

**A  
HALF-CLOSED  
BOOK**

**Compiled  
by  
J. L. Herrera**

## TO THE MEMORY OF:

Mary Brice

## AND WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Madge Portwin, Margaret Clarke,  
Isla MacGregor, Bob Clark, Betty Cameron,  
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and sundry libraries, op-shops, and book exchanges

## INTRODUCTION

Just one more ramble through unexpected byways and surprising twists and turns ... yes, I think everyone is allowed to go out with neither bang nor whimper but with her eyes glued to the page ... Poor dear, people can say, she didn't see that bus coming ...

The difficulty of course is where to store everything; and finding room in my mind is sometimes as tricky as finding room in my bedroom.

But was it a good idea to do a short writer's calendar? A year instead of my usual three years. I had mixed feelings about it. It was nice to see a book take shape so (relatively) swiftly. But I also felt the bits and pieces hadn't had time to marinate fully. That sense of organic development had been hurried. I also found I tended to run with the simpler stories rather than the ones that needed some research—and some luck, some serendipity. On the other hand, how long a soaking constitutes a decent marinade? Not being a good cook I always find that hard to decide ...

So this will be a book without a deadline. One which can just wander along in spare moments. Its date will have to wait. Even so, I hope that anyone who happens to read it some day will enjoy it as much as I always enjoy the compiling of books on writing and reading.

And may your eyes never grow dim ...

J. L. Herrera

Hobart .... 2009

PS. Speaking of serendipity it seems that the minute I finish a calendar and put it aside I find something which might've added to it. A greater sense of completeness perhaps. I thought of this when I came upon Joyce Maynard's *At Home in the World*. As an eighteen-year-old she became involved with J. D. Salinger; a relationship I couldn't help but see as damaging. When I began the book I found myself wishing I'd known about it sooner. When I finished it I was vaguely glad I hadn't.

## A HALF-CLOSED BOOK

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January 1: Maria Edgeworth

Caroline Jones

January 2: Isaac Asimov

Susan Wittig Albert

January 3: J. R. Tolkien

David Starkey

January 4: Jacob Grimm

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D. Scott Rogo wrote in *The Poltergeist Experience*, “Even the first scholars of history noted the existence and mystery of the poltergeist. Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie* cited an old German case. He reported how a house was bombarded by stones while blows erupted from its walls. These incidents occurred in A.D. 355.” And “Grimm, in his *Teutonic Mythologie*, records a case dating back to A.D. 856 in Kembden. Rappings, voices, and showers of stones plagued the unfortunate victim’s home.”

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Puzzling as reports of ‘spontaneous combustion’ are I have never doubted that there is a natural and probably quite simple explanation. The medical and scientific establishments have pooh-poohed the whole thing; not questioning the fact that unfortunate people are found burned to death in their homes and gardens and sheds and cars—but arguing that they could not have combusted spontaneously and therefore the claim is absurd. On the surface this seems sensible. Human bodies are very damp things. Arthur Upfield wrote a short story called ‘Wisp of Wool and Disc of Silver’ in which a man manages to destroy the body of a neighbour by days of burning. This story later formed the basis for a real life attempt to destroy a murder victim in the same way. But even with plenty of space, plenty of time, and large amounts of heaped-on wood and brush, it proved to be an unsuccessful effort. The puzzle in cases of ‘spontaneous combustion’ is that people have been found by police still sitting in their almost undamaged armchairs but burnt to ashes. Even in horrifying collisions, housefires, plane crashes, and war zones horribly charred bodies have not been reduced to ash.

Damon Wilson tells the story in *Spontaneous Combustion* of Charles Dickens and his use of the phenomenon ...

A case occurred in Germany in 1847 where the Countess von Gorlitz was found dead and partially burned in a locked bedroom. A doctor pronounced it as a case of spontaneous combustion but her man-servant Stauff admitted to killing her and heaping combustibles on her body. He got life imprisonment—which seems lenient for mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Germany—unless doubts remained. The defence had called famous chemist Baron von Liebig, inventor of the Liebig condenser, to prove that Stauff could not have burned her body like that because human bodies are very hard to burn. Therefore it could neither have been a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion nor could Stauff have burned the body in the way he claimed, possibly under pressure to confess. Spontaneous Human Combustion became an idea of ridicule in the scientific and medical worlds and Stauff went to prison. But the real question no one had engaged with was: if not natural combustion, and if Stauff or anyone else could not have burned the body in that room—then how did the Countess die?

“Within four years, Liebig’s opinion was being used as a stick to beat England’s most famous author, Charles Dickens. In his novel *Bleak House* (serialized between 1852-53), Dickens kills off the villainous miser Krook by Spontaneous Combustion. “The cat stands snarling – not at them; at something on the ground, before the fire. There is very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering suffocating vapor in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at the something

on the ground, before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it? Hold up the light. Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, and here is – is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he is here!”

“This grim scene affronted the senses of many of Dickens’s Victorian readers, but the scientific community was indignant for another reason. The noted rationalist George Henry Lewes lost no time in writing to *The Leader* magazine to say that he “objected to the episode of Krook’s death by Spontaneous Combustion as overstepping the limits of fiction and giving currency to a vulgar error.” Dickens replied in the introduction to the first edition of *Bleak House*, explaining: “I have no need to observe that I do not willfully or negligently mislead my readers and that before I wrote that description I took pains to investigate the subject.” He went on to mention that he had studied 30 cases, including that of Countess Bandi (1731), on whose death chamber he had based his description of Krook’s bedroom.”

Wilson notes that Dickens as a junior reporter had covered the inquest into just such a death, the verdict being death by misadventure, which had convinced Dickens that SHC was a reality. But Lewes wasn’t interested in cases; reason dictated that human bodies simply couldn’t spontaneously combust. Dickens’ friend Forster accused Lewes in the *Fortnightly Review* of being “odious by intolerable assumptions of an indulgent superiority”. But even Dickens’s reputation, and his appeal to actual cases, failed to convince the medical profession. Lewes revealed that he was basing his opinion on Liebig’s conclusions, when he declared: “I believe you will not find one eminent organic chemist who credits Spontaneous Combustion.”

“And, unfortunately, he was correct. From that day to this, Spontaneous Combustion has been dismissed as a scientific impossibility.”

I think Dickens who had thoroughly looked into the mystery was right and the medical men who had dismissed it out of hand were wrong. But that does nothing to explain what actually happens. Alcohol was originally seen as the main culprit. And being fat was thought to add fuel to the fire. As Julian Jeffs wrote in ‘Imbiber, Beware!’ “The conditions leading to spontaneous combustion were ably summarized by Lair, and are as follows: firstly, the people concerned made abuse, over a long period, of spirituous liquors; secondly, they were nearly all women; thirdly, they were mostly aged; fourthly, they were generally fat. When disaster overtook them, the extremities of their bodies were generally spared, and water, instead of putting the fire out, sometimes only made it more violent.” But many cases did not fit the image. Children, teetotalers, very thin people, teenagers, and people careful of their health have died mysteriously. But the majority of cases do appear to occur in fairly sedentary people—which just might give weight to the idea that a build-up of abdominal gases is a key factor. Other possibilities have included static electricity and ball lightning.

But Wilson also trawls another idea which is even more unlikely to be taken on board by the medical establishment: poltergeists. Unexplained fires are sometimes a feature of an outbreak of poltergeist activity. But this would not explain why combustion tends to happen, rarely fortunately, to older people. Yet if that kind of spirit possession can feed off adolescent energy and anger—can it also feed on the kind of frustration and anger that can occur later in life as horizons shrink too soon, too drastically, too much at the whim of other people?

I’m not sure if there is anything in this idea ... but it struck me that it was the term ‘spontaneous’ which was the sticking point for many people. We know that marsh gas sometimes ignites and sometimes doesn’t; but what causes it to ignite? It seemed to me that the real clue lies in the nature of the fire itself. Where a body burning has been witnessed people almost invariably speak of a blue flame. And, even stranger, bodies have burnt but left nearby flammable materials unburnt. It is as though the fire needs a very specific material to feed on. The obvious answer would appear to be a buildup of phosphine gas in the stomach or intestines which can ignite if the person swallows air, or belches or farts, which would seem to give some support to the statistics that it is more likely to occur among sedentary people, and more likely to occur when people are sitting down or lying in bed ...

So what, I wondered, is phosphine gas? Also called hydrogen phosphide it is a poisonous colourless gas with an odour of garlic which can spontaneously ignite. I can't say I like the idea of it lurking in my insides and I couldn't help wondering if there are foods or beverages which promote or discourage its development ...

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Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm came from what would be regarded as a lower middle-class background; they needed permission to be accepted to study for the law. But it was the law which inadvertently set them on a remarkable journey. Jacob got the job of researching for his lecturer, Friedrich Carl von Savigny, and it gave him the insight that laws reflect the society which creates them. So if he was to understand the nature of law it was necessary to look at the underlying beliefs people held in various different societies, from ancient Rome to France and Germany, and from there the brothers stumbled into the business of collecting the stories and memories, including the folk tales and fairy stories, of Germany. They had no preconceived method, no specific plans, no guidance, but gradually it became known that they would like to hear from people who had 'old' and 'traditional' stories to pass on. Rather than going out to collect they, mostly, were sent material or visited by people; one of their most important sources was an illiterate peasant woman called Dorothea Viehmann whose prodigious memory gave them at least thirty-five of their tales. But alongside the business of collecting folk memories they were also developing an insight into language, grammar, and changing usage. They produced a major dictionary, the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, as well as a German Grammar, and their various collections.

They chafed under the Napoleonic occupation but their grand gesture came later, unlike Beethoven who furiously scratched out his dedication of the 'Eroica' Symphony when Napoleon crowned himself emperor. When William IV, king of both Great Britain and of Hanover, died the English throne came to Victoria but women were barred from the throne of Hanover—so it was William IV's brother Ernst August, Duke of Cumberland, who became King of Hanover. And his first action was to abrogate the current constitution, on the grounds that it was 'liberal', and go back to the 1819 constitution, thus removing the privileges contained in the newer constitution. Seven professors, including Jacob and Wilhelm, refused to submit to the loyalty oath required of all civil servants. In December 1837 all seven were dismissed from Göttingen University. They became known as the 'Göttingen Sieben' and their stance gained widespread student support. The *Encyclopedia of German Literature* (ed. Matthias Konzett) says "The argument of the seven came down to this: shifting loyalties willy-nilly from one constitution to another, without any acceptable reason, and taking steps backward in rights and responsibilities would undermine both the credibility of the professoriate amongst the students and the ideals of the university."

(It is one of those quirks of history that Britain acquired Victoria simply because her father Edward, Duke of Kent, was the fourth son of George III and Ernst August was the fifth son. Had they been the other way around we would have had an Augustan era, if not an earnest one; and had the kingdom of Hanover accepted a woman on the throne ... )

The *Deutsches Mythologie* is one of their many collections from delving in old materials and the use of the word 'mythology' in the title suggests that Jacob Grimm was not going to claim the stories were true. Yet the simple factual presentation of the material, without the usual embellishments that myths garner, does seem to indicate that the stories of the stones might have some basis and that he was keeping an open mind ...

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January 5: Letitia Parr

January 6: Kahlil Gibran

January 7: Charles Addams

January 8: Wilkie Collins

January 9: Joan Baez

January 10: Robinson Jeffers

January 11: Alan Paton  
January 12: Dorothy Wall  
Eve Pownall  
January 13: A. B. Guthrie  
January 14: Peter Harbison  
January 15: Jean-Baptiste Moliere  
January 16: Rodrick Grant  
Randa Habib  
January 17: May Gibbs  
Anton Chekhov  
Ita Buttrose  
Lola Montez (d)

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The other day I was in one of those places where you wait interminably and there's nothing to read but magazines telling you about celebrities and fashions. I picked up a copy of *Vogue* and began to flip through it. But as page after page passed, each one with its 'blank slate' face of unlined skin and perfect make-up and even white teeth bared in a meaningless smile I began to long for the sight of some wrinkles; of faces full of wit and wisdom and sympathy, of faces which had lived and on which were imprinted experience and personality—not those endless bland models. Fortunately I then went on down to the Tip Shop where I had a few things 'on hold' including Kaz Cooke's delightful re-presentation of Lola Montez's 1858 *The Arts of Beauty* and her tongue-in-cheek *Hints to Gentlemen on the Art of Fascinating*. Lola, even if she probably was at times pretty tedious and lacking in skill and her spider dance made its biggest impact on men deprived of female company, was very much her own woman. More than that she was still drawing eyes, still finding lovers, and still making headlines long after she had left her twenties behind and there weren't any handy nip-and-tuck merchants around in the 1850s. Perhaps the Mae West of her day. It is a curious thought that the famous beauties of history probably would not draw a second glance in our world. Helen of Troy no doubt had a long Greek nose; Cleopatra, I feel certain, was on the portly side; and Pocahontas did not use lipstick. But I feel equally sure they had personality and strength of character which went beyond features, figure, clothes, hair ... Like them or not, they were probably hard to forget.

So what was Lola telling her readers to do? Some of her tips are, in fact, very sensible, down-to-earth, and best of all—free. It is rather horrifying to find that the commercial beauty preparations of the day contained things like corrosive sublimate, ammonia, and arsenic. But if you had followed Lola's suggestions you would've been fairly safe. Here are a few of her tips:

—sponge the roots of your hair with cold water and brush your hair for ten minutes daily.

—“If you would have the shape ‘sway gracefully on the firmly poised waist’, if you would see the chest rise and swell in noble and healthy expansion, send out the girl to constant and vigorous exercise in the open air.

And what is good for the *girl* is good for the *woman* too.”

—“Cleanliness is a subject of indispensable consideration in the pursuit of a beautiful skin. The frequent use of the tepid bath is the best cosmetic I can recommend to my readers”—

—“the great secret of acquiring a bright and beautiful skin lies in three simple things ... temperance, exercise and cleanliness.”

—“Take equal parts of the seeds of the melon pumpkin, gourd and cucumber, pounded till they are reduced to powder; add to it sufficient fresh cream to dilute the flour, and then add milk enough to reduce the whole to a thin paste. Add a grain of musk, and a few drops of the oil of lemon. Anoint the face with this, leave it on twenty or thirty minutes, or overnight if convenient, and wash off with warm water.

It gives a remarkable purity and brightness to the complexion.”

—“an easy and natural way of warding off wrinkles is frequent ablution, followed by prolonged friction with a dry napkin.”

—“If a woman’s soul is without cultivation, without taste, without refinement, without the sweetness of a happy mind, not all the mysteries of art can ever make her face beautiful.”

—“The Spanish ladies have a custom of squeezing orange juice into their eyes to make them brilliant. The operation is a little painful for a moment but there is no doubt that it does cleanse the eye and impart to it, temporarily, a remarkable brightness. But the best recipe for bright eyes is to keep good hours. Just enough regular and natural sleep is the great enkindler of ‘woman’s most charming light’.”

—“The best tooth powder I know of is made as follows:

Prepared chalk      6 ounces

Cassia powder      ½ ounce

Orris-root          1 ounce

These should be thoroughly mixed and used once a day

with a firm brush.”

—For baldness: “Boxwood shavings    6 ounces

Proof spirit            12 ounces

Spirits of rosemary   2 ounces

Spirits of nutmegs    ½ ounce

The boxwood shavings should be left

to steep in the spirits, at a temperature of sixty degrees (F), for fourteen days, and then the liquid should be strained off and the other ingredients mixed. The scalp to be thoroughly washed or rubbed with this every night and morning.”

—And if all else fails ... “one of the most fascinating women I ever knew had scarcely any other charm to recommend her. She was a young countess in Berlin who had dull eyes, a rough skin, with dingy complexion, coarse, dull hair and a dumpy form. But she had an exquisite voice which charmed everybody who heard it. Ugly as she was, she was called ‘the siren’, from the fascinating sweetness of her voice.”

And voices tend to outlast complexions. So often I see attractive women in the media who have obviously spent a fortune on their faces, their hair, their skin, their shape—and then they open their mouths and something comes out that would shatter glass or they mumble inanities which suggest their vocabulary is limited to ‘yeah’, ‘but’, and ‘like’. The illusion of beauty crumbles ...

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January 18: A. A. Milne

Jon Stallworthy

January 19: Edgar Allan Poe

January 20: Ernesto Cardenal

January 21: R. Hinojosa-Smith

January 22: Lord Byron

January 23: Reuben Darbinian

January 24: Ethel Turner

Keith Douglas

January 25: Robert Burns

January 26: Christopher Hampton

January 27: Lewis Carroll

Tim Jeal

January 28: Colette

January 29: Allan Baillie

January 30: Shirley Hazzard

January 31: Kenzaburo Oe

February 1: Muriel Spark

February 2: James Joyce

February 3: Gertrude Stein

February 4: François Rabelais  
Gavin Ewart

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‘We read Westerman and Henty and Sapper  
and went for seaside walks by the rocks and windy  
boats.’

From ‘Prep School Days’ by Gavin Ewart in  
*The Young Pobble’s Guide to His Shoes*

William Cooper in *Immortality At Any Price* has a character say ‘Several fine writers began as copy-writers. William Trevor’s one. Gavin Ewart’s another. Fay Weldon’s famous for it.’ I haven’t read enough of Gavin Ewart’s work to know whether he qualifies as a ‘fine writer’ but those he refers to as boys’ adventure story writers, such as Westerman and Henty, are dismissed these days, their writing anything but fine. And yet ... I wonder ...

Some of the problems with their books are to do with the times they lived in. Take, for instance, R. M. Ballantyne’s *Coral Island*. This was seen in its time as a rip-roaring adventure book for boys and is still re-printed as a ‘classic’. He writes, “The South Sea Islanders are such incarnate fiends that they are the better of being tamed, and the missionaries are the only men who can do it.” And “It seems to me there’s nothing too fiendish or diabolical for these people to do.” Not very nice. Such aspects run through the hey-day of the boy’s adventure story, the Boy’s Own Annuals and their ilk, the serial papers, and the large hardback offerings with an exciting coloured frontispiece usually showing a boy in peril. And the books themselves often had names like *Grit Will Tell* (R. Stead), *A Lad of Grit* (Percy F. Westerman), and *Tony Maxwell’s Pluck* (Geraldine Mockler). It is an open canon. It can include writers like Ballantyne, Robert Louis Stevenson, W. E. Johns, Leslie Rees, Ivan Southall, Frederick Marryatt, as well as those who were its mainstay like Stanley Weyman, G. A. Henty, Percy Westerman, Harry Collingwood and Atherley Daunt.

The books were popular for boys’ and sometimes girls’ Christmases and birthdays; they were also immensely popular as School and Sunday School prizes. Fairly recently I thought I would buy a couple which would come into this category: *Billets and Bullets* by Hugh St Leger which was given as a prize to Alwynne Rowlands at St John’s Church Sunday School in Launceston in 1919 and *In The Mahdi’s Grasp* by Geo. Manville Fenn which was given as a Sports Prize to Keith Harrex at New Town School in 1935. I assumed this meant New Town High School till I realised the high school was only built after WW2; so Keith was only a little lad in primary school.

They were also staple fare in the old reading books; for instance, a Longman’s British Empire Reader of 1926 says ‘Stanley John Weyman, a widely read writer of the present day, first became known to the world on the publication of his story, **The House of the Wolf**, in 1890. Since that year stories have followed regularly from his pen, many of the most successful having their scene in France. The characters and situations in Mr. Weyman’s stories are always interesting. The stirring incidents that occur in such stories as *A Gentleman of France*, *The Red Cockade*, *Sophia*, *The Long Night*, *Count Hannibal*, *The Abbess of Vlaye*, and many others, account in a large degree for the author’s popularity.’ The Reader contained a piece called “What Passed at the Inn” taken from *A Gentleman of France*.

I bought a book recently on a stall, called *The Adventures of Jack Charrington* by L. E. Tiddeman, which made me ponder over the question of whether it would have been promoted as a ‘boy’s adventure story’ or a ‘children’s book’ as the young hero lives with his widowed father in France and is only seven years old. I thought it would probably be seen as a children’s book. But ... at the back of it there was a puff piece for the publisher’s adventure stories for boys and girls, and it could probably be argued that there was not a general children’s classification, except for picture books, in most publishers’ lists. If a book had boys as heroes it could be classified as ‘boys’ adventure’ regardless of the simplicity or sophistication of the

writing and the plots; and ‘boys’ could be up to about twenty. The publisher, Sampson Low, wrote “Born six years later than Ballantyne, (ie in 1831) George Manville Fenn wrote about a hundred novels, and stories for boys, and these include *The Black Bar*, which is a tale of two midshipmen who lived in the stirring days of the slave trade. Another prime favourite, *Off to the Wilds*, contains the thrilling adventures of two friends in Zulu-land, and Fenn gave us also *Fire Island*, exciting adventures in the Eastern Archipelago. His absorbing tale, *The Silver Cañon*, gives a striking picture of life in the western plains of Mexico. Not only are there brushes with Indians, but narrow escapes from snakes, bisons and bears, and searches for gold.” They go on to say, “In addition to Ballantyne, Fenn and Clark Russell, there are many others who have delighted thousands of girls and boys—Henty with his *Cornet of Horse*, *Jack Archer* and *Winning His Spurs*; Captain Marryat with *Mr. Midshipman Easy*; Harold Avery with *A Boy all Over*, and *A School Story*; Harry Collingwood’s *Under the Meteor Flag*; and other welcome books by Fenimore Cooper, George Cupples, Robert Overton, Michael Scott and others.”

What had those children thought at the time? Were they pleased, delighted, excited by their new book—or did they groan when they saw the size of the school’s offering? (At 248 and 312 pages of small print they can’t be compared to an Enid Blyton or the Hardy Boys.) I don’t know. But the thing that struck me as I read the books was that very few schools would now even think of giving such books to boys of around ten or eleven. It’s not that there aren’t boys around who couldn’t read them. It’s that our whole attitude to what is appropriate for boys has changed. Both books would be seen as far too slow, far too adult, and far too sophisticated ...

*Billets and Bullets* moves at quite a fast pace, the young hero Cecil Forrest joins the army and is sent to Ireland, but is then kidnapped and ends up in Egypt. I think I would’ve quite enjoyed it as, say, an eleven-year-old; and I expect I would’ve found little side bits of information of interest, such as, “Cavalry horses when picketed out are placed in long rows. A heavy peg is driven into the ground at one end of the lines, and to this is attached a stout rope. The rope is then rove through pieces of iron called “D’s,” owing to their shape, which are hammered into other large pegs. These pegs are then driven into the ground, so that a taut rope is stretched the whole length of the lines, and to this the horses are made fast by head ropes; their hind legs are secured by two leather shackles, which are at the end of the heel rope; the other end of this is then secured by a picket peg, which is driven into the ground. In spite of all these precautions, horses soon learn to get loose, and some of the older ones, who are accustomed to camping out, get very crafty. They learn to undo the head rope with their teeth, and then a few vigorous kicks will generally bring up the picket peg which holds their hind legs. When once loose, they usually make the most of their liberty, first attacking the forage which is kept at the end of each set of lines, and then, as soon as they are disturbed, going off for a good gallop” and “The great thing to guard against whilst on the march is sore backs. All cavalry horses are liable to this, owing to the great weight they have to carry. The average weight of a Hussar in marching order is about eighteen stone” ... so much for the Romance of the Cavalry ...

But I found it hard to believe, when I started reading it, that *In the Mahdi’s Grasp* was ever a children’s book. I pictured poor little Jack Harrex struggling over it night by night as his parents stood over him, urging him to appreciate his good fortune in being given a book prize, and little Jack saying, “Must I?” But as I got into the story I quite enjoyed it. Yes, it is old-fashioned in style, and we would regard it as unnecessarily prolix. England is not simply the head of an Empire but all other nations are expected to bend low. But the vocabulary is not difficult and the story moves forward. It is the history behind it which would be the sticking point now, I think, more than the attitudes expressed. George Manville Fenn writes as though the Mahdi and Khartoum, though they play little actual part in the story, were words on everybody’s lips—which in the 1890s they were.

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And thinking on Gavin Ewart—I just came upon a mention of him in *Poetry Today* by Anthony Thwaite who writes, “Gavin Ewart’s poems fall into two long-separated periods. He had a precocious start: some of his early work appeared in *New Verse* when he was in his teens, and his first book (*Poems and Songs*, 1938) had a cheeky freshness, full of the lighter side of Auden — the four lines about Miss Twye soaping her breasts in the bath have become favourite anthology material. Then there was silence, only sporadically interrupted, for over twenty years, until a succession of Ewart publications began to appear in the mid-1960s. The odd thing is that the revived Ewart turns out to be recognizably the same as the old, his humour blacker and more scabrous than before, perhaps, but then we are told we live in permissive times. The formal structures of the poems — their shapes and sizes — are dashingly various: Ewart himself has said that ‘the more technical expertise goes into a poem, as a general rule, the more interesting it is’. He is not primarily interested in ‘importance’ (certainly not if it has to be of a solemn kind), much more in entertainment. In this area, as with comic anecdotes, there isn’t much room for approximation: the target must be hit in the bull or not at all. Here Ewart’s copiousness sometimes fails, and he produces a number of shots that seem literally pointless, jokes that misfire.” Still, Thwaite seems to give him a good batting average. “He continues to be prolific, and his poems get funnier and funnier.”

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February 5: W. E. Johns

February 6: Dermot Bolger

February 7: Charles Dickens

Elizabeth Honet

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Before Christmas I was chatting with someone who had read the latest offering in the Who-Wrote-Shakespeare debate and had been impressed, even convinced. The book was *The Truth Will Out* by Brenda James and William D. Rubinstein.

But a couple of days ago, while I was doing something quiet like watering the garden, I found myself wondering why we don’t call the career of Charles Dickens into question. No one asks Who-Wrote-Dickens. Yet he had no literary tradition in the family, no helpful or influential relations, his schooling was poor and he was sent at twelve to work in a blacking factory. His home life was stressful and chaotic, his father spending time in the debtor’s prison at Marshalsea. And, if anything, Shakespeare probably had a better schooling than Dickens. Yet we do not query the big rich sprawling stories of Dickens, we don’t ask about his extraordinary fertility of imagination, characterisation, and dialogue—even though, unlike Shakespeare, none of his stories are known to be straight adaptations. He may well have been inspired by existing ideas and plots, news items and social scandals, but he never sat down and simply tweaked an existing play into useable form; nor did he, as he researched his stories, lift large segments of historical material in the way we know that Shakespeare lifted material from Holinshed, Hall, and other writers.

(The same could be said of Jane Austen with a little education at the hands of governesses, George Eliot at a small girls’ school in Coventry, or the Brontë sisters. There were university-educated writers in the nineteenth century, George Meredith, Matthew Arnold, Anthony Trollope, and more ... but they have suffered in comparison with the works of Dickens ... )

The answer is probably simple. There were a lot of people who knew what Dickens was doing when he went into his study and came out with the next episode of *Nicholas Nickleby* or *Great Expectations*. Yet the same could be said of Shakespeare *in his time*. The speculation came much later. And if we want to be picky we could make quite a good case for suggesting that Dickens had the help of several interesting ghost-writers and that they simply filled in with episodes in his latest serial when he ran out of time or ideas ...

So what are James and Rubinstein saying? Their candidate is one of the Neville family, Sir Henry Neville, who had eleven children and was for a time Ambassador to France and later

spent nearly two years in the Tower where they suggest he whiled away his time writing a number of Shakespeare's plays. They base their claim on a number of points:

a) that Shakespeare did not have the education or background knowledge to write in European languages or on Italian geography; for example they cite the question of him putting Padua on the coast in 'The Taming of a Shrew', explaining this away by saying that Padua could be reached by river from the coast and therefore this shows intimate knowledge of Italy. Does it? This to me is like an Italian playwright putting Putney on the coast and his supporters explaining it away by pointing out that Putney could be reached by boats coming up and down the Thames. More puzzlingly, they don't engage with the question of ships coming and going in Bohemia. In 'A Winter's Tale' Shakespeare writes: Scene III. Bohemia. A desert Country near the Sea. Antigonus: 'Thou art perfect, then, our ship hath touch'd upon/The deserts of Bohemia'. Sir Henry Neville had visited Prague, so he must have noticed that it was a landlocked and very green country, and it is hard to imagine him writing such a description. The story becomes understandable when its origin is known to be a Polish tale, Poland having a seacoast with long deserted lines of sand dunes which probably seemed bleak and desert-like to sailors, with Shakespeare changing its setting and giving it a fresh twist ...

b) they link the various aspects of Neville's life to the subject matter of the plays (as do Shakespearian scholars to Shakespeare); I think this attempt is misguided. All the playwrights at work in London were essentially 'hacks for hire'. They wrote what they believed audiences wanted to see and managers wanted to put on. James and Rubinstein point out that Shakespeare wrote comedies after the death of his son and that this was unlikely. Why? Every family lost children. Wives died in childbirth. Parents died. Friends died. Business partners died. It was not a healthy age. A playwright refusing to write what his company needed, saying he wasn't in the mood for frivolity, would soon find himself side-lined. Equally, to read important political messages into the plays is problematical—because unless the theatre company was taken fully into Neville's confidence, it could not be counted on to stage the plays at the most telling point. Each play ran for one or occasionally two weeks. If you were unlucky and struck inclement weather or an influenza outbreak then your play was a fizzer. You would most likely do some re-writing, possibly change its name, and re-present it next time the troupe had a gap needing to be filled. So if you wanted to spread sedition then rumours round the taverns would be a far surer way.

c) they ignore the question I hoped they would engage with, that Shakespeare was not *au fait* with the heraldry of the Neville family, giving Richard Neville in 'Henry VI' the Beauchamp rather than the Neville coat-of-arms; for the parvenu Shakespeare to get it wrong, and for actors and audiences not to care, doesn't surprise me—but would a member of the Neville family, steeped in Neville history and Neville traditions, get it wrong? Nor do they engage with the mistakes in 'Macbeth'; John Burke in *A Travellers' History of Scotland* writes "Macbeth did not murder Duncan in his palace at Cawdor in Nairn, since the castle there was not built until the fourteenth century" and Macbeth killed Duncan "on a battlefield, near Elgin" not in a "ghost-ridden Shakespearian castle". Shakespeare probably knew very little Scottish history but Henry Neville would have because the Nevilles were proud of the fact that they descended from Duncan's brother Maldred. It could be argued that the changes were artistic licence—but in that case would a Neville make Duncan such a minor, pathetic, and uninteresting character?

On the other hand they write a lot about Shakespeare not having sufficient skills as a linguist to write in languages other than English; as compared to the multilingual skills of Henry Neville. Of course it begs the question whether ordinary Londoners would want to be served up large slabs of untranslated French or Latin. And call me dense—but I'm blown if I can find where these supposed linguistic skills come into the plays. The Italian plays are not peppered with Italian nor the French plays with French. The characters in Bohemia, Denmark, or Athens remain firmly in English. Macbeth never lapses into his native Gaelic. The only exceptions are a couple of lines of French in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor', and this is of the

level of nursery songs like ‘Frère Jacques’ and ‘Alouette’, a scattering of Latin phrases through the plays but only at the level of schoolboy Latin, and a couple of dozen lines of French in ‘Henry V’ and again this is only at the level of schoolboy French; even I, not a French speaker, could get the gist of it. But I think a key point in discussing the language of the Elizabethan theatre is that the people who flocked to the playhouses were mostly ordinary people who paid over their hard-to-come-by pennies for the privilege of sitting or standing long, cold, often wet hours to be entertained. Would they have made this choice if they couldn’t follow the plays? Now when we face a four hundred year gap and Shakespeare’s English has come to be seen as high culture or a set text while all but the most educated of us use a pared-down language lacking the vivid metaphors and the rich scurrility of the Elizabethans—it is vital to remember that the language of the playwrights was close to the language of ordinary theatregoers. They did not need to be courtiers or scholars to enjoy the plays ... and there would have been no public theatre if education was a requisite ...

d) by all means read *The Truth Will Out* as a lively and interesting biography of an overlooked Elizabethan courtier. But the emphasis on reading notations and scribbles in margins in a particular way seems to me to avoid the key question in all such books. The lonely poet in his attic, the lonely novelist at her bedroom window—these are acceptable—but the lonely playwright in his Tower just doesn’t work. It isn’t essential for the playwright to be there at every rehearsal but a playwright who was *never* available as each new play went into first rehearsal would be a real problem. When the director or the actors complained that a speech left them gasping, that it was losing the audience halfway through, that the ending was too weak ... well, Shakespeare could say, ‘I’ll just nip round and discuss it with Sir Henry in the Tower’ or, as the true author was supposed to be secret, he could say, ‘I’ll just duck home and fix up those lines’; he might get away with it once or twice, while his fellow playwrights would work on the spot to get the lines to play most effectively, but he would soon come to be regarded as an unmitigated nuisance holding up the rehearsals. He could, of course, take it upon himself to make the changes. In which case, by the time Sir Henry received back the children of his solitude in the form of the versions audiences actually saw they would have become step-children; they might even have become unrecognisable. In which case Sir Henry could say, ‘Well, Will, you’ve made a fine hash of these—so you might as well consider publishing them under your own name.’ This only becomes a problem if we insist on seeing Henry Neville as the lone and secret genius.

I think the thing that academics fail to give sufficient weight to is that it was the Elizabethan theatre world as a whole, in all its intimate and energetic communal efforts to keep the theatres supplied, which turned men of mostly modest education and modest backgrounds into playwrights. If we lift one figure out as untenable and thrust in a different figure who by birth and life is markedly unlike all the others then we rip that whole fabric of mutual support, occasional conflict, and constant sharing.

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The curious thing, I realised, when I tracked the book down was that I had already come across Neville in a different context. One day when I was pondering on a remote connection, a man called Winwood Mowet who married my gr-gr-gr-gr-gr-grandfather’s sister, I noticed there was a Winwood in the DNB. So I read the entry in the hope of finding an idea or two. This man, Sir Ralph Winwood, was secretary to Henry Neville and a modest man-of-letters himself. He also took over at the embassy in France after Neville left and later was ambassador in The Hague; he probably knew more about the famous poisoning case of Sir Thomas Overbury than was wise; though he urged a full and open investigation. And he was associated with Sir Walter Raleigh—but died before Raleigh’s fall. He was also a friend of the Bacon family—or he was until he walloped their dog for sitting on the chair *he* wanted to sit on—leading Bacon to rebuke him with ‘Every gentleman loves a dog’! Clearly if either Francis Bacon or Henry Neville was fascinated by the theatre and secretly writing plays for it then he would very likely have known about it. He married a stepdaughter of Sir Thomas Bodley of

Bodleian Library fame but his papers were left at Montagu House in London and some of them were published as 3 volumes in folio by Edmund Sawyer in 1725. But as James and Rubinstein don't quote from them I can only assume they found nothing there to uphold their theory ...

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The problem with reading things into things, secret codes, intimate connections, is that this too forms the basis of Andrew Field's novel which purports to be the 'autobiography' written by Edward de Vere on his deathbed, *The Lost Chronicle of Edward de Vere*, and it doesn't work. As an imaginative novel about the life of a sixteenth century courtier, traveller, poet, chaotic land owner, and head of a 'declining' family it is entertaining—and then, every so often, he remembers that he is really Shakespeare and has to link a line in a play to something in his life at court or realises it's time to mention finishing another play ... *it just doesn't work*.

Yet I don't have any problems with people reading things into plays. Why shouldn't they? And it often opens up new dimensions in the plays themselves and makes for a richer and more interesting experience.

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You can, of course, trace the places where Dickens lived and his birthplace in Portsmouth, his holiday retreat at Broadstairs, and his house in Doughty Street in London are all open to the public. But far better preserved and impressive are the places where Shakespeare lived: the house in Henley Street where he was born in Stratford, a solid house with a large garden (strictly speaking we don't know for absolute certain that he was born there—women sometimes returned home to be with mothers and sisters for a birth—but it was the family's address at the time), the big two-storey Tudor farmhouse at Wilmcote where his mother Mary Arden was born with its farm buildings and some of its land, Anne Hathaway's cottage at Shottery (which far from being a cottage is a sizeable home), the substantial three-storey house Hall's Croft where Shakespeare's daughter Susanna lived, and the attractive three-storey Nash's House where Susanna's daughter Elizabeth Nash lived. The Grammar School also still exists. But the large house that Shakespeare bought in 1597, New Place, was pulled down in 1759. The curious thing is that Shakespeare was honoured by Stratford within his lifetime and that within twenty years of his death Stratford was known as 'a towne most remarkeable for the birth of famous William Shakespeare' and that pilgrims were starting to come there to see his home and grave; though it seems to have been Shakespeare the poet they came to honour; probably because playwriting attracted far fewer kudos. It was the play, the actors, the atmosphere, the excitement, not the writer, which brought people to the theatre ...

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But the more I thought on the parallels between Dickens and Shakespeare the more I thought they are instructive. Dickens learned his trade not at university but by taking down parliamentary speeches in shorthand and transcribing and reporting on them; hard constant work but in a world of dramatic and bullish confidence and magnificently verbose politicians. Shakespeare possibly found work when he first arrived in London copying out parts for the actors in a world where each play ran only a week or two, (for instance, the Chamberlain's Men put on around a hundred plays per year), where it was cursorily rehearsed, where sets and props and costumes were minimal (no Scottish moors with fog, no large black cauldrons with smoky fire, no wonderfully-made-up witches to evoke horror, though kings and courtiers got some fine costumes to express their grandeur); the Elizabethan theatre, like a nineteenth-century parliament, depended on the great rolling ever-constant swell of words as the justification for its existence. And reliable hard-working copyists were always in demand.

And they both came from what James Shapiro calls a 'middling' world. As do almost all great writers of the English-speaking world. The very poor, the labourers and carters and dairymaids, could rarely acquire sufficient education or leisure to write. The very rich had estates, hobbies, places at court, the hard work of writing rarely led them into anything more than occasional poems, essays, or masques.

From Chaucer, son of a vintner who started his working life as a page, to Dickens, whose father was a clerk in the naval dockyard at Portsmouth, and who started his working life wrapping and carrying parcels in that blacking factory, almost all the names we remember have similar backgrounds, in trade, the lower echelons of the church, modest landowners, or some sort of office work. Shapiro in his interesting book *1599* places Shakespeare in that space between the first flush of remembered playwrights and the emerging practitioners. So there are in effect three groups there (though with a lot of overlap) and I thought it would be interesting to look at the backgrounds of his groupings.

#### First group:

Thomas Kyd. His father was a scrivener (a clerk or copyist) in London and he started out in the same work.

John Lyly. He went to Oxford but seems to have lived a hand-to-mouth existence, depending on some patronage from Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford.

Christopher Marlowe. His father was a shoemaker. He trained as a lawyer.

George Peele. His father was a salter and clerk and bookkeeper at Christ's Hospital in London where he received his education before leading a dissipated life in and around the theatre world.

Robert Greene. He came from a comfortably-off provincial family and considered studying medicine but instead he married, spent his wife's dowry, then abandoned her. He died in poverty in London.

#### Second group:

Henry Chettle. His father was a dyer and he began his working life as a stationer's apprentice.

William Shakespeare. His father was a glover who dealt in grain and wool and was a landowner and public official in a modest way.

John Day. He went to university but did not graduate.

George Chapman. He too went to university but did not graduate. He gained some patronage and support from Lady Walsingham. He is better known for his translation of Homer than for his plays; his translation described as having 'many and grievous' errors but attaining great popularity for its energy and style.

Richard Hathaway. He is said to have a Warwickshire background but it isn't known for certain if there is any connection to the family of Shakespeare's wife though he *is* described as being of the Shottery Hathaways. He wrote most of his plays in various partnerships.

William Haughton. His background isn't known for certain and most of his plays were never printed.

John Marston. From a Shropshire family, probably minor landed gentry. He trained for the law but preferred the theatre and later became a clergyman.

Anthony Munday. His father was a draper and he started out as a stationer's apprentice.

Henry Porter. His background remains unknown.

Robert Wilson. His background isn't known for certain but he married in London in 1606 and died there in 1610. He appears to have lived his life in near poverty.

#### Third group:

Michael Drayton. He began his career as a page and probably came from a minor landowning family.

John Ford. His father was probably a gentleman farmer and he was trained as a lawyer.

Ben Jonson. His father had owned some land which he lost under Mary Tudor. His stepfather was a master bricklayer.

Thomas Dekker. His parents aren't known for certain. Tradition links him to the Merchant Taylors' Guild.

Thomas Heywood. Possibly from a Lincolnshire squire background.

One thing that struck me as I read through these bios was what a shared activity the theatre was; sometimes as many as six playwrights worked on the one play. Another thing was how little material we really have. Between about a fifth and a third of the plays 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century audiences got to see have been lost. That we appear to have all of Shakespeare's production suggests that he was more businesslike and careful than most of his fellow dramatists. And the third thing is that sense of shared material; almost all the plays and poems that went the rounds were constant reworkings. Not only were there precursors for 'Hamlet', 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Dr Faustus', 'Othello' and many others. Not only did other playwrights besides Shakespeare lift large segments from Holinshed and Hall for their history plays. There were versions and yet more versions of almost everything. Thomas Dekker had his own version of 'Troilus and Cressida'. John Marston put out his version of 'Venus and Adonis'. Several others had versions of the 'Rape of Lucrece'. John Day put out his version of 'The Spanish Moor's Tragedy', as did others, and later used Shylock as an inspiration for his own writings. Anthony Munday produced a piece 'The Orator' in 1596 based on a French book translated in 1590 which contained "the declamation of the Jew who would have his pound of flesh". Robert Wilson in his 1584 piece 'Three Ladies of London' includes: "One episode deals with the effort of a Jewish creditor Gerontus, to recover a debt from an Italian merchant, Mercatore." And Robert Greene's 1588 play 'Pandosto', based on a Polish story, provided the plot for Shakespeare's 'The Winter's Tale' ...

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If we have problems with Shakespeare's background then it seems to me these problems are doubled when we come to Aphra Behn. We do not know for sure when or where she was born but her parents are thought to be Bartholomew Johnson, a barber, and Elizabeth Denham who was possibly employed for a short time by the Colepepper family. We know almost nothing of Aphra's married life and very little about her time spent in Surinam and later in Amsterdam as an alleged spy for Charles II. It was the debts she incurred when the king failed to pay her that led her to try her hand at playwriting in the hope of making some money. There is no indication that she ever attended a school or had a governess. Yet she read and wrote fluent French and had some Latin, also possibly some Dutch. She isn't a great writer but she had around twenty plays performed, as well as writing stories, essays, and poems. Women had just got a toe-hold in the theatre but there was certainly no welcome mat out for them.

Like other playwrights she re-worked existing material. Her own style shows great facility with language, a ready wit, and a quality of easy banter which is attractive. For example:

'And this man you must kiss, nay you must kiss none but him too — and nuzzle through his beard to find his lips. — And this you must submit to for threescore years, and all for a jointure.' (Hellena in 'The Rover')

'I thought this a better venture than to turn sharpening bully, cully in prentices and country-squires, with my pocket full of false dice, your high and low flats and bars, or turn broker to young heirs; take up goods, to pay tenfold at the death of their fathers, and take fees on both sides, or set up all night at the Groom-Porter's begging his honour to go a guinea the better of the lay. No, Friendly, I had rather starve abroad than live pitied and despised at home.' (Hazard in 'The Widow Ranter')

'By this time you have liked, or damned our plot;  
Which though I know, my Epilogue knows not:  
For if it could foretell, I should not fail,  
In decent wise, to thank you, or to rail.  
But he who sent me here, is positive,  
This farce of government is sure to thrive;  
Farce is a food as proper for your lips,

As for green-sickness, crumpled tobacco pipes.  
 Besides, the author's dead, and here you sit,  
 Like the infernal judges of the pit:  
 Be merciful; for 'tis in you this day,  
 To save or damn her soul; and that's her play.  
 She who so well could love's kind passion paint,  
 We piously believe, must be a saint:  
 Men are but bunglers, when they would express  
 The sweets of love, the dying tenderness;  
 But women, by their own abundance, measure,  
 And when they write, have deeper sense of pleasure.  
 Yet though her pen did to the mark arrive,  
 'Twas common praise, to please you, when alive;  
 But of no other woman you have read,  
 Except this one, to please you, now she's dead.  
 'Tis like the fate of bees, whose golden pains,  
 Themselves extinguished, in their hive remains.  
 Or in plain terms to speak, before we go,  
 What you young gallants, by experience, know,  
 This is an orphan child; a bouncing boy,  
 'Tis late to lay him out, or to destroy.  
 Leave your dog-tricks, to lie and to forswear,  
 Pay you for nursing, and we'll keep him here.' (Epilogue to 'The Widow Ranter')

The obstacles in the way of a woman from a poor and uneducated background bringing successful plays to fruition in the late 1600s seem so many and so large that I can't help wondering why no one has ever asked: Who Wrote Aphra Behn?

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An interesting question that often comes up is: what kind of resources can we realistically expect people in different eras and different walks of life to have had access to, how important are resources in the creative process, and how important was ownership of a resource ... and to what extent is education itself an owned resource ...

I was thinking on this vaguely one day while I was tidying my bookshelf and I found that if I removed my East Timor books, which I mainly bought for the use of the Hobart East Timor Committee, I owned about sixty-five books. How important were they to the process of creation? I have drawn on more than half of them in the process of creating writer's calendars but most of them are also available in libraries; ownership is not the vital aspect ... apart from the pleasure I might get in being able to browse at any time ...

More interestingly, I came upon a curious insight while I was reading in Harold Schonberg's *The Lives of the Great Composers*; in particular, the life of Mili Balakirev and the famous circle of Russian composers he created and nurtured, the best known being Mussorgsky, Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Borodin. Schonberg writes, "His friend and fellow student, the violinist Peter Dmitrievitch Baborikin, attested to the fact that Balakirev owned not a single book on harmony, orchestration, or theory." He did however have determination, a good ear, and a deep love of music. "They sat directly at Balakirev's feet. Their curriculum and method of study would have brought tears to the eyes of a good German professor. Lacking books, lacking basic knowledge, they simply leaned on each other and against Balakirev. They would get whatever scores they could, from Bach through Berlioz and Liszt, playing through them, analyzing their form, taking the pieces apart and putting them together again. Perhaps that is not a bad way to study music. They criticized one another's works, helped one another compose, advanced in tiny steps. They were a close-knit group, and two of them, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, actually roomed together for a while. As Borodin wrote, "In the relations within our circle, there is not a shadow of envy, conceit or selfishness. Each is made

sincerely happy by the smallest success of another.” Schonberg goes on to say, “Self-taught and proud of it, they defiantly made a virtue of their liabilities” and speaking personally I think the composing of a symphony or an opera is a harder proposal than composing a play or a novel. But as I was pondering on this I felt that we don’t give enough weight either to the different ways people learnt their trades or the different ways in which people co-operated. We much prefer to dwell on conflict; Robert Greene describing Shakespeare as an ‘upstart crow’ is more dramatic than those who no doubt enjoyed the chance to bounce ideas around and share a sense of support and camaraderie; we tend to look at the conflicts Dickens had with a variety of people rather than the sense of support. Now we see a ‘book’ education as essential. But when I think of Dickens turning speech into shorthand and then back into longhand for the printers—or Shakespeare working as dogsbody in the theatre and gaining a good understanding of how a play is put together, rehearsed, and presented—I cannot help feeling that both the very individualistic and competitive nature of modern creativity and the degree of specialisation which rarely allows people to learn something about everything is worlds away from the creative processes of the past ...

I think all Shakespearean scholarship is riven by assumptions and all of his plays can be used to provide symbols to bolster almost any claim and any position; but that, if we want to look at any other career in the fluid confines of the sixteenth century, can be said equally of his contemporaries where again we see assumptions and symbols and obliqueness everywhere.

Dickens as a man interested in everything and energetically engaged in the life of his era was in good company. But the curious thing is that his career is, if anything, more remarkable than Shakespeare’s, his origins more humble and his disadvantages greater. So who will offer to become the first in a cavalry charge of ‘Who Wrote Dickens’ books?

\* \* \* \* \*

February 8: Martin Flanagan  
Vivienne Wallington

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James David Fahn wrote in *A Land on Fire*, “The best examples of how land speculation in Asia can devolve into a life-and-death issue are the fierce battles waged over golf course development. They’ve led to murder in the Philippines, where three villagers opposing the construction of a golf resort at the beachfront community of Hacienda Looc were killed. They’ve led to riots in northern Vietnam, where a demonstration by villagers in Tho Da hamlet against a Korean-backed project was violently broken up by the police, leading to the accidental death of a female protestor. Some of the bitterest fighting has taken place on Java, in Indonesia. In the village of Rancamaya, golf resort developers displaced 1,000 families; and in Cijayanti, more than 300 families were forced to move. The Cijayanti conflict turned violent when some villagers tried to re-occupy their land, beating up security guards and burning down a construction camp in the process.” The conflict is not confined to Asia. Deaths have also occurred in Mexico and evictions in Hawaii. “Nevertheless, the fiercest opposition to golf seems to be in Asia, where a loose network of grass roots anti-golf activists from all over the region has coalesced to form the Global Anti-Golf Movement (GAGM). What is it about this seemingly innocuous game that makes it so violently controversial? After all, one of the things golfers like about the sport is the chance to relax amidst green and pleasant surroundings. What could be so harmful about grass, trees, lakes, and sand bunkers?”

