd: Franz Kafka  
           Charlotte Perkins Gilman  
 July 4th: Fay Zwicky  
 July 5th: Agnes Nieuwenhuizen  
 July 6th: Peter Singer  
 July 7th: Robert Heinlein  
 July 8th: Fergus Hume  
 July 9th: Barbara Cartland  
           Dorothy Thompson

\* \* \* \* \*

My introduction to Pam Ayres came at a morning tea at the Pittsworth Bowls Club in, I think, 1983. A young woman presented several selections of Ayres' poetry, and did it extremely well, including 'Hello Long Distance, Is That You?' It was my introduction to what we now call Performance Poetry but which used to be seen at best as Verse Speaking and at worst as Party Pieces and, much earlier in the century, as a recognised professional career in Elocution. I think I like the modern style best, it's nearly always fun, and a performance poet I particularly enjoy is Sue Moss.

Pam Ayres had visited Australia, and wrote several amusing pieces with an Australian connection such as 'The Exiled Gum'—

Don't stand me on the window sill  
 And pluck out every weed,  
 Don't sprinkle me with potash  
 To germinate me seed.  
 Me little heart is broken  
 My country was my all  
 If I can't sprout where the kookaburras shout  
 Well, I don't want to sprout at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

I would get more enjoyment from romance writing, love stories, the whole caboodle in fact if they contained more humour. I feel sure that the people who are really happy in their long-term relationships are the people who laugh together.

Pam Ayres had it right—  
 Come and walk beside me  
 For the sun is sinking low  
 And together to the edges  
 Of the ocean we shall go,  
 In perspective we shall put

Stepping lightly on the rubbish  
As it moulders underfoot.  
Where all the plastic bottles  
Blow across the golden sand  
And old refrigerators  
Know the tide's caressing hand,  
We will breathe the sweet aroma,  
I will take your hand for ever,  
Across life's broken glass,  
And I shall jettison you never.

Now if they can laugh about stepping in someone's abandoned lunch, through a pile of discarded condoms, and over a mile of plastic waste—well, I think the prognosis is good. Whereas Barbara Cartland never sets such trials for her young couples. They drift through an enchanted world, seemingly without broken fridges and flat tyres, and I, for one, am very dubious about their staying power.

\* \* \* \* \*

That I like romances with humour does not mean that a romance fails without humour; other people have different likes and dislikes. But I think there are three underlying problems with many works in the genre.

The first is an underlying sense of sado-masochism. In older romances women were raped, bullied, verbally abused, even spanked by the hero; his arrogance and bullying was actually treated as sexy. Modern works are less blatant but an underlying sense of bullying is often still present. We misunderstand if we interpret the need for conflict as a need to humiliate and verbally abuse women—and having the hero say at the end 'I love you' does not remove this problem.

Robin Norwood in *Women Who Love Too Much* says "both suffering for love and being addicted to a relationship are romanticized by our culture. From popular songs to opera, from classical literature to Harlequin romances, from daily soap operas to critically acclaimed movies and plays, we are surrounded by countless examples of unrewarding, immature relationships that are glorified and glamorized." She goes on to say, "Very few models exist of people relating as peers in healthy, mature, honest, nonmanipulative, and nonexploitative ways, probably for two reasons: First, in all honesty, such relationships in real life are fairly rare. Second, since the quality of emotional interplay in healthy relationships is often much subtler than the blatant drama of unhealthy relationships, its dramatic potential is usually overlooked in literature, drama and songs. If unhealthy styles of relating plague us, perhaps it is because that is very nearly all we see and all we know."

She expresses a wish to take over the writing of major soap opera scripts for one day—to show better ways of communicating and relating; this would highlight "how saturated we are with depictions of exploitation, manipulation, sarcasm, revenge seeking, deliberate baiting, piqueing of jealousy, lying, threatening, coercing, and so on"; but, sadly, I don't think the soap opera producers, any more than romance publishers, would be interested.

The second is that such books can fuel a sense of discontent. Saying that women need fantasy in their lives does not explain why the hero should almost invariably be rich and 'handsome' (though 'handsome is as handsome does' and some of the descriptions I find off-putting) and we all know how difficult it can be especially when life is being less than kind not to drift off into 'if only' day-dreams which fuel a sense of unhappiness, discontent and let-down. We would be un-human if we were never influenced by the fantasy worlds we dip into.

Barbara Cartland's writing epitomises the conflict between real obligations and making-dreams-come-true ... "her daughter Raine had fallen in love with Earl Spencer, and, after twenty-eight years of marriage, had left the Earl of Dartmouth and her four children.

This was the kind of situation which Barbara would never allow in one of her novels and here she had to face it in reality. She was desperately upset, but Raine said simply, 'It is just like one of your books, Mummy. I am wildly in love and there is nothing anyone can do about it!'"

The third problem is that as romances have become more explicit so they have fostered the belief that if you find your hero you will be sexually fulfilled. Every time you make love the two of you will have simultaneous orgasms.

Shere Hite's *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* which came out in the late 1970s says: "It is very clear by now that the pattern of sexual relations predominant in our culture exploits and oppresses women. The sequence of "foreplay," "penetration," and "intercourse" (defined as thrusting), followed by male orgasm as the climax and end of the sequence, gives very little chance for female orgasm, is almost always under the control of the man, frequently teases the woman inhumanely, and in short, has institutionalized out any expression of women's sexual feelings except for those that support male sexual needs."

Many women expressed their frustration about this: "I don't quite understand why for men, orgasm is presumed to occur each time, but for women it must be 'worked at'. Sex as it is defined between men and women is male sex." And, "I think most of the writers I've read don't understand women at all, sexually. They regard sex as an activity engaged in by two for the satisfaction of one. The current writers are worse than the older ones, because they stress the whore-like sexual techniques used by women for men. Women's needs are less and less emphasized, except by female writers."

(Most romances *are* written by women; I have the feeling that by jumping half on the bandwagon, by stressing that women can have orgasms but presenting them as invariable and usually the result of the 'hero's technique', they have not only failed to help women but have actually damaged women's ideas about themselves and sexuality. Now we have the added sense of failure. Why can't *we* achieve the simultaneous orgasms which have become *de rigueur* for our romantic heroines?)

"The reproductive model of sex insures male orgasm by giving it a standardized time and place, during which both people know what to expect and how to make it possible for the man to orgasm. The whole thing is prearranged, preagreed. But there are not really any patterns or prearranged times and places for a woman to orgasm—unless she can manage to do so during intercourse. So women are put in the position of asking for something "special," some "extra" stimulation, or they must somehow try to subliminally send messages to a partner who often is not even aware that he should be listening. If she does get this "extra," "special" stimulation, she feels grateful that he was so unusually "sensitive." So all too often women just do without—or fake it."

Barbara Cartland, bless her heart, has never been guilty of fostering the burden of the 'simultaneous orgasm'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Evolution is a fascinating thing; how, and more intriguingly, why did a wolf evolve into a Pekingese? Because life is safer on 'Mrs Pumphrey's' lap? But the thing that interests me today is *hair*. What's it for and why do some people have a lot of it? If it's to keep us warm why aren't the Lapps and the Inuit covered in it? If it's to keep us cool, a sort of insulation, then why don't the people of Black Africa have more of it? In fact, as a generalization, the people who are the proud possessors of the most hair tend to live around the Mediterranean, where it is neither boiling-hot nor freezing-cold.

Readers of romances will know that it exists for *le Sex Appeal* when it appears on the hero's chest—but is a definite no-no and must be shaved 5 times a week when it is on the heroine's legs. Now if the heroine likes running her hands through the forest on the hero's chest (bearing in mind that the vast majority of the world's men don't have hair on their chests) then I would like to ask, in the interests of fairness and non-discrimination, that the

hero should learn to like running his hands through the forest on the heroine's legs.

Taking evolution back quite a lot further, I find a lot of questions popping up. We had come from Nothing to Something, the Something being amoeba in the primeval soup, and we were doing very well by splitting in half every time we wanted some more amoeba. But! There came a great burst of radiation from the skies and the amoeba neatly began to develop X and Y chromosomes so that 2 sexes could develop. Now, why only 2 sexes? Why not 10 or 20? Think of the much greater evolutionary possibilities!

And these 2 sexes had now to develop different bodies but in perfect synchronization because if they got out of sync? Oh dear. But this made things very difficult for *women* because their bodies had to be able to do more things. Not only produce a cell with half the required number of chromosomes but then all the ins and outs in the way of hormones etc for gestation, parturition and lactation. Women, in effect, had to evolve *faster* so as to keep pace ... and not only women, of course, but everything from cows to female gnus ...

This is all quite remarkable and makes me feel very humble each time I contemplate the mysteries of Creation and Evolution.

And if a timely burst of radiation could send some amoeba—not all, I believe there are some still living in my kitchen sink—down the path to the Harlequin Superromance then might not a further timely burst send us back along that path, in that it might be only a *cul-de-sac*, and we will all once again happily become amoeba?

\* \* \* \* \*

Women in romances never seem to have any difficulty when they go to their cupboards to take out something to wear. There is always a choice and they always seem to know which one to choose. Nothing like the agonies of real life. Just how agonising real life can be I hadn't realised until I read Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*.

"United States law developed to protect the interests of the power structure by setting up a legal maze in which the beauty myth blocks each path so that no woman can "look right" and win. St. Cross lost her job because she was too "old" and too "ugly"; Craft lost hers because she was too "old," too "ugly," "unfeminine," and didn't dress right. This means, a woman might think, that the law will treat her fairly in employment disputes if only she does her part, looks pretty, and dresses femininely.

She would be dangerously wrong, though. Let's look at an American working woman standing in front of her wardrobe, and imagine the disembodied voice of legal counsel advising her on each choice as she takes it out on its hanger.

"Feminine, then," she asks, "in reaction to the Craft decision?"

"You'd be asking for it. In 1986, Mechelle Vinson filed a sex discrimination case in the District of Columbia against her employer, the Meritor Savings Bank, on the grounds that her boss had sexually harassed her, subjecting her to fondling, exposure, and rape. Vinson was young and "beautiful" and carefully dressed. The district court ruled that her appearance counted against her: Testimony about her "provocative" dress could be heard to decide whether her harassment was 'welcome.'"

"Did she dress provocatively?"

"As her counsel put it in exasperation, 'Mechelle Vinson wore *clothes*.' Her beauty in her clothes was admitted as evidence to prove that she welcomed rape from her employer."

"Well, feminine, but not too feminine, then."

"Careful: In *Hopkins v. Price-Waterhouse*, Ms Hopkins was denied a partnership because she needed to learn to 'walk more femininely, talk more femininely, dress more femininely,' and 'wear makeup.'"

"Maybe she didn't deserve a partnership?"

"She brought in the most business of any employee."

"Hmm. Well, maybe a little more feminine."

"Not so fast. Policewoman Nancy Fahdl was fired because she looked 'too much like a lady.'"

“All right, less feminine. I’ve wiped off my blusher.”

“You can lose your job if you don’t wear makeup. See *Tamini v. Howard Johnson Company, Inc.*”

“How about this, then, sort of ... womanly?”

“Sorry. You can lose your job if you dress like a woman. In *Andre v. Bendix Corporation*, it was ruled ‘inappropriate for a supervisor’ of women to dress like ‘a woman.’”

“What am I supposed to do? Wear a sack?”

“Well, the women in *Buren v. City of East Chicago* had to ‘dress to cover themselves from neck to toe’ because the men at work were ‘kind of nasty.’”

“Won’t a dress code get me out of this?”

“Don’t bet on it. In *Diaz v. Coleman*, a dress code of short skirts was set by an employer who allegedly sexually harassed his female employees because they complied with it.”

Many years ago I worked for a short time for the Smith Family in Sydney. At the end of my first week the manager called me in and said I obviously couldn’t cope with the work and it might be better if I went back to minding children (I’d been working as a mother’s help before that). I was quite willing to believe I was incapable of answering the phone and doing a bit of filing, but a friend of mine felt certain I’d been sacked because I rode a motorbike and had, among other clothes, two T-shirts with pictures of bikes on them. When I look back now I think she was right—as no one said, during that week, I wasn’t doing things right, would I like them to go over my duties once more as I obviously hadn’t caught on ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A.D. Hope wrote a poem which he titled ‘Advice to Young Ladies’; I am inclined to think ‘Advice to Young Men’ would’ve been equally pertinent ...

It begins:

A.U.C. 334: about this date

For a sexual misdemeanour, which she denied,  
The vestal virgin Postumia was tried.  
Livy records it among affairs of state.

They let her off: it seems she was perfectly pure;  
The charge arose because some thought her talk  
Too witty for a young girl, her eyes, her walk  
Too lively, her clothes too smart to be demure.

She is warned to “wear less modish and more pious frocks”; she is disgraced but life goes on. She has to watch every thing she says, everything she does and wears ... it becomes a living death. But it is more than the tragedy of one bright and lively woman, it is society’s. Hope sums up:

Historians spend their lives and lavish ink  
Explaining how great commonwealths collapse  
From great defects of policy—perhaps  
The cause is sometimes simpler than they think.

It may not seem so grave an act to break  
Postumia’s spirit as Galileo’s, to gag  
Hypatia as crush Socrates, or drag  
Joan as Giordano Bruno to the stake.

Can we be sure? Have more states perished, then,  
For having shackled the enquiring mind,  
Than those who, in their folly not less blind,  
Trusted the servile womb to breed free men?

\* \* \* \* \*

The other day I was pondering on the question: why do second-hand mysteries sell well yet you just about have to give away second-hand romances to get rid of them. In both cases people can get them at the library. In both cases buying new paperback editions is not particularly expensive. Yet, in my experience on many stalls, people snap up mysteries at a dollar or two a pop, whereas Mills & Boon at '5 for a \$1' doesn't get a lot of takers, even if they are the work of some of the best known romance writers such as Barbara Cartland, Janet Dailey or Emma Darcy. My answer, and I don't know how accurate it is, is that one romance is too like another romance and the endings are too similar; also there aren't the range of developed minor characters that a mystery requires. Hero, heroine, maybe a girlfriend, an aunt, an employer, possibly a *femme fatale* to get in the way, maybe another man to give you a tantalising page or two of wondering who she is actually going to marry—though as soon as you read their physical descriptions you have your answer. (And some romance-writers write *down* to their readers—as though, if I enjoy a romance, I must be a moron incapable of words beyond three syllables and paragraphs of more than two sentences; I find that off-putting.) A good mystery bears re-reading, formula or not (and Agatha Christie once described herself as the 'sausage machine'); it is harder, though not impossible, to find a paperback romance that bears re-reading. Several of Georgette Heyer's, such as *Cotillion*, *Arabella*, *Devil's Cub* and *The Corinthian*, I can re-read with pleasure but I'm afraid I cannot say the same for the 'Queen of Romance'. I think, after all, it *is* the lack of humour.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 10th: Frederick Marryat  
Nicolás Guillén

\* \* \* \* \*

Warren Tute in his biography *Cochrane* says "the example he set as a man of action had repercussions of which he could never have dreamed. When Cochrane was thirty-one, and at the height of his powers as Captain of the frigate *Imperieuse*, he accepted on board his ship as a First Class Volunteer a youngster called Marryat. The future author of *Frank Mildmay*, *Peter Simple* and *Mr. Midshipman Easy* was then fourteen years old. He idealized his Captain for all the qualities which most appeal to an impressionable boy of that age such as courage, physical strength and an easy commanding manner. Many years later when he had become a Captain himself and had begun to write what are some of, perhaps, the finest novels of the sea in the English language, he overlooked in his hero the possessiveness, jealousy, and ability to nurse a grievance which made Cochrane so complex a character in reality.

The hero Marryat projected in his books, who was basically Cochrane as Marryat had known him, was both romantic and richly comic. Conrad called these books 'the beginning of an inspiring tradition' and they were partly responsible for drawing Conrad himself to the sea. More extraordinary, perhaps, is the effect they had on one of the greatest German admirals—von Hipper. Hipper's mother was so appalled at her son's idea of going to sea when he was a boy that she gave him a set of Marryat's novels to discourage him since, in her opinion, they depicted what a fearful and barbaric life he would be forced to lead. The result we know."

Donald Thomas also wrote a biography of Cochrane, and also called it *Cochrane*, and says "In modern terms, Cochrane is perhaps most illuminating when seen against the social panorama of his age and in the full dimensions of his naval, political and personal life.

Directly or obliquely, his story lives in the poetry of Scott or Moore, the diaries of Creevey, the letters of William Beckford, the novels of Marryat, as much as in the despatches of the time, the court reports, or the contemporary press.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In all the brouhaha over Helen Demidenko a couple of worrying aspects of the cult of ‘writer-as-celebrity’ and, especially, the ‘young-writer-as-celebrity’ were glossed over.

Henry Handel Richardson once said “I felt that I had discovered what I liked best to do. To sit alone and unobserved, behind a shut door, and play with words and ponder phrases. What a contrast to the odious publicity of the concert platform.” But that old idea, of an author as a quiet person tucked behind a typewriter and surrounded by piles of paper, has increasingly given way, as more and more writers’ festivals, tours, interviews and book-signings take place, to the image of the author as an interesting and exciting person in her own right. The author often seems to get more attention than the actual book. But at twenty-three, unless you happen to have an unusual family or went off back-packing round South America at seventeen, you are faced with the situation: what can I say about myself? Uni? A bit of part-time work in a café? Dreams? Ambitions? Or do I say no to the publicity machine?

As a sixteen-year-old Frederick Marryat could write in his diary ‘April 1—Detained an American brig. April 2—Took a Spanish tower and blew it up. April 5—Cut a brig out from under a battery. April 8—Took a brig laden with wine—went in her to Gibraltar—’ but how many sixteen-year-olds, unless they have come here as refugees, can point to that sort of life. Yet the appetite of the media for excitement, for larger-than-life characters, provides a temptation to either create a new persona for yourself if you are afraid that you-as-you-are will make people yawn, or to exaggerate any interesting thing you’ve done till it can overwhelm your life.

The young writer who produces the expected novel of angst-ridden growing up, sex, drugs and alienation, may not have experienced any of this directly but she will not be required to prove her credentials as having roamed inner-city streets or got in with a group ‘shooting-up’ in an abandoned suburban warehouse. When Fotini Epanomitis produced the *Mule’s Foal* or Beth Yahp wrote about growing up in Malaysia in *Crocodile Fury* the media didn’t come round to see whether their families *did* come from Greece or Malaysia; their material was allowed them. (Was this because their books were insufficiently controversial?) Yet an imaginative *tour-de-force* which *isn’t* based on personal experience is looked upon with suspicion in the young writer. Helen Garner once said ‘I think a writer should at the very least be granted her material, and her subject matter’; she was referring to women’s writing but the same might be said of young writing. There was almost a sense that Helen Demidenko was talked into claiming a Ukrainian background because all the questions were slanted that way. It wasn’t accepted that she could’ve imagined or researched her material; it had to be received material for her to have managed to write the novel. If she was simply recording family stories that would make her a much less talented writer—and therefore no threat to the invisible limits that tend to hedge young writing round. Yet, if she’d been forty-five, would the media have constantly picked away at her writing, her sources, trying to find a personal connection—or would they have accepted a simple statement “This issue interested me so I researched and wrote the book”?

If we insist on turning the writer-into-celebrity then are we more likely to expect to find the writer *in* the book? And if the writer doesn’t obediently respond with personal experiences and anecdotes which fulfil our expectations will we keep at them until they sigh and say, yes, that was based on my grandfather and I got this from my great-uncle who was at Anzac Cove etc. etc. Do we need this kind of input because the cult of ‘writer-as-celebrity’ will be undermined if writers are allowed to retire quietly behind their typewriters again—and it is writers rather than books which sell books?

If Frederick Marryat’s sisters had wanted to write ‘sea-novels’ it would immediately

have been assumed they'd cribbed their material from their brother's manuscripts or jotted down his yarns told by the fire. Yet one of the best-regarded novels about Waterloo was Georgette Heyer's *An Infamous Army*. No one would suggest she'd personally experienced battle, bayoneted a man, lead a cavalry charge. (It may be as well that she was middle-aged before she wrote the book.) So if we undermine both the legitimacy and the infinite possibilities of the imagination will we get books which on the one hand are more self-centred and self-indulgent and on the other hand less truly imaginative, faction rather than fiction?

Young people, not just young writers, enjoy 'cocking a snook' at the establishment, whether that establishment is economic, political, military or even religious—and they rarely suffer by it because such establishments are pretty thick-skinned. But Helen Demidenko lost out doubly because she 'cocked a snook' at the literary establishment and it is a much more fragile creature. I am not sure she really understood what she was doing—that beginning your career by putting egg on the faces of the people whom you need as your peers, your mentors, your reviewers, your supporters, you run the risk of becoming a 'one-book writer'; never again will your work be treated with the same kind of trust, generosity, or sympathy that young writers need to make the leap from *enfant terrible* to admired and respected novelist.

Biographers allow famous writers what they kindly call a 'derivative phase', less famous writers 'copy', 'cheat', or 'plagiarise'; it's an occupational hazard. (I remember my father claiming that Catherine Gaskin's book *This Other Eden* which she wrote at eighteen was plagiarised. Was it? I don't know but perhaps 'derivative' is a fair comment and one she may later have felt was apposite.) So should we put a moratorium on young writers? You can be 'derivative' up to the age of, say, twenty-five, (it might even form a useful form of apprenticeship); after that—plagiarise and you'll find yourself without friends to come to your rescue with excuses.

\* \* \* \* \*

Frederick Marryat, I recently remembered, not only wrote children's books such as *Masterman Ready* but was also in our poetry books at school. Do you remember his piece *The Old Navy*?

The captain stood on the carronade: 'First lieutenant,' says he,  
'Send all my merry men aft here, for they must list to me;  
I haven't the gift of the gab, my sons—because I'm bred to the sea;  
That ship there is a Frenchman, who means to fight with me.  
And offs bobs, hammer and tongs, long as I've been to sea,  
I've fought 'gainst every odds and I've gained the victory! ... etc etc ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Cochrane was enough of a character to inspire any young writer; by turns, naive, flamboyant, crusading, dogmatic, hot-tempered, swash-buckling, honest and not-so-honest ... after the Napoleonic Wars, his time in parliament as MP for Westminster, a marriage at Gretna Green, and a court case in which he may have been innocent but did not come out of it absolutely squeaky-clean (it involved spreading a rumour that Napoleon was dead so as to push up commodity prices on the stock exchange), Cochrane looked for new worlds to 'conquer'. Warren Tute says of him "At the four corners of his tombstone are engraved the arms of Chile, Peru, Brazil and Greece, countries whose independence he helped to secure and who honour him to this day. In his own country he still remains but little known—a hero in a minor key—yet with it all, a century after his death, he seems upon reflection to be a remarkably modern man."

Reading of his experiences (which he later prepared as *Narrative of Services in the Liberation of Chili and Peru*) especially with Argentine 'liberator' José San Martín it is not hard to see why independence benefitted few and laid the groundwork for twentieth century problems. 'Liberator' Simón Bolívar made the famous claim 'He who serves a revolution

ploughs the sea' but, in fact, these men (Bolívar, San Martín, O'Higgins, Zenteno and others) saw liberation and revolution in terms of replacing Spanish-born Spanish officials with South American-born Spanish officials and taking over all their perks and privileges; Cochrane saw this very clearly: "he was, more than anything, alarmed by the sight of Spanish tyranny being replaced by an equally abhorrent form of oppression, masquerading as an army of "liberation"." All the venalities, corruptions, discriminations, inequalities and racism flowed through the change from colonialism to independence virtually unchecked. It was not even a case of "changing the colour of the bosses"; George Pendle wrote "When the wars of independence ended, no real *social* revolution had occurred. The structures of colonial society, inherited from Spain, remained essentially unaltered. The urban *criollos* (the principal leaders of the revolutions) quarrelled among themselves for the places of the deposed *peninsulares*. Rural *caudillos*—the 'strong men' on horseback—fought against the new authorities. To the mass of the population the change of masters was of no great consequence." Or as Dom Hélder Câmara said "Since the day of the Discovery, Latin-American society has grown and developed under the influence of the Church. Its social, economic, political, and cultural structure was forged in the molds of Iberian Christianity; and our wars of independence made no material change in our societies."

There have been few genuine revolutions of ideas or attitudes, in South America; those on the bottom have stayed on the bottom. It was Salvador Allende's government which probably came closest to earning the right to be called a revolution. Marxist may have been a convenient label (and the CIA played this for all it was worth) but it was really a revolution of the *mestizo* middle world against the privileged white Establishment. Certainly it was a class struggle but class was intimately linked to colour. It was a *racial* revolution before it was a *political* revolution. It might be said that it failed—but in one important respect Chile can never return to that way of complacent privilege—because to keep that privilege the Establishment had to endorse such brutality it lost its position of *moral* privilege. That, anyway, is my understanding.

\* \* \* \* \*

General Francisco Miranda is remembered for the part he played in the 'liberation' of South America and his role as a kind of father-figure, 'The Precursor', to those who followed such as Simón Bolívar, 'The Liberator'. He witnessed the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, he was for a time a captain in the Spanish Navy, he gained the ear of the British Prime Minister, William Pitt, and convinced him the Spanish Empire was in its death throes. He imagined it being followed by a huge nation reaching from Mexico to Tierra del Fuego, with an hereditary Incan Emperor and a bi-cameral parliament.

But Miranda had another remarkable protégé, Dr James Miranda Barry. Dr Barry, a British Army surgeon, was a pioneer of preventative medicine, working tirelessly for better health not only for ordinary soldiers, but also for the poor, prisoners, the insane, lepers, white and black, in various outposts of Empire. Prevention involved insistence (often against official opposition) on better barracks more sensibly sited, fresh air, exercise, personal hygiene, better diet, quarantine measures, as well as specific projects such as getting Cape Town's open sewers replaced by underground pipes. Dr Barry served in the Cape Colony, Mauritius, St Helena, Jamaica, Montreal and the Windward and Leeward Islands which included Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, St Vincent's, British Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Dominica. Almost two decades before Florence Nightingale burst to prominence in the Crimean War, Barry had appointed a coloured matron to the hospital on St Helena.

But Dr James Barry was a woman.

June Rose in her fascinating book *The Perfect Gentleman* implicates General Miranda (who may have also been Barry's father), Lord Buchan and Dr Fryer in an extraordinary conspiracy. "They had decided that Mary Anne Bulkley's younger daughter, whose

outstanding intellectual abilities were by now obvious, should have an education worthy of her. The problem was how to provide it: by virtue of her sex the little girl was barred from every university in the country.”

In 1809 the little girl, now James Barry, was enrolled as a medical student at Edinburgh University. She was 10 years old. She took chemistry, botany, anatomy, medical jurisprudence, Greek, natural and moral philosophy, midwifery and dissection. In her second year, she added practice of physic, theory of medicine, and, of course, Latin.

But this was the era in which the medical schools were supplied by the dreaded body-snatchers, the men who robbed grave-yards for fresh corpses. “—the many truly eminent teachers who filled the medical and surgical chairs of Scottish universities in successive generations brought about an immense improvement in teaching methods and won for themselves and the schools a European fame. In Edinburgh in 1750 there were about sixty medical students, being taught anatomy and swotting up crude prescriptions, which included ingredients such as spiders’ webs, human blood, frogs, insects and the excrement of horse, pig and even, peacock. In 1766 there were 160 students, but by 1800 the number had grown to 660—and still climbing.”

Well before the time of the infamous Burke and Hare, and around the time of Dr Barry’s training, a strange group known as Merry Andrew, Mouldiewarp, Spune and Praying Howard helped keep the medical school supplied with bodies for dissection. But it was the medical students themselves who did much of the “resurrecting”. Did Dr Barry? It is hard to imagine the little girl out in cemeteries at night.

Burke and Hare, strictly speaking, weren’t body snatchers. They lured people to their small lodging-house in Edinburgh and murdered them, then sold the bodies, giving rise to the ditty:

Down the close and up the stair,  
But and ben wi’ Burke and Hare.  
Burke’s the butcher, Hare’s the thief,  
Knox’s the man who buys the beef.

But as Norman Adams says in *Dead & Buried?* “From their dark deeds there came some good. It goaded the Government into passing the Anatomy Act. Today there is no trace of Tanner’s Close. Hare’s squalid lodging-house was swept away in 1902, but the stables remained long after to become one of Edinburgh’s first garages. In recent years the demolition squads moved in to make room for Argyle House, a multi-storied Government building, which rises like a white tombstone over the old town. But Burke’s memorial is his own skeleton, suspended in its show case at the anatomical museum. And, in a way, the museum itself.”

Meanwhile Dr Barry was making her way through this demanding course. “At the age of twelve she completed her thesis ‘De Merocele’ on hernia of the groin.”

It might be thought that with so much to hide Dr Barry would work quietly and keep a low profile. But no. She was fierce in defence not only of her rights but constantly spoke out whenever she saw injustice, cupidity, stupidity, corruption and a need for reform. When she arrived in the Caribbean, already, “In her sixteen years of army service Barry had seen more cruelty and privation than most men of her age and education would ever see.”

“As she aged, the two distinct sides of her character grew more marked: the passionate termagent, shrilling at authority and making enemies everywhere, and the infinitely generous and patient doctor.”

She paid an immense price in loneliness and eternal watchfulness, never able to simply relax. General Miranda had hoped that he would free Venezuela, at least, from Spanish rule and Dr Barry would set up an enlightened medical system for the country which might work as a model for other newly-liberated areas. It is awesome to think what she might have achieved with official support rather than official discouragement. But General Miranda died in a Spanish prison in 1816, his dreams unfulfilled. The real

memorial he left was the career of this remarkable woman.

“It is a tribute to her courage that she managed to subordinate her private life to her professional work yet survived as a human being. And never in her forty-six years’ service in the Army did she betray her ideas as a doctor or as a ‘perfect gentleman’.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Frederick Marryat went east to the First Burma War which I expect you know all about ...

Warren Tute in his foreword to his novel *The Rock*, set in Gibraltar, says: ‘People who wield power in the world, particularly those like the British, who do so with responsibility, are never much loved.’ The implication, that people who do so without responsibility *are* much loved, doesn’t seem to hold up all that well (but I would of course be interested in hearing of any examples readers might like to suggest). And just how responsible has Britain been? One hundred and fifty years after the fact, Britain has apologised to Ireland for the million preventable deaths of the Irish famine. A 1920s report suggests that 1.5 million people had died of famine since 1850 in British India. (Will they receive an apology?) And will Britain apologise to the Palawa people of Tasmania for attempted genocide in the 19th century?

On the other hand I do believe that people have the right to keep some illusions. Life can sometimes be a grim tough old business without them.

So what about the First Burma War? Was it an occasion of British responsibility? “Two Anglo-Burmese wars (1824-26 and 1852) followed Myanmar’s occupation of Assam and cost it not only Assam but also Manipur, Arakan, Tenasserim, and eventually Pegu. The rest of Myanmar fell to the British in 1885 after the third Anglo-Burmese War.” The Britannica goes on to say that British “economic policies impoverished much of the population” which led to an uprising in 1931. The Burma War was ended by the Treaty of Yandobo (1826) which also required Burma to pay a substantial indemnity, to surrender claims to Manipur and Assam, to agree to refrain from further warfare against Thailand, and to conclude a supplementary commercial treaty. It would be nice to think Britain was doing all this out of concern for the Assamese—but the simple fact was, British expansionist policy had come into collision with Burmese expansionist policy which was expansionist only in a very modest way. The wishes of the people of Assam didn’t have much to do with it. Once in control of Burma, the British set about insulting the Burmese with impunity: their refusal to remove their shoes at court just one of the ways in which they kept Burmese feelings of resentment on the boil. Someone once wrote that the British empire was lost more by social insult than social injustice. I think there is considerable wisdom in that quip. And responsibility? I must admit I didn’t find much evidence of it when reading up on Burmese history.

Marryat’s sea novels are all written in a comic vein; as though the tough life could only be endured with a sense of humour. But his non-fiction work *Suggestions for the Abolishment of Impressment*, which came out in 1822, was a serious attempt to do away with the notorious press-gangs. It did not help his career. As Thomas writes: “Some years later, he had occasion to seek permission from William IV to wear a French order conferred on him by Louis XVIII and, at the same time, to seek promotion. The King, having been Lord High Admiral as Duke of Clarence, took a keen interest when the request was forwarded to him.

“Marryat! Marryat!” said the old King suspiciously. “By-the-by, is not that the man who wrote a book against the impressment of seamen?”

“The same, your majesty.”

“Then he shan’t wear the order, and he shall have nothing!”

Like most nineteenth century novelists Marryat was fascinated by the occult, the macabre, the ghostly. His werewolf story ‘The White Wolf of the Hartz Mountains’ still turns up regularly in ‘supernatural’ anthologies. Told on a ship off Sumatra, though the

story itself is set in eastern Europe, it slightly pre-figures the work of Conrad.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 11th: E. B. White

July 12th: Pablo Neruda

July 13th: Wole Soyinka

John Clare

July 14th: Isaac Bashevis Singer

July 15th: Iris Murdoch

July 16th: David Campbell

Christopher Koch

\* \* \* \* \*

Gerald Priestland wrote a book called *The Dilemmas of Journalism* and although it came out nearly twenty years ago it still seems both relevant and amusing though with a slightly old-fashioned feeling; not least because of the concentration of the media since then into far fewer hands through mergers and takeovers.

Gerald Priestland was a BBC correspondent to places such as Washington, Paris, New Delhi, Vietnam and Beirut, before becoming head of the Religious Affairs department. He says “Victorian newspapers ... were written largely for upper-middle-class Anglican readers” and his book, in fact all his books, are written for middle-class English readers with their hearts presumed to be in the right places.

He is always sympathetic to journalists—and admires those such as Alistair Cooke, Robert Fisk, Bernard Levin and Eric Sevareid; Alistair Cooke, he points out, has seen every American president since Herbert Hoover in action—and he is fundamentally sympathetic to the media even though “our concern about them (people elsewhere especially in the Third World) tends to be restless, volatile, leaping from one end of the world to the other, arriving always too late and leaving usually too soon” and he tends to believe the media has less influence than it is usually credited with: “The mass media did not make Lenin happen, or Hitler, Nasser, Churchill, or Mao Tse-Tung. Nor did they invent communism, nazism, the IRA or the colonial liberation movements. Indeed, although they reported all these developments in the end, the mass media managed to sleep through the formative years of most of them” and “In comparison with authors, neither journalists nor anyone else would over-rate the influence of journalists” and he goes on to list the *Bible*, the *Koran*, and the writings of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Rousseau, Darwin, Clausewitz, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Jung, Keynes and Dr Spock as being far more important.

Can the media influence voters? “I have never had the experience of meeting a listener or reader who complained he had been tricked by the media into voting the wrong way. But I have met plenty who were convinced that other, less perceptive, voters had been so deceived.” But then it depends on who has been listening to whom. “It was, I think, a former Director General of the BBC who remarked that since only the young had the stamina to work in television and only the elderly the time to watch it, TV was tending to become the young telling the old what the old would rather not hear.”

He comes back to this question in his collection of BBC religious talks *Yours Faithfully*—“Personally I think the influence of journalists like myself is grossly overrated. Listeners have minds of their own, and even those who write to accuse me of undermining the faith add that, of course, their own faith remains unaffected—it is other, less strong-minded folk, they are concerned about, people who presumably cannot be trusted to make up their own minds.” He also makes the useful point “I submit that Christians ought not to be scared of a moral issue just because someone has stuck a political flag on it.”

Secrecy? Complexity? “To my mind the saddest of heresies is that there can be any simple explanation for complex events.” (Which is one good reason for supporting authors for, as George Orwell wrote, “I write because there is some lie I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. Writing a book

is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven by some demon who one can neither resist nor understand".) And "I can see very few cases for secrecy: defence secrets if you believe in them (I don't), short-term police tactics, some diplomacy where delicate timing is called for. Otherwise, if truth is to make us free, we must surely press on towards open government. People have the right to conduct their private affairs in private, and I hold no brief for intrusion into privacy. But I see no reason why public affairs, commissioned and paid for by the public should be protected as if they were private property."

Interestingly, Alistair Cooke, in *Six Men*, does not agree with what is usually taken as a shining example of media responsibility and rectitude—their decision not to report on the affair between Edward VIII and Mrs Simpson. "In law, too, the marriage of a British sovereign is like any other. But the constitutional rule—which it took the English Revolution of 1688 to establish—is that in any conflict of power, the Parliament is above the King and he must accept the advice of Parliament through his ministers on everything that affects public policy and the public interest. (Since the 'public interest'—not the public curiosity—in a royal marriage can only fairly be represented by the majority opinion of the House of Commons, this provision was crucial in the decision to let the King go.)

A general understanding of this historical rule, even some vigorous public argument about it, might have cleared the ground on which the King, the Parliament and the people could have taken their stand. But the great mischief was done by the newspaper proprietors. Their voluntary suppression of all news about the King and his affair deprived the people, and great numbers of public men and women, including probably a majority of the House of Commons, of any relevant knowledge about the constitutional crisis when it broke on them like a hurricane. They were all awash in a roaring storm, grabbing at futile props to their public status, their self-esteem, and their romantic or moral view of the monarchy. They had only a few days in which to re-examine a radical conflict of power that had taken several centuries of English history to resolve in favour of the people's sovereignty."

Priestland quotes a French ambassador who "once confided to me that if he had to choose between diplomatic cables and his daily papers as sources of information, he would always choose the newspapers."

Having just read Richard Walsh and Gerald Munster in *Secrets of State* I am tempted to agree. They say "The closer we looked at Australian perceptions of international affairs and the formation of policy, the more doubtful we became of the widespread pretensions to official expertise. We found elementary non sequiturs jostling school-boy howlers; we grew amazed at the pervasive disposition to accept false assurances from friends and the complacency about adequate information concerning supposed enemies. We learnt to put up with platitudes recycled as through Tibetan prayer wheels, but our patience was stretched when bewilderment was disguised as maturity of judgement. We breathed sighs of relief when the blemishes of analysis were not translated into policy, but we soon realised that this was because the Australian government had neither the capacity nor the opportunity to intervene in the course of events."

At times it would almost be funny if the consequences did not impinge on other peoples—"The Americans had adopted wholly inconsistent attitudes: in the Indian Ocean, they resisted a "zone of peace" because the Soviet Navy was present—allegedly in greater force than the United States; but in the South Pacific, the United States resisted a zone because the Soviet Union had no naval presence and the US dominated the scene. On the Australian side, nobody pointed out these gross inconsistencies."

But for a major problem which continues to beset diplomats and senior bureaucrats in Foreign Affairs there is no simple answer.

"The spectacle of Australian diplomats who go to some impoverished foreign country and send back glowing reports about the transient strongmen who strut about the capital city of the state is relatively familiar. It has not been confined to Asia, but could be

observed in the Greece of the Colonels and the Spain of Franco. Diplomats often become the advocates of the country where they reside: the phenomenon is called “capitalitis” in Canberra and “cliency” in Washington. But the habit is particularly catching, and the reports are all the more misleading when the country is both impoverished and the regime dictatorial. The diplomatic deviation is sustained by the prevailing circumstances: under dictatorships, diplomats have little access to the political opponents of the regime; the newspapers print only government-approved material; their own incomes condemn envoys to rub shoulders with a tiny privileged minority; and a long life inside the bureaucracy makes career officers distrustful of public controversy.

The habit of apologising for dictators nonetheless remains disturbing. If it were out in the open, it might enliven political debate. When it is put forward as “expert opinion”, it becomes insidious. Under the guise of “good relationship”, it promotes active Australian support for a regime against its own subjects, who on overthrowing that regime, have been known to take fierce revenge against the foreign friends of their oppressors.”

In their chapter on East Timor in 1975 they say “Woolcott here did a double-take with “national interest”. He recommended that Australian policy should be to pursue it as a pragmatic step, and he observed that this was what other countries were doing, in spite of their apparent ideological biases. To suggest that the foreign policy of others always reduces to their “national interest” is false, and in the Timor context it was totally misleading. Far from dealing with a group of pragmatic politicians, Australia faced a ruling group whose origins and survival were intricately inter-twined with their hostility to communism and who saw contemporary events in Timor through the grossly distorting spectacles of the Indonesian past.

The first step in formulating a policy to deal with that outbreak of fanaticism to our North would have been to recognise it for what it was. Neither Whitlam far away, nor Woolcott right next to it, managed to do so.”

Woolcott’s famous cable recommending a pragmatic rather than a principled response to Indonesia’s planned invasion of East Timor still gets quoted regularly. But what no one has ever really pointed out is that he wasn’t recommending a pragmatic stance at all. He was encouraging a prolonged bout of wishful thinking—which has resulted in Australia being the only Western nation in the world being legally bound into Indonesia’s illegal position yet, at the same time, no Australian government can guarantee that

- East Timor will never become independent through its own efforts
- Indonesia will never change its government or its policies on East Timor
- the U.N. and the international community will never take action to help East Timor become independent

Genuine pragmatism does not encourage governments to paint themselves into corners nor does it encourage them to go out on to limbs which can then be sawn off by more principled or, possibly, more pragmatic governments ...

Mr Whitlam put his own position in *Abiding Interests*; I have heard a number of comments and criticisms, so I won’t go into it in detail but just mention two of his claims which seemed to me to show a lack of scholarship. He says Australians knew more about Portugal at the beginning of the twentieth century than at the end but he appears to base this solely on the fact that the British monarchy was related to the Portuguese monarchy and that Edward VII had made a state visit to Portugal. He doesn’t explain why the assassination of the Portuguese king went almost unnoticed in Australia and he clearly isn’t a fan of SBS radio or TV. But the sub-text appears to be ‘so therefore we knew more about Timor at the beginning of the century than at the end—and therefore I (Whitlam) cannot be blamed for not knowing how to respond to the secret plan of the Indonesian generals to grab East Timor in 1974/75.’ By the early 1970s East Timor was receiving around 14,000 visitors a year, the majority of them Australian, and there were 3 flights a week between Darwin and East Timor. I doubt that this was the case in 1900. But then Indonesia closed

East Timor from 1976 to 1989. It is only since then that there has been an explosion in the growth of people interested in East Timor. By the end of the 20th century, the number of people calling themselves East Timor supporters and having a good basic knowledge of the country will exceed the number of East Timorese in the world. And there are support and interest groups in places as diverse as Nepal, Hong Kong, Austria, Canada, Finland and PNG. Was this the case in 1900? Mr Whitlam provides no evidence.

Mr Whitlam let his personal dislikes guide him on this issue, forgetting that private feelings and public responsibilities are two different things. As L. M. Montgomery has the old sea captain say, “it ain’t our feelings we have to steer by through life—no, no, we’d make shipwreck mighty often if we did that. There’s only the one safe compass and we’ve got to set our course by that—what it’s right to do.”

Differing religious, philosophical and ideological systems, with their differing interpretations of right and wrong, have made our system of international law a vital lowest common denominator to decide what is *right* in relations within and between countries. International law is flawed but it does provide both a ‘compass’ in a world full of ignorance, egos, prejudices, corruption, behind-the-scenes influence and horse-trading, and a benchmark by which the performances of individual leaders and nations can be judged. Australia, as a party to the 1960 U.N. Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (as is Indonesia) and other instruments of international law, had such a compass and benchmark.

But Mr Whitlam conflated private dislike of the Timorese with public duties and responsibilities towards them as colonized people—failing to see that the two are different and that, as prime minister, the first should always have been irrelevant to his decision-making. It is on that failure that his record must be judged.

He says of the aborted Portuguese visit in 1991, as an excuse for Indonesian brutality, that Portugal “mischievously included an Australian anti-Indonesian journalist resident in Lisbon in its delegation”; surely Mr Whitlam is not suggesting all the Portuguese journalists were *pro*-Indonesian?

(It could be pointed out that the use of anti- and pro-Indonesian is misleading anyway. Few of East Timor’s supporters are anti the ordinary people of Indonesia; they are rather anti-Suharto, anti-ABRI, and, with possible reservations, anti-Habibie.)

What Mr Whitlam doesn’t think to mention is that the Indonesians did not want Jill Jolliffe because she had a deep personal knowledge of East Timor—having written a book *East Timor: Nationalism or Colonialism* and numerous newspaper reports and articles—and it is much easier to pull the wool over the eyes of people who haven’t ‘been there before’.

But it is the work of Brian Toohey in his 1982 *National Times* articles, and his later book *The Book of Leaks* with Marian Wilkinson, which demolishes Gough Whitlam’s position. As they put it, “The leaks showed that the US knew that Indonesia had been conducting a covert paramilitary campaign against East Timor for over a year before the full-scale invasion in late 1975. Under intelligence sharing arrangements with Australia a large part of this information was passed on to Canberra. Additionally, much of the intercepted communications that formed the core of the US intelligence came from radio antennae at the base run by the Australian DSD (Defence Signals Directorate) at Coonawarra, near Darwin. Neither government attempted to dissuade Indonesia from its aggression. Indeed, they quietly condoned it. The intelligence data showed for the first time the full dimensions of the Indonesian determination to take over its small neighbour and its subsequent efforts to cover up the behaviour of its occupation forces. These measures even extended to serious planning to sink a ship bringing in a United Nations envoy. ... One of the most sensitive aspects of the top-secret intelligence relates to how Indonesia operated a two-track policy in its moves to conquer Timor. One arm of the policy called for a full-scale invasion. The other involved clandestine warfare, including possible terrorism, that

was designed to subvert Timor so that it would fall into Indonesian hands without the need for overt military intervention. The clandestine program operated for more than a year before the Indonesians resorted to outright invasion in December 1975. The CIA observed—without comment—that the activities of the Indonesian Special Forces in Timor were intended to provoke the very chaos that Jakarta then used to justify the invasion. Other features of the documents are the covert supply of arms by Malaysia for use against the Timorese, and the Indonesian sensitivity to any US or Australian disapproval of its behaviour towards Timor.

As events turned out, neither the US nor Australia utilised this potential leverage to restrain the Indonesians. In fact the documents refer to President Soeharto drawing support from the attitude of the then Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, on Timor ... Whitlam rejected Portuguese requests for Australia to form part of an international peace-keeping force for East Timor, although the proposal at least had the potential to allow a genuine free choice for Timor between independence and incorporation into Indonesia”.

Yet none of this explains the almost visceral hatred Mr Whitlam expressed, and continues to express, towards the Timorese; continuing to call them ‘thugs’ and ‘terrorists’.

(Initially, I was tempted to see this as the result of an old sense of guilt dating from WW2—in the words of Martin Boyd, “it is a truism that the only people we are unable to forgive are those whom we have wronged”, or the much earlier words of Tacitus, “It is human nature to hate those whom we have injured”—because there were at least 91 bombing raids on Dili alone during WW2, many of them by the RAAF. But Mr Whitlam’s squadron does not appear to have been involved in any Timor ‘sorties’. And Mr Whitlam, as an ordinary serviceman, cannot be seen as being in any way responsible for the official Australian decision to violate East Timor’s neutrality.)