But golf, developed on the cool grass of Scotland, creates many problems when transplanted holus-bolus to the tropics. A monoculture of permanently green grass requires the removal of trees, massive inputs of water (often at the expense of farmers and villagers), fertilisers and herbicides which can contaminate groundwater. But it is the context which is often more damaging. Golf is frequently played against a backdrop of class conflict, crony capitalism, money laundering, prostitution, corruption, discrimination, intrusion into national parks, loss of bio-diversity, the skewing of development, and secrecy. “In Asia, they’ve become settings for crooked deals. In Thailand, for instance, it’s said that many of the

country's military coups were plotted on its golf courses, which are sometimes built as a result of crooked deals themselves."

But "Land is the key to the conflict about golf in Asia. Most of the other issues can probably be resolved, at least in the more democratic countries. Now that Thailand is facing chronic water shortages, developers increasingly accept the need to arrange for their own water supplies, either by building reservoirs or practicing greater conservation. Greenkeepers may also turn to integrated pest management techniques to reduce the use of chemical inputs (although some will probably always be necessary given the demand for spotless greens and the use of foreign grasses). But Asia is so densely populated, and land so precious, that golf course development is likely to remain a visceral issue. That golf in most of Asia is seen as an imported game, one turning farmland and forests into immaculately groomed private parks catering to foreigners, adds a whiff of nativism to the debate and makes it even more emotional. As a result, the conflict about golf has become symbolic of tourism in general: On the surface it seems harmless, even beneficial to the environment, but underneath are some truly troubling issues."

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"Broadcast promotions are governed by the Independent Television Commission's code, which insists that 'no advertisement may show partiality as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy'. This regulation does not appear to apply to corporate campaigns presenting partial accounts of controversial business activities, such as those commissioned by the nuclear and oil industries. It does, however, apply to pressure groups.

"In 1999, the campaigning organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals commissioned an advert to be broadcast on Sky Sport during National Fishing Week, in which it was to relay the shocking intelligence that fish feel pain when they are hooked. The advertisement was banned by the ITC, on the basis that it was 'political'. Interestingly, a few months before, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children had run a campaign on national television campaigning against child abuse. This was judged to be non-political. One thing distinguishes the politics of the two campaigns. No one sells child-abusing kits, or organizes a National Child Catching Week. The NSPCC ad, in other words, offends no legitimate vested interests."

(George Monbiot in *Captive State*)

Richard North in *The Animal's Report* wrote "The evidence certainly was that a fish's mouth can feel pain. And what was even more shocking, perhaps because one didn't expect it, there was evidence that a fish's scales are covered by a sensitive membrane. They are probably in terrible pain while they are being handled, and often develop sores and fungi once they've been handled out of water." I know many people in the world would go hungry without fish. But need is one thing. Calling fishing a sport always strikes me as another. How can it be a sport when the aim is to catch and kill a live creature, by the very painful means of getting a sharp metal hook through the tender skin of its upper mouth? And then to stand with the creature held up, its whole weight dragging on that hook, writhing in agony, while you photograph it? The tragedy for fish is surely that they have been denied a voice. In all meanings ...

The most famous fishing treatise must be Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, first published in 1653. He wrote it in the form of dialogues and monologues, sometimes the fisherman chats with a huntsman and a falconer, sometimes he gives his own disquisitions on all aspects of fishing. But he never refers to fishing as a Sport. It is an Art and a Recreation. "O, Sir, doubt not but that Angling is an art; is it not an art to deceive a Trout with an artificial Fly" a Trout! that is more sharp-sighted than any Hawk you have named, and more watchful and timorous than your high-mettled Merlin is bold? and yet, I doubt not to catch a brace or two to-morrow, for a friend's breakfast: doubt not therefore, Sir, but that angling is an art, and an art worth your learning. The question is rather, whether you be capable of learning it? for

angling is somewhat like poetry, men are to be born so: I mean, with inclinations to it, though both may be heightened by discourse and practice: but he that hopes to be a good angler, must not only bring an inquiring, searching, observing wit, but he must bring a large measure of hope and patience, and a love and propensity to the art itself; but having once got and practiced it, then doubt not but angling will prove to be so pleasant, that it will prove to be, like virtue, a reward to itself.” This would seem to assure fish a place in heaven ...

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One day I saw a stall in aid of refugees which had a small box of books on it. I went over in hopes—but to my surprise everything in the box was about cricket. Not being a cricket fan but wanting to help the stall-holders I bought two collections of cricket stories and eventually passed them on to cricketing friends. The curious thing was that although some of the stories had famous authors none of them grabbed me. It was almost as though the sedateness of the game had undermined the possible excitement of fictional cricket.

I should possibly whisper it—but I much preferred Bill Bryson when he wrote in *Down Under* of traveling across NSW and gradually losing stations from the car radio. “Eventually the radio dial presented only an uninterrupted cat’s hiss of static, but for one clear spot near the end of the dial. At first I thought that’s all it was — just an empty clear spot — but then I realized I could hear the faint shiftings and stirrings of seated people, and after quite a pause a voice, calm and reflective, said:

‘Pilchard begins his long run in from north stump. He bowls and ... oh, he’s out! Yes, he’s got him. Longwilley is caught leg-before in middle slops by Grattan. Well, now what do you make of that, Neville?’

‘That’s definitely one for the books, Bruce. I don’t think I’ve seen offside medium slow fast bowling to match it since Baden-Powell took Rangachangabanga for a maiden ovary at Bangalore in 1948.’

‘I had stumbled into the surreal and rewarding world of cricket on the radio.

“After years of patient study (and with cricket there can be no other kind) I have decided that there is nothing wrong with the game that the introduction of golf carts wouldn’t fix in a hurry. It is not true that the English invented cricket as a way of making all other human endeavours look interesting and lively; that was merely an unintended side effect. I don’t wish to denigrate a sport that is enjoyed by millions, some of them awake and facing the right way, but it is an odd game. It is the only sport that incorporates meal breaks. It is the only sport that shares its name with an insect. It is the only sport in which spectators burn as many calories as players (more if they are moderately restless). It is the only competitive activity of any type, other than perhaps baking, in which you can dress in white from head to toe and be as clean at the end of the day as you were at the beginning.

“Imagine a form of baseball in which the pitcher, after each delivery, collects the ball from the catcher and walks slowly with it out to centre field; and that there, after a minute’s pause to collect himself, he turns and runs full tilt towards the pitcher’s mound before hurling the ball at the ankles of a man who stands before him wearing a riding hat, heavy gloves of the sort used to handle radioactive isotopes, and a mattress strapped to each leg. Imagine moreover that if this batsman fails to hit the ball in a way that heartens him sufficiently to try to waddle sixty feet with mattresses strapped to his legs he is under no formal compulsion to run; he may stand there all day, and, as a rule, does. If by some miracle he is coaxed into making a misstroke that leads to his being put out, all the fielders throw up their arms in triumph and have a hug. Then tea is called and everyone retires happily to a distant pavilion to fortify for the next siege. Now imagine all this going on for so long that by the time the match concludes autumn has crept in and all your library books are overdue. There you have cricket.

“But it must be said there is something incomparably soothing about cricket on the radio. It has much the same virtues as baseball on the radio — an unhurried pace, a comforting devotion to abstruse statistics and thoughtful historical rumination, exhilarating micro-moments of real action — but stretched across many more hours and with a lushness of

terminology and restful elegance of expression that even baseball cannot match. Listening to cricket on the radio is like listening to two men sitting in a rowing boat on a large placid lake on a day when the fish aren't biting; it's like having a nap without losing consciousness. It actually helps not to know quite what's going on. In such a rarified world of contentment and inactivity, comprehension would become a distraction.

'So here comes Stovepipe to bowl on this glorious summer's afternoon at the MCG,' one of the commentators was saying now. 'I wonder if he'll chance an offside drop scone here or go for the quick legover. Stovepipe has an unusual delivery in that he actually leaves the grounds and starts his run just outside the Carlton & United Brewery at Kooyong.'

'That's right, Clive. I haven't known anyone start his delivery that far back since Stopcock caught his sleeve on the reversing mirror of a number 11 bus during the third test at Brisbane in 1957 and ended up at Goondiwindi four days later owing to some frightful confusion over a changed timetable at Toowoomba Junction.'

"After a very long silence while they absorbed this thought, and possibly stepped out to transact some small errands, they resumed with a leisurely discussion of the English fielding. Neasden, it appeared, was turning in a solid performance at square bowler, while Packet had been a stalwart in the dribbles, though even these exemplary performances paled when set beside the outstanding play of young Hugh Twain-Buttocks at middle nipple. The commentators were in calm agreement that they had not seen anyone caught behind with such panache since Tandoori took Rogan Josh for a stiffy at Vindaloo in '61. At last Stovepipe, having found his way over the railway line at Flinders Street — the footbridge was evidently closed for painting — returned to the stadium and bowled to Hasty, who deftly turned the ball away for a corner. This was repeated four times more over the next two hours and then one of the commentators pronounced: 'So as we break for second luncheon, and with 11,200 balls remaining, Australia are 962 for two not half and England are four for a duck and hoping for rain.'

"I may not have all the terminology exactly right, but I believe I have caught the flavour of it. The upshot was that Australia was giving England a good thumping, but then Australia pretty generally does. In fact, Australia pretty generally beats most people at most things."

He may have been getting worried; Australians are very touchy. They don't like other people poking fun. So he launches forth and extols Australian sporting prowess for a large paragraph. But then he cannot resist returning to cricket.

"No, the mystery of cricket is not that Australians play it well, but that they play it at all. It has always seemed to me a game much too restrained for the rough-and-tumble Australian temperament. Australians much prefer games in which brawny men in scanty clothing bloody each other's noses. I am quite certain that if the rest of the world vanished overnight and the development of cricket was left in Australian hands, within a generation the players would be wearing shorts and using the bats to hit each other.

"And the thing is, it would be a much better game for it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Martin Flanagan is a thoughtful commentator on sport, a dedicated writer of good prose, a man concerned about justice and race relations and fleshing out the bare bones of tactics and results to present real people and real emotions. Much more common, and probably more popular, is the larrikin loudmouth knockabout style of commentators like Max Walker. I often come across his books—from *How to Hypnotize Chooks*, *How to This, That and the Other* to the one I got at a sale the other day *How to Puzzle a Python*—in libraries, bookstores, and op-shops. So I finally got around to reading one to see what makes Walker popular.

In fact I found it rather heavy going, the writing and the humour rather laboured ... "It was indeed an experience for a 'first timer' in England when I was invited to a little pub in Northampton in 1975 to meet Colin (Ollie) Milburn, the charismatic cutter of a cricket ball ... he hated running between wickets so fours and sixes were his game!

The circle of listeners under his spell in the cocktail lounge that night consisted of a few young ladies and about eight lucky Australian cricketers including yours truly.

After swapping many stories and yarns, Ollie proclaimed, “Jeezus, somebody’s nicked off with my eye! Strewth, has anyone seen it?”

Sure enough, one eye was missing ...! The limp lid had dropped down over the empty cavity like a roller door with lashes. However the working unit was alert and sparkled with a mischievous expectancy. A sense of devious fun was the best way to describe his manner.

He suspected all the players first ... one by one he blatantly ‘quizzed’ em. Even Doug Walters didn’t even have a comeback ... Dougie continued to drag on his fag and turn his glass of amber fluid towards the light to get a better view of the explosion of tiny bubbles as they headed for the white frothy blanket half way up.

Finally Ollie asked one of the women. The one sitting next to the infamous British joker stated categorically that she hadn’t sighted it despite the best possible view. He disagreed and swore in a most remarkable tone of voice that she’d pinched it ... his remaining eye-ball locked into an accusing gaze which took on the proportion of a stare during the brief discussion about his missing ‘marble’ eye.

Eventually everyone guessed what he was on about. Like a magician he kept the gathering spellbound ... each now waited for him to produce the marble from his special hiding place.

Then he did just that! Hey presto ... “There it is!”

“Where!” enquired the young woman next to him as she had a tiny taste of her brandy and dry ginger ale. Ollie leaned across to his left ... eye darting to all quadrants of the circle of friends for acknowledgement. Then he placed one hand around the clutching fingers of the girl’s right hand to steady her drink and delved deep into the tumbler of ice-blocks and golden grog.

The shape of the women’s face dropped a few inches below the bottom jaw in horrible expectation and total disbelief.

She realised that she had been silently sipping away on her drink while all the time the missing eyeball that Ollie now had retrieved with his index finger and thumb had been rolling around in the bottom of her glass with the ice cubes. “UUUUUUCKKKKKHHHH!!

She wasn’t sure whether she wanted to be physically sick or grin through clenched teeth in brave acceptance that she’d been had.

Ollie calmed her by suggesting there was no chance of catching germs from his coloured agate ... it was always clean ... and proceeded to demonstrate ...

“Look!” he said, as he popped it into his mouth. A quick suck or two to make sure he could ‘see’ out of it, up went the garage door — nobody home and the lights are out — then he hesitated ...

“Before I pop it back where it ought to be, would you like a taste?” he suggested to his squirming female companion who had now separated the brandy glass from her taste buds by as far as her arm could reach. By now her mouth was pumping copious quantities of saliva out from under her tongue to flush away the lingering taste of a stranger’s eye ball!

Even with only one eye Colin Milburn could see he may have pushed his players prank just a little too far. She was the equal to this ‘delivery’, deemed it short of a good length and consequently hit it for six with the comment. “It’s not funny ... I hate you!” Got up and stormed out. A budding friendship nipped in the bud.”

And for a man billed as ‘Australia’s Best Selling Author’ I think he could afford the services of a good proof-reader.

\* \* \* \* \*

Andrew Jennings wrote in *Foul* of the skullduggery going on in FIFA, the governing body for international soccer. And some of the stories are deeply disturbing. He introduces his book with these words:

Click, click, click

Candid snapshots from inside world football's fortress  
But stop  
That's not allowed in the villa up on Sunny Hill

They say it's the people's game  
Don't ask, how much the boss pays himself  
Or who got the kickback, who got the contract  
Don't ask, who got all those World Cup tickets

They're based in Switzerland  
Where whistle-blowing is a crime  
Their documents are forever hidden  
Nobody ever gets the evidence

This isn't a history of FIFA  
Just a taste of the truth  
Here are snapshots of how it really is  
How it's been for the last quarter century  
For the good of the game.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter is the incumbent of Sunny Hill; a man who first made headlines by becoming president of the World Society of Friends of Suspenders, a group of pathetic men who want to get women back into suspender belts. Like headscarves I believe men should spend a couple of years wearing suspenders before they tell women to wear them.

But that was only a minor sidetrack in his rise to the top of FIFA and the power, cronyism, secrecy, and corruption he has presided over. It seems astonishing to me that soccer fans around the world cannot find out what salary he draws each year—even though they are the ones who pay to keep FIFA debatably viable. But the saddest little story Jennings tells comes from the small Caribbean island of Antigua.

The little countries are as important in keeping Sepp Blatter in power as larger ones and FIFA dispensed a million dollars in largesse to the tiny nation; the money to be spent on developing the game, the players' skills, and the facilities. The local association was run by a man called Chet Greene, the nation's Minister for Sport, who with several cronies managed to divert large sums of money into their own pockets. They demanded large numbers of tickets to World Cups—and jetted off to them after billing the local association for them—they took supposedly fact-finding missions to Brazil and the USA, they gave themselves massive salaries—and put off local coaches on the grounds that there wasn't enough money to pay their wages. Jennings writes of visiting what was to be developed as their oval for local games: 'I visited the site where the pitch was planned and saw horses grazing in rough scrub alongside a wrecked beer lorry.' When he tried to question Chet Greene he was threatened with physical violence. But local reporter Ian Hughes of the Antigua *Sun* started digging and discovered the FIFA grants or, at least, the faint whiff of their trail as they headed into private bank accounts.

The local football association finally wrote to FIFA to ask for their help. They received no reply. Chet Greene was part of a wider web of nepotism, cronyism, and corruption across the Caribbean. FIFA HQ was not going to risk seeing it unravel or be made public. The local association almost in despair wrote to Switzerland again.

Jennings writes, 'At last FIFA responded. Not with help, but with a devastating blow for honest Antiguan footballers, fans and officials.' On the '20 March 2003 'The FIFA Emergency Committee has decided to suspend the Antigua & Barbuda Football Association,' announced Markus Siegler. Blatter's mouthpiece claimed 'the current chaotic situation in the administration of football in this country was preventing the national association from assuming its duties correctly.' He didn't explain what this meant.

‘As word of the suspension spread around the island, young men wept in sorrow and disbelief. Antigua’s Under-23 squad were due to compete in the regional qualifying tournament for the Athens Olympic games. Now their Olympic dreams were dashed. Football supporters on the island petitioned IOC president Jacques Rogge. Didn’t the IOC claim to stand up for the right of athletes to perform their sports?’

‘The petition said, ‘The athletes of Antigua & Barbuda Under-23 squad who through no fault of their own have been removed arbitrarily from the Olympic qualifying matches are now in deep despair as most of them will be too old to ever again compete in future Olympics. The team manager Mr Thadeus Price puts it into the proper perspective when he says, “The squad is hurting and Antigua and Barbuda is hurting.”’

‘Antigua is small but it produces world-beaters. The petition was signed by former West Indies Cricket captain Sir Viv Richards, one of the greatest batsmen the game has ever seen, and fellow Windies team members Curtly Ambrose, Kenny Benjamin and Andy Roberts. Former world middleweight boxing champ Maurice Hope signed up and so did Maritza Marten Garcia, the Cuban discus Gold medallist in Barcelona who coached in the island. Most of Antigua’s religious leaders and members of all political parties added their signatures along with representatives of most of the soccer clubs.

‘IOC President Jacques Rogge sent Blatter the mildest of letters asking him to explain why these athletes were being excluded, and left it at that. Blatter, who is also an IOC member sworn to uphold athletes’ rights, replied that FIFA was sending a delegation to Antigua ‘to look at the situation’. He didn’t say when. So a generation of Antigua’s finest were denied their one chance to compete at the Olympics. Sepp was there in Athens, beaming as usual from the VIP box.’

\* \* \* \* \*

Sport, I always feel, should be humane, fair, challenging, honest, open ... in other words ... SPORTING. And in the days before sport attracted money, professionals, sponsorship, major media, it probably was. I’m sure tempers flared on rough pitches and rudimentary courses. I’m sure there were times of bribery and rigging. But for many people sport was simply fun, relaxation, a welcome relief from long working hours and unpleasant working conditions; winning was nice but the chance to be out under blue sky and warm sun with family and friends and a picnic basket on the sidelines mattered more.

Dick Francis made a career out of writing novels on the corruption in horse-racing, other mystery writers have used golf, mountain-climbing, car racing, even croquet (!) as settings for skullduggery, our media seems to depend on the bad behaviour, on and off the field, of football players. News items regularly deal with brawls and riots in stadiums.

Recently I decided to do a snapshot of news coverage of sport. Over four days I got this outline:

WIN TV: 1. AFL Adult Males. 2. Local Footie Adult Males. 3. Golf Adult Males. 4. Cycling Adult Males. 5. Netball Adult Females.

SBS: 1. Cycling Adult Males. 2. Golf Adult Males. 3. AFL Adult Males. 4. NRL Adult Males. 5. International Rugby Adult Males. 6. Athletics Adult Males.

ABC: 1. AFL Adult Males. 2. VFL Adult Males. 3. Golf Adult Males. 4. Cycling Adult Males. 5. Motor Cycling Adult Males. 6. Motor Racing Adult Males. 7. Athletics Adult Males & Females.

Southern Cross: 1. Walking Adult Males. 2. AFL Adult Males. 3. TFL Adult Males. 4. Golf Adult Males. 5. Motorcycling Adult Males. 6. Car racing Adult Males. 7. Cycling Adult Males. 8. Basketball Adult Males & Females. 9. Running Adult Males & Females.

It is always said in justification for the dominance of men in sports coverage that they are presenting the most exciting and most professional sport. But in the case of news coverage this simply isn’t so. The majority of those stories dealt with changes to teams and coaches, bad behaviour on and off the field, money issues, drugs, racism, and other dramas. And the one thing which makes for gripping television is where the teams are very close in ability, where

there are nail-biting finishes, where the lead changes hands. Most of those stories would not qualify on any of those counts. But the thing which struck me as most worrying was that none of the sports stories carried on those four channels dealt with children. Effectively we are training our children to be passive spectators, children who will grow up to be fans rather than players.

If children regularly saw themselves and other children out there enjoying sport on the evening news then the idea that doing something energetic and physical is in the nature of having to eat your spinach would be undermined. I would *far* rather see children having a go in all kinds of sports on the evening news than hear endless dreary items about footie celebrities having stoushes in pubs or bashing their girlfriends ... Surely I am not alone in this?

\* \* \* \* \*

The most famous sporting paper, or at least the most distinctive, was undoubtedly the *Pink 'Un*, or, to be precise, the *Sporting Times*; its nickname coming from the colour of its newsprint. "The "Pink 'Un" was first printed on pink paper in April 1876, a faint rose-pink, a stock of which the office economist had bought as a cheap bargain. As the colour, however, caught on, it was retained permanently." I came across a copy of *Old Pink 'Un Days* by J. B. Booth in a second-hand bookshop and was curious enough to buy it.

It is written in a kind of clubby shorthand which assumes that readers will have heard of most of the people mentioned; which, of course, is no longer true. He writes, "On February eleventh, 1865, a doctor, with a passion for horse-breeding, and a hatred, amounting to an obsession, for "the accursed Blacklock blood," produced the first number of his paper: a small, white, eight-page sheet entitled *The Sporting Times*, and further described as "A Chronicle of Racing, Literature, Art and the Drama," price twopence."

Doctor Shorthouse did not like doctoring but neither did he see himself as an expert on the Turf; he was responding more to a perceived need in the community of racegoers. "From the first the paper seems to have attracted attention, and the Doctor harangued to his heart's delight against his *bête noire* in the equine world, the "damned Blacklock," the "cur," the "soft-hearted." Diatribes against "the damnable poison," and "the unscrupulous partisans of the Blacklock blood," appeared in well-nigh every issue, and sandwiched in the most ordinary account of a race appears such a sentence as: "Siberia is just such a wretch as we expected to find her, and being one of the accursed Blacklocks we were not surprised at her inglorious exhibition." Again: "The victory of Salpinctes has quite turned the heads of the ignorant, impudent, and imbecile twaddlers who are always drivelling about the 'stoutness of the Blacklock blood.' We take leave of the Blacklock tribe—we hope for ever!"

"But the self-denying ordinance was far too severe to be obeyed, and a fortnight later the irascible Doctor fulminated in five columns against the unfortunate stallion.

"Under the Shorthouse regime, the paper was devoted entirely to racing and to matters connected with the Turf."

So where did Literature, Art, and Drama come in? In fact the paper did give space to poetry (of the rollicking variety), stories, and news of the theatre as it grew in popularity and size. And what of other sports? They too began to be covered. Booth has several amusing stories of boxing and cricket:

— "Those were the early days of the "movies," and a reproduction of the Burns-Moir fight on the screen drew large crowds of admirers to the Alhambra, but, after all, not all the world takes a vital interest in boxing men and their little unpleasantnesses. George Scott, the then manager of the great Leicester Square theatre, in order to watch the picture and gauge the effect on his audience, ascended to the upper circle, and found himself standing immediately behind a hayseed sort of person.

"Aye, they're graand pictures," commented the man from the country, as the black shutter fell, "but does thee happen to know, mister, wot the blazes they was fightin' about?"

And elsewhere: "It is written that when Moses went to meet his father-in-law, "he did obeisance and kissed him," and the same nasty habit still obtains amongst most great rulers,

many professional footballers, and some boxers. Pedlar Palmer, for instance, invariably slobbered his man; a couple of middle-weights recently sickened a part of their audience by publicly embracing, and once upon a time, during the Army and Navy competitions at the National Sporting Club, there was a Tommy who, on being proclaimed the winner of his heat, ran across the ring and kissed his opponent. Instantly fine old Jack Angle, who was referee, sprang to the ropes:

“Drop that filthy and disgusting practice when you box here!” he cried. “Shake hands like men, and nothing more!”

— “Most famous of all, perhaps, the mythical “Ashes,” accepted as the prize the English and Australian teams strive to gain or retain possession of, were the invention of the *Sporting Times*. They came into existence in this way. In 1882, the English team, which included, “W. G.,” Barlow, Ulyett, the Hon. A. Lyttleton, C. T. Studd and A. P. Lucas, lost a memorable game at the Oval by 7 runs.

England had been set 85 to win. Would they get it?

Spofforth was confident, having great faith in himself, and Murdoch and Giffen were cheerful as they stepped on the field to finish the game. “Spoff” looked more like the demon that day than he did as Mephistopheles at a previous fancy-dress ball—and behaved like one.

“Irresistible as an avalanche,” said George Giffen, “he bowled his last 11 overs for 2 runs and 4 wickets, the finest piece of bowling I have ever seen.”

And England lost.

In the next number of the Pink ’Un an “In Memoriam” notice appeared, surrounded with black borders:

“In Affectionate Remembrance  
of  
ENGLISH CRICKET  
Which Died At  
The Oval  
On 28th August 1882.

—  
Deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing  
friends and acquaintances.

—  
*R.I.P.*  
—

*NB.—The body will be cremated and the ASHES  
taken to Australia.”*

In the whole match Spofforth took 14 wickets, 7 in each innings, for 46 and 44 respectively, and nine of his wickets were clean bowled.

Lunching one day in 1917 at the Great Eastern Hotel in the City, my fellow “Pink ’Un,” Lennard, and I were introduced to a tall, athletic man with a keen face and hair turning grey. His name was Spofforth, and when he mentioned that he was an Australian:

“Any relation to the great cricketer?” asked Lennard with interest.

He smiled, and said modestly: “Well, I used to play a little cricket myself once.”

And then we learned that we were talking to Fred Spofforth himself, the “Demon Bowler,” the idol of the cricket world, and the lion of Lord’s some forty odd years ago.”

\* \* \* \* \*

But I was left wondering if Dr Shorthouse brought down the value of the Blacklock progeny, or did people merely take it as his particular bee-in-the-bonnet and read it with a smile, and what on earth was it about Blacklock that so roused his ire? My own suggestion is that Dr Shorthouse was convinced that English thoroughbreds increasingly lacked stamina and

the popularity of Blacklock as a sire was adding to this enfeebling of the nation's horses ... an odd kind of crusade in the world of equine eugenics ...

\* \* \* \* \*

- February 9: Brendan Behan
- February 10: Fleur Adcock
- February 11: Marilyn Butler
- February 12: Charles Darwin
- February 13: Judith Rodriguez
- February 14: Bruce Beaver
- February 15: Richard Parker
- February 16: Peter Porter
- February 17: A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson  
John Dominic Crossan
- February 18: Toni Morrison
- February 19: Lee Harding

\* \* \* \* \*

Horror stories are all around us—

Peter Pringle and James Spiegelman wrote in *The Nuclear Barons* of the explosion of a radioactive waste dump at Kyshtym in the Russian Ural mountains; “the exact cause of the Russian accident may never be known. The number of people who died or suffered radiation damage is not known. Reports by Soviet emigrants suggest that no public protection measures were taken until symptoms of acute radiation sickness were found—days after the accident. The government then ordered a hasty evacuation from the towns where the effects were obvious. As hospitals throughout the region filled up, rest homes, clinics, and hotels were hastily converted into health and evacuation centers. Huge quantities of foodstuffs were seized and destroyed and new supplies were brought in and sold from the backs of trucks, with the queues reminding residents of wartime rationing. The major north-south highway through Kyshtym was closed for nine months. When it reopened, there were signs advising motorists not to stop for twenty miles and to drive at top speed with their windows up.

“A Soviet physicist who drove through the area two years after the accident later described the devastation. “As far as I could see was empty land. The land was dead—no villages, no towns, only chimneys of destroyed homes, no cultivated fields or pastures, no herds, no people—nothing. It was like the moon for many hundreds of square kilometers, useless and unproductive for a very long time, maybe hundreds of years.”

“A decade later, local doctors were still advising pregnant women to have abortions. The region was still dotted with “graveyards of the earth,” dumps for heavily irradiated topsoil, with clusters of “giant mushrooms” growing behind the barbed wire. Food was still being checked for signs of radioactivity, and fishing in the lakes was still forbidden.”

\* \* \* \* \*

*Virtual Gods* editor Tal Brooke wrote: “The term “cyberspace” was coined by William Gibson, a 44-year-old American science fiction writer living in Vancouver. Wandering past the video arcades around Vancouver's Granville Street in the early 1980s, Gibson saw teens intently hunched over video machines—and the idea of cyberspace hit him. Their eyes seemed frozen by this pale otherworldly light. Gibson turned the disturbing image into a novel, *Neuromancer*, the first novel to win science fiction's triple crown award. It became a cyberpunk classic, attracting a computer-savvy youth audience. According to Dewitt, “Critics were intrigued by a dense, technopoetic prose style that invites comparisons to Dashiell Hammett, William Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon. Computer-literate readers were drawn by Gibson's nightmarish depictions of an imaginary world disturbingly similar to the one they inhabit.”

“In Gibson's fictional realm, cyberspace is a computer-generated landscape that characters enter by “jacking in”—sometimes by plugging electrodes directly into sockets

implanted into the brain. What they see when they get there is a three-dimensional representation of all the information stored in “every computer in the human system”—great warehouses and skyscrapers of data.”

Sherry Turkle in *Life on the Screen* said of it, “In 1984, William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* celebrated its approach to computing’s brave new worlds. *Neuromancer* was a cultural landmark. In the popular imagination it represented the satisfactions of navigating simulation space. Its futuristic hacker hero moved through a matrix that represented connections among social, commercial, and political institutions. *Neuromancer*’s hero yearned to fully inhabit, indeed to become one with, the digital forms of life. He was a virtuoso, a cowboy of information space, and thus for many a postmodern Everyman.”

Brooke says, “In *Neuromancer* cyberspace is described as a place of “unthinkable complexity,” with “lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding.” This is an idealized vision of where cyberspace is heading.”

‘Idealized’ in its development from ‘ideal’ hardly seems to fit *Neuromancer* although I can understand the many hopes which swirl around about both the idea of cyberspace and within cyberspace itself; but the book is unrelievedly grim and horrible and violent, its lost people seeming to belong nowhere except in seedy flats and arcades. But I think the reason why it struck me as a horror story as much as anything Bram Stoker or Stephen King ever came up with is that the characters in it seem so totally divorced from the natural world. There are no trees or birds or flowers, no insects, no pets, no fresh air, no walks on the beach.

*Neuromancer* is classified as science fiction but to me it was a new direction for the horror story though without the specificity of the old horror genre which depended on possession, werewolves, vampires, giant rats, haunted houses, mad monks, mad scientists, mad machines even. But here there is nothing to be singled out ... except perhaps a whole way of life ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course other new technologies wreaked terrible tolls, particularly when they were first introduced. Viviana A. Zelizer wrote in *Pricing the Priceless Child*: “For in strict economic terms, children today are worthless to their parents. They are also expensive. The total cost of raising a child—combining both direct maintenance costs and indirect opportunity costs—was estimated in 1980 to average between \$100,000 and \$140,000. In return for such expenses a child is expected to provide love, smiles, and emotional satisfaction, but no money or labor.”

The situation was vastly different eighty years before that. Little children were out and about, on the streets selling papers and small items or running messages, they were up early on farms, they were in shops and factories, they were on stage and in advertisements; they were a ubiquitous presence ... and they were being mangled and killed wherever cars, trains, and trams ran ...

“On November 1, 1908, 500 New York City children marched on Eleventh Avenue, better known as “Death Avenue.” They were demonstrating against the New York Central Railroad and seeking the removal of train tracks from their neighborhood. As the *New York Times* reported, the pathetic marchers had often seen “their companions killed under freight cars and ... lost brothers and sisters in that way.” At the head of the procession came little Gerald Garish bearing the lid of a child’s coffin as a symbolic emblem.”

Nor was the misery confined to one city or one street ...

“Between 1910 and 1913, over 40 percent of New York traffic victims were under fifteen years of age. In 1914, the rate jumped to 60 percent. As late as 1927, an insurance bulletin reported with alarm that “nearly 40 percent of the automobile fatalities are those of children under fifteen, and the mortality is particularly heavy between the ages of five and ten.” That year, 558 boys and girls were killed and 15,623 injured in New York State alone.”

Zelizer gives these figures:

In 1922, 477 children died in New York City streets; but only 250 in 1933.

30,200 persons were killed by cars in 1930 nationwide in the USA.

But the same could be said of every country where the automobile has taken up residence. Cars kill and maim more people every year than war does yet people rarely fear The Car in the way they fear bombs and anthrax.

Cyberspace is not wreaking this kind of physical havoc; but it raises an unease, I think because we fear it is messing with our minds. Cars merely sit in the garage.

\* \* \* \* \*

Douglas E. Winter introducing *Dark Visions*, a book of short horror stories by Stephen King, George Martin, and Dan Simmons, wrote, “There is little historical precedent for labeling stories of fear as a *kind* of fiction until the 1700s. It was then that the modern novel emerged, made popular by what literary history calls the “Gothic.” We remember but a handful of its early voices—Beckford, Lewis, Maturin, Radcliffe, Walpole—but the Gothic was the first written entertainment for the middle class, and thus the first true form of popular fiction. Its legacy has sent academics spinning ever since in an effort to explain and make legitimate a fiction whose intent—and, indeed, singular moral function—was to provoke unease.

“The Gothic flame burned bright into the early Nineteenth Century. The great romantics—Blake, Byron, Coleridge, Keats, the Shelleys—fell beneath its influence, then influenced in turn the future of fictional fear through a triumvirate of symbolic characters: the vampire, the wanderer, the seeker of forbidden knowledge.

“Across the Atlantic, Charles Brockden Brown fathered American literature by daring to write tales of terror in an age when writing for the sake of “mere” entertainment was considered immoral. His better known heirs—Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe—created the most memorable fiction of the mid-1800s, weaving mystery and imagination in a tapestry stained scarlet with Puritan guilt. And they worked not only at novel length, but in a new form: the short story.

“In America, it was Poe; in England, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. Writing about (what else?) fear, they created the modern short story. By the close of the Nineteenth Century, the talented (and supernaturally inclined) hands of Dickens, Hardy, James, and Kipling had rendered the short story into a major literary form—much to the delight of a new and ever-increasing working-class readership, whose first exposure to written fiction came in “penny dreadfuls” and “shilling shockers.” These were halcyon years for the fiction of fear—consider but a few of the writers at work in the 1890s: Bierce, Blackwood, the brothers Benson, Conrad, Chambers, Doyle, Haggard, Hodgson, Jacobs, Henry James, M.R. James, Machen, Stevenson, Stoker, Wells, Wilde.”

And then it all went downhill. Two world wars and many minor ones gave the public their share of real horror. Hollywood provided monsters, both homegrown and alien, but not necessarily very convincing ones. There were brief spikes, there were sudden bestsellers dealing with occult themes, there were horror stories linked to space and alien beings. And then there was Stephen King ...

But I found myself pondering on that question: why do we buy and read the fiction whose purpose is to make us afraid? I think Winter provides the two keys: it *is* fiction and in the comfort of knowing it will end with an explanation there is a sense of containment and relief. That sense that even the most terrifying aspects will have an explanation flows through into real life. And the readers *were* influenced by class. The emerging middle class of the eighteenth century was intensely vulnerable. It had no vote, it had no way to control or receive advance warning of government policy even though it increasingly depended on trade and manufacture, it had little access to the top posts in education, the military, politics, and equally it was being jostled from beneath by a large and growing mass of poor who were understandably angry but who remained for almost another century disorganised, volatile, and verging on the desperate.

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Australia has not positioned itself at the forefront of the horror genre nor, curiously, of science fiction, perhaps feeling more comfortable with the genres of mystery and adventure; perhaps not having the type of society which provides a compulsion towards the ‘comfort’ of horror. This intrigued me a little as I did some reading of Lee Harding’s works because he is sometimes described as a sci fi writer and sometimes as a horror writer. I think it would be true to describe him as both. His science fiction writing always has an undertone of unease and menace.

Which makes a lot of sense to me. Because although we can create no end of man-made terror—from nuclear disasters to the uneasy world of artificial intelligence—nothing is quite so terrifying as that shadowy world where scientific possibilities meet human ambitions, human folly, human greed, human fears ...

But as I read various Lee Hardings—*A Web of Time, Heartsease, Displaced Person, The Weeping Sky* and more—I felt that something was missing. Even when he writes in the first person his characters do not have that sense of immediacy which engages the reader. There is a kind of emotional distance between reader and story. Of course middle-aged women were not his target readership and teenage boys might feel differently. But I haven’t, so far, been able to come on a Lee Harding fan. I think it is that sense of distance which both increases the sense of something troubling and uneasy—yet also fails to make the reader care enough about the plight of his mostly young and vulnerable protagonists ...

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- February 20: Mary Durack  
Astra Lacis
- February 21: David Ambrose  
Jilly Cooper
- February 22: Judith Worthy  
Norman Lindsay
- February 23: Carole Adler
- February 24: Etel Adnan
- February 25: Alexei Balabanov
- February 26: George Granville Barker  
Victor Hugo  
Elizabeth George

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Victor Hugo is best remembered, I’m sure, for *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* but the other day I came across his biography of William Shakespeare. It is identifiably a biography but equally it is a book about Hugo’s exile on the island of Jersey and Hugo’s philosophy of many things including the nature of genius. Not quite a lament and yet the book begins with a sense of regret and loss. “A dozen years ago, on an island near the coast of France, a house, at every season of forbidding aspect, was growing especially gloomy by reason of the approach of winter. The west wind, which had full sweep there, was piling thick upon this dwelling those enveloping fogs November interposes between sun and earth. In autumn, night falls early; the narrow windows made the days still briefer within, and deepened the sombre twilight of the house.

“This house was flat-roofed, rectilinear, correct, square, and covered with a fresh coat of whitewash; it was Methodism in brick and stone. Nothing is so glacial as this English whiteness; it seems to offer you a kind of polar hospitality. One thinks with longing of the old peasant huts of France, wooden and black, yet cheerful with clustering vines.

... “This home, a heavy, white, rectangular cube, chosen by its inmates upon a chance indication (possibly the indications of chance are not always without design), had the form of a tomb, its inmates were a group—a family rather—of proscribed persons. The eldest was one of those men who at certain moments are found to be in the way in their country. He came from

an assembly; the others, who were young, came from prison. To have written, furnishes a justification for bolts: whither should reflection lead, if not to the dungeon?

“The prison had set them at large into banishment. The old man, the father, was accompanied by his whole family, except his eldest daughter, who could not follow him. His son-in-law was with her. Often were they leaning round the table, or seated on a bench, silent, grave, all of them secretly thinking of those two absent ones.”

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Alison Weir wrote in *Children of England*, “The burnings were still taking place in London and elsewhere — in June, seven were burned in one fire at Smithfield — and in August the Queen wrote personally to the Sheriff of Hampshire to reprimand him for relieving a heretic who had recanted as the fire was lit. Other sheriffs received similar rebukes from the Council. Bishop Bonner of London, notorious for his cruelty to heretics, was now so terrified of ‘tumults’ at executions, that he begged the Queen to order that they take place early in the mornings, but Mary would not allow it. By now, nearly 300 people had been burned in four years, a vast number compared to the numbers burned under other Tudor monarchs: Henry VII had burned ten in 24 years, Henry VIII 81 in 38 years, and Elizabeth I would burn only five in 45 years. The persecution had become irrevocably associated with the papacy and the Spaniards in people’s minds, causing a national hatred of the Roman Catholic religion that would endure for centuries, and robbing Mary of her popularity. She was now hated and feared by the subjects who had welcomed her to the throne with such enthusiasm.”

For centuries after, and certainly in Mary Tudor’s time, people believed that it was her husband Philip of Spain who was the guiding hand behind the persecution. Modern scholars no longer appear to believe that. Even if Mary hoped to please her husband hers was the decision. I find myself full of sympathy for her over her miserable adolescence. Certainly she had the comforts and luxuries which most 16<sup>th</sup> century women did not but her father did treat her with great callousness. Yet most of the people she sent to the stake were ordinary people who had played no part in her private life. But when she married Philip he became King of both Spain and England. And when she died and her crown passed to Elizabeth historians seem to treat Philip’s physical departure as the end of his influence on the people of England. But I think that he remained as a kind of dark brooding figure in people’s psyche. The Spanish Armada is treated now as one distinct event but I think people then would have seen it as the culmination of deep and perhaps unspoken fears. It is hard to decide how much he became the personification of Catholicism in English minds and how much he was seen as the lurking danger on the Continent which encouraged English xenophobia.

And England, indeed all the people of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, were not well served by their popes. Henry VIII comes across as an unpleasant figure. But I think Pope Clement VII should come in for some of the calumny. Henry wasn’t the first person, not even the first monarch to seek an annulment. There were precedents. Yet the Pope kept Henry effectively ‘on ice’ for seven years. Not because he did not know any canon law but because, effectively, he tried to hold England hostage to the good behaviour of Katherine of Aragon’s nephew, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. So long as England waited Clement hoped Charles would leave the Papal States alone.

Other kings had divorced their wives. King John divorced his first wife to marry Isabella. Louis of France divorced Eleanor of Aquitaine who then married Henry II of England; and a later Louis also managed to get himself a divorce ...

And Pope Pius V far from showing any sympathy to Elizabeth excommunicated her in 1570 with these instructions for her subjects “they shall not once dare obey her, or any of her directions, laws or commandments, binding under the same curse those who do anything to the contrary”; thus making it unacceptable for any Catholic to obey her; an action which may have given him a warm fuzzy feeling far away in the Vatican but put all English Catholics in the untenable position of facing hell if they disobeyed their spiritual leader and being arraigned for treason if they disobeyed their temporal leader.

As I pondered on the influence of Philip of Spain I realised that he had always been the grim figure in Elizabeth's life; physically when he was present in England as her half-sister's husband, but mentally throughout her life until his death in 1598, and practically when the fleet of the Spanish Armada set sail to invade and conquer England. The Gunpowder Plot which was directed against Elizabeth's successor is the best known plot but in fact there were dozens of schemes and plots being hatched, all largely inept or unlucky, and all seen to be in some indirect way the demon brood of Philip II.

But recently I realised that Philip's behaviour towards his Dutch subjects also raised the levels of fear and anti-Catholicism in England. I was reading Barbara Tuchman's *The First Salute* in which she writes, "In 1574, the year after Den Briel, the heroic defense of Leyden against a Spanish siege rallied every city and citizen around the standard of revolt. Surrounded by lakes and laced by streams and canals of the lower Rhine, Leyden was a beautiful and prosperous cloth-manufacturing city on the rich soil of the Rhine delta called the Garden of Holland.

"The weapon against Leyden was starvation. Alva had gone, but his successor tightened the siege until not a stray chicken nor a leaf of lettuce could get in. For seven months the enfeebled inhabitants subsisted on boiled leaves and roots and dried fish skins and on chaff from old threshings of wheat. When an occasional dog was slaughtered to feed the watch, the carcass might be torn apart in bleeding pieces and devoured raw. Disease stalked as always in the footsteps of famine, adding to the sick and wounded. In their extremity the inhabitants faced annihilation or surrender." Their Prince of Orange, William the Silent, instead ordered that the dykes be opened and slowly the water crept over the land and up to the walls of the town—and on the waters hundreds of barges and scows bringing armed men and food. The Spanish were forced to lift their siege but 6,000 people had died of hunger and disease. William offered the city two alternative gifts as comfort: a remission of taxes or a university. The people of Leyden chose the university—on the grounds that taxes come and go but a university would be of permanent benefit.

"Spanish pride, trampled at Leyden, was compensated by the fearful sack in 1576 of Antwerp, the bustling and prosperous port at the mouth of the Scheldt, which served the trade, in and out, of all northern Europe. The sack was precipitated by a mutiny of Spanish troops who had not received their promised pay for 22 months. Philip II, having transferred the cost of the war into a huge debt owed to the merchants and magnates of Spain, had declared his exchequer in bankruptcy in 1575 and had received a dispensation from the Pope permitting him to revoke all promises or commitments "lest he should be ruined by usury while combating the heretics." With his customary lack of sense, the richest monarch of his time applied the dispensation to non-payment of his army on the theory that, as he was God's instrument for crushing heresy, whatever he did, whether or not wise, was right. Like most of Philip's policy judgments, it turned against himself. The mutineers in their rage set fire to every street in the wealthiest quarter of Antwerp as they broke into the city, not forgetting to fall on their knees in a prayer to the Virgin to bless their enterprise. It is a peculiar habit of Christianity to conceive the most compassionate and forgiving divinities and use them to sponsor atrocity. In the conquest of Mexico, Spanish priests, carrying banners of Christ blessed the conquistadors as they marched to the torture and murder of natives in the country. In Antwerp, the mutineers killed every citizen who crossed their path or stood in a doorway, indiscriminately striking down aged householders, young women with infants, fellow-Catholic priests and monks or foreign merchants. In an orgy of pillage lasting three days, they ransacked every warehouse, shop and residence, accumulating money, silver, jewels and fine furniture to untold value, horribly torturing anyone suspected of concealing his wealth, leaving thousands dead and an increased abhorrence of the Spaniards in the surrounding "obedient" provinces. The immediate result was the most damaging to Spain that could have occurred—a movement toward confederation of the provinces, not firm or permanent but enough to mark the beginning of the end for the governing power."

But I did have a query. How knowledgeable would people in England have been about events in the Netherlands in an era before a media came into existence? John Fiske wrote in *The Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America*, “In 1560 the Spanish ambassador reported to Philip II. that there were more than 10,000 recent Flemish refugees in England, and two years later he gave the number as at least 30,000. In 1568 there were more than 5000 in London alone, and as many more in Norwich. The Cinque Ports were full of Dutch and Walloon refugees; in 1566 they numbered in the town of Sandwich 120 householders, as against 291 English householders; that is, they were nearly one third of the population. They introduced into Sandwich the manufacture of paper and silk. In Maidstone the next year such refugees established the linen thread industry. To Honiton and other Devonshire towns they brought the dainty art of lace-making. They began the steel and iron works of Sheffield, and the making of baizes and serges at Leeds. They revolutionized the art of glass-making in England, and raised market-gardening and horticulture to quite a new level. ... After the capture of Antwerp by the Duke of Parma in 1585, more than one third of the merchants and shipmasters of that opulent city found homes on the banks of the Thames, and in such ports as Yarmouth and Lowestoft, Boston and Hull. During the reign of Elizabeth probably more than 100,000 Dutchmen and Flemings became Englishmen.” Local people may have blamed the Holy Roman Emperors, they may have blamed Philip II, but it is more likely they just saw the refugees as fleeing general Catholic ferocity in Europe ...

I was thinking vaguely on all this as I came on that question of whether Shakespeare was a Catholic. It is an interesting possibility but I am not sure that it is the right way to phrase the question. Because the idea of the primacy of the individual conscience in religious matters was still only in its infancy. Children followed their parents. Adults looked to the authority figures in their lives: ‘the King’, ‘the Queen’, ‘the Lord of the Manor’, their employer, the patriarch of the family or clan, the religious leaders they most respected.

Nor is there is any consensus on the question. Both his parents were probably Catholic sympathisers but there is nothing to clearly link Shakespeare to the Catholic faith. And writers do not agree anyway. Ian Wilson in *Shakespeare The Evidence* regards his choice of Susanna for his first child as a Catholic choice. René Weis in *Shakespeare Revealed* sees it as a Puritan name. And equally the people around him see-sawed to and fro between sympathies and otherwise. For example the Earl of Southampton was seen as a Catholic force because of his strongly Catholic mother. But she was a granddaughter of Sir Anthony Browne, Henry VIII’s Master of the Horse. Anthony’s father-in-law Sir John Gage remained a Catholic and fell out with Henry but it is said of Anthony “Legend has it that when Sir Anthony Browne occupied Battle Abbey in Sussex, granted to him by Henry VIII, he held high revelry there and grossly insulted the monks before driving them out. As the last monk reached the door he turned and uttered the famous Cowdray Curse ‘that the house of the despoiler of the Abbey should perish utterly by fire and water’ ”; his son Anthony returned to the Catholic fold, perhaps out of conviction, perhaps out of fear of the curse, and brought up his daughter Mary the same way. Sir Thomas More’s son-in-law William Roper was strongly drawn to Lutheranism but perhaps because of his father-in-law’s passionate defence of Catholicism, perhaps because of sympathy with his sufferings he remained a Catholic and his descendants remained Catholic for several generations; whereas his siblings and their descendants went in different ways. Parents who felt passionately one way were at times rebelled against by their children. People were influenced by their rulers, their times, their own ideas on what would prevail, their own very personal experiences ...

But the curious question which came to me was: what would’ve happened if Philip and Mary had had a son? Inevitably Britain would’ve been drawn into the European world of the times. So what would Philip have envisaged for such a son after the death of Mary Tudor? William Prescott wrote in his *History of the Reign of Philip the Second*, “The marriage treaty was drawn up with great circumspection ... The issue of the marriage, if a son, was to succeed to the English crown and to the Spanish possessions in Burgundy and the Low Countries. But

in the case of the death of Don Carlos, Philip's son, the issue of the present marriage was to receive, in addition to the former inheritance, Spain and her dependencies."

Philip II had a huge empire. It included the modern day nations of Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, much of Chile, Colombia, Venezuela, the smaller nations of Central America, many islands in the Caribbean, up through Mexico to include the southern and western parts of the USA; it took in Portugal. It covered Holland and Belgium. And it had a toehold in Africa. It would've changed the history of the British Isles irrevocably. It would, I'm sure, have changed the face of Catholicism irrevocably.

But to be the child of Philip II would equally have been a poisoned chalice ...

Philip's son Don Carlos is usually referred to without interest as being mentally retarded and no loss when he died at the age of about twenty-two. But William Prescott provides considerable evidence to suggest that Philip murdered his son ...

Philip's first wife, Princess Maria of Portugal, gave birth to Don Carlos on July 8<sup>th</sup> 1545 and died a few days later. Bereft of a mother and largely ignored by his father he existed in a kind of cocooned limbo. But in his late teens three unfortunate things happened. His father had betrothed him to Isabella of France but with the death of Mary Tudor Philip without so much as an apology to his son (who seems to have genuinely wanted to marry Isabella) took her as his third wife. Doubts had already been raised about Don Carlos's faith; he had already expressed some sympathies towards the plight of the Protestants of the Netherlands under his father's rule. How seriously he felt is hard to know. But it brought questions about the depth and purity of his faith to the notice of both his father and the Inquisition. And he fell down a flight of stairs, landing on his head. He seemed to recover eventually but became increasingly unstable and paranoid. Again it is hard to know whether this was a result of his accident or whether he knew everything he said and did was being reported to his father.

Philip II then took the drastic step of placing his son under what we would call 'house arrest'—"At first he was thrown into a state bordering on frenzy, and, it is said, more than once tried to make away with himself. As he found that thus to beat against the bars of his prison-house was only to add to his distresses, he resigned himself in sullen silence to his fate,—the sullenness of despair"—and denying him the company of those few people he seemed to have loved including Isabella and his aunt Joanna; "It was his sad fate to die, as he had lived throughout his confinement, under the cold gaze of his enemies."

The Papal Nuncio claimed he died happily, fully reconciled to the Church, but the secretary to the Inquisition Llorente said Carlos had been secretly under investigation for treason—and for which the penalty was death. While a Venetian noble Pietro Giustiniani said Carlos had been given "some poisoned broth" and died soon afterwards.

Probably the truth will never be known—and although Carlos might well have made a wayward and problematic king equally a degree of religious toleration on his part might have changed history—nevertheless William Prescott says firmly, "But in whatever light we are to regard the death of Carlos,—whether as caused by violence, or by those insane excesses in which he was allowed to plunge during his confinement,—in either event the responsibility, to a great extent, must be allowed to rest on Philip, who, if he did not directly employ the hand of the assassin to take the life of his son, yet by his rigorous treatment drove that son to a state of desperation that brought about the same fatal result."

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So how did Victor Hugo see Shakespeare? He begins his account: "William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in a house under the tiles of which was concealed a confession of the Catholic faith beginning with these words, 'I, John Shakespeare'. John was the father of William. The house, situated in Henley Street, was humble; the chamber in which Shakespeare came into the world, wretched: the walls were whitewashed, the black rafters laid crosswise; at the farther end was a tolerably large window with two small panes, where you may read to-day, among other names, that of Walter Scott. This poor dwelling sheltered a decayed family. The father of William Shakespeare had been an alderman; his grandfather had been a bailiff."

As he was dependent on other people's writings on Shakespeare, from Aubrey to Swinburne, he recycles mistakes as well as attitudes. Hugo has Shakespeare begin as a call-boy; then "In 1587 he gained a step. In the piece called *The Giant Agrapardo, King of Nubia, worse than his late brother, Angulafer*, Shakespeare was intrusted with the task of carrying a turban to the giant." From there he became an actor and then a writer. He links each play to things going on elsewhere; as in "In 1597, when this same Philip II said to the Duke of Alva 'You deserve the axe', not because the Duke of Alva had put the Low Countries to fire and sword, but because he had entered the King's presence without being announced, he composed *Cymbeline* [1606] and *Richard III* [1593]." But his dating of both plays and events is chaotic. The Duke of Alva, for instance, had died in 1582. The interest in his account is both in the way he constantly links plays and events and in the way he compares Shakespeare to Molière. He also says Shakespeare dedicated his 'Venus and Adonis' to Lord Southampton; "Adonis was the fashion at that time; twenty-five years after Shakespeare, the Chevalier Marini wrote a poem on Adonis which he dedicated to Louis XIII." He also claims that the disinterest in the plays following Shakespeare's death would have continued had it not been for Voltaire; "In the eighteenth century the persistent raillery of Voltaire finally produced in England a certain revival of interest."

In fact Hugo seems to be convinced that the English never appreciated what they had in the works of Shakespeare. He writes, "Shakespeare was so little printed, printing existing so little for him, thanks to the stupid indifference of his immediate posterity, that in 1666 there was still but one edition of the poet of Stratford-on-Avon (Hemynge and Condell's edition), three hundred copies of which were printed. Shakespeare, with this obscure and pitiful edition awaiting the public in vain, was a sort of poor but proud relative of the glorious poets. These three hundred copies were nearly all stored up in London when the Fire of 1666 broke out. It burned London, and nearly burned Shakespeare. The whole edition of Hemynge and Condell disappeared, with the exception of the forty-eight copies which had been sold in fifty years. Those forty-eight purchasers saved from death the words of Shakespeare."

Fortunately it wasn't as bad as Hugo suggests; the Second and Third Folios had appeared before the Great Fire, as well as reprintings of individual plays. But how many from all sources were burnt in 1666?

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And why had Hugo fled France for exile in the Channel Islands? It was Hugo the orator and politician, rather than Hugo the writer, who was in trouble. The Revolution of 1848 had swept across Europe and Hugo was linked to the upheaval—though it would not be correct to see him in terms of what we might mean by 'left-wing revolutionary'; he was neither particular radical nor particularly revolutionary ...

He went first to Belgium, then to London ... Graham Robb in his biography *Victor Hugo* writes: 'On 4 August (1852), he and Charles spluttered their way to Waterloo Station, with Juliette still travelling invisibly as self-transporting luggage. He marvelled at the sight of English interiors a few inches from his carriage window and arrived at Southampton, where a pickpocket stole his handkerchief. That evening, they boarded a steamer which Hugo identified as the *Royal Mail*. The Channel put on a magnificent storm:

All the passengers were sick except Charles and myself. We spent the night alone together on deck, lashed and knocked over by enormous waves. At last, day dawned. We saw Guernsey and its delightful harbour in the form of an amphitheatre. Then, after a few hour's sailing, we saw a line of cliffs. It was Jersey.

'Several waves of exiles had already reached St Helier. Though some were deeply suspicious of 'the ex-peer', they all turned out to greet Victor Hugo, who, according to the report of the official French busybody, Vice-Consul Laurent, looked 'downcast'. The two Adèles, Auguste Vacquerie and a cat called Grise (a native of the Conciergerie prison), were already booked into the Hôtel de la Pomme d'Or, close to the harbour. Hugo and Charles were

taken to the hotel and then to the ‘Société Fraternelle’ of St Helier, where Hugo delivered a speech.’

The French Foreign Minister commented when he heard this: ‘It is unlikely that Victor Hugo will jeopardize the security of his new haven by imprudent manifestations.’ But the Vice-Consul accused Hugo of ‘delivering the most violent speeches against the French Government. He has even insulted Monseigneur the Prince-President in the most grievous fashion. I shall refrain from repeating his insults.’

‘Hugo’s only insults were not repeated, because, apart from the phrase, ‘the sinister premeditations of the Élysée’, there weren’t any. It was a place for all the exiles to pull together, to present a united front to the enemy. And between the lines it contained the surprising message that Hugo wanted to be left in peace. Now that the clouds of his conscience had cleared, he was discovering a new sky within himself. His life was regaining its pleasing symmetry: first, his political career had almost obliterated his imaginative work; now the events it had precipitated were about to give rise to the most astonishing artistic rebirth in nineteenth-century literature.’

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February 27: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

February 28: Robin Klein

February 29: Jiro Akagawa

Hermione Lee

March 1: Smith’s Weekly

Jim Crace

Lytton Strachey

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George Blaikie introduced his book *Remember Smith’s Weekly* as ‘A Biography of An Uninhibited National Australian Newspaper Born: 1 March 1919 Died: 29 October 1950.’

It was effectively run by the triumvirate of Sir Frederick Joynton Smith, one time Lord Mayor of Sydney, who gave his name to it, edited by Claude McKay, and managed by Clyde Packer, founder of the Packer dynasty. But its success depended on both the talent it recruited and a particular knee-jerk sensitivity to Australian likes and dislikes. Blaikie sums these up as:

*Smith’s* loved: Australia, White collar workers, The Salvation Army, the steel and sugar industries, the genuine unemployed, sweated seamstresses, The White Australia Policy, Diggers, underdogs, Australian success stories, bold enterprise, Bertie Oldfield, nurses (referred to as Angels of Mercy), C.S.I.R.O. scientists, good Jews, Billy Hughes, old age pensioners, wholemeal bread, jokes, claimants of fortune in Chancery ...

*Smith’s* hated: spivs, tipsters, profiteers, military police, Jehovah’s Witnesses, white bread, Japs in the north (of Australia), black men with white women, red tape, bureaucrats, perversion, pomposity, “Dagoes”, bad Jews, Communists, go-getters, bodyline (bowling) ...

Blaikie is probably best-known for his long-running newspaper series ‘Our Strange Past’ but Kenneth Slessor wrote: ‘“Of the hundreds of people who worked for *Smith’s Weekly*,” says George Blaikie, “a large number solemnly swore in and out of their cups, in public and secretly, that one day by God they would write a book about *Smith’s*.” I am one of the hundreds who worked and swore, and I have never written the book. But I can get along with my conscience more easily now that George Blaikie has — and a fine, chuckling, rumbustious book it is.’

Slessor also tells this story of Blaikie’s early life there. As ‘an innocent copy-boy’ starting out in 1931 he had a phone call from a man claiming to be a ‘wanted murderer’ who would give him an exclusive if he would meet him outside the office. The young Blaikie waited patiently at the designated spot for more than an hour without meeting anyone. Then he looked up at the *Weekly* building opposite. “There were scores of windows in that building and every one was filled with beaming faces looking down on me.”

Blaikie describes his beginning at *Smith's*: "I joined *Smith's* as a copy boy on 24 December 1931, and on that date took home the first copy of *Smith's Weekly* my family had ever seen". He was asked to write an essay on 'A Thinking Man's Interpretation of the First Four Books in the New Testament' and, coming from a strict Presbyterian home, he had no difficulty with the assignment. But his editor pointed out that his piece would need to have been written one thousand nine hundred and thirty-one years ago to qualify as news. He was asked to write on 'The Evils of Alcohol in Both High and Low Places'. A firm temperance background helped him to pour out his piece. Again it got a negative. Only much later did he realise that *Smith's* was a bastion of hard drinking.

But it was the hoax played on him which changed his attitudes. "It was from that moment I began to change into the man who in later years, as head of the reporting staff of *Smith's Weekly*, was to write without flinching such front page sensations as "Nude Dancing in the Slums," "Black Men and White Women," "Half-caste Harvest," and "King's Cross – City of Sin."

"The hard grind of journalism steadily changed me from a gentle youth who was "pure in mind and speech and useful to Jesus Christ and his fellows" to a somewhat cynical, bald-headed journo. who is not absolutely convinced that the world is round or that the provisions of the Oaths Act (1908) are warranty that people signing statutory declarations are necessarily endorsing the truth."

His mother was not so easily seduced by his claims of the good the paper did. "Unfortunately, at that critical moment I happened to take home *Smith's* baby brother, a wild little racing sheet printed on yellow paper called *The Arrow*" which "aimed at entertaining turf and dog enthusiasts between bets with spicy, true life stories."

"The issue I took home contained on the centre double spread an exposé of the main brothels of Sydney with pictures of the premises and some of the merchandise, the story of a man who got stabbed in the face with a spoon by an angry mistress, a choice bit about an actress who had become a drug addict and had extra puffy thighs from all the needles she poked into herself, and lots of other rollicking tit-bits. It didn't mean much to me, aged sixteen, but it did startle my mother who long argued that any paper coming out of the same stable as *The Arrow* was not likely to be a Christian messenger."

After *Smith's* closed he was associated with *The Courier-Mail* and in 1950 began collecting his pieces for his column 'Our Strange Past' and his books *Scandals of Australia's Strange Past* and *Skeletons from Australia's Strange Past*. I wonder if his mother could bring herself to read them?

Many well-known writers wrote or drew for *Smith's Weekly* including Kenneth Slessor. Blaikie said, "His resignation (Reg 'Mo' Moses) to go over to *The Australian Women's Weekly* in 1935 would have been a disastrous blow to *Smith's* had not Kenneth Slessor been on hand to take over the weekly satirical chore. Which of the two men was the better at this rare art was a popular point of argument in the 1930s.

"Mo died in his first year with *The Women's Weekly*, aged only forty-six.

"Kenneth Slessor succeeded Mo as *Smith's* Editor in 1935 and remained in the chair until 1939, when George Goddard took over. In 1938, Sir Joynton Smith sought to ease some of the functions of editor, literary editor, leader writer, satirist, and main feature writer, all at the same time.

"He brought in Harry Cox as Editor-in-Chief. Harry was a Sydney journalist of tremendous energy and fast-flowing ideas, who provided a very sharp change of pace in *Smith's*.

"He had had the reputation in his reporting days, of being able to outmatch anybody, even teams of men, on difficult assignments. With him to *Smith's*, he brought a string of name writers — Stewart Howard, the author, Ross Campbell, the Victorian Rhodes Scholar and later author, as well as Bill Rodie, Bill Band, and others.

“Harry had arrived at a bad time. With the Depression wracking the economy, weekly papers had become a luxury. The new Editor-in-Chief used all his energy and ingenuity, experimenting with colour and a big variety of features designed to cater for all possible tastes. He even took a shot at attracting children with special comic strips — an extreme step indeed for *Smith's*.

“Nothing would check the sliding circulation. Harry Cox left the paper in 1939 and the ever-faithful Kenneth Slessor once more took complete charge in an attempt to hold the paper together. Slessor, who is one of Australia’s all-time great poets, is also one of her all-time great journalists, and his almost single-handed fight to save the dying *Smith's* just before World War II is one of the epics of newspaper history. He not only edited the paper but wrote the front pages, the leaders, the satire, the verses to go with the weekly caricature, the film reviews, and answered the phone to all who wished to register a grouch against the paper.”

Slessor then became an Official War Correspondent, visiting Syria, Crete, the Middle East and New Guinea before resigning in 1944. He wrote laconically of this time in his life: “I travelled again in 1940, when I was appointed Official War Correspondent with the A.I.F. I went to England with the Australian contingent, arrived just after the Dunkirk evacuation, and saw the Battle of Britain and the early blitzes. In 1941, I went with the Australians to Egypt, then to Greece, and stayed there till the evacuation in April, 1941. With other correspondents and a small Australian-British force, I got away in the last Greek freighter to leave Piraeus before the Nazis entered. After a few days in Crete, I returned to Alexandria in a naval oil-tanker. In June 1941, I accompanied the Australian force on the campaign in Syria to the capture of Damour and the occupation of Beirut. For the rest of 1941 and until early 1943, I was with the A.I.F. in Palestine, Egypt and Cyrenaica. I camped near El Alamein for more than six months, during the Allied stand there, but was unable to witness the great Battle of October 1942 as I was then in a military hospital suffering from pneumonia. I returned to Australia with the 9<sup>th</sup> Division in March, 1943, and then went to New Guinea, where I got to Lae the day after its capture, and took part in the landing at Scarlet Beach, Finschhafen, in September, 1943. During my stay in New Guinea, I flew over New Britain in a Beaufighter patrol and was in the Australian destroyer Warramunga at the bombardment of Cape Gloucester in December, 1943. In the early part of 1944, I found that, owing to the attitude of the Army Public Relations branch, and the unretracted calumnies of an Australian brigadier (who repeated the falsehood that, during the Alamein battle, I was enjoying myself in Alexandria, whereas I was seriously ill in hospital), my position as Official War Correspondent had become intolerable. I applied to the Federal Cabinet for permission to resign, and this was eventually granted . . . ”

If he is remembered now it is most likely as the author of ‘Five Bells’ which is still a staple of anthologies. But I was intrigued to see that he regularly wrote popular doggerel for the paper—such as this piece on Billy Hughes:

The old man of North Sydney  
No destiny can dim.  
As steak adheres to kidney,  
North Sydney sticks to him.  
Like perfume to the lily,  
Or bridle to the bit,  
North Sydney cleaves to Billy,  
And Billy sticks to it.

Or this 1928 one about the girls who went to boxing matches:

Rosie at the stadium  
Flaunts around her neck  
Rubies rare as radium  
Diamonds by the peck.  
Furs of real Peschaniki  
Staggering the press.



I wondered if Slessor was writing for a predominantly male audience which, because of the Depression, had had to put its marriage hopes on hold until times improved; in effect he was saying ‘there are still lots of pretty girls out there—but their lives and attitudes too are changing or being changed by circumstances’ ...

But the thing that probably left you gasping was the suggestion that the *Women’s Weekly* used to run *satire!* ‘What,’ perhaps you are saying, ‘in between the celebs and the Royals and the scandals and the boob jobs? Surely not?’ I never thought of the magazines around and about in my childhood, the *Pix* and the *Post* and the *Weekly* and *New Idea*, as being full of humour and satire and a sense of real people, I never thought I would feel nostalgic for them, but I do. I remember my mother cutting a Margaret Sydney column out of the *Weekly* about mnemonics because she found it so helpful. But where would you fit mnemonics in between Angelina and Brittney and Paris and Nicole and all the others I would prefer to ignore?

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The *Bushell’s Centenary 1883 – 1983* is one of those books to list significant dates, based around the history of the Bushell’s tea and coffee company in Australia. It has some interesting little snippets such as:

History: “In the mid-decade (1964), conscription is quietly and rapidly introduced and this is followed shortly afterwards with military involvement in the war in Vietnam. As Australia increases the number of forces dispatched, its involvement in the war begins to cause deep divisions in the nation.” (1967) “Debate on Australian involvement in Vietnam escalates and the country is deeply divided on the issue. Two members of the RSL are expelled for voicing their opposition to Australia’s participation.” (1971): “Australian withdrawal from Vietnam is announced. With a total of 8,000 men committed to the war, Australian participation ends with 415 dead and 2344 wounded.”

Mystery: Amy Johnson comes up in 1930 in “Amy Johnson becomes the first woman to fly from England to Australia. She completes the flight in 19½ days” but then in 1941 she disappeared in her plane over England.

And her fellow aviator is both fortunate and unfortunate: 1906: “Swimming is now a major pastime and the beaches are no longer cordoned off in efforts to separate the sexes. At Bondi, three of the surfers get together to form the Bondi Lifesaving Association. Less than two weeks later, their first rescue takes place. The rescued boy’s name is Charles Kingsford Smith” leading to (1928) “Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm become the first aviators to cross the Pacific from America to Australia. In a Fokker tri-motor monoplane, they cover the eight thousand nautical miles in eighty-three hours” but (1935) “Charles Kingsford Smith’s aircraft ‘Lady Southern Cross’ disappears over the Indian Ocean. The entire nation mourns his death. No wreckage of the plane is found for eighteen months.”

On it goes through shark attacks, murder and mayhem, a growing population, books and ‘Hair’ and the ever-growing Bushells’ empire ...

But it is also a reminder that *Smith’s Weekly* was an institution in its time. “1950: ‘The Diggers Paper’ ceases publication after 32 years. In its heyday in the 1920’s, ‘Smith’s Weekly’ had replaced ‘The Bulletin’ as the major critical voice of the media, but its decline during the Depression of the 30’s was never reversed.”

\* \* \* \* \*

March 2: Sholom Aleichim

March 3: William Davenant (bap)

Mary Small

\* \* \* \* \*

Arthur Quiller-Couch in his children’s adventure book, *The Splendid Spur*, set in the time of the English Civil War, wrote, “The windows of the “Crown” were cheerfully lit behind their red blinds. A few straddling grooms and troopers talked and spat in the brightness of the entrance, and outside in the street was a servant leading up and down a beautiful sorrel mare, ready saddled, that was mark’d on the near hind leg with a high white stocking. In the passage,

I met the host of the “Crown,” Master John Davenant, and sure (I thought) in what odd corners will the Muse pick up her favourites! For this slow, loose-cheek’d vintner was no less than father to Will Davenant, our Laureate, and had belike read no other verse in his life but those at the bottom of his own pint-pots.”

This seems a rather unkind portrayal as John Davenant, landlord of the “Crown” in the Corn Market in Oxford, served a term as Mayor of Oxford and sent some of his sons to university there, Robert becoming a clergyman and fellow of St John’s College, Nicholas an attorney, and William a poet and playwright. But John has fared ill at the hands of various writers; here the implication is of a slow-thinking sot; elsewhere, not least in John Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*, he is presented as the cuckolded husband and his son William as in fact the son of William Shakespeare who normally put up at the “Crown” on his route between London and Stratford. It seems quite possible that Shakespeare *was* the boy’s godfather—but is there any evidence that he was his father?

The only real ‘evidence’ for Shakespearian paternity that people have come up with are:

- 1) That Shakespeare obviously knew the Davenants well enough to, reportedly, be invited to be godfather to their son. Though William, born legitimately into the Davenant family, could never be claimed by Shakespeare—no matter how much gossip went around ... When writers such as René Weis in *Shakespeare Revealed* refer to William as illegitimate they are incorrect.
- 2) That William Davenant became a well-known poet; something which his family background gives no hint to. (But then the same lack has been used to dismiss Shakespeare; and William was the lesser poet.)
- 3) That William, when he went to London and made friends with people like Samuel Butler, claimed to be a son of Shakespeare. But this sounds more like aggrandisement and ‘putting on dog’ than truth. I’m sure ‘son’ of Shakespeare would have impressed London’s writers, and perhaps helped William’s career, in a way that ‘godson’ would not; let alone merely presenting himself as the son of an Oxford inn-keeper.
- 4) An odd and suggestive verse which did the rounds. The DNB says of it “In a curious collection of satires upon D’Avenant, one of two closely connected works of so great rarity as to have been unseen of most if not all of his biographers, there are, however, what may be contemporary allusions to the scandal. The book is entitled, ‘The Incomparable Poem Gondibert vindicated from the Wit Combats of Four Esquires, Clinias, Dametas, Sancho, and Jack Pudding,’ (1655, 12mo.) On the last page (27) of this is a poem upon the author’s writing his name, as on the ‘Title of the Booke’ (‘Gondibert’), D’Avenant. The opening stanza of this runs as follows:—

Your wits have further, than you rode,  
You needed not to have gone abroad.  
*D’Avenant* from *Avon*, comes,  
Rivers are still the Muses Rooms.  
Dort, knows our name no more. Durt on ’t;  
An ’t be but for that *D’Avenant*.

An allusion to Avon, in which D’Avenant is advised to wash himself, appears also on page 14. Unless these allusions to Avon refer to Shakespeare, it is difficult, since Avon was not then a classical stream, to see what it meant. The reference in the opening lines is to the derivation, apparently put forth by D’Avenant himself, of his name from Avenant, a name said to exist in Lombardy. This origin is gravely advanced in an elegy on Sir William D’Avenant printed by Mr. Huth from the flyleaf of a copy of Denham’s ‘Poems’, 1668.”

I then went on to read of William's career. He came to London and hung about the periphery of the court of the Stuarts, his first play known to have been performed for certain being 'The Cruel Brother' in 1630. He wrote other plays, and his 'The Wits' is described as a "comic masterpiece" (hence the allusion), as well as masques, and he began his long poem 'Gondibert'. He got caught up in the chaotic developments round Charles I (he also, poor man, lost his nose); he went to France, returned to England, then back to France, then took a ship to Virginia which was captured by Cromwell's troops and he found himself in The Tower.

At this dramatic moment in his career the fire alarm in the reference library went off. We all hurried out on to the street. The fire brigade came. We hung around in the cold. We were allowed back in. I'd just found my place again when the alarm sent us out once more. When we finally got back in I thought I would just pick up the book I had on hold (*The Lost Prince* by David Baldwin) and leave Sir William for another day!

But although it makes for a story (good or bad depends on how you view adultery, I suppose, and whether you do not mind Jane Davenant being accused of such without stronger evidence) it hardly stacks up as irrefutable proof.

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Currently books, such as Philippa Gregory's *The Other Boleyn Girl*, as well as a film, are running hard with the idea that:

- a) Mary Boleyn was younger than Anne
- b) That she was a sweet and gentle girl of a demure disposition, and
- c) That her son Henry was Henry VIII's son.

How well do these claims stack up?

The first one has no evidence to back it up. I have found birthdates for Mary ranging from 1490 to 1499. But Anne was born about 1500 or a little later. And their different experiences on the Continent suggest different ages. Anne went to the household of Margaret of Austria in 1513 as a girl of twelve or thirteen to be a maid of honour; an educative and strictly chaperoned position. Mary went with Henry VIII's sister Mary to France for her marriage to the French king in 1514 but she went, probably, as a lady-in-waiting; a different role and one which required greater maturity. But the most telling evidence, to me, is that of Mary's grandson, Lord Hunsdon, who applied for the Ormonde estates in 1597 on the grounds that he was the rightful heir. He would not have dared do this unless he was certain his grandmother had been older than Anne. If Anne had been the elder then her daughter Queen Elizabeth would have been entitled to make a claim as heir—whether she would have been able to wangle them away from the Butler family is another matter but she would certainly have stood a better chance than Mary's grandson. But there is no sign of her ever looking in that direction. I think that the claim that Mary was the baby of that family is literary licence.

And was she a sweet and demure young woman? The evidence suggests not. In her person she may have been attractive and sweet. But she had the ambitious Boleyn and Howard families pushing her into relationships which we assume were sexual, first with Francis I in France and secondly with Henry VIII in England; so much so that she gained a reputation, at least in court and diplomatic circles, as a lewd and wanton woman; the Papal Nuncio Ridolfo Pio describing her as "*uma grandissima ribalda et infame sopra tulle*" It might be argued that her family hurried her into the marriage with Sir William Carey in 1520 before her value on the marriage market was irreparably tarnished. It seems unlikely that Henry VIII proposed the marriage purely to get a young and relatively powerless husband who would complacently accept his very public cuckolding; not least because Mary and William were adults and because it would appear to be a step down for the Boleyn family—though it seems to have brought William some material advantages—but we do not know for certain Henry VIII's motivation ...

If there is a puzzle in that marriage it seems to come with the choice of William Carey who was only a knight; the Boleynes and the Howards had bigger fish to fry ...

So I am inclined to think that a different influence might have been at work.

Again it comes back to the Butler family. The 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Ormonde was James Butler, whose sons James, John, and Thomas were the fifth, sixth, and seventh earls but none of them had sons, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl had a brother Richard whose gr-grandson was Piers who became the 8<sup>th</sup> Earl. The fifth earl's widow was Eleanor Beaufort who later married Sir William Spencer and had two daughters, Catherine who married Henry Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and Margaret who married Thomas Carey and became the mother of William Carey who married Mary Boleyne. The seventh earl married Anne Hankeford and had two daughters, Anne who married James St Leger and Margaret who married Sir William Boleyne, grandfather of Mary and Anne. Eleanor Spencer and Anne Hankeford were sisters-in-law. This explains how the Boleynes were able to claim the Ormonde title as William was son-in-law of the seventh earl but when George Boleyne was beheaded alongside his sister Anne the title returned to the Butlers. So I wonder who in the family suggested Anne Boleyne might like to marry Piers Butler's son James? How different English history might have been if she had agreed to that match ... and if Henry VIII's history had been equally unfruitful then it seems very likely that his sister Mary's children or grandchildren, including Lady Jane Grey, would have become the ruling House ...

And is there anything to suggest that the son of William Carey and Mary Boleyne was actually Henry VIII's son? First of all, the law said that all children born to a legally married couple were theirs. Husbands and more occasionally wives might accuse each other of being unfaithful but all children born within their marriage were legitimate and their legal heirs.

Henry Carey in the records of Cambridge Alumni is given a birthdate of 1526 (though the DNB gives it as 1524). 'Married Anne Morgan and had seven sons and three daughters. He was granted his MA in 1564 on the Queen Elizabeth's visit, described as 'S. of William, Esquire of the body to Henry VIII, and Mary, sister of Anne Boleyn. B. 1526. M.P. for Buckinghamshire, 1547, 1554, 1555. Knighted, 1558. Created Baron Hunsdon, 1559. K.G. 1561. Warden of the East Marches and Governor of Berwick, 1568' etc. He died in 1596. Eric Ives in *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* says that Henry Carey was born in March 1526 which would agree with his university record. *The Complete Peerage* gives him a birthdate of 4<sup>th</sup> March 1526 and presents William as his father but allows Henry VIII as an alternative father (as does Burke's *Peerage*, though curiously not in the 19<sup>th</sup> century editions of Burke's I've looked at). Ives also says that it was Katherine of Aragon's supporters who promoted the claim that he was Henry's son—because this would give weight to their campaign to get Mary Tudor reinstated as the legitimate heir of Henry VIII. If Henry had not only slept with Mary Boleyn but she had had his child this would be powerful ammunition in their campaign. But it never went anywhere and Henry himself showed no interest in it even as he put Anne Boleyn aside in the swift coup masterminded by Thomas Cromwell in 1536; preferring to be seen as a king reportedly cuckolded by five of his courtiers than as a man who had not given the necessary weight to his apparent relationship with his wife's sister. We don't know when Henry's affair with Mary Boleyn ended, we don't even know for absolute certain that it *was* a sexual relationship, but as it has been suggested that Henry became tantalisingly aware of Anne somewhere between 1524 and 1526 it seems unlikely that he would've continued with a relationship with Mary—even if that relationship was only in the nature of an occasional request for Mary's presence. William and Mary appear to have had their two children, Henry in 1526, his sister Catherine or Mary in 1527, and William died in 1528. Some versions give Catherine as the first born—though, curiously, this has not resulted in a campaign to claim her father as Henry VIII ... *The Complete Peerage*, for instance, gives her name as Mary which seems more likely (and I have found her called Isabella elsewhere) but never canvasses the idea she was the offspring of Henry VIII though as she married William Knollys and had her second son around 1547 it does suggest she was older than her brother Henry ...

Henry VIII seriously considered legitimating, or trying to, his son with Elizabeth Blount (who became lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon), Henry Fitzroy, born in about 1519, and he ennobled him when he was only six as the Earl of Nottingham and Duke of Richmond and

Somerset, with precedence over all other dukes other than any legitimate sons he might have, and curiously he married young Henry to Mary Howard, first cousin to Mary and Anne Boleyn and their brother George, in 1533, but the boy was already in poor health and died in 1536, the marriage said to have been unconsummated. Henry bastardised his daughters, first Mary, then Elizabeth. But he showed no interest in any other putative children before Edward was born to Jane Seymour, not even a passing sign of affection or recognition. Henry Carey had his schooling organised by his aunt Anne Boleyn who sent him and the sons of several other minor courtiers to the French humanist Nicholas Bourbon. If the king really believed this was his son there is a greater likelihood he would've arranged a private tutor for him. It has been claimed that Henry Carey looked like Henry VIII. But without knowing the colouring and features of the Howard, Boleyn, and Carey families such a claim is meaningless. And I think a shrewd observer like Elizabeth I would have noticed if Henry Carey looked like a three-quarter sibling rather than a first cousin. But although she seems to have had a usually pleasant and friendly relationship with Henry Carey it was not particularly close.

And if Henry VIII had even a suspicion that Henry Carey was his son—after all, blood in Tudor times did matter—I think he might've stirred himself in the matter of Henry's career and Henry's marriage. There is no sign of the king ever doing so. Carey married the daughter of a Herefordshire knight, Sir Thomas Morgan, a connection that would seem quite appropriate for the son of a Devonshire knight—but which would be seen as a shameful comedown for a king's son. He then proceeded to have a large family of lusty and long-lived children (something which doesn't suggest Tudor paternity), he himself living to a respectable-for-Tudor-times age of seventy.

Henry Carey lived a life, no doubt, of solid worth, but nothing to suggest that anyone was looking to provide him with the favours and titles that would get showered on a King's son, even a wrong-side-of-the-blanket one. And if we remember him at all it is not as Henry VIII's son but as the patron of the Chamberlain's Men, the theatre company which for a time enjoyed a connection to William Shakespeare.

Certainly Henry himself never claimed royal paternity and I don't think we should—or not without far more compelling evidence. And I don't think we should do so merely because later descendants of Henry Carey think it would be exciting to claim Henry VIII as an ancestor—and Henry Carey is the only realistic means for them to do so.

And I have another reason for not wanting to run down that path on a whim. Ordinary people have a right to their lives, their families, their descendants. William Carey may have been an unremarkable man but he came from an interesting family and he lived in interesting times and I don't think he should be expunged from his son's family tree on such slim 'evidence' ... or for the sake of mere 'entertainment' ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Frederick Cartwright and Michael Biddiss in *Disease & History* engage with that question which has always wandered round in the background of Henry VIII: "That Ivan (the Terrible) was syphilitic is certain but the case of his near contemporary Henry VIII of England is controversial. Many writers have emphatically denied that Henry suffered from syphilis. That he suffered from something is agreed but the various authorities differ on the nature of the illness." He certainly seems to have suffered the diseases of the obese and the wrongly nourished but these were not infectious. "Henry was born in 1491, at least two years before syphilis erupted in Europe. While that fact makes it pointless to examine his ancestry, the question of his progeny is altogether relevant. The first of his six wives, Katherine of Aragon, mother of Queen Mary, gave birth to a male infant who died within a few days, and had at least three stillborn children all in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy. Anne Boleyn, mother of Queen Elizabeth I, miscarried at six months, at three-and-a-half months, and of a foetus of unknown age. Jane Seymour had one son, King Edward VI, born in 1537, and is unlikely to have had another pregnancy in her seventeen months of wedded life. The fourth marriage, with Anne of Cleves, was never consummated. There is no history of any pregnancy in the cases of

Catherine Howard, wedded to Henry from 1540 to 1542, or Catherine Parr who was left his widow in 1547, after four years of marriage.

“Henry had at least four children. The one known illegitimate boy, Henry Fitzroy, Earl of Richmond, died at age seventeen from a lung infection, possibly tuberculosis. Nothing else is known of his health. Elizabeth I died at the great age of sixty-nine. She is reported to have been short-sighted and may have had reason to believe she could not bear children. ‘The Queen of Scots is lighter of a fair son and I am but a barren stock’ was her remark on hearing of the birth of a Stuart heir north of the Border. Mary Tudor died aged forty-two. She was very short-sighted, spoke with the kind of loud voice used by a deaf person, and is reported to have had ‘a nose rather low and wide’ which discharged foul-smelling pus, of which her husband Philip II complained. The one legitimate son, Edward VI, died in 1553 aged fifteen. He was never a healthy child and the cause of death remains rather mysterious. Just over a year before, in April 1552, he fell ill of ‘mesels and smallpockes which breaking kindly from him was thought would prove a means to cleanse his body from such unhealthful humours as occasion long sickness and death’. There is little or no doubt that from the beginning of 1553 he became increasingly ill with pulmonary tuberculosis (consumption) but a skin eruption developed in the last fortnight of his life, his nails fell off and the top joints of his fingers and toes became necrotic. There was a widely held opinion that he had been poisoned.

“Every single incident in the above history can be fitted to an illness other than syphilis. But the evidence is cumulative. Katherine of Aragon’s three stillborn children, all dying later than the fourth month of pregnancy. Anne Boleyn’s miscarriage at six months, Edward’s skin rash in 1552 followed a little over a year by death from something sounding like a combination of tuberculosis and congenital syphilis producing syphilitic dactylitis, all are suggestive. Then we have Elizabeth’s and Mary’s short sight, Mary’s presumed deafness, the flattened bridge of her nose and a foul, purulent discharge — any of these could result from congenital syphilis. Finally we have the evidence of Henry’s last two marriages. If, as historians hold, his marriage policy was dictated by the desire to found a strong Tudor line, then the inference is that Henry became sterile or impotent in his late forties. This is a very strong argument in favour of syphilis.” And American historian Harold J. Grimm in *The Reformation Era 1500-1650* says simply, “Not realizing that his marriage was blighted as a consequence of syphilis, he believed that God was punishing him for having married his brother’s widow, contrary to biblical and canon law” ...

Henry’s mother, her mother, and his mother-in-law Isabella all had sizeable families; there is no suggestion that he came from a line of near barren stock to explain his own problems. Anne Boleyn, unwisely, was heard to say that Henry lacked virility. Robert Hutchinson in *Thomas Cromwell* wrote, “By European standards, Henry was not the great libertine of folklore. Aside from court flirtations, surviving accounts document extramarital affairs with just three women — Elizabeth Blount — mother of his bastard son Henry Fitzroy, later Duke of Richmond, Mary Boleyn and Margaret Shelton.” So there is a puzzle. Mary Boleyn’s affair with Henry VIII is placed in the early 1520s—but it is only when Henry effectively disengages from her life that she and William Carey have a family: Henry in 1526 and his sister in either 1525 or 1527. It does raise further questions about Henry VIII. Not least the curious one: Did Henry VIII actually like and want sex? Curiously, the answer may be no.

G. R. Elton in *Reform and Reformation* wrote, “Henry always argued that while marriage to a brother’s widow was prohibited by the divine law and therefore indispensable, the consanguinity of a wife’s sister belonged to the papal law and could be dispensed with. His known relations with Mary Boleyn and the impediment thereby created formed part of the general objection to the second marriage in English opinion. In 1533, when one Sir George Throckmorton was interviewed by the king about his opposition in the House of Commons, he was bold enough to mention that Henry could not marry Anne ‘for that it is thought ye have meddled both with the mother and with the sister’. Henry could only mutter, ‘never with the mother’; it took Cromwell, who was listening, to add sharply ‘nor never with the sister either’.”

At first I read this as Cromwell merely attempting to save Henry's miserable bacon (and that may well be so) but it does raise a different possibility. If Henry's affair was genuinely 'known relations' then nothing Cromwell could say would change the matter but the use of 'meddling' might suggest something slightly different. Was Henry's apparent embarrassment due more to the possibility that he wasn't certain how to describe his relationship with Mary? Did he hope that Mary with knowledge of potions and spells in use in the French Court could do something for his low libido and secret fear of impotence? Did he use her in some way as a go-between? Did she tell him intimate stories of French private lives? Or was she, like Catherine Parr, a woman whose presence he simply found comfortable and undemanding ...

To flirt, to need the constant flattery of women, to hope that the novelty of a new woman in his life would re-ignite his desire, to use the need for a son to bolster a low libido, and the sickness of both his known sons ... all of these things just may point to syphilis ...

\* \* \* \* \*

The image of John Davenant and his pub patrons is one of noise and bustle and bawdiness in the Cornmarket in Oxford. But this space has a far grimmer connection. It was here that Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, died at the stake; as also did Bishops Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, in the reign of Mary Tudor.

The most famous collection of stories of martyrs I suppose is John Foxe's work *The Book of Martyrs*; doubts can be raised about the details of his accounts, though not the sort of doubts that can be raised about some Catholic saints—did they really exist?—all of Foxe's characters undoubtedly existed. And he tried to take his stories from eye-witness reports. It is this, I think, which made his accounts so popular. He drew strongly Protestant morals from them—but he also created a sense of immediacy and raw courage and devotion to an ideal.

The man who has created on-going partisanship, both for and against, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, is famous for a different reason. He created the foundation stone of Anglican worship, *The Book of Common Prayer*. Diarmaid MacCulloch in his biography of Cranmer creates an image of a man who came from nowhere and by talent reached to the top of the new religion, but also flawed, confused, unsure of where he should be taking Henry VIII's church which was essentially Catholicism without the Pope.

And having lived a spiritually confused life, a confusion I sympathise with, he died a spiritually confused death. Again I have some sympathy. Under pressure from Mary's minions he recanted his views. But far from then using him as a symbol of a man who had seen the light and returned to the Catholic fold Mary promptly had him burnt at the stake.

Why did Cranmer recant his views? Whatever else he stumbled over he had shown not the slightest interest in re-establishing any part of the old ways. He had a wife and three children and he may well have hoped to make life under Mary Tudor easier for them. But MacCulloch also suggests that it was the horror of Bishop Ridley's death which undermined his will and his courage. Ridley too left his mark on England; it was at his suggestion that Edward VI created sixteen grammar schools, some of which still exist, and planned a further twelve colleges, not built because of the young king's death. He also urged the use of the empty buildings of Bridewell as lodgings for the very poor of London.

John Foxe writes of Ridley's death on October 16 1555, "Upon the north side of the town of Oxford, in the ditch over against Balliol College, the place of execution was appointed; and for fear of any tumult that might arise, to let the burning of them, the lord Williams was commanded, by the Queen's letters, and the householders of the city to be there assistant, sufficiently appointed. And when everything was in readiness, the prisoners were brought forth by the mayor and the bailiffs."

Ridley wore a black gown, slippers, and a nightcap; Latimer a long shabby frieze gown with a kerchief on his head. Ridley kissed Latimer and said 'Be of good heart, brother, for God will either assuage the fury of the flame, or else strengthen us to abide it.' Those around them received their clothes, even Ridley's truss, then they both had an iron chain bound round their waists. Ridley's brother brought pouches of gunpowder to hang round their necks. But the fire

was set to the wood around their feet. The gunpowder was no swift end. As the fire was lit Latimer was said to have cried out ‘We shall this day light such a candle, by God’s grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.’ Soon after Latimer was unconscious or dead.

“But Master Ridley, by reason of the evil making of the fire unto him, because the wooden faggots were laid about the gorse, and overhigh built, the fire burned first beneath, being kept down by the wood; which when he felt, he desired them for Christ’s sake to let the fire come unto him. Which when his brother-in-law heard, but not well understood, intending to rid him out of his pain (for the which cause he gave attendance), as one in such sorrow not well advised what he did, he heaped faggots upon him. So that he clean covered him, which made the fire more vehement beneath, that it burned clean all his nether parts before it touched the upper; and that made him leap up and down under the faggots, and often desire them to let the fire come unto him, saying ‘I cannot burn.’ Which indeed appeared well; for after his legs were consumed, by reason of his struggling through the pain (whereof he had no release but only his contention in God) he shewed that side towards us clean, shirt and all untouched with flame. Yet in all this torment he forgot not to call unto God still, having in his mouth, ‘Lord, have mercy upon me,’ intermingling his cry, ‘Let the fire come unto me, I cannot burn.’ In which pangs he laboured till one of the standers by with his bill pulled off the faggots above, and where he saw the fire flame up, he wrested himself unto that side.” Finally, after he could no longer stand on his charred legs, the flames reached the gunpowder.

I do not blame anyone for thinking twice. Yet people chose the stake rather than exile, escape, or subterfuge. And perhaps more puzzlingly people accepted the right of those in power to inflict heinous suffering. No one rushed forward with a bucket of water. No one attacked the officials as they went about their jobs. No one had to be stopped from dashing forward to free those tied up. In one way this seems to exemplify the gap in thinking between us and the world of more than 400 years ago. In other ways I am not sure that we have traveled as far as we think. When writer and lawyer Alan Dershowitz approved the USA bringing back torture (on the grounds it might save lives) I couldn’t help wondering how carefully he had thought it through.

There is a personal touch in all this. John Williams who was acting as lord lieutenant in Oxford at the time was an ancestor of mine. He didn’t preside over the trials for heresy, he didn’t choose Oxford, he didn’t deliver the prisoners. But he was one of the hundreds who stood there in the name of religion and watched Ridley in his terrible suffering. What was he feeling and did he believe the Queen was right? I think he did. I think it was only later as Mary’s reign came to its pathetic end that he, like many others, accepted that the new church was here to stay. And that is the sad thing about martyrs. What they stood for, in this case, the refutation of transubstantiation and a celibate priesthood and the ending of the sales of indulgences, just don’t seem to matter very much to later generations ...

The other side of the horror is surely that parents down through the ages gave their children *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* to read as noble and improving literature. Perhaps it is. Certainly it has many stories of great courage. But I wonder how many children suffered horrific nightmares because of it? Nicholas Tucker in *The child and the book* writes, “E. Nesbit was also tortured by fear as a child. In one of her stories, *The Aunt and Amabel*, she describes Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, one such frightener from her youth, as ‘A horrible book – the thick oleographs, their guarding sheets of tissue sticking to the prints like bandages to a wound ... it was a book that made you afraid to go to bed: but it was a book you could not help reading.’ ”

\* \* \* \* \*

So what of William Davenant as a poet rather than a putative love child? I went looking in anthologies to see if any of his poetry continues to be reprinted and found that *The Oxford Book of English Verse* grants him the fame of two poems; his *Song*, and *The Philosopher and the Lover; to a Mistress dying* which goes:

*Lover*

Your Beauty, ripe, and calm, and fresh,

As Eastern Summers are,  
Must now, forsaking Time and Flesh,  
Add light to some small Star.

*Philosopher*

Whilst she yet lives, were Stars decay'd,  
Their light by hers, relief might find:  
But Death will lead her to a shade  
Where Love is cold, and Beauty blinde.

*Lover*

Lovers (whose Priests all Poets are)  
Think ev'ry Mistress, when she dies,  
Is chang'd at least into a Starr:  
And who dares doubt the Poets wise?

*Philosopher*

But ask not Bodies doom'd to die,  
To what abode they go;  
Since Knowledge is but sorrows Spy,  
It is not safe to know.

And a week later I went to see how William got out of the Tower and what happened next ...

After two years incarcerated, in which he finished the three books of 'Gondibert' (which the DNB describes as "insufferably dull") he was released, possibly by the intervention of the Lord-keeper Whitelocke, though others are mentioned including the poet John Milton. He kept a low profile for a while but began to dabble with opera, including a musical version of 'Macbeth', and his piece 'The Siege of Rhodes' in 1656 is regarded as the first opera publicly produced in England, the first to use painted scenery (though masques did use scenery) and the first to use an Englishwoman, Mrs Coleman, as an actor on stage. In 1660, after another brief imprisonment, he formed the Duke's Company which put on some of his re-worked early pieces, also some pieces he'd written with John Dryden, though he was sole author of 'Man's the Master', a comedy which continued in popularity for several more generations ...

\* \* \* \* \*

(And in case you have a different curiosity: *The Lost Prince* deals with the mysterious man known as 'Richard of Eastwell', a Latin-reading brick-layer, who has been claimed by the Richard III Society as a lost son of Richard III. Baldwin though makes out a case for him to be the second of the Princes in the Tower, Richard of York. You might like to read the book and see what you think ... )

\* \* \* \* \*

March 4: Alan Sillitoe

March 5: Mem Fox

March 6: Cyrano de Bergerac

March 7: Piers Paul Read

March 8: Kenneth Grahame

March 9: Stephen Axelsen

Mircea Eliade

Taras Shevchenko (New Style)

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I must admit my image of Alan Sillitoe was of a writer of gritty pieces about delinquent youth, Borstal boys, soccer matches on cold winter afternoons—stories of young working class

men and poverty-stricken families, books like *Raw Material*, *Key to the Door*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and his most famous piece *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*. So I was curious to see that he had written of his travels in 1967 in the Soviet Union in *Gadfly in Russia*. He says 'In the evening we went to a party at the flat of Valentina Ivasheva, a professor of English literature at Moscow University. She had written textbooks for students on 'British proletarian novelists', and in the chapter dealing with my work said I was the only 'genuine working-class novelist', which seemed no favour to me, who rejected labels of any sort.'

Label or not, he did not strike me as a travel writer waiting to be discovered; his small contretemps and disasters along the way are neither comic nor dramatic, his presentation of the countryside is skimpy and uninteresting, and his presentation of the people he meets does little to bring them alive. Probably the most interesting little bits are his snippets of history and his information on writers and writing ...

This is a segment from his time in Kiev:

From Wednesday, 28 June 'In 1941-3 the Germans burned down Kiev University, razed nearly all the buildings around the main boulevards, destroyed the town hall, and dynamited the precious Church of the Dormition. A hundred thousand people were sent to forced labour in Germany, and two hundred thousand others murdered, including over a hundred thousand Jews at Babi Yar, a ravine on the city's outskirts. The massacre was the subject of a poem by Yevtushenko, and described in a novel by Anatoly Kuznetsov.

'In the evening I read poetry at the Place of Culture, and had dinner with other writers and several local officials. The poet Mark Pinchevsky asked about recent writing in England, and told me that David Storey's *This Sporting Life* had recently come out in a Ukrainian translation. The large printing sold in a day, and it was now hard to obtain a copy. The royalties, Mark said, would provide sufficient for Storey to spend a couple of interesting weeks in Kiev, if he got in touch with the Writers' Union.

'I said I would pass the information, and did, though I don't think David took advantage of it. Pinchevsky asked if I would send him a copy of *Roget's Thesaurus*, and Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*' ...

And from Thursday, 29 June

'We joined a conducted tour of the Perchersky Lavra and the Monastery of the Caves. Founded on its wooded hill slope above the river in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, part of its inner acres were set aside for the accommodation of the 150,000 pilgrims up to 1914 who were said to come there every year to the most highly revered convent in Russia.

'I had often noted, in a Baedeker bought in a Nottingham bookshop for five shillings twenty years before, the Catacombs of St Anthony in Kiev, and now I could see them. Excavated in clay soil, and supported by masonry, they honeycombed the ground under the cathedral.

'Just above six feet in height, only one person at a time could pass along the claustrophobic tunnels. Our serpentine group, provided with candles, was led by a monk, who pointed out the seventy-three saints at peace in their niches, bodies in open coffins mummified due to the benign temperature and chemical properties of the soil. The holy air was stifling, possibly from candle fumes, and in half an hour I was glad to see open sky, and hear the great bell of the Lavra tolling its somber notes.