José Ramos-Horta wrote in his ‘autobiography’, *Funu*—“As the Timor issue became more popular in Australia, Whitlam became more virulently anti-FRETILIN. Of Timorese leaders, he had this to say:

Political parties emerged there for the first time in May 1974 ... They were led by mestizos ... who seemed to be desperate to succeed the Portuguese as rulers of the rest of the population.

And on another occasion:

I myself hesitate to accept at face value the claims of the political personalities who have emerged in the first year of political activity in Timor. They have sprung from what appears to have been a political vacuum under the Portuguese. Most appear to represent a small elite class—the educated, the government officials, and various other Westernized elements.

Whitlam ignored the historical fact that the “educated” have always led liberation struggles everywhere in the world, for this is their historical and moral responsibility. In his vindictive drive against East Timor’s independence, Whitlam tried to discredit the entire leadership with labels such as *mestizos*. One is tempted to ask how many aborigines are in the Australian government? For anyone aware of the fate of the original inhabitants of Australia, and the present living conditions of those who survived the head-hunting pogroms of the 19th century, Whitlam’s professed preference for a racially pure Timorese leadership was an intellectual travesty—to say the least.”

I know that there are many good-hearted people within the ALP who believe Mr Whitlam couldn’t possibly have been or said anything racist—and therefore the Timorese must’ve misunderstood. But Cheryl Buchanan, in a little booklet about the struggle of the Larrakia people of Darwin, *We Have Bugger All!*, writes of their visit to the 1972 ALP Conference to try to stop building development going ahead on the land they were claiming, (for which several Larrakia, including Fred Fogarty, had already been jailed on what appeared to be trumped-up charges): “We saw Enderby and Murphy. Murphy was the

most sympathetic of the lot, but only seemed to be interested in the aspect of legal aid for Fred. We also spoke to Whitlam, who had the most racist attitude of them all. We related the story to him, and Fred said, "Look we cannot afford to wait any longer. It only takes them 10 months to build really big suburbs." Whitlam's joke for the day was, "You've waited for 200 years, a few more years won't matter." A few more jokes, and finally we got a response from Whitlam. That was when we threatened to put up the tent embassy again. He looked embarrassed and the meeting broke up."

Recently I heard someone say, "The trouble with Whitlam is that he is caught in a time warp", so perhaps he deserves sympathy not criticism, for there are few fates more terrible than the constant compulsive need to re-live and re-hash old mistakes, angers, regrets, excuses and justifications, instead of finding the courage and integrity to admit them and move on ...

\* \* \* \* \*

James Gordon Bennett the Younger was proprietor of the New York Herald between 1867 and 1918 and he set out rules of courtesy and fair play "for the guidance of Reporters and Copyreaders". Among his rules were:

Do not use any expression that will unnecessarily hold any one up to ridicule. The printing of anonymous interviews, statements and implied accusations is forbidden.

Don't say "Chinaman" for a Chinese.

Don't call a Jew a Hebrew.

Don't use "Italian" in crime stories; say foreigner. Reflections on nationalities or races are taboo.

Don't say "colored man" when you mean negro.

Don't call her an "old woman," say "aged."

He should also be remembered for his delightfully brief response to William Randolph Hearst who, hoping to purchase the Herald, cabled Bennett to ask the paper's price and received a telegram: 'Price of Herald three cents daily. Five cents Sunday. Bennett.'

H. L. Mencken, author of *The American Language* and *New Dictionary of Quotations*, was once taken to task for describing a black Iowa lawyer as having a 'complexion the colour of a good ten-cent cigar' and accused of 'Hitlerite references'. He complained of 'the growing sensitiveness of politicians. Nobody denounced me as a white-baiter when I wrote that Herbert Hoover had a complexion like unrisen dough'. But descriptions would seem to fall under roughly the same guidelines as 'ethnic jokes'. David Dale paraphrases Michael Kinsley's guidelines (Kinsley was editor of the *New Republic* magazine):

1. It's best to tell jokes on your own ethnic group, so that you may end up challenging the stereotype, rather than endorsing it.

2. If the joke is about another group, consider whether you would be embarrassed to tell it to a member of that group. If you would, don't tell it to anyone.

3. Consider if the joke insults a group which is already suffering rather than a group which can look after itself. On this criterion, you should be less inclined to tell a joke about Aborigines than one about Italians.

4. Remember that some traits are more offensive than others. According to Kinsley, jokes about drunkenness, laziness, or greed are more tolerable than jokes about physical characteristics, personal habits or intelligence.

5. Kinsley says, 'If you tell an ethnic joke, make sure its funny ... Wittiness is important not only for its own sake—to compensate for any offence—but as a test of motive. An unfunny ethnic joke is merely an expression of contempt. A funny one need not be.'

This particular question came up in regard to Eric Jolliffe's cartoon series *Witchetty's Tribe*; he was accused of being racist in the early 70s and a variety of people including

some Aborigines and historian George Blaikie came to his defence; the strange thing I thought, as I read the claims and counter-claims, is that in his efforts *not* to be racist he forgot about sexism. It is this which leaves a slightly sour taste to some of his humour.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just been browsing through Paul Lyneham's *Political Speak: The bemused voters' guide to insults, promises, leadership coups, media grabs, pork-barrelling and old fashioned double-speak*. It came out in 1991 and although it's still amusing and relevant it probably needs to be updated about every five years; after all, there are new parties on the political scene and who now remembers who Charles Blunt was?

At the end he gives his 'Political Dictionary'; just a little taste—

Aid, foreign—a budget outlay that shrinks each year in inverse proportion to the needs of the Third World.

Amateur—a Minister who does not tout for political donations.

Ambassador—a job for political mates who have touted for too many political donations.

Banana republic—a nation in which a Treasurer in an Italian suit creates mass unemployment in a bid to curb imports.

Budget—an annual ceremony in which the Treasurer is allowed to lock up the Press Gallery.

Eminent—a person so important he can appear in hotel lobbies without his trousers.

Gerrymander—stacking the system to make the undeserving invincible.

Grovel—for the ambitious polly who accidentally beats the Prime Minister at golf.

Jargon—political code enabling pollyies to fill speeches and press releases without informing the public of anything, as in 'EPAC and the IMF say our GDP will exceed the OECD average if we continue to deregulate and aim for a level playing field. OK?'

Jobs—useful paid work engaged in by many Australians before we continued to deregulate and aimed for a level playing field.

Junket—international fact-finding tours of major importance on which our politicians sacrifice their precious time during the Australian winter, e.g., a study of level playing fields in the south of France.

Mortgage—the means by which families in the nineties are forced to pay for the stupidity of the banks in the eighties.

National debt—the legacy that will convince our kids that age does not mean wisdom.

Swinging voters—those who can't decide how to make the best of a bad deal.  
and—

Tycoons—the 'great Australians' of the eighties who have left us eternally in their debt in the nineties.

\* \* \* \* \*

Now that I have convinced you that the problem lies with politicians and diplomats rather than the media let me wash away that comforting rock and leave you swimming—

Martin A. Lee and Norman Solomon begin *Reliable Sources: A Guide to detecting Bias in News Media* with: "Imagine turning on the television to watch the evening news on a major network. You're familiar with the anchor and many of the correspondents, but there is something different about this particular broadcast. Instead of the usual lineup of corporate sponsors, tonight's news is brought to you by the United Mine Workers, the Machinists Union, the American Federation of Teachers, and Teamsters for a Democratic Union. You switch to another network news program and there are commercials for Greenpeace, the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Sierra Club.

If we saw only commercials from labor organizations or environmental groups on television it would doubtless strike us as odd, out of kilter. Yet we rarely give it a second thought when we see one commercial after another from corporate sponsors. They are so prevalent and so routine that we hardly pause to dwell on their implications. A whole

generation of Americans has come of age in a TV environment so conditioned by corporate sponsors that it's hard to envision any other state of affairs."

They give some useful rules of thumb, including A. J. Liebling's adage, "freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

- "When you watch TV or read a newspaper, be alert and skeptical".

- Be conscious of who the sponsors and advertisers are.

- Be aware of what other businesses are owned by TV networks and newspapers, along with what those businesses produce, where and who by.

- "Our society demands that politicians and government officials disclose their financial involvement. Why shouldn't the media disclose theirs?"

- "Western reporters cover South Africa from the point of view of the people who run it, not from the point of view of those who suffer it" quoted from *Africa Report*. That holds true for most reports. We hear what President X said yesterday; we rarely hear from the people who will be disadvantaged by his latest decision.

- Corrections, background information, and dissenting points-of-view are rarely given the same blaze of coverage. Sometimes they don't even appear in the same paper or magazine. Sometimes they don't appear until years later ...

Lee and Solomon provide this telling story: 'In August 1987, *New York Times* editorial writer Karl Meyer reminisced about Major Smedley Butler, describing him as the U.S. Marine hero who tried to bring "true democracy" to Nicaragua 75 years earlier. Repeated U.S. interventions in Nicaragua had been motivated by our desire to spread democracy, said Meyer. As proof he cited a communiqué from Washington that Major Butler carried with him to Nicaragua: "America's purpose is to foster true constitutional government and free elections."

Butler, however, saw his role somewhat differently than the historical revisionists at the *Times*. He admitted rigging Nicaragua's 1912 election on behalf of the Taft administration, which entailed rounding up 400 Nicaraguans who could be counted on to vote for the U.S.-controlled dictator, Adolfo Diaz. Only those 400 were told of the election, and as soon as they cast their ballots the polls were closed. "Today," Butler wrote home to his wife, "Nicaragua has enjoyed a fine 'free election,' with only one candidate being allowed to run ... To the entire satisfaction of our State Department, Marines patrolled all the towns to prevent disorders."

After Butler retired, according to editorial writer Meyer, he "lamented the futility of his own interventionist missions." Not exactly. Butler attacked the motivation behind U.S. meddling. The *New York Times* didn't see fit to print Butler's speech before the American Legion on August 21, 1931, in which he stated: "I spent 33 years being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.

"I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1916. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenue in. I helped in the rape of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street.

"I had a swell racket. I was rewarded with honors, medals, promotions ... I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was operate in three cities. The Marines operated on three continents." '

\* \* \* \* \*

Perhaps you're wondering when I'm ever going to get round to Christopher Koch and his book which sparked off this long foray into the world of journalists and journalism, *Highways to a War*. Koch says "Finally, the influence and inspiration of two other books must be acknowledged: *One Crowded Hour*, Tim Bowden's account of the life of the

combat cameraman Neil Davis, and *Page After Page*, the autobiography of the cameraman and stills photographer Tim Page” but there were some mutterings that he had taken more than inspiration from *One Crowded Hour*. Had he? At first I thought I would read both books and make up my own mind. Then that struck me as a good way to spoil my enjoyment of both. So I’ve been reading *Highways to a War* and I’ll leave it to other people to make whatever comparisons they wish ...

Yet while Neil Davis was very definitely a man, Koch’s Mike Langford is more in the nature of an idea. He is physically elusive but I also found him elusive as a character; as though he’d been created to explore the dilemma between sympathy and impartiality and where it might take the reporter. (It takes Langford into uneasy waters.) Yet the dilemma is more obscure than it seems. All reporting, in words and pictures, is partial and determined by sympathies. Even if the reporter is driven by ideology, ideas, curiosity, money ... people are always going to intrude.

Mike Langford is not the only one to believe that the Western governments which kept the South Vietnamese fighting instead of negotiating, then ran away and left Saigon to face the arrival of the North Vietnamese alone, were guilty—even though many of his fellow reporters do not share his sympathy for the South Vietnamese soldiers.

As one of the men says in explaining why journalists don’t get their novels written—‘We live *inside* things like the war in Vietnam, and novelists don’t, on the whole: they tend not to have the stomach for it. And we know in the end that it’s impossible to bring it back as it really was. So we give up; we get paralysed; the pages lie in the back of the desk and turn yellow, and we go out and get pissed instead.’ Impartiality and objectivity are fictions and belong to novelists, not newsmen.

It’s a long book, too long perhaps, the men get lost sometimes in the narrative, but there are moments which particularly struck a chord with me.

Jim Feng says of Phnom Penh in 1975—‘none of us had believed that Phnom Penh would fall in those days’—and I found that strange. Was it what reporters were saying to each other in 1975—or saying to Christopher Koch? I was in Phnom Penh early in 1973 and people accepted with a kind of fatalistic calm that the Khmer Rouge could come in at any time. Lon Nol’s army had neither the will nor the ability to stop them. Power and water were off for anything up to 12 hours a day and there was a 10pm—6am curfew. It was like watching a clock run down. But the Khmer Rouge chose instead to consolidate in the countryside. The Americans increased their aerial bombardment. Those two ‘missing’ years, I believe, hold a key to Khmer Rouge behaviour later on. Koch has a Cambodian say of them ‘They are like the Nazis’ and I’ve often wondered if a comparison with the SS would not help us to understand them better. The city, left isolated, gained a psychological quality (rightly or wrongly) as the centre for all that was crowded, decadent, greedy, influenced by foreigners, a hot-bed of tainted money and failed enterprise and bought politicians: compared to the SS idea of the country and its peasant farmers as something pure and natural and healthy which could look back to the days of the ancient mythical wars and warriors in which physical beauty and physical courage meant more than any money-making ability or intellectual development ...

I have read that Ieng Sary, Pol Pot, and others met with old SS men in Europe. I wonder ...

\* \* \* \* \*

July 17th: Christina Stead

\* \* \* \* \*

Christina’s father is always taken as her model for the father, Sam, in her best-known book *The Man Who Loved Children*. Her own image of her father, as a cold, domineering man who was unsympathetic to both her as a girl, because she wasn’t pretty, and to her ambitions, is well-known. So how did other people see David Stead? Eric Rolls in *They All Ran Wild* gives a fascinating picture of Stead as the professional man.

“Governments tolerate newspaper criticism because they have to in democratic countries. They do not have to tolerate Royal Commissioners who run counter to Government policy. David Stead, a fisheries naturalist and administrator who was appointed by the New South Wales Government in 1925 to investigate the rabbit nuisance, lost his job. He gave no comfortable assurances to the Government that it was doing all that could be done. He blasted its servants, the Pastures Protection Boards, for all they had done and had not done since they were formed in 1902, and gave twenty-two recommendations for the control of rabbits which were never published. The rest of the report was printed in an abbreviated form by the department of Agriculture.”

(His commission was to study the life history and habits of the rabbit; the means, effectiveness and relative costs of the methods being used to control and exterminate rabbits; and the possible effects of these methods on other animals, birds, “useful insects” and “aquatic life”.)

“Stead was two years on the job. It was his third commission. His familiarity with the procedure of getting information made it possible to complete the work in this time. His thoroughness made it an enormous task and there was little enough information for him to begin on. He said he was astounded at the lack of concentration in the official study of the pest. Not even records had been maintained. All early files were missing. (Retiring secretaries still like to clean out their offices. Late in the 1950s valuable early records of the Victorian Lands Department were burnt as rubbish.)

Stead’s report had 745 pages. It was too long. It would have been even more forceful if it had been cut by half. There were errors of history since he relied for some of the information on C.W. Holland, Chief Clerk of the Queensland Department of Public Lands, who gave his writings an intensely irritating air of accuracy by quoting an authority for each of his mis-statements. Some of these errors persist in the histories of present-day scientists. There were occasional errors of deduction, such as Stead’s acceptance—after investigation—of the general belief that the millions of poisoned rabbit carcasses were causing the increase in the sheep blowfly.

But his twenty-two recommendations might have saved New South Wales millions of pounds. He said that control by the Pastures Protection Boards had failed. They were persisting with methods that were found to be useless; they had little knowledge of the life history of rabbits; they had no desire to change their ways; they were needlessly poisoning native wild life. He advised that a separate rabbit administration be set up under a “rabbit menace commissioner” who would supervise all details. He advised the formation of an organization to investigate the life history, diseases and parasites of rabbits and the various methods of destruction. This would have set up a body like the C.S.I.R.O. Division of Wildlife Research twenty-three years earlier. He advised that wire-netting be issued by the State to landholders requiring it, free of interest and on the easiest terms of repayment. He advised that in all future subdivisions of land the boundaries be arranged for the convenient construction of netting fences. (This seemingly vital requirement has never been regarded by surveyors. The design of the soldier settlement blocks on one of which I wrote this book can only be described as silly although it was made by a man who later became Chief Surveyor of New South Wales. Boundaries were run through flood-country. We were forced to net them and we lost miles of irreplaceable netting in a flood a few weeks after the line was completed. Thereafter stock had to be run with the neighbours’ for about eighteen months until more material was available. Of course we did not build netting fences again. The law had been satisfied by the first fence, so we then built the hinged wire fences we had wanted to build in the first place. I have lost count of the times that they have been dropped before a flood and lifted up after it. They were still stock-proof seventeen years after erection but of course they were never rabbit-proof. Another boundary was moved half a chain off an existing fence-line by the surveyor for no reason and run through the middle of a ground tank.)

Stead wanted a stiff levy on skins and carcasses to help finance the investigating body. He advised an exhaustive inquiry into the possibility of hutch-rearing of domestic species. He advised a concentrated effort on fumigation with calcium cyanide after general destruction of harbour. At the end of his foreword to the report he said: "This report is looked upon by me as merely a first contribution to a most important and intricate subject. I trust that it will be followed by continued investigations with a view to ridding the country of the greatest economic and industrial incubus which has ever loaded Australia's development."

Parliament treated the report with expediency and contempt. Both sides of the House moved to stop it from being printed. One party favoured the rabbiters, the other party the dealers and exporters of skins and carcasses. Both sides wished to nurture the Pastures Protection Boards. The rabbits flourished with Parliamentary sanction.

Stead had had various positions with the New South Wales Fisheries and introduced steam-trawling to Australia. His attempts to interest a lethargic Government in the development of our fisheries were so insistent that he was sent to investigate Malayan fishing to get him out of the way. He was there for fourteen months and for the last eight months was Acting-Commissioner of Food and Fisheries. He was critical of British policy—probably for sound reasons—and he was sent to Honolulu on a food-conservation conference to keep him quiet when he came back. This previous history may have counted against the result of his rabbit inquiry. He was an individualist; he was outspoken; and his interests went far beyond the task he was immediately engaged in. Those are excellent qualities but they are also the qualities which embarrass governments. He was too prickly to handle.

The rabbit inquiry was his last Government job. He lost even his superannuation. He was wrong about trawling. Our tiny continental shelf was quickly fished out. But he was not wrong about rabbits, or for the need of a different controlling body."

He was also away from home a great deal ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I think I must be extraordinarily obtuse—because I managed to get to my late teens without realising Australia has a class system. As a child I certainly believed England still had classes (or perhaps more correctly English *books* still had a class system) but I felt it had nothing to do with us. I think two things contributed to this naivete. Growing up on the Darling Downs I was surrounded by people who were either German or Irish in origin; on the one hand we had neighbours who were Werners, Zimmerles, Berghofers, Vohlands, Batzloffs, Geitzelts, Kuhls, Dornbuschs, Kleins—on the other, we had Barrons, Brosnans, Walshs, Gambles, Buckleys, Conroys ...

And my mother had a habit of saying, whenever she heard an unusual name, "I suppose he's Catholic" or "I wonder if that's Hungarian" (or Spanish or Russian or Chinese), and I still find myself curious about these two strands—culture/language and religion. Class, when it was finally borne upon me, just didn't seem terribly interesting. I meet people who say "This has become a very middle-class suburb" or "I'm proud to be working-class" and I always feel a kind of amazement. To think in those terms would never occur to me.

Yet class does matter to many writers and perhaps none more so than Christina Stead. To read books such as *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* or *Letty Fox* is to read books which are fundamentally underpinned by class. Their characters are intimately aware of the nature and impact of class in every aspect of their lives. Since then I've been pondering—do people who aren't aware of or aren't interested in class ever join Communist parties? And—are writers better writers and readers better readers if they *are* aware of all the nuances of class in life and society? Is this why I'm not very successful in either department—because I simply don't *see* what is obvious to most people?

I turned to Craig McGregor's very readable book *Class in Australia* for

enlightenment. It has the trenchant sub-title ‘Who says Australia has no class system?’ Not me exactly. I wouldn’t have the courage. And he immediately gets stuck into anyone who might have doubts with his first chapter ‘Class Counts’; by the end of the book he had me convinced: Australia *is* a classist society and it is wilful blindness on my part that I’ve been able to live in it for nearly 50 years almost without noticing and certainly without caring.

(A small digression: McGregor mentions Bondi Junction—‘The Junction and the areas around it have always been my private symbol of Middle Oz. The absolute dead-spit no deviation centre, the middle of the middle. No extremes. No factories. A few offices. A lot of shops.’ But strangely enough I used to work in a factory at Bondi Junction. It made the bladders to go inside footballs. My job was to blow each one up on an air-line to make sure it had no holes. So whenever anyone asked me what I did I was able to respond “I am a bladder-blower.” I wonder what happened to that factory?)

McGregor says “I’ve always liked the way Australians tend to think of class distinction as a sort of Pommy hangover which someone else is guilty of. Class? In Australia?” And it remains true that Australia can never match England in this regard. Take George Mikes’ *How to Be Inimitable*—“The English talk—and talk a great deal—of upper, middle, and working classes. They also talk of upper-middle and lower-middle classes, and more recently they have started mentioning a top-working class—just to fit in between the middle-working class and the lower-middle class. This, of course, makes them fully conscious of how pitifully inadequate their language is to describe the other 120 clearly defined castes and 413 sub-castes of English society. What about the lower-middle-upper layer of the lower-upper-middle class? What about the middle-middle of the middle-middle class? And how can you really clearly distinguish between the upper-upper-middle people who by no means qualify yet for the bottom upper?” I think, after all, I will leave class-consciousness to others. My poor old brain is reeling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Why do people write biographies? I assume because of a fascination, which isn’t necessarily the same as a liking, for the subject. And what makes readers *read* biographies. Sometimes I read for the life itself, sometimes for an insight into the life-work, or even the age they lived in; but sometimes for a more specific curiosity such as how or why they began writing or how a particular work came to be written.

But. *There is a danger*. I came upon this little *Reader’s Digest* piece when I was waiting somewhere. “You shall be kissed—and often, and by someone who knows how,” said Rhett Butler, and women in movie audiences gasped. Scarlett O’Hara, her face only centimetres from his, swooned. But that may have been because actress Vivien Leigh was overcome by a whiff of foul air. Truth be told, Clark Gable, the great Hollywood heart-throb who played Rhett, had breath bad enough to deflect cannon fire.”

It might be called the Bad Breath Factor.

Discovering the foibles and failures of a writer you admire can make them seem endearingly human. It can also put you off reading any more of their work.

I enjoyed Jill Ker Conway’s memoir *The Road to Coorain* but soon afterwards I learned that she is a director of the Nike company, a company which has an appalling record of exploitation of poor women. Peter Hancock visited Banjaran in West Java—“I asked an old man where I could find women who worked in the Nike factory. He replied that they had not returned since leaving at 4.00 am the previous evening. I was puzzled, and he explained that all the factory workers worked for Feng Tay (Nike). I had little chance of seeing them, as even their own families rarely saw them.

He said the local community called the women from Nike ‘walking ghosts who work in Satan’s factory’ (*mereka pergi dan pulang seperti hantu dari pabrik Setan.*) If I wanted to speak with them I would have to become a ghost myself, he added.” (*Inside Indonesia, 1997.*)

Hancock records that the company does not pay “menstrual leave, sick leave,

maternity leave, holiday pay, food or transport allowances and rarely pays bonuses, all of which are stipulated in Indonesian labour law.” He also interviewed a young man who had worked as a supervisor and left; “He stated that he was shocked during his training as a Nike supervisor by the new skills he was expected to learn: skills to control women. These usually translated to verbal abuse, such as ‘fuck you’ and ‘move you stupid bitch’, to be used indiscriminately on the workers.”

This Nike factory may be an aberration but one such factory is one too many.

My query when it came to Peter Corris’ semi-biography of Professor Fred Hollows was different. Hollows had spoken out vigorously on behalf of the East Timorese, he became founding patron of the East Timorese Relief Association, and when he was terminally ill he got out of bed to go and open an exhibition of East Timorese photos. Clearly it was an issue close to his heart. Yet there is not a word about it in the book. East Timor might as well not exist. I was pondering on this when I came upon this piece in Corris’ novel *The January Zone*—“The real threateners were nasty: there were a couple of pro-Palestinian bombers, an IRA sniper and an East Timor nationalist who threatened kidnap”. The Timorese have suffered dispossession, loss of families and communities, destruction of their religious and cultural identities—could they not be left their good name? And, although I don’t claim to any expertise in Timorese history, I know of no case of kidnap carried out by East Timorese (except under Indonesian instigation), it simply isn’t a Timorese crime. Hundreds of East Timorese children have been kidnapped and taken out of their country by Indonesian officials and the whereabouts of many of them remain unknown—but that isn’t what Corris is suggesting.

I think writers *do* have the right to write what they like—and readers to respond however they wish. I remember a woman saying she’d gone out and burned my novel *The Vigil* because she didn’t like what I’d said about Gough Whitlam and the Catholic church and she thought I must be a very nasty person and she didn’t want her children reading my book. I felt a bit gob-smacked. I hadn’t thought of my little book arousing that sort of feeling in anyone. But I fully accept her right to do and say what she felt. And as the sheer volume of words in a novel grows it perhaps becomes easier to forget that some of those words may be confronting, annoying, or offensive, to some readers ... and by the time you’ve done ten re-writes the whole book runs the risk of becoming a big yawn ...

The problem with Jill Ker Conway and Peter Corris is that I just haven’t wanted to buy or read any of their books since then.

My problem with Hazel Rowley’s biography of Christina Stead is a different one. Was it necessary to dwell so long and drearily on the last years of Stead’s life? Would it not have been better to say simply that she wrote little—chronicling what she did write and what her plans were—without emphasizing her difficulties in getting projects finished. And I prefer books which do not dwell on a writer’s death but rather reaffirm the place they have maintained through the reprinting of their works, courses which study their writing, competitions and programs named in their honour, responses of younger readers and students coming fresh to their books. I’m sure Hazel Rowley researched with care and affection for her subject but I had the feeling her honesty had stripped Stead of her dignity.

Now I can understand why some writers have left instructions in their wills that they do not wish their papers to be made available for potential biographers ... I don’t know if their wishes will be respected but I appreciate their unease.

Curiosity is a powerful reason to read. And publishers demand “tell all” biographies. These thoughts were on my mind when I came upon the Robert Penn Warren poem which begins:

The little Sam Clemens, one night back in Hannibal,  
Peeped through the dining-room keyhole, to see, outspread  
And naked, the father split open, lights, liver, and all  
Spilling out from the sack of mysterious pain, and the head

Sawed through ...

Did it refer to a true event? Had Mark Twain some terrible trauma in his childhood? Was it symbolic of a dramatic break with the past? Was it allegorical? Did I want to know? Should I rush out and get a biography of Mark Twain?

\* \* \* \* \*

July 18th: W. M. Thackeray

July 19th: Gottfried Keller

July 20th: Louisa Anne Meredith

July 21st: A. D. Hope

Arthur Mee

Hart Crane

July 22nd: Tom Robbins

July 23rd: Alex Buzo

Fotini Epanomitis

July 24th: Lord Dunsany

July 25th: Elias Canetti

July 26th: Aldous Huxley

\* \* \* \* \*

Stephen Jay Greenblatt in *Three Modern Satirists* says of Aldous Huxley: "Huxley's lucid remarks (about the novel of ideas) account for a great deal of the uneasiness one feels in reading his novels. They are, indeed, largely "made-up affairs," with paper-thin characters who live in a world which often seems to be little more than a colossal debating society or an interesting tea party. Huxley is not terribly concerned with the great social and political issues of his time. Unlike Orwell, he is not outraged by the plight of the common man, nor haunted by the specters of oppression and tyranny, nor under the compulsion to be a pamphleteer or a revolutionary. Huxley is concerned, rather, with the Bright Young People and their eccentric parents who fascinate Evelyn Waugh; he writes of the sophisticates and intellectuals who flit irresponsibly through the maze of London society. Huxley does not feel comfortable in doss houses and slums, does not write well about torture and rebellion, and physical pain, but prefers expensive restaurants and country estates, witty conversation and delicate love affairs. In his novels there are few of the filthy details, little of the physical disgust, and nothing of the furious indignation that characterise Orwell's work, but only the clash of ideas and attitudes, the tensions of conflicting philosophies. Yet, in spite of the artificiality and the unreality of Huxley's novels, they contain much that is brilliant and powerful, for beneath the slick surface of wit and erudition there is a cold and bitter examination of society and its sickness. To appreciate Huxley, one must go beyond the novel of ideas; one must see that Huxley's characters are not monstrous because they can reel off neatly formulated notions, but spout their precious ideas *because* they are monsters. The tendency of Huxlean characters to talk endlessly and accomplish nothing is not a lapse in the author's style but a symptom of the disease which afflicts society. With Huxley, as with Waugh and Orwell, technique and meaning merge in the totality of the novel.

A major problem in Huxley's novels is tone. George Orwell always made his personal position, his likes and dislikes, perfectly obvious; but Huxley is more subtle and detached, contriving to hide his own judgment behind the mass of contradictory opinions and emotions expressed in his books. The tone of satiric novels like *Crome Yellow* (1922), *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Brave New World* (1932) lies somewhere between anger and amusement, disgust and fascination, but, like an unstable chemical element, it can never be precisely fixed or characterized. Huxley's ability to balance conflicting ideological claims, to fathom and to express coherently contradictory opinions, to manipulate subtly the tone of

his novels is impressive, but these same qualities are manifestations of a fundamental flaw in his writing—the inability to adopt a clear position ... When Huxley’s novels fail, it is because of the author’s amoeboid mind. A successful satirist must have a limited point of view, to which he is devoted and by which he assesses all human behaviour. Huxley is profoundly aware of the sickness of society, but he cannot settle his mind on a standard of judgment. The “multiplicity of eyes” the author strives for is ultimately destructive to many of his novels, because Huxley is temperamentally unable to choose between them.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Aldous Huxley parodied two young Australians, P. R. Stephenson and Jack Lindsay, in *Point Counter Point*—Stephenson becomes Cuthbert Arkwright —“The trouble with Cuthbert,’ Spendrell was saying, ‘is that he’s never quite learnt to distinguish art from pornography.’” Arkwright also “had an idea that by bawling and behaving offensively, he was defending art against the Philistines.” Walter Bidlake regards him as “That vulgar, stupid lout,” and “He made his living, and in the process convinced himself that he was serving the arts, by printing limited and expensive editions of the more scabrous specimens of the native and foreign literatures.” Jack Lindsay is portrayed as “Willie Weaver” and doesn’t fare much better, with “his little cough of self-approration” ... “‘I would laugh, I would applaud,’ the little cough might be interpreted; ‘but modesty forbids’.”

This is a long, if not necessarily honourable, tradition.

Ernest Hemingway, convinced that John Dos Passos had portrayed him as George Elbert Warner in *Chosen Country* and portrayed him in a less than flattering light, told William Smith he had acquired at his place in Cuba “a pack of fierce dogs and cats trained to attack one-eyed Portuguese bastards who wrote lies about their friends” and, as if this wasn’t enough, he then went on to portray Dos Passos as unpleasantly as he could in his next novel *A Moveable Feast*.

Christina Stead used her erstwhile friend Florence James as the major inspiration for the character of Eleanor Herbert in her novel *Miss Herbert*. Hazel Rowley says “When the book was accepted for publication in the States in 1976 Stead asked for it not to appear in England or Australia. It did nevertheless, and Florence James was duly hurt”. Christina, in her collected letters, *Talking into the Typewriter*, says ‘*Miss Herbert* is an old MS. ... I meant to show how a creature who had no reason to do so, would talk anti-Semitism just because she was a toady and wanted to appear as a ‘lady’.’ I find it very hard to picture Florence James as an anti-semitic toady.

\* \* \* \* \*

Craig Munro called his biography of P. R. Stephenson *Wild Man of Letters* though undaunted might be a better description. Yet Stephenson is more likely to be remembered for the confusions of his political thought. As a student he was an ardent Communist; he gradually moved through every ‘ism’—anarchism, aestheticism, Bohemianism, nationalism—finally reaching Fascism and being interned without trial in Australia during WW2. He may have been unwise, impulsive, brash, confused, subjective, hopeless with money and a trial to his long-suffering wife, Winifred, but some of his books including *Bushwhackers* and *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* are still read.

Stephenson went to England as a Rhodes scholar but he teamed up there with fellow Australian Jack Lindsay to found the Fanfrolico Press. It brought out perfectly respectable books such as Liam O’Flaherty’s *A Tourist Guide to Ireland*, Rhys Davies’ *A Bed of Feathers*, John Skelton’s *The Tunning of Elynour Rumming*, (which is respectable only by means of age and quality), *A Master of Hounds*, a biography of Harry Buckland, immortalised by Siegfried Sassoon in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, and *Pavlova: The Genius of Dance*. The two young men were seen as go-getting young Australians and not really wanted in the staid world of publishing. But their challenge didn’t last long. They made what was probably an error of judgment by taking on *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*. Crowley was greedy, offensive, disliked for his promotion of the most extreme

ideas of ‘black magic’ and extremely difficult to work with. His book played a major part in bankrupting the Fanfrolico, though Jack Lindsay blamed the Wall Street crash, and Stephenson, undaunted, founded The Mandrake Press (which helped inspire the comic strip, Mandrake) but that, also, went broke.

Lindsay busied himself with left-wing Declamations such as ‘We Need Russia’ and ‘On Guard for Spain’ as well as more scholarly works such as a biography of John Bunyan and a book about the English Civil War, *Puritanism and Revolution*. During WW2 he was in Signals then the Army Theatre Unit. His post-war novels included *Betrayed Spring* and *Choice of Times*. His pre-war novel *The Blood Vote*, which didn’t get published till 1984, was set in Brisbane in 1917 during the great conscription debate. Yet it manages to be oddly detached in tone and lacking in verve and life. Was it this that kept it from publication rather than lack of interest in its subject matter?

Lindsay stayed on in England. Stephenson came home—and set up the Endeavour Press and brought out such things as Banjo Paterson’s *The Animals Noah Forgot* and Miles Franklin’s *Bring the Monkey* as well as a book on contract bridge. He also published Patrick White’s first book *The Ploughman*. (White’s parents were shareholders in the press.) He used the press to publish his own *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* and took on Xavier Herbert’s huge novel *Capricornia* and it would seem fair to say that the book helped bankrupt the press.

Still full of hope, Stephenson began a new press, the Publicist, this time financed by John Miles, remembered now as the father of Bea Miles whom Kate Grenville fictionalised in her prize-winning book *Lilian’s Story*.

After the war and his tribulations he collaborated and ghosted a number of books with Frank Clune, mostly popular histories or biographies of Australian ‘characters’. But it might be said that Stephenson was as much a character as anyone he helped portray. And after Huxley’s unkind portrayal in *Point Counter Point* Xavier Herbert was also less than sympathetic in using him as ‘the Man’ in *Poor Fellow My Country*. Perhaps he deserves a better parody in someone else’s novel. It takes courage to keep on getting up off the floor.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the Australian Parliament discussed allowing *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* into Australia, the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, reportedly dissented on the grounds that he would not want his wife to read the book. Lawrence’s book had survived a famous trial in 1960 where its publisher, Penguin, had been taken to court for publishing an obscene book. Yet the whole situation, from parliamentary debates to court case, was underpinned with a curious irony.

Aldous Huxley said: “My wife typed out the manuscript of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* for him, even though she was a bad typist and had no patience with English spelling—she was Belgian, you know. Then she didn’t always appreciate the nuances of the language she was typing. When she started using some of those four-letter words in conversation, Lawrence was profoundly shocked.”

\* \* \* \* \*

- July 27th: Hilaire Belloc
- July 28th: Beatrix Potter
- Gerald Manley Hopkins
- July 29th: William Beebe
- July 30th: William Gass
- July 31st: Fay Kellerman
- Primo Levi
- August 1st: Herman Melville
- Julio Herrera y Reissig
- August 2nd: Geoffrey Dutton
- Isabel Allende

Rómulo Gallegos  
 August 3rd: Leon Uris  
               P. D. James  
 August 4th: Tim Winton  
               Walter Pater  
 August 5th: Ted Hughes  
               Guy de Maupassant  
 August 6th: Alfred Lord Tennyson  
               Rolf Boldrewood  
 August 7th: Dornford Yates  
 August 8th: Marjorie Rawlings  
 August 9th: John Dryden  
               Tove Jansson  
 August 10th: Alfred Döblin  
               Laurence Binyon  
 August 11th: Enid Blyton  
               Charlotte Yonge  
 August 12th: Ridgwell Cullum  
 August 13th: Robert Southey  
 August 14th: John Galsworthy  
               Bryce Courtenay  
 August 15th: Frederick Forsyth  
               Sir Walter Scott  
               Bernardo Guimarães  
 August 16th: Dennis Altman  
               Georgette Heyer

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I went over to the National Trust house, Runnymede, to lock up; there was no sign of guides or visitors in the house—but I finally came on the guides sitting out on the front porch, chatting, and enjoying the afternoon sun. And what do two ladies in their eighties talk about? Well, as a matter of fact, Dennis Altman—

Realising my ignorance, I went out to see what was on offer and borrowed *The Comfort of Men*. It is a fairly straightforward coming-of-age novel, I suspect strongly autobiographical, and very readable. But running through it is a curious thread—a campaign to declare Tasmania an independent nation. He puts it—“Tasmania celebrated its independence on a fine spring day in 1971”—yet it comes about entirely as a result of a push by a small conservative group, a kind of ‘back door’ independence which hardly seems to have aroused anyone ...

His image of Tasmania as an incorrigibly conservative place is understandable (given that Tasmania didn’t bring in Gay Law Reform until 1997—though I am told it is actually better legislation than that of states who moved to change their statute books sooner; I hope it was worth waiting for) but Margaret Scott notes that Tasmania “has been home to some of the most convinced conservatives and some of the most impassioned radicals in Australia” and some of the impassioned radicals are very interesting.

Among the convicts brought to Tasmania were the Tolpuddle Martyrs—Manning Clark wrote “on 4 September 1834, the ship carrying George Loveless who had been transported for seven years for participating in a conspiracy to raise wages at Tolpuddle, near Dorchester, dropped anchor in Hobart Town. The following day, in the gaol-yard at Hobart Town, within the confines of those forbidding walls, (Governor) Arthur told Loveless what a fool he must have been for having anything to do with such things. To which Loveless replied with dignity: ‘The motives by which we were influenced were to prevent our wives and families from being utterly degraded and starved’. Arthur, who

believed the heart of man to be desperately wicked, assumed that Loveless must have been the victim of more artful men. As he saw it, Loveless could be won back to a life of docility by a knowledge of God's saving grace, and the fear of damnation rather than by the deterrents of severe punishment. His was a vision of tamed and shrunken men. He would train a race of the docile to go forth and multiply and replenish the earth of Van Diemen's Land and subdue not only it, but also their own innate vicious propensities. Loveless had quite a different dream of what men could be once they liberated themselves from their oppressors. He had that dream of the day when all men were brothers. Arthur had the vision of that day when God had tamed all men. It was Jehovah who stilled the raging of the waters, and the madness of the people. So two men with different visions of the future of mankind confronted each other that day in the gaol-yard at Hobart Town. To achieve the vision of Loveless, men had to combine, but because of their isolation and the convict system, his seed fell on stony ground in Van Diemen's Land.'

(Extraordinarily, 250,000 people in England had signed a petition requesting their release—and up to 30,000 had marched through London; it was this pressure which finally brought them home from Van Diemen's Land.)

Then there were the Young Irishmen. Richard Davis writes: "There O'Brien, Mitchel, Meagher, O'Donoghoe, Martin, O'Doherty and MacManus for a time experienced a common exile in what Mitchel described as 'the most beautiful country in all the world: magnificent forests, precipitous forests, and grand lakes, lying in crystalline beauty amidst umbrageous hills'"; Tasmania begins to sound like a tourist destination rather than a penal colony.

More recently Tasmania became the cradle for the world's first Green Movement. Tasmania established Australia's National Trust to save heritage buildings and places. Tasmanian Premier, Albert Ogilvie, had accepted at least 200 Jewish refugees (by 1939) and tried to shame the Liberal Party and other State governments into accepting larger numbers from Austria and Germany.

And then there is the Tasmanian idea for an Aboriginal Provisional Government which is innovative and exciting.

A book called *Tasmanian Inventions and Innovations* draws attention to some other Tasmanian 'firsts' in different fields including Robert Strachan's first manned flight in Australia; an automatic potato-digger; the first use of ether as an anaesthetic in the southern hemisphere; and the development of the humidicrib; Launceston was the first Australian town to put its sewerage system underground; Tasmania brought in the first country work scheme and provided legal recognition for de facto relationships in the 1920s.

But independence? I think Tasmania fell into statehood for geographical and historical reasons, without giving a great deal of thought as to whether it is the best option. I was very much aware of this after a recent visit to Queensland and then coming back to all the talk about state debt and selling the Hydro. Tasmania's population is similar to that of the Darling Downs, the Maranoa and the Granite Belt, (which I will call Dar-Mar-Gra) though its size is less. But it has vastly more politicians, and more services. Tasmanians in their private lives tend to live without luxury or conspicuous consumption; their expectations are fairly modest. But this has obscured the fact that their expectations as a state are far less modest. Tasmania has a Governor for 470,000 people whereas NSW has a Governor for around six million. The area of Dar-Mar-Gra has several good hospitals in Toowoomba but much of the regional health services are funded through community support of, for example, the Flying Doctor Service, the Bush Children's Health Scheme and the CWA (and Queensland's hospitals were traditionally funded by the Golden Casket lottery), Tasmania has much less community-funded health care. Currently there is complaint about the Upper House; should it be abolished? But instead of focussing on this very relevant question the ALP and Liberals have combined to reduce Lower House seats so as to squeeze out the Greens! There *is* a need for some degree of review of even the best

legislation—but this could be handled by appointing 5 Ombudsmen, one for each Lower House electorate who could then work as individuals in each electorate and as a review panel for parliament.

It has been said that individual MP's salaries and their staffs are not the major reason for building up an unrealistic level of state debt. This is probably true. But any politician worth his or her salt is constantly pushing for state spending for more services in his or her electorate as well as funding for pet projects which may be worthwhile and may be of the calibre of the infamous 'Road to Nowhere', and, good projects or bad, they all tend to need ongoing maintenance and funding. Tasmania does need less politicians—but to destroy the Hare-Clark system rather than looking long and hard as to just how the large state debt has been created and the expectations intrinsic in statehood seems a very ill-considered response.

There is always a vague idea that a bonanza will come to our rescue—a gambling bonanza, a gas bonanza, a manganese bonanza, a tourism bonanza, a sale-of-the-hydro bonanza—which is not unlike a cargo cult mentality. Something good will come. But has the good come through the expenditure of \$3 billion of borrowed money? Or have Tasmanians been sold a—well, a pup; though a pup would be vastly cheaper. Allied to this is that we compare ourselves with Melbourne and Sydney—yet these are unrealistic economic models, unsuitable social models and unfortunate environmental models. It takes about as long to fly from Charleville to Brisbane as it does from Hobart to Melbourne. Young people in Charleville see no problem in going to Brisbane, or further afield, for education, experience, opportunities, adventure, skills and a wider knowledge of life—but the suggestion that our young people might go from Hobart to Melbourne is seen as shameful. Why? Bass Strait is more than a physical barrier; it acts in various psychological ways. Yet if we send our children out with our blessing and bring them back, if they wish to come back, to a warm welcome, both they and we are the beneficiaries.

Tasmania *could* become a region of another state. Victoria seems the most obvious but there is no absolute reason why we should not become a region of South Australia, NSW, even NZ, if that appeals to Tasmanians—and if they see it as a way which would reduce expensive infrastructures without removing basic services.

Tasmania *could* become a territory in the same way that the ACT is run; there is no shame in being a territory; it does not automatically provide fewer services or promote a cultural cringe. It depends on what people see as fundamental values in their society and what structures support and enhance those values. Tasmanians could go on seeing themselves as 'different' even if they were ruled by bureaucrats rather than politicians. They would probably still have to lie down in front of bulldozers and sign petitions to try and stop ghastly commercial developments; that is the nature of the beast, state or not.

And Tasmania *could* become independent. There are dozens of UN Members with populations or sizes smaller than Tasmania. But it would solve nothing if the expense of underlying structures was simply carried through from statehood to nationhood. And international banks are harder to deal with when it comes to debt than the Commonwealth. But small nations can survive and do a good job. Vanuatu has 180,000 people. Iceland has a quarter of a million and is further from the world than Tasmania. It has a proud democratic tradition, a lively and vigorous language and cultural life; it plays a small but worthwhile part in the international community; and it makes its living from fishing, farming and tourism in much the same way Tasmania does. But it keeps infrastructures under careful review and pares consumer choice to the bone. We have been encouraged to desire a huge range of expensive imports in the name of 'choice'; Icelanders are *proud* of the limits they keep and their good record in recycling and renewable energies.

Statehood may be a good choice—but statehood *as it currently is* seems to me the worst of our options. Can we not give the matter more thought than the very simplistic questions of who should own the Hydro and who should park their rear ends on the nicely-

upholstered seats in Parliament House?

\* \* \* \* \*

There have always been homosexual men in Australia's public life; it is hypocrisy and homophobia which pretends there hasn't. Robert Lacey tells the tragic story of one of them. "The Duke's greatest venom was reserved for homosexuals. When Noël Coward leaned across the footlights at one of the first performances of *Private Lives*, to deliver personally his memorable line about the yachts of the Duke of Westminster—who was sitting, that night, in the circle—the Duke was doubly insulted, and his persecution of his homosexual brother-in-law, Lord Beauchamp, became a tragic *cause célèbre* in the 1930s.

William Lygon, the Earl Beauchamp, who married Bend Or's sister Lettice in 1902, was Liberal leader in the House of Lords, a cabinet minister, Governor General of Australia for a time" (he was actually Governor of NSW at the time of Federation; 'Breaker' Morant in his poem 'An Enthusiastic Sportsman Enthuses' wrote:

So now the Brands  
Seek other lands;  
Alack! long ere they reach 'em  
A fickle crowd  
Will cheer as loud

For godly Governor Beauchamp—) "and loaded with all the dignities that go with a career of successful public service—Knight of the Garter, Chancellor of London University, Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire and Warden of the Cinque Ports. His graceful Worcestershire home at Madresfield Court was immortalized by Evelyn Waugh as *Brideshead*, and his younger son Hughie is generally acknowledged to have been Waugh's model for *Brideshead's* central character, Sebastian Flyte. Lord Beauchamp had seven children in all by Lettice Mary Grosvenor—but he was also a homosexual and Bend Or regarded this as an insult to his sister that he could not tolerate.

Lettice Mary Grosvenor was, in fact, quite unconcerned by her husband's predilections when he was not sharing the matrimonial bed—for her upbringing had been such that she had no idea what a homosexual was, and her brother's efforts to enlighten her might have been amusing had not the news, when Lady Beauchamp finally grasped it, provoked a severe nervous collapse. It is difficult at fifty years' distance to disentangle precisely what occurred in the scandal that led to Lord Beauchamp's disgrace in 1931, but all are agreed that it was his brother-in-law who played the most active role in bringing it about notably by passing on to King George V the news that one of his Knights of the Garter was a homosexual.

The King's initial response is said to have been as bemused as that of poor Lady Beauchamp—"I thought men like that always shot themselves." But once convinced of Bend Or's charges he sent a private request to Beauchamp to resign all his official appointments. Bend Or, in the meantime, had gone so far, according to Evelyn Waugh's biographer, Christopher Sykes, as to invite his nieces, Beauchamp's four daughters to give personal testimony against their own father—though this was a proposition which, Sykes says, they rejected with contempt.

It was at Bend Or's instigation that the Home Office issued a warrant in 1931 for the arrest of Beauchamp on homosexual charges carrying severe prison sentences, and Beauchamp, only just dissuaded from suicide by his son Hughie, went into exile in Australia. A few years later his wife Lettice died heartbroken by the tragedy.

The 2nd Duke of Westminster's rationale of the vendetta which he waged with such fervour against the fellow aristocrat he liked to call his 'bugger-in-law' was always his concern for his sister. He was performing an act of mercy, he liked to argue, sparing her the pain she would have suffered from her husband's disgrace, and there can be no doubting the strength of his family loyalty and affection.

But such evidence as can now be assembled makes it clear that it had been Bend Or

himself who originally made his brother-in-law's private proclivity into a public scandal. Lord Beauchamp's homosexuality was of concern to comparatively few people for most of his life. It was the Duke of Westminster who chose to make an issue of it in the late 1920s, and then his frequent, open and provocative insults stung his brother-in-law into bringing a legal action to defend his name.

The case was held in camera, and the Grosvenors have managed to keep its sordid and bitter family recriminations secret to this day, but it was the evidence that Bend Or dug up to provide sexual chapter and verse for his personal allegations that provided the basis for the subsequent Home Office warrant of 1931. The 2nd Duke of Westminster had a remorseless appetite for the hunt—and the death of his sister under the strain of events served only to intensify the rancour with which he hounded his quarry.

Lord Beauchamp heard of his wife's death at the end of July 1936 when he was in Venice, and he immediately made arrangements to return to England to be present at her funeral. But Bend Or had already been in touch with the Home secretary, making it clear that he would not have the burial of his beloved sister desecrated by the odious presence of her husband. So when Lord Beauchamp arrived at Dover on a Cross-channel steamer he had to be persuaded by his family to return to the Continent without setting foot on English soil, since he still risked immediate arrest. Lord Beauchamp died two years later."

\* \* \* \* \*

August 17th: V. S. Naipaul  
                  Oliver St John Gogarty  
August 18th: Nettie Palmer  
August 19th: Ogden Nash  
August 20th: Emily Brontë  
August 21st: Mudrooroo  
August 22nd: Ray Bradbury  
August 23rd: Mary Clarke  
                  Ananda K. Coomaraswamy  
August 24th: David Ireland  
                  Jorge Luis Borges  
August 25th: Thea Astley  
August 26th: Eleanor Dark  
August 27th: Lady Antonia Fraser  
August 28th: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

\* \* \* \* \*

Have you ever stopped to think how far-reaching a decision made in one country may ultimately be in a quite distant country? Take for instance the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which, after a period of religious peace ushered in by Henry IV, was ushered out by his successor, Louis XIV, and Roman Catholics fell upon French Protestants in great fury and sent 400,000 of them fleeing to Belgium, Holland, England, Prussia, even Ireland and beyond.

Among the great Irish writers who trace their families back to these Huguenot refugees are Dion Boucicault, Charles Maturin, Samuel Becket and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Why not work for a B. Litt.?"

"That would be rather fun. I'm afraid they wouldn't accept Lefanu, would they? It would have to be somebody duller."

(Dorothy Sayers in *Gaudy Night*)

These days, when genre writing is an accepted part of many university courses, I'm sure no one would quibble about Le Fanu. The curious thing, perhaps, is that while genre fiction has gained in respectability as a subject for research, the ghost story has largely been

subsumed into the horror and mystery genres and lost its distinctive appeal. Julia Briggs wrote in *Night Visitors* of the incredible popularity the ghost story had in the 19th century, no popular literary magazine being complete without at least one ghost story in each issue. (I might quibble with her sub-title ‘The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost-Story’; ‘The Ghost-Story in English’ would be more correct, the bulk of her contributors being Irish, American, French, Welsh and Scottish—which provides an interesting side-light in itself into the ghost-story.)

Another practitioner of the ghost-story is Walter de la Mare, also interestingly a descendant of French Huguenots, and like Le Fanu subtle in his treatment of the genre; there are no clanking chains, no spectral hands, no rattling skeletons in dismal dungeons; rather he captures a sense of perplexity. Somehow, if we could manage to turn swiftly enough we would see the answer before it slips away, leaving us to the dusk and the unexplained ... His style, the narrated story, is the simplest formula, yet his stories are never simple and unlike most writers in this area he was equally adept in both prose and poetry as he created his gentle and often rather sorrowful mysteries.

He wrote poems on many subjects, sometimes wry, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, on subjects as various as clocks and chronometers, cats, George Washington, birds and old houses; ghostly poems as well as ghost stories. His ‘ghost’ poems are full of yew, bindweed, lichen, withered grass, nightshade, gravestones, coffins, ‘cold hand’, ‘cold cinders’, and with names like ‘The Spectre’, ‘The Ghost’, ‘The Familiar’; even his poem ‘A Ballad of Christmas’ has three spectral figures instead of wise men—Pilate, Herod and Judas.

\* \* \* \* \*

I don’t want to give the impression that the fleeing French Protestants excelled only in one particular area. John Ormerod Greenwood tells this interesting story—‘Among the refugees from the *dragonnades* of Louis XIV which followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and brought cruel persecution to the Protestants of the south of France was a child of two ... Anthony Benezet (to use the Anglicised form of his name) used to summarize his family history: ‘One of my uncles was hung by these intolerants, my aunt was put in a convent, two of my cousins died at the galleys, and my fugitive father was hung in effigy’ ... From St. Quentin, to which Benezet’s father had migrated from the south of France, it took them 17 days to reach Rotterdam and take passage for England. Little Antoine was two, his sister Marie-Madeleine four, and his mother eight months pregnant when they crossed the Dutch border, their guide offering the guard the choice between being shot or accepting a bribe to let them pass. They settled, like so many refugees of that time, including Voltaire, in Wandsworth; Jean-Etienne Benezet (Antoine’s father) became Voltaire’s ‘man of affairs’; and Antoine was probably educated in the ‘Quaker great school’ founded by Richard Scoryer, and run at the time by the refugee schoolmaster John Kuweidt. At any rate, Anthony apparently joined Friends before he went on at 18, with his family, to Philadelphia, where he followed the German refugee Daniel Pastorius as master of Germantown school in 1739.

Besides being a schoolmaster famous for his gentle methods, Anthony Benezet became the chief architect of the campaign against negro slavery, inherited from Pastorius and later carried to England by Benezet’s pupil, friend and secretary William Dillwyn.’

Dean Freiday notes that in England John Wesley took Benezet’s 1771 book *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, changed and abridged it slightly and brought it out in 1774 as his own *Thoughts Upon Slavery*.

(It was Pastorius and the Germantown Quakers from Germany and Holland who, in 1688, put out their statement ‘There is liberty of conscience here ... and there ought to be likewise liberty of the body, except for evil-doers, which is another case. But to bring men hither, or to rob and sell them against their will, we stand against’; unfortunately not a lot of people were listening.)

‘But our present concern with Benezet is that he was the first Quaker known to have promoted a ‘relief scheme’ in the modern sense ... ’ This was to help the Acadians, the French settlers driven out of the Canadian province of Nova Scotia in 1755; the people of whom Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote in his epic poem ‘Evangeline’. Benezet helped 500 Acadians, who were Catholic, to settle in Philadelphia.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ghost stories as fiction may have declined somewhat but ‘true’ ghost stories are enjoying a vogue, particularly those which act as a visitor’s guide to haunted houses.

And then there is the paranormal in general, which tips over into the horror genre with its monsters and buckets of green slime—I don’t know about monsters but *The Amityville Horror* certainly had green slime, inexplicable really, because why slime, and why green—and why did nobody think to have it analysed. Well, I don’t know that I would’ve thought of doing so in those circumstances either. None of the answers proposed were totally satisfying yet Jay Anson makes a powerful point when he says: ‘it takes more than imagination or a case of ‘nerves’ to drive a normal, healthy family of five to the drastic step of suddenly abandoning a desirable three-storey house, complete with finished basement, swimming pool, and boathouse, without even pausing to take along their personal household belongings.’

I discovered recently, in *Mysterious Ireland*, that I have a (sort of) ghost story in the (very distant) family—

William Mareschall, the Earl of Pembroke, was sailing from Wales to Ireland in the 13th century; “William was caught up in a great storm and feared both for his ship and his life. The earl beseeched God to spare his life, and he vowed that wherever the ship made land, there he would build a church as thanksgiving.

By God’s providence they were set down at Bannow Bay, and there William built his abbey. When it was finished, he sent to Tintern Abbey in Wales to come and found a Cistercian community at Tintern de Voto. Later, secular buildings were added and a castle joined the abbey in the green vale of Wexford. One might well wonder what kind of paranormal phenomenon would disturb such a sanctified spot. Yet over the centuries there have been tales of torchlight processions, and the brothers, close cowled and singing their office, have been seen entering the great door of the abbey long after Tintern had become a partial ruin. As late as 1991 men working on the site heard the sound of singing coming from the abbey, and if one visits Tintern one does get the impression of being watched.

In company with many another religious house, Tintern’s community was dissolved in 1533 and the lands granted, for services rendered, to Sir Anthony Colclough to hold ‘in capite’ on the order of Elizabeth I for an annual rent of 26 shillings and 4 pence. The Colcloughs became so well integrated with the local Irish that it was said that they were ‘more Irish than the Irish’, but they had one disadvantage. They were one of the few families in both England and Ireland who were said to be under ‘the curse of fire and water’ that devolved upon anyone in possession of original church lands. One local tale says that Sir Anthony in fact murdered the friars at Tintern when he came to take up his ownership. Another tale says that the Colcloughs were cursed because they meddled in fairy matters by levelling a fairy rath or fort.

Sir Caesar Colclough fell foul of the little people, it is said. He was betrothed to the Redmond heiress of the Tower of Hook, and when he had to make a journey to England his loving fiancée said that she would burn a candle in her window to guide him home. On Colclough’s return to Ireland his boat was steered towards the Tower of Hook. The fairies, alas, had sent the lady to sleep and put out the light, and the unfortunate Colclough ran his boat onto the rocks and perished, his body being found on the shore. It was his grieving fiancée who is said to have transformed the tower into a lighthouse to safeguard other mariners.”

My great-great-great-grandmother, Bridget Colclough, is said to have been a

descendant of the notorious Sir Anthony.

\* \* \* \* \*

Walter de la Mare as a boy pondered on the difficult question—should he pray for the devil, for his redemption and forgiveness. I sometimes find myself caught up with this question. What do I believe when I talk of evil, think of evil—is it a sickness, something inherited (a bad gene perhaps), something to do with environment, family influence, the opposite of good ... but do I believe in ‘the devil’. Good simply *is*—we don’t talk of grappling with good—but evil does summon up images of a struggle, grappling, wrestling, overpowering. And while we talk of God at work in the *universe* we tend to talk of the Devil at work in the *world*; it is a very limited concept.

If we call the Creative Force, “the maker of Heaven and Earth”, God, then we are immediately faced with the knowledge that God is not simply Creation. From the tiniest piece of matter to the vastness of the universe we can observe patterns and laws at work. Yet these patterns are not necessary for Creation which can begin and can continue to exist in a state of unpatterned and unregulated chaos. But the laws and patterns are necessary for Life. Beyond a certain level of chaos, life is probably not possible. And beyond a much lower level of chaos, a life lived with a degree of free will is probably not possible. Questions of choice, of good and evil, would become irrelevant if we could not even make an intelligent guess as to when the sun would next come up.

The force of good can be an evolving force. There appears to be nothing to require it to pre-date the emergence of life, let alone the first appearance of a particle of matter, the first gas, the first glint of light, the first variation in temperature. It can evolve as life evolves. But it needs a certain degree of natural order in which to flourish. Sun set and sun rise, tides, currents, seasons, birth and death. All are forms of the natural order. All are necessary for evolution. All are beautiful in their own ways. All are dependent on Creation and none are dependent on Good and Evil. They existed Before; probably they will exist if there is an After.

The impulse to worship “gods” of nature, of fertility, of the sun and the moon, of the sea and the earth and the harvest was a very natural impulse, perhaps even a very wise impulse. People understood the need for a firm foundation not only to life but to life in all its richness and wonder and mystery.

A force which is Good appears totally dependent on the Creative Force—but is the Creative Force dependent in any way on a force which is Good? In that question seems to lie our constant seeking for reassurance, for religion, for meaning. Do we matter to the “Maker of Heaven and Earth”?

We have come to assume that it is all the same manifestation. That God is a single force. Yet the evidence is very slight. For example, in Genesis we find “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” and in Exodus “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” But our understanding of this as meaning One Being is conditioned by our own sense of self, as One Individual rather than One Humanity or One Earth. We put the Creative Principle and the Principle of Good together. Yet we know that the Principle of Evil is also a manifestation of the Creative Principle, another facet. Evil is as dependent on Creation as is Good. And Evil is as dependent on the Natural Order as is Good. They are both requirements if free will is to have any meaning. Yet can we believe in a God which is solely Good, knowing this? Are questions of Good and Evil irrelevant in our seeking to understand God, Creation, the Universe? Rather they exist as evolutionary impulses. “The Kingdom of God lies within” simply means that; as we search within we nurture one or the other. It is not God within, so much as it is the Kingdom. Whether we make of it something beautiful or a charnel-house is up to us.

So this God we debate endlessly has at least three Principles—Creative; Knowable in the Natural Order; Evolutionary in all aspects of our lives. Genesis is a very strange story in its mix of allegory and ordinariness, mundanity and mystery. Yet in a confused way it seeks

to incorporate something of all three ‘facets’ of God.

Should we pray for ‘the devil’ as Walter de la Mare wondered. I think so. He is us, he is ours. We can make him large or small, strong or weak. The choice is ours. That I think is a reason for religion, to remind us that we have the power to choose.

\* \* \* \* \*

I feel sure that as long as there has been writing, there has been ‘ghost-writing’. But Violet Powell in her interesting book *A Substantial Ghost* suggests Maude ffoulkes as the first official ghost-writer, hired for that purpose, and setting the career of ghost-writing on an official if not entirely salubrious path, primarily because the people who wanted a ‘ghost’ had something scandalous to reveal—such as—Lady Cardigan, widow of the ‘hero’ of the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War; then there was the ex-Crown Princess of Tuscany, the ex-Crown Prince of Germany, the ex-King of Bulgaria, the Infanta Eulalia of Spain, and perhaps most interesting, the Countess Marie Larisch, who had been the go-between in the love affair of Archduke Rudolf with Countess Mary Vetsera in Austria which ended in murder and suicide—and paved the way for his brother to take the throne of the Habsburgs and get himself murdered in Sarajevo.

Mrs ffoulkes had a miserable childhood, of which Violet Powell wrote ‘Thirty years later Maude could find no good word to say for her step-father, even his moustache she considered had been grown to hide a sensual mouth which might have belied his otherwise decorous appearance. Hate is a bad diet for a growing girl, and as her relations with her mother were always lukewarm there was no compensating affection from her own parent. When Mrs ffoulkes came to write the memoirs of women anxious to pay off old scores, the pains of her own life gave her sympathy with their grievances. On the other hand the years when she suffered from unkindness left her with the conviction that there need be no restraint when grievances were given a public airing. This point of view was undeniably a help in producing sensation books, but it made it difficult for her to understand that a shower of avenging arrows might also wound innocent bystanders.’

She began her career by writing *Famous Beauties of Two Reigns* and filled in hungry moments with some journalism and by working as a publisher’s reader, among her finds being Algernon Blackwood’s first book *The Empty House*, and, later, *Tell England*. On the other hand she turned down *Tarzan of the Apes*. But it was her meeting with the ancient and eccentric beauty Lady Cardigan and the resulting book *My Recollections* which brought her into contact with the strange world of European royalty. Her sympathies were Edwardian, her taste for the bizarre and the supernatural ever-present, but she also comes across as a generous woman in many ways whose writing was sometimes helped and sometimes hindered by a penchant for the trivial. She was also tough and persistent; in her sixties, over-weight and having already suffered a serious car accident, she drove over the terrible roads of eastern Europe to interview King Zog of Albania in 1933.

The problems she faced as a ‘ghost’ remain: it is neither autobiography nor biography; the ‘ghost’ never has real freedom but neither is the ‘ghost’ accountable to the public, being able to fade away, ghostlike, in the corridors behind subject and publisher. It is perhaps symbolic and appropriate that she finished her career with her book *True Ghost Stories*.

\* \* \* \* \*

August 29th: Gillian Rubinstein

August 30th: Carmel Bird

\* \* \* \* \*

In her book to help budding writers, *Dear Writer*, Carmel Bird has the delightful statement “I hope you will not find your novel or stories rejected seven times. However, I think you must realize that your book could be turned down by one or two publishers”; I ran up more than 50 rejections with one book before giving up, and several others have gone over the 20 mark—clearly I haven’t followed all Carmel’s wise advice in that book or

its sequel, *Not Now Jack — I'm Writing a Novel ...*

\* \* \* \* \*

A lot of things get lumped together under the symptom 'writer's block' but in fact that term should not be used all inclusively; for example, Mary Shelley wrote, "I busied myself *to think of a story*,—a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name. I thought and pondered—vainly. I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative."

This is 'ideas block' rather than 'writing block'. Once she had her idea she wrote with enjoyment and fervour. 'Writing block' itself could usefully be broken down further (as could 'ideas block') to help to pinpoint the trouble. We might have 'plot block' where we know where we want to go but can't quite come up with a believable means of getting there. There could be 'character block' where the plot is all worked out but the people to take it on its way refuse to 'come alive' in our heads. Then there are problems with setting; somehow the words on the page seem to lack any sense of 'atmosphere' and gradually the story seems to falter and die. With whodunnits there is often a kind of 'clues block'; with thrillers we may become convinced that our planned climax is not much better than flat beer; if it's supposed to be funny and our friends refuse to roll round the floor holding their sides each time we read them a chapter ...

Then there is what I might call 'research block' when a story is worked out but we keep putting off doing the necessary background research because it is too difficult, too depressing, too obscure ... I must admit I have trouble with this one. And its alter ego: the writer who researches endlessly but just never seems to get round to actually writing the book.

\* \* \* \* \*

Carmel Bird, in her novel *White Garden*, provides atmosphere partly by setting it in a very specific moment—"It was summer. 3 February 1967. The sunny city beyond the walls of these gardens was troubled by the story of a man hanged that morning within the prison of the city for the murder of a prison officer. Ronald Ryan was the hanged man's name, and it was a name never to be forgotten. He was known as 'The Last Man Hanged in Australia'. All over the country people stood still at eight o'clock that morning, stopped what they were doing and thought about death at the end of a rope within the prison walls. For many years afterwards people would say: 'I remember the day they hanged Ronald Ryan. It was stifling. There was a kind of pall across the city. You could smell death in the air.'"

That day *The Age* newspaper began its editorial 'Capital punishment is unwise and unnecessary because it cannot be justified by Christian philosophy, by modern criminological research or by ethics' and ended it with 'There is nothing more to say; except that it is not too late to halt this hanging while courage remains, while mercy and charity exist and while time runs to a close.'

Thirty years later, the man who defended Ryan, Paul Opas, continues to believe Ryan was not guilty. It is not that Opas ever claimed that he was infallible in judging his clients. In *The Great Ring-In*, in which highly-regarded Regal Vista was secretly substituted for poorly-performed Royal School at a race-meeting in country Victoria, he says frankly that the accused, Rick Renzella, "almost boasted about misleading me and the court in an interview he gave to the press after his conviction".

But as an article in *The Sunday Tasmanian* (19/1/1997) pointed out Opas is not the only one to have doubts. Two years after the shooting, the warder, Helmut Lange, who may have found the missing round of ammunition and suppressed it, or been pressured to

suppress it, (and the case hung on the fact that one round of ammunition was missing) committed suicide while on duty at the jail. Could he no longer live with his conscience ...

*The White Garden's* sequel *Red Shoes* suffers a little, I think, because she could not quite decide on the right tone and style a guardian angel should take, nor the degree of omniscience such a being should have. Nevertheless, and especially if you love shoes, it is an intriguing novel.

I have just been re-reading Walter Starkie's account in *Raggle-Taggle*—"Now I know the reason why Gypsies bury a good pair of boots with a corpse. They know that the dead must wander many a weary mile over burning plains as I am doing now, and well-fitting boots are necessary. Boots are objects of veneration to the wandering folk because so much depends upon them. ... When we read fairy stories which were inspired by Gypsy wanderers we find a great many descriptions of magic shoes which carry men over hill and over dale. It was the Gypsies, I am sure, who invented the seven-leagued boots to give themselves courage on a tedious journey. Shoes are a symbol of fertility and the good things of this life, as any Gypsy will tell us. When I was at Huedin a Gypsy woman told me that the girls used to throw their shoes up on the branches of a tree to find out if they were to get married. If the shoe stuck in the branches, then the girl would find a mate within the year. Everyone knows the old nursery rhyme of the woman who lived in the shoe, but few realize its significance.

"There was an old woman who lived in a shoe;

She had so many children she did not know what to do."

The shoe is here the symbol of fertility, for it was the shoe which the friends of the old woman threw after her when she set out as a bride from her father's house" ...

Mental illness, too, lends itself to dramatic treatment but I don't think any book has made quite the same impact on me since I read Janet Frame's agonising account in *Faces in the Water* ...

\* \* \* \* \*

An interview with Bryce Courtenay in *The Sunday Tasmanian*—"Not that Courtenay enjoys the writing process. He finds it lonely and isolating, and when writing will lock himself away for days at a time for months on end.

"I have yet to find a writer who actually enjoys the process," Courtenay said. "No writing is easy. If writing were pleasurable, then everybody would be doing it."

I do accept that writing vacuum-cleaner manuals is likely to be lonely and dreary and I know that finding a way to get work published is extraordinarily difficult—a painting can be put on display but most people really don't want to sit and listen to a writer talking about what her book is about, unless she is very famous—but I've never been able to see writing fiction as a lonely activity. People, places, events, conversations, humour, pathos, time, all become so real the difficulty is to leave them behind when it's time to put the dinner on or answer the phone.

Courtenay is not alone. Gavin Casey is even more definite—"Anybody who thinks writing a book isn't a lonely job, has never tried to write one."

Writers of writing manuals tend to warn writers of the loneliness, the difficulties, the problems of getting words on the page; they probably feel a need to do so, so they can't be accused of false pretences. If they only spoke of the joys of writing they might get irate letters from writers overcome by loneliness.

And yet ... Sidney Sheldon in an interview in *The Writer* said "I consider writing the most exciting thing in my life. Most of my writer friends hate writing; they love "Having written." I love the actual act of creating." And a letter to the same magazine said "Why not approach the task with the joy and gusto of a William Saroyan, who couldn't wait for each day to begin so he could rush to his desk to write his tales of the common folk of our land?"

You may remember the exchange in Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*—

"Isn't the writing of good prose an emotional excitement?"

“Yes, of course it is. At least, when you get the thing dead right and know it’s dead right, there’s no excitement like it. It’s marvellous. It makes you feel like God on the Seventh day—for a bit, anyhow.”

You’re still not convinced that writing is a joy and a privilege?

Then let me finish up with some words from a famous American: “A writer who hates the actual writing is as impossible as a lawyer who hates the law or a doctor who hates medicine. Plotting may be a bore even if you are good at it. At least it is something that has to be done so that you can get on with the real business. But a writer who hates the actual writing, who gets no joy out of the creation of magic by words, to me is simply not a writer at all.

“The actual writing is what you live for. The rest is something you have to get through in order to arrive at the point. How can you hate the actual writing? What is there to hate about it? You might as well say that a man likes to chop wood or clean house and hates the sunshine or the night breeze or the nodding of flowers or the dew on the grass and the song of birds. How can you hate the magic which makes a paragraph or a sentence or a line of dialogue or a description something in the nature of a new creation?”

(from *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, ed. Dorothy Gardiner & Kathrine Sorley Walker.)

\* \* \* \* \*

Authors in Australia tend, even if they’ve taken all of Carmel’s good advice, to be poor or relatively so. The Bryce Courtenays and Colleen McCulloughs exist in a fairly-thinly tenanted strata. (This is not a whinge; I’m sure they work long and hard for their incomes; the problem, as I see it, is with publishers who prefer to pay a \$1 million advance to 1 writer rather than 10 \$100,000 advances to 10 writers (or 20 \$50,000 advances to 20 writers etc) because it is easier to promote and make a profit out of 1 super writer rather than 10 semi-super writers ... I’m not sure I agree with their equation; I’m not particularly attracted to Ancient Rome as subject matter (ancient anywhere for that matter) so I’ve never bought any of McCullough’s series whereas the law of averages would suggest that at least *one* of their semi-super writers would have to set a book in a society or on a subject which attracts me.)

The other day I came across a recipe for ‘The Poor Author’s Pudding’ and wondered if it might become staple fare at gatherings of writers—‘Flavour a quart of new milk by boiling in it for a few minutes half a stick of well-bruised cinnamon, or the thin rind of a small lemon; add a few grains of salt, and three ounces of sugar, and turn the whole into a deep basin: when it is quite cold, stir to it three well-beaten eggs, and strain the mixture into a pie-dish. Cover the top entirely with slices of bread free from crust, and half an inch thick, cut so as to join neatly, and buttered on both sides: bake the pudding in a moderate oven for about half an hour, or in a Dutch oven before the fire.’

(Elizabeth Ray’s adaption from Eliza Acton’s *Modern Cookery*, 1845.)

\* \* \* \* \*

- August 31st: Charmian Clift  
William Saroyan
- September 1st: Edgar Rice Burroughs
- September 2nd: D. K. Broster
- September 3rd: Lennie Lower
- September 4th: Mary Renault
- September 5th: Arthur Koestler
- September 6th: Elizabeth Ferrars
- September 7th: C. J. Dennis
- September 8th: Siegfried Sassoon

\* \* \* \* \*

A chapter from a book *Trauma and Recovery* was passed on to me by someone

working in the area of child abuse—and I was interested to see that it mentioned Sassoon—‘One of the many casualties of the war’s devastation was the illusion of manly honour and glory in battle. Under conditions of unremitting exposure to the horrors of trench warfare, men began to break down in shocking numbers. Confined and rendered helpless, subjected to constant threat of annihilation, and forced to witness the mutilation and death of their comrades without any hope of reprieve, many soldiers began to act like hysterical women. They screamed and wept uncontrollably. They froze and could not move. They became mute and unresponsive. They lost their memory and their capacity to feel. The number of psychiatric casualties was so great that hospitals had to be hastily requisitioned to house them. According to one estimate, mental breakdowns represented 40 percent of British battle casualties. Military authorities attempted to suppress reports of psychiatric casualties because of their demoralizing effect on the public.’

Yet the powers-that-were clung to the belief it was a purely physical symptom—and where men had not been exposed to explosions they were clearly men of low moral fibre—‘moral invalids’—or malingerers who should be dishonourably discharged.

‘The most prominent proponent of the traditionalist view was the British psychiatrist Lewis Yealland. In his 1918 treatise, *Hysterical Disorders of Warfare*, he advocated a treatment strategy based on shaming, threats, and punishment. Hysterical symptoms such as mutism, sensory loss, or motor paralysis were treated with electric shocks. Patients were excoriated for their laziness and cowardice. Those who exhibited the “hideous enemy of negativism” were threatened with court martial. In one case, Yealland reported treating a mute patient by strapping him into a chair and applying electric shocks to his throat. The treatment went on without respite for hours, until the patient finally spoke. As the shocks were applied, Yealland exhorted the patient to “remember, you must behave as the hero I expect you to be ... A man who has gone through so many battles should have better control of himself.”

‘Progressive medical authorities argued, on the contrary, that combat neurosis was a bona fide psychiatric condition that could occur in soldiers of high moral character. They advocated humane treatment based upon psychoanalytic principles. The champion of this more liberal point of view was W.H.R. Rivers ... His most famous patient was a young officer, Siegfried Sassoon, who had distinguished himself for conspicuous bravery in combat and for his war poetry. Sassoon gained notoriety when, while still in uniform, he publicly affiliated himself with the pacifist movement and denounced the war. The text of his *Soldier’s Declaration*, written in 1917, reads like a contemporary antiwar manifesto:

I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.

I am a soldier, convinced that I am acting on behalf of soldiers. I believe that this war, upon which I entered as a war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest ... I have seen and endured the sufferings of the troops, and I can no longer be a party to prolong these sufferings for ends which I believe to be evil and unjust.’

His anti-war statement (and throwing his medal in the sea) was attributed to his mental collapse; Rivers got him back into the trenches; and he survived the war ‘but like many survivors with combat neurosis, he was condemned to relive it for the rest of his life. He devoted himself to writing and rewriting his war memoirs, to preserving the memory of the fallen, and to furthering the cause of pacifism. Though he recovered from his “bad case of nerves” sufficiently to have a productive life, he was haunted by the memory of those who had not been so fortunate:

Shell shock. How many a brief bombardment had its long-delayed after-effect in the

minds of these survivors, many of whom had looked at their companions and laughed while inferno did its best to destroy them. Not then was their evil hour; but now; now, in the sweating suffocation of nightmare, in paralysis of limbs, in the stammering of dislocated speech. Worst of all, in the disintegration of those qualities through which they had been so gallant and selfless and uncomplaining—this, in the finer types of men, was the unspeakable tragedy of shell-shock .... In the name of civilization these soldiers had been martyred, and it remained for civilization to prove that their martyrdom wasn't a dirty swindle.

Within a few years after the end of the war, medical interest in the subject of psychological trauma faded once again. Though numerous men with long-lasting psychiatric disabilities crowded the back wards of veterans' hospitals, their presence had become an embarrassment to civilian societies eager to forget.'

Sassoon wrote a deeply moving poem on this 'Repression of War Experience':

Now light the candles; one; two; there's a moth;  
What silly beggars they are to blunder in  
And scorch their wings with glory, liquid flame—  
No, no, not that,—it's bad to think of war,  
When thoughts you've gagged all day come back to scare you;  
And it's been proved that soldiers don't go mad  
Unless they lose control of ugly thoughts  
That drive them out to jabber among the trees.

Now light your pipe; look, what a steady hand.  
Draw a deep breath; stop thinking; count fifteen,  
And you're as right as rain ...

Why won't it rain? ...

I wish there'd be a thunder-storm to-night,  
With bucketsful of water to sluice the dark,  
And make the roses hang their dripping heads.  
Books; what a jolly company they are,  
Standing so quiet and patient on their shelves,  
Dressed in dim brown, and black, and white, and green,  
And every kind of colour. Which will you read?  
Come on; O *do* read something; they're so wise.  
I tell you all the wisdom of the world  
Is waiting for you on those shelves; and yet  
You sit and gnaw your nails, and let your pipe out,  
And listen to the silence: on the ceiling  
There's one big, dizzy moth that bumps and flutters;  
And in the breathless air outside the house  
The garden waits for something that delays.  
There must be crowds of ghosts among the trees,—  
Not people killed in battle,—they're in France,—  
But horrible shapes in shrouds—old men who died  
Slow, natural deaths,—old men with ugly souls,  
Who wore their bodies out with nasty sins.

You're quiet and peaceful, summering safe at home;  
You'd never think there was a bloody war on! ...  
O yes, you would ... why, you can hear the guns.  
Hark! Thud, thud, thud,—quite soft ... they never cease—

Those whispering guns—O Christ, I want to go out  
And screech at them to stop—I'm going crazy;  
I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sassoon is remembered for his war poetry (and his sharp criticisms of people 'at home'— You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go) and his sporting pieces but what else, I wondered, did he write.

He turned to satire, in titles such 'News from the War-After-Next', 'On Reading the War Diary of a Defunct Ambassador', 'Lines Written in Anticipation of a London Paper Attaining a Guaranteed Circulation of Ten Million Daily' and 'Mammoniac Ode' (which begins—

Hark, hark, the Mark in the Money Market sings!  
And sweet Swiss francs in Bernese Banks  
Yodel to Mammon a million thanks  
For swift and profitable flight on funded wings) as well as poems of social commentary such as 'The Case for the Miners'—

*'Why should a miner earn six pounds a week?*

*Leisure! They'd only spend it in a bar!*

*Standard of life! You'll never teach them Greed,*

*Or make them more contented than they are!'*

That's how my port-flushed friends discuss the Strike.

And that's the reason why I shout and splutter.

And that the reason why I'd almost like

To see them hawking matches in the gutter.

He wrote a variety of nature poems, mostly not particularly memorable though I appreciated his little piece 'Outlived by Trees'—

Beech, cedar, lime, when I'm dead Me,

You'll stand, lawn-shadowing, tree by tree;

And in your greenery, while you last,

I shall survive who shared your past

—but the pieces I liked best were his forays into his beliefs—

'I am the emblem of your phantom yesterday.

I am tomorrow's journey and the eternal track

Across the desert land of life where none turn back.

I am the setting sun, the sun that rises red;

And the white moon, silvering dim cities of the dead.'

(from 'The Hour-Glass')

Sleepwalkers empty-eyed come strangely down the stairs.

These are my selves,—once proud, once passionate with young prayers,

Once vehement with vows. I know not when they died,

Those ignorant selves .... Meanwhile my self sits brooding here

In the house where I was born. Dwindling, they disappear.

Me they did not foresee. But in their looks I find

Simplicities unlearned long since and left behind.

(from 'December Stillness')

Simplicities unlearned ...

\* \* \* \* \*

September 9th: Phyllis Whitney  
September 10th: Peter Lovesey  
September 11th: O. Henry  
September 12th: Kevin Brophy  
September 13th: Saxby Pridmore  
                    Roald Dahl  
September 14th: Eric Bentley  
September 15th: Agatha Christie

\* \* \* \* \*

Do you remember the film of *Death on Nile* where the question is asked ‘Can you libel the dead?’ Yet I couldn’t remember it being in the book. The fault of my memory I assumed and re-read it. But no. Rosalie Otterbourne says of her mother ‘It isn’t really her fault. She got discouraged. Her books didn’t sell any more. People are tired of all that cheap sex stuff .... It hurt her—it hurt her dreadfully. And so she began to—to drink. For a long time I didn’t know why she was so queer. Then, when I found out, I tried to—to stop it. She’d be all right for a bit—and then suddenly, she’d start and there would be dreadful quarrels and rows with people.’

Did the makers of the film believe ‘dreadful quarrels and rows’ wasn’t a sufficient motive?

And it is an intriguing question: Can you libel the dead?

I came upon an American answer to this question—no, you can’t unless the libel action was begun before the person claiming libel died. But what about Australia? Golvan and McDonald don’t touch on this subject in *Writers and the Law*. But Graham Fricke in *Libels, Lampoons and Litigants* says simply, ‘While most civil actions today ‘survive’ the death of the victim, libel actions do not. They ‘die’ with the death of the person involved.’

\* \* \* \* \*

September 16th: Wilfrid Burchett

\* \* \* \* \*

Robert Harris wrote *Selling Hitler: The Extraordinary Story of the Con Job of the Century — The Faking of the Hitler “Diaries”*; a shabby yet entertaining story of how Stern magazine, the Rupert Murdoch news empire, reputable historians such as Hugh Trevor-Roper, and collectors of Hitler memorabilia, were all taken in by a forgery in which almost everything was inauthentic. Yet as Clifford Irving, hoax biographer of Howard Hughes, has said “Corporate profit justifies any form of lunacy” and Harris sums it up neatly, “The impending fiasco, swollen by the profligacy of West Germany’s journalism, was abetted by the parsimony of Great Britain’s.”

(The suspicion existed—that the diaries were a CIA ‘plant’; at first I found this astonishing but I’ve since learned the CIA faked the diary of an alleged Soviet defector, which was published by Doubleday as *The Penkovsky Papers*. Given that the CIA had, and may still have, several former Nazis on the staff of Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe it becomes understandable that they could be suspected of wanting to portray Hitler in a more kindly light.)

Running like a curious thread through the whole story is another Irving: David. Harris says of him, “Whatever allegations may be levelled at Irving as an historian—and there have been many—there is no doubting his ability to sniff out original documents. Over the past twenty years he had become only too familiar with the scale of the trade in forgeries. He had himself almost been fooled by a faked ‘diary’ of the German intelligence chief, Wilhelm Canaris.”

Irving turned up at the press conference in West Germany, called to announce the ‘find’ of the ‘diaries’, and threw a large spanner in the works. Over the next five days he records making £15,000 in interviews, articles, and contracts for further work exposing the ‘diaries’ but then, having milked that position dry, he decided to alter his position and

declare the diaries genuine as a way of generating fresh controversy and therefore fresh income. Harris says, “There were a number of factors which made this an attractive idea, apart from the obvious injection of fresh publicity it would provide. One was temperamental. Irving had always relished his role as an *enfant terrible*. He liked being outrageous, making liberal flesh creep. Now, for the first time in his career, his stand on the diaries had put him on the side of conventional opinion. It was not his style and he found it disconcerting.”

When the Bundesarchiv in West Germany officially announced the diaries were forgeries, Irving hastily produced a press release pointing out that he was the first person to declare the diaries to be fakes—to which a reporter on *The Times* responded, “Yes, and the last person to declare them authentic.”

Queries were raised about whether it was right to use the diaries to present Hitler as fundamentally ‘ordinary’ in the sense that the widely-shared activity of keeping a diary might suggest. Queries were raised about the rightful owner of the diaries’ copyright. But almost no one seems to have engaged with the basic question of whether it is ethical to publish the diaries of people (whether dead or alive) who have not given specific permission for publication. It was simply assumed that because Hitler had been dead fifty years and because he had been a ‘public figure’ this was not an issue. When Richard Burton’s wife Susan published his diaries after his death her action was decried as tasteless even though he had specifically left the diaries to her in his will; it might be argued that it was seen as tasteless because the diaries referred to people who were still alive but this same argument could be used about the Hitler diaries. It could also be argued that we all, even if we didn’t start World War Two, are public figures to some extent, we all engage with public institutions and the ‘public’ to varying degrees. So where should we draw the line? Historians would say they have a right to any material which might throw further light on an important period in history; the media would claim the public has the right to know the truth. I would query whether people’s private diaries *do* throw either ‘light’ or ‘truth’ on their public conduct. A personal diary, as opposed to an appointments diary, acts significantly as a ‘safety valve’. As Elizabeth Bowen put it in *The Death of the Heart*: ‘And a diary, after all, is written to please oneself — therefore it’s bound to be enormously written up. The obligation to write it is all in one’s own eye, and look how one is when it’s almost always written — upstairs, late, overwrought, alone ...’ Virginia Woolf and Bertolt Brecht have both been criticised for making ‘anti-Semitic’ statements in their diaries (they also make anti-other-things statements in their diaries) but I am inclined to think that precisely because they let off their irritation privately they were able to treat the people in question with kindness, courtesy and good humour (and if you would like to point out that kindness and courtesy were not Brecht’s strong points then I will amend that to suggest the man in question had his drink topped up, his jokes laughed at, and his hand shaken or his back slapped when the party was over and the guests were saying ‘Gute Nacht’); it is the people who irritate us yet in whom we can discern good qualities that most often need that ‘safety valve’; the people we find utterly repulsive we don’t invite round for tea or parties in the first place ...

But the diaries should surely have rung alarm bells because of their *style*. They were (cursorily) checked for the authenticity of the handwriting and their historical accuracy. But their nature is all wrong. They are written neither in the immensely turgid, tedious, almost impossibly prolix style of *Mein Kampf* nor in the terse shorthand an extremely busy man might be expected to use at the end of a long day.

And I have one more, I think insuperable, objection. They do not appear to ever mention the weather. Now I am congenitally incapable of keeping a diary without mentioning the weather and I believe this holds true for most of the human race. If you want me to believe Hitler was the one exception then the onus of proof is on you ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Re-writing history has almost become an industry in itself. I was just browsing in *The True Story of the Maid Of Orleans* by Maurice David-Darnac which suggests that Joan of Arc was neither a poor peasant girl nor did she burn at the stake.

Hugh Thomas in *The Murder of Rudolf Hess* suggested that the Rudolf Hess in Spandau prison was not the real Rudolf Hess, then he went on in *Doppelgängers: The Truth about the Bodies in the Berlin Bunker* to suggest that the body of Eva Braun in the bunker was not Eva Braun at all, but simply an already dead woman brought in off Berlin's streets. He also had some unkind things to say about Hugh Trevor-Roper—"It is a sad fact that, unless forced to do so, historians hardly ever read any scientific periodicals or scientific articles concerning matters of historic interest, and they almost never seek professional assistance to further their understanding. And if they do seek such advice they tend to negate its effect by themselves interpreting the advice they have been given so that it fits their own purpose—quite often inadvertently—thus rendering expert, unbiased advice instantly biased and inexpert. But in the case of the forensic data relating to the supposed corpses of Hitler and Eva Braun the carelessness in failing to include Professor Sognaes's contrary forensic interpretation is inexcusable." (Professor Sognaes was a forensic odontologist.)

It was Trevor-Roper who gave the thumbs up to the Hitler 'diaries' after seeing them in a Swiss bank. I can understand him being swayed by the information that handwriting and paper experts had seen them. But, really, he gave them less time and care than I would give to buying a kitchen table—despite the fact they had the potential to radically change thinking about certain aspects of 20th century history.

Yet I feel being an historian is a hard job. You have neither a training in the forensic sciences nor do you have the excitement and colour that the eye-witness has.

Of course being an eye-witness is a tricky business. Warren Tute says, "One of the great difficulties of projecting an event or a life even from the recent past into the present is that the emotional tension of a particular day, year or period has a deep and subtle effect on the events and people of the time which can be imagined but never properly recaptured by subsequent generations. Art is essential to bring it alive and art is a dangerous skill to apply to history.

Those who heard Churchill's great speeches in the Second World War are scarcely likely ever to forget the effect they had. But to listen to them in London whilst the bombs were dropping was one thing, to hear a recording of them in New York was another and to read them today is yet something else. The climate is different, people's reactions change and the human understanding applied to any person or event is never really the same from one day to the next."

\* \* \* \* \*

The debate on whether to keep David Irving out of Australia is an interesting one. Other people have been kept out of Australia. Nobel Peace Prize laureate, José Ramos-Horta was prevented from entering Australia from 1977 till 1983, even though both his father and grandfather had risked their lives to assist Australian troops in East Timor in World War II, and he had committed no crime nor been accused of one. (Australia was the only country to deny him entry.)

There was an attempt to keep Czech writer Egon Kisch out of Australia in the 1930s. Kisch was prevented from leaving his ship in Fremantle. In Melbourne he was also prevented but, in desperation, jumped from the ship to the dock, sustaining a broken leg. (Frank Hardy presents a colourful account in *Power Without Glory*.) In Sydney he was finally able to speak.

Sir Percy Joske wrote "Menzie's first task (as Acting Leader of the United Australia Party) in his new capacity was of a highly controversial nature—to defend the exclusion from the Commonwealth of Herr Egon Kisch, which he did on the basis of confidential information received by the Government. The Kisch incident created a degree of

excitement at the time. Kisch had been given a dictation test in Gaelic, which he failed to pass. The High Court held this to be no test, as, according to the Court, Gaelic was not a European language. Some people might not agree with the High Court. Menzies was not responsible for the administration of this test but he was blamed for it, and it was subsequently said that he treated any matter relating to the Gaelic tongue with profound respect. He continued to regard Gaelic, despite the High Court judgment, as still a living language.” But did the Court mean that Gaelic was not a language of Continental Europe? Or did they mean it was a dead language? And what did the failure of a Czechoslovak writer to pass a test in Gaelic *prove*. And what of Kisch himself? He came to Australia to urge rejection of Fascism and a greater understanding of Adolf Hitler. But, here, he was presented as a Communist and excluded on those grounds. Hungarian writer George Mikes in his 1968 book *Boomerang* wrote ‘The 1901 law prohibited the entry of seven classes of persons. The first class consisted of those who failed to pass the ‘dictation test’. Although this device was intended to exclude non-Europeans it led to some amusing results. After World War I, when Egon Erwin Kisch, the brilliant Communist journalist, wanted to visit Australia, the immigration authorities determined to keep him out, gave him a dictation test in an outlandish language. Kisch failed even to recognize it, and was refused permission to land. He jumped off the boat and broke a leg. He had to be taken to hospital where he spent several weeks. He wrote a biting and witty book on—or rather against—Australia on the basis of his experiences in hospital.’ Of this book Nettie Palmer wrote “Kisch’s book is brilliant and saucy, sometimes hit-or-miss, sometimes right in the middle of the note.”

Did Kisch have much impact on Australia? One of the people who heard him speak was a young man called Alan Marshall—‘In 1934, I was stirred into action by the Government’s treatment of Egon Erwin Kisch, a Czech writer, who was barred from landing in Australia where he was going to address a meeting against war and fascism. He had been a victim of Hitler’s persecution in Germany where, even then, concentration camps were being set up.

Finally he jumped from his ship on to the pier at Port Melbourne and broke his leg. Kisch was a writer, and his arrest became the concern of all Australian writers who valued freedom.

He was released, and I heard him address a huge meeting at the West Melbourne Stadium, where I first learnt of nazi torture and the horror its victims were suffering’.

Another young man listening was Wilfrid Burchett, who was denied renewal of his passport in 1955 and travelled on a Cuban passport until 1972 when the Australian Government relented. He credited Kisch with making “an indelible impression” and changing the direction of his life. He was born on a small farm in Victoria and during the Depression was ‘on the roads’, ie. carrying his swag, for a while.

(What happened to Kisch after the fiasco in Australia? Pablo Neruda writes of meeting him in Mexico several years later. Strangely, he describes him as a “Czech humorist” and says “Kisch left some fascinating books and I greatly admired his wonderful talent, his child-like curiosity, and his dexterity at legerdemain. No sooner had he entered my house than he would pull an egg out of his ear or swallow, one by one, as many as seven coins, which this very fine impoverished exile could well use for himself. We had known each other in Spain, and when he showed incessant curiosity about my reason for using the name Neruda, which I was not born with, I kidded him: “Great Kisch, you may have uncovered the secret of Colonel Redl”—the famous Austrian spy case of 1914— “but you will never clear up the mystery of my name.”

And so it was. He died in Prague, having been accorded every honor his liberated country could give him, but this professional interloper was never able to find out why Neruda called himself Neruda.”)

Craig Cormick in an article ‘Nuclear Tests and the Mushroom Syndrome’ writes that “on 3 September (1945), the Australian journalist Wilfrid Burchett arrived in Hiroshima

and wrote the first account by an outside journalist of the devastation.” In his account Burchett said “In Hiroshima, thirty days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly—people who were uninjured in the cataclysm—from an unknown something which I can only describe as the atomic plague.

Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write these facts as dispassionately as I can in the hope that they will act as a warning to the world.

In this first testing ground of the atomic bomb I have seen the most terrible and frightening desolation in four years of war. It makes a blitzed Pacific island seem like an Eden. The damage is far greater than photographs can show.

When you arrive in Hiroshima you can look around and for twenty-five and perhaps thirty square miles you can see hardly a building. It gives you an empty feeling in the stomach to see such man-made devastation.”

Cormick also chronicles his difficulty in trying to get his story out. “He sent a copy by wire to the Tokyo news agency office, *Domei*, but unfortunately General MacArthur had just declared Tokyo off limits to journalists. Nevertheless, a colleague, stuck at Yokohama, hired a Japanese journalist to go to Tokyo to fetch it.

Meanwhile in Hiroshima an official US Pentagon Press Investigatory Group arrived by plane to view the city. Officials accompanying the journalists as press handlers were surprised to find Burchett there ahead of them, and were both hostile and suspicious of him. The military led the press around by the hand, subtly pointing out what the military considered to be of interest and demonstrated the proud success of its bomb. The journalists were not encouraged to talk to the bewildered locals. After a quick tour of the city and the customary press conference they headed back to their plane.

Burchett requested to go with them—but was refused. He even asked if they could take a copy of his story to give to the *Daily Express* correspondent in Tokyo. That too was refused.

So he made the long return trip by train. Meanwhile his story was received and was printed on the front page of the *Daily Express* and given gratis to the press of the world. Patiently riding a Japanese train and unaware his story was being carried around the world, he arrived in Tokyo just in time to walk into a press conference being held by Brigadier-General Thomas Farrell, the deputy head of the Manhattan atomic bomb project, to refute Burchett’s claim of an “atomic plague”. A senior military official involved in the project described his story as “so much nonsense”.

His camera with his film of Hiroshima was stolen and MacArthur wanted to withdraw his press accreditation and expel him from Occupied Japan.”

In 1971 Burchett revisited Japan and continued to do so. Out of this came his book *Shadows of Hiroshima* in which he says “I could have had no idea when I entered Hiroshima just four weeks after the city’s incineration that this would become a water-shed in my life, decisively influencing my whole professional career and world outlook.”

There is something rather touching about the life of Wilfrid Burchett. His writing is at times, tedious, repetitive, strident, and most obviously ‘one-eyed’ but he has also been called ‘the most famous radical journalist of his generation’; he believed in what he was doing and he was never seduced by the chimera of trying to be seen as ‘impartial’ or ‘unbiased’. He was partial and he was biased and he never minded saying so up front.

But he was also a man of considerable personal courage. That doyen of Australian journalists, Richard Hughes, who was strongly anti-Communist, described him as ‘one of the best and bravest correspondents I’ve ever known’. He went in to see some of the victims in Hiroshima—“I had to see the horrors for myself. I had to look at the suppurating third-degree burns, the bleeding eyes and gums, the fallen-out hair which lay like black haloes around almost every head. The victims and their family members who looked at me

with a burning hatred which cut into me like a knife. At one point Dr Katsube spoke to me in English: ‘You must go. I cannot be responsible for your life if you stay any longer.’ ”

He was in his sixties when he went out into the bush of southern Africa to live with and talk to the left-wing liberation movements in Angola and Mozambique. He also looks, in his pictures, overweight and unfit. But he saw, quite rightly, that you cannot understand what people really want without doing the hard slog and going out to talk with them.

He retained some of his toughest criticisms for Henry Kissinger—talking of his slipshod scholarship, political manipulations, vanity, and outright deceit and lying—who of course never went out into the bush to talk with anyone—and, it seems, makes millions on the ‘talk circuit’ giving his views on this and that. Yet, Burchett was not alone in criticising Kissinger. Henry F. Jackson, in *From the Congo to Soweto: U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Africa Since 1960*, wrote, “Kissinger’s indifference verged on contempt in his treatment of African Ambassadors in Washington. He refused continually to receive the diplomats of individual missions and deigned to see them infrequently only en masse.” Even an inside source like John Stockwell, who was head of the CIA’s Angola Task Force and wrote of that fiasco in *In Search of Enemies*, says “Carl (Deputy Chief of the CIA’s Africa Division) insisted that it was Kissinger who was pushing the agency into the covert operation in Angola. Kissinger saw the Angolan conflict solely in terms of global politics and was determined the Soviets should not be permitted to make a move in any remote part of the world without being confronted militarily by the United States. Superficially, his opposition to the Soviet presence was being rationalized in terms of Angola’s strategic location on the South Atlantic, near the shipping lanes of the giant tankers which bring oil from the Middle East around the horn of Africa to the United States. This argument was not profound. Soviet bases in Somalia had much better control of our shipping lanes, and any military move by the Soviets against our oil supplies would trigger a reaction so vigorous that a Soviet base in Angola would be a trivial factor. In fact, Angola had little plausible importance to American national security and little economic importance beyond the *robusta* coffee it sold to American markets and the relatively small amounts of petroleum Gulf Oil pumped from the Cabindan fields.

“No. Uncomfortable with recent historic events, and frustrated by our humiliation in Vietnam, Kissinger was seeking opportunities to challenge the Soviets. Conspicuously, he had overruled his advisors and refused to seek diplomatic solutions in Angola. The question was, would the American people, so recently traumatized by Vietnam, tolerate even a modest involvement in another remote, confusing, Third World civil war? Carl Bantam and I did not think so.”

So the American people, unless they took the time out to read something like Basil Davidson’s *The Eye of the Storm* or Wilfrid Burchett’s *Southern Africa Stands Up*, never got to hear about, let alone judge, American involvement in Angola.

Burchett records a long and interesting conversation he had with Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillén—“The Spanish conquest started in 1511 and within forty years there was scarcely one of the original population left. But the Spaniards who came had no taste for hard work. They needed African labor for their farms. They had already acquired a taste for slaves in Spain. From 1517 onward large numbers of slaves were imported, continuing until 1880. Official statistics gave a figure of some 800,000, but in reality it ran into millions. Apart from official imports, there was a huge black market by which the slaves were smuggled in. Cubans are almost exclusively a mix of Spaniards and Africans ... Today we never speak of Africa in the abstract. The reality is that Africa is composed of many different nations, peoples speaking different languages and with different characteristics. But we are especially conscious of those parts of Africa from which so many of our ancestors came. Angola is one of them. Very many slaves were brought to Cuba from Angola ... because of our antecedents we have great sympathy for Spain and for Africa. These are the two forces which decided the character and way of thinking of the Cuban people. During the Spanish

Civil War, many thousands of Cubans went to fight—many of them to die—with the Republicans. Spain is the country of our white ancestors, just as Angola is one of those of our black ancestors. It is part of the roots of life. Sympathy for the Angolan resistance struggle is part of our revolutionary nature, as was also our sympathy for the Spanish Republicans and for the Vietnamese and others fighting wars of national liberation. But it is also because Angola is part of us. It is the great pride of our people that we are able to do something for one of the lands of our ancestors.

Don't forget that we are also indebted to the newly freed slaves who fought side by side with Cubans in our own war of independence from the Spaniards.'

Burchett saved most of his criticisms for the American government but he says "I was expelled from Greece, with British approval, immediately following the elections on 31 March 1946, for reporting what I had seen in Salonika and in Greek Macedonia; also for predicting that civil war was bound to break out. The policy of the Left, including EAM which represented the anti-Nazi resistance movement, was to boycott the elections. But I saw village after village surrounded by the British-backed Greek Army, escorting those of voting age to the polls and shooting those who tried to escape the army cordons. I went into prisons the day following the balloting (the authorities believing I was a UN 'observer') and talked with those who had been wounded by rifle fire or beaten unconscious for trying to avoid voting. One of those with whom I talked had a high British decoration for his wartime activities."

(Greek Macedonia is the subject of a book which ran into publication difficulties when pressure, so I understand, was brought by the Greek Government on the Cambridge University Press; yet if the information put out by the Aegean Macedonian Association of Australia is correct it is a subject which needs to be written about and published. "The Balkan Wars of 1912-13 ended in the partition of Macedonia among Greece, Serbia and Bulgaria. The Aegean part of Macedonia secured by Greece was officially known as Northern Greece up until August, 1988 when it was proclaimed the Greek Province of Macedonia.

The present denial of basic human rights to ethnic Macedonians in Greece has its roots back in 1913 when Greek soldiers committed atrocities over the Macedonian population. As indicated in the Carnegie Report on the Balkan Wars, 161 villages were burned down and more than 16,000 houses were destroyed.

Englishman W. Hild in his personal narrative on his travels in Aegean Macedonia commented that not only was the Macedonian nationality persecuted in life but also death, with graveyards desecrated, crosses with Macedonian names removed, and even bones taken out of their graves and burned.

An Australian, Bert Birtles, commented in his book *Exiles In The Aegean*, a personal narrative published in 1938, "If Greece has no Jewish problem, she has the Macedonians. In the name of "Hellenization" these people are being persecuted continually and arrested for the most fantastic reasons. Metaxas's way of inculcating the proper nationalist spirit among them has been to change all the native place-names into Greek and to forbid use of the native language. For displaying the slightest resistance to this edict—for this too is a danger to the security of the State—peasants and villagers have been exiled without trial."

Little has changed. The human rights denied to the Macedonians in the 1920s and 30s are still denied to them in the 1990s.")

Even so, I am inclined to believe that it was anti-Americanism, rather than pro-Communism, which increasingly drove Burchett's life-work after Hiroshima. He wrote the largest of his output on Vietnam and he never minced words when it came to describing the American generals—"The Têt offensive was indeed one of the greatest feats in the history of warfare until that time. Above all, it deflated the bragging of U.S. generals, especially that of the Commander of the U.S.-Saigon forces, General William C. Westmoreland. He and other U.S. generals were proven to be bungling amateurs, out-manoeuvred on the

battlefields; their much-publicized gadgetry of super-detection, laughable. They had failed to spot the movement and concentration of scores of thousands of troops around every major town and base, including three battalions around Westmoreland's own headquarters at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut air base and a company of commandos outside, and soon inside, the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. They had failed to spot the movement of hundreds of thousands of tons of supplies into position in and around every major city. What movement had been spotted was wrongly evaluated. Five days before the attack, Westmoreland did have some inkling of things going on, but sounded the alert in the northernmost sector only as if an invasion from the North was coming! He and his generals boasted that detection techniques were so perfect that "no Vietcong could cook a pot of rice undetected." An hour before midnight on January 30, 1968, they were cooking pots of rice by the tens of thousand around over one hundred cities and towns, around every U.S. and South Vietnamese base and almost on the steps of the U.S. Embassy!

(*Grasshoppers & Elephants*)

In all the talk about liberation movements and more especially whether we should support movements which do not overtly work for democracy or capitalism, one key point always seems to be missed: wars may be fought to enable people to have the freedom to make political and economic choices but war itself tends to do away with such choices. Take Australia in World War Two. In 1940 the Communist Party was banned (though this was later rescinded) as was the Australian League for Peace and Democracy, the Minority Movement, and the 6 branches of the Italian Fascist Party and in 1942 the Australia First Movement and the Jehovah's Witnesses came under the cold suppressing eye of the government for 'hindering the war effort'. Strict censorship came into force. Restrictions were placed on where people could live and travel. Some products could no longer be made. The government had immensely increased powers over the workforce. People were restricted on what they could eat and wear. The 'market' no longer reigned supreme ... Had Japan not got bogged down in China and instead gone for broke in Australia we'd be kidding ourselves to suggest the government would have taken time out for elections ... Yet when liberation movements do not appear to be democratic and capitalistic in their struggle against foreign invaders (often euphemistically called colonisers, settlers, etc) we are chary of giving support precisely because they haven't acted in ways we wouldn't have acted had we become a Japanese colony.

That the USA chose Hiroshima because it was predominantly a civilian city rather than a military target—and avoided carrying out any conventional bombing raids over it so as to get 'unsullied' data—is now well attested. But is it time for us to relook at the conventional wisdom that has always had the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as the determining factor in Japan's surrender?

Meirion and Susie Harries in their major work *Soldiers of the Sun* say 'The Americans got in first ... But by themselves they were not the conclusive military strike that the Americans intended them to be. The full horror of their effects would not become clear for months, even years; and it was possible for some military leaders to convince themselves, and even others, that the damage had not been overwhelming ... It was the blow that had fallen in between the two atomic explosions which finally halted the Japanese army—a blow from the direction long expected, from the power that had been the primary enemy of Japan since the Meiji Restoration. On August 8, 1945, Soviet forces launched a four-pronged offensive into Manchuria in great strength.'

By choosing predominantly civilian populations in a militarised society, the USA, in effect, made choices which gave it the greatest amount of data on the effect of the bombs on human beings but did not make the choices which would bring the war to its speediest conclusion and 'save American lives'.

Burchett wandered here and there—Cuba, Cambodia and Vietnam, North Korea, Germany, Africa ... telling anyone who would listen about the 'other side' in dozens of

conflicts. He said of fellow journalist and friend Henry Keys “Keys was a very tough, experienced and resourceful journalist, with the sort of pugnacious never-take-no-for-an-answer attitude and total disrespect for officialdom which made Australian journalists very popular among Fleet Street editors.” I suspect Keys would have said the same about Burchett.

David Irving may like to suggest that he too writes about the ‘other side’ and that that is a legitimate exercise. But I cannot help thinking that, as one of the people banned from Australia, he is in better company than he deserves.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 17th: Frank O’Connor  
William Carlos Williams

September 18th: Dr Johnson

September 19th: William Golding

\* \* \* \* \*

Charles Morgan in *A Breeze of Morning* writes “As we grow older, we begin to take conventional views of childhood, and the conventions change like the fashions. Once it was fashionable to pretend that all children were whimsical creatures who knew no difference between kisses and thimbles; more recently that they were a tribe of savages.” When I read that I wondered if he had been reading *Lord of the Flies* but no—Morgan’s book came out in 1951 and Golding’s in 1954. So it would seem that Golding, far from breaking new ground, was responding to a popular feeling and perhaps taking it to its extreme.

To understand the feeling in Britain at the time—post-war, continued rationing, a country a-wash with guns, and a generation growing up which had been deprived of their fathers at a crucial time in childhood—it is worth reading David Yallop’s *To Encourage the Others*. In a country where many older people believed they were facing a situation of unprecedented lawlessness among the young, a nineteen-year-old youth bordering on mental retardation, Derek Bentley, was hanged for a murder he almost certainly did not commit.\* Yallop’s thesis is that the Government went ahead with the execution, in 1952, so as to send a message to the young: We are prepared to be tough. The hard line, rather than justice, would prevail. Of course, it had, if anything, the opposite effect, confirming young men in their post-war disillusionment, and youth crime rates continued to rise. Golding’s novel needs to be read against this background. But I think he made a fundamental error in assuming young lawlessness was inherent, rather than seeing it for the rebellion against adults that it really was. In 1939 a Quaker conducted an unusual experiment: he took a group of juvenile delinquents from London and allowed them to set up a community in Scotland where there was no adult supervision. Within weeks these young ‘incorrigibles’ had organised themselves, devised rules for the orderly running of their community, and were getting on with life. The experiment unfortunately was disbanded because of the war—but I have a suspicion Golding misunderstood a fundamental relationship: boys without any adult presence act differently to those same boys in an adult-run society where they are required to meet standards of adult behaviour but have no share in adult power.

\* \* \* \* \*

In *Man & Time*, J. B. Priestley begins “In our strange era some of our wealthiest men plot and plan and toil, probably ruining both their health and some of their acquaintances, so that once or twice a year they can, as they say, ‘get away from it all’, going into what is left of the wilderness, often at enormous expense, to hunt game, to fish, to cook on a camp fire—in fact, to live for a while as their remote ancestors lived all the year round. They are trying to escape, if only for a brief spell, from their own time. But I do not suppose they leave their watches at home. They have only to glance at their wrists to know the hours, the minutes, the seconds. The men whose lives they are imitating, at such trouble and expense, knew nothing about hours, minutes, seconds. Sunrise and high noon and sunset would be enough for them, these hunting ancestors of ours, living in family groups or small tribes

and for the most part, we imagine, in caves. It is surprising that, as yet, no top travel agency, the kind that organizes expensive safaris, has arranged to let genuine prehistoric cave dwellings to millionaire sportsmen. But what could not be rented out with the caves is their original occupants' notions of time. The new tenants would still be looking, often anxiously, at their watches."

William Golding attempted the difficult imaginative feat of going back into Neanderthal time in *The Inheritors*. Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor say in their study of Golding "The epigraph suggests, for example, that Golding wishes to overturn H.G. Wells' account of the Neanderthaler (both in *The Outline of History* and his tale *The Grisly Folk*) as *Lord of the Flies* had subverted Ballantyne."

My quibble with the book is not to do with time but with language. His people speak briefly, neatly, precisely, grammatically correctly. Now I would query that—I believe they would have spoken at great length, playing with sounds, with language (they had all the time in the world to use in talk), but grammar would not have been a key preoccupation, any more than spelling was a key preoccupation with the Elizabethans. I also believe their language would have been much more complex.

Take for instance the Aboriginal people who are now accepted as having arrived in Tasmania about 30,000 years ago, bringing their language, already richly developed and closely allied with that of the southern mainland groups; a language which because of the almost complete destruction of the tribes and their dialects and variations has now come under the umbrella name of Palawa. The attempts to record Aboriginal language in Tasmania were half-hearted and *ad hoc*; yet it should have been obvious to even the most cursory observer that here was a rich and complex language or languages—James Walker wrote that in 1833, "Thos. Wilkinson, the Catechist, has attempted the translation of the first three chapters of Genesis, and has succeeded as well as could have been anticipated. It is extremely difficult to come at the idiom, as every tribe speaks a different dialect, it might also be said a different language, and even among the individuals of the same tribe a great difference is perceptible. The pronunciation is very arbitrary and indefinite. The literal translation is confined in great measure to the verbs and the nouns. It is not clearly ascertained whether prepositions and conjunctions or anything analogous to the expletives in use with us are contained in the aboriginal tongue." Genesis begins:

*Troteh Godneh pomleh heavenneh co-entanneh, lywerreh crackny. Godneh trytityeh—trytityeh crackny. Godneh lapre trytityeh narreh coopeh. Godneh dyvidneh trytityeh lywerreh. Godneh kany, coentanneh ninginneh rothinneh, tibreh. Godneh pomleh cathehbyweh trytityeh lackrenneh wakehlenneh tywerreh: narreh pomleh pullenneh.*

Wilkinson also recorded an Aboriginal women's hunting song which begins:

*Nikkeh ningeh tibreh nickeh mollyga pollyla ...*

*Namu rykenneh trehgana*

*Nabeh thinninneh trehgana ....* But as well as his difficulties of interpretation, his Euro-centric views of how languages should be constructed and what they should be used for, he also came up against the wall of secrecy; there were things which Aboriginal people, even reduced to abject mendicancy, had no intention of sharing. The near-genocide inflicted on them means that they took spiritual, language, and cultural beliefs not only to individual graves but also to the ever-lasting loss of extinction. The dedicated work and sharing that has gone into gathering up the scraps may not ever be able to bring back a living language. Each time I think on this it seems to me to be a loss of such magnitude that Golding's novel seems by contrast trivial and dull.

\* \* \* \* \*

Linguists understandably study words and constructions and concepts—but I think one of the most intriguing things is to stand outside a room, say a restaurant, where a lot of people are speaking in a particular language but you cannot discern individual words. Now if you do that to a group of people speaking Tamil and a group of people speaking, say,

Pitjantjatjara, there is an immediate sense of *recognition*, even though it doesn't mean the two languages have a single solitary word in common.

\* \* \* \* \*

In *Man & Time* Priestley turns to Australia's indigenous people for their understanding of time, quoting at times from Elkin's *The Australian Aborigines*, "Now these people believe that every man possesses a soul or spirit that exists eternally. The life of these spirits is in cyclic form: They pre-existed usually in definite sites in the country of the group: then, incarnated through the mother, they enter profane life, passing time. At death they return to their spirit-homes.

And these dwelling places exist not only in a sacred world but also in a sacred time (the Great Time)—a time that is qualitatively quite different from profane or passing time. It is '*all-at-once* instead of *one-thing-after-another*', past and present and future merging and becoming one—the eternal instant.

Their myths relate the deeds of great ancestors or heroes. 'To the aborigines, things are as they are, because of the personal actions of heroic beings in the past'. But this 'past' belongs to that same sacred time of the spirit homes: It is also present. The usual term that they use for the past creative period also means 'dreaming': Their myths are about the eternal dream time. 'The time to which they (the myths) refer partakes of the nature of dreaming; as in the case of the latter, past, present and future are, in a sense, coexistent—they are aspects of the one reality.' They have many forms of totemism, embracing different kinds of life, but their term for the cult totem is also the 'dreaming'; and the cult totem is the 'door into the eternal dream time'. The opening of that door is through ritual, its ceremonies abolishing profane or passing time and leading the way into the eternal dream time. When in these ritual ceremonies the original great deeds of mythical heroes are re-enacted, the men taking part in them enter the time when the deeds were originally performed, not into the past, but into an eternal present.

Access to the 'eternal dream time', these aborigines believe, can be gained only by observing the traditional rules of behaviour. The 'secret life' of ritual and mythology is infinitely more important and meaningful than day-to-day existence, earning a living, trying to appear important, and so on.

'It is the life', as Elkin tells us, 'in which man really finds his place in society and in nature, and in which he is brought in touch with the invisible things of the past, present, and future.' From it men obtain courage and strength, but not if they desecrate or neglect the sites, break the succession of initiates, forget the myths and omit the rites', all of which results in the loss of an anchor in the past, a source of strength, and a sense of direction for the future'.

When a young man is initiated into the sacred life of the group or tribe, he is given a new name, usually taken from one of the myths, and this name is never mentioned except on sacred ground. It is his passport 'into the eternal, unseen world of ancestral and totemic heroes'. And now the initiate plays his part in keeping the group or tribe aware of that other world, that other time—the eternal dream time.

So much for what is—or has been—believed by black men coming to us out of the Stone Age. (Somebody should compare these beliefs, in terms of breadth, depth, and response to the profoundest psychological needs of man, with the beliefs of the average citizens of Sydney and Brisbane.) Here the indifference to passing time and the emphasis and dependence upon the Great Time are obvious. This is modern man's life in reverse. He feels his life is being ticked away—this is the only reality—and cannot enter, into any 'eternal dream time', knows nothing of the 'invisible things of the past, present and future', and has no such hidden source of courage and strength: He feels himself fastened to a hawser that is pulling him inexorably toward the silence and darkness of the grave.

Yet he too dreams, discovering, if he chooses to remember it, in this strange night existence a confusion of past, present, and future, as we shall see. But no idea of an 'eternal

dream time', where gods and heroes (from whom he is not separated for ever) have their being, comes shining through to make modern man forget his calendars and clocks, the sands of his time running out. Outwardly the black fellow, scrabbling in the desert for edible roots and small animals to cook, cuts a poor figure compared with the white man descending from his aircraft to ride in a car toward a Melbourne expense-account lunch; but inwardly, where the psyche also needs sustenance, the case is altered, and it might be better to drop the comparison."

\* \* \* \* \*

Time is a fascinating thing. Like the belief in a Big Bang, there is a belief that although Time may be endless it was not beginningless. I understand the problem. When I was young I would lie in bed and ponder 'who made God?' and, no matter how I approached it, there was always something there. I could not imagine a moment when God did not exist. The same problem applies to the universe. 'What made Matter?' We cannot imagine a Nothing. A universe without an atom, a particle, a crystal, a temperature, a sound, a wave, a light ...

Similarly I feel I need to believe in a beginning of Time. And yet, why? I cannot come up with any overwhelming reason for the need for a beginning. It is just a habit of mind.

I turned to Stephen Hawking's and *A Brief History of Time* because I had *rather* a lot of questions. Can Time exist if there is not a precise moment of beginning? Does it require a Big Bang in a sense to get the cosmic clock ticking? Did Time exist before the first small particle whirled in space? Has Matter always existed—and therefore Time? Does Time require Matter to entropy to prove it exists? Will Time go on existing if Matter, somehow, ceases to exist? Clearly Matter existed before the Big Bang and Life did not come into being until well after—so does this suggest different kinds of time? Did particles whirl for uncountable aeons before there were sufficient to notice. Were they changeless and therefore, possibly, timeless in those aeons? Stephen Hawking talks of Real Time which is linear and only runs forward and Imaginary Time which can run both forward and backwards (and perhaps in every other direction). So that our lives are lived in Real Time, as is the Universe probably, while our minds live in Imaginary Time, memory, precognition, trance and awareness of time passing.

To talk of a beginning and an end in Real Time is a scientific exercise and may yield answers. But to talk of beginnings and ends in Imaginary Time becomes meaningless. I remember reading of an experiment in which an elderly woman, near death, had her bed placed on scales. At the moment of death the scales suddenly weighed the bed at 6 pounds less. It might be that the scales malfunctioned at that precise moment. It might be that she had air in her lungs which was released. But, strangely, I have never heard of the experiment being repeated. I am quite willing to offer my body to science when my 'time' comes—though I suppose my family might be a little bit miffed to find I only have a measly little 2-pound-soul. But if the scale was weighing more than the release of air, it was weighing a soul, then the idea of a soul having matter and weight suggests it must also need to exist not only in Imaginary Time and the eternal instant, but also in Real Time.

I find this quite fascinating; just as Hawking finds the universe a fascinating place and manages to convey some of his fascination. But I must admit he didn't answer my questions. Obscurely, I felt glad.

\* \* \* \* \*

I don't know that I was very informed about the world when I was young—we didn't get a radio till I'd been at school for several years and only got a couple of newspapers a week—but two stories which have remained in my mind were the kidnapping and murder of young Graeme Thorne in 1960 and the volcano which erupted on the island of Tristan da Cunha in 1961.

When I first came on a description of William Golding's novel *Martin Pinscher* I

jumped, erroneously, to the conclusion it was set on Tristan da Cunha—or its fictional equivalent—whereas my, later, reading of the novel itself suggests Golding had something more narrow and grim—like the Old Man of Hoy—in his imagination’s view.

I think childhood impressions *do* influence the way we read the world, even if we don’t always see the influence for what it is. But I know I’ve retained my fascination with the little Atlantic island ever since.

Michael Bakewell in his biography *Lewis Carroll* (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) has an interesting little story to tell. ‘While Dodgson was busily engaged in charting the tropics and zones of the Common Room wine cellar, his brother Edwin was fighting a losing battle with his bleak and inhospitable parish in Tristan da Cunha, where he served his hundred parishioners as ‘post master, potato-patch digger, arbitrator, librarian, meteorologist and social entertainer’.

... Edwin had appealed to his brother for help and advice. Dodgson’s projected solution to the islanders’ miseries was highly imaginative, but distinctly drastic. He urged that the entire population, together with their sheep and cattle, should be transported either to the Cape or to Australia.

... Dodgson set to work with a vigour and determination which could not have been exceeded if he himself had been the islanders’ priest. He campaigned tirelessly on his brother’s behalf for the next four years, but from the outset he was frustrated by the complexities, evasions and obduracy of the Civil Service whose machinations made those of Dickens’ Circumlocution Office look positively obliging.

The Admiralty informed Dodgson that he had no authority to act on the islanders’ behalf, and that, in any case, it was a matter for the Colonial Office. The Colonial Office said that nothing could be done until the Admiralty agreed to send a boat to transport the islanders to the Cape and, once they had arrived, the Colonial Office would do its best to interest the Cape authorities. Dodgson was then informed that no move could be initiated without the Cape government first sending for the islanders, but the next official to whom Dodgson applied told him that there was no point in approaching the Cape authorities since they had no jurisdiction over Tristan. The home government must begin the action.

... Although Dodgson believed that he had managed to secure an understanding from the government agent for New South Wales to accept the islanders, when Dodgson and Edwin went to see Lord Salisbury in 1885, he told them he was not confident of remaining in office long enough for anything to be achieved. The islanders were left to battle it out with the rats, and poor Edwin, exhausted with living so long ‘as a second Robinson Crusoe’, applied for missionary work in Africa.’

\* \* \* \* \*

(\* Derek Bentley received a posthumous pardon this year.)

\* \* \* \* \*

September 20th: Upton Sinclair  
                  Stevie Smith  
September 21st: H. G. Wells  
September 22nd: Murray Bail  
September 23rd: Baroness Orczy  
                  Alison Alexander  
September 24th: F. Scott Fitzgerald  
September 25th: Jessica Anderson  
September 26th: Joseph Furphy  
                  T. S. Eliot  
September 27th: Faith Bandler  
                  John Marsden  
September 28th: Ellis Peters  
September 29th: Cassandra Pybus

\* \* \* \* \*

Robert Lacey in *Aristocrats* writes, “It was the Spaniards who gave the world the curious notion that an aristocrat’s blood is not red but blue. The Spanish nobility started taking shape around the ninth century in classic military fashion, occupying land as warriors on horseback. They were to continue the process for more than five hundred years, clawing back sections of the peninsula from its Moorish occupiers, and a nobleman demonstrated his pedigree by holding up his sword arm to display the filigree of blue-blooded veins beneath his pale skin—proof that his birth had not been contaminated by his dark-skinned enemy.

*Sangre azul*, blue blood, was thus a euphemism for being a white man—Spain’s own particular reminder that the refined footsteps of the aristocracy through history carry the rather less refined spoor of racism.”

(Later, he tells the story: “Whenever the Rothschilds went to visit the first, Victorian Duke of Westminster, they used to notice the strange difficulty that he and the rest of the Grosvenor household had in remembering the name of the Duke’s favourite gun dog, Joe—for Joe’s name had, in fact, been changed for the weekend. Normally he was known as Jew.”)

\* \* \* \* \*

Blue stockings have tended to get rather a hard time in print—“The blue stocking is truly stupid and unendurably dull, as you have discovered. But you have discovered *who* this blue stocking is. Look in the mirror and you will find out. These smug blue stockings express a lot of foolish, affected opinions about literature and science, and there’s not a jot of sense in any of it. They speak not because they’re interested, but because they want to flaunt their intelligence with which nature has so meagrely endowed them, their lofty aspirations (of which they have as many as the chair they sit on), and their education (of which they have as much as a scarecrow). Whose crude image or sleek figure do you see in the mirror? Why, your own, my friend. Yes, you may grow your beard long or you may carefully shave it, but there’s not a shadow of doubt that you are the truest blue stocking of them all, and that is why I have thrown you out on two occasions: because I cannot endure blue stockings, who are ten times more numerous amongst us men than amongst women.” (Nikolai Chernyshevsky)

And then there was George Bernard Shaw also having his fun in the *Domesticity of Franklyn Barnabas*—

Franklyn. If you want to know what’s wrong with me, you must ask her. What is wrong with her is that she is a bluestocking.

Conrad. Oh, come! That’s rather out of date, isn’t it? I don’t believe the women students at Cambridge know the meaning of the word. You don’t object at this time of day to a woman cultivating her mind and being educated?

Franklyn. Not at all. Nobody ever does: among our set of people at any rate. A bluestocking is not an educated woman or a woman with a cultivated mind.

Conrad. What else?

Franklyn. A bluestocking is a woman who has a mania for intellectual subjects without having a ray of intellect.

Conrad. Oho! That’s not a bluestocking: it’s a university professor. When a man is mentally incapable of abstract thought he takes to metaphysics; and they make him a professor. When he is incapable of conceiving quantity in the abstract he takes to mathematics; and they make him a professor. When he is incapable of distinguishing between a clockwork mouse and a real one he takes to biology; and they make him a professor. And so on. The fact is, these chaps are clockwork mice themselves.”

The term ‘blue stocking’ originated in the mid-eighteenth century when various women promoted literary discussions in place of card-playing parties. But it was the men

who came, rather than the women, who wore the blue stockings, everyday blue worsted rather than the black silk they wore to evening functions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elizabeth Gaskell wrote some delightful ghost stories, some of which Jenny Uglow has now collected up and published as *Curious, If True*. The title story is told by an Englishman travelling in France where he hopes to trace some ancestors, believing himself to be descended from John Calvin's sister. He becomes lost one evening and appears to enter a confusing, strange, and slightly sinister world in which fairy tales have come to life. But perhaps it is just a dream ...

A portrait on the wall is pointed out to him: 'The countenance strikes me as resembling something I have seen before—in an engraving from an historical picture, I think; only, it is there the principal figure in a group: he is holding a lady by her hair, and threatening her with his scimitar, while two cavaliers are rushing up the stairs, apparently only just in time to save her life.'

'Alas, alas!' said she, 'you too accurately describe a miserable passage in my life, which has often been represented in a false light. The best of husbands'—here she sobbed, and became slightly inarticulate with her grief—'will sometimes be displeased. I was young and curious, he was justly angry with my disobedience—my brothers were too hasty—the consequence is, I became a widow!'

After due respect for her tears, I ventured to suggest some commonplace consolation. She turned round sharply:-

'No, monsieur: my only comfort is that I have never forgiven the brothers who interfered so cruelly, in such an uncalled-for manner, between my dear husband and myself. To quote my friend Monsieur Sganarelle—'Ce sont petites choses qui sont de temps en temps nécessaires dans l'amitié; et cinq ou six coups d'épée entre gens qui s'aiment ne font que ragaillardir l'affection.' You observe the colouring is not quite what it should be?'

'In this light the beard is of rather a peculiar tint,' said I.

'Yes: the painter did not do it justice. It was most lovely, and gave him such a distinguished air, quite different from the common herd. Stay, I will show you the exact colour, if you will come near this flambeau!' And going near the light, she took off a bracelet of hair, with a magnificent clasp of pearls. It was peculiar, certainly. I did not know what to say. 'His precious lovely beard!' said she. 'And the pearls go so well with the delicate blue!'

Is the real message of the story a warning to ancestor-hunters: you may not like what you find? Respectable forebears may prove to be something quite different to the accepted family mythology.

\* \* \* \* \*

In my last year at school we had a lovely art teacher, very sweet and full of enthusiasm. We painted with great exuberance, great swirling colourful extravaganzas. I think everyone liked her. Then, at the end of the second term (there were three terms in Queensland in those days) she was sacked for something which had nothing to do with her teaching and the school engaged a woman to come in from the local Technical College a couple of days a week. What design work had we been doing? Blank looks. What theory of Art? More blank looks. And so it went on. She simply said, right, we've got a lot to get through, and we got stuck straight into it, paring the syllabus to the bone but getting the fundamentals covered. I walked into the Junior exam and there were all the questions we'd covered in our last-minute-rush and I heaved a great sigh of relief. *I knew how to handle them.*

Now, many decades later, I know that failing the one subject I felt I had a little talent for would not have destroyed my life—but as a very shy and gauche 15-year-old it would've been devastating. Since then I have always been profoundly grateful that teacher *did* get sacked. It has nothing to do with liking. I still remember her as a sweet and happy

person who loved art—but she did a terrible thing: wittingly or not I cannot say, she did not respect her students. A teacher is there to teach, to make sure the curriculum is covered, to present her subject with all the thoroughness, clarity, and excitement at her command. Being liked is a bonus.

When I read, years ago, that Helen Garner had been sacked I had an image of a very young teacher who had unwittingly mentioned the birds and the bees in passing—and, oh I could just *see* that fuddy-duddy old headmaster in his metaphoric frock-coat and whiskers ... and then I read her book *True Stories* and found it wasn't like that at all. Far from just starting out she was in her fourth school and far from just touching on sex in passing ...

“Before we can start, I want to make you understand that the words some people think of as dirty words are the best words, the right words to use when you are talking about sex. So I'm not going to say ‘sexual intercourse’, I'm going to say ‘fuck’ and I'm going to say ‘cock’ and ‘cunt’ too, so we'd better get that straight” ...

I was, quite simply, shocked.

So I came to *The First Stone* with a different perspective to what I might have had if I hadn't read *True Stories* first. I now felt that the 13-year-olds in that long ago class, who were shocked, distressed, confronted, or felt their private space had been abused—with no escape from the power of the teacher and a couple of noisy dominant boys—had not been respected. And I know I want my children, and all other children, to be respected within the classroom.

Perhaps it is important that the Ormond College case be turned into a book. I'm not sure. But was Helen Garner the right person to write it? We would accept, I think, that people's *physical* space should be respected—so should not their *language* space also be respected?

Virginia Trioli in *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist* says ‘What *The First Stone* bogged us down in was a fundamental confusion of sex with sexism’. Meaghan Morris in Jenna Mead's *bodyjamming* says, “you really can't understand the core of the story if you think in terms of sex-and-sexism, or even a critique of *anti-sexism*”. It might also be as Malcolm Bradbury suggests in *The History Man* that most of us are very unclear about what Gross Moral Turpitude means and when it applies—

‘There's a rumour around that they're trying to fine you,’ says the bra-less girl, ‘because you're such a radical.’

‘Is there?’ says Howard. ‘Well, as it happens, they can't fire me for that. Only for gross moral turpitude.’ The girls giggle and say, ‘What's that?’

‘Who knows, nowadays?’ asks Howard.

And later ...

—‘There's a thing called gross moral turpitude,’ says Howard, ‘it's a very vague concept, especially these days. But I have political enemies who'd pin anything onto me they could.’

—‘Carmody's way of putting it was crude but terse,’ says Marvin. ‘He said he could have done as well in your seminar if he'd had a left-wing head and, er, female genitals.’

—‘He's a sad case,’ says Miss Callender, ‘appealing for assistance. Like your Miss Phee. But one you bed and one you punish.’

Amanda Cross in *An Imperfect Spy* writes—

‘Faculty members should not flirt with women students, let alone come on to them.

Here there was an objection voiced. “Plenty of women law students have married their professors,” a young woman near Kate remarked. “My friends tell me there are examples in every law-school faculty, men, that is, whose wives were their students. I don't think we ought to get too sweeping about this.” The students all looked to Kate for her answer.

“Relationships are one thing,” Kate said. “Sexual harassment is another. I can't really believe any of you wouldn't be able to tell the difference.” ’

And then it appears to become a matter of life and death in Reginald Hill's *An Advancement of Learning* ...

'Today her appeal comes before you,' he went on flatly, avoiding any undue stress, 'and it is based on two things. A piece of information and an allegation. The information requires no comment from this body, I feel. We live in a modern era. It is this: for the past two years, until last term in fact, Miss Sewell was the mistress of Dr Fallowfield, the lecturer I have just mentioned. It is with reluctance that my client reveals this. It is with greater reluctance that she asserts that Dr Fallowfield has deliberately falsified her assessment grades to bring about her apparent failure.'

One of the young women at the heart of the Ormond College case dispels much of the confusion and obfuscation when she writes simply, "Why does it seem necessary to emphasise that at the heart of this case lies the principle that a person in a position of responsibility should not abuse that position? It is disturbing that this fairly simple proposition, which argues that a person who is the head of a residential college should not sexually harass the students under his or her care, seems to require stating and defending."

The NZ Human Rights Commission sums up sexual harassment succinctly on one of its posters:

Unfair  
Unwanted  
Unacceptable  
Unlawful ...

But it is the Orr case which still tends to dominate discussion of the question of Gross Moral Turpitude—and can still lead to quite heated arguments in Tasmania. It struck me that Cassandra Pybus put it very sensibly in her book *Gross Moral Turpitude*—"Discussion of the Orr case has focused completely on the question of procedures for the dismissal of professors, but it might be an idea to shift the focus to proper procedures for the appointment. Had these been followed in 1952, there would never have been an Orr case, at least not one which involved the University of Tasmania."

I mentioned this to a friend who responded "But the University always knew what sort of man they were engaging—because he asked for moving expenses to bring not only his wife but his mistress from Melbourne". The sad thing was—no one thought to tell the young Suzanne Kemp what sort of man the University had engaged.

Some years ago I was working with a young woman who'd just come out from Ireland. At her first job the manager offered her a bit extra if she would stay and clean after work. Glad to make some quick money she said yes, then found this involved him following her in when she went to clean the female toilets. She saw no option but to abandon that job and look for another. A survey carried out in Tasmania several years ago found woman in country areas and small towns who had put up with years of sexual harassment—because they felt they had nowhere to turn to and no other jobs to move to.

I think if I have a problem with *The First Stone* it is this: women who have got nowhere with efforts to discuss, complain, or negotiate over harassment may now be reluctant to take the larger step of seeking redress through the law because of the fear of what other woman may think of them; that, as Helen Garner suggests, this may be seen as the "most appallingly destructive, priggish and pitiless way of dealing with it."

\* \* \* \* \*

September 30th: Truman Capote  
October 1st: Faith Baldwin  
October 2nd: Graham Greene  
Wallace Stevens  
October 3rd: Gore Vidal  
James Herriot  
October 4th: Justin D'Ath  
October 5th: Vaclav Havel

October 6th: Val Biro  
October 7th: Thomas Kenneally  
October 8th: John Cowper Powys  
October 9th: Jill Ker Conway  
October 10th: Ivo Andric

\* \* \* \* \*

In *Death of a Schoolboy: a novel of Gavrilo Princip, the Sarajevo Assassin* Hans Koning has his young 'hero' say "Suppose you stage a demonstration; the police and the soldiers will heave you out of sight before you've properly opened your mouth". The imaginative reconstruction of Princip's life is a pertinent reminder that where people are not allowed to vent their anger, frustration and deep-seated resentment they are likely to take sudden desperate action. Princip did—and yet there is a touching innocence about the book. The young plotters say "We weren't political plotters; we were actors in a morality play. Or so we felt" and "A child stealing another child's toy is as serious an event for investigation as Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, for as we supposedly dig into the mysterious logic and illogic of history, we're only tabulating a million children stealing a million toys." So they agonize to and fro. But they could not see that this action to rid their country of a man they regarded as a tyrant would lead to millions of ordinary men from as far away as Australia and New Zealand dying in trenches in France and Belgium. But then—who could?

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I was looking in the *Chronicle of the 20th Century* for something quite different when I noticed that the first fourteen years of this century were far from being a comfortable period for monarchs and heirs-apparent; uneasy indeed was the head that wore a crown ... The following is a cursory list culled from that volume ...

April 4. 1900. "The Prince of Wales escaped uninjured today when a 16-year-old anarchist fired two shots at him from point-blank range on a Brussels railway station"

July 30, 1900. "The much-loved King Humbert I of Italy was shot dead by an anarchist, Angelo Bresci, late last night at Moza"

August 2. 1900. "Francis Salson, an anarchist, tries to assassinate the Shah of Persia"

October 17. 1900. "Plot to murder the Czar is uncovered"

November 16. 1900. "Woman hurls an axe at Kaiser Wilhelm II but fails to hit him"

November 15. 1902. "Belgium: Attempted assassination of King Leopold II by anarchist Gennaro Rubino"

June 11. 1903. "Queen Draga of Serbia and King Alexander were murdered in their bedroom early this morning. A group of disaffected army officers ... forced their way into the Royal Palace in Belgrade, shooting down the King's bodyguards"

February 17. 1905. "An assassin's bomb blew Grand Duke Sergei to pieces in Moscow today ... It happened as his carriage passed through the gates of the Kremlin. The bomb, filled with nails, was thrown into his lap from a distance of about 15 paces"

December 1. 1905. "20 officers and 230 Guards are arrested after plot to kill the Czar is uncovered"

June 3. 1906. "Rome: Discovery of plot to blow up Victor Emmanuel III"

May 31. 1906. "King Alfonso of Spain and his bride Queen Victoria narrowly escaped assassination on their wedding day as they drove in an open carriage to the Royal Palace in Madrid. A bomb hidden in a bridal bouquet was hurled at them from a balcony on the route"

February 1. 1908. "King Carlos I and Crown Prince Luiz were assassinated in Lisbon today in the wake of last month's failed revolution. They were shot at point-blank range by assailants whose leader, a cavalry sergeant, was killed in the melee following the murders"

April 27. 1909. "Joy as Young Turks topple old Sultan"

July 16. 1909. "Prince, aged 12, replaces ousted Shah"

October 26. 1909. "Japan has lost its senior statesman, Prince Ito, to an assassin's

bullet”

October 4. 1910. “King Manuel of Portugal has been deposed by a well-planned revolution”

February 15. 1912. “Last month the Emperor resigned and China officially became a Republic”

March 18. 1913. “The King of Greece was assassinated in Salonika this afternoon. He was shot through the heart while taking his customary walk”

April 13. 1913. “Madrid: Anarchist tries to assassinate King Alfonso XIII”

June 11. 1913. “Grand Vizier is assassinated at Constantinople”

June 13. 1914. “The monk, Gregory Rasputin, confidant of the Czar and Czarina, is stabbed” (Of course he wasn’t royal—and he survived another 4 attempts on his life before being murdered by Prince Felix Youssouпов in December 1916)

And—June 28. 1914. “Two shots from a Browning automatic pistol which was fired by a 19-year-old student, today killed the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his morganatic wife, the Duchess of Hohenburg. It was the 14th anniversary of the marriage, for which Franz Ferdinand had taken an oath of renunciation to exclude from the throne any children they may have”

\* \* \* \* \*

Bosnian Serb writer, Ivo Andric, in the third book of a trilogy *The Bridge on the Drina* looks at the history of this troubled region, using as his centrepiece the great stone bridge at Visegrad in Bosnia built on the orders of the Grand Vizier, Mehmet Pasha.

He brings to it a sense of the sweep of history but also a critical eye “Whenever a government feels the need of promising peace and prosperity to its citizens by means of a proclamation, it is time to be on guard and expect the opposite”, a sense of the natural beauty of the region, and an understanding that out of old tragedies something useful and unifying can sometimes come.

He also tells the story of the Austrian arrival; Bosnia having been part of the Ottoman Empire:

“The formal and official entry of the Austrian troops took place the following day.

No one could remember such a silence as then fell on the town. The shops did not even open. The doors and windows of the houses remained shuttered though it was a warm sunny day towards the end of August. The streets were empty, the courtyards and gardens as if dead. In the Turkish houses depression and confusion reigned, in the Christian houses caution and distrust. But everywhere and for everyone there was fear. The entering Austrians feared an ambush. The Turks feared the Austrians. The Serbs feared both Austrians and Turks. The Jews feared everything and everyone since, especially in times of war, everyone was stronger than they. The rumbling of the previous day’s guns was in everyone’s ears. But even if men were now only listening to their own fear, no one living that day would have dared to poke his nose out of doors. But man has other masters. The Austrian detachment which had entered the town the day before had routed out the police chief and gendarmes. The officer in command of the detachment had returned his sword to the police chief and ordered him to continue his duties and maintain order in the town. He told him that at one hour before noon next day the commandant, a colonel, would arrive and that the leading men of the town, that was to say the representatives of the three faiths, were to be there to meet him when he entered the town. Grey and resigned, the police chief at once summoned Mula Ibrahim, Husseinaga the schoolmaster, Pop Nikola, and the rabbi David Levi and informed them that as ‘recognized notables’ they must await the Austrian commandant next day at noon on the kapia, must welcome him in the name of the citizens and accompany him to the market-place.”