'After a nap I walked with Mark Pinchevsky to a balustrade overlooking the river, where we talked further about writers and writing. Asking about censorship in the Soviet Union, he said that at present things were much better than they'd been, though he wasn't optimistic, because the lid could come down any moment.

'He handed me some of his poems, with English versions, and asked if I could get them published in London. I told him about *Modern Poetry in Translation*, a magazine started by Daniel Weissbort and Ted Hughes. I was on the editorial board, and promised to see what

could be done. He said I shouldn't say anything about taking his manuscripts out of the Soviet Union, nor let them be seen at the frontier.

'At supper in the Intourist Hotel I was presented with a rare and beautiful edition of Shevchenko's poems, the script of his handwriting reproduced on light blue paper, and translated into Russian.

'Shevchenko (1814-61) was regarded as 'the father of Ukrainian literature', and his writings were so feared by the tsarist authorities that he was sent to Siberia, and forbidden to write or paint – though he did small drawings whenever his guards were out of sight.'

\* \* \* \* \*

William Saroyan wrote a little piece called 'The Theological Student'. "I began to meet the theological student about a quarter of a century ago in the plays of certain Russian writers. Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, Andreyev and Gorki seldom wrote a play in which the theological student did not appear. The theological student seemed to be the playwright himself looking back at his youth with an amused but admiring eye. He was certainly a good man to have around—young; nervous; pale; often pimply; not the least bit handsome; ridiculous and pathetic; ill-clothed; ill-fed; eager for tea; full of the lore of heaven, hell and earth; and yet for all that a man who could be counted on to liven matters up considerably, for he was a devil at heart.

"He was certainly always in the midst of a desperate struggle with sin, which appeared to be an overwhelming longing to kiss the girls, a longing that never failed to startle him and bewilder them. Some of the girls were women with children older than himself. These rather liked him, for he was clumsy, inexperienced, inept, and therefore amusing to them. More in charity than in passion they permitted him to breathe heavily in their arms, only to discover later in the afternoon that he was thinking of killing himself. His habit of coughing nervously in their faces made them cry out, "Oh, Alexander Alexandrovich!"—which he took for an expression of love. He disgraced himself in company by his ill-timed remarks and by his uncontrollable desire to escape being good.

"He was useful to each playwright, however, in that it seemed perfectly natural for him to explain why humanity was unhappy."

Tolstoy, for instance, has the theological student blame "man's unhappiness on women" although he spreads his net more widely, even blaming the railroads or the need to eat; Dostoyevsky has his student claim that man was unhappy "because his very birth had been a nervous disorder"; and "Gorki's theological student was the best of the lot, though, for he hated everything which made life miserable, and everything made life miserable".

Yet the theological student is never seen reading books on theology, writing essays on theology, sitting in lectures on theology, planning a career which will use his theological studies. He is rather in the nature of a stock character perhaps like the butler in the traditional whodunit. I was intrigued by this idea and I have been browsing in Chekhov to see how he treated his theological student ...

Strictly speaking, although he has a 'University Student' in several plays, we are never told what they are students of. Most likely Saroyan had in mind the character of Trofimov in *The Cherry Orchard* who makes various serious and rather pompous observations—

'Human pride, as you see it, has something mystical about it. Maybe you're right from your point of view, but if we reason it out simply, without frills, what's the point of human pride, what's the sense of it, if man is poorly constructed physiologically, if the vast majority is crude, unthinking, profoundly wretched. We should stop admiring ourselves. We should just work.'

'Maybe man has a hundred senses and in death only the five we know perish, the remaining ninety-five live on.'

'Mankind is advancing, perfecting its powers. Everything that's unattainable for us now will some day come within our grasp and our understanding, only we've got to work, to help the truth seekers with all our might. So far here in Russia, very few people do any work. The

vast majority of educated people, as I know them, pursues nothing, does nothing, and so far isn't capable of work.'

'They're all earnest, they all have serious faces, they all talk only about major issues, they philosophize, but meanwhile anybody can see that the working class is abominably fed, sleeps without pillows, thirty or forty to a room, everywhere bedbugs, stench, damp, moral pollution ... So obviously all our nice chitchat serves only to shut our eyes to ourselves and to others.'

'We're at least two hundred years behind the times, we've still got absolutely nothing, no definite attitude to the past, we just philosophize, complain of depression, or drink vodka. It's so clear, isn't it, that before we start living in the present, we must first atone for our past, put an end to it, and we can atone for it only through suffering, only through extraordinary, unremitting labor.'

—but the other characters merely regard him as absurd and take little notice of him. Yet it may be that Chekhov did use him to express something much broader than one family on one estate—when he has him say 'All Russia is our orchard.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Andrew Wilson in *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* quotes from the 1187 epic *The Lay of Ihor's Host* who "led his brave troops/against the land of the Polovtsians/in the name of the land of Rus". This 'land of Rus' was the early medieval kingdom of Kievan Rus, dominant in eastern Europe between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, and covering most of western and central Ukraine, part of what is now Belarus and parts of what is now western Russia. *The Lay of Ihor's Host* is likened to other ancient epics like *Beowulf* and deals with Prince Ihor's (known to us as Igor) campaign against the Polovtsians, a pagan tribe from the eastern steppes. The Prince and his followers were beaten and the epic is "more of a lament than a celebration." The poem, supposed to be written soon after the events it describes disappeared and was found again in the 1790s by Count Musin-Pushkin "a collector of antiquities in the service of Catherine the Great" but the original copy was destroyed along with the Count's house during the great fire which preceded Napoleon's occupation in 1812. Doubts were thrown on the authenticity of that manuscript. But in 1852 a fourteenth century chronicle, the *Zadonshchina*, inspired by the original Lay, was discovered and appeared to authenticate the earlier copy.

Wilson goes on to say "there is little agreement as to who the Rus actually were. Linguistic imprecision and, unfortunately, Russocentrism have too often led to the assumption that 'the Rus' were simply early medieval Russians. Many translations of *The Lay of Ihor's Host*, including the 1961 version by Vladimir Nabokov ... render the 'land of Rus' (*Ruskaia zemlia*) as 'the Russian land'. Tsarist and Soviet historians, and many of their Western rivals, have too often abused the idea of east Slavic common origin in an 'ancient Rus nation' to deny Ukrainians (and Belarussians) any separate identity at all. Ukrainian historians, on the other hand, have tended to argue that the Russians and Ukrainians, or at least their ancestors, have always pursued separate historical paths."

Leonard Clark in his adaption for children, *The Tale of Prince Igor*, says the epic "tells of how the Russians set out for the eastern steppes from their towns on the Rivers Desna and Sein, on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1185. The expedition, a foolhardy one, was led by four princes, Igor, Vsevolod, his brother, Vladimir, his son, and Svyatoslav, his nephew." The Polovtsians are presented in a very dark way:

But the enemy were already hurrying  
Along unready roads towards the mighty Don,  
Flocks of black swans let loose at midnight;  
You could hear their wagons creaking.

And he, too, presents it as a Russian epic on Russian land:  
On Russian land the ploughman's voice was rarely heard,  
The ravens croaked as they divided the corpses between them,  
Crows gossiped as they flew to their bloody banquet.

O those old wars were terrible and bitter enough,  
But nothing compared to this battle by the Don.

No suggestion that it is a part of *Ukraine's* history. But, incredibly, three of the princes, including Igor, survived.

Some believe 'the Rus' was a loose conglomeration of peoples while others see them as a relatively united and homogenous people. But 'the Rus' existed before any ideas of the nation state had developed. The Kievan Rus were those peoples for whom Kiev was the cultural, administrative, religious, and commercial power at the heart of their lives. The Russians have used the similarities as part justification of their long absorption of the Ukraine. The Ukrainians have used the important differences they see in language, culture, religion, and history to promote the sense of a unique people deserving an independent and unique nation. And to complicate things further—Prince Igor's ancestors, the Novgorod dynasty, were as much Vikings as they were Slavs.

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Of course Chekhov, I found, doesn't quite belong in a consideration of Ukrainian writers; in Janet Malcolm's very readable introduction it is clear he came there as a 'swallow' not a nestling, yet the thought that he had a closer connection persisted. V. S. Pritchett begins his biography *Chekhov: A Spirit Set Free* with "Anton Chekhov was born on January 17, 1860, in the small seaport of Taganrog, a town just outside what are now the boundaries of the Ukraine, on the Sea of Azov in the south of Russia." Perhaps, in my usual shipshod way, I simply saw near enough as good enough.

And there were others who have been overshadowed by more famous namesakes; I found this in an essay by Adrienne de Bouvier in a little writers' magazine, *The Write Angle*, "Whom did Alexei Konstantinovich Tolstoy (not to be confused with Leo Tolstoy, born 11 years later) model himself on? *Nobody*—he relied on his own integrity to guide him. Alexei was born in 1817 in the Ukraine, where he spent his formative years on an uncle's estate. He became a poet, novelist and dramatist. He declined Tsar Alexander II's offer to appoint him as aide-de-camp, and settled for the honorary title of court huntsman, which enabled him to pursue his love of writing.

"He excelled at satire and wrote a comic history of Russia which did not endear him to the aristocracy. He was criticized for his failure to embrace the social schools of the day. Two of his plays were censored. Undaunted, Alexei continued to write."

But if I was looking for a truly indigenous son of the Ukraine then the man to focus on was Nikolai Gogol who was born there in 1809. And did *he* embrace 'the social schools of the day'? That is a surprisingly hard question to answer.

On the one hand there is the chaos in which Gogol (in Ukrainian: Mykola Hohol') lived his life, failing at most of the things he tried, acting, the bureaucracy, lecturing in history, and burning as much of his writing as he kept and published, always in a frenzy of doubt and despair; on the other hand there is the uneasy world of the Ukraine itself, invaded down through the centuries by everyone from Genghis Khan and Catherine the Great, to the Cossacks and Turks, and feeling the weight of the Russian yoke in the nineteenth century.

Dmytro Cyzevs'kyj in *A History of Ukrainian Literature* writes: "To this day, Gogol's relationship to the Ukrainian national problem has not been definitively established. His works certainly betray no concern for it: in the spirit of the best Romantic traditions, they unite interesting narrative with the resolution of certain purely literary exercises and ideological problems. Although he had not set himself the task of ethnographic and historical accuracy (for which he was criticized by Andrij Storovenko and Kulis), he was able to create sensitive, vivid, charming and (because of their general tone), extraordinarily faithful pictures of the Ukrainian landscapes, life and national character. And, in *Taras Bul'ba* he succeeded in elevating from Ukrainian history to the level of the great Romantic epic as he combined stylistic elements from folk *dumy* with the narrative approach of Walter Scott and Homer. In addition, Gogol' developed in his work the basic principles of the Romantic outlook and also alluded to the

main features of his own ideas; his writings, therefore, are not merely amusing, but are the completely serious manifestations of his opinions.”

His best known works are his short stories, ‘The Overcoat’ and ‘The Nose’ (he had a very long nose himself) which still turn up in anthologies, his novel *Dead Souls* in which a rogue goes around acquiring the documents of deceased peasants, his play *The Government Inspector*, and the Cossack epic *Taras Bulba*.

“Gogol’s verbal talent was phenomenal: the rhythm of his language, his originality of expression (explained in part by his faulty knowledge of Russian), his use of Ukrainian phraseology, especially of folk songs (which he collected, carefully studied, and made the subject of an interesting article) with excerpts of which he sometimes composed entire pages of his stories. All of these features of Gogol’s writings, along with their peculiar “bilingualism,” make his work a true monument of world Romantic literature and one that succeeded in drawing many Ukrainians home again. It is not without reason that Sevchenko, in 1844, hailed him as “my great friend” and “brother.””

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Shevchenko was born a serf but managed to get an education; in his poetry he was influenced by both Ukrainian folk songs and by the broader epics of the Romantic era, particularly the work of Byron. But Shevchenko drew attention to the oppression of the people in poems such as ‘The Dream’, ‘The Caucasus’, and ‘The Epistle of Oppression’ and in stirring words such as—

*Vsvoji xati-svoja pravda,*

*i syla i volja!* — In your own house — there prevails your own truth, and strength and freedom!

—and with his concentration on themes such as ‘Truth’ and ‘Freedom’, but more particularly by his membership of the secret Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius, which despite its religious name, was seen by tsarist Russia as a hotbed of sedition, nationalism, and incipient revolution; Shevchenko was exiled for five years (1851–56) and made to perform military service even though he was well past his youth, having been born in 1814. Just before his death he wrote:

“The day passes, as does the night ... And, singing hold of your head in your hands, you wonder: why does the apostle of truth and knowledge not come?”

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March 10: Enid Moodie Heddle

March 11: Floyd Kemske

March 12: Kylie Tennant

Paul Buddee

David Armitage

March 13: Noela Young

March 14: Maxim Gorki

March 15: Hesba Brinsmead

March 16: Donna Rawlins

March 17: Kate Greenaway

March 18: William Hatfield

March 19: Tobias Smollett

March 20: Dianne Bates

March 21: Thomas Shapcott

March 22: Rosie Scott

March 23: Sonya Hartnett

Jeremy Hooker

March 24: Olive Schreiner

March 25: Anne Brontë

March 26: Robert Frost

Richard Dawkins  
March 27: Kenneth Slessor  
March 28: Mario Vargas Llosa  
March 29: Mary Gentle  
March 30: Milton Acorn

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Do you remember the fuss that was made when it was said that Colleen McCullough had taken a plot from L. M. Montgomery? I don't remember anyone pointing out that Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* owes quite a lot to Kate Douglas Wiggin's 1904 book *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. And both books could be said to owe a lot to that nineteenth-century tradition exemplified in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* where the child in its innocence and happiness overwhelms and changes adults; Little Lord Fauntleroy and the grumpy old man, Rebecca and two ossified elderly aunts, Anne and the rigid and reclusive brother and sister on their little farm on Prince Edward Island. Not to mention later books like *Susannah of the Mounties* by Muriel Portman. They are books to celebrate the innocence and natural goodness of childhood.

There is a related and over-lapping genre of children's books, such as Susan M. Coolidge's Katy books and Louisa M. Alcott's Little Women books but they are more focused on the dynamics and the duties contained in families. Though 'Katy' is in the titles she is not the key ingredient. More abstract themes like responsibility, sharing, and womanly behaviour are the real foundation stones ...

I was thinking of this question of childhood innocence when I came upon the interesting information that Prince Edward Island's best known poet is Milton Acorn—and far from dwelling on rustic beauty, rural peace, or picture postcard images he comes across more like the Geoff Goodfellow or Myron Lysenko of Canadian poetry, something far more gritty, brusque, and down-to-earth. I rather liked his image of someone who rolls up his sleeves, spits on his hands, and gets down to work, surrounded by the sawdust of his craft ....

Since I'm Island-born home's as precise  
as if a mumbly old carpenter,  
shoulder-straps crossed wrong,  
laid it out,  
refigured to the last three-eighths of a shingle.

\* \* \* \* \*

And although my image of this 'end' of Canada still retains those images of rich autumn colours, church socials, serene but unremarkable rural prosperity, it did not really surprise me to learn that one of the world's most unpleasant environmental disasters is equally a part of maple woods and green fields.

It seems to be human nature. I read in *Contaminated Sites in Australia* (ed. Gerard C. Rowe and Steven Seidler) that Australia has over ninety thousand known toxic waste sites; from sheep dip to industrial solvents, from asbestos waste to Maralinga, and with a clean-up bill estimated to be between \$5 and \$10 billion. (Yes, Johnny, we do love our country. It is such a marvelously big place to dump nameless horrors and forget about them ... ) And we've managed that extraordinary record in only two hundred years. Nor does it seem to matter whether a country is large or small—its behaviour follows the same pattern.

In huge countries like the United States—

'Just yesterday our newspaper published a map showing the sites of toxic waste dumps in our state. They were everywhere, cancerous tumors just beneath the surface of the earth. Like Virginia, I too have wondered about invisible killers — in the water contaminated by chemical companies' refuse, in the air polluted by automobiles and factories, in the atmosphere bombarded by microwaves, in the food riddled by additives.'

From *A Choice of Heroes* by Mark Gerzon. The state he was referring to was Indiana.

In small over-crowded places like Holland—

‘Since the discoveries at Volgemeer Polder (where authorities found more than ten thousand barrels of dangerous chemical rubbish) more than four thousand other dumps have been found in Holland. More than three hundred and fifty of them posed a certain threat to public health.’

From *High Tech Holocaust* by James Bellini.

And even more insidiously out at sea—

Howard Kohn wrote in *Who Killed Karen Silkwood?*: “The new *Progressive* told of plutonium seeping from a nuclear dump outside Sheffield, Illinois, a region rich in walnut forests and soybean fields. The NRC said there was no health hazard, but cattle and fish were dying of unfamiliar diseases; and local officials were alarmed enough to fence off nearby swimming holes. Kitty’s drawer was cluttered with similar reports. At Maxey Flats, Kentucky, plutonium and uranium waste had leaked into underground streams. Radioactive curium from New York’s West Valley disposal site had left a trail down the Cattaraugus Creek, across Lake Erie, over Niagara Falls, into Lake Ontario. Cesium and cobalt from the Indian Point reactor on Long Island had settled in the Hudson River. One million gallons of radioactive waste embalmed in metal barrels had been sunk off the coasts of Delaware, Maryland, and California. The barrels, steel with a concrete matrix, were corroding. Men in minisubmarines had begun tests near the Farallon Islands, fifty miles west of San Francisco, after gigantic sponges were found growing on the barrels. About sixty-seven thousand barrels were at the bottom of the Atlantic and another forty-seven thousand in the Pacific. No one knew the exact total; the AEC had destroyed its records of the dumping.”

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So what of Canada? The *Lonely Planet Guide* to Cape Breton Island, just east of Prince Edward Island, says, “Just three blocks east of the Charlotte St museums is one of North America’s largest toxic waste sites, the notorious Sydney Tar Ponds. From Kia Auto Mall at the corner of Prince and Dodd Sts, go 700m north on Dodd and then Intercolonial St, keeping right toward Ferry St, which runs directly into the site (entry forbidden). From the gate at the east end of Ferry St you’ll get a good view (and smell) of this poisonous pool and the now defunct steel mill, visible beyond a long hill of slag known as the ‘High Dump.’ The ‘Tar Pond’ is actually the tidal estuary of Muggah Creek, and toxic wastes are carried out to sea with every tide. A kilometer beyond the mill ruins is a 51-hectare coke oven site, now just a field of coal-black rubble contaminated to depths of 25m, it’s a scene of utter desolation you’ll probably only want to see once in your life.

“From the founding of the Sydney steel mill in 1901, some of the world’s dirtiest coal was burned here to produce coke, and wastes were simply allowed to accumulate. After the mill became unprofitable in 1967, a Crown corporation took over from Hawker Siddley. The first cleanup attempt was undertaken in 1986 with the installation of a pumping system and incinerator intended to reprocess the wastes. The system never worked, and it was abandoned after eating up \$55 million in federal and provincial funds. The coke ovens closed in 1988. In 1996 a \$20 million scheme to bury the Tar Ponds under a mountain of slag was canceled when alarmingly high levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) were discovered by the contractor. In 2001 the mill was finally shut down, leaving behind 700,000 tons of sludge, including an estimated 45,000 tons contaminated with deadly PCBs.”

I remember hearing it said that no one should write poetry after the Holocaust. No one thought to say why they were picking on poetry; that it was apparently okay to go on writing novels, short stories, and non-fiction. And the thinking behind this did not make a lot of sense to me. Surely they should’ve been making the opposite claim? To allow Hitler to destroy poetry along with millions of Jews, Gypsies, gays, incurables, not to mention ordinary civilians across Europe ...

And poetry is both public and private. But from the most intensely private confessional poetry to the most intensely public poems about the state of the world and its horrors—it

remains a form which tends to reach out to tiny groups reading or listening simply because they like poetry.

The question which came to me after coming across that bit about the tar ponds was: can poetry actually deal with things like toxic waste? I think it can ... and more so if we take poetry as one way to deal with the most profound issues of human survival. It wouldn't surprise me in the least to find that Milton Acorn wrote poems about this place of 'utter desolation' ...

He says that he "without apology or embarrassment (made) use of Marxist and existentialist ideas" in his writing. He was wounded in the head in WW2 and began his poetry career afterwards in small magazines and chapbooks; *In Love and Anger*, *The Brain's the Target*, *Against a League of Liars*, *I've tasted My Blood*, and his major collection *Dig up my heart: Selected Poems*. He died in 1986. But the more I looked for material about him the more the image of an angry, passionate, thwarted, overlooked man began to take shape. He wasn't 'the Peaceful Carpenter of Charlottetown' but a man railing at the smugness, complacency, dishonesty, and unfairness of Canadian society. *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, perhaps understandably, said of him. "The poems of Acorn's early maturity, collected for the most part in the first half of *I've tasted my blood*, are generally brief and straightforward, but have a subtlety of technique that gives them a surprisingly rich resonance. A sensitive ear for the nuances of North American speech rhythms and a gift for imagery, ranging from delicately precise notation to an almost surrealistic evocativeness, are joined to a fine organizing intelligence. Acorn's best lyrics are miniature dramas in which conflict and resolution find expression through the subtle interplay of rhythm and imagery." I have noticed that such august volumes are rarely wild about politically-engaged material—but I wonder which of his poems Canadian readers most liked ...

And there is another question in there. Do tourists actually follow those instructions until they come to the gate on Ferry Street? Do tourists *want* to view that scene 'once in your life'?

\* \* \* \* \*

March 31: Nikolai Gogol

April 1: Rolf Hochhuth

April 2: Hans Christian Andersen

April 3: Reginald Hill

April 4: Pavel Gusev

Jane Hall

Ronald Hope

April 5: Algernon Charles Swinburne

April 6: Marcia Vaughan

Philip Henry Gosse

April 7: William Wordsworth

April 8: Ursula Curtiss

April 9: Cyril Pearl

April 10: Celia Syred

Penny Vincenzi

April 11: Bernard O'Dowd

April 12: Jack Hibberd

April 13: Seamus Heaney

Samuel Beckett

Christopher Hitchens

April 14: Arnold Toynbee

April 15: Henry James

Michael Biddiss

April 16: J. M. Synge

April 17: Isak Dinesen

NZ writer Maurice Gee wrote a novel called *Going West* which purports to be the main character's attempt to write the biography of a great poet. The thing that puzzled me was that the novel has no poetry in it at all. Would someone think to write a study of a great poet without ever quoting from their great poetry? It didn't seem very likely. But then I heard Maurice Gee interviewed for some program and he said that as he wasn't a great poet he didn't feel he could put poems into the novel. At first I thought this was a fair explanation. Then I decided it was a cop-out. Would anyone write of a great scientist or a great suffragette without quoting at length from their writings? Of course not. It would just require a lot of hard work in creating the novel. And if you go out and pick up a book of poems by even the greatest of poets and open it at random you will find lines which are hardly 'great'. Some of them are not even moderately good. As Peter Wimsey says in *Gaudy Night*—"It appears to be altogether a choice of evils. But you have only to command. My ear is open like a greedy shark to catch the tunings of a voice divine" to which Harriet says "Great Heavens! Where did you find that?" and Wimsey replies "That, though you might not believe it, is the crashing conclusion of a sonnet by Keats. True, it is a youthful effort, but there are some things that even youth does not excuse." And Lord Byron was no longer young when he began a song with,

'Oh my lonely — lonely — lonely pillow!

Where is my lover, where is my lover?

Is it his bark which my dreary dreams discover?

Far far away! And alone among the billow' ... though, fortunately for his reputation, he admitted it wasn't very good and didn't seek to publish it.

Henry Lawson had no apparent qualms about publishing 'The Township'—or he needed the money—even though it begins:

Let us sing in careless measures

of the days of long ago,

Like the trot, trot, trot of horses,

In the time of Cobb & Co.

But the other day I saw a copy of *Going West* for sale at 10c and thought I would re-read it. In fact, this time round I felt I could forgive Gee for what previously seemed a glaring omission. Because the book is not really about the great poet—it is about his childhood friend and biographer and what he reads into their lives and various shared experiences ...

So what of NZ's 'great poets'? The other day I came upon an interesting little poem 'Memorial to a Missionary' by Keith Sinclair who, it turns out, was writing of the grandfather to our Henry Clarence Kendall. Thomas Kendall 1778 - 1832 went to NZ as a missionary, in fact their first resident missionary (which implies there had been others who briefly hopped off boats, held a service or two, and got back on board) and the author of New Zealand's 'first book'.

How biographical the poem was I couldn't guess. Sinclair certainly suggests that Kendall damaged Maori culture. But he also suggests that Kendall was damaged in the process.

The poem begins—

Instructed to speak of God with emphasis

On sin and its consequence, to cannibals

Of the evil of sin, he came from father's farm,

The virtuous home, the comfortable chapel,

The village school, so inadequately armed,

His mail of morals tested in drawing-rooms,

Not war, to teach his obscure and pitied pupils.

—but—

The unfaithful shepherd was sent from the farm of souls

To live, a disgraceful name in the Christian's ear,

A breathing sin among the more tolerant chiefs.  
An outcast there, or preaching where he fled  
To Valparaiso from devils and reproof,  
Or coasting logs round Sydney, still he strove  
To find the life in the words his past had said. ...

I found Thomas Kendall in *The New Zealand Book of Events*:

1808 *Apr 4* At a Church Missionary Society meeting in the rectory of the Rev. William Goode at Blackfriars, London, the Rev. Samuel Marsden, Anglican chaplain of NSW, proposed a CMS mission in NZ, and the idea was accepted.

1814 *June 10 – July 25* Lay preachers from NSW, Thomas Kendall and William Hall, made an exploratory visit to the Bay of Islands where they distributed tracts and held services on their ship.

That sounded a pretty normal sequence of events—BUT THEN—

1823 *Aug 3* Marsden arrived in the Bay of Islands to deal with a problem created by Thomas Kendall who had taken a Maori girl as a “second wife”. Kendall was suspended from the CMS on Aug 9. ...

And did he go to Valparaiso? Well yes, it seems so. His son Basil, father of our Henry Clarence, was for a time an officer in the Chilean Navy ...

\* \* \* \* \*

It always seemed to me that Henry Kendall’s poem ‘Bell-birds’ which we had in our reading books at primary school was very green and very English. You may remember it. The first verse goes—

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,  
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling:  
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges  
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.  
Through breaks of the cedar and sycamore bowers  
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers;  
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,  
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.

—and seems just the thing to enjoy on a hot summer’s day. Just not somehow something which shouts ‘Australia!’

But Joan Dugdale writes in *The Gripping Beast* of her character Ursula Kenning traveling a NSW road “Which drops, now, from the exposed ridges, and winds down to Brisbane Water, and to the city of Gosford, sprawling along its shore. Here beside the winding road was once, until quite recently, a forest: where bellbirds sang tink-tink among the tall timbers, the sound now here, now there, the birds themselves invisible; where falling water splashed among the tree-ferns; where stood a little monument to poet, Henry Kendall, now a hundred years dead, whose most famous poem celebrated this place. The monument, a poor thing, remains beside the road, but the poet’s place, if it lives at all, lives only in verse and memory” ... Even so, I now find myself thinking of it as having something of the greater lushness of the NZ landscape lurking somewhere in the background. But this is a curious question: are the poems of Aotearoa noticeably more lush and green? And is there a great poet lurking there to be written about?

I came upon that missionary poem in a book called *Spirit in a Strange Land* which calls itself an anthology of New Zealand spiritual verse. Though I quite enjoyed it and there are familiar names in it, Janet Frame, Alan Curnow, Keri Hulme, Fleur Adcock, C. K. Stead, and others, nothing really stayed with me. I think the Land of the Long White Cloud is still waiting for its great poet.

\* \* \* \* \*

I have come upon C. K. Stead described as The Grumpy Old Man rather than The Grand Old Man of New Zealand Letters; the one who enjoys tearing other writers to pieces in his

reviews. Perhaps. And this poem of his, 'Lucifer Dictates His Reply', does not exactly drip sweetness and light—

Sorry for yourself  
God? No wonder!  
No one ever wrote  
A longer novel  
Or a worse one.  
You let the characters take over.  
Look what they've done!

What I hate most  
Is the mad womanish  
Self-centre in us  
Demanding parturition.  
I don't want to be  
A self-conceiver.

Don't sit there  
On your big  
Bad novelist's bum  
Cracking down on the kids for misdemeanours  
And letting the crimes pass.  
Be a man, God.  
Get out the napalm and the toxic gas.  
I need a strong hand to curb this urge  
To ape my betters.  
I feel a novel coming on.  
Hit me with all you've got.

—but not long ago I came across his novel *Sister Hollywood* in a sale and I found I rather enjoyed it. Perhaps he was speaking personally as well as allegorically and it was the novel he felt 'coming on'. Who knows? It suggested a man looking back with both irritation and nostalgia on to the Hollywood of the late 1940s and early 1950s. An image which is surprisingly common. People like to wallow in that remembrance of their childhood selves being transported by the glitz and glamour, the make-believe, the escape from fairly limited and mundane lives—and yet they often temper their memories by a sharp critique of the things that were wrong with Hollywood; in this case the communist hunts, the alcohol, the failure of dreams, the broken marriages, the level of insincerity ...

\*

The other day I picked up a book called *A Case of Immunity* by Neil Giles which is a futuristic mystery. The blurb says 'this novel joins the growing list of popular detective fiction now being published in New Zealand'. But cast your thoughts across the Tasman and think 'detective fiction' and Ngaio Marsh immediately fills the view. I found myself wondering if she has been good for young writers there; a kind of Grand Old Lady figure to either emulate or studiously avoid or even rebel against—or was she seen as too much of an expatriate to really influence the next couple of generations of writers?

What shall we sing? sings Harry.

Sing truthful men? Where shall we find  
The man who cares to speak his mind:  
Truth's out of uniform, sings Harry,

That's her offence  
Where lunacy parades as commonsense.

Of lovers then? A sorry myth  
To tickle tradesmen's palates with.  
Production falls, wise men can prove,  
When factory girls dream of love.

Sing of our leaders? Like a pall  
Proficiency descends on all  
Pontific nobodies who make  
Some high pronouncement every week.

Of poets then? How rarely they  
Are more than summer shadow-play.  
Like canvassers from door to door  
The poets go, and gain no ear.

Sing of the fighters? Brave-of-Heart  
Soon learns to play the coward's part,  
And calls it, breaking solemn pacts,  
Fair Compromise or Facing Facts.

Where all around us ancient ills  
Devour like blackberry the hills  
On every product of the time  
Let fall a poisoned rain of rhyme,  
*sings Harry;*  
But praise St Francis feeding crumbs  
Into the empty mouths of guns.

What shall we sing? sings Harry.

Sing all things sweet or harsh upon  
These islands in the Pacific sun,  
The mountains whitened endlessly  
And the white horses of the winter sea,  
*sings Harry.*

'Themes' by Denis Glover

Was that too pessimistic to say 'and gain no ear'? Are trans-Tasman readers kind to their poets and novelists? I turned to C. K. Stead's *Kin of Place* to see if he had pronounced on this question of The Great Poet. Without going that far, he grants his laurel wreath to two poets:

James K. Baxter "at once careless, prolific and brilliant" ...

And Allen Curnow "inventive, unpredictable, writing poetry which strikes me, as it has done serially over the years, as unsurpassed by the work of any other poet at present writing in English." ...

\* \* \* \* \*

April 19: Richard Hughes

April 20: Anthony Howell

April 21: Max Weber

Henry Montherlant

April 22: Henry Fielding

April 23: William Shakespeare  
Halldór Laxness  
Gladys Lister

\* \* \* \* \*

Iona and Peter Opie wrote in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*, “A problem intriguing alike to the riddle collector and to the Shakespearian student is the identity of the ‘Book of Riddles’ lent by Master Slender to Alice Shortcake (*Merry Wives*, I. i). It is almost undoubtedly that listed by Laneham in his letter from Kenilworth (1575) and by *The English Courtier* (c. 1579) as *The book of Riddels*. Whether it was the same as *The Booke of Meery Riddles* as is presumed by Furnivall, Brandl, and other scholars is not proven, though it is probable. The collection is extant in an edition of 1600, and from internal evidence seems to belong to one of the previous decades. Among the seventy-seven riddles are seven rhymes still known to children: ‘He went to the wood and caught it’, ‘Two legs sat upon three legs’, ‘What is that as high as a hall?’, ‘What is they which be full all day?’, ‘I came to a tree’, ‘What is it that is higher then a house?’, and ‘What is that as white as milke?’ Even if Shakespeare was referring to another book it would not be unreasonable to suppose that he was familiar with these problems. Further editions of the *Meery Riddles* were printed in 1617, 1629, 1660, 1672, and 1685, a collection similarly styled appeared in 1631, and *A New Booke of Merry Riddles* (in two parts) was issued in 1665. Many of the riddles of 1600 reappear in the 1631 collection, though they had obtained a more literary flavour; others are noted for the first time, e.g. ‘Tis black without and black within’, ‘I am cald by name of man’, and the renowned ‘Hitty pittie within the wall’, later to become a favourite of the impertinent Squirrel Nutkin. Indeed, the riddles were already termed ‘Very meete and delightfull for Youth to try their wits’ (1631) and ‘No lesse vsefull then behouuefull for any yong man or child, to know if he be quick-witted, or no’ (1629). The remaining important collection of the seventeenth-century underlines what has been said. It is a manuscript collection (Harley 1960), apparently of youthful composition, for the spelling is vile even for the period (c. 1645). It was made by the Holme family of Chester, principally (?) by the Randle Holme (1627-99) who later wrote *The Academy of Armory*. The manuscript is one of the most valuable of all English riddle collections. Its very imperfections are of interest, for they show, in contrast to the complete forms of the riddle books, the manner in which the rhymes were orally transmitted three centuries ago. It contains fourteen rhymes still commonly remembered, including, ‘j have a little boy in a whit cote’ (Nancy Etticoat), ‘What is yt that is rond as a cup?’, ‘On yonder hill ther stand a Knight’ (Gray Grizzle), ‘Four & twenty white Bulls’, ‘There was a King met a King’, and most of those already mentioned.’

\* \* \* \* \*

While I had riddles on my mind I came upon a book in the library called *Anglo-Saxon Riddles* by John Porter and couldn’t resist finding out what kind of riddles might have been around a thousand years ago. Porter writes, “It is a rare culture that does not riddle, since riddle is metaphor, transformation and analogy, poetic perception, verbal play, language under creative imagination, “making it new”. Whether as child’s game, mythic repository, or lyric poem, as here, the riddle re-fashions vision by showing things stranger than they seem. It reveals by disguise, confuses to illumine, unifies the disparate through paradox.” He took his riddles from the 10<sup>th</sup> century *Book of Exeter*, no longer complete but full of delights. The fullness of nuance, innuendo, double entendre, and layers of meaning no doubt are only open to scholars of Anglo-Saxon. But I thoroughly enjoyed this little foray. So here are some examples:

*Riddle Seven*

Soundless my robe when I step on earth  
or rest at home or ruffle the waters.  
My clothes and this lofty air  
at times lift me over human dwellings,  
and then clouds’ power bears me

far above folk; my dress  
rustles loud and whistles,  
sings clearly when I am far  
from flood and field, a flying spirit.

(Answer: a swan)

*Riddle Twenty-five*

I am a wondrous thing, woman's delight,  
handy in the home; I harm no  
householder but him who hurts me.  
My stalk is tall, I stand in bed,  
my root rather hairy. The haughty girl,  
churl's gorgeous daughter,  
sometimes has courage to clasp me,  
rushes my redness, rapes my head,  
stows me in her stronghold. Straightway  
the curly-locked lady who clamps me  
weeps at our wedding. Wet is her eye.

(Answer: an onion)

*Riddle Forty-four*

Strangely hangs by man's thigh  
below his lap. In front is hole.  
Is stiff and hard, stands in good stead  
when the man his own skirt  
over knee hoists, wants that known hole  
with his dangler's head to greet,  
fill it as he filled it long and oft before.

(Answer: a key)

*Riddle Forty-seven*

A moth ate words. A marvel to me  
when I found out their strange fate,  
that the worm swallowed some man's song,  
a thief in the night filched his fine speech  
and its stout structure. The stealing guest  
was not a whit wiser for the words he guzzled.

(Answer: a bookworm)

*Riddle Fifty-four*

A man came walking where he knew  
she stood in a corner, stepped forward;  
the bold fellow plucked up his own  
skirt by hand, stuck something stiff  
beneath her belt as she stood,  
worked his will; they both wiggled.  
The man hurried; his trusty helper  
plied a handy task, but tired  
at length, less strong now, than she,  
weary of the work. Thick beneath  
her belt swelled the thing good men  
praise both with their hearts and purses.

(Answer: a butter churn)

*Riddle Sixty-eight*

I saw the creature crawl away;  
it was weirdly wreathed in wonder.

*Riddle Sixty-nine*

Wonder formed in wave; water turned to  
Bone.

(Answer: these two riddles add up to iceberg.)

*Riddle Eighty-one*

I am bulge-breasted, belch-throated,  
have head and high tail,  
eyes and ears and one foot,  
back and sharp beak, sheer neck  
and two sides, a stick in the stomach,  
a perch above people. I suffer pain  
when what shakes forests shifts me,  
and storms beat me as I stand,  
and the hard hail, and rime cloaks me,  
and frost settles, and snow falls  
on me with my pierced belly and I  
my misery.

(Answer: a weathervane or weathercock)

\* \* \* \* \*

Patricia and Philip Mockridge in *Weathervanes of Great Britain* say that weathercocks with their Biblical association can be dated from the ninth century; ‘vane’ comes from the Old English *fana* meaning a flag or banner and refers to the great variety of more secular designs. They write, “Their immediate impact is considerable: immense variety of form, executed with highly skilled craftsmanship or unsophisticated care, frequently with humour, sometimes with real beauty. The interesting stories or legends attaching to numbers of them are a bonus.”

They give a different version (or translation) of that riddle; Michael Alexander’s version in *The Earliest English Poems*.

I am a puff-breasted, proud-crested  
a head I have, and a high tail  
eyes and ears and one foot,  
both my sides, a back that’s hollow,  
a very short beak, a steeple neck  
and a home above men.

Harsh are my sufferings  
when that which makes the forest tremble take and shakes me.  
Here I stand under streaming rain  
and blinding sleet, stoned by hail;  
freezes the frost and falls the snow  
on me stuck bellied. And I stick it all out  
for I cannot change the chance that made me.

Their weathervanes range from the most abstract to the most representational, from early ones on churches, manors, guilds, and markets, to very recent ones on business premises, schools, and hospitals. And many are quirky and delightful. They write, “Symbolism can be in the eye of the beholder. Thus one member of staff at Livingstone School, Bedford, claimed that its snail weathervane suggested the children’s slow but steady progress, ‘making haste slowly’. To another, less starry-eyed, it indicated that unregenerate children are still, like Shakespeare’s schoolboy, ‘creeping like snail unwillingly to school’.” But the vane Anthony Robinson created for Stratford-upon-Avon’s new Swan Theatre is “a springboard for philosophical thought” because “Globe-like lines of latitude and longitude glance at the theatre of the world, and as a world. Interwoven strands hint at rippling water, continuity and harmony, the flames from which the new theatre arose, the flame of genius. The

vertical spindle diminishes towards infinity, timelessness ... And well-met by moonlight these pennants release even more ethereal notions.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course a mention of Anglo-Saxon brings things like *Beowulf* and King Alfred to mind; it also brings, more generally, the tradition of sagas to mind. Nowadays, mention sagas and immediately domestic scenes and family conflicts come to mind rather than the warlike image that still hangs round the ancient Norse tradition. But Iceland's sagas, the eddas, are a bit of everything; fighting, living, ploughing, animals, folk lore, humour, and sorrow. I was thinking on this when I came upon this curious little mention: “Skin-changers” were universally believed in once, in Iceland, no less than elsewhere, as see Ari in several places of his history, especially the episode of Dufthach and Storwold o’Whale. Men possessing the power of becoming wolves at intervals, in the present case compelled to so become, wer-wolves or *loupsgarou*, find (a) large place in medieval story, but were equally well-known in classic times. Belief in them still lingers in parts of Europe where wolves are to be found. Herodotus tells of the Neuri, who assumed once a year the shape of wolves; Pliny says that one of the family of Antaeus, chosen by lot annually, became a wolf, and so remained for nine years; Giraldus Cambrensis will have it that Irishmen may become wolves; and Nennius asserts point-blank that “the descendants of wolves are still in Ossory;” they retransform themselves into wolves when they bite. Apuleius, Petronius, and Lucien have similar stories. The Emperor Sigismund convoked a council of theologians in the fifteenth century who decided that wer-wolves did exist.”

(From *Völsunga Saga: The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, with Certain Songs from the Elder Edda* translated by Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris, 1904.) The curious thing about this was that I didn't think there were, or ever had been, any wolves in Iceland. Clearly such superstitions had been brought with them when they came from Norway and proved to be tenacious traveling companions. Or people were reluctant to give up a good scary story ...

But I have been reading the Penguin edition of *The Sagas of Icelanders* somewhat in the hope of finding comedy and riddles. Perhaps I was interpreting comedy in a more modern sense because I must admit I rarely found much humour in the stories, except perhaps in the names bestowed on various people such as in *The Saga of Hrafnkel Frey's Godi*, “It was in the days of King Harald Fair-Hair, son of Halfdan the Black, son of Godord the Hunting King, son of Halfdan the Mild and Meal-stingy, son of Eystein Fart, son of Olaf Wood-carver, King of the Swedes, that a man named Hallfred brought his ship to Breiddal in Iceland—” What is there in abundance are genealogies, fascinating little glimpses into everyday farming life and law (such as the fact that cross-dressing was grounds for divorce), much violence, and a sense of extraordinary mobility. People seemed to sail to and fro between Norway and Iceland, Iceland and Ireland, the Orkneys and Iceland, with the sort of casualness with which I might take a bus into town. The stories remind me very much of the unvarnished almost laconic style people often adopt when they sit down to write their memoirs for their family rather than for publication. And I suspect many of the sagas were written for the next generation in much the same way. In most cases the sagas are anonymous.

Robert Kellogg says of their writing, “The *Islendinga sogur* began being written in a brilliant and tormented period of Icelandic history known as the Age of the Sturlings (*Sturlungaöld*). The history of this critical time, from about 1220 to 1264, is told in the huge collection of contemporary sagas called *Sturlunga saga* (The Saga of the Sturlung Family). The Sturlungs were one of five great families locked in a struggle for power that led finally to the collapse of the old Icelandic Commonwealth. They derived their family name from the fact that they were the sons and grandsons of Sturla Thordarson, a chieftain who lived at a farm called Hvamm in the middle decades of the twelfth century. One of Hvamm-Sturla's sons was Snorri Sturluson and a grandson was the great historian, his namesake Sturla Thordarson. The five feuding families became extremely powerful, capable of assembling armies of 1400 men and of amassing to themselves most of the godords (ie. the authority and rank of a chieftain with

legal and administrative responsibilities). In the Age of the Sturlungs, learned people were assembling and writing down a priceless heritage of history and historical fiction, myth, legend and poetry. And yet at just this time the nation was witnessing unprecedented instances of violence, atrocity, abuse of power, meanness of spirit, arrogant violations of decency, not to mention of honour. One of many victims was Snorri, killed in his home on 22 September 1241, by a war party which included two of his former sons-in-law.

“In the Sturlung Age, the Icelandic foundation myth, with a king at its centre and a stubborn refusal by independent and ambitious farmers to serve him, was a pattern for thinking about the relationship of Icelandic chieftains to the Norwegian crown four hundred years later. There are many such stories of Icelanders and the Norwegian kings in the kings’ sagas, in the *Islendinga sogur* and in the closely related genre of *paettir*. In addition to the dire effect of their feuds and power struggles, the great families of the Age of the Sturlungs also began accepting honours and official duties from the king of Norway. Finally in 1262-3, as an alternative to social dissolution and anarchy, the Icelanders formally agreed to become his subjects. The literary activity of the Sturlung Age, especially the *Islendinga sogur*, must be connected with the military and moral adventures that were threatening to destroy the laws and values inherited from the noble and independent farmers of the Saga Age.”

The stories are drenched in blood, more awful for its casual throwaway presentation—

“He (Thorvald) then spoke: ‘This is an attractive spot, and here I would like to build my farm.’ As they headed back to the ship they saw three hillocks on the beach inland from the cape. Upon coming closer they saw they were three hide-covered boats, with three men under each of them. They divided their forces and managed to capture all of them except one, who escaped with his boat. They killed the other eight and went back to the cape.” (*The Saga of the Greenlanders*)

—but one curious little aspect of Icelandic verse, sprinkled through the narratives, which seems to suggest a link to the mind-set of the Anglo-Saxon world is the constant use of metaphor in ways reminiscent of those riddles ...

Here are just some of their delightful metaphors: sole-bucket = shoe; troll women’s foe = noble man; fish of the valleys = snake; horse of the waves = ship; highland deer’s paths = Scotland; drink of the giant’s kin = poetry; wind’s brother = sea; moon-bears = giants; land the birch fears = fire or hearth; seed sown from the eagle’s mouth = poetry; dew of distress = tears; bearer of the ale-horn = woman; peak’s pane = heavens; smithy of spells = mouth ...

\* \* \* \* \*

April 24: Margaret Wild

Anthony Trollope

April 25: Walter de la Mare

Lillian Beckwith

April 26: Morris West

April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft

April 28: Harper Lee

April 29: Ian Kershaw

April 30: Paul Jennings

May 1: Joseph Addison

May 2: Alan Marshall

May 3: Deirdre Hill

May 4: Marele Day

Robin Cook

May 5: Karl Marx

May 6: Sigmund Freud

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Quoted from: ‘Stigma Cola — the banning of an indigenous wonder-food’ *New Internationalist* April 2008:

‘Coca, in its natural leafy form, is possibly the most stigmatized food and medicine the world knows. Medical studies from Harvard University have shown that it has two to three times as much calcium as milk and in a form that is easily absorbed, suggesting possibilities for treating osteoporosis. It helps regulate blood sugar levels, so could help with diabetes and hypoglycaemia. It contains more protein than walnuts and has large amounts of vitamins A and E. It’s also rich in iron and potassium, good for blood and heart health. Used in a poultice, coca leaves offer relief from rheumatism and bone dislocation.

At a more mundane level, it makes flour for baking, tea for drinking, or left in its original leaf form for chewing, which has a mildly stimulating effect, similar to coffee. It could even be made into a fizzy soft drink that Bolivians could make and sell, or chewing gum, toothpaste, cosmetics.

Instead, because it is also the leaf from which the chemical drug cocaine is derived, it’s doomed. Coca is stigmatized and its legal export, from countries like Bolivia or Peru where it grows most abundantly, is restricted to a fraction of its potential. To police this restriction, the US launched coca eradication programmes in Andean countries, destroying the livelihoods of thousands of local peasant farmers. Meanwhile, half of the world’s illegal cocaine continues to be consumed in the US.

But coca is not cocaine, any more than natural sugar is vodka. ‘There has been a grave misunderstanding,’ says Professor Silvia Rivera, a leading campaigner for coca promotion. ‘I have been chewing coca every day for 30 years and I am a healthy person. I have it in the evening, after a meal — like many people have coffee. It gives a natural energy but comes with nutrients.’

The legal global market for this most indigenous product — coca leaves are central to Andean religion and tradition — could be tremendous. Instead, current attitudes, and a UN Protocol prohibiting trade in coca derivatives of any kind, keep it out of health-food shops and stop Bolivians from benefiting legally from their wonder-food.

Ignorance is only part of the problem, though. Up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coca products were widely available in the form of drinks or sweets or anaesthetics. Then, according to Silvia Rivera, ‘a powerful lobby gave Coca-Cola virtual monopoly and use of the name. It was a manoeuvre, a conspiracy to remove from the market an indigenous product.’ And multinational pharmaceutical companies benefit from the legal limits placed on a crop they also use.

Since coming to power, former coca-grower Evo Morales, whilst declaring war on drug trafficking, has scrapped the US-imposed ‘zero-coca’ policy. Coca leaves are back at the heart of Bolivian culture — at the presidential inauguration a little bowl of leaves was placed on each seat. But it may take a while for the rest of the world to catch up.’

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From *The Cocaine Wars* by The Sunday Times Insight Team (Paul Eddy, Sara Walden with Hugo Sabogal): “Miami is a city of startling assertions: that no matter where you live, a drug dealer lives nearby; that the revenues from drug trafficking are greater than those from tourism, exports, health care, and all other legitimate businesses combined; that *most* of the currency in circulation in Miami carries traces of cocaine.”

“Coca is the oldest stimulant known to man and chewing the dried leaf to extract the alkaloids it contains has sustained humankind in the Andes since prehistoric times. In Peru, gourds containing coca leaves, and even a partially chewed quid of coca, have been unearthed from burial middens dating back to 2100 B.C. In Colombia, some of the idols standing in San Agustin’s mysterious Valley of the Statues, idols dating back to 600 B.C., display the characteristic distended cheek of the coca chewer.

In more modern times, the great Inca civilization believed the plant was divine, brought from heaven by the first Inca emperor, Manco Capac. Throughout the Inca empire, from Ecuador to Chile, coca was at the center of their religious, and social system. The right to chew it was a sovereign gift, bestowed on priests, doctors, young warriors, the relay runners who

traveled 150 miles a day to deliver messages, and the scholars who kept the empire's accounts. Solid gold coca sprigs adorned the temples of the sun, whose altars could be approached only by those with coca in their mouths. If coca was the last thing a dying man tasted, he went to heaven.