His translator, Lovett F. Edwards, says “*The Bridge on the Drina* is not a novel in the usual sense of the word. Its scope is too vast, its characters too numerous, its period of action too long; it covers three and a half centuries. Dr Andric himself calls it a chronicle;

let us accept his word.” Edwards also says “As other gifted students of his race and time, and as his own students in *The Bridge on the Drina*, he belonged to the National Revolutionary Youth Organization, and experienced the customary cycle of persecution and arrest.”

Ivo Andric received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961.

\* \* \* \* \*

Greg King in *The Murder of Rasputin* tells of the events leading up to Prince Felix’s terrible bungling despatch of the Siberian peasant who had gained favour at the court of Tsar Nicholas II by reason of his ability to stop the bleeding attacks of the Tsar’s haemophilic son Alexei. Felix, in a fervour of patriotic passion and religious ecstasy, had convinced himself (and a number of his friends) that only the death of Rasputin could save the Romanov throne. He lured Rasputin to the Moika Palace where the unfortunate man was poisoned with cyanide, shot, bludgeoned, bound, and thrown into the icy Neva River still alive. He appears to have died either from drowning or from the cold.

Felix believed, erroneously, that Rasputin had great power and influence over the Tsarina. It is a measure of the remoteness of the Russian aristocracy from the people that such a simplistic idea could be so sincerely believed. Rasputin, the simple man from Pokrovskoe in Siberia, undoubtedly had many faults. He was crude, he was lecherous (though it was not his fault that a strongly sensual strain ran through Russian religion in which giving in to your carnal appetites was not necessarily seen as objectionable or sinful), he became increasingly dependent on alcohol after the 1914 stabbing left him with chronic pain. He undoubtedly had great charisma and presence which he was not averse to using to improve his position in society. But the assumption that he corrupted the Romanovs might be better turned around—did not they and society corrupt Rasputin? The top echelons of Russian society can be compared to the French nobility on the eve of the French Revolution. Extraordinarily greedy, selfish and blind. The gap between rich and poor, between the aristocracy and the peasants, was immense. And they appeared oblivious to the need to do anything about it. When the population grew restive they simply encouraged another pogrom ... King writes, “Before the Revolution many Russian aristocrats lived lives of unimaginable luxury. They built summer and winter palaces, vacationed on the French Riviera, sent their laundry to Paris, and lavished huge fortunes on extravagant, hedonistic pleasures.” The Youssoups managed to get quite a lot of valuables out of Russia after the Bolsheviks took over but “Left in the Moika Palace were five secret rooms filled with treasures—forty-seven thousand different items, including 1,182 pictures, 100 packages of silver, 184 musical instruments, antique sculptures, snuffboxes, coins, weapons, jewels, and tapestries.”

The most fascinating thing about Rasputin remains his ability to heal, by prayer, the ailing Tsarevich each time he was in danger of bleeding to death. Although Rasputin had some knowledge of hypnosis some of his ‘cures’ were effected when he was hundreds of miles distant from the young heir to the throne and when the Tsarevich was unconscious. It suggests that even though Rasputin was a “lecherous old devil” there remained in him an untouched core of sincerity, simplicity, faith, and compassion. Although he accepted the sexual offers which came his way, he remained impervious to bribes and was unambitious in his personal lifestyle.

And perhaps the most ironic thing about his life was that *had* the Tsar and Tsarina listened to him they might have saved themselves, at least long enough to come to an understanding of democracy ... King writes: Rasputin himself made no secret of the fact that he was against Russian participation in World War I. He felt—rightly, as circumstances would prove—that the country could not afford such total and destructive warfare and that the drawn-out conflict would eventually lead to internal strife. “It’s time to end this slaughter,” he once declared to Felix. “Isn’t Germany our brother, too? The Lord said: ‘Thou shalt love thine enemy as thine own brother.’ That’s why the war must cease.”

The single most obvious cause of the Revolution was the deprivation, hunger and misery brought about by the War and the fact that in 1917 there was no sign that things would ever get better.

Just days before his murder on 16 December, Rasputin, clairvoyantly, wrote to the Csar in these words:

‘I write and leave behind me this letter at St. Petersburg. I feel that I shall leave life before 1 January. I wish to make known to the Russian people, to Papa, to the Russian Mother, and to the Children, to the land of Russia, what they must understand. If I am killed by common assassins and especially by my brothers the Russian peasants, you, Tsar of Russia, have nothing to fear, remain on your throne and govern, and you, Russian Tsar, will have nothing to fear for your children, they will reign for hundreds of years in Russia. But if I am murdered by *boyars*, nobles, and if they have shed my blood, for twenty-five years they will not wash their hands from my blood. They will leave Russia. Brothers will kill brothers, and they will kill each other and hate each other, and for twenty-five years there will be no nobles in the country. Tsar of the land of Russia, if you hear the sound of the bell which will tell you that Gregory has been killed, you must know this: if it was your relations who have wrought my death, then no one of your family, that is to say, none of your children or relations will remain alive for more than two years. They will be killed by the Russian people ... I shall be killed. I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray, be strong, think of your blessed family.

Gregory.’

Within months the Tsar, Tsarina, and their five children were dead and the great exodus of the Russian nobility had begun, the Youssouповs ending up in France where Prince Felix died in 1967. ‘Once, when asked if he regretted killing the peasant, Felix smiled and replied, “No, I shot a dog.”’

But he didn’t shoot a dog (at least, he did actually shoot a dog and drag it through the snow, dripping blood, in a confused attempt to convince the police no person had been killed in his Palace that night; but that isn’t what he meant) he shot a man and, saint or sinner and possibly both, Rasputin lives on, long after his assassin has been forgotten.

Maria Rasputin in her story of her father *Rasputin: The Man Behind the Myth* provides a different vision. “Papa loved the vast sweep of the Western Siberian steppes, the forests of stately larches and tall birches, the prim little farms, where whole families worked in the fields, waving to him as he passed; this was the Russia he loved, and would always love. These were the real people. And years later, when he was living in St. Petersburg, he made frequent invidious comparisons between the city folk, aristocrats and commoners alike, and these hardworking, and for the most part pious, muzhiks.”

She also tells a story of his willingness to ‘meddle’ in an unpopular cause. “As the armies withdrew from Poland, they uprooted the local Jewish communities, dispersing them over many sections of Russia; all in the mistaken belief that the Jews were pro-German. Once inside Russia, they were looked upon as German spies and attacked by disorganized mobs, although what assistance these poor homeless and hungry people could have given to the enemy was never made clear. But here was a cause for my father, and despite his pain, he threw himself into the effort with a total commitment that raised him out of the dark mood into which he had fallen. And, for a while, life was pleasant in the flat at 64 Gorokhovaya Ulitsa. He was powerless to stop the war, but he could do something to save the Jews.

Because of this campaign, Papa created a whole new set of enemies, consisting in the main of those who wanted a scapegoat upon whom they could load the consequences of their own shortcomings. But he was enured to enemies by then, and a few more could not prevent him from doing another of God’s tasks. After some struggle and a good deal of maneuvering he managed to have a bill presented in the Duma that protected the rights of the Jews, including the right to receive an education in the State Schools. And the bill was

passed; the first such in the history of Russia.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“ ‘The assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and his charming consort has shocked all the world in general, and pained London in particular, for it was only last autumn that they came to England to see a typically English product — the Flower Show.’ Thus was the arrogant, dead bully sanctified by the Press.”

(F. Tennyson Jesse)

“What set off the interlocking alerts of the European armies in 1914 was not the isolated assassination of the archduke in Sarajevo but the decision to mobilize. The effect of the thousands of orders issued was to create an unstoppable chain reaction of reinforcing alerts. The alerts acted like ratchets, step-by-step moving Europe into war but unable to function in reverse toward peace.”

(Paul Bracken)

“so these two nations went about the earth hot eared and muddle headed, with loaded navies and armies terribly ready at hand.”

(H.G. Wells, writing of England and Germany,  
*In the Days of the Comet*)

“For the last thirty years there have been no conservatives; there have only been nationalistic radicals of the right and nationalistic radicals of the left. The last conservative statesman was the fifth Marquess of Lansdowne; and when he wrote a letter to *The Times*, suggesting that the First World War should be concluded with a compromise, as most of the wars of the eighteenth century had been, the editor of that once conservative journal refused to print it.”

(Aldous Huxley)

“I knew Leonard Outhwaite, the pacifist M.P. who was an Australian. His indignation at the slide back to barbarism made him savagely satirical at question time. He asked the responsible Minister if he was aware that an organisation was distributing pacifist literature from a certain address, which turned out to be that of the British and Foreign Bible Society. When Lloyd George was speaking on his ‘knock-out blow’, Mr Outhwaite interjected: ‘It’s murder’, and Lloyd George was startled into silence.”

(Martin Boyd)

\* \* \* \* \*

Questions were asked, at the time, about what was happening on Gallipoli—such as the reports by the British war correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett—“As usual, with the start of all British expeditions, the medical arrangements were totally inadequate to meet the requirements of the hour. Optimism had minimised our casualties to the finest possible margin, but the Turks multiplied them at an alarming rate. Apparently there was no one in authority to direct the streams of wounded to other ships where accommodation could be found for them, and many were taken on board the warships. Finally, orders came that the wounded were to be sent on board those transports which had already discharged their landing parties; and doctors would be sent aboard to look after them until they reached Egypt. But many succumbed who might otherwise have been saved.”

Hindsight is even more scathing. Dr John Laffin in *British Butchers and Bunglers of the First World War* points out that the British commander, Hamilton, was not appointed until a month before and the French commander, d’Amade, had been removed from the Western Front for “gross dereliction of duty”. Hamilton “set off for the Mediterranean equipped with two small tourist guidebooks on Western Turkey, an out-of-date and inaccurate map never intended for military use and a 1905 textbook on the Turkish army” and “Kitchener had denied him any aircraft, which were vital for reconnaissance in an unknown area.”

But Laffin goes beyond this degree of unpreparedness and ineptitude. “No military or naval intelligence appreciation of the Gallipoli-Dardanelles situation was ever made, not

even at strategic level. Had such an analysis been attempted it might have shown that no serious naval or military attack was necessary. Major-General Sir Charles Calwell, an astute Director of Military Operations, believed that ‘so long as they are more or less threatened, the Dardenelles and Constantinople placed a trump card in the hands of the Allies.’ His point was that without risking a ship or a soldier the Entente Powers could have kept the great Turkish forces occupied. The weapon would have been bluff. Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, preferred invasion of Gallipoli and penetration of the Dardenelles, and he had his supporters.”

Laffin is not alone in his criticisms. Among the books in his bibliography are *Poor Bloody Infantry: The Truth Untold*, *The Psychology of Military Incompetence*, *The Killing Ground*, *The Vanished Army*, *Vain Glory*, *Cannon Fodder*, *Eye-Deep in Hell*, *The Somme—Death of a Generation*, and *Lions Led by Donkeys*. The questions he puts are—

How could the Allied armies lose so many men and over such a long period without any significant gain in ground?

Why didn’t the general public—as well as the press and pulpit—complain about the massive casualties?

Why did the generals persist, in one battle after another, with methods of attack long after they had been proved ineffective?

Similarly, when it was obvious that a particular attack had failed, and when heavy casualties then precluded success, why was it still pushed?

How could generals accept such calamitous losses on their own side with apparent equanimity?

Why was a general who was the architect of an offensive which caused the loss of 20,000 men on the first day permitted to remain in command of his battered army?

How were the senior generals able to conceal their inadequacies for so long?

Did no other strategies and other tactics exist?

Did the senior generals and their staffs have any conception of what they were asking their fighting soldiers to do? That is, did they know and understand about the conditions on the battlefield?

Why were independent commands—as at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia—given to generals obviously too old, too unfit or otherwise unsuitable for the task?

Did any of the men in great authority have any sense of shame or remorse over their failures and the loss of life which ensued?

\* \* \* \* \*

The other day I was reading David Boulton’s *Objection Overruled* about Conscientious Objectors in Britain during WW1. I had always been vaguely under the impression that most COs came from a religious background and I was surprised to find this was not so; the majority of the men who refused to fight were Socialists. In many ways they had a harder time in the press, before the tribunals, in prison or alternative work schemes, not least because those in power could understand, if not approve, the sort of plea made by people such as Dr Alfred Salter (who later became a Labour MP) “Look! Christ in khaki, out in France thrusting His bayonet into the body of a German workman. See! The Son of God with a machine gun, ambushing a column of German infantry, catching them unawares in a lane and mowing them down in their helplessness. Hark! The Man of Sorrows in a cavalry charge, cutting, hacking, thrusting, crushing, cheering. No! No! that picture is an impossible one, *and we all know it*” but the tribunals couldn’t understand that non-religious people might also oppose the war, some tribunals going so far as to say if you haven’t got a religion, you haven’t got a conscience, therefore you can’t be a conscientious objector.

But all the COs suffered in varying degrees, from the hurt in the charge of cowardice, through all forms of physical torture including being immersed in sewage, beaten, kicked, handcuffed and fettered for days on end, starved, denied shelter or medical attention,

through to being given 10 years penal servitude and even the death penalty.

Chartist poet, Ernest Jones, imprisoned in solitary confinement in 1839 wrote:

*Troublesome fancies beset me  
Sometimes as I sit in my cell,  
That comrades and friends may forget me  
And foes may remember too well.*

*That plans which I thought well digested  
May prove to be bubbles of air;  
And Hopes, when they come to be tested,  
May turn to the seeds of despair ...*

*For sickness may wreck a brave spirit  
And time wear the brain to a shade;  
And dastardly age disinherit  
Creations that manhood has made.*

It is true that the men in the trenches faced constant discomfort, fear, pain and horror, but they faced it together. It was the sense of comradeship which stopped men from deserting, from giving up, from committing suicide ... but the COs faced their battles alone; they faced the tribunals alone, they faced the Army alone, they faced a hostile press and public alone, and they often faced years of prison either in solitary confinement or denied more than brief speech with others at set times.

For men who defied conscription on political rather than religious grounds their reasons were many and varied; but they tended to understand better than most that the real winners were the arms manufacturers. The *Labour Leader* pointed out in August 1914 “that four directors of the Nobel Dynamite Trust, one of the ‘Big Five’ partners in what was known as the Armaments Ring, were Germans. Three German banks were major shareholders. Other blocs of shares were held by four senior officers in the British Army, one French officer, five German officers and two brothers-in-law of the Prime Minister—Harold Tennant, Under-Secretary at the War Office, and Lord Glenconner, an officer of the National Service League. The Trust ... not only had extensive interests in, and interlocking relationships with, several British arms firms, including Vickers, but also had major interests in four German arms factories and lesser interests in many more, including the already notorious firm of Frederick Krupp. Vickers in turn owned Henry Whitehead and Co., whose shareholders’ list carried the names of Tennant, six backbench MPs, the Speaker of the House of Commons, twenty-five Peers, two Bishops and a Dean. Whitehead’s had supplied the Austrian fleet with the torpedoes being used against British ships, and the British firms of Yarrow and Thornycroft had supplied the Austrian fleet with most of its engines and boilers.” Boulton quotes Philip Snowden, ‘These are the people whose internationalism is unquestioned. The Armaments Ring has been busy equipping the various nations who are at war, and guns made in the same factory and ships built in the same yard will be used against each other in this conflict.’

I think I will leave the last word with Dr Salter if you don’t mind.

‘There are only two main religions in the world, though each of them has many forms: 1. The religion which trusts in the power and ultimate triumph of material forces—faith in materialism. 2. The religion which trusts in the power and ultimate triumph of spiritual forces—faith in God.

... This religion believes that Truth, ignored, martyred, crushed it may be for the time, will emerge triumphant when the glory and pomp and power of Empire are vanished and forgotten. Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Rome, Spain, were all mighty world-powers that conquered by relying on material force. By each of these in turn the claims of love, of

mercy, of brotherhood, of the sanctity of human life, were treated with scorn as contemptible weaknesses, and the advocates of such claims were suppressed or laughed out of court. All these military Empires in their day and generation were omnipotent. Nothing could stand against them. All have perished and gone—but the world of the Lord endureth for ever.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Strangely, the Archduke is not much remembered. Who were his children? Does he have descendants? We mostly don’t know and don’t care. It is the murdered Tsar, not the murdered Archduke, who has retained the curiosity of writers with legions of books about his and his family’s fate. For a long time it was the possible survival of Anastasia which aroused most interest but Michael Occleshaw in *The Romanov Conspiracies* sets out a good case for the survival of Tatiana. And yet—why the enduring interest? It is certainly not that the Romanovs were better, wiser, or more likeable rulers than the other royal families who have gone into exile or died out, apparently without arousing much interest or concern.

And what of Gavrilo Princip himself. He was imprisoned in Theresienstadt, in solitary confinement, where he died of tuberculosis on the 28th April, 1918. Koning writes “He almost made it. Only six more months, and the vast Empire that had used his deed to go to war had broken up because of that war ... It wasn’t possible to understand, to take the measure, of the loneliness in which Gavre survived those years and in which he died. The very act of doing so would seem to diminish that loneliness.” He was taken out secretly and buried in an unmarked grave.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dobrica Cosic wrote a novel of this time, *South to Destiny*, although he only mentions Princip once—“The day I fled to Serbia they took my wife to Tuzla and put her in prison. My wife’s sister took my daughter Senka, she’s five year’s old. This is her sock.” He took a little white sock out of his wallet and gazed at it tearfully. “The evening the news came that Princip had killed Franz Ferdinand, I fled across the Drina. But first, I stood over my sleeping child, looking at her long enough to last me a lifetime; the room was airless and the bed was swimming in my tears. I couldn’t move. Then I saw this sock on a chair and took it.”

But the book captures the confusion of the times, as well as the cynicism of the Great Powers in their dealings with the Balkans. The strangest little anecdote comes near the end when the Serbian army has fled south—“The squadron commander lined up the troopers and ordered them to kill the rest of the horses that couldn’t be saved. The soldiers moved reluctantly toward the horses, and on command shot them one after another between the eyes. Some soldiers wept as they remembered how the animals had carried them to weddings or on swift rides through crooked lanes. Adam Katic killed several and sobbed aloud; he tried to save one black horse, but the squad commander hit him and forced him to go on with the slaughter. This was the hardest thing he’d done since the beginning of the war.

After several thousand horses had been killed, the surviving ones suddenly became restless. They herded in groups, pawed the ground, and moved against the killers. The soldiers fired their rifles in terror, but through pools of blood the horses continued to advance. The soldiers fixed bayonets and retreated into the sea, and the officers fired their revolvers, but the horses wouldn’t stop. They came right up to the men who were now waist-high in the sea, drenched by the waves. The men talked softly to them, begging their forgiveness for all the times they had let them go hungry and thirsty, for all the rides, the spurs, and the blows, for the slaughter in the name of the fatherland. A few paces from the men the horses halted. The wind howled and the sea bathed them in foam.’

\* \* \* \* \*

October 11th: François Mauriac  
October 12th: James McAuley

October 13th: Guy Boothby  
October 14th: Miles Franklin  
October 15th: P. G. Wodehouse  
October 16th: Oscar Wilde  
October 17th: Les Murray  
October 18th: Heinrich von Kleist  
October 19th: John le Carré

\* \* \* \* \*

William Garner in *Sleeping Dogs* wrote ‘Ever since Peter Wright waited until he was safe in Tasmania before blowing the gaffe in *Spycatcher*, they get the galloping twitches when one of their dear pensioners kicks over the traces.’

Hugo Young—‘And presiding over this unseemly spectacle, was a Prime Minister who, having failed to control the original crisis posed by the Pincher book stood firm on her own conviction that however many courts found against her, she had a duty to fight the case until the last drop of taxpayers’ money had been expended to defend the principle that spies should not talk. What some called stubbornness, even vanity, she referred to as her bounden duty.’

And Judith Cook in *Unlawful Killing* wrote ‘M15 has, of course, had something of an image problem since the publication of *Spycatcher* by ex-M15 officer Peter Wright. In it, he explained how freewheeling souls within the organisation had tried their best to bring down the democratically elected Labour government of Harold Wilson. Wright became the focus for one of Margaret Thatcher’s personal vendettas. Her efforts to prevent the publication of the memoirs first in Australia then, when that failed, in Britain, cost the taxpayer tens of thousands of pounds and led to her Cabinet Secretary, Sir Robert Armstrong, reinventing the phrase which reverberated around the world, ‘being economical with the truth’. (The original coining of the phrase is variously ascribed to St Thomas Aquinas or Edmund Burke.) Whatever one feels about Wright, and the answer might well be ‘not a lot’, one has at least to recognise that he took Thatcher on and won.

... The allegations concerning (Roger) Hollis (the ex-head of M15) had appeared in some detail in 1981 in an earlier book written by Chapman Pincher and had subsequently been denied by Margaret Thatcher in Parliament. She had already vetoed a number of books on security issues and was now determined that Wright’s book be stopped. Yet her attitude was, at the very least, inconsistent, since it soon became known that the information on Hollis in Pincher’s book had come from Wright and that a small group of Ministers close to Thatcher had known this all along—as Hugo Young points out in *One of Us*, this meant it had been published with what amounted to government approval’ ...

The irony, in my view, is that no one would have taken much notice of Wright’s book if it hadn’t been for the court case. His writing is pedestrian and he has very little to offer in the way of revelation. In fact, about the most interesting snippet was: ‘He (Harold Potter) could have been a kindly, small-town librarian. Sadly for Potter, I became one of the worst abusers of the Registry, routinely holding scores of files at a time, though never, I suspect, as bad as Millicent Bagot, the legendary old spinster in F Branch who kept tabs on the International Communist Party for decades. I have always assumed Millicent to have been the model for John le Carré’s ubiquitous Connie. She was slightly touched, but with an extraordinary memory for facts and files. “I only hope we get the files back when she retires,” he would mutter to himself after a particularly heavy file request from F Branch.’

*Unlawful Killing* is a much more interesting book partly because it is about an unsolved murder and partly because, if Cook’s theory is right, then it suggests a degree of arbitrary power and paranoia in Britain’s intelligence community which might give every citizen there pause.

In 1984 an elderly woman, Hilda Murrell, was killed very unpleasantly. Police regarded it as a break-and-enter gone wrong and arrested a young man but eventually had

to release him because the evidence did not fit.

Cook says ‘From the media reports and police statements it would be impossible to guess that underneath the official story of the police investigation there ran an unofficial sub-text, a sub-text which would eventually surface and blow the story of the murder of a Shropshire rose-grower into a full-scale political *cause celebre*.’

Hilda Murrell\* was an energetic anti-nuclear campaigner but this lead seemed to peter out and Cook’s sub-text, strangely, was the sinking of the Argentine warship *General Belgrano* in the Falklands War and the fact that Hilda Murrell had a relative in Naval Intelligence. The decision to sink the ship remains murky as it was outside Falkland waters and heading for the Argentine coast. It might have chosen to turn back—in which case it could’ve been deemed hostile when it entered Britain’s exclusion zone—but it didn’t do so and showed no sign of doing so. Three hundred and eighty-six men drowned when it was hit by British missiles (questions about preparedness and communications remain) and the decision-making behind the sinking remains classified.

But the assumption that the relative had information, *passed it on*, was known to have passed it on, and that this old lady mainly interested in developing new varieties of roses was then going to pass it on to someone else, seems to belong in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land.

(\* The very moving 1996 film *Sacred Fire* was dedicated to the memory of Hilda Murrell. The case officially remains unsolved.)

Richard Deacon who has made a career of writing about various intelligence services puts forward Guy Liddell as a more likely Fifth Man (in place of Roger Hollis; while Roland Perry suggests Victor Rothschild for Fifth Man and Andrew Boyle is only prepared to identify him as “an American citizen of British birth”) and points out that Fourth Man, Anthony Blunt, and putative Fifth Man, Guy Liddell, were both related to the Queen Mother.

This raises some curious questions ...

Anthony Blunt was reportedly quietly pardoned after going to Germany at the request of the Royal Family to rescue some indiscreet correspondence belonging to the Duke of Windsor. Yet the Duke held no public position for many years before his death; he had his own contacts should he have ever felt the need to get back any correspondence; he and his wife were disliked by the Queen Mother who regularly referred to the Duchess as ‘that woman’ so it’s hard to see why she should have sent her relative to save the reputation of her brother-in-law; he made only one visit to Germany—for 12 days in 1937—where he met most of the Nazi bigwigs, including Goering, Himmler and Ley (whom the Windsors found repellant), and had a very brief meeting with Hitler (according to their translator, ‘In these conversations there was, so far as I could see, nothing whatever to indicate whether the Duke of Windsor really sympathised with the ideology and practices of the Third Reich’); the British Ambassador to France had warned the Duke that the Nazis were skilled in turning any statement to useful account in their propaganda and the Duke had agreed, confining himself to bland and polite noises; he was then given the job of Military Liaison with the French forces and sent back reports which were models of good sense and observation, drawing attention to the low morale in the French army, lack of preparation, the lack of experience and skill, and the weakness of General Gamelin; noting that the Northern Ardennes was poorly defended: “There are no anti-tank defences ... ” (General Guderian broke through here with his Panzers a year later) and the Maginot Line, far from being impregnable, very easily breached with a bit of imagination. “In the minds of the French officers interviewed on the tour there is one dominant obsession, and that is the excellence, the impregnability of the Maginot Line ... The Maginot Line does not seem to be an insuperable barrier. Given the weight of artillery, close support from aircraft, natural or artificial fog, tanks with guns capable of penetrating the armour of the embrasures, armoured trucks or tractors to carry faggots to fill up the space in the anti-tank rail obstacles, enterprising infantry with flame-throwers, and sappers with explosives, it should

be possible to break the crust ... After that, there will be nothing but a few demolitions and troops in the open to stop an advance to Paris ... ” But not only were his reports not acted upon, they were apparently not even read as a matter of ‘principle’ in the war office. (Michael Bloch came upon a War Office memo ‘I do not think you have seen this report by H.R.H. the Duke of Windsor. You will not I think want to read it’.)

The wild-cat scheme to kidnap the Duke and Duchess before they could leave Portugal for the Bahamas was entrusted to Walter Schellenberg who wrote in his memoirs—‘Replies from Berlin to my reports had grown cooler and cooler. Then suddenly after about a fortnight I received a telegram from Ribbentrop: ‘The Fuehrer orders that an abduction is to be organized at once.’ This was an unexpected blow. Since the Duke was so little in sympathy with our plans an abduction would be madness. But what could I do? I was quite certain that it was Ribbentrop alone who was behind this order. He had made a completely wrong evaluation of the situation, and had probably distorted my reports in order to persuade Hitler to sanction this ultimate folly.’

So what could the Duke have written that was so compromising—yet he saw no need to ‘rescue’ in his or the Duchess’s lifetime. Was it all a smokescreen to get Blunt off the hook of a possible trial as a traitor—or did the correspondence actually come from the pen of a different Royal? Had someone in Buckingham Palace been taking Edward’s name in vain?

Deacon makes a point which I have wondered about too—“In the early days of Winston Churchill’s government this was one of the problems they were up against. Since the war this has been to a large extent concealed by directing attention solely to the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, but in fact even with King George VI and Queen Elizabeth there were indications in the 1939-41 period of a desire for a negotiated peace. This was shown originally by George VI’s preference for Lord Halifax as Prime Minister rather than Winston Churchill, and by the present Queen Mother of how sad it was that the German commander of the *Graf Spee* should have committed suicide when he scuttled his ship in the entrance to Montevideo harbour in 1940. After all, the *Graf Spee* had set out to sink and destroy innocent and unarmed merchant ships and, quite apart from that, Britain was at war with Germany.”

Lord Mountbatten certainly visited the Windsors and they reportedly used to hide things when he came to visit because of his tendency to ‘light fingers’; he wanted the Duke’s personal possessions brought back to England against the Duchess’s wishes, he also tried to get her to leave her jewels to Prince Charles. Bloch says ‘while the Duke was always happy to see his old shipmate he was somewhat suspicious of Mountbatten’s motives in extending the hand of friendship after so many years of coldness. These suspicions proved justified, for even while the Duke was still alive Mountbatten began scheming to obtain control of the ex-King’s fortune, his archives, and his personal possessions.’ When the Duke died and while Wallis was away at his funeral the house was broken into and a number of the Duke’s private papers stolen. He was hardly likely to be in possession of secrets of state; so did someone want back the less-than-cordial letters written to him by his brother George VI and other members of the Royal Family, letters which would automatically pass to Wallis ... And, if so, who was the someone? The Queen Mother?

Mountbatten remains an interesting and enigmatic figure. When he died in Ireland there were two local *gardai* on security duty yet only weeks before, as Gwen Robyns reports, Mountbatten saw friend Barbara Cartland who said ‘I hate Ireland and I wish that you weren’t going there.’ ‘Don’t worry,’ he laughed. ‘I’ve got nineteen security guards!’ ‘Nineteen!’ I exclaimed. ‘Last year you had thirty-six—I signed books for them all.’ ‘They thought so many was unnecessary.’

I found myself wondering if the IRA targetted Mountbatten because he assiduously fostered the idea that he was more important than he really was. But I suspect his death in

such circumstances has diverted attention from both his war record and his alleged bisexuality. Other war leaders have come under the microscope but Mountbatten, despite mutterings that he took the credit that should've gone to others and put the blame for some of his own poor decision-making on to his subordinates, continues to be treated kindly when it comes to his war record. Deacon quotes a CIA operative asking "What we could never understand was how Mountbatten, a known homosexual and therefore a security risk, managed to achieve the kind of promotion and jobs he got. Was he ever positively vetted?" Probably not. He was too close to the Royal Family. And there is still no consensus on his sexual proclivities. *Was* he homosexual? Bisexual? A voyeur? And does it matter? Reportedly, he was known as 'Tricky Dicky' behind his back, long before the epithet was bestowed on Richard Nixon, but this was said to have been prompted by his skill and opportunism in promoting himself rather than anything to do with his private life.

It has often been said that George was totally unprepared to take over as King yet as Second in Line to the Throne and someone who'd grown up in a Royal Family—and whether Edward died of old age or suddenly in a car crash—George always knew there was a strong likelihood the crown would come to him. And why worry? After all, as George Bernard Shaw said of his Queen, "Nowadays, a parlour maid as ignorant as Queen Victoria was when she came to the throne, would be classed as mentally defective."

(When George took over after Edward's abdication he ordered all the relevant files to be kept secret until the year 2037. Why? Even the most sensitive secrets of state rarely stay closed for more than 50 years. So what is in these papers that they must remain hidden for a hundred?)

It is also said that Edward and the rest of the family were moderately pro-Nazi, and indeed the British upper class in general. I'm not absolutely convinced. To be pro-German is not the same as being pro-Nazi. And the Royal sons had grown up with the anguish and guilt of their father who'd gone to war with his cousin causing more than 10 million people to die and 20 million more to be wounded; that they were prepared to do almost anything to avoid another war—especially after 'the war to end all wars'—is understandable.

But I wonder if there is not another agenda under the continuing efforts to paint Edward as anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, pro-appeasement, selfish, cowardly and greedy. Among Edward's friends were Churchill, Beaverbrook and the Austrian Rothschilds ('it is not generally known that he (Edward) helped a number of Austrian Jews emigrate to England, including his favourite musicians, the pianists Radicz and Landauer, and the Austrian official who had been attached to him at Enzesfeld after the Abdication, Dr Ernst Brunert.') and they all, none of them sentimental men, retained Edward as a friend even when he'd ceased to have any position or influence.

Bloch says, 'The new King sought to simplify and modernize. He disliked courtiers, palaces, debutantes, large official receptions, wasteful expenditure, superfluous paperwork, elaborate ceremonies and the Established Church. He regarded the whole world of his father with distaste—the stultifying routine, the unvarying traditions, the extravagance, the ancient hierarchical apparatus, the attendant bishops, the seasonal peregrinations between the royal palaces and estates.'

St. John Catchpool wrote in his biography 'The Prince of Wales, later to become King Edward VIII, was deeply concerned for youth welfare, and Dr. Mallon invited him to visit Toynbee so as to see something at first hand of conditions in the East End. During a rousing meeting held in the long hall of the Whitechapel Art Gallery (then an adjunct of Toynbee), Prince Edward spoke with great enthusiasm of 'my friend Dr. Mallon and his band of helpers'. After the meeting Mallon asked me to show the Prince round some of the boys' clubs. As we walked in the darkness through the narrow streets of Wapping, behind the London docks, with no police car or personal detective close at hand, the Prince told me how much he preferred to be out and about among working people, in contrast to the official receptions, bodyguards and all the rest of the paraphernalia considered necessary

for royalty'. After the Abdication 'References to the Duke of Windsor were officially taboo. Some slum-dwellers in East London, however, hung up banners which read: 'God bless our King and Queen AND the Duke of Windsor'.'

Sir Samuel Hoare, at the time when he was First Lord of the Admiralty wrote 'If on the one hand he was, as many thought, wayward and irresponsible, on the other hand, no one could deny his surpassing talent for inspiring enthusiasm and managing great crowds. He seemed to know personally every officer and seaman in the fleet. On one of the evenings there was a smoking concert in the aircraft carrier *Courageous*. ... The vast underdeck was packed with thousands of seamen. In my long experience of mass meetings I never saw one so completely dominated by a single personality. At one point he turned to me and said: "I am going to see what is happening at the other end." Elbowing his way through the crowd, he walked to the end of the hall and started community singing to the accompaniment of a seaman's mouth-organ. When he came back to the platform, he made an impromptu speech that brought the house down."

Hoare went on to say in his memoirs, "And so, late at night, ended the reign of Prince Charming, whose fatal weakness, more serious than his personal affections, was that he did not like being King. The ritual and tradition of a historic office made no appeal to him. He had never changed his mind since as a boy he wrote in his diary:

"What rot and waste of time, money and energy all these State visits are! This is my only remark on all this unreal show and ceremony."

A great many people, from the Royal Establishment, the War Office, and the Church, must have heaved a great sigh of relief when Edward departed. For, had he stayed, there might have come about a leaner, trimmer, simpler, more modern Monarchy.

Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in *The Long Week-End* say 'Most ordinary people were for the King; most important people were against him. Churchill expressed the ordinary point of view when he accused the Prime Minister in the House of betraying both the King and Parliament. The Beaverbrook Press followed the same line, its aim being as much to get rid of Baldwin as to support the King. Intrigues became complicated: it was rumoured that Beaverbrook and Churchill were pressing the King not to give way to the Cabinet. Churchill was mentioned as an alternative Prime Minister; if he were gainsaid in the Commons, it was felt, he could carry the country with him in a general election. Sixty M.P.s were supposed to have written to the King, pledging their support. Nevertheless, nobody could tell how a general election would go, nor how the Dominions would react if Churchill were successful. The risk was not run.'

History, as well as the Monarchy, might have been markedly different.

There may be good and proper reasons for Edward's continuing villification—there are also still people with a vested interest in that villification.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is a perception that small countries are likely to have more efficient spy services than large ones. The KGB is influenced by the fate of those who might find the courage to offer unpalatable material. The CIA drowns in money yet Brian Toohey and William Pinwill in *Oyster* say that on August 2, 1950 "the *New York Herald Tribune* listed five events that US intelligence had failed to predict: the North Korean attack on the South that year, the 'fall' of Czechoslovakia to the communists, the split between Tito's Yugoslavia and Moscow, the communist victory in China and the Israeli victory in Palestine". British intelligence was caught unawares when Singapore 'seceded' from the Federation of Malaysia. Neither the CIA nor the KGB apparently had any inkling of the 1974 coup in Portugal, even though a babe in arms could see the situation was going to 'break' ...

Australians, I suspect, do not make good spies—perhaps they're too 'plain faced'—and it does not surprise me to learn that probably Australia's most active spy, which isn't saying a lot, was a New Zealander, Ian Milner, whose fairly modest career formed the subject for Richard Hall's book, *Rhodes Scholar Spy*. So what about the spy services for

Aotearoa? Nicky Hager documented their current state in *Secret Power: New Zealand's Role in the International Spy Network*.

You may remember the controversy when New Zealand wanted to declare its ports closed to American nuclear warships. Hager says "The United States government wanted other countries to see New Zealand punished for its nuclear-free policies but the UKUSA alliance was too valuable to be interrupted by politics." If anything, the flow of US intelligence into New Zealand has *increased* since NZ banned nuclear ships.

It is an extremely informative book. Hager says, "All writers write from a particular perspective. I believe that spying and other intelligence activities are not, in themselves, necessarily good or bad. Issues of right and wrong arise in relation to who is being spied upon, who is given access to the intelligence and what they do with it. Few New Zealanders would object, for example, to intelligence activities aimed at protecting New Zealand from attacks such as the 1985 *Rainbow Warrior* bombing. But I am appalled that New Zealand provides very detailed intelligence about its small and vulnerable South Pacific neighbours to outside powers which are aggressively pursuing their own interests in the region.

Intelligence is not just neutral information; it can be powerful and dangerous. Intelligence gathering and military force are two sides of the same coin. Both are used by countries and groups within countries to advance their interests, often at the expense of others.

The type of intelligence described in this book, signals intelligence, is the largest, most secret and most expensive source of secret intelligence in the world today. This eavesdropping on the communication of other countries has implications for power relations between countries in every part of the globe."

Yet the relationship between governments and intelligence services is rarely open, accountable and well-informed. A curious new question is also arising as governments push to privatise their own functions and justify their spending on espionage by suggesting it will bring economic, as well as military or diplomatic benefits. Yet they don't want the private sector to actually get into the process of encryption. As Hager notes, "The UKUSA agencies have been attempting to curb the spread of this technology, which is a major threat to their influence, so far without enough success to stop it. In the United States, for example, the NSA tried unsuccessfully to have the 'Clipper' chip (which it could break) made mandatory for all 'secure' American communications systems. In Europe, the GCHQ succeeded in forcing the manufacturers of the new Europe-wide GSM mobile phone system to downgrade its encryption (which, initially, it could not break). In Australia DSD officers at first scoffed at a West Australian, Monty Sala, who claimed to have developed unbreakable encryption software but soon after they turned up at his Perth company and stopped him getting several export sales ... It remains to be seen how much the public can find a technological answer to maintaining privacy in a world with systems like ECHELON."

On the other hand a former NZ prime minister: "There are insurmountable difficulties involved in trying to channel useful economic intelligence to private companies. How do you choose which of rival companies to give intelligence to? Should you help a foreign-owned company operating in New Zealand or a New Zealand-owned company producing its products in China?"

And of course, no matter how much money the system soaks up, there is no guarantee it will know what is about to happen. The Fiji coup caught NZ on the hop, even though it had trained Colonel Rabuka, and it had no warning about the bombing of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*. "Secret intelligence neither gave any warning before the bombing nor helped to catch the French agents afterwards. And 40 years of New Zealand loyalty to the United States-British alliance were not enough to move Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher to condemn France's actions, not even with a formal slap on the wrist. Yet at that time both leaders were publicly campaigning against terrorists."

There are things we all need to think about. A whole generation is growing up with an ‘electronic mind-set’, yet where people have not the money, the resources, the structures, perhaps even the ideology or religious acceptance, for electronic communications, the whole massive system of electronic surveillance is left flat-footed. It may be we are reaching a situation where we can’t even enter the mind-set of people who do not use e-mail—

The very fact of putting TOP SECRET on a document discourages cross-checking, comparisons, questions, or accountability. And intelligence is increasingly compartmentalised on a ‘need to know’ basis to diminish leaks yet as workers sift through millions of electronic communications, choices as to what their superiors ‘need to know’ are also adding in a different kind of bias. And who finally knows? Not the politicians, not the taxpayers, not the electorate (in whose name, as the ‘national interest’, the whole expensive pyramid has been constructed); and finally the spy chiefs can only cope with a digested overview into which yet more bias and omission has been factored.

Anthony Masters, in *Literary Agents: The Novelist as Spy*, chronicles the careers of various ‘names’ who were both spies and writers (from John Buchan to Ian Fleming) and notes that it is finally with John le Carré that the image of spy as a figure of glamour and excitement disappears, probably never to be revived. Spying becomes dull, routine, sordid, mostly desk-bound, ‘just a job’ in which the moral dilemmas are more likely to be raised by people outside the organisation. Yet, in a sense, Smiley’s world is as remote from real life as James Bond’s because the novelist is always in control of the plot, the characters, the beginning-middle-end, the motivation and the climax. This enclosed world creates a cosiness, a sense of logic and meaning, a pursuing of purpose, a sense of cause and effect, a kind of informed neatness, which is hard to find in real life espionage.

\* \* \* \* \*

There is the perception that Israel’s Mossad is one of the world’s best spy services (though it was caught out in 1973) and has severely tarnished its reputation with the case of Mordecai Vanunu. John Loftus and Mark Aarons in their book *The Secret War Against the Jews* looked at the situation from the opposite end. The book is about the Philby’s, the Dulles, US and UK intelligence services, and about money, power and oil.

But the Philby which mainly concerns them is not Kim. “Three decades before the state of Israel was even born, there were British spies on the job, dedicated to the destruction of the Zionist dream. One made it his life’s work. Harry St. John Bridger Philby was no ordinary spy but a professional nonconformist and dissembler. He manufactured so many contradictory sides to his character that even his real controllers were never sure where his true loyalties lay. A self-confessed fanatic, irascible and cantankerous, he was among the first, and most effective, of those who spied on the Zionists.

Remarkably he has escaped the major attention devoted to his famous Communist double-agent son, Harold Adrian Russell Philby, or “Kim” as he was known. Certainly Kim was more notorious, particularly after his fellow double agents, Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, fled to Moscow in 1951, and his own defection from British intelligence and flight behind the Iron Curtain in 1963. But in many ways, Kim was but a shadow of his father, St. John Philby—“Jack” to his friends.”

They go on to say, “The history books describe the rise of fascism as the most important event of the 1920s. They were wrong. The Nazis would have remained a minor political party, and Germany would have remained a cash-starved country, weaponless and powerless, but for a massive influx of outside investment capital. Our intelligence sources believe that the most important event of this period was the alliance between American oil companies and Saudi Arabia. It was the indispensable precondition for war and the Nazi Holocaust.

The history books do not even mention the secret partnership of Ibn Saud, Jack Philby, and Allen Dulles. Together they were the secret source of oil, wealth, and

international influence that worked behind the scenes to put Hitler on to the world stage. These men, who fuelled the Nazi war machine in the 1930s, were the same ones who sabotaged the Jews' last, best hope of an escape route to Palestine. The partners in oil, our sources allege, were profoundly evil men who bore substantial responsibility for the Holocaust but escaped the judgment of history."

\* \* \* \* \*

I am not a great fan of John le Carré's Cold War spy novels, though I appreciate the quality of the writing, but the other day I sat down to read his rather different offering *The Little Drummer Girl*—

He uses the character of Charlie as a vehicle to explore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He says "She was a featherweight, caught in a swirling storm, but suddenly, to her amazed relief, theirs was the commanding wind" and I often felt sorry for her; it is painful to be a literary device but despite the didactic way in which both Israelis and Palestinians present their views it is a curiously passionless book. I found it hard to make the leap from the manufactured positions in the book to the blood on real streets. Was this because le Carré had tried too hard to be as fair and impartial as possible, was it his nature to write in a calm and detached manner, or was it that he had set out, again, to explore dilemmas—and dilemmas are, by their nature, more concerned with the intellect than the heart and the blood?

Peter Ustinov once wrote, "In the words of an enlightened Jewish friend, a noted sociologist and humanitarian with whom I have been honoured to serve on many committees, 'The Palestinians are the last victims of Hitler.'" (Or as Mark Mazower puts it in *Dark Continent*, "Half a million Palestine Arab refugees during the 1948 Israeli-Arab War paid the price for Europe's reluctance to absorb its diminished Jewish population.")

Ustinov goes on, "I will not reveal his name lest he too should become the target of hasty judgement and misrepresentation.

The allegation that some of one's best friends are Jewish is always a cue for a gale of ironic laughter. When an allegation that some of one's best friends are Palestinians produces the same sarcastic guffaw in lieu of the stunned silence of today, we will know that the problems of that tortured corner of our globe are well on their way towards a pacific solution."

At the risk of being seen as very naive I believe the German people should have given up land for a Jewish state and a (smaller) Romany state. It is true that money as compensation is useful but, in the final analysis, money is little bits of fancy paper churned out by a machine. It doesn't come from the *heart*. Land carries with it an immense baggage of emotion, myth, history, identity. To talk of shame, regret, sorrow, but make no profound sacrifice, to give nothing which has been loved and cherished down the centuries, in the end reduces history to a business deal.

\* \* \* \* \*

October 20th: Frederic Dannay

October 21st: Ursula Le Guin

October 22nd: Doris Lessing

October 23rd: Robert Bridges

October 24th: Nairda Lyne

October 25th: Thomas Macauley

October 26th: John Arden

John Romeril

\* \* \* \* \*

I once came across the suggestion that John Romeril's 1975 play *Top End* is probably the first play, in English, to deal with East Timor. This seems quite likely. After him came a rush of plays and readings: a group of Timorese put on a production of *Semiesmente Mãe* based on poems by Maria Casimiro, then the play *Death at Balibó* was staged in Darwin.

Michele Turner's book *Telling* inspired a group of Timorese in Melbourne to develop excerpts into a play. Then came *Zero Sum*, based on the death of young NZ student Kamahl Bamadhj in the Dili Massacre, at the Melbourne University Theatre. A group was formed in Darwin and toured the play *Wall of Testimony* which was the first Timorese play to reach Hobart. David Hayhow's radio play *The Sea Change* went to air on the ABC earlier this year. Since then Tony Nicholls' play *Speaking for the Dead* has gone ahead in Western Australia and there are two new plays in the pipeline in Melbourne and Sydney.

And then there is Martin Wesley-Smith's play *Quito* which was first put on by the Sydney Metropolitan Opera in 1994 and has since toured overseas. It demonstrates a great many of the problems and, I suppose, the power that can be generated by the complex mixture of theatre, mental illness and social protest.

There is a general view that putting in 'propaganda', whether political, social or moral, deadens the power of the material and diminishes the art of the production. It often does. But as Thornton Wilder once said "The theater is so vast and fascinating a realm that there is room in it for preachers and moralists and pamphleteers." Of course room is not the same thing as value. Yet a play written without passion runs equal risks of falling flat—and passions are as likely to be political, social or moral, as personal.

And mental illness is difficult to convey in ways which portray the disintegration of the personality without undermining respect for the person. In a way Shakespeare had it easy when he sent Lear lurching off into the storm.

Brian Hoad said that *Quito* "is about political as well as personal madness, about how societies as well as individuals can suffer from it, from schizophrenia—the disintegration of personality; a failing sense of reality; wild distortions of thoughts, emotions and behaviour; voices in the head, delusions, paranoia, mania, depression, suicide."

He goes on to explain that *Quito* "was the nickname of Francisco Baptista Pires, an 11-year-old refugee from East Timor who managed to make it to Darwin after Soekarno's goons (I assume he means Soeharto's) laid siege to the former Portuguese colony in 1975, slaughtering some 200,000 people—about a quarter of the population—including members of *Quito's* family who failed to escape. Successive Australian governments adopted the usual low posture and saw, heard and spoke no evil."

Ken Healey wrote "In best Brechtian mode, *Quito* uses a number of media, from television news footage to seductive cabaret. After the opening song I also found all the lyrics perfectly comprehensible, an important element of a work that offers non-stop social comment.

The librettist's legal expertise must have been useful in vetting the lyrics of the show stopper, in which Gareth Evans as an ole cowpoke is held up to a degree of ridicule that the Minister for Foreign Affairs could match only if he sought to find the words actionable.

*Quito* was a schizophrenic East Timorese youth, educated in Darwin from the age of 11, who was shot in the throat by one of Darwin's finest while wielding a knife. He eventually died, hanging from his own pyjama cord, on the day a charge of attempted murder was withdrawn.

Previously he had been incarcerated and force-fed a drug which he claimed made him worse. He was an amateur rock composer and singer, apparently about as dangerous to the common weal as some of the mentally ill the Victorian police have used for target practice since *Quito's* death in 1990."

Hoad says "There is a quote which particularly sticks in the mind: "Few of us can tolerate invasion of any sort. Everyone needs a private, secure place—mental and physical"... "

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I was waiting for something or someone and dropped into a nearby bookshop to pass the time; they had a basket of cheap books, mostly plays, and I was tempted into buying two of them for my son. One was John Romeril's play *The Floating*

World—

Les is a WW2 digger who is persuaded to go on a *Women's Weekly* Cherry Blossom cruise to Japan with his wife Irene. Les is loud and crude, Irene comes out with regular malapropisms. Yet they are both, in their kind of innocence and straightforwardness, quite likeable. They simply haven't given any real thought as to whether they *want* to go to Japan; it is the cruise itself which has attracted them.

(Les does quite a bit of 'chundering' in the early stages of the play; I have often wondered how actors cope even if it is a good old Australian tradition. I had a slightly different wonder when I read Justine Ettler's *The River Ophelia*—how did a young woman manage to produce more vomit in a month or two than most of us could produce in a lifetime? Was this the good old Australian tradition taken to extremes or is it a basic requirement of 'grunge' fiction?)

As the voyage progresses Les is constantly reminded of his time in Changi prison and the Burma Railway; it as though everything is conspiring to force him to remember painful memories he has largely succeeded in burying:—the regimentation of boat drill, the abrupt requests over the public address system, the way their days are ordered by meal times and organised amusements, his memories of a concert party during the war, the young Asians who provide much of the staff on board, his shipboard 'friendships' with men with war memories, Irene's inability, as the ship steams northward, to understand or prevent Les' increasingly morbid inward dialogue with old memories, dead comrades ... it is his dwelling on the suffering of his mates which both makes Les a sympathetic figure and finally tips him over into a long-delayed breakdown ...

\* \* \* \* \*

October 27th: Graciliano Ramos

\* \* \* \* \*

I have a friend who divides her life between Paris and São Paulo and she sends me books. I don't do anything to deserve them. They just come. And one of the wonderful things about them is they are often authors I would probably not otherwise have thought of reading—among others, Primo Levi, Basho, Graciliano Ramos, Cecília Meireles, Casimiro D'Abreu and Martin Hansen—

"Beg yours?"

"Martin Hansen."

"Not any relation to you-know-who?"

"I wouldn't think so."

\* \* \* \* \*

Graciliano Ramos was born in 1892 and spent his earliest years in the state of Alagoas in the north-east of Brazil; his father, moving from shop-keeping to cattle-raising, took the family to the neighbouring state of Pernambuco where they were all but ruined by drought. So they returned to Alagoas and settled in the town of Viçosa. He told the story of his growing-up and these moves in his last book *Childhood (Infância)*. His reading book in school was the stories of the Baron of Macaúbas who told his stories through birds and insects. Ramos writes "It didn't seem nonsense to me for the animals to understand each other, fight and make peace, and tell their undoubtedly curious adventures. I had thought of this; I admitted that the frogs of the Penha dam could express themselves and sing intelligible things for us. The weak complained, the strong shouted demands. They constituted a society. Businessman frogs, cowboy frogs, the reverend João Inácio frog, the José da Luz frog which liked grand uniforms, naughty frogs, sons of the little frog Teotoninho Sabiá, the frog Master Firmo the tailor, the frog Rosenda the laundress chattering her gossip at the edge of the water." But he could see that it was condescending and—"It was ridiculous that a hirsute and serious individual, a learned man and baron, should chirp advice and buzz admonitions."

He also says of his schooling "It was at this time that they imposed Camões on me in

manuscript. Yes, sir: Camões in horrible stained characters—and manuscripts. At the age of seven, in the interior of the North-east, ignorant of my own idiom, I was compelled to divine, in a strange language, the daughters of Mondego, the pretty Inês, the arms and the distinguished barons. One of these barons was probably the Baron of Macaúbas, the one of the birds, the fly, the spider web; and the punctuation. God forgive me. I abominated Camões.”

His books include *Anguish (Angóstia)* and *Barren Lives (Vidas Sêcas)* which was the one Marie-France sent me. Unfortunately I lent it to someone before I'd finished it and have never been able to get it back again.

Before beginning his literary career he had tried and failed to become a journalist, then sought a career in local politics becoming mayor of Palmeira where he gained a reputation for incorruptibility. His first novel *Caetés* (about a man who is trying to write a novel dealing with the conflict between the Caeté Indians and the arriving Portuguese) was published in 1933. He set up a school in Palmeira and became director of the state printing press and began on his second novel *São Bernardo* (about a young man who has been a labourer on the plantation of the title, but who aspires to take it over by whatever means necessary). In 1936 he was suddenly dismissed from his positions and imprisoned without trial. He was released with as little explanation and warning and, surprisingly, was offered the position of federal inspector of education in Brazil. His two interests, writing and education, continued to fill his life even though his health had been damaged by his imprisonment. He brought out children's books, short stories, a travel book of Eastern Europe, articles and an account of his imprisonment. I cannot help wondering if, in his educational role, he took Camões off primary school curricula and sought out reading books that were less pedagogical than the Baron.

And it came to me as I was writing this that children would eventually come to want to read the classics if they were first introduced to the *writers* in an interesting way. I don't think Camões could ever be regarded as an author for children but his *life* is worthy of the *Boys' Own Annual*.

\* \* \* \* \*

M. Scott Peck in *People of the Lie*: “‘Imaginary evil is romantic and varied,’ wrote Simone Weil in her essay ‘Criteria of Wisdom’; ‘real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring.’ It is no accident that when C.S. Lewis depicted hell he described it as a grey British Midlands city (in *The Great Divorce*). Having recently visited Las Vegas, my own latest vision of hell is that it is an endless slot-machine emporium, far removed from the variety of night and day, monotonously noisy with dull-eyed people spasmodically yet regularly yanking machines for all eternity. Indeed, the tasteless glitter of Las Vegas is a pretence designed to hide all that tasteless dreariness.

If one ever has the good fortune to meet a living saint, one will have then met someone absolutely unique. Though their visions may be remarkably similar, the personhood of saints is remarkably different. This is because they have become utterly themselves. God creates each soul differently, so that when all the mud is finally cleared away, His light will shine through it in a beautiful, colourful, totally new pattern. Keats described this world as ‘the vale of soul-making.’ and whether they know it or not, when they help their patients clean away the mud, psychotherapists are engaged in the activity of saint-making.”

I have been pondering on this and the ideas Simone Weill presents in *Gravity and Grace* which Marie-France recently sent me ... and one of my thoughts is on the ‘sainthood’ of Simone Weill herself. She has been included in a book of 20th century ‘martyrs’; her self-denial and compassion are seen as ‘saintly’. I don't think either designation is quite right. *She might have become ...*

But I think we must simply take her as a brilliant young philosopher and draw from her work as from a well of sweet cool water.

\* \* \* \* \*

October 28th: Tasma  
October 29th: Desmond Bagley  
October 30th: Geoff Dean  
Ezra Pound  
October 31st: Dick Francis  
November 1st: Hagiwara Sakutaro  
November 2nd: Odysseus Elytis  
November 3rd: Martin Cruz Smith  
November 4th: Eden Phillpotts  
November 5th: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox  
November 6th: Barry Dickens  
November 7th: Albert Camus  
November 8th: Bram Stoker  
November 9th: Turgenev  
Goronwy Rees  
November 10th: Oliver Goldsmith  
José Hernández

\* \* \* \* \*

The epic poem has a long history in Spanish America, its first major exponent being Alonso de Ercilla with his *La Araucana*, which began to appear in 1559. Pablo Neruda says of it: ‘When the Spanish conquistadors pushed them back, after three hundred years of fighting, the Araucanian Indians retreated to those cold regions. But the Chileans continued what they call “the pacification of Araucania,” their war of blood and fire to turn our countrymen out of their own lands. Every kind of weapon was used against the Indians, unsparingly: carbine blasts, the burning of villages, and later, a more fatherly method, alcohol and the law. The lawyer became a specialist at stripping them of their fields, the judge sentenced them when they protested, the priest threatened them with eternal fire. And hard spirits finally consummated the annihilation of a superb race whose deeds, valor, and beauty Don Alonso de Ercilla carved in stanzas of jade and iron in his *Araucana*.’

But the genesis of what is probably Spanish America’s best-known epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* lies in the gaucho tradition and the country-city dichotomy which, as in Australia, is a major part of the Argentine experience. Many interesting parallels can be drawn between Argentina and Australia—the diverse emigrant experience, the search for a national identity by a country with a relatively small population but regional leadership aspirations, the tendency of its people to live in large coastal cities but view the countryside and its space and solitude with ambivalent attitudes (this is even more extreme in Argentina because of the situation of Buenos Aires and its role as political, economic and social capital), and the continuing struggle to come to terms with the treatment of its indigenous peoples.

The rule of General Rosas was founded in a strongly anti-intellectual gaucho spirit, strongly resisted by essayists such as Domingo Sarmiento who wrote “My saddle, spurs, polished sword, buttoned coat, gloves, French képi, and overcoat, everything was a protest against the gauchesque spirit ... ” but in the end, because of its brutality, by the gauchos themselves. Hernández began his career in the army but he later founded a liberal newspaper *El Río de la Plata* in which he opposed conscription and supported local elections and local autonomy. The paper, like his fictional writings, was imbued by the gaucho spirit and his conviction that the countryside and its people were being neglected and exploited by the rising power of the capital. “The capital is still weakened by the monstrous privileges accorded to it by the colonial system. Here there has been created a kind of aristocracy to which the defenceless country pays tribute as if they were the vassals of some feudal lord.”

The gaucho spirit was a vital underlying force in the development of Argentine (and also Uruguyan) literature, not so different from the use of the drover, the boundary rider, the stockman, the bushranger, as characters in the development of an independent and identifiable Australian literature. Previous writers such as Echeverría, Ascasubi, and Estanislao del Campo all helped lay the ground for Hernández's epic, but it is far more complex and rich than anything which had gone before.

Martin Seymour-Smith says that before the publication of *Martín Fierro*, "which is among other things a protest against a Europeanized, urbanized government's treatment of rural dwellers, Spanish-American literature had exhibited most of the usual characteristics of a colonial literature. The often bizarre and always colourful reality of the Spanish-American nineteenth century is practically ignored; there are no movements to speak of—just a number of individual versions of romanticism. Spain and things Spanish were of course nominally rejected; but, so far as the literature is concerned, this rejection is in favour of non-Spanish Europe rather than the native South American. The conditions were not yet conducive to the creation of a truly indigenous literature: ceaseless and often violent political activity effectively hindered the development of an intelligent and educated reading public. The only indigenous culture, although magnificently vigorous, was rural, illiterate and entirely cut off from the other, Europeanized one. Hernández' *Martín Fierro*—which is, most successfully, written not in a gaucho spirit—is important because it is the first serious attempt to bridge this gap. It is a romanticizing and even, fundamentally, a conservative work: but it also has revolutionary elements. Whether Hernández' original purpose was didactic or not, his work shows—for the first time in South American literature—a sophisticated mind achieving imaginative identification with the non-literate population."

'Martín Fierro' is a *payador*, a *gaucho* minstrel, who is conscripted and sent to the frontier to fight against the Indians—and he begins his story with '*Aquí me pongo a cantar*', 'Now I start to sing'—but he deserts and becomes an outlaw and the epic follows his adventures; it is a number of interlinked experiences, it is a poem of social protest, it is an opportunity to present a romanticised view of the *gaucho* life and its hardships and sorrows; and it is a way of presenting the solitude and grandeur of the landscape, of man against that solitude; a landscape that many of its readers will never personally experience, nor perhaps would many of them wish to ...

Jean Franco sums up the place of the epic—"Most remarkable of all was the popularity of the poem, not in intellectual circles but amongst the ordinary people, some of whom learned it by heart and repeated it to the illiterate gauchos on the *estancias*. Seventy-two thousand copies were sold in seven years and by 1878 an eleventh edition of the first part of the poem, the 'Ida', was brought out. In 1879, the second part of the poem 'La vuelta de Martín Fierro' (The Return of Martín Fierro) was published and five impressions of 4000 copies each appeared in 1879 and 1880. These numbers speak for themselves at a period in which novels and poems by distinguished writers reached only a handful of readers. José Hernández was unique in breaking down the barrier that separated the literary élite from the mass public. Nevertheless, serious writers mostly ignored the poem and it suffered an eclipse between 1880 and 1910 when a new Argentinian nationalist spirit pervaded the literary scene and made critics and writers resurrect *Martín Fierro* as a national epic."

\* \* \* \* \*

At the time that Galtieri went on trial in Argentina I wrote a little essay I called 'The Ghost of Adolf Hitler'. In 1939, General Juan Perón went to Europe and became a firm admirer of Hitler and Mussolini; and as Vice President and Minister for War he was well-placed to bring Argentina into WW2 on the Axis side. The problem was: there was no strong popular support for this position. The Falklands had played virtually no role in Argentine politics—but suddenly, they became the ideal vehicle for whipping up anti-

Allied feeling. “Few people asked why—after a hundred years of semi-dormancy and mutually-beneficial Argentine-British co-operation—the Malvinas should suddenly become an issue of fierce and fervent nationalistic rhetoric. It wasn’t wise to ask too many questions in Perón’s Argentina.”

Fascism was defeated largely by outside forces in Germany and Italy, it died its own natural death in Spain and Portugal where people came to see it had no answers and no real policies. But in Argentina it lived a more shadowy existence, cloaked as Peronism, never truly seen as a specific ideology rooted in the European experience of WW1, the Depression, and the rise of totalitarianism, never truly defeated by the forces of democratic opinion. It is perhaps understandable that Argentina had a ‘dirty war’, clandestine, confused, arbitrary, deceitful—it had to be hidden under the catch-all of anti-communism because no one had ever been quite honest about the pro-fascist nature of the military.

This same ambivalence influenced Argentina’s relations with the Falklands—it could not afford to resolve the question of the Falklands because it did not know when its tense society would need an outside ‘whipping boy’; the Falklands was a useful issue to keep to hand. “Successive Argentine presidents—from Lonardi to Aramburu, Frondizi to Illia, Onganía to Videla—used it to the full as a highly emotive and unifying factor in their society ... So it was passed from president to president. An issue they were too insecure to risk trying to dismantle and, equally, an issue they were incapable of bringing to an honourable conclusion—believing, as they did, that its usefulness as a political tool probably outweighed its value as a territorial part of Argentina.”

But by the time Galtieri gained the presidency and inherited the issue one important thing had changed: Britain, to its shame, had the Islanders under intense pressure to accept the ‘leaseback’ solution whereby the Islands would be *given* to Argentina and *leased* back by Britain for a set period of time. The Islanders were told that this would give them the same sort of prosperity and security that the people of the New Territories enjoyed. During this period, British citizenship was taken from several hundred Islanders (on the grounds they had no grandparent born in the British Isles) and they received instead the status of ‘citizen of a dependent territory’. When the Falkland Islands Association in London protested they were told ‘*It is nothing personal. The bill is designed to keep the Hong Kong Chinese out of Britain*’ which, apart from its hypocrisy, was a reminder that racism is alive and well in British bureaucracy and small comfort to the Islanders who had lost the right of residence in Britain at a time their government was negotiating to give their homeland to a group of fascist-inclined generals. The problem for Galtieri was that Britain wanted a quiet no-fuss under-the-counter agreement; he wanted—and not only for his personal popularity; the junta was under increasing attack world-wide for its appalling human rights record—a massive military-victory ticker-tape-parade type of success ...

What I, and possibly the Argentine people, didn’t know was that Galtieri was a drunk. I saw him only as drunk with ambition, with the power his fellow military officers had conferred on him. I finished up the essay “Galtieri failed and found that the price of failure was the anger and resentment of both his people and his fellow military officers. He faces court-martial and possibly even the firing-squad. Because he, like so many men before him, failed to see the dismal shape of the ghost of Adolf Hitler skulking in the corridors of Argentine politics.”

Chilean playwright, Ariel Dorfman, once wrote “It’s terrible to lose a war”—“Almost as terrible as to win one.” If Galtieri had won, how many more thousands of young Argentinians would’ve disappeared into mass graves ... and in the euphoria of victory who, except their families, would’ve cried ...

Christopher Joyce and Eric Stover in *Witnesses from the Grave: the science of identifying human remains* devote several chapters to the attempt to identify the bodies tumbled anonymously into the Argentine military’s mass graves. It is a profoundly moving record. The families, and in particular the Madres and Abuelas (mothers and grandmothers)

of the Plaza de Mayo, were often reluctant to give their support to the work. If their children's bodies *should* be identified, using all the skills of forensic pathology, then their last hope that their sons and daughters might still be alive, somewhere, would be gone. I understand, I sympathise, I do not honestly know how I would respond if it were my sons who had 'disappeared', but I *think* I would rather know the truth, no matter how painful. Not knowing would not prevent my imagination seeing the worst in all its horror, a never-ending horror ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Argentina has always had the right to test its claims to the Malvinas in the International Court of Justice. It laid claim to South Georgia in 1927 and the South Sandwich Islands in 1948. In 1947 and again, later, Britain offered to submit all Argentina's claims to arbitration. Argentina refused. (Argentina, Chile and Britain also have overlapping claims in the Antarctic: "In 1954 Britain offered to refer the Antarctic dispute to the International Court of Justice, but the offer was turned down by Argentina and Chile".) But none of these cases are dependent on Britain taking the initiative and making an offer. As a sovereign nation and United Nations member Argentina has the right to take any issue it wishes to the Court.

It could be said that to do so would be vastly cheaper than going to war, it would've saved the lives of hundreds of young men, and it would've enhanced Argentina's status as a dignified mature law-abiding Member of the United Nations. It still has the right to initiate court proceedings. So why has it never been willing to do so? I cannot say for certain that it would lose—the case is by no means a simple one and I am a housewife not a lawyer—but I think the fundamental problem is that it not only cannot afford to lose the case but the Argentine people would not be happy with a partial success, such as certain rights in East Falkland.

Yet if a country is not willing to have its claim tested in an independent tribunal does it have the right to maintain the claim as being a true and legal claim?

Anyway, see what you think ...

Argentina bases its claim to the Falklands on five aspects:

1. Geographical and ethnic proximity. The Falklands were part of the Gondwana land-mass, joined to both southern Africa and southern America. But it must've broken away a very long time ago because it has more than thirty species of plants, as well as birds and insects, which are unique to the islands. The Islanders are mainly of British and Scandinavian stock. The islands do not share a continental shelf with Argentina being separated by a deep trench which contains the Malvinas and San Jorge basins which are believed to be rich in oil; though that still remains the sixty-four-dollar question (as Colin Phipps wrote back in 1977 "The on-shore fields in the San Jorge and Magellan Basins are small and none of them would be commercial under the off-shore conditions pertaining around the Falkland Islands. It is possible that larger accumulations exist off-shore, but the available seismic evidence suggests that the basins may be too shallow, in terms of sediment thickness, for the development of significant hydrocarbon reserves") and many Islanders would prefer not to know the answer to that question. The pressure to begin drilling came from Britain.

The physical and personal 'closeness' implied by geography and ethnicity are not compelling reasons in a world of nation states cheek-by-jowl, their ethnic groups overlapping.

2. Discovery. No one knows for certain who was first to see the Islands. Was it Amerigo Vespucci in 1502 or João de Lisboa in about 1505? Was it Sebastian Gomez in 1520 or Camargue in 1540? Was it John Davis in 1592 or Richard Hawkins in 1594? Or Sebald de Weerdt in 1600? At first glance it would seem strange that there should be so much doubt. But take, for example, Dava Sobel's terrible story of Commodore Anson in 1741, in *Longitude*—"As he rounded the tip of Cape Horn, a storm blew up from the west.

It shredded the sails and pitched the ship so violently that men who lost their holds were dashed to death. The storm abated from time to time only to regather its strength, and punished the *Centurion* for fifty-eight days without mercy. The winds carried rain, sleet, and snow. And scurvy all the while whittled away at the crew ... Anson held west ... until he figured he had gone a full two hundred miles westward, beyond Tierra del Fuego ... as the haze cleared, Anson sighted *land* right away, dead ahead. It was Cape Noir, at the western edge of Tierra del Fuego ... The fierce currents had thwarted Anson. All the time he thought he was gaining westward, he had been virtually treading water.”

Two hundred years earlier, in tiny wooden ships, around islands which can still see huge icebergs in their neighbourhood, and where the wind reaches gale force two days out of five, the possible proximity of land was something to avoid rather than embrace. The many confusions become understandable.

But it is doubtful if the confusions matter. Discovery, even when clear-cut and unchallenged, is not synonymous with sovereignty.

3. First settlement. The islands had had several names appended not necessarily to them, but to the general area—Davis Southern Isles, Hawkins Maiden Land, Sebald Islands, Islas de Sanson y de Patos—and it was not until 1690 that the word Falkland was first used, by Captain Strong; but the French provided the first real interest in the islands. After the visit by Jacques de Beauchene in 1701 sealers predominantly from the port of St Malo began to visit and called the islands Les Isles Malouines. The French also provided the first settlement—in 1764—funded and created by Count Louis Antoine de Bougainville. The British put down a settlement at Port Egmont on Saunders Island, not a good site for a settlement. In the meantime the French settlement at the far more attractive site of Port Louis was sold to Spain. Spain and Britain then did some sabre-rattling with Spanish forces occupying Port Egmont until 1771 when a Spanish Declaration and British Counter-Declaration were signed in London resulting in Spain removing its garrison from Port Egmont. The status quo of Spanish East Falkland and British West Falkland had been restored. The following year saw the arrival of the first American sealers—who referred to East Falkland as Spanish Maloon, and West Falkland as English Maloon; over the next 30 years American ships explored the Islands thoroughly, scattering names such as Penn, Barclay, Fox, Quaker, Coffin, New, States, etc, liberally upon their anchorages.

(As I ploughed through encyclopaedias and histories I came upon no less than five different reasons given for Bougainville’s transfer of his settlement; but the most common was along the lines of “Spain soon complained that the Falklands were part of the South American continent; and France promised to surrender them to Spain provided Bougainville was indemnified.” Yet this raises more questions than it answers. If Spain saw Bougainville’s presence as illegal, it was under no obligation to pay him anything; if it was doing so merely as a means of goodwill and peaceful relations then Bougainville’s few simple dwellings and barns, plus some livestock, would be generously assessed at £2,000 to £3,000. So why did the Spanish treasury—which regularly cried poor when it came to funding outlying settlements and which maintained the Spanish garrison which moved in as Bougainville’s settlers moved out in a permanent state of privation—front up with the huge sum equivalent to £24,000—£25,000? Undoubtedly, it saw itself as purchasing title to the land on which the French huts and barns were situated. But I think the Spanish saw themselves as purchasing something immeasurably more valuable. Claims of discovery (Bougainville believed Amerigo Vespucci in 1502 to be the discoverer), names on maps, fine speeches, invoking the name of kings, even plaques put on shores, had no more value than Dirk Hartog’s Dutch plate left on an Australian shore. But the French, with only minor interest and intrusion by the English, had made all the running so far as exploration and exploitation went and they had now greatly boosted their right of possession by putting down the first settlement. It was this ‘nose-in-front’ that the Spanish in effect were purchasing.

Yet, in terms of actual physical area, they did not know what they were buying. No one knew exactly what the Falklands consisted of. Naturalist Ian Strange in his fascinating research into 18th century maps of the Islands notes the Philippe de Pretot version of 1771 from “the map “Carte Des Isles Malouines Nommees par les Anglois Isles Falkland” which appears in de Bougainville’s “Voyage autour de Monde” 1771. In this map the coastline is not complete and only two place names are given—the Baye Francoife (now Berkeley Sound) and I. Sebaldes (the Jason Islands). Unlike many of the earlier maps, the cartographer in his work has featured many of the hill ranges and fresh water ponds with interesting accuracy, although in general the map has little resemblance to other French maps of that time.” And the Bellin version of 1764 from “the map “Carte Des Isles Malouines ou Isles Nouvelles que les Anglois noment aujourd’hui Isles de Falkland” which appeared in Bellin’s “Petite Atlas Maritime” Paris 1764. By this period cartographers were giving more attention to mapping the Islands and entire coastlines are shown, although it is interesting to note on this map that a section to the north of what is now Cape Dolphin, East Falkland, is shown as a separate island.”

Map-makers and explorers clumped small islands into larger aggregates; they divided the large islands into smaller entities. Just as the English were astonished to find a French settlement on what they believed to be uninhabited land so the Spanish were later to find an English presence on what they had thought they were acquiring as ‘vacant possession’.)

This provides fuel for Argentina’s claim—although it remains unclear whether there is any document to prove that Spain saw Argentina, rather than any other former colony, as the rightful ‘heir’ to East Falkland.

4. The Nootka Sound Agreement. At first glance a treaty signed between Spain and Britain in 1790 to delineate territory in the North Pacific does not seem to have much to do with the Falklands. Britain’s star was in the ascendant, Spain’s was dipping towards the horizon, and the agreement is predominantly in Britain’s favour. But Article VI says “It is further agreed with respect to the eastern and western coasts of South America and the islands adjacent, that the respective subjects shall not form in the future any establishment on the parts of the coast situated to the south of the parts of the same coast and of the islands adjacent already occupied by Spain; it being understood that the said respective subjects shall retain the liberty of landing on the coasts and islands so situated for objects connected with their fishery and of erecting thereon huts and other temporary structures serving only those objects.” And the secret protocol adds “Since by Article 6 of the present convention it has been stipulated, respecting the eastern and western coasts of South America, that the respective subjects shall not in the future form an establishment on the parts of these coasts situated to the south of the parts of the said coasts actually occupied by Spain, it is agreed and declared by the present article that this stipulation shall remain in force only so long as no establishment shall have been formed by the subjects of any other power on the coasts in question.”

But apart from the fact that this would require a very elastic definition of ‘adjacent’ it puts Argentina in a bind. By the time it laid claim to the Falklands it had voluntarily ceased to be a Spanish subject. It could set this aside. But then it runs into the problem with the ‘subjects of any other power’. Its first action after putting down a small settlement in the 1820s was to try to stop American sealers by impounding the American vessel, *Harriet*, and taking her master to Buenos Aires to put him on trial. And not content with this action, it then seized the *Breakwater* and the cargo of seal-skins from the *Superior*, both American ships.

5. Claim. In 1820 a ship, the *Heroína*, sailed from Buenos Aires to the Falklands to lay claim to the Islands. This would seem to be strongly in support of Argentina’s claim. But there is a problem. The claim was made, not on behalf of Argentina but on behalf of the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata which, like most Spanish settlements was a population centre and an ill-defined hinterland. Borders came much later. The United Provinces

included the area which became Uruguay in 1828, a considerable portion of southern Chile, and Paraguay. Argentina did not recognise Paraguay as a separate and independent state until 1852.

(There is another problem which I haven't really seen discussed: the question of precedent. There may well be good reasons for going back to the 19th century and re-drawing boundaries. The United States could return a number of states to Mexico. Brazil and Chile could return chunks of Bolivia. Germany could return Schleswig-Holstein. The map of Africa could be re-drawn quite possibly to its benefit. But if the world, including Argentina and Britain, is not willing to have every border looked at with microscopic care—then why should the Falkland Islanders in effect be singled out and put under intense pressure to do so?)

I think it is likely there is archival material, especially in Spain, which could throw new light on the situation. But you can see Argentina's problems when it comes to claiming clear and unequivocal title.

A number of red herrings have been brought into the debate—such as the revolt against General Beresford and the murder of William Dickson and Matthew Brisbane—but they are irrelevant to the legal question of sovereignty.

Yet they *are* interesting—for the light they throw on the complex and sometimes angry, sometimes beneficent, sometimes ambivalent, relations between Argentina and Britain throughout the 19th century.

There is a tendency for British history to concentrate on 'responsible' sea captains and navigators. But Commodore Sir Home Popham wasn't one of them. He was ordered to sail to Venezuela but instead went to Buenos Aires where he captured the city, sending the Spanish Viceroy fleeing into the interior, installed General Beresford, and sailed home with a ship full of loot. He was court-martialled (though I doubt the loot was returned) and General Whitelocke was dispatched to Buenos Aires to support General Beresford, arriving there in 1807. The city-folk formed an *ad hoc* militia and attacked the British "with musketry, hand grenades, stinkpots, brickbats, and all sorts of combustibles"; there was a hasty retreat, Beresford spending 6 months in a Buenos Aires prison before escaping, and Whitelocke eventually going on trial in England.

But, strangely enough, two positive things came out of Beresford's brief reign. He had broken the trade nexus between Buenos Aires and the mother country and allowed local merchants to buy and sell more widely, improving both profits and the quality and variety of goods. And the people of the capital, flushed with their victory over Beresford and Whitelocke, began asking the question: why should they tamely accept the Spanish back. It was never Beresford's intention, I'm sure, but he inadvertently helped Argentina become the first fully independent nation in South America.

(Equally I doubt that British Foreign Secretary Canning was motivated by altruism when he signed the 1823 agreement with the French Ambassador Polignac "whereby France renounced any intention of restoring to Spain her South American colonies" (Anthony Wood, *Europe 1815 — 1945*) but it *did* remove a possible complicating factor.)

In 1820 a ship sailed from Buenos Aires. It had an English captain, Daniel Jewitt, but its purpose was to claim the Falklands in the name of the Government of the United Provinces of Rio de la Plata. The ship found no less than 17 American ships sealing round the Islands.

In about 1826 a man called Luis Vernet took over the abandoned French/Spanish settlement at Port Louis. He too was attracted by the wealth of fur seals around the islands and the, by now, large herds of French cattle running wild. He formed a successful settlement with a mixed group of people, English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, *gauchos*. But he stopped an American ship from sealing around the islands which eventually brought American retaliation. Vernet went to Buenos Aires to demand that his government tackle the American government. Buenos Aires was extremely reluctant to do

so—yet the USA *did* finally pay compensation in 1886; the problem being, so far as I can determine, that the compensation went to the Argentine government, which hadn't lifted a finger in support of Vernet in his troubles, rather than to his heirs; the American explanation being that they had initially believed Vernet's settlement to be "a nest of pirates".

Meanwhile, the small settlement began to disintegrate. Buenos Aires began to use the islands as a convict settlement—shipping over Indians who had tried to resist dispossession—and the *gaucho* population, wanting more freedom, murdered two of Vernet's English 'partners', William Dickson and Matthew Brisbane, several other settlers, and the governor sent to replace Vernet. Then a British navy ship HMS *Clio* sailed in and did some sabre-rattling. It did little damage and killed no one. But the replacement governor, Don José María Pinedo, packed up and went home to Buenos Aires. For Vernet this was more reason to continue trying to get a reluctant government in Buenos Aires to do something. The government did. It brought out sets of stamps showing the Islands as an Argentine territory!

Perhaps Vernet would've been better to have come back to the Islands to work out a deal with the arriving British administration. He had, much earlier, given a land grant to an Englishman, G. T. Whittington, which the new administration refused to honour—but Whittington persisted and seems eventually to have acquired some land. The last of Vernet's male settlers were taken off the islands by the British sealer *Hopeful*, glad to go it would seem after the murder of their fellow pioneers by *gauchos* and convicts. But three women stayed and one of them, Antonina Roxa, worked out a friendly business deal with the interim British governor, Lieutenant Smith, to enable her to continue to farm in the islands. So was it a matter of principle with Vernet? Was it a matter of pride? Or was it a matter of ambition that he couldn't accept anything less than full control? Would he have been content to run a small and isolated province accountable to a faraway and unhelpful government in Buenos Aires—or would he, as in Uruguay and Paraguay, eventually have wished to become a small independent nation?

And why was the government of General Rosas so totally unwilling to do anything? I assumed that it needed and wanted British capital to help it develop the infant nation and up to a point this is true. (Rosas, the scourge of Argentina's indigenous peoples, unlike many other Argentine strong-men, who ended up in Spain, or General San Martín who died in France, retired to England and died in Southampton.) But Britain as *the* major investor in Argentina was not really a factor till later in the century, when American explorer, Hiram Bingham, wrote that "The Englishman has made many native Argentinos wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice". So I wonder if the real reason was that in a country with huge areas of 'unsettled' and virtually unexplored territory the government simply could not see any reason to want the Falklands? Or did Rosas and his fellow generals see Vernet as a rival, an empire-builder in his own right, a kind of Orélie-Antoine (the eccentric Frenchman who hoped to become emperor of an independent Araucanian nation in southern Chile), a loose cannon? Or were the generals in Buenos Aires simply too busy with their 'Indian Wars' to give the matter their attention?

About 1840 two hard-headed Scottish businessmen, Alexander and Samuel Lafone, with large meatworks and shipping interests up the River Plate were attracted to those huge herds of wild cattle in the Falklands. They sent two of their local managers, Don Marcelino Martínez, then Don Juan Quevedo, to negotiate an agreement with Governor Moody (who was not very enthusiastic—though the government in London had been attracted by the idea of a port for battered ships coming round the Horn it had also seen the Islands as a place for unemployed and unwanted Napoleonic war veterans, and Moody was reluctant to undermine the idea of the Islands as a country of independent small-holdings—but wealth and influence prevailed); they finally sold up all their interests in Argentina and Uruguay, floated their Royal Falkland Land, Cattle, Seal and Whale Fishery Company in 1849, and

moved their business interests, lock, stock and barrel, to the Falklands. I doubt they would have taken such a step if they believed there was any likelihood of conflict between Argentina and Britain (and they were well placed to know). Their company, familiarly known as the FIC, appeared to be a vote of confidence in the infant colony—and no one then realised that it would gradually stultify economic, social and political life in the Falklands.

But the strange thing about their company proposal is that there is no mention of that animal which is now so entwined with Falkland life and even appears on the coat-of-arms: the sheep. It was a relatively late arrival but English and Scottish breeds flourished; as in fact does Tasmania's contribution to the Falkland sheep industry: the Polwarth.

Argentina's large wool industry is often seen as a British creation but it would more correctly be called a Falkland creation. Settlements in Patagonia financed and encouraged by Buenos Aires were miserable failures; settlements by Scots and Englishmen who had first gained knowledge of southern latitudes farming in the Falklands, or by Argentines, such as Carlos Moyano, governor of Santa Cruz, who had gone to the Falklands for ideas, advice and stock, succeeded. So suitable were not only Falkland-acclimatised sheep but also Falkland shepherds and even sheepdogs from the Islands that almost all sheep flocks in Patagonia in the late 19th century owed something to the Falklands.

And this is perhaps the *moral* crux of Argentina's problem. Can a sovereignty claim be dropped when it is economically expedient to do so and raised when it becomes politically expedient to do so—and remain a viable claim?

Yet I think it would be fair to say that had Argentina's official twentieth century attitudes to the Falkland Islanders been in the nature of those of Carlos Moyano—friendship, respect and goodwill—then sovereignty might simply have faded away as an issue. After all, British colonialism, though it might've helped make a tough, self-sufficient and unique small society, was nothing to write home about and British attitudes to Falkland problems were often in the nature of "out of sight, out of mind". But official Argentine attitudes towards the Islanders (which is a quite different matter to Argentine-British relations) have frequently been marked by contempt, petty insults, unhelpfulness, a grudging and rude attitude in business dealings, and a desire to make life as difficult as possible for the Islanders.

Many Islanders were shocked by the way young Argentine conscripts were treated by their own military commanders (naturalist Ronald Lockley writes in *Birds and Islands* of an Islander talking about the Argentine officers, "Bloody bastards most of them, they despised their conscripts. Saw one shoot a conscript dead in the street for failing to salute when he walked past the poor bugger"); it was a reminder, if one was needed, of the nature of the men who wielded power in Argentina.

But Argentina's right to take its sovereignty claim to the International Court of Justice remains, despite its attempt to take the Islands by force, so perhaps its people and especially the families of the young men who died in pursuit of that claim will find the strength and the integrity to demand that their government either test that claim in Court or lay it to final rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

A friend once sent me Jorge Luis Borges' book *Labyrinths*; I found it a fascinating book but I didn't pretend to understand any of the stories except what Borges called his 'knife fights in the dark'; I've just been reading Donald Leslie Shaw's appraisal of Borges' *Ficciones* and I'm afraid even that comfortable supposition has been destroyed. He says 'One of Borges's most disconcerting concepts is that which links him to some forms of the Theatre of the Absurd (Beckett, Stoppard): the non-existence of human individuality. Not contented with questioning our confidence in the 'real' outside ourselves he questions too what we hold most dear: our own unique selfhood. Thus in 'La forma de la espada' the originality of the narrative strategy lies in the way Moon, the traitor, tells his story from the

standpoint of the victim, only revealing his true identity in the trick ending. Borges hints at the meaning when Moon remarks: ‘*acaso Schopenhauer tiene razón; yo soy los otros, cualquier hombre es todos los hombres.*’\* We sense that, as in the case of Lönnrot and Scarlach, there is a deliberate attempt to blur the difference between the betrayer and the betrayed. So that if, at one level, this is a crime-and-punishment story in which Moon’s expiation of his treachery is his compulsion to seek the contempt of others by the particular way in which he tells his story, this is only the outer level. The inner level is not moral but metaphysical.

This is confirmed by ‘*El fin*’. Here the apparent theme is not treachery but vengeance. The story evokes, with additions and embellishments, two episodes from José Hernández’s (1834-86) nineteenth-century narrative poem *Martín Fierro*, (1872 and 1879). These are Martín’s successful knife fight with a negro and a singing contest later in the poem. Martín’s killer after the contest turns out to be the brother of his earlier victim. Again the story has a trick ending in that the identities of the two antagonists are not revealed until the penultimate paragraph, just as Moon’s is not revealed until the end of ‘*La forma de la espada*’. This seems to be the point of the tale; but it is not. The climactic closing line returns to the inner theme of the earlier story; ‘*...ahora no era, nadie. Mejor dicho era el otro.*’\*\* Recognition of the fact that there may be no continuity of the personality except through memory, which is fallible, or through ongoing dispositions or traits, which are unreliable, opens the door in this case to the idea that the repetition of an action identifies the agent with whoever committed the act previously. As the negro kills Martín he repeats Martín’s action in killing his brother. By the same token, he inherits the weariness, the sense of guilt and the sense of futility which had haunted Martín thereafter, and thus, in a way, ‘becomes’ Martín.

‘*Tres versiones de Judas*’ represents the culmination of the idea. Here Borges applies the concept of the oneness of betrayer and betrayed to the archetypal examples: Christ and Judas. Borges gradually induces us to consider the possibility of inverting the positions in which we usually place Christ and Judas so that the true redeeming sacrifice is made by God, not as Christ but as Judas. If previously he had tried to subvert our comfortable presuppositions about how the universe works, or about our own individuality, here he slyly questions one of our central spiritual assumptions. *Tout se tient*.

Borges himself writes “More than once, I tried to speak with the gauchos, but my efforts failed. In some way, they knew they were different. Among themselves, they used a spare, guttural Brazilianized Spanish. It was obvious that both Indian and negro blood ran in their veins. They were short and strong; at La Caledonia, I became a tall man—something that had never happened to me until then.

Almost all of them dressed with their legs wrapped in the *chiripa*, and a few wore the wide, baggy *bombachas*. They had little or nothing in common with the complaining heroes found in the books of Hernández or of Rafael Obligado. Under the stimulus of Saturday-night alcohol, they were easily moved to violence. There wasn’t a single woman around, and I never once heard a guitar.”

Strangely enough, Borges’ poems are more accessible than his prose. I discovered this by chance. A friend said she’d rung the State library to see if they had his book *Sandlines*; they were sorry to say they didn’t. Next time she was in her local library she found it there but it was *The Book of Sand*, she had been diverted by the Sandline conspiracy on Bougainville ... and the poems, I venture to suggest, can be understood without the difficulties attendant on his stories. Such as ‘The blind man’—

Traps lie in wait for me. My every step  
Might be a fall. I am a prisoner  
Shuffling through a time which feels like dream,  
Taking no note of mornings or of sunsets.  
It is night. I am alone. In verse like this,

I must create my insipid universe.

Italo Calvino, in *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, says of Borges, “The last great invention of a new literary genre in our time was achieved by a master of the short form, Jorge Luis Borges. It was the invention of himself as narrator, that “Columbus’ egg,” which enabled him to get over the mental block that until nearly forty years of age prevented him from moving beyond essays to fiction. The idea that came to Borges was to pretend that the book he wanted to write had already been written by someone else, some unknown hypothetical author—an author in a different language, of a different culture—and that his task was to describe and review this invented book. Part of the Borges legend is the anecdote that when the first extraordinary story written according to this formula, “El acercamiento a Almotásim” (The Approach to Al’Mutásim), appeared in the magazine *Sur* in 1940, it was in fact believed to be a review of a book by an Indian author.”

It has been said that Borges should have received a Nobel Prize for Literature. Perhaps. (Who now, for instance, remembers or reads Sully-Prudhomme?) But I think Borges has achieved something much more important. Calvino goes on, “What I particularly wish to stress is how Borges achieves his approaches to the infinite without the least congestion, in the most crystalline, sober, and airy style. In the same way, his synthetic, sidelong manner of narration brings with it a language that is everywhere concrete and precise, whose inventiveness is shown in the variety of rhythms, the syntactic movements, the unfailingly surprising and unexpected adjectives.” Biographers, novelists, critics, readers, cannot leave Borges alone. And so long as he exerts this mysterious pull he will never be forgotten.

\* ‘maybe Schopenhauer is right; I’m the others, any man is every man’

\*\* ‘now I was no one. Better said I was the other’

\* \* \* \* \*

November 11th: Jack Absalom

Dostoyevsky

November 12th: Janette Turner Hospital

November 13th: R. L. Stevenson

November 14th: Steele Rudd

November 15th: William Cowper

Sue Woolfe

\* \* \* \* \*

Daniel Defoe took the story of Alexander Selkirk and his travails and immortalised him as ‘Robinson Crusoe’. But many other writers were intrigued by Selkirk’s lonely sojourn. He became a 1781 play, *Robinson Crusoe, or Harlequin Friday*, and a nursery rhyme:

Poor old Robinson Crusoe!

Poor old Robinson Crusoe!

They made him a coat,

Of an old nanny goat,

I wonder how they could do so!

With a ring a ting tang,

And a ring a ting tang,

Poor old Robinson Crusoe!

William Cowper produced a poem he introduced with “Supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk, during his solitary abode in the island of Juan Fernandez.

I am monarch of all I survey,

My right there is none to dispute,

From the centre all round to the sea,

I am lord of the fowl and the brute.

O Solitude! where are the charms  
That sages have seen in thy face?  
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,  
Than reign in this horrible place.”

Branwell Brontë was inspired to write his poem ‘Juan Fernandez’:

Tossed overboard, my perished crew  
Of Hopes and Joys sink, one by one,  
To where their fellow-thoughts have gone  
Where past gales breathed or tempests blew  
Each last fond look ere sight declines  
To where my own Fernandez shines,  
Without one hope that they may e’er  
Storm-worn, recline in sunshine there.

More recently, Patrick Kavanagh wrote in his ‘Inniskeen Road, July evening’:

I have what every poet hates in spite  
Of all the solemn talk of contemplation.  
O Alexander Selkirk knew the plight  
Of being king and government and nation.  
A road, a mile of kingdom, I am king  
Of banks and stones and every blooming thing.

And Elizabeth Bishop in ‘Crusoe in England’ has the castaway safely home again and pondering on his experiences ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Norman Nicholson writes ‘Cowper’s life was a tragic one, yet it is not for tragedy that we turn to his poems. His poetry, at its best, is the poetry of pleasure, of the plain, ordinary pleasures which every man can enjoy. Again, though Cowper himself was always on the verge of insanity, his poetry is essentially the poetry of the sane. He is in every way a paradox: a recluse who became the spokesman of a great popular religious and democratic movement; and an oddity, an eccentric, a refugee from society, who, perhaps more than any other English poet expressed the aspirations of the average man of his time. His poetry is rarely exciting, rarely adventurous in language or form, yet it is his passages of unaffected felicity which are memorable and moving. It does not try to reveal the unseen, but it makes things seen appear with a new and astonishing clarity.’

Cowper’s contemporary, John Clare, also suffered from what we might regard as a nervous breakdown and spent time in an asylum.

His life was a hard one in many ways—he was writing from the heart when he said “If the necessities of the poor are always to be left to the mercy of another’s prosperity—their oppressions in a general way will always be permanent and their benefits ever precarious ... the manna must be scattered in the wilderness for the poor to claim as a right and not left in the power of another’s charity for them to solicit as a blessing for then thousands will be sent empty away”—but he left poetry of enduring tenderness and beauty.

I am—yet what I am, none cares or knows;  
My friends forsake me like a memory lost: -  
I am the self-consumer of my woes; -  
They rise and vanish in oblivion’s host,  
Like shadows in love’s frenzied stifled throes: -  
And yet I am, and live—like vapours tost

Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, -  
Into the living sea of waking dreams,  
Where there is neither sense of life or joys,  
But the vast shipwreck of my life esteems;

Even the dearest, that I love the best  
Are strange—nay, rather stranger than the rest.

I long for scenes, where man hath never trod  
A place where woman never smiled or wept  
There to abide with my Creator, God;  
And sleep as I in coldhood, sweetly slept,  
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,  
The grass below—above the vaulted sky  
(‘I am’)

The very layer of crab that’s wattled in the hedge  
The old post in its red paint crused with waggons rushing through  
The teazles prickly burrs or the little hubs of sedge  
Will bring me to the old place where I lived a moon ago

...

I always see a bit of home in every likely thing  
(‘Recolections of Home’)

He rarely wrote straight-out humour, as in ‘St Martins Eve’—  
And the old dame tho not in laughing luck  
For that same night at one fell sweeping stroke  
Mischieving cat that at a mouse had struck  
Upon the shelf her best blue china broke  
Yet spite of fate so funny was the joke  
She laughed untill her very sides did shake  
And some so tittled were they could not smoke  
Laying down their pipes lest they their pipe should break  
And laughed and laughed again untill their ribs did ache  
—or cynically—

Things least to be believed are most preferred  
All counter fiets as from truth sacred mint  
Are readily believed if once put down in print

—as well as his felicities of description, ‘the bothering bustle of the wind’, ‘The Corncrakes Rispy Song’, he uses many of the attractive old country words such as—  
‘foubroyce’, ‘mouldywharp’, ‘soodle’, ‘pooty’, ‘whilom’, ‘whimble’—and he records, with regret, the changing face of the country. This was the time when the communally-owned Commons were being ‘privatised’, enclosed and put to the plough ...