Even today it has a touch of the miraculous. Coca is the gift that Peruvian Indians give to the parents of a prospective bride. It is the talisman put under the cornerstones of new houses and it is an abundant source of vitamins. Throughout South America, an estimated eight million people chew coca leaves, and millions more drink *mate de coca*, 'coca tea,' which is sold in almost every supermarket.

So the people of the Andes do not take kindly to foreigners telling them they should not grow coca. The first to try were the Spanish conquistadores. In 1567 the Council of Lima, established by Spain, condemned coca as 'a worthless object, fitted for the misuse and superstition of the Indians.' During the rule of Francisco de Toledo, the fifth Spanish viceroy, over seventy ordinances were issued against coca.

But as Father de Acosta, a Jesuit missionary in Peru, wrote in 1590: 'I think it works and gives force and courage to the Indians, for we see the effects which cannot be attributed to imagination, so as to go some days without meat, but only a handful of coca ...' It was not long before the Spanish were paying the Indian mine workers in coca leaves — and the Church collected tithes from them in coca.

Almost 400 years later when, under US pressure, the Peruvian government began a coca eradication program and prohibited the chewing of coca below an altitude of 1,500 feet (it is beneficial in combating altitude sickness), the country faced strikes and demonstrations in the coca-producing centers of Quillabamba and Tingo Maria. In 1980 in Cuzco, with the blessing of the local archbishop, the coca growers held the first of what has become an annual congress. By 1984, Cuzco's renowned agricultural college had become the focus of scientific opposition to American 'crop substitution' projects, pointing out that one of the suggested substitutes, tobacco, was vastly more harmful to mankind than coca.

Cocaine, the principal alkaloid in the coca leaf, was also once regarded as practically divine. Who first isolated cocaine remains a matter of controversy because, by the mid-nineteenth century, there were a number of doctors and scientists in Europe conducting experiments to understand the remarkable qualities of coca. Some of them clearly enjoyed the work. 'Borne on the wings of two coca leaves, I flew about in the spaces of 77,438 worlds, each one more splendid than the other,' wrote Dr. Paolo Mantegazza, an eminent Italian neurologist in 1859. 'I prefer a life of ten years with coca to one of a hundred thousand without it.'

In any event, cocaine had been successfully isolated in 1880, when a German army doctor prescribed it for Bavarian troops on autumn maneuvers and noted a 'marvelous increase in their energy and endurance.' The doctor's report aroused the curiosity of Sigmund Freud in Vienna, who induced one of his young interns to experiment further with cocaine. The intern discovered that it had qualities useful for surgery: the ability to numb tissue while simultaneously constricting blood vessels, which limited bleeding. As a result, the discovery of the first local anesthetic was announced at a medical conference in Heidelberg, Germany, in September 1884. Freud, in the first of five essays on cocaine, eulogized it as 'a magical drug.' He recommended it for the treatment of depression, nervous exhaustion, hysteria, hypochondria, severe anemia, phthisis, and febrile diseases; as an aphrodisiac; and as a cure for syphilis, asthma and alcoholism. The pharmaceutical companies were swamped with orders.

Freud's enthusiasm for cocaine was soon tempered by his realization that 'for some people' it had awful side effects. He gave it to a friend, Ernst Fleischl von Marxow, a fellow doctor, in the hope of weaning him off morphine. The 'cure' succeeded, but only in transferring von Marxow's addiction from morphine to cocaine. Within a year he was injecting himself with one gram a day — one hundred times the original dose — and eventually suffered acute cocaine poisoning and psychotic delusions in which he imagined white snakes creeping

over his skin. But Freud's reservations about cocaine's negative side came too late to save his friend — and other users. In as little time as word took to spread, coca and cocaine achieved enormous popularity in Europe and America, and Freud was accused of launching 'the third scourge of mankind.' ” (The first two scourges, according to his accusers, were alcohol and morphine.)

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Felicity Lawrence in *Not on the Label: What Really Goes into the Food on your Plate*, writing on the coffee glut and Third World poverty, said: “Some of the world's poorest coffee growers have not waited to hear the end of the debate. They have grubbed up their unprofitable coffee bushes and replaced them with a more lucrative cash cop. In Peru, as the world price of coffee beans has plummeted, they have switched to growing coca for cocaine. In Ethiopia, the birthplace of coffee, farmers have turned to the stimulant khat, and in Angola marijuana is becoming a valuable cash crop.”

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And in *Earth Follies* by Joni Seager: “When the American government declared a “war on drugs” in the late 1980s, Guatemalan forests were the first casualty. In 1987, officials in the Guatemalan government and the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) entered into an agreement to defoliate vast areas of Guatemala's north and northwest—a region that contains a wildlife refuge and the largest area of unplundered rainforest remaining in Central America. Starting in April 1987, DEA and Guatemalan military planes dumped a barrage of chemicals that included paraquat, glyphosate, and chemical components of Agent Orange. By that summer, one-third of Guatemala had been sprayed, hundreds of cattle had died from drinking contaminated water, dozens of Guatemalans had died, and uncounted more were sick.

“The DEA asserted that the spraying was intended to destroy poppy and marijuana fields. Critics note that the sprayed areas happened to be war zones, and argued that the US government was in fact using chemical warfare to assist the Guatemalan military's counterinsurgency operation under the guise of drug eradication. Drug-crop spraying does, in fact, usually herald increased militarization.”

Herbicides were developed for careful targeted spraying on weeds, not this open slather approach which eventually contaminates everything—people, livestock, air, water, soil—and the only tiny gleam of corporate responsibility comes in Seager's information that when the US government wanted to purchase a herbicide known as ‘Spike’ from Eli Lilly to spray on coca crops in the Andean nations—Eli Lilly refused to sell it to them for that purpose. The government had to look elsewhere for its poison.

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Aerial spraying of everything, from endangered species to food which will eventually end up in supermarkets, may seem bizarre. But I suppose it is less bizarre, though certainly just as un-Christian, as this story from Geoffrey Robertson's *The Justice Game*. In 1989 a Colombian presidential candidate Dr Luis Carlos Galan was shot dead at a rally. The assassins escaped but dropped a Galil rifle as they ran. Robertson writes, “I have watched this news clip many times. The assassination happened on 18 August 1989 and I spent much of the following year studying the arms and money trail which made it possible and which also facilitated the murders of dozens of judges and journalists. It was an unusual job for an Old Bailey barrister, and it took me to the beaches of Antigua and the banks of Bermuda, to the cattle and cocaine valleys of Colombia and to the gun factories of Israel, ending in Washington with testimony to a Senate committee.”

The gun was part of a consignment manufactured by Israeli Military Industries (IMI), which is a section of the defence ministry, and which included 400 Galil assault rifles, 1,000 Uzi sub-machine-guns and 200,000 rounds of ammunition, all destined for the tiny Caribbean island of Antigua which has a defence force of ninety-four soldiers already supplied by the United States and with no obvious enemies. “The guns, including the one dropped by Galan's killers, were destined for the Medellin cartel.”

The ruling political family in Antigua, the Bird family, responded to Colombia's formal complaint by setting up a Commission of Enquiry and "They soon had a scapegoat — a nineteen-year-old customs clerk, Sean Leitch, who was arrested for signing some shipping documents presented by Sarfati's agent. On his slim shoulders the nation of Antigua laid its guilt for aiding and abetting the murders of the Colombian judges and journalists, policemen and politicians."

The Commission wound its way through a story of gun-running at sea, misappropriated and mis-spent aid, debt, corruption, mercenaries, money trails more complex than any Bermuda triangle, and blatant greed. It is debatable how effective or what impact the Commission had, and it is doubtful whether it made the slightest dint in the cocaine trade, "But at least there was one result of the Commission's work which can never be undone: it was able to clear the name of Sean Leitch, the nineteen-year-old customs clerk whom the authorities had attempted to make the scapegoat for the entire affair."

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"Brian was an LSD visionary. He kept his LSD tabs in a little red pill bottle and dispensed his liquid acid generously from a dropper. A lot came out of those little bottles—not the least of which was 'Sgt. Pepper'. My first trip transformed me, and ever since I have seen the world in a different, liberated light. My acid epiphany was that Fellini movies looked like normal documentaries. And do to this day.

It's not kosher to promote drugs these days, but the truth is that LSD truly made me aware of the potential of the human mind and the depth of the human spirit. More lately, Ecstasy has shown itself to be a brilliant liberator, freeing some people from neurosis and depression. Like everything, there's a downside—but the near-fascist governments of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century forbid even investigating the positive aspects of these chemicals."

Eric Burdon in *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood*.

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And from *Come Together – John Lennon in his Time*: 'Finally, seven hours after the concert began, John and Yoko came on: his first concert appearance in the United States since the Beatles waved goodbye at San Francisco's Candlestick Park five years earlier. 'The room was so high you felt like laughing or crying with happiness or pinching yourself to see if it was really happening,' Jerry Rubin recalled. 'John was terrified going onstage,' Stu Werbin said. 'He was following Stevie Wonder, with a makeshift band, trying out new material. He worried that people might start yelling for "Hey Jude."'

'John opened with 'John Sinclair,' followed by Yoko's 'Sisters, O Sisters' and John's 'Attica State.' None had ever been heard before. The basic tracks for these songs on the album *Some Time in New York City* were recorded that night. The song 'John Sinclair' is stronger and more intriguing than critics have realized, especially when one sees John singing it in the (unreleased) film *Ten for Two*. John ended each verse with the phrase 'gotta set him free,' repeating 'gotta' no less than fifteen times over a dissonant guitar chord. The lyrics referred to recent revelations that the CIA was involved in heroin trafficking in Southeast Asia on a massive scale while Sinclair rotted in jail for selling two joints.'

(as quoted in *The Chatto Book of Dissent*)

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Peter D. Kramer wrote in *Listening to Prozac*, "Tess's progress also seemed to blur the boundary between licit and illicit drug use. How does Prozac, in Tess's life, differ from amphetamine or cocaine or even alcohol? People take street drugs all the time in order to "feel normal." Certainly people use cocaine to enhance their energy and confidence. "I felt large. I mean, I felt huge," is how socially insecure people commonly explain why they abuse cocaine or amphetamine. Uppers make people socially attractive, obviously available. And when a gin drinker takes a risk, we are tempted to ask whether the new found confidence is not mere "Dutch courage."

“In fact, it is people from Tess’s background — born poor to addicted and dependent parents, and then abused and neglected — who are most at risk to use street drugs. A cynic may wonder whether in Tess’s case drug abuse has sneaked in through the back door, whether entering the middle class carries the privilege of access to socially sanctioned drugs that are safer and more specific in their effects than street drugs but are morally indistinguishable in terms of the reasons they are taken and the results they produce. I do not think it is possible to see transformations like Tess’s without asking ourselves both whether street-drug abusers are self-medicating unrecognized illness and whether prescribed-drug users are, with their doctors’ permission, stimulating and calming themselves in quite similar ways.”

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Ann Jones in *Kabul in Winter* wrote: “Before the mujahidin took on the Soviets in 1979, Afghanistan produced a very small amount of opium for regional markets; neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan produced any heroin at all. By the end of the jihad, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area was the world’s top producer of both opium and processed heroin, supplying 75 percent of opium worldwide. As scholar Alfred W. McCoy reports in *The Politics of Heroin*, it was mujahidin who ordered Afghan peasants to grow poppy to finance the jihad. It was Pakistani intelligence agents and drug lords like the all-around villain Gulbuddin who processed heroin. (Gulbuddin reportedly owned six refineries.) It was the Pakistani army that transported heroin to Karachi for shipment overseas. And it was the CIA that made it all possible by providing legal cover for these operations. The CIA applied to Afghanistan the lesson it had learned earlier in Laos and Burma: a covert war demands a covert source of money, and there is none better than the drug trade. How to end the drug trade along with the covert war seems a problem in synchronicity the CIA didn’t solve.”

She goes on to say, “Both drugs and alcohol are *haram* (bad or forbidden) in Islam, but just as Afghanistan bent the drug rules to finance the jihad, it now bends the rules on alcohol to make allowances for international residents who seem unable to live without it. The anti-heroin crowd in the West doesn’t bend, though. One American consultant hired to make a poppy assessment voiced off-the-record the opinion of many who’ve studied the drug trade in the US and abroad: “The only sensible way out is to legalize drugs. But nobody in the White House wants to hear that.”

Not only didn’t hear—in 2004 President Bush upped the money from \$73 million in 2003 to \$780 million for his war on drugs. This would involve complete eradication, including using defoliants; “in December 2004, farmers in Nangarhar province along the Pakistan border complained that planes had come at night and sprayed tiny gray pellets on their fields and houses, and now their poppies were dying. Their livestock and their children were sick. Karzai was furious. His spokesman called it “a question of sovereignty, a question of being aware of what is going on in the country.” Britain and the US denied that they had anything to do with it. Ambassador Khalilzad said the US hadn’t even contracted out the job. Hajji Din Muhammad, the governor of Nangargar, didn’t buy it. He said, “The Americans control the airspace of Afghanistan, and not even a bird can fly without them knowing.”

The Americans, of course, can’t afford to go after the kingpins; they need them in their hunt for the Taliban and Osama bin Laden so it is the small farmers who are in their sights.

“But it’s not Afghan farmers who are getting rich. Profits go to politically connected smugglers, warlords, commanders, government officials—the usual suspects. Still, the poppy crop has lifted lots of farmers from abject poverty and enabled them to hang on to their land. When I visited a poor northern farm family I’d met a year earlier, I was pleased to see they’d acquired a generator, electric lights, a TV set, and a motor-bike. The source of this good fortune was poppy, growing to within a foot of the doorstep. “Please don’t tell the Americans,” the young son said. “Now we can go to school.” His gesture took in two younger brothers. “If the Americans take our poppy, we must go back to work for the carpet-makers.” The farmer’s wife had gone to work in the poppy fields of a big local landowner instead, earning five dollars a day. She was getting out of the house and making top dollar—circumstances that were being

duplicated all across the country and dramatically changing the status of rural women. Husbands won't keep them at home when there's money like that to be made."

The dilemmas and the hypocrisies which beset all nations matter; but the dilemmas and the hypocrisies which beset the United States are spread everywhere with an agonisingly careless and damaging hand ...

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So what of the relationship between cocaine and Coca-Cola? Mark Pendergrast in *For God, Country and Coca-Cola* writes: "There's no question that The Coca-Cola Company loves its own history. As if to prove the point, in 1990 it spent \$15 million on its Atlanta museum, which indoctrinates over 3,000 Coca-Cola-drenched tourists daily into the company's high-tech version of its past. The press release on opening day called the museum a "fantasyland." In more ways than one, it is just that. The red-clad, clean-cut young guides assure visitors, for instance, that Coca-Cola *never* had any cocaine in it."

The creator of Coca-Cola was a Dr John Pemberton, an inventor of patent medicines in Atlanta, Georgia. He called it a 'nerve tonic' but also sold it as a refreshing soda fountain beverage. He said in 1885: "The use of the coca plant not only preserves the health of all who use it, but prolongs life to a very great old age and enables the coca eaters to perform prodigies of mental and physical labor." Pemberton, like Freud, was also drawn to cocaine as a useful anesthetic in cases of eye surgery.

But Pemberton was not the first to use the coca leaf in a beverage. "The coca leaf found its most famed commercial use in a now-forgotten drink called Vin Mariani, invented by Angelo Mariani, an enterprising Corsican who in 1863 began selling Bordeaux wine with a healthy infusion of coca leaf. Pemberton's French Wine Coca, first advertised in 1884, was a direct imitation. Since Pemberton then modified his Wine Coca to create Coca-Cola, Vin Mariani is, in effect, the "grandfather" of Coca-Cola."

Vin Mariani contained 0.12 grains of cocaine per fluid ounce. A 6 fluid ounce glass therefore gave you 0.72 grains of cocaine a time. Pemberton strengthened his own recipe by adding kola nuts mainly from Ghana which contained caffeine. His recipe for his own version contained Citrate Caffein, Vanilla, Coca, Citric Acid, Lime Juice, Sugar, Water, Caramel, and oil of orange, of lemon, of nutmeg, of cinnamon, of coriander, of neroli—and all left to marinade in alcohol for 24 hours. In 1903 the recipe was changed. The cocaine was removed from the coca leaves before they were added to the marinade.

I cannot help thinking that it is the Western passion to refine and pin-point the powerful principal in everything, from coca leaves to yellowcake—and then use and abuse the refined part—which is part of the problem. Chewing or marinading coca leaves undoubtedly provided other benefits, such as Vitamin C, which have been overlooked.

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And what of Freud and his experiments? I wanted to get a more mainstream take on his flirtation with cocaine and picked up a copy of *Freud* by Ronald W. Clark. He says the young Freud was casting round for a subject which would bring him to public attention and, with luck, also bring in some money. "Freud's interest had been aroused by reports of an experiment carried out during the German Army's spring maneuvers. A Dr. Theodor Aschenbrandt had treated exhausted troops with cocaine, a stimulant made from the leaves of the coca plant. Although used by the Indians of South America, where the shrub grows profusely, cocaine had been virtually ignored in Europe until Sir Robert Christison, the Scots physician and toxicologist, had—shortly before his death in 1882 at the age of eighty-five—testified to its use as a stimulant during his vigorous last years when he could "walk, run, or climb mountains better than any of his contemporaries." Aschenbrandt, one of the first to experiment seriously with the drug, found that "Bavarian soldiers, weary as a result of hardships and debilitating illnesses, were nevertheless capable, after taking coca, of participating in maneuvers and marches."

Freud sent away for a supply and wrote: "I first took 0.05 gram of *cocainum muriaticum* in a 1% water solution when I was slightly out of sorts due to fatigue. The solution is rather viscous, slightly opalescent, and with an unusual aromatic smell. At first the taste is bitter but this then changes to a series of very nice aromatic flavors ... A few minutes after taking the cocaine one suddenly feels light and exhilarated. The lips and palate feel first furry and then warm, and if one drinks cold water it feels warm to the lips but cold to the throat. But on some occasions the main feeling is a rather pleasant coolness in mouth and throat."

He could see its value in the field of pain relief and as an anaesthetic; and in his article 'Uber Coca' he also suggested it as a stimulant and for digestive disorders. He also suggested its use for anaemia, asthma, and as an aphrodisiac. But then he made a serious mistake. He advised its use for morphine addicts: "I should unhesitatingly advise cocaine being administered in subcutaneous injections of 0.03-0.05 grms. per dose in such withdrawal cures and without minding an accumulation of the doses" ...

He had transgressed virtually every normal safeguard. He had taken the idea from a report in the *Detroit Therapeutic Gazette*, a small publication which lacked any of the safeguards of the best medical writing of the time. He had begun by using it on a morphine addict without concern for an already debilitated mind and body and the possibility of a deeply addictive and depressed state of mind. He injected it even though all his prior experiments had been with using the drug orally. And he set no careful limits and no declining dose. The more his patient wanted the more he gave. That he continued to ingest cocaine himself without any side effects did nothing to ameliorate the storm which broke about his head.

I freely admit that I am not a brain but it seems obvious to me that making things people eat, smoke, drink, or inject, illegal destroys far more than it saves. Addiction, allergies, mental aberrations, damage to heart and lungs and digestion and blood vessels, are all serious health concerns and like other serious health concerns are best tackled with education, information, research, and treatment—not consigned to the shadowy world of international cartels and conspiracies ...

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- May 7: Robert Browning
- May 8: Thomas Pynchon  
Charlotte Marie Tucker
- May 9: J. M. Barrie  
Richard Adams
- May 10: Danielle Hunebelle
- May 11: Stephen Chan
- May 12: Edward Lear

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You didn't think of Edward Lear as a writer of recipes, did you now? Of course not. And you would be quite right. 'To Make an Amblongus Pie' would make Margaret Fulton blanch—unless the dear soul has a sense of humour under that businesslike exterior.

'Take 4 pounds (say 4½ pounds) of fresh Amblongusses, and put them in a small pipkin.

Cover them with water and boil them for 8 hours incessantly, after which add 2 pints of new milk, and proceed to boil for 4 hours more.

When you have ascertained that the Amblongusses are quite soft, take them out and place them in a wide pan, taking care to shake them well previously.

Grate some nutmeg over the surface, and cover them carefully with powdered gingerbread, curry-powder, and a sufficient quantity of cayenne pepper.

Remove the pan into the next room, and place it on the floor. Bring it back again, and let it simmer for three-quarters of an hour. Shake the pan violently till all the Amblongusses have become of a pale purple colour.

Then, having prepared the paste, insert the whole carefully, adding at the same time a small pigeon, 2 slices of beef, 4 cauliflowers, and any number of oysters.

Watch patiently till the crust begins to rise, and add a pinch of salt from time to time.

Serve up in a clean dish, and throw the whole out of the window as fast as possible.’

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Jane Grigson wrote in her *Vegetable Book*, “Not long after the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Joseph Conrad’s death, in 1974, I came across *Home Cookery* by his wife, Jessie. It was her second cookery book, published long after Conrad’s death, but happily she included his preface to her first one. He enjoyed his wife’s cooking and in their early, hard up, lodging house days he must have appreciated her frugal skill. He concluded that of all the books, only those on cookery are morally above suspicion. Their one aim, he wrote, is ‘to increase the happiness of mankind, to add to the cheerfulness of nations’. As negative proof, he adduced the theory that the ferocity of the Red Indians was caused by their wives’ lack of culinary skill. ‘The Seven Nations around the Great Lake and the Horse tribes of the plains were but one vast prey to raging dyspepsia.’ ”

I’m not sure where we might take that theory, given that it was the ferocious Europeans who came close to wiping out whole Indian tribes, but Grigson goes on to give one recipe from that source: “Mrs Conrad doesn’t say so, but I wonder if she had this recipe from her husband, or from someone she met when they were visiting Poland, his native country? It seems to belong more to that part of Europe, with its sweet-sour sauce, than to English cookery, and it is improved by adding dill weed.

*60 g (2 oz) butter*

*2 small onions, sliced thinly*

*4 or 5 medium-sized boiled beetroot*

*1 tablespoon flour*

*300 ml (½pint) milk, or milk and single cream*

*pepper, salt*

*3-4 tablespoons sugar*

*1-2 tablespoons white wine vinegar*

*2-3 tablespoons double cream*

*mashed potato*

Melt the butter in a frying pan. Add the onion, cover and cook gently until soft and yellow. Peel and slice the beetroot and place it on top of the onion. Sprinkle over the flour, and stir in milk and cream. Simmer for 10-15 minutes to cook the sauce properly, turning the beetroot about with a wooden spoon. Add salt and pepper, then the sugar and vinegar gradually, a little bit of each at a time, until the sauce tastes piquant and sweetish, without being over sugary. Stir in the cream. Have ready a hot serving dish, bordered with the hot mashed potatoes, and pour the beetroot mixture into the middle.

If you want to add dill weed, do this when you stir the cream into the sweet-sour sauce.”

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Edward Lear probably saw himself increasing ‘the happiness of mankind’ and certainly of children if not ‘the cheerfulness of nations’. Edward Strachey in 1894 imparts other qualities to the writing of Nonsense. “But it is not Bad Sense, but Nonsense which is the proper contrary of Sense. In contradiction to the relations and harmonies of life, Nonsense sets itself to discover and bring forward the incongruities of all things within and without us. For while Sense is, and must remain, essentially prosaic and commonplace, Nonsense has proved not to be an equally prosaic and commonplace negative of Sense, not a mere putting forward of incongruities and absurdities, but the bringing out a new and deeper harmony of life in and through its contradictions. Nonsense in fact, in this use of the word, has shown itself to be a true work of the imagination, a child of genius, and its writing one of the Fine Arts.”

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May 13: S. A. Wakefield

George Finkel  
 Rosie Boycott  
 May 14: Richard Deacon  
 May 15: Mario Cuomo  
       David Almond  
 May 16: Marlin Bree  
 May 17: David Burke  
 May 18: Bertrand Russell  
 May 19: Edward de Bono  
 May 20: Joan Dalglish  
 May 21: Dorothy Hewett  
 May 22: Arthur Conan Doyle  
       Garry Wills  
       Don Cupitt  
 May 23: Mitch Albom  
       Susan Cooper  
 May 24: Mary Grant Bruce  
 May 25: Len H. Evers  
 May 26: Denis Florence Macarthy  
 May 27: Julia Ward Howe  
 May 28: Nan Chauncy  
       Thomas Moore

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May 28 1904. “There will be a Royal Commission on allegations against the British New Guinea authorities concerning the massacre of up to 50 New Guinea natives off Goaribari Island on March 6. The natives were shot dead while boarding the *Merrie England*, which was anchored off the island. The ship’s commander, Captain Harvey, was to arrest natives involved in the killings of two missionaries in April 1901. Officials said the natives attacked the ship, but observers claim they had been invited on board and then fled when fired at by police. Some thought it the most un-British act they had heard of”.

Of course un-British acts, whatever they might actually be though usually involving guns, were part and parcel of empire-building. Francis Younghusband fell upon Tibet in what P. D. Ouspensky called “the rape of Lhasa in 1904” and wrote of “the 700 ill-led Tibetan soldiers mown down ... in one ninety-second burst from Younghusband’s Maxim guns; they and their ancestral broadswords and their pathetic matchlock guns, so prettily embossed with turquoise and coral, belong to the irredeemable history of crime”. A crime the *Chronicle of the 20th Century* describes more prosaically:

April 10 1904: “British kill 190 Tibetans at Gyantse.”

May 6 1904: “A brisk battle was fought today high up in the Karo Pass between the column protecting the British Mission to Lhasa and a force of some 3,000 Tibetans. At one stage the affair took a dangerous turn with the British force held up by riflemen positioned behind the wall and two flanking stone-built native forts. Captain Bethune and his small assault party had been killed rushing the wall and the guns made no impression on the forts.

“The day was saved by Major Row’s Gurkhas, who climbed the face of a nearly sheer precipice and fired down on the Tibetans. At the same time the Sikhs climbed to the edge of the glacier and flanked the forts. The Tibetans then fled, pursued by the Mounted Infantry. They lost 400 dead.”

And why was Britain in Tibet with assault forces, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Mounted Infantry, and piles of dead Tibetans?

September 7 1904: “Anglo-Tibetan treaty gives UK trading posts and forbids Dalai Lama to make cessions to foreign powers.”

And there were other ‘un-British acts’ as New Guinea was slowly colonised by Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands.

But an equally damning story, in a different way, is the one researched by Olaf Ruhen and mentioned by John Hetherington in *Forty-Two Faces*: ‘Ruhen spends at least half his time travelling, and he says his heaviest expense as a writer is travel. Much of his travelling is done in fairly primitive style, because the places he wants to see can rarely be reached by regular airline, air-conditioned train or de-luxe motor coach. He has, however, never been tempted to stay at home and get his background material by reading in libraries, as some writers do. For one thing, he likes travel. For another, he knows the danger of supposing something to be true merely because it has been published. He makes a pastime of tracing to their sources popular anecdotes of Australian history which generations of historians and journalists have perpetuated in print, and he has found many stories of this kind to be largely apocryphal. As an example of the way history is twisted, he cites a familiar tale which has often been published in Australian books, magazines and newspapers. It concerns three hundred and twenty-six Chinamen reported to have been fattened and eaten by natives of Rossel Island, in the Luosiade Archipelago, off the south-east tip of New Guinea, and Ruhen says of it: ‘It just isn’t true. The French ship *St Paul* was wrecked there all right in 1858, and three hundred and twenty-seven Chinamen and some of the crew landed until help could be brought. But they were under indenture to Hong Kong and Singapore principals, and the wreck offered them too good an opportunity to escape their commitments. They disappeared, and left one of their number to tell a tale that would prevent a search for them. *The Sydney Morning Herald* interviewed the supposed lone survivor when he got to Sydney. Every subsequent account was based on his unsubstantiated story alone. And it was instrumental in delaying the development of New Guinea—the British Government quoted it as an excuse not to move into New Guinea when pressed to do so by the New South Wales Government in, I think, 1863. The natives were too savage, they said: and this reputation has undeservedly stuck to the Rossel Islanders ever since.’

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Sean Dorney in his book *Landline* about PNG’s attempt to hire mercenaries to use on Bougainville is scathing about the level of corruption in all arms of the PNG government. Henry Okole in *Westminster Legacies*, on how aspects of British parliamentary and executive structures have been transplanted, does not minimise the problems, terrain, languages, lack of preparation, a very different society; as he writes, “The PNG national parliament may be in serious need of reform. Some important features of the Westminster model of government have been rendered ineffective by the ever-changing political temperament of the country. Fluctuating coalitions, regime instability and a culture of ‘spoils politics’ have permeated the character of a parliamentary democracy. The adoption of the *Integrity Law* in 2001 was the first serious attempt to stabilize politics in the national parliament. If, as a new nation, PNG has successfully overlaid democratic politics on its Melanesian cultures, it has less successfully inculcated the *modus operandi* of a Westminster system.”

But he also writes, “A retrospective look over 28 years of nationhood reveals that many of the institutional designs that PNG adopted are now either unworkable or outmoded in the face of the country’s fast-changing socio-political landscape. National elections have yielded highly unusual results, compared to what the relevant literature on developed or developing countries would suggest. The party system has been dubbed a ‘deviant’ case, given its incomparable characteristics relative to other developing democracies. The House of Parliament, at least over the last 12 years, has gone from a genuine chamber of the people to one that has been progressively controlled by the executive. All the while, democracy in PNG prevails as if all the main institutional pillars of the government are effectively functioning. At present, the country remains one of only a handful of countries from the developing world that has maintained an unblemished record of democratic continuity.”

Equally the attempt to transplant such imported ideas as books and stage plays has experienced a long and bumpy ride as they infiltrate and overlay oral tribal Melanesian cultures.

PNG plays, poems, novels, literary magazines do not leap off the shelves at me. They are hard to find. Non-fiction, travel, anthropology, politics, ecology, has a niche. But I looked upon each piece of fiction I found in the way people brandish tiny gold nuggets with whoops of joy. I came, for instance, on a book called *Five New Guinea Plays* which introduced me to five Niugini writers: Kumalau Tawali ('Manki Masta'), Arthur Jawodimbari ('Cargo'), John Waiko ('The Unexpected Hawk'), Leo Hannet ('The Ungrateful Daughter'), and M. Lovori ('Alive'). I enjoyed my first taste of PNG drama but, unfortunately, there was nowhere to go from there. It was the same story with poetry. I have occasionally found poems in anthologies—but again there seems no simple way to follow up. No one here is rushing to publish PNG's poets. So if you're feeling the same sense of frustration I thought I would include two such poems.

If we had grown to face  
The morning dew together,  
We could show our fathers that after all  
Their counsels were not wasted.  
When our enemies came, with youthful bodies,  
We would have borne the children to safety,  
Then taken our arms to the front.

If it had been, we would have shared  
The scolding, the praise, the worries together.  
Together we would have faced the first arrows  
To defend our Lukinya Rocks, our indestructible backers,  
Whose changing colours we watched  
With misty eyes, under the dawning sun,  
When our legs were too thorny to carry us there,  
And our hands too small to grasp the protective shields.

But tell me, what is in your mind  
That causes me to scratch my head?  
Yesterday you looked at me sideways,  
And since my return you have denied me my due.  
Brother, the fault is not mine.  
It is the path of the whiteman  
That our fathers chose for me;  
Yet this has deepened my love for you.

'Poem' by Pokwari Kale

Hey, my friend!  
Have you now become a Motu man?  
I have just come from your forgotten home.  
The trees stand tall and straight  
in the Purari delta  
and all have grown to the same height!

You look like a Motu man,  
Your hair dyed red with ashes of fire;  
it shines like a mirror in the Koki sun.  
But your name is a Purari name.  
The Gulf water laughs at you:  
can you forget your name?

The nipa palms cracking in the wind;  
the tide returning fast;  
canoes arriving from all corners;  
waves rising higher with the wind.  
They beat the empty beach like a husband  
who beats his wife for losing her child.  
She cries: come home, I know you are alive!

—The town has swallowed me  
and beer is sweet to me  
like a husband is sweet to his wife.  
I am a Motu man—but only for a night.  
My home lies undisturbed:  
one day I might return.

Now the night is deep  
and I cannot find my way:  
I have become Moresby's red dust.

'Forgetting Home' by Benjamin Evara

\* \* \* \* \*

Randolph Stow begins his novel *Visitants* with this intriguing short prologue:

'On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 1959, at Boianai in Papua, visitants appeared to the Reverend William Booth Gill, himself a visitant of thirteen years standing, and to thirty-seven witnesses of another colour. At 6.45 p.m. Mr Gill, an Anglican missionary, glanced at the sky to locate the planet Venus. He saw instead a sparkling object, "very, very bright," which descended to an altitude of around four hundred feet. The craft was shaped like a disc, perhaps thirty to forty feet across, with smaller round superstructures, and had on the under-side four legs pointing diagonally downwards. Uppermost on the disc was a circular bridge, like the bridge of a ship, perhaps twenty feet in diameter.

Behind this bridge, and visible from the waist up, human figures emerged and proceeded to busy themselves with some operation on deck. They bent and straightened from time to time, occasionally turning in the direction of the onlookers, but showed on the whole no interest in anything but their machine. The focus of activity appeared to be a thin blue spotlight directed at the sky. This was switched on at irregular intervals, each time for the space of a few seconds. The figures, seemingly four in all, continued preoccupied with this work for the rest of the night.

On impulse, as one of the figures leaned forward over the bridge, the clergyman saluted him by waving a hand over his head. The figure replied in kind, like the skipper on a boat (said Mr Gill) waving to someone on the wharf. Then a Papuan teacher called Ananias waved with both arms, and two other figures returned the greeting. Encouraged, Mr Gill and Ananias began to wave a good deal, and were acknowledged by all four visitants. The watching Papuans were "surprised and delighted". Small boys called out, everyone beckoned the "beings" to come down. But there was no audible response, and the faces and expressions of the figures remained obscure, "rather like," as Mr Gill said, "players on a football field at night."

The tenuous contact ended with a display of technology by the groundlings, and wistfully on their part. They signaled to the disc with a flashlight. "The object swung like a pendulum, presumably in recognition. When we flashed the torchlight towards it, it hovered, and came quite close towards the ground ... and we actually thought it was going to land, but it did not. We were all," said Mr Gill, speaking for the thirty-seven witnesses to his testimony, "very disappointed about that."

The craft, after floating above Boianai for two nights, ascended to a great altitude and vanished.”

This case, far from being overlooked in UFO annals, is given serious coverage by Dr Allan Hynek in *The Hynek UFO Report* in which he notes that Mr Gill and the villagers complacently explained away the mystery as ‘it might be just a new device of you Americans’ but even more intriguing is that Boianai was not the only place in PNG to receive a mysterious visitation in 1959. Sixty-one sightings were recorded in Boianai, Baniai, Ruabapain, Dagura and elsewhere ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Cassandra Pybus in *The Devil and James McAuley* suggests his time in New Guinea just after WWII was a seminal experience for McAuley. “On 13 February 1949 McAuley was introduced to the retired archbishop of Papua, Alain de Boismenu, at his retreat at the subcoastal mission station at Kabuna. Almost eighty years old, Bishop de Boismenu retained a compelling presence. McAuley was quick to realise that he had found a man of true greatness: “an inspiring force of mind and will, large views, courage, intense affections and complete self-abnegation, cheerfulness, candour, a noble simplicity utterly devoid of pretension. And behind these qualities something more ... a rare sanctity and unerring spiritual discernment”. Meeting with this man was to turn McAuley’s life around.”

“As he (de Boismenu) told the Australian Catholic Congress in Melbourne in 1904, the “primitive children” of Papua were “unquestionably of an inferior nature ... which has lived too long prey to original sin” and were highly susceptible to the works of the Devil. Doing battle with the Devil in order to save souls was de Boismenu’s central vocation and Papua was the Devil’s playground: a place of “sorcerers and snakes, bound together by a shadowy conspiracy”, according to de Boismenu’s famous acolyte, Paul Claudel. In Papua, de Boismenu had come to understand “the real weight of diabolical action”, he told his fellow missionaries in 1919. “It is no longer symbolic, it is tangible, heart-breaking.” The Devil was most determined to stop the Papuans wearing the holy cross and taking sacraments, thereby cutting them off from the source of their salvation, de Boismenu told his missionaries. To defeat the Devil’s intention he emphasised the use of solemn exorcisms to drive out the diabolic adversaries and he performed many such exorcisms himself. He was an inspired exorcist.”

The archbishop’s most famous recruit was a French nun Marie-Thérèse Noblet who had been miraculously cured of Pott’s disease at Lourdes. But she began to experience what she regarded as the attentions of the Devil; swoons, sharp pains, being tied down and thrown down. The archbishop removed the current Mother Superior of the Handmaidens of the Lord in Papua, Mother Bernadette, and installed Marie-Thérèse. Extraordinary events continued. The archbishop regularly exorcised her. Night by night she was thrown about and suffered excruciating pain. “The savagery of the Old One intensified in the highlands because, de Boismenu explained, “he was reigning far and wide over that almost pagan district. He greatly dreaded this visit from one who had wrestled so many souls from him”. Marie-Thérèse died, worn out by her wrestling with the Devil, at the age of forty.

James McAuley was immensely impressed by what he learned of her life in PNG and became a Catholic on his return to Australia; a very vigorously proselytising Catholic; his wife also converted, some of his friends like A. D. Hope regarded it tolerantly as an amusing foible but others like Hal Stewart (with whom he had created the Ern Malley Hoax) resented the pressure and broke with McAuley. James McAuley moved on into the company of Catholic leaders such as B. A. Santamaria and his poetry was increasingly tinged by his new world view. Marie-Thérèse can be seen in his writings:

Now is the three hours’ darkness of the soul,  
The time of earthquake; now at last  
The Word speaks, and the epileptic will  
Convulsing vomits forth its demons. Then  
Full-clothed, in his right mind, the man sits still,

Conversing with aeons in the speech of men.

In a way it is not hard to see that church people who summed up their lives as a constant fight with the Devil became obsessed, even paranoid, with the unseen dimensions of their apparent struggle. They saw what they believed in. And in that obsession there is something which strikes me as rather unhealthy ...

John Garrett in *Footsteps in the Sea* writes “De Boismenu visualized the mission as an outpost in the ‘war in heaven’, the supernatural strife between demons and angels. Verjus had seen his own sufferings and self-inflicted austerities as a dramatic sacrifice meant to procure salvation for Papua from its bondage to devils, disease and death. De Boismenu was also much concerned with demon possession as an explanation of the grimmer aspects of the Papuan environment and the practice of sorcery. Over against these horrors he set a strong belief in the ministry of the Holy Angels. The healing of the wounds of the world, in his mind, was connected with devotion to the Virgin of the healing shrine of Lourdes as deliverer from the power of Satan. This complex of beliefs lies behind the selection of the most celebrated of his helpers in Papua, Marie-Therese Noblet, a delicate young upper-class French woman who had been miraculously cured, at Lourdes, of spinal tuberculosis, at the age of seventeen. The cure was followed, for the rest of her life, by recurrent psychological and spiritual torments, especially when she was alone at night. Her contorted body, according to witnesses, became a battleground with demons, who identified themselves through her “voices” during her fits of possession, by names known in European witchcraft. Stigmata – lesions symbolic of Christ’s sufferings – appeared on her body. The paroxysms were interpreted by sceptics as psycho-sexual excesses and by theologians, such as de Boismenu and her family friend Jullien, as signs that Satan and his legions were doing battle with her. The bishop and two of his priests – one of them being Andre Pineau, who later wrote about her – counselled and exorcised her, at first in France and later in Papua. To her, they were fatherly deliverers; Marie-Therese, outwardly saintly and unperturbed, was brought to Papua as the Mother Superior of the local religious community of women founded, at the close of World War I in 1918, by de Boismenu. The bishop introduced her to the mission in 1921, with no qualms about bringing a sensitive young woman accustomed to elegant French provincial houses to face muddy trails and grass huts. What seemed a gamble paid off; she was an acclaimed success, a candidate for sainthood and a protectress of the whole mission. She fitted in almost at once as Superior of the Handmaids from the day she was presented to them as their “little mother.” She did not complain about her daily life, but de Boismenu and Pineau, under the seal of the confessional, ministered to her at night during her bouts of Satanic possession. Theologians and psychiatrists wrangle over the true nature of her “states” and her claims to sanctity; she exemplified one of de Boismenu’s reiterated themes – unassuming saintliness achieved through interior struggle with supernatural evil.”

I cannot help wondering what the local people really knew and thought ... and far from undermining their belief in sorcery and the demons who lurk beyond the villages at night she seems to be the embodiment of that missionary idea that it was dark-skinned pagans who were the chief focus of the powers of evil ...

Personally I would have thought there was far more obvious evil to be found on the battlefields of Europe. And it is a curious thought: I have never come upon a report of a Quaker ‘possession’ or ‘exorcism’. Do you have to believe in the Devil, possession, and exorcism—to suffer? Not just accept it vaguely as a possibility but truly, deeply, unerringly believe. And the more intensely and constantly you believe—the more you are at risk?

John Garrett also points out that some of the earliest missions in New Guinea were German ones in what was then a German colony, the German Imperial Protectorate of Kaiser Wilhelmsland. Three main areas of missionary activity were set up. Johann Flierl and the Bavarian Lutheran mission which was probably the most successful in the early years as it learnt local languages and engaged with the dilemmas of land and community; as Garrett says

of Flierl: ‘Flierl made the mistake at Simbang of assuming the land they thought they had bought by cheap barter belonged of right to the mission; he later came to understand how land in New Guinea was ceded by grace and favour, being an inheritance from ever-watchful ancestors – therefore in local custom not permanently alienable.’ And of his successor, Christian Keysser, Garrett said, ‘He grasped one central point: in New Guinea, people cannot easily conceive of themselves as autonomous individuals; their self-awareness is woven into the context of their extended families, clans and ancestors. To expect them to come one-by-one to Jesus is to entertain a frustrating hope; they either come together, in company with the entire group which shapes and constitutes their lives, or they become detached and isolated misfits.’

The Rhenish Lutheran Mission set up near Madang and had probably its greatest success when it brought several Samoan missionaries to New Guinea; they were better able to understand the local society and share their faith and expertise.

And the Catholic Divine Word Missionaries set up near Wewak. They were much more closely entwined with business activities (with its links to forced labour and land loss) but were able to partly offset the unfortunate connotations of this by appealing to an indigenous love of mystery and ritual. But all missions faced the same dilemmas—and when they alienated land or failed to engage the whole community through its elders and chiefs then they walked a very parlous road.

Not only did the local people find themselves caught up in wider political and theological confusions, where their faith was at the mercy of people far away in Europe, and where having been given Jesus and Christianity as the peaceful antithesis of tribal warfare and payback they now found that white Christians were far more ferocious warriors whenever it suited them—but the impact of German colonialism in PNG also remains. When Germany lost its colonies after WWI those possessions, including the islands of New Britain (originally New Pomerania), New Ireland (originally New Mecklenburg), and Bougainville, were given to the Australian mandated-territory of Papua and New Guinea. The island of Bougainville, linked to the Solomon Islands by languages and cultures, should have become a part of what was still the British colony of the Solomon Islands. It might have saved independent PNG a great deal of expensive opprobrium ... and it might’ve changed the course of history in the Solomons ...

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“The natives in the neighbourhood of Herbertshoehe (near Rabaul), which is the seat of the Government of New Guinea and other German possessions in the Pacific, have often given trouble, and it is barely two years ago since the family of a planter at Herbertshoehe was murdered by a horde of aborigines. The cause of the tragedy in that case was a land dispute. At the punitive expedition following the murders, about 200 natives were said to have been killed.”

A. G. Plate in *The Telegraph* 1904 as quoted in *Meanjin*.

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May 29: André Brink

May 30: Julian Symons

May 31: Helen Waddell

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Eileen Colwell says in her introduction to *The Princess Splendour & Other Stories* by Helen Waddell, “In 1966 a manuscript which had been lost for thirty years was discovered in a publisher’s cupboard. It was the typescript of a number of fairy tales retold by Helen Waddell, the classical scholar, during the First World War.

The history of this manuscript is a strange one. Commissioned by an educational publisher, the stories were considered too difficult for ‘elementary school’ children. A schoolmaster was employed to simplify them and bowdlerized versions were published anonymously in a series called *The Fairy Ring*, now long out of print. Not all the stories were used in this way, but the remainder were put aside and forgotten—for nearly twenty years.

By 1934 Helen Waddell had made her name as an author and the publishers decided to make a book of the stories they had not used. Later, at Helen Waddell's request, the manuscript was handed over to the author's publishers, Constable's. Once again nothing was done with it until, thirty years later, it was re-discovered and I was asked to select and edit those stories I considered of most appeal to children." It suggests either someone whose thoughts were on graver matters than fairy tales—or someone who was too shy and retiring to push publishers into doing something with her material—though possibly the key word in the saga was 'commissioned'.

But Colwell does say of her, "Little is known of Helen Waddell as a person for she disliked publicity, but much can be deduced from her books. It is safe to say that she loved children and animals and good company. Again and again we find descriptive details that could only have been observed by someone with a feeling for the countryside and the perceptive eye of a poet. Her sense of humour was delightfully keen. A friend described her as 'the gentlest of women and one who hated injustice, intolerance, cruelty and war'. The picture that emerges is not that of a dry-as-dust scholar, but a woman of warm sympathies, with a deep faith in God."

It seems quite extraordinary to me that a book could be so completely overlooked and forgotten—and I wondered if the publisher had actually paid on delivery of the manuscript. I am fortunate in that I can afford to write purely for my own pleasure but the majority of the writing being done in the world today is on the 'for hire' basis; newspapers, magazines, advertising, labels, manuals, theses, reports, minutes, studies, textbooks, biographies ...

Although the writing world mainly concentrates on books that weren't commissioned, mostly prose and poetry, this is only a fraction of the printed matter which surrounds us.

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Perhaps the most famous castrated man in history was Peter Abelard. And he was castrated because of his illicit love affair with the equally remembered Heloise. When I read Helen Waddell's novel *Peter Abelard* I cried pots of tears. I'm not sure how I would've felt had I met the real Abelard but she writes a deeply moving story. But men have been castrated for various reasons; those eunuchs in Middle Eastern harems, the famous Italian *castrati* with boys' voices in men's bodies (I heard a recording of the last one to be recorded and I found his singing eerie rather than beautiful), for reasons of revenge, in sex change operations ... and the most contentious: should rapists be castrated? I know this has been a refrain to the most horrible of sex crimes—but does it work? FBI profiler John Douglas in *Mindhunter* says no, that what is going through the rapist's mind "is not sex—it's anger and rage." He goes on to say that this "is why it doesn't do any good to castrate repeat rapists—as satisfying and fulfilling as the idea may be to some of us. The problem is, it doesn't stop them, either physically or emotionally. Rape is definitely a crime of anger. If you cut someone's balls off, you're going to have one angry man."

But I felt that he was largely focused on angry young men, taking their mediocrity and their frustrations and rejections out on women and girls. I think that pedophilia often has a different motivation. And I think there are men so consumed by sex that it adversely affects their ability to live a normal life. And then there is clergy abuse which comes into, I think, a category of its own. Because these, predominantly men, abused a position of power and respect. They didn't need to achieve a position of dominance over young altar boys and young children in church schools and youth groups. They already had a god-like status from which they could destroy innocence and know that in most cases their behaviour would remain secret. It is possible to place a lot of the blame on enforced celibacy and young people going into a kind of life which did not allow normal relationships—before they were knowledgeable and comfortable with their own sexuality. But that is not a blanket excuse. Some did their abusing as bishops and highly-placed administrators. They had had ample time to come to terms with their own weaknesses. Nor does it excuse their willingness to hide and protect other abusive individuals. And the numbers are truly disturbing: Associated Press recorded that 325 Catholic priests accused of sexual abuse resigned, retired or were removed in 2002 in the USA; and the

*New York Times* put the number as high as 432. Jason Berry and Gerald Renner wrote in *Vows of Silence* “Behind the term “child sexual abuse” lay a range of behaviours. True pedophiles, fixated on children, were extremely difficult to treat. They used child pornography to excite fantasies for masturbation and showed pornography to kids in grooming them for sex. Some pedophiles could achieve orgasm ten times a day—a biochemical circuitry in sexual over-drive. From a program at the Sexual Disorders Clinic of Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Peterson had begun utilizing Depo-Provera, a synthetic hormone injected once a day, to lower the sex drive of certain priests at St. Luke.”

So perhaps some form of castration has a niche?

But in the middle of occasionally pondering on the question I came upon a book called *My Life in Crime* by Terrys T. Olender and she, the first female District Attorney in the USA, wrote “Castration, technically termed bilateral orchotomy, is a tinderbox controversial subject, in which few are interested. Concealed behind public ignorance and blushes, medical neglect and apathy, there is a dearth of information relative to it. Having dug into what primeval dirt is available, I can now lay claim to the dubious honor of being somewhat an authority on the matter.

“There has been some experimentation with bilateral orchotomy. San Diego County in California has castrated around 140 apprehended sex deviates (including several matriculates from the psychiatric experimental institution). All by voluntary submission. In another state, several hundred sex criminals have been castrated. *Not one* castrate has since been arrested as a sex recidivist.

“The argument against legislated castration (enforced by law instead of voluntary submission) is that the castrate would become antisocial and commit retaliatory crimes of violence. The record negates this contention. While some castrates have been arrested, they were for nonviolent crimes (burglary, theft, bad checks).