The plough has had them under hand  
And over turnd ’em all

And now along the elting Land

Poor swains are forc’d to maul ...

‘The bawks and Eddings are no more

The pastures too are gone

The greens the Meadows and the moors

Are all cut up and done

There’s scarce a greensward spot remains

And scarce a single tree

(‘The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters’)

\* \* \* \* \*

November 16th: Michael Arlen

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Moorehead, visiting Kenya, wrote in *No Room in the Ark*—‘All this area is known as the White Highlands, and it was once notorious for the escapades of a hard-

drinking group of settlers who came out from England in the nineteen twenties and thirties. These were the 'cheque-book farmers', and from all accounts it was a pretty lively existence, an attempt to combine the elegance of the South of France and Mayfair with the wildness of Africa. All too often the champagne parties ended with quarrels over runaway wives and shooting affrays in the morning; and since so many of these people came from well-known families they provided a useful source of news for the more sensational press in England. Things culminated in the murder of the Earl of Errol in 1941, and after that the war closed in and put a stop to the more lurid escapades, possibly for ever. Nowadays the White Highlands is a very sober place of farms and cattle ranching, and the local place names—Happy Valley, Blood Pressure Ridge—have a slightly dated sound.'

James Fox called his investigation of this murder *White Mischief*; his name inspired by an earlier book by Evelyn Waugh, *Black Mischief*. Waugh came to Africa principally to report on the crowning of the Emperor of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) which forms the bulk of his book *Remote People*. "Something a little more conspicuous was expected of the Imperial coronation but the response of the world Powers exceeded Ethiopian expectation in a manner that was both gratifying and embarrassing. The States less directly interested in African affairs construed the notification as an invitation, and those with important local interests seized the opportunity for a display of cordiality and esteem out of all proportion to anything their previous relations with the country had given reason to expect. Two Governments sent members of their royal families; the United States of America sent a gentleman of experience in the electric installation trade; the Governors of British Somaliland, the Soudan, Eritrea, the Resident of Aden, a marshal of France, an admiral, three airmen, and a marine band all appeared in various uniforms and orders. Substantial sums of public money were diverted to the purchase of suitable gifts; the Germans brought a signed photograph of General von Hindenburg and eight hundred bottles of hock; the Greeks a modern bronze statuette; the Italians an aeroplane; the British a pair of elegant sceptres with an inscription composed, almost correctly, in Amharic." And of the man to be crowned, Waugh says, "there was only one man whose rank, education, intellect, and ambition qualified him for the throne. This was Ras Tafari" who was "distinguished neither by the blood of Menelik nor any ostentatious feat of arms." But all this show and protestations of friendship were of little help to Ethiopia (Abyssinia) when Italy cast covetous eyes on the country.

Waugh had, meanwhile, moved on southwards, gathering material for his novel. *Black Mischief* isn't a memorable book—but one thing has always stayed in my mind, the awful stereotyped Armenian, Krekor Koumenian. He is all the usual things—cowardly, greedy, underhand, dishonest ... you know the minute you meet him he'll have a soft damp handshake and will cheat you when he changes your money ... In fact, almost every time I come upon an Armenian in a novel I know he is a going to be a minor villain, a black marketeer, a sleaze-bag, a crook ... but why? What draws writers to so often portray Armenians in such stereotypical negative terms?

Hans Eysenck once wrote: "The first of these derives from a careful study, carried out by LaPiere on attitudes towards Armenian immigrants to Fresno County in California. He found a common attitude to the effect that Armenians were dishonest, lying, and deceitful, but the records of the Immigrants' Association gave them as good a credit rating on the average as any other group. They were described as parasitic, but they applied much less frequently for charity to the County Welfare Bureau than native Americans. They were considered to have an inferior code of social morality and to show evidence of considerable social friction, yet they appeared in fewer legal cases than their numbers would lead one to expect. If anything, therefore, the stereotype of the Armenians is not only irrelevant: it is directly contrary to fact."

On the other hand, America has produced the delightful series of mysteries set in an Armenian community in Philadelphia by Jane Haddam, where the horror of what was done

to the Armenians by the Turks early this century is summed up in the statement ‘*Loukoumia* was the Greek and Armenian name for what the rest of the world called Turkish delight—but in Armenian neighborhoods, and Greek ones, nothing was ever called Turkish anything unless somebody was trying to start a fight’.

And then there is that doyen of Armenian-American writers, William Saroyan. He came to fame through his first collection of stories, *The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*, and went on to popular dramatic success with his plays, *My Heart's in the Highlands* and *The Time of Your Life*, which won a Pulitzer Prize, which he turned down. But I have recently been reading a collection of the stories he had published, predominantly, in *The Armenian Review*, which have been published as *My Name is Saroyan*. He writes of everyday life, of school, of the Depression years, of his family; he retells folktales, he creates his own; he comes up with some delightful titles—‘One of the Long and Confidential Prayers the Religious Old Armenian of Fresno used to Make Every Wednesday Night at the First Presbyterian Church About Twenty Years Ago, and How Empty the World is Without Him’, and ‘The Problem of the Unhappy Little Boy Whose Father Regarded Him as a Child, Instead of a Personality, Little Suspecting that Anyone capable of Knowing Sorrow is Ageless and Will Therefore Refuse to Have a Wounded Heart Healed by a Kewpie Doll’; he writes “I do not believe any other language can be so pure and intimate and dignified as our language. Armenian is a language in which insincerity is impossible. It is a language, in fact, evolved solely to hold its people together as a family”; elsewhere he says “He began to be a poet. He began to be alive, and such a change is the greatest poetry, even if it is never written”; and, without dwelling on the past, he tells this little story: “One winter morning the door of our classroom opened and our principal, Mr. Dickey, brought into our midst a boy in strange clothes who was small and frightened, and I saw that this boy was an Armenian and there was something about his shy presence that made me ill with joy, for I knew that he had come from our country and that he had seen all that had happened there and that somehow, in spite of it all, he was still living, and through him everything was saved, our cities, our hills and plains, our streams and trees, our churches, our laughter and song, and that through him we were still a people and a nation, whole and imperishable, and I wanted to get up from my seat and speak to him in our tongue, and I wanted to protect him from the strangeness of our room, from the eyes that were staring at him, and I wanted him to lift his head and know that here in this new country he was not alone and that he had brothers here.

I went to this boy during recess when we were in the schoolyard, and we talked in our language and became brothers, and he told me of the things that had happened and he said that all of a sudden they were driving his father and mother and his brothers and sisters along a road at night, and their house was burning, and he could see men being struck by soldiers with whips and with blades and he could hear screaming and praying, and it was ghastly but he could not cry because it was not a small thing that a boy could cry about, and then they killed his father before his eyes, and his mother became insane with grief and could not keep on walking, and his brothers became separated from him, and he could not find his sisters, and he was cut off from everyone he knew and loved, and for a long time he walked with all the people who had been driven from their homes, and along the roads he saw the bodies of dead men and dead women and the bodies of many dead children, and all over the country it was the same and everywhere were the bodies of children who had died.”

But this frail traumatised little boy was not fated to live and grow up safely in America. “My mother called me to her and said, “Do you know that little boy, Goorken, who came from the old country? He is dead.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Julia Briggs wrote, ‘One result of these changes was a reversion to a type of horror story that runs a gamut of apparently supernatural terrors, ending up with a naturalistic

explanation, a late variation on the old Gothic device. This may be seen as the logical outcome of a greater emphasis on concrete detail, and may similarly reflect a conviction that the horrors of real life outdo those of the imagination, itself a hangover from the war. One of the earliest to adopt this style was the Armenian writer ‘Michael Arlen’ (Dikran Kouyoumdjian, 1895-1956). His cool, sophisticated, often deflating tones compass physical violence and a harsh comedy of the unbelievable, welding them into a kind of hysterical laughter. His use of elaborate structural devices, for example the kind of melodramatic insets used in Gothic novels and more recently in Machen’s *The Three Imposters*, gave his work an almost baroque inventiveness, though the stories themselves were often basically silly.’

I suppose the bare bones of most ghost stories *are* basically silly. But the best authors can persuade us to suspend our sense of logic and disbelief for a moment. But, of course, it isn’t for his ghost stories such as his collection, *Mayfair*, that we remember Arlen but for his novel *The Green Hat*—

Noël Coward tells the story of trying to put on a play and just as rehearsals were about to start the director said sadly he was out of money and could do nothing unless Coward could come up with £200. Coward hunts through his address book for the names of wealthy acquaintances but discards them on the grounds “that, being rich, they wouldn’t be good for more than a fiver, if that”. And then he comes across the name of Michael Arlen— “I had not seen him for a year or so, and during that time *The Green Hat* had been published and was a triumphant Best Seller. I remembered our casual meetings during the last few years. I remembered our occasional heart-to-heart talks sometimes in corners at parties, sometimes in his little flat in Shepherd Market. He knew all about being poor. He knew all the make-shifts of a struggling author. He also must have known, many times, the predicament I was in at the moment, that dismal resentment at being forced by circumstances into the position of being under obligation to people. He was the one to approach all right. Success was still new to him, and the odour of recent shabbiness must still be lingering in his nostrils.” They go out and “Half-way through dinner I blurted out my troubles, and without even questioning me about the play or making any cautious stipulations about repayment, he called for a cheque form and wrote out a cheque for two hundred pounds immediately.”

This doesn’t solve everything of course. There’s still cast illnesses, tantrums, resignations; the weather turns absolutely miserable, the “theatre cat made a mess in the middle of the stage”, but first night comes. The play goes on. “The first person to clutch my hand afterwards was Michael Arlen. His face was white with excitement and he said: ‘I’d be so proud, so *very* proud if I had written it.’

The play was *The Vortex*.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Ormerod Greenwood in *Quaker Encounters* wrote ‘In November, 1893, Richard Binns of Derby drew the attention of the Meeting for Sufferings to the persecution of Christians in Armenia.’ He saw the Turks as ‘determined to crush if not exterminate them’, but the British government saw no need to do anything; ‘in 1896 Turkish resentment exploded in massacres of Armenians throughout the Empire, including Constantinople itself.’ Sixty thousand Armenian women were said to be deprived of their menfolk and a Cambridge palaeographer J. Rendel Harris managed to get into Armenia, despite discouragement from the British and Turkish governments and ‘sent back harrowing reports’ while a ‘tidal wave of refugees’ reached Philippopolis ... yet these massacres were only a ‘pipe-opener’ for what would happen under cover of the First World War.

There is no absolute agreement on how many Armenians died when Turkey decided to kill or deport the entire population of (Turkish) Armenia while the world was otherwise engaged during World War One; Turkish bureaucracy was not German bureaucracy. On the other hand, the Turkish authorities do not seem to have done much, at the time, to try and

hide the massacres. That has come since. Suggestions for memorials, books, recognition of the attempted genocide, have been met with a variety of stonewalling tactics. And yet—it is hard to see why the Turks bother. It would take more than a memorial or two, a book or two, to fill up the black holes of our ignorance. There are shelves of Holocaust books—histories, trials, memoirs, books of photographs, documentaries, the experiences of ‘hidden’ children, studies of trauma, videos, novels ... but Armenia might not exist for all the space it takes up on our shelves.

(A friend, whose family made the long journey from Armenia over several generations through Iran to Calcutta—where there were 5 Armenian churches and a college, though the oldest Armenian church in India is in Madras—and finally to Tasmania, told me how upset she felt when a Turkish official publicly claimed there had never been an Armenian massacre. And it is not only the official Turkish position which is one of denial. The 1977 *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* describes the genocide “as a myth concocted by ‘Entente propaganda mills and Armenian nationalists’” and an article in *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 1988, speaks of the “so-called massacres of 1915”.)

Yet there *was* an awareness early this century: Novelist Jack London described the famous prize-fight between the Canadian Tommy Burns and the American Jack Johnson in Sydney in 1908 as ‘an Armenian massacre’ and the use of the word ‘genocide’ in Russia was taken to refer to Armenia. But the world forgot. If it had ever cared very much.

The crashing silence of the library shelves was broken by Yuri Rost’s *Armenian Tragedy* which deals, not with the genocide except for the brief note—“In April 1915 the Turkish Government embarked on a policy of liquidation of its subject Armenian population. 1.5 million were shot in 1915-16. A further 1 million escaped to Europe (including Russia), the Middle East and America.”,—but with the conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh and the earthquake which struck Armenia in 1988 and which took nearly 30,000 lives, 80,000 livestock, and left whole villages and towns homeless as winter came on and the temperature dropped to -10C.

In the immediate aftermath of the quake there was the fear that the nuclear reactor which had been foisted on Armenia and which was only about 30 kms from the epicentre might split open and the misery would be compounded by another Chernobyl.

The situation with neighbouring Azerbaijan, if anything deteriorated with some Azerbaijanis putting up posters and banners to say ‘Allah be praised. He has punished the infidel’, ‘Hurrah for the earthquake’, ‘God is just, He knows who to punish’—which led many Armenians to refuse to accept any help from Azerbaijan.

But he also tells stories of courage and kindness—“Sambal Garbyan, a man with an extraordinary memory, helped many lost persons. This twenty-six-year-old lawyer committed to memory thousands of names and addresses and could instantly tell them to relatives. This human computer reunited hundreds of families.”

The complexities of the situation in Nagorno Karabagh are thoughtfully unravelled by Levon Chorbajian, Patrick Donabedian and Claude Mutafian in *The Caucasian Knot: The History and Geo-Politics of Nagorno-Karabagh*. The mountainous area of Nagorno was once part of Armenia but the movement of Azerbaijanis into the lowlands gradually cut the enclave off from the motherland by a narrow strip only 15 kilometres wide. Armenia had just lost nearly half its territory to Turkey, it was in no position to object to the borders the Bolsheviks imposed on the country in 1920; as Edmund M. Herziz says “Armenia in 1920 was a devastated and desperate land”. And this is the fundamental problem: the inviolability of borders is in conflict with the right of a people to self-determination.

Andrei Sakharov said “For Azerbaijan the issue of Karabagh is a matter of ambition, for the Armenians of Karabagh it is a matter of life and death.” The solutions proposed, such as an exchange of land, further dispossesses Armenia—yet the war has impoverished Armenia while bringing no benefits to far-from-united Azerbaijan. I thought the international community might like to buy part of the narrow strip and simply rejoin

Nagorno to Armenia. But it is hard to see the international community doing that (and hard to see fervently jingoistic Azerbaijan accepting the sale of a few hundred hectares); the reason is simple: Azerbaijan has oil, Armenia does not.

Armenia is surrounded by predominantly Muslim nations, Azerbaijan, Kirghizia, Tadjikistan, Turkey and Iran. Down through the centuries it has constantly been invaded—Assyria, Babylon, the Medians, Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Mongols, the Seljuq Turks, the Egyptian Mamlüks, the Ottoman Turks, the Persians—yet, at first glance it is hard to see why. It is a small land-locked country, high, dry and cold, geologically unstable, relatively infertile, with few natural resources. Pablo Neruda, who called it a “noble, martyred nation” and said of the capital that it was “one of the most beautiful cities I have seen; built of volcanic tuff, it has the harmony of a pink rose”, wrote of his arrival “Far off, to the south, Mt. Ararat’s snowy peak towers over Armenia’s history. This, according to the Bible, is where Noah’s ark came aground to repopulate the earth. A hard undertaking, because Armenia is rocky and volcanic. The Armenians farmed this land with untold sacrifice and raised their national culture to the highest place in the ancient world.”

But Armenia was on the trade routes of the ancient world.

Perhaps too its nature and history as the world’s first Christian nation and the way in which Christianity became so entwined with its culture, language, literature, music and daily life, encouraged both envy and anger that it had something unique? Perhaps it was anger that Islam fell on stony ground in Armenia which encouraged the pogroms to be seen as ‘jihads’? Or perhaps it was the same sort of confused envy and spite which caused the conquistadors to destroy the wonders of Indian America or the Danes to burn the beautiful manuscripts in Irish monasteries ...

An Armenian woman living in Western Australia told me the harrowing story of her father who, as a nine-year-old boy, was smuggled out of Armenia in a caravan, travelling in a basket on a donkey, through the mountains of Iran where the convoy was attacked by brigands—but finally reaching safety in India; her mother-in-law, as a little girl, was one of a group of people being herded into a church (burning down churches with their congregations inside was a common Turkish tactic)—but a group of Cossack horsemen appeared on the horizon, causing the Turks to flee, an exciting reprieve she never forgot; another little girl, the sole survivor of her family, was hidden in a fireplace by a kind Turkish woman who brought her out only when her husband and sons were absent from the house—but this was a situation too precarious to last and the Turkish woman managed to get her on to a Greek freighter, believing that no matter where the ship was going it had to be safer. The little girl ended up in Beirut; safe, but safety could not remove her deep-seated trauma ...

And for those who managed to escape the Turkish slaughter, reaching Russia, Greece, India and even further afield including the United States, their problems were far from over. In 1925 Greece deported 50,000 Armenian refugees; in other places they faced poverty and discrimination.

When the Armenian Patriarch, Vazgen I, spoke at Echmiadzin in the aftermath of the earthquake, “Even the survival itself of the Armenian people seems like a miracle to modern historians” he was speaking the truth; and when he went on, “The soul represents the unity of all man’s creative powers, the synthesis whose secret our people possess and have proved it through the long centuries. Today also we are that same people who stand now unflinching before our fate, obeying Thy command—to live, to be and surmount all our difficulties” I hope it was prophetic—and that the future will be a happier, safer, more peaceful future.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘I went by train to Erivan, the Armenian capital, where Alfred Backhouse met me. He was the leader of the Lord Mayor’s Relief Committee I was to work with, a Quaker like

myself, and we quickly became firm friends. I stayed for a few days at the premises of the American Committee for Relief of the Near East, and set about learning Armenian, a difficult and very ancient language. Then Alfred and I travelled by carriage through the Araxes Valley, traditional site of the Garden of Eden, dominated by Mount Ararat with its twin snow-capped peaks. We passed Etchmiadzin, a third-century monastery with a fine library containing very ancient papyruses—probably the oldest surviving Christian monastery in the world; and eventually reached Igidir, a village crowded with Armenian refugees, including many unclaimed orphans. This was to be our base.

... I was very anxious about the monastery at Etchmiadzin, which was right in the line of the Turkish advance. I rode there to see the Librarian, who loaded me with several of the second- and third-century papyrus manuscripts. He begged me to get them away to safety, and if possible to see they were handed over to the Archimandrite at Jerusalem.”

So wrote St John Catchpool in his memoirs *Candles in the Darkness*. But, unable to travel south to Jerusalem, he decided to go by way of Russia, still in the throes of Revolution. There he was accused of spying and put willy-nilly on a train to Siberia. From there he managed to get to Japan, then down through China, also in turmoil, to Hong Kong and from there on a boat to Egypt. There he took a train to Jerusalem; his precious manuscripts, “among the most ancient Christian records still extant” were still safe and he “liked to try and make out a little of the later books written in Armenian, but those in Aramaic, the most valuable ones, were only for scholars.” In Jerusalem, he “set out for the house of the Archimandrite, the High Priest of the Armenian Church in Jerusalem, a little south of King David’s tower. His secretary eyed me doubtfully, till I began explaining my visit in Armenian. At the words ‘ancient books from Etchmiadzin’ his face lit up, and he quickly showed me into the Archimandrite’s study.

I was somewhat awe-struck by the imposing figure who came to meet me, dressed in long dark silk robes, a high black bishop’s mitre on his head, a chain of gold with a cross round his neck—dangling on his chest beneath his long grey beard—and a cord of gold thread round his waist. He welcomed me with a broad, benevolent smile, which broadened into a beam of delight when I repeated the words I had used with the secretary and started to unwrap my treasures. He cleared his papers off the table, and his alert eyes followed every movement as I put the books down before him. When they were all spread out across the table in rows, he impulsively came forward, threw his arms round me, and kissed me on both cheeks.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Keith Bosley in *The Elek Book of Oriental Verse* devotes a couple of pages to Armenian poetry, which he introduces with, “A Renaissance in 19th-century Venice, Istanbul and Tbilisi, the Georgian capital, led eventually to the development of the two literary dialects of today—the Western, used by diaspora writers and open to French influence, and the more conservative Eastern (now Soviet). Vahan Tekeyan, Siamanto and Daniel Varouzhan are Western poets; the latter two were among the two million Armenians murdered by the Turks in 1915. Of Eastern poets, the best known is Yeghishe Charents, with his blend of patriotic and revolutionary elements as in the famous ‘radio’ poem given here, with its image of the poet as a broadcasting station.

Few nations of comparable size—there have never been more than four million Armenians—have a culture of such liveliness and sophistication.”

In the brief moment when both Turkey and Russia were exhausted after the First World War it looked possible that Armenia might achieve its independence—and this is why Yeghishe Charents’ ‘radio’ poem ‘Into the Future’ is a very positive poem—

In these glowing, windswept, babbling times  
it falls to me to sing the song  
of a million hearts both far and near today,  
to fling the present joy, the great upswing

of my comrades in their countless millions  
toward the times to come  
it falls to me today— but it was not to be. What Turkey had left of  
Armenia was subsumed into the USSR and suffered the rigours of the Soviet system for the  
next 70 years. Charents was executed in 1938 in the Stalinist purges. Yahan Totovents  
(1889-1937), also killed in the purges, was Armenia's best-known novelist in the early  
years of being a Soviet republic. His book *Scenes from an Armenian Childhood*, about life  
before the Turkish massacres, came out in 1930. Yet even those rigours cannot compare  
with the horrors which preceded them. Siamanto (1878 - 1915) wrote his poem 'The  
Dance' just before he died.

*And choking back the tears in her blue eyes,  
In a field of ashes where Armenian life was dying still,  
The German witness spoke of our horror.*

Unspeakable the tale I tell—  
What I with humanly relentless eyes  
From my safe window overlooking hell,  
Gnashing my teeth and terrible with rage,  
Saw with these eyes, relentlessly human.  
In the ash-heap that was the Garden City  
The bodies were piled up to the treetops  
And from the waters, the springs, the streams, the road  
The angry babble of your blood  
Still speaks into my ear of its revenge.

Do not be shocked by the unspeakable,  
But let man know man's crime against mankind,  
Two days under the sun, going to the grave,  
Man's evil to mankind  
Let all the world's hearts know.  
That morning dark with death was a Sunday,  
The first to break in vain on broken bodies,  
When in my room from evening to daybreak,  
Bent over a stabbed girl's agony  
With my tears I was watering her death.  
Suddenly, clad in black, a bestial mob,  
Brought twenty young wives, fiercely whipping them,  
And lewdly singing in the vineyard stood.

Leaving my half-dead patient on her pallet  
I went out on my hellish balcony:  
The black mob filled the vineyard, thick as trees.  
One brute roared at the young wives: 'You will dance,  
Dance when we beat the drum!'  
And the Armenian women longed for death  
As on their flesh the whips came cracking down.  
And twenty, hand in hand, began to dance ...  
The tears flowed from their eyes like wounds:  
O how I envied her who lay behind me  
Hearing her curse creation with a quiet  
Gargle as the poor sweet Armenian girl  
Released her dove, her lily to the stars ...

I shook my fists uselessly at the crowd.  
'You will dance!' howled the savage mob;  
'Dance till you die, beautiful infidels,  
Dance with bare breasts, and smile at us, and no complaints!  
For you no weariness, for you no shame:  
You are slaves—dance with limbs, with heads uncovered,  
Dance till you die, and give us all a thrill!  
Our eyes are thirsty for your curves, your deaths.'

The twenty sank exhausted to the ground.  
'Get up!' The naked swords flickered like snakes.  
Then someone fetched a pitcher of kerosene.  
Human justice, I spit in your face.  
Without delay the twenty were anointed.

'Dance!' roared the mob; 'this is sweeter than all the perfumes of Arabia!'

They touched the naked women with a torch.  
And there was dancing. The charred bodies rolled.

In shock I slammed my shutters like a storm,  
Turned to the one gone, asked: 'These eyes of mine—  
How shall I dig them out, how shall I, how?'

*(translated by Garbis Yessayan & Keith Bosley)*

\* \* \* \* \*

November 17th: Auberon Waugh  
November 18th: Gwen Meredith  
                  C. E. W. Bean  
November 19th: William Yang  
November 20th: Nadine Gordimer  
November 21st: Voltaire  
November 22nd: Jon Cleary  
                  George Eliot  
November 23rd: Robert Barnard  
November 24th: Laurence Sterne  
November 25th: Brenda Niall  
November 26th: Charles Schulz  
November 27th: Charles Austin Beard  
November 28th: Randolph Stow  
November 29th: C. S. Lewis  
November 30th: Jonathon Swift

\* \* \* \* \*

Ernest Benn, publisher, and I suspect grumpy old man mainly interested in the promotion of Empire and Free Trade, wrote a number of books with scintillating titles such as *The Confessions of a Capitalist* and *The Murmurings of an Individualist*. He was also a reminder that it is not only the nastier type of dictator who does not like other nations looking too closely at what is going on; he did not want the League to look too closely at what Britain was up to in Ireland, India or Palestine, saying, "I repeat, Peace is not a paper plan, it is a State of Mind and is incompatible with an arrangement which encourages all to busy themselves about the wrongs—real or supposed—or the doings—actual or imaginary—of others" and "To put a new label on an addled idea does not alter it, and we

must guard against the subtle inference that a League called a Federation will escape the fate of any scheme based upon the assumption that anybody's business is everybody's business. Two thousand years ago, Aesop told the whole story of the League of Nations, but he called it the Fable of the Miller, His Son and Their Ass."

We know that the League with all its flaws and hopes existed. But did Aesop?

Sir Roger L'Estrange brought his tales to English readers and accepts him as an historical figure, saying, "Aesop (according to *Planudes*, *Camerarius* and Others) was by birth of *Ammorius*, a Town in the *Greater Phrygia*; (though some will have him to be a *Thracian*, others a *Samian*); of a mean Condition, and his person deformed to the highest degree: Flat-Nos'd, Hunch-Back'd, Blobber-Lipp'd; a Long Mishapen Head; His body Crooked all over, Big-Belly'd, Baker-Legg'd, and his complexion so swarthy that he took his very Name from't; for *Aesop* is the same with *Aethiop*." And as if this wasn't enough for the poor man to bear he also gives him a speech impediment. L'Estrange accepts that Aesop was a slave and this seems very possible, given that heart-rending statement in one of his 'morals' that "The same applies to men who are slaves: the most miserable of all are those who beget children in servitude". L'Estrange has him dying by being pushed off a cliff at Delphos after being imprisoned for 'sacrilege'.

L'Estrange might also qualify as a grumpy old man as he managed to upset almost everybody. Born in 1616 he was imprisoned once under Cromwell and twice under Charles II. His paper *The Observer* made Whigs and Dissenters its main targets but was suppressed when it opposed the Act of Indulgences. He also wrote *The Works of Flavius Josephus compared with the Original Greek* and translated works from French and Spanish including *The Decameron* and "some of rather dubious nature" and critics also found fault with his "simplified spelling". Despite upsetting a great many people he managed to live to 84 and die in peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

Spelling was also a subject dear to the heart of Jonathon Swift. Pat Rogers writes: 'the language was, as always, undergoing change. It is notorious that a peaceful and broadly conservative society will attach great importance to purity of *speech*, as though this guaranteed a good state of national health. In the eighteenth century writers felt genuine anxiety that the language might fall into decay; the result would be that their works would prove perishable because their meaning was lost. This was not altogether an unrealistic fear, inasmuch as the bulk of medieval authors became impenetrable to the ordinary reader. Chaucer was still intelligible but scholarship had not yet discerned a method in his irritating metrical madness. The need to create a bulwark against change, then, arose principally from literary considerations, though it was buttressed by insularity—the flow of French words into English went on throughout the period, especially during the time of war, and many disliked cultural infiltration. Hence a number of projects to create an official institution along the lines of the Italian and French academies, which should act as a court of linguistic appeal. The most famous proposal was that of Swift in 1712, embodying a desire to hold grammar and vocabulary in permanent stasis. Swift's ideas did not get a very fair hearing, because they emerged in a sharply political context, but they could never have formed the basis of a realistic programme.'

Some Quakers suggested that as they advocated 'plain talk' perhaps they should also advocate 'plain spelling', one Friend pointing out that 'righteousness' had a number of superfluous letters, but the idea never caught on.

But Peter Ustinov writes, 'The insistence on accurate spelling at modern schools is an effort to invest a living language with rigor mortis, and to prepare a rhapsodic means of self-expression for the glacial corridors of computerdom.'

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in his 1913 book *On the Art of Writing* says 'Does it or does it not strike you as queer that the people who set you 'courses of study' in English Literature never include the Authorised Version, which not only intrinsically but

historically is out and away the greatest book of English Prose? Perhaps they pay you the silent compliment of supposing that you are perfectly acquainted with it? ... I wonder.'

A. D. Hope in Candida Baker's *Yacker* series tells of students complaining of the obscurity of his poems. But in discussion it came out that the students simply were not familiar with either Greek and Roman myths or the *Bible*. 'I gave them the example that my first year class were doing, Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, and we came to the part where he says, 'Through the sad heart of Ruth ...' Anyway, I picked on a fairly bright girl and I said, 'Who was Ruth?', and she said, 'I always thought it was Keats's girlfriend.'

No doubt church people feel we should read the *Bible* principally for its content rather than its language and style. But there seems to be another good reason for studying *Bibles* plural—they tell us some useful things about the development of language. Quiller-Couch provides three successive versions—

*Wyclif* - Lo, I seie to you pryvyte of holi thingid / and alle we schulen rise agen / but not alle we shuln be chaungid / in a moment in the twynkelynge of an ye, in the last trumpe / for te trumpe schal sowne : and deed men schulen rise agen with out corrupcion, and we schuln be changid / for it bihoveth this corruptible thing to clothe uncorrupcion and this deedly thing to putte aweye undeedlynesse But whanne this deedli thing schal clothe undeedlynesse / thanne schal the word be don that is written / deeth is sopun up in victorie / deeth, where is thi victorie ? deeth, where is thi pricke ?

*Tyndale* - Beholde I shewe you a mystery. We shall not all slepe : but we shall all be changed / and that in a moment / and in the twinclinge of an eye / at the sounde of the last trompe. For the trompe shall blowe, and the deed shall ryse incorruptible and we shalbe changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruptibilite : and this mortall must put on immortalite. When this corruptible hath put on incorruptibilite / and this mortall hat put on immortalite : then shalbe brought to pass the saying that is written, 'Deeth is consumed in to victory.' Deeth, where is the styng ? Hell, where is thy victory?

*Authorised Version* - Behold, I shew you a mystery ; we shall not all sleepe, but wee shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinckling of an eye, at the last trumpe, (for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed). For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortall must put on immortalitie. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortall shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to passe the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' O Death, where is thy sting ? O grave, where is the victory ?

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm not sure that Jonathon Swift intended readers to pin-point the places visited in *Gulliver's Travels*—but people continue to try to do so. He places Lilliput and Blefuscu to the south-west of Sumatra and north-west of Van Diemen's Land but as he provides no scale we can only conjecture. It has been said he was influenced by the explorations and maps of the Dutch explorers touching Australia as well as by Bishop Joseph Hall's account of an imaginary voyage to Australia, which came out in 1605. He has Gulliver say "Let it suffice to inform him, that in our Passage from thence to the *East-Indies*, we were driven by a violent Storm to the north-west of *Van Diemen's Land*. By an Observation, we found ourselves in the Latitude of 30 Degrees 2 Minutes South." Later he says "My Intention was to reach, if possible, one of those Islands, which I had reason to believe lay to the North-East of Van Diemen's Land."

My brother was over drilling for water on Christmas Island recently and brought me back a book called *Christmas Island: The Early Years* by Jan Adams and Marg Neale. They say "There is some evidence that Jonathon Swift may have used the newly discovered Christmas Island as the setting for Lilliput in *Gulliver's Travels*."

"Christmas Island was named by a British East Indies Company Captain, William Mynors, on Christmas day 1643 when, with many sick crew members, his ship stood off the Island unable to find safe anchorage" ... the Dutch apparently sighted it soon after as it

turns up as ‘Moni’ on a Dutch map by Pieter Goos in 1666 and the first recorded landing was by William Dampier in 1688 ... But 30’2” South would have run Gulliver into the Western Australian coast long before he got anywhere near his destination. By choosing not to suggest a longitude I suspect he wanted to leave his little world shrouded in continuing mystery.

But it *is* interesting that if you were to cut Christmas Island in half you would have two islands roughly corresponding in shape to Lilliput and Blefuscu.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am convinced that it is only necessary to add ‘Lost’, ‘Hidden’, or ‘Secret’ to a title and sales will go up. I acknowledge their power.

Hamish MacInnes called the book about his expedition to Mount Roraima on the border between Guyana, Brazil and Venezuela, *Climb to the Lost World*—

My great-great-great grandfather had a business first in St Eustatius then in Guyana (or British Guiana as it then was) but shop-keeping didn’t excite him and he is thought to have met with or heard von Humboldt which fired his imagination and he eventually put together a small expedition of his own into the mysterious interior of Guyana. He disappeared and his fate remains unknown. His daughter, my great-great-grandmother, perhaps understandably, did not want to stay in the country which had swallowed up her father, her father’s money, and her mother’s dowry. She’d been sent to Scotland for her initial schooling and a relative, a Mrs McInroy, kindly took her to stay at Barcaldine Castle. Many years later, when she’d married a Scotsman kind enough to remove her forever from Guyana, she came to western Queensland—and not surprisingly dropped the name Barcaldine on the land they acquired, after many vicissitudes, through Thomas Mort.

Hamish MacInnes writes “Of course Conan Doyle wasn’t the first Englishman to be inspired by the Roraima legends. Nor was he the first to moot the lost world theory. In 1884 Sir Joseph Hooker suggested that the flora of the Roraima plateau would differ considerably from that of the plain and newspaper correspondents took this a stage further, hinting that prehistoric monsters might even make their home on Roraima’s summit, having been suspended in their evolutionary development.”

MacInnes reaches the summit—“We dumped our gear and started to walk across the level plateau. It was a dark, bare table top, variegated by tiny shallow pools and sunken gardens. I felt as if I had awakened from a nightmare: arriving in heaven, after that climb from hell. When Joe came out of the hole, in my mind I saw him emerging from Hades; this fancy was tinged by reality as the sun made our clothes steam, as if we were smouldering ... We walked about feeling strangely unrestricted: there were no roots, no jungle, no vertical drops ... just flat rocks. We saw a magnificent panorama of mesas: a weird contorted skyline of grotesque sandstone figures towards the Venezuelan part of the summit. We looked along the edge of those fantastic cliffs and saw the waterfalls tumbling down into the Paikwa watershed. About a mile distant was the Diamond Waterfall. There were hidden gardens containing naturally executed statues, fashioned by the omnipotent forces of wind, water and time. There were rocks which resembled igloos. The conglomerate capping the summit was striking: white pebbles stood out in the wasted and windblown sandstone ... In successive ages of erosion the water has cut fantastic channels within channels in the depths of these chasms. There were various levels of chambers; it was like staring down into opera boxes, all delicately carved in arches and scrolls.” But no monsters, nothing bigger than “small black frogs”.

It was only when I finally went and read Conan Doyle’s *Lost World* that I realised why the plateau MacInnes and his companions reached after so much drama and hardship was so *empty*. Conan Doyle’s expeditioners had shot all the prehistoric life forms they found there!

\* \* \* \* \*

Alberto Manguel in his fascinating—and very readable!—book, *A History of*

*Reading*, writes “Filed under Fiction, Jonathon’s Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* is a humorous novel of adventure; under Sociology, a satirical study of England in the eighteenth century; under Children’s Literature, an entertaining fable about dwarfs and giants and talking horses; under Fantasy, a precursor of science fiction; under Travel, an imaginary voyage; under Classics, a part of the Western literary canon. Categories are exclusive; reading is not—or should not be.”

Swift is equally complex and hard to classify when it comes to his views on Ireland.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, in his farewell speech to Parliament, could say: “My objection to the present ministry is that they are avowedly arrayed and embodied against a principle—that of concession to the Catholics of Ireland—which I think, and must always think, essential to the safety of the empire ... In fine, I think the situation of Ireland a paramount consideration. If they were to be the last words I should ever utter in this House, I should say, ‘Be just to Ireland, as you value your honour. Be just to Ireland, as you value your own peace’.”

But Swift’s famous piece *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland, from being a Burden to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Publick* has been used to prop up opposing views for Swift’s feelings about his adopted country.

‘I HAVE been assured by a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance.in *London*; that a young healthy Child, well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked, or Boiled*; and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricasie, or Ragoust*. ... I GRANT this Food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very *proper for Landlords*; who, as they have already devoured most of the Parents, seem to have the best Title to the Children ... THOSE who are more thrifty (*as I must confess the Times require*) may flay the carcase; the Skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable *Gloves for Ladies, and Summer Boots for fine Gentlemen*. ... I fortunately fell upon this Proposal; which, as it is wholly new, so it hath something *solid and real*, of no Expence, and little Trouble, full in our own Power; and whereby we can incur no danger in *disobliging ENGLAND*: For, this Kind of Commodity will not bear Exportation; the Flesh being of too tender a Consistence, to admit a long Continuance in salt; *although, perhaps, I could name a Country, which would be glad to eat up our whole Nation without it.*’

\* \* \* \* \*

December 1st: Max Stout  
December 2nd: Mary Elwyn Patchett  
December 3rd: Joseph Conrad  
December 4th: Rainer Maria Rilke  
Thomas Carlyle  
Katharine Susannah Prichard  
Francisco Franco

\* \* \* \* \*

I do apologise for inflicting General Franco on you but I couldn’t help but find the following story, in Paul Preston’s monumental biography of the Spanish leader rather interesting: ‘That Franco’s account of Spain’s situation reflected genuine, albeit misplaced confidence, may be deduced from the astonishing fact that while Europe was being destroyed by war and Spain by starvation, the Generalísimo was writing a work of fiction. Entitled *Raza* (Race), a romanticized account of a Spanish family nearly identical to Franco’s own, it was written in the form of a film-script although published as a novel. The plot relates the experiences of a Galician family, totally identifiable with Franco’s own, from Spain’s imperial collapse in 1898 to the Civil War. The pivotal character in the book is the mother figure Doña Isabel de Andrade. Alone, with three sons and a daughter to bring up, like Franco’s mother Pilar Bahamonde, the pious Doña Isabel is a gentle yet

strong figure. Pilar was abandoned by Francisco's dissolute, gambling, philandering father. In contrast, in the novel, the hero's father is a naval hero and Doña Isabel is widowed when he is killed in the Cuban war.

*Raza* was produced some time in the last months of 1940 and the first months of 1941. Franco dictated it, pacing up and down in his office. The text was then passed to the journalists Manuel Aznar and Manuel Halcón for the style to be corrected. Asked how he could spare the time in such tense moments to write fiction, Franco replied that it was merely a question of time-management and that working to a timetable made everything possible. The fact of being able to write at all, almost as much as the intensely romantic style of the book, indicates the extent to which Franco was isolated from the real conditions of Spain at this time.

In the plenitude of his political power, Franco wrote a book in which he created a past worthy of the providential Caudillo. It was as if the fulfilment of many of his ambitions had made his past the more unacceptable. The novel exchanges the modest reality of Franco's family for the status of minor aristocracy, *hidalgos* (which translates as 'son of a somebody'). Similarly, the choice of pseudonym under which it was published, Jaime de Andrade, an ancient and noble family to which he was distantly connected through both his parents, leaves little doubt about his social aspirations. *Raza* constitutes a revealing insight into Franco's egotistical drive to greatness. Not only does he romanticize his own parentage, childhood and social origins through the hero, José Churruca, but also manages to work in a reference to himself in all his own real glory as the all-seeing Caudillo.

The choice of title reflected Franco's current infatuation with Nazism. The internal logic of the title was that the hero and his family are considered to carry the essence of all that is valuable in the Spanish 'race' and so are able to save Spain from the foreign poisons of liberalism, freemasonry, socialism and communism. This is what Franco considered himself to have done through the Civil War and through the subsequent relentless eradication of leftists. It is not difficult to see a link between Franco's fabrication of his own life and his dictatorial remodelling of the life of Spain between 1936 and 1975.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Running alongside theories of race and destiny in Franco's Spain was a powerful stream of anti-intellectualism embodied in the famous 'debate' held at the University of Salamanca between General Millan Astray of the Spanish Foreign Legion, and the Rector of the University and renowned philosopher Miguel de Unamuno in 1936.

"Down with Intelligence! Long live Death!" cried the General.

But Unamuno summed up sadly "You may win but you will not convince. You will win because you possess more than enough brute force, but you will not convince because to convince means to persuade. And in order to persuade you would need what you lack—reason and right in the struggle. I consider it futile to exhort you to think of Spain. I have finished."

Astray wanted Unamuno executed but Franco commuted it to perpetual house arrest. Unamuno died in December 1936.

\* \* \* \* \*

I hesitate to mention it but I had never heard of Nicolás Guillén until I came across mention of him in Wilfrid Burchett's book *Southern Africa Stands Up*. And then, suddenly, I seemed to be coming across Guillén wherever I turned—

In Viriato da Cruz's poem—  
Voices from Brazilian sugar plants,  
from the tonga drums, from the  
pampas, from factories,  
Voices from Harlem District South,  
voices from slum locations,

Voices wailing blues going up the  
Mississippi, echoing from rail road wagons.  
Voices weeping with Carrother's voice  
"Lord God what will have we done"  
Voice of all voices in the proud voice  
of Langston  
in the beautiful voice of Guillen ...

and in Edouard Maunick:  
recognizing all the roots  
tongue-ties me with bereavement  
on the shores of denial  
I will choose to be Negro  
I've read Senghor and Césaire  
and Guillen and Richard Wright  
but Lorea and St John Perse  
Dylan Thomas and Cadou  
Paul Eluard, vertical  
all reinvent memory  
you step out of the mirror  
to marry morning with night ...

Reinaldo Arenas, who lives in New York, wrote in *Granta*, "Some—like Nicolás Guillén, Roberto Fernandez Retamar, Lisandro Otero and many others—betrayed themselves and became high-ranking servants of the State and thus of its system of repression."

And Jean Franco says "In Cuba, the *Revista Avance* also promised literary revolution, but here avant-garde theories happened to coincide with social preoccupations. The Paris fashion for Negro art was taken up by white Cuban intellectuals and there was born the Afro-Cuban poetry movement. The Afro-Cuban style was also taken up by Luis Pales Matos (1898-1959) of Puerto Rico and also had influences as far as Ecuador. In Cuba itself, after the initial experiments with poems that imitated rumba rhythms, the movement gained depth and seriousness in the poetry of the mulatto poet, Nicolás Guillén (1902-) whose early compositions were influenced by the Spanish poet Garcia Lorca. Guillén drew on African lore, on Cuban folk-poetry and on the speech rhythms of ordinary people. Thus his 'Sensamaya' was based on a Yoruba rite which had become part of Cuban Negro folklore, a rite in which a procession dances around the effigy of a boa" but "He was later to move away from this humorous light verse to poems in which he identified himself with the poor of Cuba and expressed his feelings about his mixed race. But indirectly he reflected the re-evaluation of the Negro culture which had initially come from Europe".

Guillén went to Spain in 1937, with the aim of supporting the Republicans in the Civil War, and out of this came his collection of poems *España*. He was exiled by the Batista regime in the 1950s. Not surprisingly, he became a firm supporter of Castro, joining the Cuban Communist Party. But it was his role in the Union of Writers and Artists which brought criticism of him from other writers; not least because the excitement of writing poems of protest, revolution, and social change can pall. Guillén died in 1989.

\* \* \* \* \*

Josef Goebbels also had aspirations as a writer. As a boy he was writing:  
I stand beside the bier of death  
Stare at your limbs so stiff and cold  
You were my friend with every breath  
The only one my life may hold

By the time he was twenty, he'd written a couple of novellas and was working on a drama 'Judas Iscariot'—which a Catholic priest told him he must destroy. (Later he dwelt upon the rejection of one of his manuscripts by a Jewish publishing firm; forgetting or ignoring the problems he'd had with the Catholic church.) Goebbels agreed but had already given his copy to his girlfriend. He began another play 'Heinrich Kämpfert' and an autobiographical novel in which he styled himself Michael Voorman, and called it 'The Battle of the Working Class'. (Later he recast this as 'A German Life in Leaves from a Diary' and had it published through the Nazi publishing house.)

The influences on the young man were the expected ones—Nietzsche, Dostoyevski, Ibsen, but also Marx and Engels, though he had done his university dissertation on a minor Romantic dramatist of the early 19th century, Wilhelm Schütz; but also influencing him were two Jewish professors he admired, Friedrich Gundolf (a biographer of Goethe) and Max von Waldberg. At that time he could write, probably expressing a widely held belief, "You know I don't particularly like this extreme anti-Semitism. I wouldn't say the Jews are my best friends, but I think we won't get rid of them with insults or polemical attacks or even pogroms, and if we could, it would be ignoble and unworthy of decent human beings."

This was the young man, shy, suffering from an inferiority complex because of his small stature and club foot, and coming from a poor Catholic background, who might have become a minor civil servant, the manager of a provincial bank, a writer of some ability though not of the first rank ... instead, he met Hitler.

It was the beginning of a love affair which lasted until his death. Other top Nazis were quick to desert the sinking ship but Goebbels stayed to go down with Hitler. Yet, in the beginning, he had great difficulty because he genuinely believed in socialism (and soon realised Hitler used the word and the idea as it suited him, not because of any deeply held conviction) and his training as a scholar balked at Hitler's discrepancies, contradictions, illogicalities and confused thinking. Instead of questioning his admiration for the man, he bludgeoned his own ideas into conformity with Hitler's. Goebbels could have managed without Hitler—his own and his family's aspirations were modest—but could Hitler have 'succeeded' without his Propaganda Minister?

Mark Twain first took the card-playing expression, a 'new deal', in 1872 and gave it a wider political and economic context; paving the way for Franklin D. Roosevelt to create his 'New Deal' in the 1930s; Roosevelt is credited with the term 'United Nations' in the 1940s. Goebbels is credited with coining the term 'Iron Curtain' in 1944; George Orwell thought up 'Cold War' in the same year. And 'Fifth Column'? Gareth Thomas says "The phrase is traditionally ascribed to (General) Mola, who led one of the four columns converging on Madrid, confident that the fifth would contribute from within to the downfall of the city."

\* \* \* \* \*

A book I have always liked is Alistair Mair's *The Douglas Affair* which came out in 1966. The main theme is the quest for independence for Scotland but two other threads run through the story. One is the situation in Spain and the way the dead hand of the past makes change so difficult (even though the dead hand of Scotland's past has been translated into a damaging sentimentality instead of Spain's totalitarianism); the other is the underlying question 'will a democracy kill, and how will it kill, if the status quo is threatened'.

James Douglas and his wife have been holidaying in Spain and as they are preparing to leave the country they see a man shot by the Civil Guard. The police dismiss the death. The man has been wanted for a long time, a Communist, a Basque, a political agitator, their captain explains.

Douglas responds, "Do you believe in anything enough to fight for it for thirty years? Would you do it for God? Or freedom? Or justice? Would you do it for your police state, Mondeño?"

It is still a curious question. The Spanish Civil War aroused such passion yet was a

war won essentially by exhaustion; and in the end the passions don't matter. The old, the Spain of autocratic past, austere, proud, a Spain of an immense gap between rich and poor with little in between but the dreams and myths fed to the poor, was never going to give way to the new, the world of a liberal bourgeois democracy, with its mild permissiveness and timid industrialization and modest middle-class growth and aspirations, without a bitter and prolonged rearguard action. Perhaps it was inevitable that Franco's Nationalists won the battle—a past as fierce and dramatic as Spain's was never going to give in easily; it had demonstrated that, chaotically, throughout the nineteenth century—but it was also inevitable that they would lose the war. The past can be mimicked, it can never be recaptured.

Gareth Thomas wrote a thought-provoking book *The Novel of the Spanish Civil War* in which he studied books *about* the war, rather than writers who had lived or died (such as Federico García Lorca or Miguel Hernández) or written during the war. Thomas says “An examination of the novels of the Spanish Civil War can teach us much about the relationship between art and literature. In particular they demonstrate the need for the artist to retain not only personal integrity but also respect for a diversity of values other than his own; today's orthodoxy may appear indefensible to future generations. Many of these works had a utilitarian purpose: once that purpose was served, they became expendable. They are interesting today, not as artistic creations, but for what they tell us of the emotional and intellectual climate in which they were written.”

He studies both Republican and Nationalist novels (though Republican novels could not be published inside Spain until 1967), as well as novels by writers such as José María Gironella who attempted to do an “impartial” trilogy (Arthur Koestler wrote “Anyone who has lived through the hell of Madrid with his eyes, his nerves, his heart, his stomach, and then pretends to be objective, is a liar”) but Gironella was writing with the care and calm of hindsight; even so he managed to displease everyone with his trilogy—*The Cypresses Believe in God*, *A Million Dead*, and *Peace Has Broken Out*—which was a reminder that the gaps between people, ideas, values, visions, during the war, were not gaps to be closed by impartiality.

There were many things I had never before taken into consideration. I had never realised that ordinary Spaniards were far more terrified of the thousands of Moroccan mercenaries fighting with Franco's forces than they were of the Italian and German airmen. (Paul Preston in his biography, *Franco*, says that both the Italian and the Luftwaffe pilots were shocked by Franco's viciousness. We remember Guernica for the suddenness of its horror—but for men and women living daily with the fear of rape and torture and hunger, planes in the sky were not their foremost fear.) Thomas says “The atrocity ... occupies a key place in the narrative fiction of the Spanish Civil War ... the fear of the *timbrazo* is an almost universal preoccupation in the Civil War novel.” And it might be argued that it was the kind of *enjoyment* the Moroccans brought to their killing that was so terrifying for ordinary people out in the countryside. Yet the Moroccans have walked away from history almost as though they weren't there.

The other issue is the role of the Catholic Church. The Nationalists promoted a rigid prudish male-dominated Catholicism which suited the temper of the Church at the time (though they weren't alone in their almost puritanical ideas; the Anarcho-Syndicalists rivalled their prudishness) and the Church, tragically, chose not to be a force for peace, unity and compassion in Spanish society at the time that society most needed such a force. Thomas says, “Catholic mythology, in particular, was to prove a fundamental component of the Nationalist novel. The idea of the War as a Crusade is commonplace in the early novels: embarrassments such as the fact that some of the most devout Catholics in Spain, the Basques, were fighting on the Republican side, were not allowed to get in the way of this central myth.”

Franco did very nicely for himself, his family, and his cronies, putting away millions,

living in luxury—but the improvements which came slowly to Spain came in spite of Franco. He could not keep the world out of Spain. He could not hold back the future. The myths, in the end, had nothing to offer.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just been reading Finley's *The Use and Abuse of History* in which he says, 'In an essay entitled 'The search for a Usable Past', Henry Steele Commager pointed to the two key elements. The United States became a state before it was a nation, unequipped with 'history, tradition and memory'. The lack was quickly dealt with in the first half of the nineteenth century, chiefly by New England literati. Then came the repeated waves of immigrants, who had to be incorporated psychologically and that was achieved by constant repetition of 'easily grasped common denominators' selected from the now well-established 'usable past'.

It struck a chord. Do we as Australians seek to present history or 'usable' history? History is full of sorrow, embarrassment, guilt, humiliation, horror, regret ... but 'usable' history is a much more amenable creature ... but if we focus on 'usable' history what lessons are we drawing for our use and, possibly, abuse ...

The other day I was sorting through some grotty old manuscripts, wondering whether to chuck them out, when I came across one written for an essay competition in 1986, the set subject being 'Is History Repeating Itself' ...

'Fifteen years ago, I remember being harangued by a man convinced that Portugal's colonies were the 'last bastion against communism in Africa'. It sounds familiar doesn't it? The United States maintains that Indonesia is the 'last bastion against communism in South-East Asia'. The trouble with bastions—first or last—is that they tend to become total liabilities. From the armour of the dinosaurs to medieval walls to the Maginot Line, history bears this out.

The mistakes Portugal made are being echoed in a hauntingly familiar refrain by Indonesia. The chorus in the wings is the same, the catchy words have a remembered ring—only the victims are different.

The Portuguese monarchy ended in 1910 and the ensuing period was dogged by economic problems, monarchist agitation, the First World War, a restive army and a massive bank fraud. Perhaps not surprisingly, the nation was beguiled into believing that the 'law and order' authoritarianism of António Salazar might be the solution. He moved cautiously, cloaking his dictatorship in a semblance of constitutionality. His protégé (and ultimately his successor) was Marcello Caetano, a young economist who edited a newspaper called 'New Order'.

These events evoke Suharto's rise to power at a time of confusion, inflation, economic stagnation and confrontation. He took several years to consolidate his position under a veneer of constitutional niceties and named his 'law and order' dictatorship the 'New Order'.

But by the time its flaws were beginning to show up, Caetano had inherited a very tired old order with no answers to dissent and incipient bankruptcy at home, and a disintegrating empire abroad.

Portuguese fascism with its censorship, secret police and destruction of all viable opposition proved no bar to Western acceptance and Portugal became a founding member of NATO—set up to 'defend democracy'. As Len Deighton once wrote 'Portugal is a subtle land; without sign of Salazar on poster or postage stamp'. Salazar spent disproportionately on the military—he needed them to keep his empire and he needed them to keep him in power.

His NATO allies stood by him until the bitter end; providing military and diplomatic support—and helping to prolong the agony of the Portuguese and their subject peoples. Yet, a decade before, Dr Agostinho Neto (Angola's first president) had sought Washington's help only to be curtly dismissed. Pragmatism dictated Washington's response—the desire

to keep Portugal in southern Africa so that the United States could discreetly ‘run’ the blockade of Rhodesia. Thousands of Cuban troops in Angola are the pragmatic result of that lack of vision.

The NATO countries are Indonesia’s major supporters. Whenever a justification is needed, it is found in Indonesia’s special creation ‘Pancasila democracy’—censorship, secret police and the destruction of all viable opposition. But Indonesia too is a subtle land. And to keep the colonies and the loyalty of the military Suharto spends disproportionately on the armed forces.

Antonio de Figueiredo once wrote wryly, “Marxists had long been warning the world of the evils of capitalism with capital, but no one had turned his attention to the still worse evils of capitalism *without* capital”. Salazar eventually allowed Western corporations into the colonies, so that he could pay the military. The result has been called ‘imperialism on credit’—her wealth flowed increasingly to the West and Portugal’s indebtedness rose. Indonesia is following a similar course; prompting Brian May to write “The Russians are playing a quiet waiting game in Indonesia”—waiting for capitalism without capital to fail.

By the time the tanks rolled into Lisbon in April 1974 Portugal was exhausted. The painful steps to coup d’état had included long and arduous conscription for the nation’s young men, more than ten thousand dead and twice as many injured, demoralization, inflation and foreign control. As J. P. Silva has pointed out, a dictatorship whose platform was fervent nationalism was brought down because of its unpatriotic policies. Yet, till his stroke in 1968, Salazar projected a benevolent fatherly image; ‘Papa’ Salazar knew best. As mild, as calm, as comforting as the image ‘Bapak’ Suharto presents.

The end came as a relief, bearing out the twenty-year-old prediction of Amílcar Cabral (leader of Guinea-Bissau’s independence movement) that the end of Portuguese colonialism would bring down Portuguese fascism. In the 1950s and onwards, Portugal had settled a million of her poor in the colonies—a policy not permitted to be questioned. But the answer came—when nearly a million Portuguese came flooding home; a wave of social and economic trauma for the small nation. But Portugal opened her doors and took them all in.

The question is—will Indonesia? Her massive ‘transmigration’ policy plans to put a million people into West Irian alone by 1989—where tension already exists between ‘settlers’ and Melanesians. History demonstrates clearly the dangers in the concept of *lebensraum*.

Portugal went to considerable trouble to make the face of colonialism more attractive—changing ‘colony’ to ‘province’ and then to ‘state’—but the newly-independent nations of the Third World were not fooled. Just as the Non-Aligned Movement has recently shown that it does not regard Indonesia’s colonies of East Timor and West Irian as ‘provinces’.

And as the men who tried to spell out the dangers to Portugal—Captain Galvão, General Costa Gomes, General Spínola—were disgraced, dismissed or imprisoned, so too have Indonesia’s ‘prophets’ such as General Yusuf, Lieutenant-General Dharsono and former Governor Sadikin suffered. But it is not too late for Indonesia to learn from Portugal’s mistakes—and use them to avoid the quagmire of interminable war and bankruptcy.

It has been written of Portugal’s April Revolution “Freedom had been late in arriving but when it came it had generosity and style”. It will be glad tidings if history can bring freedom for Indonesia and her subject peoples too, with generosity and style.’

Like ‘Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely’ the dictum about learning from history if we do not wish to repeat the same mistakes is a very powerful idea. It is true that Joseph Furphy wrote in *Such is Life*, “the Past, though glazed beyond all semblance of truth, is a clinging heritage of canonised ignorance and baseness; a drag rather than a stimulus. And as day by day, year by year, our own fluid Present congeals into a fixed Past,

we shall do well to take heed that, in time to come, our own memory may not be justly held accursed. For though history is a thing that never repeats itself—since no two historical propositions are alike—one perennial truth holds good, namely, that every social hardship or injustice may be traced back to the linked sins of aggression and submission, remote or proximate in point of time”, but I think we can find historical propositions sufficiently alike to draw some useful lessons.

But which history, what era, whose perspective—should we study the successes or the mistakes, and are we sure that what we are studying as facts are the facts and *all* the facts. The history we think we’re studying may be a step up from Alan Scholefield’s quip—‘Weren’t the Philippines Spanish?’ ‘I know the Japanese had them during the war. John Wayne retook them single-handed’—but is a step reliable enough?

I began mulling over this interesting question. Would Winston Churchill have avoided the Gallipoli debacle if he’d studied the life story of Attila the Hun?

The head of the British Military Mission in Poland in 1939 (Lt. General Carton de Wiart) maintained “the débâcle was not due to the great efficiency of the German advance, to the German mechanised divisions, or, most surprising of all, to the German Air Force. It was due to the complete breakdown of the Polish communications. The result was that nobody knew what to do, and great bodies of troops were left without orders. This was particularly the case with the Polish Air Force, which seems never to have received any effective orders at all. The Polish Air Force was not destroyed by the German Air Force”, he maintained, “as about three-quarters of the machines flew off during the collapse to neighbouring countries, and are now interned. As to the German mechanised transport, it was constantly breaking down and the ground is strewn with broken down cars and tanks. The Polish Air Force, however, having had no orders, does not seem to have made any use of this confusion.”

While Susan Bergman in *A Cloud of Witnesses* writes, ‘Planning the dismemberment of Poland, Hitler dismissed—in one chilling remark—suggestions that the world community would object to Germany’s aggression. The Führer merely retorted, “Who remembers the Armenians?”’

Goronwy Rees in *The Great Slump* points out ‘The Florida Land boom displayed in miniature so many of the features which were later reproduced on a much larger scale on Wall Street in 1929 that it is curious that its lessons went unnoticed by the greater part of the nation.’ No one was taking any notice when the American Friends Service Committee made a statement in June, 1954, ‘urging the United States not to follow the French example of trying to deal with Indochina’s problems in military terms. “Nothing but disaster lies down that road”.’

Ralph Summy tells this interesting story in *Legacy and Future of Nonviolence*—“Latin Americans have a long history of nonviolent action—or *brazos caídos* (literally, fallen arms)—against ruthless dictators. Much of it has been successful, in the sense that the dictator was deposed. According to Patricia Parkman, “the existence of such a tradition ... has been visible throughout the region (in Brazil and Haiti, as well as in the Spanish-speaking republics) at least since the early years of this century.” Between 1931 and 1961, eleven Latin American presidents left office in the wake of civic strikes.”

Parkman describes these strikes as “the collective suspension of normal activities by people of diverse social groups united by common political objectives.”

One of them was against dictator Maximiliano Hernández Martínez of El Salvador in 1944. He had come to power by killing anything up to 30,000 people in a country of about one million. There was a failed armed uprising followed by a successful “civic action”. But as Ralph Summy says “One of the more ironic historical footnotes to Martínez’ downfall is that a national day is now celebrated in El Salvador to commemorate the heroic patriots who failed in the armed insurrection, while the success of the nonviolent civic strike is left to the reflections of a handful of scholars.”

I feel sure the Spanish people would come to a more innovative form of co-existence with the Basques if they were to take to heart William Atkinson's reminder "Fierce independence had been the hallmark of the Basques since their first emergence in recorded history. Rome had never wholly subdued them, nor the Visigoths, and Islam still less. With the birth in Asturias and the consolidation in León of the effort to re-establish Christian authority over a reunited Peninsula, the Basques once more served notice that they sufficed to themselves, and by the late ninth or early tenth century at latest they too were firmly constituted a kingdom" ...

I know Suharto is more and more frequently being compared with ex-President Marcos, which is understandable, but when I was reading Paul Preston's *Franco* it struck me that some useful comparisons could be drawn between Suharto and Franco. You may remember how it was assumed the Spaniards were temperamentally unsuited to democracy, which was sometimes a polite way of saying they were either 'incapable', 'liked being bullied' or that Franco was good for Western business; all of which assumptions were frequently bandied round and none of which were true. I think Preston summed it up well when he wrote: "Every year on 20 November, a band of his most fervent supporters meet and feebly chant '*Franco resucita, el pueblo te necesita*' (Franco rise up, the people need you). Every year, the ageing Francoist stalwarts are fewer and fewer. Soon there will be none."

\* \* \* \* \*

- December 5th: Christina Rossetti  
Kaz Cooke  
Flora Thompson
- December 6th: Evelyn Underhill
- December 7th: Willa Cather  
Susan Isaacs
- December 8th: Padraic Colum  
James Thurber
- December 9th: John Milton
- December 10th: Emily Dickinson  
Rumer Godden  
George Macdonald
- December 11th: Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
Naguib Mahfouz
- December 12th: Louis Nowra
- December 13th: Laurens van der Post  
Heinrich Heine
- December 14th: Michael Cook
- December 15th: Edna O'Brien  
Charles Clarke
- December 16th: Noel Coward  
Jane Austen  
Arthur C. Clarke
- December 17th: Erskine Caldwell
- December 18th: Christopher Fry  
'Saki'/H. H. Munro

\* \* \* \* \*

Libraries presented in stories are often of 'The Body in the Library' type. But a story I enjoy is about one of those little libraries run by volunteers which crop up in all sorts of organisations. Quaker writing is often seen as earnest stuff but there is William Sessions' series of *Laughter in Quaker Grey*, Chuck Fager's *Quakers are Funny* and Basil Donne-Smith's collections set in and around the Much Madder Meeting House ...

(Is there a type of humour which is identifiably ‘Quaker’? I must admit I had never asked this question until I came upon Dorothy Canfield Fisher’s comments—“The Quakers are fervent in their faith. But in many ways they are different from other fervently religious men and women. Perhaps an analytic mind might say that these differences stem from one quality: a consciously cultivated sense of the true proportion of things ... One of the certainly not-planned-for results of this constant Quaker effort to see things in their real proportion is that there is often among these sincerely earnest and deeply spiritual people, the liveliest kind of what Meredith calls ‘the Comic Spirit.’ No other faith has—has it?—a tradition of sheer fun, derived from its own practices. Are there comic Presbyterian stories based on the Presbyterian way of life? There were, in the Middle Ages, of course, many satires, usually harshly savage attacks on those who failed to live up to the creed of their Church. These satiric comments on medieval religious life are sometimes spoken of as ‘humorous.’ It is to be supposed that people laughed over them. We do, ourselves, sometimes. But the taste they leave in our mouths is bitter. They have none of the quality of the Quaker jokes which give that rare blessing, a hearty laugh which leaves behind no sting, no shame, no resentment, no blame.”)

Donne-Smith begins one story “As I sometimes suspect may be the case with other Meetings of The Society of Friends, our library at Much Madder is rather a status symbol than the scene of any very serious research. Apart from the occasional raid on it by an applicant for membership who hears his Visitors practically on his doorstep, even the journals of Fox and Woolman tend to waste their sweetness on the desert air. But the library does undoubtedly give us a warm feeling of reassurance: a feeling that strangers bent on questioning the validity of our beliefs, could well be daunted by so solid a wall of knowledge. So, in its way, it serves us faithfully, rather like the trilby hats spinsters are said to display on their hatstands in order to keep at bay undesirable callers.”

Unfortunately the Purchasing Fund is so small that the library is dependent on donations which means that strange things creep in, such as the “second (Index) volume of *The Gas Industry Report* for 1953” and “*Teach Yourself Long Jumping*”. And they are looked after by Eugenia Trudge “who was appointed Librarian on account of her little Nature books for children which had quite a vogue at one time among Friends” which combined “instruction with piety” such as “Sam the Squirrel, or The Benefits of Thrift” and “Billy Bumble or The Fruits of Toil”. Each year the books are counted carefully but one year fail to balance, causing her to write “The Librarian thinks the missing volume may well be Volume 2 of Dundreary’s ‘*Eighty Years a Sinner*’ now propping up the roll-top desk in the Committee room.”

But the winds of change blow. Three Friends—Jasper, Edward and the narrator—are deputed to reorganise the library. Under two cards, namely ‘Keep’ and ‘Out’, they set to work. Edward is about to put Jasper’s favourite book *Quo Vadis* on the ‘Out’ pile when the narrator manages to get in a very unQuakerly hack on his shin and a hasty “Wrong pile, old chap”; then comes a “short sharp struggle over ‘*Towards a Quaker View of Sex*’ which Edward held up asking “Where do we put this?”. “In the dustbin” said Jasper for whom of course the Permissive Society holds more horrors than even Ancient Rome.”

The shelves are now half-empty, the unwanted books being stacked ready to be sold off at three pence a volume; they are thanked for their efforts and the Treasurer allocates £5 to purchase new books. But, alas, only one reject sells, the other rejects creep back on to the shelves “like pets forbidden the sofa” and no one comes forward with ideas of new books to be purchased.

Of course I would have no difficulty suggesting new books to be purchased—but it reminds me of the little library started at our school when I was about ten. In the small room beside the stairs a few shelves of books suddenly appeared. What excitement! Of course modern librarians would probably object to the contents—which were things like Enid Blyton, ‘Biggles’, the ‘Bobbsey Twins’ and ‘Milly-Molly-Mandy’. But for children

who often had very limited, or even non-existent, libraries at home library-time was always a pleasure and we all read virtually every book on the shelves. (There was just one poor book which sat there, week in, week out; if anyone picked it up, someone else would cry ‘Don’t read that! It’s so *boring!*’ Twice I picked it up out of pity, and twice I gave up after the first chapter, so I cannot tell you the plot; all I remember is that it was set in a windmill in Holland.) Instead the books I remember were the exciting adventure stories—such as Ivan Southall’s *Danger Patrol* and a book whose author I’ve forgotten called *The Crimson Rust*. I hated school with a deadly hatred but one tradition I remember with affection was that at the end of every year every child received a book. (For many years I believed every State School round Australia did this but, sadly, it isn’t so.) By the time I left primary school I had acquired 7 books, (I didn’t start school until I turned seven), several of which I still have.

I know the debate rages on—should we give our children ‘home-grown’ books or simply ‘good’ books? Should we censor children’s reading and children’s library shelves. I think the answer to the first is both. I was thrilled when I came across Dorothy Cottrell’s *The Singing Gold* as it was the first book I’d ever read which mentioned Toowoomba! We had several of the Billabong books but the life of Victorian squatters was, in many ways, as remote from a small Queensland dairy farm as the world of Enid Blyton or Jean Webster. But at the same time I think children need books about the world beyond the horizon. I had not seen the sea—or a circus—or a tram—or a skyscraper—till I was well on in my childhood. My only access to such exciting things was through books.

Not that we had very many but as my mother’s two sisters did not have children most of the books from their youth came to us. There was an almost complete set of Billabong books, some L. M. Montgomery’s, a very moving book (at least I found it so) called *Cross Currents* by Eleanor Porter, and several old annuals.

My father had almost nothing from his childhood except for two books which he passed on to his grandsons—*The Red Swastika* by Mark Harborough and *Five in a Secret* by Alfred Judd. They are both ‘treasure’ books, perennial favourites with young readers, and both set in England. The Judd came out in 1929 and the ‘Five’ are two boys, two girls, and a dog called Kim. I jumped to the conclusion that the ‘swastika’ book, which came out in 1932, must have something to do with the rise of the Nazis but no—it is a Scout book and the swastika is a beautiful mosaic the boys find in an underground tunnel. Their leader explains that it may mark the burial site of an early Celtic missionary. “The Swastika has been used by pagans, you know, as well as by Christians, so we cannot be sure that they went to all the trouble of making one because they understood the man’s teaching. Anyway, I think his personality had so impressed them that they had a glimmer of what he was after, or else they wouldn’t have done what they did with his dead body. That, then, is the story, Scouts, as I see it.”

Of course this doesn’t answer the question of what *should* be in children’s libraries. Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan in *On Learning to Read* present a thesis which seems partly self-evident: children learn to read quickly and well if they have access to reading which interests them—and different things interest different children. My son taught himself to read at the age of five because he wanted to be able to read Dr Who books; I was very slow to learn to read, still muddling along at 7 and 8, perhaps because of the lack of books to grip my interest. But most of the arguments on the contents of school libraries are waged by adults over what they believe children should or shouldn’t read. Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is one of the books which has been caught in this crossfire.

William M. Gibson wrote “Curiously, however, while Mark Twain thought well of *Life on the Mississippi*, having intended to make it “a standard work,” he was never fully aware that *Huckleberry Finn* was his best full-length fiction. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say he took a defensive attitude about “Huck, that abused child of mine who has had so much unfair mud slung at him.” In March 1885 Mark Twain was offered membership in

the Concord Free Trade Club at the very moment when the public library of Concord eliminated *Huckleberry Finn* from its shelves as “the veriest trash.” The heart of his response, to the Concord Free Trade Club, follows:

... a committee of the public library of your town has condemned & excommunicated my last book, and doubled its sale. This generous action of theirs must necessarily benefit me in one or two additional ways. For instance, it will deter other libraries from buying the book; & you are doubtless aware that one book in a public library prevents the sale of a sure ten & a possible hundred of its mates. And secondly it will cause the purchasers of the book to read it out of curiosity, instead of merely intending to do so after the usual way of the world & library committees; then they will discover, to my great advantage & their own indignant disappointment, that there is nothing objectionable in the book, after all.

... Ten years after writing the Concord letter, he jotted down in a notebook a truly penetrating comment on the novel, calling it “a book of mine where a sound heart & a deformed conscience come into collision & conscience suffers defeat.”

But Twain didn’t see Huck as a book for children—and the dialect for many readers, not only children, remains difficult—and if we take adult books and force children to read them we do need to allow room for adults and children to dissent from that decision. *Tom Sawyer* is certainly an easier book for children but I do have a problem: for children who have personal contact or a wide range of reading in regard to ‘Indians’ the very graphic portrayal of Injun Joe as the personification of evil probably doesn’t matter but for children who will form their images solely on that portrayal it needs very careful and sensitive thought, rather than a casual “That’ll do for the Grade Sixes, it’s been popular for yonks and the words aren’t too difficult.”

And I have a theory that if you want young readers to form a life-long affection for a writer, don’t force their books on them; put them away in a high cupboard and say mysteriously “when you are older ... ”

\* \* \* \* \*

Philippe Aries wrote a book about children *Centuries of Childhood* in which he pointed out the lack of children’s literature in medieval times, except for a few ‘textbooks’; because many children died in infancy and most were illiterate a separate literature was not deemed necessary; but, as Sheila Egoff writes “Then came the Puritans. Having decided that “since children were not too little to die, they were not too little to go to hell,” the Puritans almost simultaneously discovered (or “invented,” as McLuhan says) both children and children’s books. They were the first to realize that children are interested in other children and that their books should therefore have child characters who were, however, made to express adult values in every aspect of their carefully controlled lives and deaths.

As much as we criticize seventeenth-century religious tracts disguised as fiction, it can be supposed that children were delighted to have books with child characters ... ” even though “the Puritans created a well-intentioned straitjacket that only the foremost writers of children’s books have been able to discard.”

“In the next one hundred and fifty years, until about 1850, the religious tone gradually softened and themes increased in variety and scope.” ... “The anonymous author of *Goody Two-Shoes* (1765) who relates a “disadvantaged” child’s rise to station and fortune with dramatic verve, and Maria Edgeworth in “The Purple Jar” (1801) display a sensitivity toward childhood that was far ahead of its time”.

P. G. Wodehouse poked fun about this profoundly-entrenched belief in the necessity for children’s books to contain a moral, to be ‘improving’, in his little story ‘The Tom Brown Question’. A stranger in a railway carriage says “the difficulty about *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* is this. It is obvious that part one and part two were written by different people ... The question is, who wrote the second. I know, but I don’t suppose ten other people do ... ” He enumerates several differences in support of his theory, differences which seem to convince his listener ... so who does he say wrote the second? Imagine the following scene:

“We have come to speak to you on an important matter, Mr Hughes. We are the committee of the Secret Society for Putting Wholesome Literature Within The Reach Of Every Boy, And Seeing That He Gets It. I, sir, am the president of the S.S.F.P.W.L.W.T.R.O.E.B.A.S.T.H.G.I.” He bowed.

”Really, sir, I—er—don’t think I have the pleasure,” began Mr Hughes.

”You shall have the pleasure, sir. We have come to speak to you about your book. Our representative has read Part I., and reports unfavourably upon it. It contains no moral. There are scenes of violence, and your hero is far from perfect.”

”I think you mistake my object,” said Mr Hughes; “Tom is a boy, not a patent medicine. In other words, he is not supposed to be perfect.” ...

\* \* \* \* \*

One day I picked up, in a second-hand bookshop, a 1920 book, *Books and Their Writers*, which had a chapter on Saki. S.P.B. Mais (who is remembered for his new idea, in the 1930s, of a ‘Southern Railway Moonlight Walk’ to Chanctonbury Ring which turned into chaos when, instead of the expected 40 walkers, 1,440 turned up!) writes ‘It was in the Christmas vacation of 1905 that I was presented with a copy of *Reginald* by a fellow-undergraduate. There are some debts that one can never repay in full; it is perhaps something that we never forget the friend who introduces us to an author who ultimately becomes a favourite: I shall feel that I have, in some degree, repaid him in this case if I can entice any reader of this chapter who may have missed Munro’s work to love it as I do, for he who brings before our notice what exactly suits our temperament is a private benefactor of a very high order. “Saki’s” humour—let it be admitted at once—is not for all tastes.’

Julia Briggs in her study of ghost stories says ‘One author whose work anticipated this post-war mood, though he himself died in action at Beaumont Hamel in 1916, was ‘Saki’, Hector Hugh Munro. His short stories, generally set in high society, consisted of wit matches, elegant displays of cynical repartee. He used the epigram as a vehicle for surprising, often socially unacceptable truths, as the war poets were to do, although their bitter and laconic efforts derived from Housman and the Greek anthology rather than from Wilde’s comedies. Saki wrote a few fantasies and fewer ghost stories: one of these, ‘The Open Window’, turns out to be a spoof. Another, ‘The Music on the Hill’, is a fairly conventional tale of Pan’s revenge. Much the most interesting is ‘Gabriel-Ernest’, the story of an inappropriately named werewolf (from *Reginald in Russia*, 1910). A naked savage boy who makes no secret of his hunger for child-flesh appears on a country estate and even invades the drawing-room. The inflexible and unimaginative county society, however, cannot take his self-confessed proclivities seriously, preferring to believe that he is joking, until, of course, it is too late. Instead of the supernatural here symbolizing a repressed desire or disguised impulse, the naked and bestial boy stands for unpalatable reality, things as they are, and the reluctance to accept painful but obvious truths suggests the way in which Edwardian society insulated itself from the less pleasant facts of life, an attitude perpetuated during the war. The supernatural is frequently used to represent inadmissible truths, whether about the inner life or the outer world.’

Mais writes ‘*The Chronicles of Clovis* (1912) is, in the opinion of most of his admirers, his best book. It is certainly his most characteristic work. In it we see his understanding of and love for animals, his almost inhuman aloofness from suffering, his first-hand knowledge of house-parties and hunting, his astounding success in choice of names for his characters, his gift for epigram, his love of practical jokes, his power of creating an atmosphere of pure horror, his Dickensian appreciation of food and the importance of its place in life, his eerie belief in rustic superstitions, and his never-failing supply of bizarre and startling plots.’

My only Saki is *The Unbearable Bassington* which although not his best-known work displays the range of his humour ... and Martin Seymour-Smith says of it ‘It was on an unusual theme for its time, and psychologically it is penetratingly accurate; it suggests that,

had he not been killed (by a sniper), he might have developed into a major novelist' ...

... 'You can't prevent the heathen being converted if they choose to be,' said Lady Caroline; 'this is an age of toleration.'

'You could always deny it,' said the Rev. Poltimore, 'like the Belgians do with regrettable occurrences in the Congo. But I would go further than that. I would stimulate the waning enthusiasm for Christianity in this country by labelling it as the exclusive possession of a privileged few. If one could induce the Duchess of Palm, for instance, to assert that the Kingdom of Heaven, as far the British Isles are concerned, is strictly limited to herself, two of the under-gardeners at Palmby, and, possibly, but not certainly, the Dean of Dunster, there would be an instant reshaping of the popular attitude towards religious convictions and observances. Once let the idea get about that the Christian Church is rather more exclusive than the Lawn at Ascot, and you would have a quickening of religious life such as this generation has never witnessed. But as long as the clergy and the religious organisations advertise their creed on the lines of "Everybody ought to believe in us: millions do," one can expect nothing but indifference and waning faith.'

... 'And now I must be running away; I've got to open a Free Library somewhere. You know the sort of thing that happens—one unveils a bust of Carlyle and makes a speech about Ruskin, and then people come in their thousands and read "Rabid Ralph, or Should he have Bitten Her?"'

It is strange to think of Free Libraries ... an idea which rose with meteoric delight at the beginning of the 20th century and looks likely to plummet to earth somewhere remote and inaccessible somewhere around 2003 ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A friend of mine once said that Jewish parents were responsible for creating many nursery rhymes because of their love for, and special way of relating to, children. When I asked her where she'd found this information she lent me her copy of *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* which does say "we read that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries children were treated as 'grown-ups in miniature'. In paintings we see them wearing clothes which were replicas of those worn by their elders. The conduct and the power of understanding we find expected of them were those of an adult. Many parents saw nothing unusual in their children hearing strong language or savouring strong drink. And behaviour was not as abashed as it is today. The spectacle of their fathers asleep under the table and in other 'even more lamentable positions' would not be unfamiliar to them. The Puritans had good cause for some of their objections, as the popular literature of the time is vivid witness. ... Probably only the Jews, whose ideas about children have always been enlightened, may be excepted. The two rhymes towards the end of the *Haggadah* which are included for the special entertainment of children during the long Passover service, 'Ehod Mi Yode'a' and 'Had Gadyo', are probably the earliest nursery pieces to have received official approbation." And "It has often been presumed that the original of 'The House that Jack Built' is a Hebrew chant, 'Had Gadyo', which was first printed in 1590 in a Prague edition of the *Haggadah*."

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course there are nursery rhymes and nursery rhymes—and some have extremely grim or risqué beginnings—and some of them do not strike me as suitable for young children. Would you, for instance, put your children to bed with:

Baby, baby, naughty baby,  
Hush, you squalling thing, I say.  
Peace this moment, peace, or maybe  
Bonaparte will pass this way

Baby, baby, he's a giant,  
Tall and black as Rouen steeple,

And he breakfasts, dines, rely on't,  
Every day on naughty people.

Baby, baby, if he hears you,  
As he gallops past the house,  
Limb from limb at once he'll tear you,  
Just as pussy tears a mouse.

And he'll beat you, beat you, beat you,  
And he'll beat you all to pap,  
And he'll eat you, eat you, eat you,  
Every morsel, snap, snap, snap ..... ?

William Sessions wrote, "It is well known that early Friends altered Latin grammars to avoid pagan examples, but V. Sackville-West, in her delightful book on *Nursery Rhymes*, states that the Quakers altered these too. She has kindly allowed me to reproduce the extract, but wrote that although she carefully put down in her notes for her book the references, there is no reference down about this Quaker one. Here is V. Sackville-West on 'The Cat and the Fiddle'.

'A very peculiar jingle, very peculiar indeed, in fact nonsensical; and so the Quakers thought, for they tried to amend it. They tried to turn it into reasonable sense, which is the last thing any child desires. Rearranged by the Quakers this is how the old rhyme came out.

'Hey diddle diddle, The cat and the fiddle'  
(Yes, thee may say out, for that is nonsense)

'The cow jumped over the moon;

(Oh no, Mary, thee mustn't say that, for it is falsehood, thee knows a cow could never jump over the moon; but a cow may jump under it; so thee ought to say,

The cow jumped *under* the moon)

'The little dog laughed ... '

(Oh, Mary, stop! how can a little dog laugh? Thee knows a little dog can't laugh. Thee ought to say, The little dog barked ...)

'And the dish ran after the spoon ... '

(Stop, Mary, stop! A dish can never run after a spoon. Thee had better say ...)

I have asked a number of Friends with long Quaker traditions in their families, but have not heard of any editing of Nursery Rhymes. I also asked Professor Mook, who has done a great deal of research in American Friends' folklore, but he had not heard of any. We both put letters in our respective country's Friends' Journals on the subject, but received only negative replies."

So the very strict Quaker family Vita Sackville-West heard of must have been an exception.

Nursery rhymes blend into schoolyard verse which, strangely, always just seemed to *arrive*; no one made it up, no one said 'my cousin told me this', no, one day we were skipping or singing or passing something on behind our hands—next day, a new ditty was doing the rounds, only to be superseded days or weeks later. Some of the ditties, I remember, were both lively and subversive; I do not imagine children made up:

'Red, white, and blue,  
The Irish cockatoo,  
Sat upon a flagpole,  
Doing a Number Two.'

But I didn't particularly think of Australia as having a tradition of its own nursery rhymes—until I came across *Twinkle, Twinkle, Southern Cross* by Robert Holden. Nursery rhymes were slow to find a niche partly because of the small number of white children, a small publishing industry, and the fact that the nursery rhymes of other cultures

and other places travel well. There was no pressing need for distinctive Australian rhymes. Many good writers eventually brought out poems and rhymes for small children, writers such as C. J. Dennis, Ethel Turner, May Gibbs, Norman Lindsay, Hugh McCrae, Amy Mack and Zora Cross, but I was left wondering—was there/is there a tradition of rhymes and stories for young children in Aboriginal cultures or do they simply share ‘adult’ stories around the campfire?

\* \* \* \* \*

A. J. Langguth says ‘Writers may remember the good times of their childhood but they make use of the bad.’ And Saki’s childhood was largely composed of bad. He was born in Burma and sent back home to England with his mother and brother and sister but his mother died suddenly and the children were taken in by their Aunt Charlotte and Aunt Augusta who knew nothing about children and caught them up in the whirlwind of their bad temper, mutual envy, and bitterness at the life they were forced to lead as middle-aged spinsters.

It is not surprising that fierce and terrible aunts fill Saki’s stories and often come to terrible ends; it must’ve been a very satisfying revenge. Yet Langguth’s biography is extraordinarily funny; too funny really, because the copy I came upon was in the State Reference Library and sitting there snickering in those serious surroundings doesn’t go down terribly well. Perhaps I will treat myself to a copy for my next birthday so I can chuckle in peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 19th: Jean Genet  
December 20th: Zoe Fairbairns  
December 21st: Frank Moorhouse  
                  Anthony Powell  
December 22nd: David Martin  
                  Yasmine Gooneratne  
                  E. A. Robinson  
December 23rd: Marie Bjelke-Petersen  
                  Ken Methold

\* \* \* \* \*

Angela Thirkell in *Trooper to the Southern Cross* wrote, ‘I’ve seen some pretty good poker players in my time. Once when I was fossicking round near the osmiridium fields in Tasmania one vacation, I saw a man called Peter Barker, though his real name I believe was Joe Stevens or Stevenson, lose all the cash he’d got and all the osmiridium he’d found in six months, and his swag and his bluey. But he bluffed the whole gang in the end on three sevens and a pair of Jacks and got the lot back.’ But who today remembers the osmiridium fields of north-west Tasmania? Even though Marie Bjelke Petersen used them in what was probably her most famous book *Jewelled Nights*—

That famous clip of Joh Bjelke-Petersen sitting on a bulldozer and saying how much he enjoys knocking down trees always made my brother furious. And the strange thing is that Sir Joh’s aunt, Marie Bjelke Petersen, holds a proud place as one of Tasmania’s early conservationists.

The family came out from Denmark in 1891 to settle in Hobart. Marie’s first job in her new land was as a physical education teacher at The Friends’ School and physical education was to become a family preoccupation, with several teaching it and two setting up their own gymnasiums, including the Bjelke-Petersen School of Physical Culture in Macquarie Street, Hobart.

Alison Alexander in her biography of Marie explores the family’s name: “The young couple themselves set up house in a large villa in Bjelke Avenue, then on the outskirts of Copenhagen, virtually in the country. The avenue is reputed to be called after the family, though Copenhagen authorities rather stuffily insist it was called after an eighteenth century

Admiral Bjelke, so perhaps the family was called after the avenue. Certainly it was at about this time that George changed his name to Bjelke-Petersen, while the rest of the family remained commonplace Petersens. Bjelke was said to be a distinguished name reserved for royalty; but one researcher found that in 1569 a Swedish Bjelke Petersen was the local hangman. Marie wrote, much later, that the children often used to ask their father why their family had ‘Bjelke’ added, but he would never tell them.” I wonder if Marie, when she became Australia’s most popular romance novelist, was tempted to drop the Bjelke for the sake of her readers who were sometimes reluctant even to make a stab at pronouncing it.

Her books such as *The Captive Singer*, *The Immortal Flame*, *The Rainbow Lute* and *Jewelled Nights* (which was filmed) all sold well through the 1920s, not only in Australia but also in the UK and the USA—and she must be one of a tiny number of Australian romantic novelists to ever get a review in the *New York Times*!

“And speaking of scenery, let me say that we shall have to take greater care of it than we have done in the past. It has grieved me more than I can possibly express to see the way our scenery is being slaughtered. Every time I go to the West Coast it makes me sad, for I always see many miles of fresh destruction. Let us make a start to stop it, for if we do not our greatest source of wealth will have gone for ever. The myrtle forests do not come up a second time. Once you have set fire to them they are gone for ever. In six months you can destroy what could bring you in millions of pounds later.”

This was Marie speaking at the opening of the film of *Jewelled Nights* in 1926.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 24th: Matthew Arnold  
Mary Higgins Clark  
December 25th: Rebecca West  
Dorothy Wordsworth  
December 26th: Henry Miller  
December 27th: Elizabeth Smart  
December 28th: Anthony Cohen  
December 29th: Gerard Windsor  
December 30th: Rudyard Kipling  
Stephen Leacock

\* \* \* \* \*

I had an Irish great-aunt who, after teaching in various places, retired to a large English town. Gradually, her street began to fill with newly-arriving immigrants from Africa, India, or the Caribbean. Someone said to her she should sell her house and move, as the value of her property would go down. She responded that she liked her new neighbours and had no intention of moving—and I believe she lived there until her death in 1976. Though I never met her I was reminded of her when I came across Paul Scott’s address to the Commonwealth Countries’ League in 1969 which he entitled ‘Enoch Sahib: A Slight Case of Cultural Shock’.

He begins by saying “The floating vote is known to me personally. The floating vote is my aunt, the dear and ancient one who would vote for Mr. Powell tomorrow, even though she lives in the quiet of a seaside town where a brown face on the promenade would be as rare a sight as a dodo among the seagulls. Mr. Powell, she says, has such a *strong* face, and cares about *us*.”

He goes on “Mr. Powell knows that recently things have been going none too well. He has shrewdly judged that a stern call to close the gate, lock the door, seal the windows, and sit in one’s decent parlor on one’s ordinary backside, counting the money, is likely to have the strongest possible appeal. I say shrewdly judged, because if he does not *see* the defeatism of the policies he advocates, he should go back and sit in the chair of Greek at Durham University ... He has skillfully manipulated racial arguments so that they emerge as the semi-articulate protests of worried or terrified people he felt it his plain duty to stand up

for as spokesman, untainted himself by anything remotely like prejudice, untainted in fact by anything that can't be put down to the plain common sense of a man who will Sort Out the Mess and Get Things Done.

But the arguments, manipulated or not, aren't to be got rid of by throwing on them the sand of counterprejudice. You do not bury an unexploded bomb. You study it to identify its mechanism, and then try to render it harmless. So far as I'm concerned the primary area for study is oneself, since this is the only area from which one can report with any degree of accuracy."

I've recently noticed an extraordinary number of people saying "I'm not racist". Perhaps they truly aren't and 'I tips me lid' but I'm afraid I am and I'm afraid it looks like being a life-long struggle ... And I secretly suspect many people feel able to say that because they have used a very narrow definition. I frequently come across nice people who would not dream of referring to 'abos' or 'wogs' but see nothing wrong with referring to 'rednecks' or 'loonies' ... but perhaps I am being overly pedantic ... and it might rather be that because people are not *publicly* racist they feel able to make this claim. Most of us do not go round bashing up people of a different colour or burning down Asian restaurants but that doesn't mean we don't have thoughts and feelings we would be ashamed to bring out into the fierce light of day. It begins, I think, with that fleeting sense of 'them' and 'us', and 'us' has a way of being better, nicer, more reasonable, cleaner, brighter, more respectable ... you know what I mean ...

Scott goes on to say "A little bit of Bharatpur in Birmingham is no different from a touch of Camberley in Calcutta. What repelled the caste Hindu there about Anglo-Indian manners and customs is the same as what repels a white fish-and-chips-eating native of Britain about mosques and temples and the smell of Rajasthani cooking."

He finishes up with some thoughts on aid which seem worth repeating:

"Aid is given because a country is too poor to afford what it is thought right that it should have. Very often its poverty is partly explained by our past imperial possession of it. But aid should not be looked on as conscience money. True, aid is seen as an investment in political stability, in friendship instead of enmity. But more than that, I think there must be many ordinary decent Englishmen—to borrow Mr. Powell's emotive phrase—who, *in spite* of the national tendency to insularity, see aid as a means of putting into practice a theory I and they would hate to see disappear from the range of human theories—the theory that it is right for every nation to share, on as equitable a basis as possible, and as soon as possible, all those philosophies, discoveries, developments, and amenities that raise the standards by which the world may live. And not least among those standards are those which we call moral. It is, I believe, *those* standards which Mr. Powell's activities threaten to lower."

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul Scott once said—"For the British, on the whole, there have been three Indias. Kipling's, Forster's, and currently the comic India as conveyed by the impersonations of Mr. Peter Sellers." Adding Scott's India we get the grand total of four—which seems rather parsimonious. Personally I would've thought there are several thousand million waiting for their Rushdie, their Seth, their Arundhati Roy.

And it's not a very impressive line-up. Kipling's jingoistic India has been discreetly put in the cupboard in the laundry, leaving his sentimental India to be Walt Disneyised. Forster's India always seems to me to be unbearably drab and petty. And Paul Scott had the terrible burden of writing in the shadow of two men who were deemed to have written everything anyone would ever want to read about India.

Some of the interesting books I've come across recently are non-fiction—such as *Khaki Mischief* (about an extraordinary homicide last century), *Ten Fingers for God* (which deals in passing with that vexed question of missionaries and the worth thereof), *Quakers in India* (Quakers founded that institution *The Times of India*; this book also reminded me that India was as much an artificial creation as was Indonesia, Yugoslavi, or the USSR) and the

one I'm reading at the moment—*Gifts of Passage* by Santha Rama Rau—

\* \* \* \* \*

Kipling's poems turn up here and there—but what was Kipling like as a poet overall? He wrote much as an imperialist (though critical of the empire's functionaries); he could be a misogynist but also managed the occasional attractive love poem. But the overall impression is that he wrote too much and a great deal of it was spoiled by bombast.

He had a way with words, a good control of idiom, a bright and lively mind, an interest in a great many things, and the wisdom to know that "No question is ever settled until it is settled right"—but I felt his most attractive poems are some of his sea poems, his whimsy—such as 'A Charm' and 'Harp Song of the Dane Women'—and some of his wryly comic religious verse—such as 'Eddi's Service', 'The Answer' and 'Cain and Abel' in which Abel is a cattle rancher and Cain a market-gardener, and Abel's bulls definitely are not kind to Cain's cucumbers—thus: "But, seein' all he had had to bear,

I never could call the Judgment fair!"

It is always interesting to see where he cast his eye but the results are not necessarily memorable—

#### MELBOURNE

Greeting! Nor fear nor favour won us place,  
Got between greed of gold and dread of drouth,  
Loud-voiced and reckless as the wild tide-race  
That whips our harbour-mouth!

#### SYDNEY

Greeting! My birth-stain have I turned to good;  
Forcing strong wills perverse to steadfastness:  
The first flush of the tropics in my blood,  
And at my feet success!

#### BRISBANE

The northern stock beneath the southern skies—  
I build a Nation from Empire's need,  
Suffer a little, and my land shall rise,  
Queen over lands indeed!

#### HOBART

Man's love first found me; man's hate made me Hell;  
For my babes' sake I cleansed those infamies.  
Earnest for leave to live and labour well,  
God flung me peace and ease.

And so, from Hobart, I bid you peace and farewell.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 31st: Simon Wiesenthal  
José María Gironella

\* \* \* \* \*

The End