“Without equivocation, I state that aggressive urges and drives are definitely curbed by castration. After viewing, during my five year(s) in the D.A.’s office, the parade of sex fiends’ victims — the mutilated, bludgeoned, venereal-infected women and children — I am inclined to agree with the proponents of bilateral orchotomy for sex crime repeaters: a snip in time might well save nine.” (Her book came out in 1966.)

But Abelard was a bigger man than his cowardly attackers both in life and in Waddell’s book. He wrote frankly of the attack on him by Heloise’s Uncle Fulbert’s recruits in his autobiography *Historia calamitatum*: “—one night as I slept peacefully in an inner room in my lodgings, they bribed one of my servants to admit them and there took cruel vengeance on me of such appalling barbarity as to shock the whole world; they cut off the parts of my body whereby I had committed the wrong of which they complained. Then they fled, but the two who could be caught were blinded and mutilated as I had been, one of them being the servant who had been led by greed while in my service to betray his master.

“Next morning the whole city gathered before my house, and the scene of horror and amazement, mingled with lamentations, cries and groans which exasperated and distressed me, is difficult, no, impossible, to describe. In particular, the clerks and, most of all, my pupils tormented me with their unbearable weeping and wailing until I suffered more from their sympathy than from the pain of my wound, and felt the misery of my mutilation less than my shame and humiliation. ... How could I show my face in public, to be pointed at by every finger, derided by every tongue, a monstrous spectacle to all I met? I was also appalled to remember that according to the cruel letter of the Law, a eunuch is such an abomination to the Lord that men made eunuchs by the amputation or mutilation of their members are forbidden to enter a church as if they were stinking and unclean, and even animals in that state are rejected for sacrifice. ‘Ye shall not present to the Lord any animal if its testicles have been bruised or crushed, torn or cut.’ ‘No man whose testicles have been crushed or whose organ has been severed shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord.’

... "I had still scarcely recovered from my wound when the clerks came thronging round to pester the abbot and myself with repeated demands that I should now for love of God continue the studies which hitherto I had pursued only in desire for wealth and fame. They urged me to consider that the talent entrusted to me by God would be required of me with interest; that instead of addressing myself to the rich as before I should devote myself to educating the poor, and recognize that the hand of the Lord had touched me for the express purpose of freeing me from the temptations of the flesh and the distractions of the world so that I could devote myself to learning, and thereby prove myself a true philosopher not of the world but of God."

Waddell puts these words in his mouth "I am not a man now," he said. "I am a kind of monster. You go home and read *Attis* again, Gilles, and some of Martial; and then read the passages in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, about the kind of thing I am now. And how, with that knowledge in me, do you suppose I am to rule the Schools? I'd shrivel in my chair and stammer at the first snigger."

Perhaps some students did laugh and talk behind his back—but many continued to flock to hear him no matter where he went or how he tried to live hermit-like in remote places ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Abelard and Heloise

Were a pair of sentimental geese.  
They ought to have taken exercise,  
Not spent their time in sighs and cries.  
Gone in for netball or sailing boats  
Instead of writing sloppy notes.

W. H. Auden in 'Give Up Love'.

Perhaps. But if there were 'sloppy notes' we don't have them; what we do have are many deep and interesting letters; though it is true that most of those we have are the ones written after they had parted and are more to do with matters of faith and Christian doctrine, ideas, traditions, and dilemmas ...

Abelard died in 1142 and Betty Radice writes, "Heloise outlived Abelard by some twenty-one years; she is recorded in the necrology of the Paraclete as dying on the 16 May in 1163 or 4. The romantics have liked to think that she died, like Abelard, at the age of sixty-three. ... Heloise is recorded in the Paraclete's burial record as having been buried alongside Abelard in the abbey church, which was later known as the chapel of St Denis or the Petit Moustier ('Little Monastery'). This was the small oratory built by Abelard's students many years before, to replace the simple reed and thatch structure he had first set up. There is no record of her body having been put into Abelard's tomb. In 1497 the abbess of the time had the bodies moved from what was described as a damp and watery position and placed on either side of the high altar in the new oratory which had been built further away from the Ardusson. They were moved again in 1621 to a crypt below an altar on which stood a stone representing the Three Persons of the Trinity, which was believed to have been carved under Abelard's direction. In 1701 this stone was moved to a better position in the choir, and in 1780 the bodies moved again to a new position, still in the crypt. When the convent was sold at the time of the Revolution and the buildings demolished, apart from the residence of the abbess (the present Château, dating from 1685), the bones were taken to the church of St Laurent in Nogent-sur-Seine, and in 1800 to Paris, to Alexander Lenoir's Musée des Monuments Français. They were later moved to the cemetery of Mont Louis, now Père Lachaise. There they are still, in a sarcophagus brought from St Marcel which Lenoir believed to have been Abelard's original tomb, beneath a Gothic-style structure and surrounded by modern iron railings, through which flowers are still sometimes placed beside their effigies by tourists who know something of their history, and by Parisians on All Souls' Day."

\* \* \* \* \*

Helen Waddell was born in Tokyo in 1889 where her father was a Presbyterian missionary; they returned to Belfast where she went to university and began on the long

journey to become a famous medieval scholar of her day; her best-known works being *Wandering Scholars* (1927), *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (1929), and *Peter Abelard* (1933). But I was intrigued to find a couple of her letters in *Irish Women's Letters* compiled by Laurence Flanagan including this one written in 1919 on the subject of Home Rule: "Your letter has just come in. You *are* a dear to write so frankly; and I'll be frank too.

Listen: when the American colonies declared their independence, after not one hundredth part of the oppression this country received, was it treason? No. But it would to this day be treason, if it had failed.

If there had been no Great War: if two hundred years from now Alsace-Lorraine had risen against German Rule, would it have been treason?

If three hundred years from now, Belgium, overrun by a triumphant Germany had rebelled, would it have been treason? If, her language gone, half her country settled by Germans from across the Rhine (many of whom, however, became imbued with the Belgian spirit), but nevertheless governed equitably enough according to Teutonic ideals, she had continued to conspire, to keep alive the Belgian nationality, the hate of the conqueror, the passion for her own individuality, would it have been the malignant outworking of the spirit of evil, or the unconquerable, unquenchable 'seed of fire' which makes a man love his own country and his own children as he cannot love the alien?

The cases, you will say, are not parallel. They never are, quite. But they are going in the same direction.

One *can* be a Home Ruler, and loyal to the greater issue as well. Witness the Redmonds and Professor J. M. Kettle, and hundreds of less-known Irishmen.

I'm sorry I hurt you by telling you that about my father. But you know, it was his passion for lost causes, for 'the under dog', that makes me love him.

Dear, how *can* you possibly feel as we felt, he and I? You are English: you are of the governing nation. I see the same incapacity in Gregory.

You liken the cleavage to that between Cavalier and Roundhead. The issue there was 'government by consent of the governed': and the 'rebels' won. Only for that, they would be traitors still. It is the same issue still.

Ireland, given a Home Rule parliament when the electorate of the three kingdoms decreed it, would have given its blood like water. Sinn Fein had no love of Germany, except as a means to an end. Dear, *have* you forgotten the Ulster papers before the war? But then you didn't read them, of course, in India. The half-veiled references to German aid, that became frank outrage in wilder oratory. Do you not know that Ulster armed itself with German rifles?

What Sir Edward Carson did was to break down the hold that constitutional government had at last won in Ireland. He proved that a threat of physical force could paralyse 'government by the will of the majority'. English papers actually commented on the contrast between the red fury of Ulster and the apathy of the rest of Ireland, as proof that Ulster was much more in earnest *against*, than the rest of Ireland *for*.

Do you know that speeches on behalf of the Ulster position, collected in book form, are now suppressed as anarchic in tendency in Ireland? And by some of the very men who made them?

Ulster never feared religious persecution for itself: it used the case of the Protestants in the South and West as its strongest arguments. It must protect them, who could not protect themselves. It was offered partition: in five minutes the scattered remnant was thrown overboard, to make what terms it could, while Ulster grasped at a chance of setting up a sort of city-state. That action made the Ulster Covenant so much waste paper.

Another thing: you speak of Parnell's morals: 'these by thy gods, O Israel.' There is a monument in London to a greater than Parnell, greater even in sin, for his was a double adultery. Parnell had no wife, and Nelson had. And I do not think it likely that Parnell would have left the name of the woman in his will, to 'the care of a grateful nation', as Nelson left the name of Lady Hamilton. For this reason — that Parnell was dealing with a nation whose

attitude to the marriage bond is infinitely more exacting than the English. Curiously, Gregory was talking of it the other day. ‘Parnell would never have made shipwreck,’ he said, ‘if his supporters had not been in the main Irish Catholics. And adultery is a thing they will not bear.’

But, dear, it only vexes you and vexes me. Put it this way: I’d be insane to discuss ‘Home Rule for India’ with my knowledge. I can only wish that Tagore had not had to renounce his title as a protest against the flogging in public of educated men. That I was sorry to hear: but I recognize that a Government in a terrible situation acts terribly, and does things it might not in cooler blood. Anyhow, I have no knowledge. I only know that my faith in the fairness of British administration is very great.

But here I know a little: and more than that, I feel.

My father and mother were Irish,  
And I am Irish too.  
I bought a wee fiddle for ninepence,  
And it is Irish too.

All the same, I have no hatred for England: I’ve an immense liking for it: and for certain Englishmen, a great deal more than liking. I don’t call them tyrants, and I don’t call the Easter ‘rebels’ either martyrs or traitors.

I suppose I’m a hopeless trimmer. Just as my head was with the Roundheads, and my heart distinctly Royalist.

Does it matter? Saintsbury and Gregory, two of my best friends, are Tories *in excelsis*: Saintsbury’s Toryism is almost a joy to me, it’s so complete. I am quite convinced that he is a Jacobite in fact.

Dear — the men who died for the Pretender — were they ‘traitors’? And upon my honour, scores of the men who died in Easter week died ‘for a dream’s sake’. And yet, to you, with your traditions, I see that they *must* be traitors. So be it.

I come back and back to the catalogue of the Twelve Apostles. ‘He chose ... Simon the Zealot’ (as who should say, a man who had been ‘out’ in Easter week) ... Matthew the Publican.’

And by tradition, it was Matthew who had denied his birthright who wrote the Gospel for the Jews.

But I see that mine is an attitude you can’t well understand. But remember the tradition among us, that one of us was hanged for treason in ’98, and that the Governor of the Jail where he was hanged was a kinsman of his own.

My dear love to you. And remember, dear heart, before you worry over me too much, that we’re nearly all Radicals in youth!”

Helen Waddell is always described as an extremely private person—but that letter does seem to say quite a lot about her personality and her attitudes.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 1: Joyce Nicholson

June 2: Thomas Hardy

June 3: Ian Glynn

Duff Hart-Davis

June 4: Elizabeth Jolley

June 5: Mrs Aeneas Gunn

June 6: Alexander Pushkin

June 7: Elizabeth Bowen

June 8: Ivan Southall

June 9: Patricia Cornwell

June 10: Saul Bellow

June 11: Anna Akhmatova

June 12: Oliver Lodge  
Djuna Barnes

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I assume it was simply her name which attracted me to want to find out something about her. I certainly knew nothing of her life and work. Then I came upon a book called *Women of the Left Bank* by Shari Benstock in which she says of Barnes, one of those expatriate Americans who lived as a lesbian in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s and helped to make up a lively literary community, “Because the better known of Barnes’s writings—*Ryder*, *Ladies Almanack*, *Nightwood*, and *The Antiphon*—include characters and situations drawn from her own biography, particularly of the Paris years, there is a tendency to read her fiction as a record of her life. The mysterious unreality of *Nightwood* has translated itself into accounts of Barnes’s life, so that the self-imposed seclusion of the later years is linked to the apparent hedonism of her ten-year residence in Paris. Cultists of the period take pride in being able to identify the various Paris characters who appear in her work, focusing upon the *roman à clef* aspects that tie the writing to a specific time and place. Djuna Barnes becomes a pathetic victim of the Parisian nightworld, her “basic heterosexuality” undermined by the evils of a lesbian community, her beauty lost in drunken brawls, her wit turned acid. She is read as a participant in the Paris lesbian community portrayed in *Ladies Almanack*; she is Nora in *Nightwood*, a victim of the drugged, alcoholic, sexually ambiguous Paris nightworld. Such an interpretation of Barnes’s Paris years has now become the standard material of expatriate accounts. It has been difficult to rewrite this myth, to place Djuna Barnes in a community of serious women writers in Paris, to suggest that the informing despair of *Nightwood* might be interpreted beyond the biographical details of her own life, to discuss her seclusion as a deliberate act of devotion to her writing, to offer alternatives to the crass efforts at psychoanalysis indulged in by most commentators on her life and work.”

Her first publication was a small book of poetry, *The Book of Repulsive Women*, which she brought out in 1915 when she was twenty-three and in which she took female sexuality as her subject. She wrote mainstream articles for the media as a way of earning money but her novels were very much her own exploration of lesbian life and love. In Paris she was remembered more for her beauty and her ‘caustic wit’; in later years she became a Garbo-like recluse. But my question for myself was simply—is any of her work still available for the reading?

\* \* \* \* \*

Another expatriate American lesbian in Paris was Sylvia Beach; perhaps best known as the publisher of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. But, looked at closely, her role as publisher becomes extraordinary. In 1921 when she set up her bookshop, Shakespeare and Co, in Paris using a gift of money from her mother to get her started, she made about a hundred dollars in her first year. Though it has been suggested that she approached Joyce about publication this is clearly not the case; she agonised over the request, discussing it with her friend and lover and fellow bookshop owner, Adrienne Monnier, whose own shop “the first lending library ever established in France” was almost opposite Shakespeare and Co.

Yet Shakespeare and Co was a tiny operation. A few small poetry chapbooks would make sense—not a massive thousand page contentious novel. It is as though Vikram Seth turned up in Hobart and asked Lyn Reeves with her little Pardalote Press to bring out *A Suitable Boy*. The idea is mind-boggling. And Sylvia probably came to regret her decision to take it on; it brought back her problem with migraines in full force, it almost bankrupted her, it involved her constantly loaning money to Joyce—even though she lived very simply and parsimoniously herself while Joyce pigged out in good restaurants. In 1931 she put off her one assistant and gave up her car; the bookshop struggled on, Beach selling off items including her first edition of *Ulysses* to try to keep afloat, but in 1941 she was interned by the Nazis and her beloved Shakespeare and Co closed. Benstock says that Sylvia Beach probably made a few hundred dollars from her publishing venture.

But the real question in all this—and more so for the men who laud *Ulysses* to the skies as *the* great novel of the twentieth century—is why none of the mainstream male-dominated publishers with funds and resources and supposedly able to see a great book when it was offered to them all turned it down flat. Why did it take a struggling young female bookshop proprietor to bring it to the public?

But far from engaging with this question most responses seem to be of the ‘she should’ve been grateful for the chance to serve genius’ type of reply; or as Ryland Vaughan in Dorothy Sayers’ novel *Strong Poison* puts it “Genius must be served, not argued with”. Why should she serve? And the book might’ve been a better book with fewer of those long dull passages if she had been prepared to argue with Joyce.

Perhaps more intriguingly—is this what Dorothy Sayers had in mind in that passage in *Strong Poison* (which came out in 1930) when Lord Peter Wimsey, trying to get Harriet out of prison, goes round to see two of Harriet’s friends, Sylvia Marriott and Eiluned Price? When Lord Peter Wimsey says “People who work hard usually do pay back, I fancy—except geniuses” Eiluned Price says, “Women geniuses don’t get coddled, so they learn not to expect it.”

When I re-read *Strong Poison* I noticed something odd. Sylvia Marriott starts out as Sybil Marriott—then, halfway through the book, she suddenly gets called Sylvia. It is as though Sayers had based her on a real Sylvia who took over the character. Perhaps she had a friend called Sylvia—but with all the publicity given to Sylvia Beach, James Joyce, and *Ulysses* at that time I couldn’t help wondering if they had infiltrated Sayers’ novel. Eiluned Price is described as ‘anti-man’ which is possibly her euphemism for lesbian and just might suggest that she stood for Adrienne Monnier (and I was intrigued to find that ‘monnaie’ in French means money, coins, currency, and ‘monnayer’ means to convert into cash; perhaps she chose Price as a more common and less-obvious name as a connection; and Eiluned comes from the Welsh ‘eilun’ meaning an idol or icon); whereas Sylvia Marriott is seen as more sympathetic but also more ambiguous. Read in this way, it would also become possible to read the murdered man Philip Boyes (which sounds like Boyce) as Joyce (Philip Boyes is seen as an extremely talented writer whose books don’t yet sell because they are too modern and too ‘filthy’) with his importunities and his belief in the value of his work against the pot-boilers of others in the expatriate literary community. Boyes also doesn’t believe in the bourgeois convention of marriage—or not until he has thoroughly destroyed Harriet’s reputation; which might suggest Joyce’s relationship to Nora Barnacle. And Sylvia with her leg laid up on a cushion and unable to do more than hobble around might become a metaphor for Sylvia and her little bookshop tied to a project with no easy outcome, yet from which she couldn’t afford to simply walk away.

In fact, the more I thought of the novel and Beach’s situation the more I felt many aspects of the novel might be read as code for a situation which more than likely interested Sayers. I am sure her sympathies would’ve been with Beach, not Joyce, and that she might’ve been poking some private fun—but whether this kind of code might be seen as a new and different way to read an old but well-known novel I have no idea ...

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When I went to the library to see if there was any chance of bringing any of Djuna Barnes’ work back from relative obscurity I was delighted to find that they could offer me two; her early book of short stories *Smoke and Other Early Stories* and *Nightwood*.

*Nightwood* is a strange book; it has no sense of grounding. Its people have a shadowy and insubstantial sense to them. And it is not hard to see why people found various things to dislike about the book.

The author might be read into any of the three women characters, Robin, Jenny, and Nora. And none of them come over as conventional heroines, or even particularly likeable. Robin abandons her husband and child for the sake of living with another woman. Jenny is sharp and difficult. Nora seems to drift through life with more interest in death and dying than

living. And many conventional readers would've found the lack of structure disconcerting, the use of words like 'bum' and 'fart' and 'shit' confronting, her apparent knowledge of nightlife and prostitution and drunkenness enough to destroy any idea of her respectability, her dwelling on 'inversion' ('She was always holding God's bag of tricks upside down') neither sympathetic nor attractive, her apparent fascination with death rather gloomy, and the strong vein of anti-religion which runs through the book a reason for dismay (though the line 'you have dressed the unknowable in the garments of the known' is a reminder that conventional attitudes to religion of the God-in-his-nightdress type were ripe for challenge). But these things probably would not weigh with modern readers. So I think its failure, or more precisely its forgottenness, ultimately lies in its bleakness.

On the other hand the early stories which she wrote for American newspapers are a delight; they are little slices of action like something seen briefly by a passer-by and written in a lively witty style mildly reminiscent of the later works of Damon Runyan and John Dos Passos. Douglas Messerli notes the surprise of modern readers that these pieces appeared in sporting papers but in fact most newspapers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries carried both fiction and poetry. Their taste usually ran more to the serial and the melodrama but a large number of writers began their careers by writing newspaper fiction. Messerli says, "Throughout her writing career, Barnes has employed her figures as emblems, caricatures, and stereotypes that have their roots in the character typologies of the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But in these early newspaper works this method of characterization may have been less a conscious decision of Barnes to draw on previous literary traditions than it was a convention of her medium."

So just a little taste of her newspaper style:

She borrowed incessantly, did Leah, she borrowed Paprika's slippers out of bed, and her shifts into bed, and she borrowed her face powder, and her hair ribbons and her stockings. And she borrowed, most of all, Paprika's charm.

Leah was thin and pock-marked and colorless, and still, without the stiffness of a wall flower was one, and chose Gus to lean on.

It goes without saying that Gustav was blind, as blind as a man in a rage and as a man in love.

He listened to Paprika's soft voice, and not being able to estimate the distance that sound carries, put his arm about Leah's waist while Paprika sat upon the other side of the table.

Leah would have been just as well pleased to have had Gus in her own room, but that was impossible, as it was chaperonless.

Paprika was safe, because Paprika had a moribund mother under the counterpane, a chaperone who never spoke or moved, since she was paralyzed, but who was a pretty good one at that, being a white exclamation point this side of error. Therefore, Leah was hugged in Paprika's presence.

(from 'Paprika Johnson')

I rather regretted she had not gone on developing in this vein. But as her newspaper stories were written for money and *Nightwood* because it was something she wanted to write this suggests *Nightwood* says much more about her life and character and view of the world ...

\* \* \* \* \*

June 13: Dorothy Sayers

June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe

June 15: Simon Callow

June 16: Joyce Carol Oates

John Shelby Spong

June 17: Henry Lawson

John Tierney

June 18: Paul McCartney

June 19: Patricia Wrightson

Aung San Suu Kyi

June 20: David Cox

June 21: Noreen Shelley  
John Agard

June 22: H. Rider Haggard

June 23: Frank Dalby Davison

June 24: Alicia Ann Spottiswood

June 25: George Orwell

June 26: Pearl Buck

June 27: Lafcadio Hearn

Helen Keller

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Scientist Arthur Eddington gave the 1929 Swarthmore Lecture to Quakers gathered in London and the fascination of the lecture now I think is in the way he looked at the beginnings of the Universe and all that he took from his understanding of it. This is long before any Big Bangs got in the way. He starts out, “Looking back through the long past we picture the beginning of the world—a primeval chaos which time has fashioned into the universe that we know. Its vastness appals the mind; space boundless though not infinite, according to the strange doctrine of science. The world was without form and almost void. But at the earliest stage we can contemplate the void is sparsely broken by tiny electric particles, the germs of the things that are to be; positive and negative they wander aimlessly in solitude, rarely coming near enough to seek or shun one another.” And so it slowly goes on from there. He describes the planets, bits whirled off our sun and cooling, as a ‘rare accident’. Matter in the universe is usually hot; “Cool matter appears as an afterthought. It is unlikely that the Sun is the only one of the starry host to possess a system of planets, but it is believed that such development is very rare.”

He goes on to speak of the development of the elements and the extraordinary properties of carbon. He says he will avoid the controversies thrown up between the Mechanists and the Vitalists. (Yes, the 1920s had its ‘camps’ too.) And he says, “Probably most astronomers, if they were to speak frankly, would confess to some chafing when they are reminded of the psalm “The heavens declare the glory of God.” It is so often rubbed into us with implications far beyond the simple poetic thought awakened by the splendour of the star-clad sky. There is another passage from the Old Testament that comes nearer to my own sympathies—

“And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice ... And behold there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?”

“Wind, earthquake, fire—meteorology, seismology, physics—pass in review, as we have been reviewing the natural forces of evolution; the Lord was not in them. Afterwards, a stirring, an awakening in the organ of the brain, a voice which asks “What doest thou here?” ”

The first thing that struck me is that this idea of rarity was soon superceded. The fifties, sixties, seventies; the chorus grew for a universe of peopled planets, of intelligent life in its millions. As Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee write in *Rare Earth* there was an explosion of writings, alongside the Big Bang books, to say ‘we are not alone’. We may in fact live in a universe teeming with life. But as the authors of *Rare Earth* note the balance is tipping back the other way. “Carl Sagan estimated in 1974 that a million civilizations may exist in our Milky Way galaxy alone.” Then they go on to say, “If it is found to be correct, however, the Rare Earth Hypothesis will reverse that decentering trend. What if the Earth, with its cargo of advanced animals, is virtually unique in this quadrant of the galaxy—the most diverse planet, say, in the nearest 10,000 light years? What if it is utterly unique: the only planet with animals in this galaxy or even in the visible Universe, a bastion of animals amid a sea of microbe-

infested worlds? If that is the case, how much greater the loss the Universe sustains for each species of animal or plant driven to extinction through the careless stewardship of *Homo sapiens*?

“Welcome aboard.”

The things required for intelligent life, other than tiny tough microbes, include, so far as we can discern, water, oxygen, plant life, a reasonably stable temperature, neither too hot nor too cold; but also things which do not readily come to mind like plate tectonics. In fact a planet like Earth may be nearly as rare in the Universe as hen’s teeth are here.

But in another way Eddington and his colleagues set the scene for a different way of looking at the world which might ultimately undercut his chosen Bible verse. Physics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was in love with models. Physics was about things which could be made to demonstrate every aspect of these natural laws. Even the brain was seen as a material model, its cog-wheels its electrical impulses, and its marvels beholden to physical laws. But all these wonderful models, from planets orbiting suns, to the kinds of time-and-motion ideas that infested factories slowly gave way to a deeper understanding and “matter and all else that is in the physical world have been reduced to a shadowy symbolism”. But symbols are not enough. “Natural law is not applicable to the unseen world behind the symbols, because it is unadapted to anything except symbols, and its perfection is a perfection of symbolic linkage. You cannot apply such a scheme to the parts of our personality which are not measurable by symbols any more than you can extract the square root of a sonnet.”

The material world has had to give way to symbols but symbols, in their turn, are ill-suited to the uniqueness of every human experience. Science can tell me what goes on in my brain when I think. But thought itself has no substance, no body, no life ... and yet its power is immense. Over my life. Over all human life. Perhaps over all life. But Arthur Eddington brought a touching humbleness to his work. All the scientist and the astronomer can do is seek and postulate and test. The certainties of one generation give way to the certainties of the next—and the follies and dead-ends of the last. Physics is now moving towards something which might begin to suggest that the Unknowable, which the Bible simply calls Lord, *is* in the wind and the earthquake and the fire. It permeates everything. It exists in other dimensions. It even asks different questions.

Albert Einstein said, “The human mind is not capable of grasping the Universe. We are like a little child entering a huge library. The walls are covered to the ceilings with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written these books. It does not know who or how. It does not understand the languages in which they are written. But the child notes a definite plan in the arrangement of the books in a mysterious order which it does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects.”

I wonder. Perhaps the only thing capable of grasping the Universe *is* the human mind. As a place, as a concept, as a complex set of mathematical equations, as matter, as dimensions. As love, as hope, as eternity ...

As Fred Alan Wolf writes in *Parallel Universes*, “The fact that the future may play a role in the present is a new prediction of the mathematical laws of quantum physics. If interpreted literally, the mathematical formulas indicate not only how the future enters our present but also how our minds may be able to “sense” the presence of parallel universes.

“Are we pressing the mathematical laws of physics too far? “As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and so far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality,” wrote Albert Einstein. Einstein was undoubtedly referring to the mathematical laws of quantum physics in that these laws described only possibilities of reality but never reality itself. Can mathematics describe reality? I believe that the answer is yes, provided we take the new view given us by parallel universe theory. The laboratory of parallel universe experimentation may not lie in a mechanical time machine, a la Jules Verne, but could exist between our ears.”

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‘The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.’

John Milton

\* \* \* \* \*

“However, commerce’s most successful culture coup to date has taken place in the once-fertile frontiers of the American mind. Accounts of North America in the 1600s tell of a forest so vast that a squirrel could travel from Virginia to Illinois “without ever touching the ground.” Today, by virtue of a media-happy free market, it may now be possible for a person to travel from one week to the next without thinking an original thought unshaped by manipulative messages! Much of the territory between our ears has now been commercially “colonized.” The question is, if we get evicted from our own minds, who are we?”

(from *Affluenza* by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor)

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But the world which asks us to fill our lives with material goods, and our minds with the wanting of, requires us to be able to see and hear. Advertising is geared to sight and hearing. Which brings me to the original question that thinking about Helen Keller posed. Did she effectively inhabit a parallel universe? Do all those who have never seen or never heard or never smelled effectively inhabit a different world? Is our sense of ‘one world’ dependent on our faculties which in turn enable us to conceptualise one world and share that conceptualisation? People like Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan who had such a long hard struggle to live in this concept of a world excite our admiration. People who have spent long periods of solitary confinement in a dark dungeon and who lose contact with ‘reality’ excite our pity.

But the puzzle in there is why we should invariably see the universe, the universes, waiting beyond this reality as terrifying places. Is the terror they evoke not to do with their different realities but rather that we are primed to feel at home only in the one reality and everything else becomes a place to fear, to avoid, to escape from ...

Helen Keller made a remarkable escape from one limiting reality. She never saw a struggling worker or experienced a shocking workplace or a soup kitchen or a crowded tenement but she had a vision: “I foresee the day when the people will take over all man’s products and distribute and transport them to the consumer. Man’s forces will be managed by all for the benefit of all. That is democracy. We have never before seen democracy. It has never existed in the world.” You do not have to be blind to visualise a better fairer world. But I think that what she envisioned went beyond the prosaic idea of better distribution and fewer extremes of wealth and poverty. There are no words to share the images she conjured up in her own mind. And will there come a time when the world ‘between our ears’ can take us beyond the limitations of any ‘reality’?

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June 28: Luigi Pirandello  
Cicely Mary Barker  
June 29: Lydia Pender  
June 30: Czeslaw Milosz  
July 1: Dorothea MacKellar  
July 2: Herman Hesse  
July 3: Franz Kafka  
Evelyn Anthony

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“Did you see the photograph some time ago in one of the magazines of a dog’s head severed from its body which the Russians are keeping alive for some obscene Muscovite purpose by pumping blood into it from a bottle? It dribbles at the tongue when it smells a cat.”

I found this story from *Virtual Organisms* by Mark Ward quite horrifying and it is a reminder that fictional horror can never compete with real horror.

The best known horror story from Eastern Europe remains Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Stoker was an Irishman. And he used to great effect that image of the remote and mysterious reaches of a world almost unknown to most of his readers. It wasn't hard for them to believe that superstition, fear, strange semi-mythical beasts, not to mention the supernatural, remained part of the way of life there. The beliefs and misbeliefs, the folkloric horrors that people clung to, were fertile ground on which to build that kind of horror story. And they weren't far wrong. The real castles with dungeons, torture chambers, iron maidens, not to mention wolves, dark forests, cliffs, bad roads, the discomfort of horse-drawn coaches, superstitious peasants, and all the trimmings, were still there. Now, of course, the castles have central heating and electric lighting, the peasants work in car factories, and the wolves are ready for the endangered list.

But the curious thing is that some of the most famous horror stories to come out of the region didn't depend on these kinds of fears but on a vastly different stamp of bourgeois suburbanism and a mechanical inventiveness of the better educated and more logic-minded. Franz Kafka is still seen as the 'master' of this kind of almost casual awfulness which might strike at the most decent, most sensible, most reliable of good citizens. *Metamorphosis* doesn't depend on any of the staples of horror for its impact. *The Trial* never builds to a terrifying climax. Its horror instead lies in its almost laconic presentation of the horror of the unresolved. Franz Kafka's turning of a man into an insect is horrible precisely because it defies logic—yet family and victim try to respond in the most natural and logical of ways ...

I recently came across the information that Kafka also wrote some shorter, equally unsettling pieces, one of which was about dogs, and I have been reading 'Investigations of a Dog' in his *The Complete Stories*. This doesn't have the sly horror of 'Description of a Struggle' or the upfront awfulness of 'In the Penal Colony'. It could be taken as a parable of human nature or seen as the way that we use and pigeonhole dogs—pack dogs, performing dogs, dogs barking out the national anthem, dogs set up in solitary splendour as Best in Show, dogs as laboratory specimens—but I felt that Kafka sets a different course right at the beginning of the piece.

"How much my life has changed, and yet how unchanged it has remained at bottom! When I think back and recall the time when I was still a member of the canine community, sharing in all its preoccupations, a dog among dogs, I find on closer examination that from the very beginning I sensed some discrepancy, some little maladjustment, causing a slight feeling of discomfort which not even the most decorous public functions could eliminate; more, that sometimes, no, not sometimes, but very often, the mere look of some fellow dog of my own circle that I was fond of, the mere look of him, as if I had just caught it for the first time, would fill me with helpless embarrassment and fear, even with despair." ...

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July 4: Fay Zwicky

July 5: Katherine Scholes

Kevin Hart

July 6: Elizabeth Durack

The Dalai Lama

July 7: David McCullough

Robert McCrum

July 8: Fergus Hume

July 9: Ida Rentoul Outhwaite

July 10: Marcel Proust

July 11: Alexander Afanesev

July 12: Pablo Neruda

July 13: John Clare

John Dee

July 14: Gertrude Bell

July 15: Lawrie Ryan

Jocelyn Bell Burnell  
Robert Conquest  
July 16: Christopher Koch  
Aida Bortnik  
July 17: Christina Stead  
July 18: Reginald Ottley  
July 19: Victor Kelleher  
July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith  
July 21: A. D. Hope  
July 22: Betty Roland  
July 23: Raymond Chandler  
Carol Odell  
July 24: Jean Webster  
July 25: Elias Canetti  
July 26: George Bernard Shaw  
Terry Denton  
James Preston  
July 27: Hilaire Belloc  
July 28: Beatrix Potter

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As a child I can remember my aunt lending me a children's book called *The Rambles of a Rat*. I think she kept it handy to occupy young nieces and nephews as I seem to remember several readings of it. Though mice were a regular feature of farm life rats seemed to me, then and now, to be more of a city creature. Not nice but perhaps under the ongoing influence of that book quite acceptable as small furry creatures. The other rats to appear in a childhood book were Samuel and Anna Maria Whiskers in Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Tom Kitten*. And I found them terrifying as they made their way through those ancient dark walls and chimneys and unused parts of the old house. On the one hand they understandably needed to eat and a kitten baked in pastry would probably be delicious—but on the other hand my heart always went out to Tom Kitten. And unlike Peter Rabbit, Tom Kitten's ultimate safety was marred by the knowledge that he could never leave his fear behind him ...

Real rats, unlike book rats, have rarely received a good press. But not long ago I came across the curious question in *Disease & History* by Frederick Cartwright & Michael Biddiss that no one has adequately explained why bubonic plague effectively disappeared. Neither the rats nor their fleas can be shown to have disappeared. "There is a type of animal plague known as 'campestral' or 'sylvatic' which affects wild rodents such as rats, rabbits, hares and squirrels. Rodent—flea—rodent transmission could carry infection to the urban or companionable species, black rats, hamsters and guinea pigs. There is a possibility that this is the type of plague which was once human and which transferred to the rodent. Our forefathers were quite as observant as we are, and they appear not to have noticed any unusual mortality of rats, which has been a marked feature of later outbreaks in India, China and Mongolia. Perhaps the epidemiology is correct but operated in reverse. The great plagues may have originated in the human but been transmitted by fleas to the rat."

And the other day I came upon an interesting book in the library by Robert Sullivan called *Rats: A Year with New York's Most Unwanted Inhabitants*. I enjoyed reading it—though it was hardly ideal reading matter over lunch as it does naturally refer to garbage and sewers quite often—but it also had this interesting little footnote: "Fancy rats are related to the wild *Rattus norvegicus* very possibly because of Jack Black, the rat catcher to Queen Victoria. Jack Black caught rats for the queen, but he also kept rats that interested him for himself. He sold some of these rats to women; in the Victorian era, keeping rats as pets was a fad—Beatrix Potter is thought to have bought her pet rat from Jack Black himself. Jack Black also bred a strain of albino *Rattus norvegicus* that he subsequently sold to Victorian-era scientists in

France. Laboratory rats are today available for purchase on-line; a scientist can order the rat as per his or her experimental rat-genetics needs. The progenitor of the modern laboratory rat is the Wistar rat, a rat bred in the Wistar laboratories in Philadelphia. I have read that the Wistar rat was begun with an albino rat that the Wistar Institute originally got from France. I like to think that all the great scientific achievements that have been made in the modern scientific era as a result of work with laboratory rats are ultimately the result of the work of Jack Black, rat catcher.”

The idea of ladies in long skirts and veils keeping rats as pets seems very much at odds with that image of women climbing on chairs and screaming at the mere sight of a mouse. But I couldn't help wondering if Beatrix Potter initially wanted a rat as a model for her drawings. I will never look on Mr and Mrs Whiskers in quite the same way ... And she *did* call her pet rat Sammy and describe him as white with pink eyes. She also complained that he had eaten several fingers off her gloves. But she kept him as a pet till he died of old age.

So what of that book? I asked at the library to see if they might be able to track it down. They couldn't conjure up a copy for me but said it can now be read on-line and that it was written by Charlotte Marie Tucker (1821 – 1893) who was the daughter of an East India Company official and wrote animal stories for children with a strong moral and gave her royalties to charity. Later in life she became a missionary, went to India, and died in Amritsar. With that interesting little snippet to go by I went looking for more about her ...

The DNB suggests her missionary impulse grew after the death of her parents. “For some time Miss Tucker had thought of undertaking missionary work in India, and finding herself in 1875 without home ties, and with sufficient means to render her independent of missionary funds, she set to work at the age of fifty-four to study Hindustani. But, although she learned the grammar and construction with ease, she never mastered any Indian language colloquially. She went to India as an independent member of the Church of England Zenana Society in October 1875.” She went first to Amritsar then to Batala in Lahore. “In 1878 the Baring High School for native Christian boys was permanently established in Batala, and under its shadow Miss Tucker resided, taking great interest in the pupils. At times she was the only Englishwoman within twenty miles. She helped by her liberality to found a ‘plough’ school for Indian boys not yet Christian, who as soon as they became converts were drafted into the high school.”

She comes over as a fairly typical woman of her era; dedicated, strong-minded, of great personal rectitude, willing to brave dust and heat and indifference with a stiff upper lip. After she died in Amritsar “She was buried at Batala on 5 Dec., in accordance with the terms of her will, without a coffin, at a cost not exceeding five rupees. There is an inscription to her memory in the Uran dialect in the church in Batala, and a memorial brass was placed in Lahore Cathedral.” I found I liked the suggestion in this of someone who lived and died in simplicity.

Her mother was a Boswell, related to James Boswell, which may have encouraged her to believe in a family talent for writing. Her first children's book came out in 1852 ‘Claremont Tales’; “Her industry was unceasing. The British Museum ‘Catalogue’ has 142 separate entries of books published by her between 1854 and 1893. Some are short tales written for the series of simple story books issued by Nelson, the Glasgow publisher; others, like ‘Wings and Stings’ (1855), ‘The Rambles of a Rat’ (1854), and ‘Old Friends with New Faces’ (1858), are of a more ambitious character. A few of her productions reached two, or in rare cases three, editions. Most of the tales are allegorical in form, with an obtrusive moral.”

But the moral obviously wasn't obtrusive enough. For the life of me I can't remember taking from the book anything other than the idea that to be rat and sail the world really wasn't a bad life ...

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July 29: Dominique Bona

Sharon Creech

July 30: Emily Brontë

Darina Allen

July 31: Primo Levi  
August 1: Lorna Goodison  
August 2: Isabel Allende  
August 3: Max Fatchen  
P. D. James  
August 4: Henry Savery  
August 5: Ted Hughes  
August 6: Rolf Boldrewood  
August 7: Dean Farrer  
August 8: Charles A. Dana  
August 9: John Dryden  
Izaak Walton  
August 10: Laurence Binyon  
August 11: Enid Blyton  
August 12: Robert Southey  
August 13: Allan Aldous  
August 14: Bryce Courtenay  
August 15: Sir Walter Scott  
August 16: Georgette Heyer  
August 17: V. S. Naipaul  
August 18: Nettie Palmer  
August 19: Jonathan Coe  
Yevgeniy Ambartsumov  
August 20: Vasily Aksyonov  
August 21: X. J. Kennedy  
August 22: Ray Bradbury  
August 23: Charlotte Hobson  
August 24: Jorge Luis Borges  
A. S. Byatt  
August 25: Thea Astley  
Shelton Lea  
August 26: Eleanor Dark  
August 27: Theodore Dreiser  
David Rowbotham  
August 28: Sheridan Le Fanu  
August 29: Maurice Maeterlinck  
Gillian Rubinstein  
August 30: Mary Shelley  
August 31: Charmian Clift  
September 1: Edgar Rice Burroughs  
September 2: D. K. Broster  
September 3: Will Dyson  
September 4: Mary Renault  
September 5: Arthur Koestler  
September 6: Don Charlwood  
September 7: C. J. Dennis  
September 8: Siegfried Sassoon  
September 9: Phyllis Whitney  
September 10: Thomas Roy  
September 11: D. H. Lawrence  
September 12: Michael Ondaatje  
Michael Dransfield

Louis MacNiece  
September 13: Roald Dahl  
September 14: Baron von Humboldt  
Margaret Sanger  
September 15: Agatha Christie

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The most famous Belgian refugee of all time never existed. His name was Hercule Poirot. But what of the real refugees? Marilyn Lake in *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War I* provides an interesting and little known sidelight. "The appeal which most fired the imagination and aroused the generosity of the Tasmanian people was that for the invaded Belgian nation. By 1918 Tasmanians had raised over £59 000 for the Belgian people. One of the results of the German conquest of Belgium was the exodus of thousands of refugees to Britain. Unable to cope with the influx, the British government suggested that the dominions might come to its assistance by placing some of the refugees themselves. John Earle, like A. H. Peake in South Australia, opposed the plan, explaining that already there were thousands of unemployed in his own state. The Tasmanian premier offered instead to send financial aid to the refugees in England.

"In Devonport however a large public meeting, chaired by the warden of the local council, declared itself adamantly in favour of importing Belgian women and challenged Earle to change his decision. One particularly outspoken advocate of the plan explained that the simple, rustic Belgians would make excellent domestics. The secretary of the local branch of the Workers' Political League, W. H. Lewis, condemned what he termed the 'society dames' plea for cheap domestic labour' and Earle, similarly, was little moved by the north-western women's call for 'white slaves'. He replied that he sympathized with the Belgian women to the extent of £10; he asked the Devonport council clerk to ascertain from each of the four hundred people at the meeting the extent of their sympathy and to collect it. By October 1914 the Belgian Relief Fund in Tasmania had raised £500, all of which was forwarded to the Belgian Relief Commission in London.

"One of the features of fund-raising during the war was the institution of 'Days': Wattle Day, Red Cross Day, Navy Day, Belgium Day, Australia Day. To raise further funds for the Belgian Relief Commission, a Belgian Flag Day was proclaimed for 26 March 1915. Newspapers were unanimous in praising the Belgian nation and the bravery of her people and commended the cause to the people of Hobart. 'The Belgian people', said the *Daily Post* 'are justly and properly the wards of the world.' Stalls were erected throughout the city, buildings were decorated with the national colours of Belgium and motor cars were also bedecked with ribbons and streamers of red, yellow and black. Crowds thronged the streets to partake of the festivities. There was a car procession led by the Hobart fire brigade's engine and a bizarre collection of floats, some of which exhorted the Kaiser to beware, while others appealed for money to aid wounded soldiers. Paddy's Market in the centre of town also proved a fine attraction: shoppers were enticed to buy everything from a goat to a typewriter. After an evening concert in Franklin Square, the organizers estimated the day's earnings to be £800, a result which they felt reflected the greatest credit on all concerned."

The Tasmanian efforts were truly extraordinary; when H. E. Pratten looked into the operations of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium in 1916 he found that of the £1.5 million donated by the world Australia and New Zealand had contributed £1 million. "The Australian states and New Zealand had contributed 3-6s. per capita compared with the United States' contribution of 2½d. per capita. By March 1917 the British empire had contributed collectively US 18c. per capita, the Australian Commonwealth \$US 1.23 per capita and Tasmania the surprising amount of \$US 6.53 per capita (or in sterling £1 7s. 2½d.)."

Of course, if Tasmania *had* asked to receive boatloads of Belgian refugees, instead of *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* we could have had *The Mysterious Affair at Smithton*. And the world would be a different place.

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September 16: Nan Hunt  
Grey Owl  
September 17: William Carlos Williams  
September 18: Dr Samuel Johnson  
September 19: William Golding  
Libby Gleeson  
Michael Noonan  
September 20: Stephen King  
September 21: Hazel Edwards  
Edmund Gosse

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William G. Johnsson in *Blessed Assurance* writes, “Edmund Gosse, in a moving passage in his book *Father and Son*, describes the effect of his father’s reading from the book of Hebrews to him when he was a boy: “ ‘The extraordinary beauty of the language—for instance, the matchless cadences and images of the first chapter—made a certain impression upon my imagination, and were (I think) my earliest initiation into the magic of literature. I was incapable of defining what I felt, but I certainly had a grip in the throat, which was in its essence a purely aesthetic emotion, when my father read, in his pure, large, ringing voice, such passages as “The heavens are the work of thy hands: They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they shall all wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.” But the dialectic parts of the epistle puzzled and confused me. Such metaphysical ideas as “laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works” and “crucifying ... the Son of God afresh” were not successfully brought down to the level of my understanding. ... The melodious language, the divine forensic audacities, the magnificent ebb and flow of argument which make the Epistle to the Hebrews such a miracle, were far beyond my reach, and they only bewildered me.””

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Men writing about their fathers was once a staple; even when they were writing about the families they grew up in their fathers tended to get the lion’s share of the attention. (For example I am just reading Leon Edel’s *Lions of Bloomsbury* and Leonard Woolf’s father gets paragraphs but his mother gets nothing except the mention that she was Dutch; yet presumably after the father died leaving a young family she was essential to their survival ... ) Things have changed somewhat. Women write about their mothers. Writers give greater prominence to their siblings. And I have come across some interesting and unusual variations.

For instance I am very fond of the writings of William Saroyan who lost his father when he was only three and later acquired a man he regarded as a foster father rather than just a friend and mentor. As editor James H. Tashjian wrote in *My Name is Saroyan*: ‘Saroyan’s course to success dates back to the beginning of his association with Reuben Darbinian—when Darbinian first published him, or when Saroyan accepted Darbinian in lieu of his deceased father.

‘The circumstances into which Armenek Saroyan and Reuben Darbinian were born reflect the sharp contrasts imposed on Armenians by the division, early in the nineteenth century, of the historical Armenian homeland into Turkish and Russian spheres of occupation. The quality of life and opportunity of Armenians in the six Armenian provinces held by the Turks was dramatically lower than that enjoyed by their confreres on the other side of the line of demarcation that split Armenia into two parts.

‘Saroyan’s father was born in the city of Bitlis, in the western (“Turkish”) section of the Armenian landmass. From what little we know of the early history of the family, the Saroyans were struggling minor craftsmen unable to formally educate their children. The presence of an American Presbyterian mission in Bitlis allowed the precocious Armenak to enter that establishment’s free school, and his promise came to the situation of his mentors, especially the

Reverend William Stonehill. Armenak adopted the Presbyterian faith and finally was made, under circumstances still unclear, a presbyter preparing for pulpits in America. He married Takoohi Garoghlanian and, by the time he went to the United States in the early 1890s, leaving his family behind to rejoin him later, Armenak had sired two daughters, Cosette and Zabel. William's older brother, Henry—the "Krikor" of his "Aram" stories—was born in Erzurum, Armenia, during the family's trek to America.

'Armenak only somewhat practiced his profession while awaiting the arrival of his family. Apparently, on Sundays, he would trolley from New York to preach before a Protestant Armenian congregation in Paterson, New Jersey, but this must have been a part-time occupation, for when his family debarked at New York, they found Armenak working principally at odd jobs in the Bowery. His wife's people had already migrated to California, and it was at their insistence that Armenak finally yielded and led his brood to Fresno where, again, poverty awaited them. So to speak, the Saroyans had jumped from the Turkish frying pan into the American fire.

'Reuben Darbinian, born Artashes Tchillingarian (January 23, 1883), was a native of the city of Alkhalkalak in eastern Armenia, in the Russian occupation zone. Like most Armenians residing within the Russian-held area, the Darbinian family was well-off compared to the oppressed Armenians living in Armenak's Turkish sphere. Reuben received a European education and eventually graduated from the University of Moscow in June 1909 as a Doctor of Jurisprudence, with a reputation as a campus liberal and an Armenian political agitator.

'Hounded by the Russian authorities, Darbinian made his way to Vienna and finally assumed an editorial post with the Armenian journal *Azadamart*, in Constantinople. In 1913 he transferred to Berlin as the journal's correspondent.

'In 1914, with the threat of war hanging over Europe, Darbinian returned to Russia where he became the editor of the Baku *Arev* newspaper. Upon the establishment of the Independent Republic of Armenia (May 28, 1918), Darbinian headed that state's negotiating mission in Moscow and, in January 1920, was appointed the Republic's Minister of Justice.

'When the Armenian Republic fell (December 2, 1920) through the complicity of the Turkish and Soviet authorities, Darbinian was able to escape to Teheran, where he accepted an invitation to edit the *Hairenik Daily* in Boston. He arrived in the United States on March 22, 1922, and the first issue of *Hairenik* to appear under his editorship was that of April 1, 1922.

'Already a charismatic figure of the Armenian revolution, Darbinian added to his personal prestige by producing the most sought-after Armenian newspaper of his day. Almost immediately, he initiated the *Hairenik Monthly*, a literary-historical journal and, nine years later, he introduced an English-language section into the Daily. It was in these columns, as we have already pointed out, that Saroyan began publishing in the *Haireniks*, a collaboration which Saroyan continued when the wholly English-language *Hairenik Weekly* appeared in 1934.'

Saroyan had lost his father; Darbinian had just lost his stepson. The two men formed a warm and affectionate relationship.

I also came across Faith Bandler's novel *Wacvie* which is essentially a daughter's memoir of her father. She obviously wrote it as a novel so that she could put words in her father's mouth and emotions in his heart. But it still reads as a powerful memoir of a forgotten or overlooked part of Australia's 'heritage': the taking of Pacific Islanders into slavery in Queensland and northern NSW to work on the sugar cane farms. She introduces it: "This is the story of my father, Wacvie Mussingkon who, in June 1883, was kidnapped from Craig Cove, a village on the coast of Ambrym Island in the New Hebrides. He was sold as a slave in Mackay, Queensland, and worked on the sugar plantations until he escaped in 1897, finally settling at Tumbulgum in New South Wales, where he died in July 1924."

She went to the New Hebrides, now Vanuatu, in 1974 to collect information and see the place where her father was born. But she also says, "There were other reasons why the book had to be written. The slave trade of Australia has never been included in school curricula. I

have found that most Australians do not believe that slave labour was used to develop the sugar cane industry. Those who were enslaved did not have the opportunity to tell their story. The story has only been told by historians with a detachment from the thoughts and feelings of the people concerned.”

Strictly speaking, we *were* told about it in primary school but because it was always called ‘blackbirding’ it demeaned, undermined, and trivialised the pain of the Pacific Islanders who were kidnapped and brought to Australia—and their families left to grieve over their mysterious non-return were never mentioned. I am not sure whether ignorance or trivialisation is worse ....

And although some missionaries colluded, not least because they saw it as time spent in a ‘Christian country’ and the Christianity would therefore ‘rub off’, others were forthright in their condemnation. A Scottish missionary, John G. Paton, in Vanuatu said bluntly, “Gild it as they may, I call it slavery.”

The book is written in a plain simple style which is very effective. “The island’s population had been severely reduced by the white invaders. The toll of the rampage had been so severe that it was possible their well-ordered and peaceful mode of living had been permanently ruptured by the boats coming and taking away the young men. ... They stole people and this was an unpardonable act.”

Wacvie is auctioned in Mackay and goes first to a sugar plantation then to a sugar mill from where he eventually escapes over the border. He marries and has eight children and gets himself a small farm where he grows bananas. “In the winter he would gather his children around the open fire and tell them the stories of his own childhood: how his mother had cooked the lap lap, how his father had caught the fish and killed the wild pigs. He told of their festivals, of their coming together to celebrate or mourn; of the grief in the villages when some were taken by the white men; of the anguish and distress suffered by those taken and those who were left. He told of his own voyage on the rough seas and how he had hated working as a slave for the white men in Queensland. He told of his escape from the plantation and mill, and the long road to freedom.”

Wacvie never saw his homeland again.

But the feeling that remains, beyond the anger and indignation, is that Faith Bandler loved her father deeply.

“Late one afternoon in the middle of winter he came home but did not gather the children together. Instead, Ivy put him to bed. Next morning his eldest son was sent to fetch the village doctor. Later an ambulance came and took him to the district hospital. He was put in a tent at the back of the hospital.

In the early hours of a bitterly cold morning, Ivy sat, his hand held in her own. Then he died.”

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And what of Edmund Gosse’s famous memoir *Father and Son*? Although there are many aspects of his childhood I would not want to share, as he was the only child of two strict Plymouth Brethren parents who married late in life, it is also at times touching and rather beautiful; perhaps not least because he never doubted that they loved him even in the midst of a life that seems now incredibly narrow, rigid, and restricted. He wrote, “It is generally taken for granted that a life strictly dedicated to religion is stiff and dreary, that I may have some difficulty in persuading my readers that, as a matter of fact, in these early days of my childhood, before disease and death had penetrated to our slender society, we were always cheerful and often gay. My parents were playful with one another, and there were certain stock family jests which seldom failed to enliven the breakfast table.” They were quite capable of treating their religion to a degree of amusement “joking very mildly and gently about such things as an attitude at prayer or the nature of a supplication. ... My Mother was sometimes extremely gay, laughing with a soft merry sound.”

If Edmund Gosse at times prompts feelings of sympathy I could not help also feeling sorry for his father, Philip Gosse. “My Father was a zoologist, and a writer of books on natural history; my Mother also was a writer, author already of two slender volumes of religious verse — the earlier of which, I know not how, must have enjoyed some slight success, since a second edition was printed — afterwards she devoted her pen to popular works of edification.” But he was only seven when his mother died, leaving him to a strange inward-looking and intense relationship with his father.

The older man was a talented naturalist and writer—but he found his safe world riven by Charles Darwin and the evolution debate. His well-regarded books included *History of the British Sea-Anemones and Corals*, *Actinologia Britannica*, and *The Romance of Natural History*. Edmund Gosse writes of the disaster their popularity (and the popularity of the seaside holiday and the passion to collect) wrought. “The ring of living beauty drawn about our shores was a very thin and fragile one. It had existed all those centuries solely in consequence of the indifference, the blissful ignorance of man. These rock-basins, fringed by corallines, filled with still water almost as pellucid as the upper air itself, thronged with beautiful sensitive forms of life,—they exist no longer, they are all profaned, and emptied, and vulgarized. An army of ‘collectors’ has passed over them, and ravaged every corner of them. The fairy paradise has been violated, the exquisite product of centuries of natural selection has been crushed under the rough paw of well-meaning, idle-minded curiosity. That my Father, himself so reverent, so conservative, had by the popularity of his books acquired the direct responsibility for a calamity that he had never anticipated became clear enough to himself before many years had passed, and cost him great chagrin. No one will see again on the shore of England what I saw in my early childhood, the submarine vision of dark rocks, speckled and starred with an infinite variety of colour, and streamed over by silken flags of royal crimson and purple.”

Other naturalists found the debate an excitement and a challenge. But Mr Gosse turned instead to the Bible as his solace and support, writing papers and articles and a book in which he attempted to reconcile the world of Genesis with the world of Evolutionary Theory. They found some readers in his religious world—but the scientific world brushed them aside with “chilly reviews”, faint amusement and, predominantly, an attitude of indifference. There was no easy way back to the safe world in which the wonder of Nature was an expression of the wonder of God.

As he grew up, Edmund Gosse found he could no longer share his father’s beliefs and it brought conflict and estrangement. Edmund Gosse went on to become an authority on the literature of Scandinavia. But for all the difficulties and limitations of his childhood and adolescence his father *had* given him an incomparable gift: a sense of the magnificence of language and the fascination of the natural world. His memoir came out in 1907.

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September 22: Murray Bail

September 23: Alan Villiers

September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald

Barbara Ker Wilson

September 25: Jessica Anderson

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If someone says to me ‘Oh, you must read—whatever’ some perverse aspect of me seems to say ‘Oh, must I?’ Much more acceptable are the people who say something like ‘I’ve always loved so-and-so ...’ So-and-so being a novelist, a poet, a book, maybe a composer or artist or journalist. Sometimes they can sum up their reason for liking. Humour. Pathos. Exotic locations. A good yarn. A way with words. Something a bit ‘different’. Sometimes it is something sentimental such as a book which belonged to their mother or given when they were sick in bed. And sometimes they say vaguely ‘I really don’t know why I’m so fond of—’ his books/her poems/their travel stories ...

The other day I noticed a friend had several books by Nigel Balchin on her bookshelves. I knew nothing about him or his work. But she expressed this kind of misty affection. So I thought ‘well, here goes’, and I have been reading Balchin’s *Mine Own Executioner* and *The Fall of the Sparrow* and *The Borgia Testament* ...

I cannot say I have been bowled over and can’t wait to find more of his work but I quite enjoyed them. And when I came to think on it, except for some lucky finds in which no one else played an obvious part (other than donating a particular book to a particular op-shop or making a particular choice for the library shelves; that kind of thing), almost all the books I’ve liked had their genesis in someone else’s liking. I can remember the people who pointed me towards James Herriot and Christopher Isherwood and Dick Francis and Dorothy Sayers. I have an old aunt with a particular affection for Irish writer Dorothea Conyers which led me to read a couple though I wasn’t particularly impressed. I came to Somerville & Ross and Georgette Heyer because of my mother’s affection for them ...

But the greatest motivation is curiosity. That moment when I say ‘I wonder’ ...

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The thing about Nigel Balchin is that he belongs in that great continent of middling books, middle list, middle-brow, middle everything. A great heaving mass of books which sometimes gets shunted off into the most remote reaches of the Outback and forgotten, or remaindered and pulped—or alternatively falls off the cliff-edge and into the review pile of someone who thinks this just might be the work of a coming writer and gives it a decent puff ... but most of the books never go anywhere in particular ...

I was thinking of this middling idea when I was in the little book exchange in Bellerive one day and it had a box of books marked ‘6 for \$1’. I bought \$3 worth. Even the ones which had sold well in their day struck me as middling. Perhaps that is the fate of most books. To fall from their brief pinnacle of fame and end up in such bins. But the bundle did contain one impressive novel. A middling book, yes, which had its moment of fame. Ernest Raymond’s *We, the Accused*; the story of a murder largely told from the view of the perpetrator and perhaps owing something to the hunt for Dr Crippen ...

This thought came back to me the other day when I was reading one of Alexander McCall Smith’s books. They have had a lot of publicity to suggest they are something extraordinary. But it struck me as yet another of those pleasant mid list books. I came upon an article somewhere which said the mid list book is a threatened species. I think this is true. Unless a book can be puffed to the skies or is extremely topical then it runs a real obstacle course to get published. The books which were the growing-in-experience of young writers or the decline of old writers once found their place on the mid list. Now, if they are published, they are hyped everywhere, their authors sent out to sign them in huge numbers, bookshops are bribed to give them a prominent spot—people buy them ... and then reality sets in. This book just isn’t the book that will last, the one you want to be shipwrecked with, the one you will pass on to your heirs. It was a pleasant read. Nothing more. In other words—it was a mid list book and should have been presented as such.

Now there is nothing wrong with the mid list book. Some of my favourite books and authors are what I would deem mid list books and mid list authors. I don’t demean Jessica Anderson by putting these few thoughts under her name. I could have put them under a hundred authors. Her books, like *Tirra Lirra by the River* and *The Commandant*, are to me the epitome of the mid list book. Good solid reads that never set the world on fire but deserved to be published. All I want is for publishers to stop pretending good books are great books, that competent prose is deathless prose, that capable authors are the next Nobel Laureate, for book covers to come with the title and the author’s name written in large clear print and none of this splatter about ‘No 1 Bestseller’ and all the rest of it. In other words, honesty in publishing, and while I am on this particular hobbyhorse: I hear more and more readers complaining that the author’s name comes in bigger and bigger type and you practically have to get out your magnifying glass to read the book’s title to see if it’s something you haven’t yet read. If

publishers continue down the road of turning authors into brands they may end up killing the novel more effectively than film, TV, or the Internet have yet managed ...

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September 26: Minette Walters

September 27: John Marsden

September 28: Ellis Peters

Kate Douglas Wiggin

September 29: Cassandra Pybus

September 30: Geoffrey Robertson

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An aunt of mine recommended *The Tyrannicide Brief* to me—mainly because she was in the process of researching some ancestors by the name of Cooke and wondered if there might be a connection. By the end I had come to the conclusion that it didn't seem very likely. But the book is a fascinating read. Robertson takes the life of John Cooke as his centerpiece. Cooke was the man who drew up the charges that eventually took Charles I to the chopping block. Cooke was a man ahead of his time in the various law reforms he suggested. He was also a brave and dedicated man. And he died horribly, hung and disemboweled and burnt, when Charles II came to the throne. But behind the life and times Robertson draws attention to the subtle ways in which the 'rights' of the rich and titled to more sympathetic treatment, at law, at the bar of history, in the popular media, and in the lesson books of our schools, continue to skew the way we look at everything. We may purport to admire the 'li'l Aussie Battler', the swaggie, the larrikin ... but we don't get to see them on the front pages of our popular magazines. It is Princess Mary, a top model or film star, the czars of the business world ... not some housewife from Woop Woop or an unemployed youth from the unfashionable suburbs ...

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I felt that Robertson was too kind to Cromwell in his Irish foray. James Scott Wheeler in his book *Cromwell in Ireland* says that it is impossible to know how many people died in Ireland but that the estimates made by William Petty, the man in charge of surveying and valuing the lands in Ireland that were used to pay the debts the English Government had incurred, put the loss of population at 616,000 people and that this is the most reliable estimate we are ever likely to have. Of these he has 112,000 Protestants dying by insurrection, famine and war; 157,000 Catholics by famine and war, around 40,000 mostly Catholics fled to the Continent, and a minimum of 275,000 and as many as 400,000 mostly Catholics died of bubonic plague and other diseases between 1649 and 1652. "Much of the Irish population was starving by 1650. The English policy of free-fire zones, coupled with the raids carried out by both sides to deny food and shelter to their enemy, left much of the Irish population homeless and hopeless. Such a population was a perfect target for infectious disease."

Not only was the economy of the country destroyed but it was then followed by a massive land transfer. "The English confiscated something like 11 million out of 20 million acres in Ireland, and transplanted 3,000 Catholic landowners and over 40,000 of their servants and families to Connacht."

"The common people of Ireland were the ultimate losers, especially the Catholic majority. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were killed by war, famine and disease."

And far from being magnanimous in victory England then placed endless restrictions, some of them of great intrusion and pettiness, on the Irish people including contempt for language, religion, and culture. All the sad Troubles since can be traced back to decisions made in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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In the last few weeks we have been hearing a lot about rules, regulations, reforms, of the international financial system. It reminded me of George Monbiot in *Captive State* pointing out that red tape, though tiresome, can prevent terrible problems down the track. Making people

jump through hoops may lead to a lot of grumbling. But doing away with hoops or ignoring them as they lie rotting on the ground can be far more dangerous. Philippe Sands wrote *Lawless World* before the ‘meltdown’ but it could well be said that a nation which ignores rules at home is likely to ignore them beyond its borders. The United States has been deeply resistant to laws at home; things like gun laws have been dismissed. It has also shown a deep reluctance to join up to international protocols on things such as the Convention against Torture, the Kyoto Protocol, and the International Criminal Court. The financial mess in the USA is indicative of a culture which ignores those rules which appear to limit the nation and its citizens in some way; only things like Free Trade Agreements have been embraced.

I must admit that President Nixon appalls me with what he did in Chile, in SE Asia, and in the Watergate Building. Yet, curiously, I think his responses to things like drugs and porn were sensible. And Sands says that “on 1 January 1970, Richard Nixon signed into American law the National Environment Policy Act. This was the world’s first comprehensive environmental protection regime. Nixon’s contribution to environmental protection is not widely appreciated, nor is the fact that his concerns extended beyond national boundaries. The United Nations Charter has no explicit environmental rules, and until 1972 no UN institution was dedicated to environmental matters. It was Nixon’s Administration which joined efforts for an environmental programme within the United Nations, and supported the UN’s first global conference on the protection of the environment, held in 1972 in Stockholm. In the run-up to that conference, Nixon proposed a new global instrument: ‘It would be fitting by 1972 for the nations of the world to agree to the principle that there are certain areas of such unique worldwide value that they should be treated as part of the heritage of all mankind and accorded special recognition as part of a World Heritage Trust.’ The World Heritage Convention was adopted in 1972, and the United States was the first country to ratify. Today it protects more than 700 cultural and heritage sites around the world, from Kew Gardens in London to the Galapagos Islands 600 miles west of Ecuador.”

This did not necessarily mean that he was a stickler for the rules himself, nor that he was a closet greenie, instead lashing conservationists as “enemies of the system” and claiming they wanted to return the United States to the way the Indians had it, “Dirty, filthy, horrible”, but this legacy, no matter what its motivation, has been valuable—and I expect it is a reminder that there is something worthwhile in everyone. More attractive, to my mind, was Eleanor Roosevelt in her campaign to get the USA to promote and sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But as Julian Burnside recently pointed out in his 2008 Tasmanian Peace Trust Lecture: “—at the same time the Universal Declaration was being framed *at the same time* the Americans were putting together a much more dark and secret deal.

“It was a deal with the scientists and doctors who ran Unit 731. Unit 731 was a medical scientific experimental centre, set up by the Japanese in Harbin, North China, shortly after Nanking was taken. In Unit 731 the Japanese performed medical experiments every bit as frightful as those performed by Dr Mengele in Auschwitz. Their experiments included things like the aerial spraying of villages with anthrax spores and other toxins in order to watch the spread of the contagion. It included freezing people to death in order to watch the changes in their cells, it included injecting live human subjects with various poisons and then dissecting them whilst they were still alive in order to watch the physical effects of the poisons and perhaps the worse extreme was the dissection alive of pregnant women in order to watch the effect on the developing foetus. Whilst the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was being framed, the Americans did a deal with the scientists and doctors who ran Unit 731 giving them immunity from prosecution in exchange for the products of their research. And that’s why almost no one has ever heard of Unit 731, because it disappeared without trace under the cloak of American-provided immunity. It was the shabbiest transaction imaginable and the fact that it could be done by the nation that was pushing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is beyond belief but it is true.”

Alongside that American belief that rules are made to be broken goes that cowboy mentality which has become increasingly blatant in corporate life. Bryan Burrough and John Helyar in their 1990 book *Barbarians at the Gate*, the story of one takeover, draw attention to the way debt effectively became a corporate player. “The cartel’s product, the high-yield, or ‘junk,’ bond, was by 1988 being used to raise money — usually for takeovers — by virtually every major investor, brokerage house, and leveraged-buyout firm. Ted Forstmann fervently believed junk bonds had perverted not only the LBO industry, but Wall Street itself.”

He believed it was not the junk bonds themselves but the way they were twisting priorities. It was ceasing to be the worth of the company being bought and its potential; instead “All that mattered now was keeping up a steady flow of transactions that produced an even steadier flow of fees — management fees for the buyout firms, advisory fees for the investment banks, junk-bond fees for the bond specialists.”

“Sooner or later, Forstmann knew, the economy would turn down and all the junk-bond junkies would go belly-up when they couldn’t make their mountainous debt payments. They were like those ‘no-money-down’ real estate investors with no money in their pockets when their debts came due. When that happened, Forstmann feared, the use of junk-bond debt would be so widespread that the entire U.S. economy might be dragged into a depression.”

The sub-prime mortgage crisis has been given credit for doing that; but the problem of massive bad debts waiting to hit the banks was there long before we heard people talking about sub-prime ... The whole financial system was already thoroughly permeated by business practices and attitudes which were definitely sub-prime ...

Take, for instance, the sequence of events David Yallop presents in *In God’s Name* in regard to Vatican money-man Michele Sindona known as ‘The Shark’ ...

‘September 1973: at the Waldorf Astoria in New York the Prime Minister of Italy, Giulio Andreotti, rises to his feet at a luncheon and, delivering a eulogy to The Shark, hails him as ‘the Saviour of the Lira’.

January 1974: Grand Hotel, Rome. American Ambassador John Volpe awards The Shark, ‘The Man of the Year’ citation.

March 1974: prices on the Milan Stock Exchange are flying high, as is the exchange rate against the dollar at 825 lire. If Sindona were to close down the huge currency operations now he would emerge with a profit of at least 100 billion lire. Anna Bonomi, a rival in the Milan financial world, makes an excellent offer for Sindona’s holding in Immobiliare. Sindona refuses to sell.

April 1974: the Stock Market goes into decline and the exchange rate falls dramatically. It is the beginning of Il Crack Sindona. The Franklin Bank in New York announces a net operating income for the first quarter of 2 cents per share compared with the previous year’s 68 cents per share. Even this is a falsified figure. The reality is that the bank had suffered a 40 million dollar loss.

May 1974: Franklin has the brakes put on its massive currency speculation. National Westminster of London object to the volume of Franklin’s sterling clearings through its account. In the previous week they have averaged £50 million per day. Franklin now announce that they will not declare a quarterly dividend, the first time since the Depression that a major American bank has been forced to omit a payment to shareholders. The Shark tells the Board of Società Generale Immobiliare that the balance sheet is the best in the company’s history.

July 1974: the holes are showing in Italy and the USA. In an attempt to fill the Italian hole, The Shark merges Banca Unione and Banca Privata Finanziaria. He calls the new creation Banca Privata. Instead of two medium-size bent banks in Milan, he now has one very large bent bank in Italy’s financial centre. Instead of two large holes, one gigantic hole is revealed: a 200 billion lire hole.

August 1974: it is time for the Establishment to rally round. In Italy Banco di Roma, having taken a large part of the Sindona empire as collateral, pushes 128 million dollars into Banca Privata in an attempt to fill the hole. In the United States the Government, fearing the

collapse of Franklin will trigger off a capitalistic Armageddon, gives the Franklin unlimited access to Federal funds. Over two billion dollars flow from the reserve into the Franklin.

*September 1974:* Banca Privata goes into compulsory liquidation. Estimated losses are in excess of 300 million dollars. This includes 27 million dollars of Vatican money plus their share of the Bank.’

And on *October 8<sup>th</sup>* the Franklin collapses. ‘Losses to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation — 2 billion dollars. It is the biggest bank crash in American history.’

Within the next three months other connected banks, Bankhaus Wolff A.G. of Hamburg, Bankhaus I.K. Herstatt of Cologne, Amincor Bank of Zurich, and Finabank of Geneva, all come crashing down. So what was learnt from that dreadful sequence of events? So far as I can see—absolutely nothing.

Julian Burnside has said and written, in books such as *Watching Brief*, that he was not originally in favour of a Bill of Rights for Australia; didn’t we have a solid law-abiding democracy with fairly decent fairly honest politicians? But the detention and abuse of asylum-seekers caused him to rethink his position and come down firmly in favour of such a Bill.

But no matter how well drafted any Declaration or Bill or Convention is it is only as good as the processes which educate people, the means by which it is applied, and the ways in which governments, corporations, NGOs, and ordinary folk comply. And one of the ‘rights’ under most threat in a computerized constantly video-ed age is privacy. Geoffrey Robertson says in *The Justice Game* that: “The question that all editors who affect concern for human rights should ponder, before they engage in further attempts to stave off the advent of a privacy law, is this: why is privacy a value which calls for protection under every human rights treaty ever devised? There is, I am convinced, a psychological need to preserve an intrusion-free zone of personality and family, and there is always anguish and stress when that zone is violated. Hence the European Convention and other charters speak of a ‘right’ to respect for private and family life, home and correspondence. But in the same breath, these declarations also speak of the ‘right’ of freedom of expression. In real life, the two rights are rarely seen to co-exist. Influenced, perhaps unduly, by the media’s self-interest, we have become much more concerned about free speech violations than privacy violations: the former attract the undivided attention of human rights organizations (some formed solely for this purpose) while the latter are rarely condemned. We are inclined to perceive loss of privacy merely as a *quid pro quo* for being rich and famous, forgetting (as Orwell never did) that this was how communism deprived *all* citizens of any right to privacy from the State. The concern is not merely, or even mainly, for princes or film stars or potentates: instant international exposure is liable to alight upon anyone caught up in a major disaster or unperfected moment of heroism or horror. The same protection should be offered to all, implemented by law rather than left to our better nature.

“It is a mistake to see privacy only in terms of the excesses of the tabloids. A whole range of intrusions — from unlicensed private detectives to bailiffs and credit agencies and secret intelligence services — take liberties in this area as well. What matters is that the law should enforce respect for a few fundamental decencies, so that privacy and freedom of expression are recognized as values which are universal and complimentary. Public figures, whether crowned or elected or created by happenstance, might then enjoy the reputation they deserve. Regulations, in other words, which must withstand revelations about all aspects of their lives *except* that part lived behind a door marked ‘do not disturb’. This part will be located by laws which will generally deny entry to the cradle, the school and the toilet, to the bedroom, to the hospital and the grave.

“This is because a ‘right’ is empty rhetoric unless it can be enforced. ‘Voluntary self-regulation’ is a fraud. The media must be obliged to recognise a lowest common denominator of decency which says about certain photographs (of Diana in the changing room, for example) ‘up with the publication of this we will not put’. In her lifetime, considerations of decency and respect for privacy were treated with contempt. When Diana was surreptitiously photographed

by the *Sun*, pregnant on a Caribbean beach, the newspaper was immediately condemned by the Press Council — a ruling which it used as an excuse for republishing the photographs under the banner headline ‘THIS IS WHAT THE ROW’S ALL ABOUT, FOLKS!’ After her death, however, there seems to be a new awareness of two limits: dimly, one imposed by conscience, and more keenly, a fear that readers content to be treated as voyeurs will revolt if regarded as ghouls.”

Australia does have a Privacy Act but most of us are unaware of our rights under it and it remains largely a toothless tiger. In fact nothing is sacrosanct. Our children. Our homes. Our vehicles. Our nights out. Our shopping habits and our hospital visits. It bothers me too that we are so reluctant to extend any kind of privacy to any other species on the planet. A wild creature cannot settle down to a meal nor can it mate or give birth or die without a camera team rushing to invade its privacy. I’m not surprised that many creatures are reluctant to breed in zoos and parks ...

*The Justice Game* is Geoffrey Robertson’s account of his years as a young Aussie barrister in England and some of the epic and entertaining battles which came his way—from ‘Rupert the Bare’ in *Oz* magazine and his tussles with Mary Whitehouse to life and death struggles in some of the more repressive parts of the world. I enjoy court room dramas, accounts of strange and bizarre cases, battles which have changed our legal landscape, but many memoirs by legal figures are remarkable for their dullness and pomposity. *The Justice Game* breaks the traditional mould and is well worth reading.

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- October 1: David Hamlyn  
Sharon Jarvis
- October 2: Graham Greene
- October 3: Gore Vidal  
James Herriot
- October 4: Anne Rice  
Bruce Treloar  
Bill Scott  
Richard Sorge
- October 5: Vaclav Havel  
James G. Porter
- October 6: Melvyn Bragg  
Audrey Oldfield
- October 7: Thomas Kenneally
- October 8: John Cowper Powys
- October 9: Michael Dugan  
Ciaran Carson
- October 10: Harold Pinter
- October 11: François Mauriac
- October 12: James McAuley  
Edward VI
- October 13: Robert Ingpen  
Doug MacLeod
- October 14: Miles Franklin
- October 15: Pixie O’Harris  
Douglas Reeman  
Marie Stopes

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I remember coming upon Muriel Spark’s reminiscences of the time she was General Secretary of the Poetry Society in England—and her less than complimentary remarks about Marie Stopes. At the time I was mainly surprised by the idea that Marie Stopes wrote *poetry*.

In fact Marie Stopes attempted to write almost everything. June Rose in her biography *Marie Stopes and the Sexual Revolution* paints a picture of a fascinating, ambitious, forthright to the point of dogmatism, courageous but difficult and sometimes callous woman. Marie Stopes was the first woman to gain her Ph.D in Botany from the university in Munich; she became a pioneer in the new field of paleobotany, she became an expert on coal (which took her to study in Japan where she acquired enough Japanese to translate several Noh plays)—and then in 1915 she heard American birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger speak in London and it effectively changed her life. Sanger was under threat of imprisonment back in the States for daring to open a birth control clinic there. Marie sat down and wrote an impassioned letter to President Wilson: ‘Have you, Sir, visualized what it means to be a woman whose every fibre, whose every muscle and blood-capillary is subtly poisoned by the secret, ever-growing horror, more penetrating, more long drawn out than any nightmare, of an unwanted embryo developing beneath her heart? White men stand proudly and face the sun, boasting that they have quenched the wickedness of slavery. What chains of slavery are, have been or ever could be so intimate a horror as the shackles on every limb, on every thought, on the very soul of an unwillingly pregnant woman? And you have thousands of such slaves in your ‘free’ United States, many of them ‘honoured’ wives, forced to stumble through nine months of nightmare for want of the scientific knowledge which every grown man and woman has the right to know.

I pray that you, Sir, may be instrumental not only in rescuing Mrs Sanger, a tender and sensitive mother from injustice, but also that you will hasten the establishment of a new era for the white race, when it may escape the sapping of strength and disease that are the results of too frequent child-birth by overworn or horror-stricken mothers’ ... The charges against Margaret Sanger were dropped.

Stopes opened her first birth control clinic in London, with the vital help and economic support of her husband Humphrey Roe, and she wrote her best-seller *Married Love* which dared to put forward the needs of women to receive sexual pleasure. It received condemnation from many quarters. Some newspapers, including *The Times*, refused to review it, but *The Lancet* called it an ‘extremely sensible little book’ and the *Medical Times* urged ‘all medical men and women’ to read it as they would ‘glean valuable information’ from it and it soon ran into extra editions. The Roman Catholic church roundly condemned the book, the clinic, and Marie herself, leading her to the increasingly paranoid belief that the Catholic Church was behind many of the unfortunate things that happened to her, including the burning of several of her mobile birth control vans. It is hard to know what was paranoia and what was true. When Pope Pius XI brought down his encyclical *Casta Conubii* in 1930 against birth control, Marie believed it was aimed squarely at her. It said, “But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious.” There is a real possibility she was right to think this. If she hadn’t cut through the secrecy and unmentionability that surrounded sex and reproduction and encouraged people to think and plan their families it is debatable whether this encyclical would ever have seen the light of day. And I think she was at her most powerful and persuasive when she focused on the ‘grave’ reasons behind her actions; tired, sick, undernourished women, huge families dependent on one poorly paid breadwinner ... Nor, of course, did the Pope take his thinking to its logical conclusion; that all couples after menopause should become celibate. Equally, he did not condemn interventions like pain relief as being against Nature. In the early days she also faced criticism from the Anglican Church and other denominations. But the Anglicans eventually changed their stance and came out in support of her work at the 1958 Lambeth Conference: ‘The procreation of children is not the sole purpose of Christian marriage; implicit within the bond of husband and wife is the relationship of love with its sacramental expression in physical

union ... the responsibility for deciding upon the number and frequency of children has been laid by God upon the conscience of parents everywhere' ...

She followed *Married Love* with *Radiant Motherhood*, *The Truth about Venereal Disease*, *Contraception, its Theory, History & Practice* and other works which although they sometimes had factual errors were extremely widely read for their open, frank, sensible, enthusiastic presentation of hitherto embarrassing, hidden, yet desperately needed information.

But the endless struggle tired Marie (and perhaps played a part in her personal problems and lack of closeness with her husband and son) and she turned to poetry as solace.

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Margaret Sanger was an equally brave, forthright, and difficult woman and it is perhaps not surprising that after her first flush of friendship with Marie Stopes the two women often saw themselves as rivals and in disagreement. Working as a nurse she gained first hand knowledge of the problems of poor women and their endless child-bearing—over-crowded houses, chronic ill-health, malnourished children—and both through her practical work in setting up the first birth control clinic in the USA as well as her books such as *What Every Mother Should Know*, *My Fight for Birth Control*, a newsletter 'The Woman Rebel' and her later autobiography, she changed and improved lives for many women. But we owe her for more than her personal activities. Etienne-émile Baulieu in *The Abortion Pill (RU-486)* said he was inspired to develop the pill because "Altogether, well over 50 million abortions are performed each year, half of them illegally. The World Health organization estimates that, as a consequence, 200,000 women die annually. In some countries 50 percent of all maternal mortality is because of unsafe abortion. And for every woman who dies, another twenty to thirty suffer infections, uterine perforations, and lasting injuries often leading to sterility. The emotional toll is impossible to measure." He writes, "The oral contraceptive developed by Gregory Pincus was a revolution in the 1960s. This was, I believe, the first time that a medical discovery was perceived as changing human behaviour. RU – 486 is the next step. Its range of action falls between that of the pill, which altered women's lives decades ago, and conventional abortion, which is still their last resort." (Curiously RU – 486 appears to have a variety of other uses; against some kinds of breast cancers and brain tumours; and possibly for endometriosis, stress disorders, severe burns, glaucoma, AIDS, and during menopause ... )

"Pincus also studied the stages of synthesis and breakdown of hormones and their role in certain mental disorders. In the early 1950s, his international role could hardly be matched. When he devoted himself to developing an oral contraceptive, I was disappointed. It seemed like a needless loss to pure science. But Pincus knew his idea's time had come.

"The turning point came with Katharine Dexter McCormick, a socialite who had retired as a reclusive philanthropist when her young husband, Stanley, developed schizophrenia. Pincus was working on the hormonal biochemistry of psychiatric diseases, and this was one of those important but unpopular projects which Mrs. McCormick liked to support.

"Mrs. McCormick told her friend Margaret Sanger about Pincus. Sanger, an ardent feminist and enlightened thinker, had resolved to put science in the service of women.

"She laid the groundwork for the Planned Parenthood Federation of America and its international affiliates. ... Condoms, withdrawal, or abstinence were not the answer to birth control, she knew. Diaphragms, which had to be fitted by specialists, were available only in a few modern clinics. Sanger arranged to meet with Pincus and Mrs. McCormick.

"At that brief session, in 1951, Sanger convinced Pincus of the need for a medical contraceptive that was easy for women to use. McCormick asked how much he would need for research. Pincus stalled; pressed again, he blurted out a number: \$125,000. McCormick got out her checkbook. In the end, she gave almost \$2 million to the Worcester Foundation.

"At seventy, her fiery militancy cooling only slightly, Sanger whipped up support for Pincus. She could only spare \$2,300 herself for Pincus's work, but she marshaled wealthy friends. The philanthropist Mary Lasker helped by setting up a prestigious award in this field, and she conferred the honour on Pincus."

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Perhaps harder for the modern reader to deal with is the way that aspects of contraception, birth control, family planning, and the broader issues of population were entwined with the issue of eugenics. Eugenics became a dirty word after World War Two and its linkage to the extermination camps but, in fact, it was running into problems and bad publicity in the 1930s with its promotion of the sterilisation of the ‘unfit’ campaigns. The unfit were not only people in asylums and institutions for the ‘feeble-minded’ but also people with low IQs or linked to crime. Even so, it might be argued that the issue of eugenics did bring some positives, such as:

Encouragement of a greater openness in discussion of sex, physical inheritance, responsibilities, reproduction, etc.

The understanding that some diseases, such as haemophilia and Huntington’s chorea, were passed from parents to children.

Money and support to research ‘nature versus nurture’ issues, what actually constituted ‘feeble-mindedness’, the importance of diet, the treatment of children in orphanages and institutions, whether mental problems were hereditary and what precisely was mental illness.

Greater care in determining causes of death.

Helping to move parenting from a fatalistic acceptance that children just ‘came’, wanted or not, to a sense of planning and responsibility; and, concomitantly, greater research into contraception, birthing, and early childhood.

Even the first glimmers of concern that things like smoking might impact on the health of babies.

(I think it could also be argued that in countries with a home-grown birth control movement there has been greater acceptance of planned parenthood than in countries where it is foreign governments, UN bodies, and bureaucracies which have pressed a need for birth control; it is not hard for such outside ‘interference’ to take on a racist tinge.)

And as Daniel J. Kevles in *In the Name of Eugenics* reminds readers—eugenics may have changed its name and its more blatant link to racism, classism, and sexism, but it remains with us in constantly used words and phrases like ‘gene pool’, references to ‘good’ and ‘bad’ genes, the growing acceptance of terms like ‘designer babies’, and the extraordinary fact (to me) that it is seen as quite acceptable for women to ask for the sperm of an unknown ‘genius’, who will play no role in the child’s life and whose identity will be kept hidden, rather than seek out a loving father for the babies they want to have. Eugenics as an attitude is still alive and well ...

But the question which interested me was why so many of the names in the history of eugenics came from a very limited grouping: middle class white males from a non-conformist background and with close links to science. Perhaps it is not so surprising. The business establishment was not interested in eugenics because they needed the poor, the unskilled, the not very bright, the unambitious, to carry out the mind-numbing repetitive tasks the Industrial Revolution had thrown up in its casual millions. The aristocracy and landed gentry could afford some inbred imbeciles so long as they could sit astride a horse, point a gun in the right direction, sire children, and sit without embarrassing everyone with their inanities in the House of Lords. And the poor simply didn’t have access to the knowledge and the opportunity to make real decisions about family size or genetic fitness ...

The men who pioneered the eugenics movement were effectively being squeezed from every side. It is not surprising perhaps that an apocalyptic tone crept into their work, their research, and their writings. Their attitudes become understandable, if not necessarily defensible, when it is understood that they understood Darwin’s idea of ‘fitness’ in terms of human intelligence. It could also be argued that they were caught in the same confusion over what ‘fitness’ meant as Darwin himself. Hilary and Steven Rose wrote in *Alas, Poor Darwin*, “It is his contradictory use of the term ‘fitness’ which points to the problem. Typically when Darwin is discussing flora and fauna, fitness means reproductive success; however, when he is

discussing human populations fitness suddenly no longer means reproductive success, as that would entail recognising the poor with their large families as the fittest. Suddenly ‘fitness’ becomes suffused with the dominant social values of his time, filled with the ideas of social progress and superiority that elsewhere are given no tolerance in Darwinian theory.”

Yet intelligence was the precious boon of mankind and it faced danger on every side. It is still in danger—from nuclear fallout, addiction, toxic wastes, mind-numbing entertainment, ambition, greed, laziness, malnutrition of all sorts, pressure to conform—the list goes on. Only the poor can be absolved ...

\* \* \* \* \*

So what of Marie Stopes as a poet? I wondered if Muriel Spark who was increasingly attracted to Catholicism found Marie’s anti-Catholic attitudes hard to take. But I think any young woman, unless she was the most reverential and self-effacing of acolytes, would have found problems with Marie Stopes. Because Marie had strong ideas on everything and wasn’t shy about putting them forward (though some of them were not in themselves stupid ideas—she urged the Prime Minister in 1940 to bomb Berlin, something which might arguably have shortened the war, and was told that Britain did not bomb civilians; she urged the Prime Minister in the 1920s to bring in a basic wage of £3 a week—) and she believed implicitly that her poetry was genuinely good and that therefore anyone who criticised it was being narky and wrong-headed. People like George Bernard Shaw and Robert Graves admired her birth control work but they were unprepared to admire her poems and novels.

But John Masefield *was* prepared to praise her poem ‘We Burn’:

We speak of fire  
When oxygen leaps swift  
In fierce embrace to carbon,  
Then the lift  
Of heat flicks red-hot tongues  
So fierce they heavenward aspire.  
Eyes that perceive the smoke,  
The glow, the cinder,  
Of swift embrace divalent,  
Yet are blind  
When the same force plays on a lower scale  
Whose ranges lend to man his lissome life,  
His power, his love, and all his leaping strife.

\* \* \* \* \*

October 16: Daisy Bates

October 17: Rodney McRae

October 18: Heinrich von Kleist

James Logan Pearsall Smith

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G. H. Bantock wrote in *From James to Eliot*, “When Logan Pearsall Smith confessed to Henry James that he wished to do the best he could with his pen James replied that, if such was the case, ‘There is one word — let me impress upon you — which you must inscribe upon your banner, and that word is Loneliness’.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Writing always demands a savage solitude, particularly in its last stages.” From *Moebiusstrip* by Giti Thadani. Yes, but then Summer Locke Elliott’s mother said, “If you really wanted to write, you’d be able to do it on the edge of a bathtub.” Of course, with luck, bathrooms are also places of savage solitude no matter how uncomfortable it might be to write while sitting on the edge of a bath. So I am always surprised at just how many writers say they like to have the radio or a tape or CD playing while they write. I assume this refers entirely to

soft background music. But announcers come on the radio, tracks change from quiet to loud, there are sudden gaps and climaxes. How savage can solitude ever be?

Chekhov complained about his lack of solitude in his early writing years: “I write under the most atrocious conditions. My non-literary work lies before me flaying my conscience unmercifully. The offspring of a visiting kinsman is screaming in the next room, in another Father’s reading aloud [Lesion’s] *The Sealed Angel*, to mother ... Someone has just wound up the musical box and it’s playing “La Belle Hélène” ... Can you conceive of more atrocious surroundings for a literary man?” He appreciated it when he finally achieved a peaceful place to write.

But the curious thing is that writers complain of their lack of solitude in which to write—and when they achieve the desired solitude they turn around and complain of loneliness.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am always puzzled. How can a writer be *lonely*? Characters and events and places jostle round the keyboard, begging to be incorporated, and threatening to take over ‘real’ life with the power of their imagined existence. Lonely? Never.

But as I thought on it I felt that James was referring to something slightly different. Most things, from painting a picture to cooking a cake, are to some extent shareable at all stages. But writing has two extremes, the idea of the book in your mind and the finished book printed out on paper. It is very hard to share anything until it reaches its final form. For people who feel the need to share along the way writing imposes a particular kind of limitation. And that limitation is most easily expressed as a kind of loneliness.

Perhaps too Henry James experienced it as an inability by the noisy hurrying world around him to truly share what he was struggling to express. A thought, an idea, a way of looking at life which seems to fall to earth unappreciated is its own kind of loneliness ...

\* \* \* \* \*

October 19: Edel Wignell

Sir Thomas Browne

\* \* \* \* \*

R. W. Ketton-Cremer in *Norfolk Portraits* said of Thomas Browne: “Dr. Thomas Browne had lived quietly in Norwich for more than thirty years. He was the trusted friend and medical adviser of many of the citizens, and had a wide practice among the gentlemen of the county. He had married a Norfolk lady, and brought up a flourishing and successful family of sons and daughters. His garden, full of unusual flowers and herbs, and sometimes tenanted by such exotic fowl as ostriches and pelicans, was one of the sights of Norwich; and his house was full of rarities and curiosities of every kind. His neighbours were to some extent aware of his learning and distinction; they knew that translations of *Religio Medici* and *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* had carried all over Europe the name of the modest physician whom they consulted about their ailments. The country gentlemen to whom he dedicated *Hydriotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus* may even have had some inkling that their names would be carried down to future ages by their association with those few chapters of miraculous prose. When (to quote Matthew Stevenson again)

*‘the King knighted the so famous Browne  
Whose Worth and Learning to the World are knowne’,*

no-one doubted that the honour was deserved, or that Browne’s presence in the city conferred some lustre upon it. But none of the opulent squires and active citizens of seventeenth-century Norfolk can ever have suspected that Dr. Browne, that courteous and retiring personage, would come to be regarded by posterity as so incomparably the greatest man among them.

In a sense, perhaps, the King’s recognition of Browne was the new age honouring the old; even as, in our own time, such distinctions are usually bestowed on a writer or painter whose best work was done many years before. By 1671 Browne’s opinions, as well as his style, were becoming somewhat out of date. New currents of thoughts, new discoveries and

methods in medicine and chemistry, were beginning to circulate. Science and reasoning were achieving a new standard of lucidity and order; and Browne, with his soaring and cloudy speculations, the stately eloquence and loaded splendour of his writing, his insurmountable belief in witchcraft and alchemy, belonged to the age which was passing.

The honour bestowed upon him was not one which could confer any additional glory on the author of *Religio Medici* and *Hydriotaphia*; but there can be no doubt that it afforded Browne a lasting if sober pleasure. He was a devoted royalist, even though his only overt action in support of Charles I during the Civil War had been to refuse to contribute towards the Norwich subscription for the reduction of Newcastle. So strong was Parliamentary sentiment in Norfolk that only the bravest and most fervent royalists ventured upon more heroic action than this. But in an obscure book, *Adenochoiradelogia*, a treatise on the power of the Stuarts to cure the King's Evil, there is a curious and perhaps apocryphal story of how Browne advised that a child afflicted with that complaint should be taken to Breda to be 'touched' by Charles II, then a young King in hopeless exile. The child's father was a nonconformist and Parliamentarian, but the mother smuggled the child over to Holland without his knowledge, and the King's touch duly cured its disease; whereupon the father exclaimed 'Farewell to all dissenters, and to all nonconformists: if God can put so much virtue into the King's hand as to heal my child, I'll serve that God and that King so long as I live with all thankfulness'. Even if this particular story is not true, there is plenty of other evidence for Browne's deep attachment to the royal house; and the King's recognition of his merit must have brought him great happiness.

Sir Thomas Browne returned from the glittering scene at the New Hall to his collections of birds' eggs and dried plants, to the composition of *Christian Morals* and the strange little treatises which were to form the *Miscellany tracts*, to his experiments on the coagulation of milk with 'the skin of a peacock's gizzard' and on the 'singular uses in physick' which may be made of frogspawn. His preoccupation of the moment was the dissection of a dolphin, which had lately been sent to him. It has been stated, owing to the misreading of a passage in one of his letters, that the King came to his house and witnessed the dissection of this creature: but the crowded programme of the royal visit did not admit of any such pleasant relaxation. However, the King did see something of the dolphin; for Lady Browne had 'an art to dresse and cooke the flesh so as to make an excellent savory dish of it', and Sir Thomas sent collars of it to the King's table after his return to Newmarket, 'which were well liked of'."

\* \* \* \* \*

You may remember the moment in Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* where Peter Wimsey says:

"What the devil am I sitting on?"

"Sir Thomas Browne, I expect. I'm afraid I rifled your pockets."

"Since I was such a bad companion, I'm glad I provided you with a good substitute."

"Is he a constant companion of yours?"

"My tastes are fairly catholic. It might easily have been *Kai Lung* or *Alice in Wonderland* or Machiavelli—"

The trouble with this is that it makes Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* (The Religion of a Physician) sound like just another book you might casually pick up and read in a quiet moment. Whereas in my two attempts to struggle through the *Religio Medici* I have found it almost impossibly difficult. It always comes as a salutary reminder that although he knew nothing of quantum mechanics or the complex compounds of modern pharmacology, nor could he envisage a computer or a jet aeroplane, the seventeenth century threw up its share of profound, if at times ponderous, thinkers.

Cyril Connolly said "Poetry is baroque. I cannot but feel that the prose writers of the baroque period, the authors of King James's Bible, Sir Thomas Browne, Glanville, were poets who had lost their way." Does this make, if not the reading, at least the interpretation any easier? Perhaps. Because his writing does have its moments of 'loaded splendour'.

Just a small taste ...

‘There are no Grotesques in Nature; nor anything framed to fill up empty Cantons, and unnecessary spaces. In the most imperfect Creatures, and such as were not preserved in the Ark, but, having their Seeds and Principles in the womb of Nature, are everywhere, where the power of the Sun is, in these is the Wisdom of His hand discovered. Out of this rank Solomon chose the object of his admiration. Indeed, what Reason may not go to School to the wisdom of Bees, Ants, and Spiders? what wise hand teacheth *them* to do what Reason cannot teach *us*? Ruder heads stand amazed at those prodigious pieces of Nature, Whales, Elephants, Dromidaries and Camels; these, I confess, are the Colossus and majestick pieces of her hand: but in these narrow Engines there is more curious Mathematicks; and the civility of these little Citizens more neatly sets forth the Wisdom of their Maker.’

‘Wisdom is His most beauteous Attribute; no man can attain unto it, yet Solomon pleased God when he desired it. He is wise, because He knows all things; and He knoweth all things, because He made them all: but His greatest knowledge is in comprehending *that* He made not, that is, Himself. And this is also the greatest knowledge in man. For this do I honour my own profession, and embrace the Counsel even of the Devil himself: had he read such a Lecture in Paradise as he did at Delphos, we had better known our selves, nor had we stood in fear to know *him*. I know He is wise in all, wonderful in what we conceive, but far more in what we comprehend not; for we behold Him but asquint, upon reflex or shadow; our understanding is dimmer than Moses Eye; we are ignorant of the back-parts or lower side of His Divinity; therefore to prie into the maze of His Counsels is not only folly in man, but presumption even in Angels.’

\* \* \* \* \*

October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

October 21: Ernest Favenc

Eleanor Spence

\* \* \* \* \*

Rose Lindsay wrote in her lively memoir *Ma & Pa* of selling off household items, ‘A neighbour who had his eyes on the garden seats that still reposed on the verandah made her an offer. ‘I never thought that they would feed the children,’ she said, when he handed over the cash. The two potstands followed suit, and then a couple of rustic tables went to Ernest Favenc’s fernery. He called one Sunday morning and said how much he would like to have them, and without asking the price put four sovereigns down. Ma said that one was enough. He smiled and handed shillings to all the kids. ‘You bring them to the house’ he said to Bill.

‘When he had gone Ma said, ‘Always remember that you have seen one of Australia’s explorers.’ He was a quiet man who walked to the ferry each day in grey clothes, with a faraway look in his eyes, without ever noticing anyone.’

Rose is remembered as wife and model to Norman Lindsay but I must admit I knew nothing of Favenc’s explorations. We had men like Burke and Wills, Sturt, Mitchell, Hume and Hovell, and Eyre dinned into our little heads when I was at primary school—but no mention of Favenc. So I went looking for his life and career.

\* \* \* \* \*

Making rustic furniture was a passion for Rose Lindsay’s father; what I suppose we would now call ‘Jimmy Possum’ furniture and which has become quite sought after. It was so much a feature of their home life that I couldn’t resist copying in a chapter from her book:

‘Don’t you think it would be dangerous?’ Ma said to Pa, when he decided to make a rustic cot for the baby.

No, he didn’t think so.

‘The ends of the twigs might stick into its eyes,’ she said.

‘There won’t be any ends. I’ll work a design that will interlock.’

‘I don’t quite fancy it at all,’ she insisted, but had to give in when Pa set up the frame and interlaced wires to hold the mattress.

‘I’ll keep it a light oak,’ he said, as he sawed up a blue-gum for the rails.

‘Don’t you think it’s a bit too large for a cot?’ Ma asked.

‘What’s the good of making it too small? It will last for a life-time.’

‘No-one wants a cot for a life-time,’ Ma said.

‘You want a cot, don’t you?’ Pa asked, rather sternly, and Ma said, yes, she supposed she did, but continued to eye the thing with some disfavour as it progressed.

‘It’s going to give me a lot of thought,’ Pa said, as he bent sticks to meet, so that no ends would stand forth and stab the child.

‘Be sure to clamp the tacks well down, you know babies will put them into their mouths,’ Ma said, as she stood by, holding the future tenant in the crook of her arm. ‘Look at your lovely new cot,’ she crooned to it as it looked from Pa to Ma with pale wondering eyes.

‘It can have a lie in it when I get the sides finished,’ Pa said. Remembering his promise after a week of twig-twisting, he called Ma to bring the baby, patting down the mattress and pillow. He stood back to exult as Ma lifted the child over and held it suspended halfway to the mattress, which she was unable to reach, owing to the height of the sides and the shortness of her arms.

‘I thought there was something wrong with it,’ she wailed, as she struggled to lift it back—a feat beyond her, as her arms were pinioned to the arm-pits on the cot side.

‘You do something, I can’t hang onto the baby any longer.’

‘Why, of course, you ain’t got any reach,’ Pa said, as he lowered the child onto the mattress, where it kicked and gurgled, while Pa scratched his head and said he’d be blown.

‘Now, what are you going to do about it?’ Ma snorted.

‘I can’t raise the mattress without spoiling the design.’

‘Well, you had better put it on the verandah and grow ferns in it.’

‘You could stand on a box to reach it,’ Pa suggested, but Ma said she’d do no such thing, and left Pa to work it out.

He decided to cut the legs down sooner than sacrifice the sides, so that, when finished, the sides almost touched the floor, and Pa lost heart.

‘Just because you have short arms the whole thing is ruined,’ he said.

But Pa soon recovered from blows like this.

‘A pram would be a good idea,’ he said. Ma agreed, but she didn’t know that he was figuring on making it out of rustic wood till he came home with a few twigs and a set of wheels.

‘You can be sure that if you make it, you will push it yourself, for I won’t be seen with it.’

‘I paid ten bob for them wheels,’ he protested.

Undaunted, Pa went on with the job, hammering away in the end room night after night, with not a kind word from Ma.

‘Put the nipper in,’ he said to her, wheeling the thing into the kitchen one night. She refused to have anything to do with it.

‘Flesh and blood can stand so much, and no more,’ she snapped, as Pa sorted out the Innocent, and placed it in. ‘As happy as a king,’ he said, pushing the pram under Ma’s icy face. She was forced to notice the danger to the infant, for Pa, his mind darkened by the last mistake of making the sides too high, had gone to the other extreme with the pram and had the sides so low that the child had the appearance of sitting on a highly decorated tray.

‘You’ll have to strap that child on, or it will fall off any minute. Why on earth you made it like that, with a place no bigger than a cigar box to put its feet into, I don’t know.’ Ma said, grabbing the excited infant, who was bobbing up and down like a Jack-in-the-box, and chortling gleefully.

‘There’s no pleasing you,’ Pa said dolefully, as he wheeled the empty pram around the floor, hoping for some praise. ‘I went to a lot of trouble with all that fancy border.’

He had certainly gone to a lot of trouble with the border of interwoven sticks about six inches high, all polished a light oak, and not a nail showing.

‘I’ll soon make a hole for the feet,’ he said hopefully.

‘But it will fall out of those low sides,’ she insisted.

‘I’ll work a key border all round that,’ he said, wheeling it back sadly to the work-room.

To Ada, Ma said, ‘I suppose I’ll have to make the best of it. After all, he has worked hard on it.’ So when Pa worked his key border, and asked her advice about a suitable cover for it, having erected two poles to carry a canopy top, she suggested green baize. Pa said he thought that a nice flowered cretonne would show it off. ‘I’ll buy it and pay for it myself,’ he added. Which he did, bringing home a piece of sky-blue crepe covered with giant pink and red chrysanthemums, dashed with gold. ‘It’s hand-painted,’ he said, displaying the gaudiest piece that ever left the shores of Japan.

He covered the top, with a scalloped edge all round, and retained a square to make a matching quilt.

‘I think that might run if it got wet,’ Ma said.

‘You’d never thinking of taking it out in the rain!’ he said with awe.

‘I wouldn’t think of taking it out at all,’ Ma assured him, but Pa had his own ideas about that, for when completed, after many more nights of toil, he proudly wheeled it in again with golden wheels, and the canopy top fluttering like a butterfly.

‘I don’t like those gold wheels,’ Ma said, in a stunned way.

‘Just what it needed for the finishing touch.’

‘You’re right,’ she agreed.

‘We’ll have a day out on Sunday,’ he announced.

When he wheeled it back to safety, Ma said, ‘I suppose if I refuse he will only go and get drunk. I’d as life be pole-axed,’ she added in misery.

Pa sat up late on the Saturday night, putting finishing touches and encouraging Ma to do a bit of feather-stitching around the quilt. And a gay affair it looked on Sunday, as Pa tucked the infant in, with an anxious inquiry as to its bowels.

‘That’s one thing neither you nor God can control,’ Ma snapped.

‘Will you put an extra napkin on it?’

‘On a scorching day like this, no. I really don’t know how I’m going to stand it myself, being dragged all around that road.’

Pa had outlined the route that they were to take; from Longueville to Gore Hill, down to North Sydney, thence by boat to the city, to Hyde Park for a stroll, and return by ferry from Erskine Street to Longueville.

‘I bet they’ll look,’ Pa said proudly, as he buttoned up in readiness, with his starched collar biting into his neck, and his black beard glistening with a dash of brilliantine.

‘I should have me peacock silk for this day,’ Ma said, as she pinned on her small black crinoline hat with a pink rose nestling under an ostrich feather, and adjusted the folds of her black taffeta silk frock with shoulder-puffed sleeves.

Pa stepped out, stiff and proud, pushing the pram, with the infant sitting up like a Indian potentate in all the glittering glory, the sun beating mercilessly down on them as little Ma tottered bravely beside; and they disappeared over the paddock on the long trek, a sight for all to see.

They arrived home at nine o’clock at night, Pa triumphant, Ma footsore and on the verge of a collapse.

‘We were treated like a procession, crowds got around us everywhere. I’d die before I’d go through it again,’ she said.

‘The Pram’ from *Ma and Pa* by Rose Lindsay.

\* \* \* \* \*

But if Favenc the Explorer was unknown to me then Favenc the Writer was an equally surprising discovery. I found Stephen Knight had included his story ‘My Only Murder’, a quite stylish little whydunnit in his collection *Dead Witness*. Knight says of him “(Hume) Nisbet touches often on the north and the exotic inland, but they became central and dominating

themes in the work of ERNEST FAVENC, another immigrant, this time of permanent character. Educated in England and Germany, spending most of his life roaming the true inland as explorer, surveyor and general assimilator of its strangeness, Favenc wrote across a range of sub-Conrad materials, but where Nisbet would wave a fabulous wand, Favenc's more arid experiences led him towards a self-absorbed irony, as in 'My Only Murder', title-story of his 1899 collection.

"Although H. M. Green likened Favenc to 'Boldrewood', he was never quite as flamboyant in style or in chauvinism, and his later tales were more calmly grim — and much the less to Green's taste as a result. One of the men who in action and writing mapped Australian responses to the interior and exterior, in terms of both land and psyche, Favenc, like Louis Becke and J.M. Walsh, made his narratives negotiate strange new worlds through various kinds of romance, that flexible genre of fear and hope which had been similarly used in other contexts of fluid mystery, as in twelfth century Europe or in the Napoleonic world."

Favenc wrote newspaper pieces under the pseudonym of 'Dramingo', he wrote non-fiction such *History of Australian Exploration from 1788* (1888) and *The Explorers of Australia and their Life-Work* (1908) as well as fiction in books like *The Secret of the Australian Desert* (1894) and *My Only Murder and Other Tales* (1899) and poetry in *Voices of the Desert* (1905).

In this particular story a man has been saved from a flooded river up in the Gulf country by an old drover. In gratitude he says in effect 'come and stay with me anytime, my house is your house etc'; twelve years later he is comfortably settled in Sydney with a wife and family when the old drover turns up and moves in. The old bushman tells everyone over and over again that he didn't even stop to drop his trousers before plunging into that river. The story and his presence begin to weigh on everyone but he is deaf and blind to all hints that it is time for him to move on again. The disturbing thing about the story, when the old man sickens and dies and everyone is kind and sympathetic and he gets buried with a tombstone to remind the world for posterity of his bravery, is that the reader starts to rationalise his murder; that maybe it wasn't so terrible, maybe it was a better way to go than old and poor and alone ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Thomas Shapcott took the gravestone of Hungarian Károly Pulszky "Inscription, plot U835, Toowong Cemetery, Brisbane, Australia:

In memory of Charles Pulszky

Born in London 10<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1853

Died in Myrtletown 5<sup>th</sup> June 1899" as his inspiration for his novel *White Stag of Exile*.

How much is fact and how much fiction I do not know. Nor does it matter. But Ernest Favenc when he died in 1908 was very much better known in Australia. He was born in London, though his father Abraham Favenc was Hungarian, and migrated to Australia in 1863. Now he too could as easily be an overlooked name in a suburban cemetery ...

But a hundred years ago his name as an explorer was significant. As a child I got served up a mixture of history and geography under the catchall of 'Social Studies' which I took as gospel truth UNTIL ...

We were told by the people who decided which explorers and how they were to be presented that John Oxley when he reached the Brisbane River found it 'clear' and 'sweet'. But when I actually saw the Brisbane River for the first time I couldn't imagine anyone voluntarily drinking from it. Either Oxley or the writers of our texts, I decided, must be deaf blind and silly. No one then spoke about land-clearing, siltation, pollution or the damage humans were doing to the planet; nor in fact did anyone suggest that he might have crossed the river very close to its source before it became brown and dirty. People sometimes think it was only sexual things which were hidden from children back in the 1950s, and it is true that no one suggested that James I's favourites were young men or that a writer like Oscar Wilde could be sent to prison for sodomy, but all kinds of things, from the plight of the Aborigines to the atomic tests to the pollution by factories were equally off-limits. There *were* good things about growing up

in the fifties but as I have seen more and more of the hidden things, like the Stolen Generations, dragged out into the light (and it does not surprise me that many Aboriginal people have trouble parenting; they were never parented themselves but merely regimented and treated like automatons, never loved, never treated as precious ... ) I am left with a vague and uneasy sense that those times of relatively carefree happiness were built on a profound ignorance.

There are things which should not be put on to children, or only on a 'need to know' basis, like *Stranger Danger*, but our ignorance was the outcome of our parents' ignorance. And the fact that they were kept ignorant or deliberately lied to by governments, businesses, scientists, and bureaucrats is a measure of the contempt felt for 'ordinary people' ...

The question of Ernest Favenc is a much less fraught one. I think he was allowed to slip into obscurity because although he was born in London he wasn't a fine upstanding Englishman like Edward John Eyre or a Scot like Major Mitchell, he wasn't a trail-blazer like Sturt, and he didn't disappear in mysterious circumstances like Leichhardt. Perhaps too he came on the scene too late; his explorations across northern Queensland, around the Gulf of Carpentaria and across into the Northern Territory were helpful to pastoralists, if not to the indigenous people, and helpful to those who wanted to build railways and roads. But most of the mysteries were already solved. Nevertheless *The Australian Encyclopaedia* says of him: "Favenc was a resolute, competent bushman and a good journalist. His short stories are always interesting, his three romances are still readable, and his verse is capable and vigorous."

And when the library tracked down his doorstep *The History of Australian Exploration 1788 - 1888* I found that despite its pompous dedication, 'To The Hon. Sir Henry Parkes, G.C.M.G., C.C.I., M.P., as the oldest ruling statesman in Australia, and in the present centenary year the premier of New South Wales, the mother colony, from whence first started those explorations, by land and sea, which have resulted in throwing open to the nations of the world a new continent, now rapidly developing, under free constitutions, a prosperous, contented, and self-governing community, this history of Australian Exploration is dedicated' (all in capitals of course) the book then bustles along; full of the 'usual suspects' and expressing the usual white attitudes of 1888. But it does contain a few oddities which were never passed on to school children such as 'Dampier now reappears on the scene in charge of the *Roebuck*—a ship sent out by the English Government in 1699. His account of his voyage is very minute and circumstantial, but he still retains his aversion to the unfortunate natives, of whom he always speaks with the greatest scorn. Some of his statements are slightly doubtful, to say the least of it, as, for instance, one concerning the capture of a large shark, "in which we found the head and bones of a hippopotamus, the hairy lips of which were still sound and not putrified, and the jaw was also firm, out of which we pluckt a great many teeth, two of them eight inches long and as big as a man's thumb, small at one end and a little crooked, the rest not above half so long' and 'From the journal of Edmund Kennedy "A curious fact I observed here is, that the men chew tobacco; it is, of course, in a green state." This was almost, certainly, the *pituri* plant, which the natives of the interior chew, and then bury in the sand, where the heat of the sun causes it to ferment; it is then chewed as an intoxicant, the natives carrying a plug behind their ear in their hair. It is offered to a stranger as an especial compliment, and great is the affront if this toothsome morsel is declined. It only grows in certain localities, far west of where Kennedy saw the natives using it, and the blacks of the locality where it is found barter it away with other tribes, by which means it is found at a considerable distance from where it grows. Amongst the natives there are *pituri* and *non-pituri* chewers.'

But he also included what were probably two of his own particular interests:

— his apparent fascination with the newly discovered artesian water basins and his belief that underground water would revolutionise agriculture in Australia. Elsewhere he claims that the introduction of hoofed animals was good for Australia because it packed the soil down hard and, although he records the disappointments of various explorers in finding salty water far

inland, he doesn't take that thought any further and wonder what will happen when people increasingly clear and confine the streams and begin irrigating ...

— and his apparent conviction that Australia was first discovered by the French. He presents the information, 'In Cornelius Wytfliet's "Descriptionis Ptolemaicae Augmentum," Louvain, 1598, the following passage is to be found:—

"The Australis Terra is the most southern of all lands; it is separated from New Guinea by a narrow strait; its shores are hitherto but little known, since, after one voyage and another, that route has been deserted, and seldom is the country visited unless when sailors are driven there by storms. The Australis Terra begins at two or three degrees from the equator, and is maintained by some to be of so great an extent that if it were thoroughly explored it would be regarded as a fifth part of the world." ' Torres had not yet sailed through the strait that now bears his name—and would not reach it until 1606.

Favenc then gives considerable space to the voyage of Jean Binot Paulmier de Gonneville who left Normandy in June 1503 in *L'Espoir* on a voyage to India but was blown off course and landed on what is usually assumed to be Madagascar. But Favenc goes to considerable trouble to 'prove' that what Gonneville calls the 'Southern Indies' was in fact the Kimberley region of Australia. How convincing his arguments are is debatable but just as later Dutch ships fetched up unwittingly on the Western Australian coast so too is it possible that Paulmier de Gonneville fetched up on that same coast but further north a century earlier ...

Even so it doesn't solve the mystery of Torres Strait. Unless Gonneville actually landed on the coast of New Guinea rather than Australia then he could not have been the source of that information. The mystery remains ...

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Cecil Hadgraft in *The Australian Short Story Before Lawson* includes Ernest Favenc's story 'Malchook's Doom' and says of the problematic question of portrayals of Aboriginal characters, "To press beyond acknowledgement of virtue, or justice by law, was rare—for instance to show or imply that black might have equal cause with white for individual feud or revenge. Ernest Favenc, however, has two such stories, both in his 1893 collection, *The Last of Six*. In 'The Missing Super' a native, flogged with a whip, bides his time for a year, and takes his revenge. 'Malchook's Doom' ... is a shocking tale of atrocity."

In 'Malchook's Doom' two drovers have killed an old Aboriginal man by rolling him in the spinifex then setting it alight but the dead man appears to come back to haunt Malchook. I don't want to give the impression that Favenc was generations ahead of his contemporaries in his attitudes. But Hadgraft says of him, "His attitude to the Aborigines is reasonably impartial—a sympathy for their losses, a pity for their sufferings, an understanding of their revenge. In 'Pompey', the existence of a half-caste boy leads eventually to tragedy, when in a 'dispersal' father and son unknowingly kill each other."

But even that modest amount of praise makes Favenc a rarity in nineteenth century Australian letters. And Favenc has another, even more thoroughly overlooked and forgotten claim to fame—as a children's writer. Not a very big claim, admittedly, but that is possibly posterity's fault. Marcie Muir in her book *A Bibliography of Australian Children's Books* suggests they would have been better books if he had not tried to tailor his material to a 'European' readership. *Australian Children's Literature* (by John Foster, Ern Finnis, and Maureen Nimon) also dismisses his children's books, such as *The Secret of the Australian Desert*, as boys' adventure style writing without anything distinctively Australian in it. Favenc the Explorer had an intimate and deeply knowledgeable sense of the Outback and the Far North; but Favenc the Writer was largely dependent on publishers in Britain; except for his short articles and stories which were usually published in *The Bulletin*. It was an unfortunate marriage and its children never succeeded in developing their own distinctive selves ...

\* \* \* \* \*

October 22: Doris Lessing  
October 23: Robert Bridges

October 24: Nairda Lyne  
October 25: Thomas Macauley  
October 26: Christobel Mattingley  
October 27: John Cleese  
October 28: Erasmus  
October 29: John Keats  
                James Boswell  
October 30: Morris Lurie  
                Rudolfo Anaya  
October 31: Dick Francis  
November 1: Edward Said  
November 2: Odysseus Elytis  
November 3: J. E. Macdonnell  
                Conor Cruise O'Brien

\* \* \* \* \*

J. E. Macdonnell was an immensely prolific Australian author in his day. His novels about the sea, mostly dealing with aspects of World War II naval engagements, came out in a steady stream and were extremely popular. And remain easy to find in op-shops. He was very much a writer for men. It is a man's world and his readers I feel sure were almost always men. Women are girls on shore or mothers; romance is not a noticeable aspect of his stories. But I quite enjoyed the one I recently bought for a few cents, called *Frogman*, not least for its sense of Sydney in World War II with Harry's Café de Wheels outside the Garden Island dockyard and other aspects of life and attitudes and slang from then.

The blurb said of him, 'James Edmond Macdonnell is one of the most prolific writers in Australia today. His books have been translated into many languages, selling in the millions throughout the world. And he is still writing ...

'He served in the Navy before, during and after the War, climbing up through the hawsepipe from ordinary-seaman to officer in the gunnery branch. This experience of both lowerdeck and wardroom provided invaluable insight into his fictional characters.

'He lives with his wife, two daughters and a son in the shorebound Sydney suburb of St Ives, but his main interest, apart from sports cars, lies in swapping stories, of varying degrees of truthfulness, with old shipmates.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Philip McCutchan also took World War II naval life as his subject matter for a string of popular books, as did Dudley Pope, though the British rather than the Australian navy. He too had been in the War and used his experience on board ship as the foundation stone for his stories. But he also chose to run with several series characters. The one I've just been reading, *Cameron in the Gap*, has First Lieutenant Donald Cameron for its 'hero'. The book is certainly full of action, death, and drama. But I felt that Cameron, though tough, capable, and lucky, was almost devoid of character. No sense of personality shines through as the convoy steams through dangerous waters to embattled Malta. It could be said that it is the ships which are as much the heroes as the men ... but they are equally devoid of personality ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Douglas Reeman though another Navy man who took up a pen took a slightly different slant; how did such men make a living after the war when there was less need of seamen, officers, gunners, and all. His character in *High Water* takes to crime. But in fact men being demobbed after World War II were luckier than their First World War counterparts. They received more help and support programs; they found themselves facing a healthy economy. But they too didn't get the counseling which might have saved many families the horrors of alcoholism and psychotic behaviour. While thousands of men encouraged to start smoking in war time went on to die horribly of lung cancer.

And the genie let loose at Nagasaki and Hiroshima also went on to take the lives of thousands of servicemen in the postwar years.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mark Gerzon in *A Choice of Heroes* wrote:

‘“Further tests,” dreamed Dr. Edward Teller, another of the bomb’s illustrious fathers, “will put us in the position to fight our opponents’ war machines while sparing the innocent bystanders. Weapons of this kind will reduce unnecessary casualties in a future war.” Teller led the male chorus that, as Albert Schweitzer later described it, “sang a hymn of praise to the idyllic nuclear war to be waged with completely clean hydrogen bombs.”

‘After fathering their diabolical child, whose growth they measured not in inches but in megatons, the bomb’s inventors soon lost their feeling of unparalleled power. The Russians had also given birth to a nuclear son. The nuclear arms race was under way.’

But—

‘Except for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the largest number of known victims of nuclear explosions have been Americans. American men and women have been killed by a force as invisible as it is lethal: radiation. A few of the victims were exposed as part of the cleanup crews that entered Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the war. Others were soldiers ordered to watch the A-bomb test at close range. But the largest number lived in the American Southwest near the sites where the A-bomb was first tested during the late forties and early fifties. They live amid the breathtaking landscape described so rapturously in *When a Man’s a Man*. But their skies were no longer “unstained,” the wind no longer “unburdened.”

Usually, ten to thirty years elapse between any low-level exposure to a carcinogen and the onset of cancerous tumors. This is why, beginning in the sixties and accelerating during the seventies, cancer began appearing with frightening frequency in towns such as Parowan, St. George, and Cedar City in Utah and in scores of other towns in bordering regions of Nevada and Arizona. At first, each family struck by this mysterious malignancy viewed it as a personal tragedy. But their views changed when, to cite one example, four Utah farmers, whose land intersected at a crossroad precisely downwind from an atomic bomb site, were all stricken by cancer. Then the tragedy is no longer personal. It is political.

“Well,” says elderly Irma Thomas of St. George, Utah, “just within a block of my home there’s Wilford, he had cancer, and his wife Helen died of stomach cancer. Carl across the street died of throat cancer, and Ernie died of it, and his wife has it now. The boy next to them died of leukemia, and my sister across the way there, she had breast cancer. She died. And her husband has it now.”

Each of her neighbors in this sad little town has a list. Says Elmer Pickett: “My sister, my niece, my aunt, four uncles, my sister-in-law, my mother-in-law, my grandmother, and my wife ...” Echoes Dave Timothy: “Two of my aunts. Three of my uncles. And two of my doctors.”

When an eerie pinkish-red cloud drifted over the area roughly thirty years ago, the spokesman from the Atomic Energy Commission assured them: “There is no danger ...” In an Atomic Energy Commission mission film that must make government officials cringe, an army chaplain tells a nervous soldier not to worry about the blast that they are about to witness a few miles away. The chaplain declares that “the army has taken all the necessary precautions to see that we are perfectly safe here.” Even though the bomb was, as Truman put it in his diary, “the most terrible thing ever discovered,” its fathers thought they could detonate it with impunity. Their arrogance was rooted in ignorance, or machismo, or perhaps a self-destructive mixture of both.

A young soldier, Patrick Stout, was General Groves’s driver when he escorted a group of inquisitive reporters to the site where, two months earlier, the first A-bomb (code name, Trinity) had been successfully detonated. To demonstrate how safe the site was, Groves ordered Stout to stand in the bomb crater for half an hour. Patrick Stout later died of leukemia.

“They told us we would be the closest human beings outside of Hiroshima to a nuclear blast,” said one of the marines who was ordered to watch an A-bomb test in Nevada only one mile from ground zero. He is dying of cancer.

“Nobody told us anything about radiation,” complained a sixty-year-old ex-serviceman who was sent to clean up Hiroshima. He is dying of cancer.

*Time* magazine called it “A Fallout of Nuclear Fear.” The *New York Times* labeled it the “Grim Legacy of Nuclear Testing.” But for the men and women whose bone marrow is rotting and whose neighbors are being decimated, it is far more personal than such headlines suggest. It is seven children dying of leukemia within a hundred yards of one’s house. And it is women, angry at being betrayed by the government — men — they trusted. They had left such matters to men before, but they never would again.’

Commentator Max Walsh said of the men in charge of Australia’s war in Vietnam: ‘The Vietnam war was not, for Australia, a national war. At no time did its impact fall squarely on the electorate as a whole. It was a war of the young. For the first time in Australia’s history there was a war that discriminated against the young. Unlike previous wars, the prominent representatives of the ruling class felt no need to sacrifice the comforts and prospects of home even though they were not reluctant to tell those being sent that the cause was good, just and necessary. Successively we had as Ministers for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, Phillip Lynch and Andrew Peacock. These were three ambitious young politicians who in another generation, in another war, would have felt uncomfortable, indeed would have found their political futures endangered had they preferred the heat of debate to the risks of the front line.

‘That all three have prospered in their political careers is indicative of the shift in values marked by the Vietnam war.’

(from *Poor Little Rich Country*)

It always seems strange to me that so much is said about the civilian response to the returning Vietnam veterans—some shouted abuse and an occasional spit—while governments and the defense forces treated the men as whingers and malingerers when they pointed to mysterious and sometimes chronic ill-health or birth defects in their children. It has taken Australia *forty years* to finally get serious about checking the health of all the men and their children and grandchildren from Vietnam ... and this doesn’t even touch on the horrors the Vietnamese people (not to mention those of Laos and Cambodia) still endure.

In fact ordinary Australians had every right to abuse returning soldiers, so long as they didn’t break the law, just as ordinary Australians have every right to abuse losing jockeys and footie referees so long as they keep it within bounds. But successive Australian governments have pointed the finger at ordinary individuals as a very effective way of diverting attention from the appalling things governments have done to servicemen. Not only in the Vietnam War but before and since—

When I picked up Roger Cross’s and Avon Hudson’s book *Beyond Belief* I wondered if the title wasn’t a little over-the-top but after reading it I can only say that the things the Australian Government did to its servicemen back in the 1950s *are* beyond belief.

Nor has it ended. Only this morning I heard a news story that the Australian Navy was still putting its service personnel at risk by the continuing presence of asbestos ...

But the situation of civilians caught in the tests is probably worse because of the ignorance that surrounded them. Almerita Lander and her husband Mack who was building yards on Welbourne Hill Station had three of their children with them in their caravan there and another child away in Alice Springs. Cross and Hudson quote her as saying, “At no time did anyone officially tell us that the trials were about to begin. Vague rumours had been circulating which we dismissed as just that.” When the atomic bomb was exploded at Emu Plains the children were outside playing and Almerita had meat and bread cooking on their outside campfire. They went to take ‘smoko’ over to the yards; “As we walked, I noticed how silent it was (remember the explosion occurred at 7 am). Usually there were many crows around cawing raucously. Other birds kept us company too: butcher birds, cockatoos and little

finches. This day, except for some kites coasting around high in the sky, there were none. Why? It puzzled me but I did not dwell on it. ... In the sky an unusual cloud appeared. It was like a broad ribbon. It stretched across the sky at a low altitude. As we watched, it moved further across the sky, traveling from west to east, and finger-like clouds dangled from its fringe. Later, an official observer sent out in a plane to track its direction confirmed this description.”

At first they thought it was a dust storm but unlike any dust storm they had ever seen. “A black cloud was slowly and quietly rolling through the scrub. To us it was quite sinister because of its blackness and because it seemed to be creeping up on us.” A fine grey dust which made them cough and sneeze and their eyes water infiltrated everywhere. “It grew dark as it rolled over and disappeared in the distance.” The meat on the fire was covered in a grey scum, the dust everywhere was impossible to sweep out. They had to use some of their precious water brought in 44-gallon drums from the bore to clean the caravan. The dust rose round them as they walked and was “sticky and pervasive” but they had nowhere but outside to cook and for the children to play.

“No one ever came to advise us that the ‘dust’ was the fallout from the bomb. It was as though we didn’t exist. ... Shortly after, word went around that a sickness was laying low the Aboriginal people living at Wallatina and Mintabie. Old people and young children were dying, their bodies covered in sores and their eyes weeping. No medical specialists visited them or any doctor as far as I can remember and it was assumed that it was a measles epidemic. Who really knows what caused the sickness? Was it more convenient not to know?”

The Landers were a white family. But Almerta later wrote a poem ‘The Black Cloud’ in which she looks at it from a black perspective. The poem ends:

None came to help us and so we died,  
Laying the bodies in the sand, side by side.  
Singing our burial songs, sad and low,  
Each wondering who would be the next to go.

The young man swept his arms towards the skies  
‘It was a bomb, they tell us now,’ he cried, raising sightless eyes,  
‘Pouring deathly rays over our sacred earth,  
Poisoning forever our native land, our land of Dreamtime birth.’

We were expendable, no one takes the blame,  
But let it go down in history to their everlasting shame.

I have since heard that tests on NZ sailors exposed to radiation in the Pacific showed the way in which their DNA had become ‘scrambled’ leading to birth defects in their children—but also creating a way to prove that servicemen with ongoing health problems weren’t whingers; they had a genuine case for help and recognition and compensation. *But how much more sensible never to expose either service personnel or civilians to radiation and fallout—*

And it seems strange to me that the ‘great’ war books are always seen as those of writers like Leo Tolstoy and Norman Mailer when the men who had endured war would far rather sit down to a J. E. Macdonnell or a lively biography or a battalion history. Literary writing, far from recreating the immediacy of the experience, tends to distance the reader ... and no amount of dwelling on the consistency of the mud or the dullness of mass-cooked food quite seems to overcome that sense of distance ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A different genre dealing with ships and the sea, though still often written by men who went to sea in their youth, is that of the shipwreck book. A while ago I was reading *The Grey Widow-Maker* by Bernard Edwards and more recently *The Wreck of the Abergavenny* (captained by John Wordsworth, brother to William Wordsworth) by Alethea Hayter which

sets the scene: “John’s idyllic summer at Grasmere, during which Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson, Mary’s sister, had also stayed at Dove Cottage, came to an end in September 1800, when William and Dorothy stood and watched him dwindle into the distance as he hurried down the Grisedale Tarn at the start of his way back to London. He had been appointed captain of the *Earl of Abergavenny*, in succession to his cousin, John Wordsworth senior, and had to be in London to be sworn in to his command.” The ship, an East Indiaman, was wrecked on Weymouth Sands in 1804 and John Wordsworth was drowned.

The term ‘grey widow-maker’ comes from Kipling’s poem ‘Harp Song of the Dane Women’:

What is a woman that you forsake her,  
And the hearth-fire and the home acre,  
To go with the old grey widow-maker?

She has no house to lay a guest in —  
But one chill bed for all to rest in,  
That the pale suns and the stray bergs nest in.

One book I’ve always found particularly interesting is *Wrecks in Tasmanian Waters* by Harry O’May. The O’May family was well-known in Hobart because they ran the ferries on the river. And his book has one intriguing little snippet which has always made me wonder: “In June (1856) the wreck of an unknown vessel of about 200 tons was discovered on the beach at Piper’s River. As it was buried in the sand it was thought to have been there some time.” How long, I can’t help wondering, is ‘some time’ and was it ever identified ...

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November 4: Richard Brinsley Sheridan (bap)

\* \* \* \* \*

Sheridan introduced ‘Mrs Malaprop’ into the world as a character in his play *The Rivals* and gave us the term Malapropism, meaning a word used wrongly, from the French *mal à propos* = not to the purpose. She is fiction and her malapropisms are there for comic effect. But I know people delight in collecting them, though usually to show how our education system is going down the tube, and I am sure we all do them occasionally. I remember, many years ago, our landlady referring to ‘conversation’ banks rather than ‘conservation’ banks which I thought was rather nice. I could picture them in quiet evenings tossing chat to and fro across the paddocks ...

Even though Mrs Malaprop is there as a comic foil to the more serious business of romance and marriage she has lasted as much for her character as for her infelicities. These fall from her lips in an endless stream—extirpate when she means extricate, progeny instead of prodigy, superstitious for superficial, illegible for ineligible, intuition instead of tuition, an allegory on the banks of the Nile instead of an alligator—but they also create a character who is energetic, bossy, talkative, superficially clever but probably of no education beyond a little from a governess and thus contemptuous of the benefits of education, interested in the social world, opinionated and certainly with a good opinion of herself, and no shrinking violet yet deferential to people of higher social standing, particularly men; in other words she is worth reading for her character and her style as much as for her amusing mistakes—

LYDIA: Madam, I thought you once —

MRS MALAPROP: You thought, miss! I don’t know any business you have to think at all — thought does not become a young woman. But the point we would request of you is, that you will promise to forget this fellow — to illiterate him, I say, from your memory.

LYDIA: Ah, Madam! our memories are independent of our wills. It is not so easy to forget.

MRS MALAPROP: But I say it is, miss: there is nothing on earth so easy as to *forget*, if a person chooses to set about it. I’m sure I have as much forgot your poor dear uncle as if he had never existed — and I thought it my duty so to do; and let me tell you, Lydia, these violent memories don’t become a young woman.

SIR ANTHONY: Why sure she won't pretend to remember what she's ordered not! Aye, this comes of her reading!

LYDIA: What crime, madam, have I committed to be treated thus?

MRS MALAPROP: Now don't attempt to extirpate yourself from the matter; you know I have proof controvertible of it. But tell me, will you promise to do as you're bid? Will you take a husband of your friend's choosing?

LYDIA: Madam, I must tell you plainly, that had I no preference for anyone else, the choice you have made would be my aversion.

MRS MALAPROP: What business have you, miss, with *preference* and *aversion*? They don't become a young woman; and you ought to know, that as both always wear off, 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion. I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor — and yet, miss, you are sensible what a wife I made! — and when it pleased Heaven to release me from him, 'tis unknown what tears I shed! ...

Even in that small segment I have no difficulty in immediately gaining a vivid image of Mrs Malaprop. Yet, interestingly, Eric Rump says she had an unexpected genesis. “Few audiences, or readers, however, remember Mrs Malaprop for her role as the ‘she-dragon’, as Jack calls her, or because of her (hoped for) relationship with Sir Lucius; they remember her for her hilariously inappropriate use of language. A character who misuses language is not new with Sheridan — examples can be found as far back as Shakespeare’s Dogberry and Mrs Quickly — but, of them all, Sheridan probably owes his most specific debt to Mrs Tryfort, a character in his mother’s uncompleted comedy, *A Journey to Bath*. Mrs Tryfort is described by another character, Lady Filmot, as being someone who is fond of ‘hard words, which without miscalling, she always takes care to misapply’, and at least one of her errors ‘contagious countries’ — appears in Mrs Malaprop’s opening scene. Julia, in a phrase reminiscent of Lady Filmot, describes Mrs Malaprop as someone whose words are ‘ingeniously *misapplied*, without being *mispronounced*’, but perhaps what distinguishes Mrs Malaprop not only from Mrs Tryfort but from her other predecessors as well is the sheer variety, perverse ingenuity and unshakeable confidence she displays throughout in manifesting that she is ‘queen of the dictionary’. It is indeed a bravura performance. Some of her slips may be no more ingenious than those devised by earlier writers, but in others — ‘pineapple of politeness’, ‘a nice derangement of epitaphs’, ‘as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of the Nile’ — she (or Sheridan) achieves an unsurpassed creative dottiness. It is perhaps this range and variety — along with the fact that her name has passed into the language — that gives to Mrs Malaprop that curious quality, possessed by a small group of other comic characters, of being part of the work while at the same time possessing an almost autonomous existence outside or apart from it.”

Spoonerisms on the other hand were unintentional inversions of words or letters and their name comes from the Oxford don, Dr William Spooner, warden of New College from 1903, who was famous for his dyslexic speech—though of course people have been spouting both spoonerisms and malapropisms since speech began. And although a great manner of amusing statements have been attributed to him he probably only produced a fraction of them. The *Insight Guide to Oxford* says, ‘Many are thought to be apocryphal, made up subsequently to nurture the myth. There is no evidence, for example, that he once proposed a toast to “our queer Dean”. It is also said that he expelled one undergraduate with the words “Sir, you have tasted two whole worms, you have hissed my mystery lectures and you were found fighting a liar in the quad: you will leave at once by the town drain.”’

Spoonerisms are all around us too. The other day the guide at Runnymede told how her friend, after a couple of drinks, suggested they go and see ‘Beauty on the Mountie’ instead of ‘Mutiny on the Bounty’ (some strange sexual hi-jinks contained in that!) and I’ll never forget the poor man ringing up a Hobart radio talkback program and inadvertently calling the hosts ‘Sick and Rue’ instead of ‘Rick and Sue’ ... And as well as the noun ‘spoonerism’ we can also ‘spoonerise’ or get our tongues in a knot ...

I enjoyed Mike Cooper's little poem 'The Birdwatcher's Guide':  
The guy who botched the Birdwatcher's Guide  
is off with a rabble in hot pursuit,  
but it's up to the birds to decide.

The bird-hide is not for the birds. Inside,  
timidly, the twitchers agree to prosecute  
the guy who botched the Birdwatcher's Guide.

"Don't spoonerise, don't versify, don't  
pun!" The publisher was resolute,  
but it's up to the birds to decide.

A botcher will never be driven to suicide.  
The publisher's hoping that someone will shoot  
the guy who botched the Birdwatcher's Guide.

"It's our sanctuary, thanks," the swamphen cried,  
"and possibly this refugee is a worthy recruit,  
but it's up to the birds to decide."

There's nothing as tough as a wordbotcher's hide.  
They'd fail if they tried to electrocute  
the guy who botched the Birdwatcher's Guide,  
but it's up to the birds to decide.

\* \* \* \* \*

These days the dreaded typo has become a comic source in itself; when added to grammar confusions it is a staple of some newsletters and humour columns. And there are some delicious ones out there:

"I read in a British newspaper some time ago about an army officer who discovered that by a typing error he had been entered in the Gazette as a major with seniority from 1 January in the year 1042. Obviously it was supposed to be 1942, but he immediately applied for back pay in the sum of several hundred thousand pounds. To his astonishment, back came a letter from the Ministry of Defence, informing him that his claim would be allowed. It went on, however, to tell him that as he appeared to be the only surviving officer of the Battle of Hastings in 1066, he was being held personally responsible for the large number of bows, arrows, spears and shields which had been misappropriated on that occasion, the value of which by sheer coincidence was only a few pence more than the sum he had claimed as back pay. In the circumstances both parties agreed to forget the matter."

(Peter Cameron in *Necessary Heresies*)

'No one knows more about miscommunication than the Reverend A.J. Jones of Pretoria, South Africa. Let me tell you his story.

It started when he ran a classified ad in the local newspaper. The first day the ad appeared, it read:

The Rev. A.J. Jones has a color TV set for sale. Telephone 555-1313 after 7 p.m, and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who lives with him, cheap.

He wasn't happy, and he called to let the folks at the paper know. So the next day they tried to undo their mistake. The new ad read:

We regret any embarrassment caused to Rev. Jones by a typographical error in yesterday's edition. It should have read, "The Rev. A.J. Jones has color TV set for sale, cheap. Telephone 555-1313 and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who lives with him after 7 p.m."

Another call was made, and again they tried to fix the confusion.

The Rev A.J. Jones informs us he has received several annoying telephone calls because of an incorrect advertisement in yesterday's paper. It should have read, "The Rev. A.J. Jones has color TV set for sale. Cheap. Telephone after 7 p.m. 555-1313 and ask for Mrs. Donnelley who loves with him."

One day later ...

Please take note that I, the Rev. Jones, have no TV set for sale. I have smashed it. I have not been carrying on with Mrs. Donnelley. She was until yesterday my housekeeper.

You would have thought that would end the ordeal, but if you watched closely, you saw another ad a few days later that read:

WANTED: a housekeeper. Telephone the Rev. A.J. Jones, 555-1313. Usual housekeeping duties, good pay, love in.

I assume he gave up trying.'

(from *War in the Pews* by Frank Martin)

\* \* \* \* \*

Speaking of Mounties—were we?—I recently came upon the reason for their red uniform. In *Susannah of the Mounties* by Muriel Denison ...

"'But I thought police always wore blue,' said Sue, wishing she could understand.

'They do,' said Michael, 'almost all the world over. But long ago, when the first British regiments came to Canada they wore red coats; and the Indians learned that where there was a red coat there was kindness, medicine, gifts, friends. Red stood for all that was good in the white man. And after a time the Indians learned that red meant justice, too ... that if a Redcoat was called to decide a point in a quarrel, the Redcoat decided for right, without fear or favour.

'So years ago, when they were first forming the Force, the Indians asked that the men wear red coats, saying: "We know that the soldiers of our Great White Mother wear red coats and are our friends." So now, Sue, wherever the red coat is seen, and it can be seen a long way off, it is a warning to both strong and weak, honest and dishonest that the rule of law prevails.'

...

Sue learned that Indian children were taken into the school at the age of six and that besides learning to read and write the boys were taught to be good farmers, the girls to be nurses, maids, and cooks. 'When they leave us,' he explained, 'it is to go into a household that we know about and where we are sure that they will be well taken care of.'

...

But when an Indian comes and takes a boy away ... 'We can't allow that,' said the priest, as one of the boys adjusted a broken harness strap. 'These prairie lands are all right for the Indians now, but in time they will be covered with wheat and ranches. There will be no room for the Red Man to roam or deal in wild horses. We must educate the young Indian for the new life that lies ahead of him. That is our mission.' Picking up the reins he drove rapidly away."

Even if the Mounties were willing to intervene impartially in bar room fights they stood by while the massive theft of land and children and culture took place with impunity. Canada *has* finally apologised to their 'Stolen Children' though not for the theft of land, and provided some compensation. And the Mounties *can* take heart in the simple fact that red is sexier than blue ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Anon., Idem, Ibid, and Trad.

Wrote much that is morally bad:

Some ballads, some chanties,

All poems on panties—

And limericks, too, one must add.

*The Lure of the Limerick* by W. S. Baring-Gould

Every so often I think I will do a little piece on those Latin words which are all around us yet go largely unnoticed. So here, finally, is a taste, perhaps an entrée ...

Because it *is* odd that we use strange words like et cetera, day in, day out, and never turn a hair. If French is the language of ballet and Italian the language of music then Latin remains the underlying language of the law; obiter dicta, jus cogens, mens rea, pro bono—I can see youthful law students groaning over them. Yet we only blanch when we actually think of them as Latin; day in, day out, we refer to de facto partners and hear of personas non grata and ex gratia payments and worry that the corrupt and the short-sighted will rule the world ad infinitum. Of course every word comes from somewhere and lots of our words had a Latin origin. Remember learning derivation in school? I don't know that I got a lot from it. But I do know a lot of older people mourn its passing. The only bit I can remember went 'pes, pedes, a foot = pedestrian' etc ... which may be a good description of my writing ... but makes me wonder what it was about that particular one that it has stuck like a burr ...

Why do people still learn Latin? The *Collins Gem Latin Dictionary* says, "There are two main reasons for learning Latin: one is to read the best in the literature of the Romans; the other is to understand the Latin basis which underlies the structure of many modern languages and the extensive Latin element which still survives in the terminology of historians, lawyers, scientists and other professional writers."

Margaret Scott wrote in *Changing Countries*, "There were, however, at least two rather stronger reasons for making the A girls study Latin. Because its grammatical constructions are quite different from those of English, you can't translate a paragraph of English prose into Latin until you have analysed exactly what is being said and worked out the logical relationships between the various sentences. This forces you to read very closely and cling like a limpet to the course of an argument as well as inducing you to organise your own writing in a coherent way. I firmly believe that translating a piece of English into reasonably stylish Latin constituted one of the most valuable educational exercises that I was ever required to undertake. It has certainly had a more lasting effect on the way in which I think, read and write than anything else I learned at school."

There *are* useful bits of Latin for a writer or a reader to know—Idem = the same, also, likewise; Ibid (Ibidem) = in the same place—and when you come to set up your book and the printers toss round words like 'verso' and 'recto' a little bit of Latin will help you avoid saying something along the lines of 'I don't think I like the sound of that recto business—couldn't we give it a miss?'

\* \* \* \* \*

A whole new world of confusions, embarrassments, and humour is now opening up to us as people delve into cross-language confusions. Spanglish, Franglish, Japlish, their myriad counterparts, and the book I have just been browsing in, *Chinglish* by Oliver Lutz Radtke, which takes some amusing translations of Chinese characters into English on shops and signs and public institutions in China as its subject matter.

These fall into various categories such as the attempt to translate literally as—  
'Deformed Man Toilet', 'Takewaterplace' or 'Bell Bumping Site' ...

Then there are those where we would choose a different word to go on the sign such as—  
'Dongda Hospital for Anus and Intestine Disease Beijing'; we would probably put Bowel or possibly something blander like Internal ...

Then there are some where the writer probably knew what he meant but not quite how to express it—

'After first under on, do riding with civility' or 'I like your smile, but unlike you put your shoes on my face' which is a polite but curious way to say 'Keep off the Grass' and the even politer 'The ancient building is renovating Excuse me for bringing trouble to you' and 'The store be sterilized inside please be contented' or as 'Police Tips': 'Avoiding being stolen should be always remembered. Be prepared for danger in times of safety'.

But some are head-scratchers. ‘Strange juice’, ‘Caution Dander’, or ‘Meeting critical situation asks velocity to poke strikeing’ or ‘The thing tube office’ ...

Some are not problematic as English but appeal to fears we would not think to call upon: ‘No Smoking — A small match may destroy a hundred year-old palace’. Indeed it may.

\* \* \* \* \*

November 5: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox  
November 6: Roger Vaughan Carr  
November 7: Helen Garner  
November 8: Ruth Manley  
November 9: Ivan Turgenev  
November 10: Oliver Goldsmith  
November 11: Kathy Lette  
November 12: Janette Turner Hospital  
November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson  
November 14: Steele Rudd  
November 15: William Cowper  
November 16: Colin Thiele  
Joan Phipson

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One day I was browsing in Marcie Muir’s *A Bibliography of Australian Children’s Books*. What a treasure of forgotten books and authors! For instance did you know that Ina L. Austen brought out four booklets in 1915, *How Alyce was told at Six*, *What Alyce learnt at Nine*, *Alyce on the Threshold*, *Alyce in the Country of Teens*; “The above four booklets are an attempt to teach a girl something about sex in a story form.” How good were they, how explicit, how helpful? I have no idea. Then there was Sylvia Cairns’ *Uncle Willie Mackenzie’s Legends of the Goundirs* in 1967; “Aboriginal legends told to the aboriginal author by her uncle, the last surviving member of the Darwarbada tribe” even though we are usually given the impression that Aboriginal writing is a fairly recent phenomenon. And Enid Blyton’s *The Secret Seven* had a kind of forerunner in Bessie Marchant’s *The Adventurous Seven* which came out in 1914. But the most popular subject for children’s books I discovered, apart from the general topic of aspects of country life, was by far — Captain Cook.

Captain Cook may be a very ‘safe’, even an important, subject for children’s books—but I have never yet met a child gripped by his life and work. It is adults who are interested in his navigational skills, his ways of keeping order, his background, his life and death ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Mavis Thorpe Clark wrote of her experiences as a beginning writer in *The early dreaming* when she began sending out stories while still a schoolgirl, “It meant that I was always looking for the postman. He didn’t come early enough in the morning for me to get mail before going to school, but he came late enough in the afternoon for me to be waiting by the letter box.

He was almost a hunchback, that postman — perhaps the result of many years of carrying the mailbag on his back — and an Irishman. He had very blue eyes and a whiskery face, though not a heavy beard. His gait, with body so thrown forward, was at a toppling, walking run. His feet were big and flat but he wasn’t any taller than me because he couldn’t straighten.

I was shy then and not given to telling people that I wrote. Only my mother understood, I think, how my life was bound up with words — to write and be published. So it was a while before the postman knew why this jumpy schoolgirl was waiting in the front garden every afternoon. When at last I told him, he looked at me with those bright eyes and then, with a wriggle of his bent shoulders, let his pack slide to the ground. He said, ‘My dear, I want to give you an Irishman’s blessing.’ He knelt down on the asphalt path just inside our gate and invoked a blessing on my head.

The next afternoon he brought me a gift — a book. It was entitled *A Visit to Iceland and the Scandinavian North* by Madame Ida Pfeiffer, and was translated from the German. It was a very old book, having been published in 1853. At the time it was the date — 1853 — that impressed me. Yet it was an extremely lively account of a woman of the Victorian era, travelling alone, in an area almost as difficult and remote as the moon.

There were no inns or hotels to accommodate Madame Ida as she travelled on horseback over the cold lava fields and mountains or through the wet meadows of Iceland. Often she slept under those northern stars, huddled for some shelter against a breakwind of lava stones; or on a bench in a wooden box-like village church in the midst of the village graveyard!

It was not until later that I linked my Irishman's blessing with the contents of this book. Not, in fact, until I travelled in remote areas. Then it seemed almost as though I had been given a will to go, an eye to see and a heart to respond as Madame Ida had gone, seen and responded.

I still have my Irishman's book. It contains a preface, in which the author says:

As I grew to the age of ten to twelve years, nothing gave me so much pleasure as the perusal of voyages and travels.... I now feel persuaded that I am neither tempting Providence, nor justly incurring the imputation of wishing to be talked about, in following the bent of my inclinations, and looking still further about me in the world. I chose Iceland as my destination, because I hoped there to find Nature in a garb such as she wears nowhere else.... judge me therefore, not too harshly, but grant me rather the enjoyment of a pleasure which hurts no one, while it makes me happy.

Did my Irishman (I never knew his name) when he gave me that book, also give me the impetus to be a traveller, writing of the far places in my own country that gave me 'the enjoyment of a pleasure that hurts no one, while it makes me happy'? I like to think that he did."

I quite enjoyed the Mavis Thorpe Clark books which have come my way. Another writer of her style and generation (or a little later) I have always enjoyed is Patricia Wrightson. She was editor of the NSW School Magazine, for which my mother wrote some stories and said she always found her a very sympathetic and helpful editor, and Walter McVitty in *Authors and Illustrators of Australian Children's Books* praises both the concept of the School Magazine for the help it gave both writers and readers, and "The NSW *School Magazine* has played a particularly important role in nurturing Australian talent. Many of today's successful writers owe much to the editorial guidance and encouragement they received from Noreen Shelley, Patricia Wrightson and Lilith Norman during the time these celebrated writers were chief editors of that magazine. The same is true for many of our illustrators."

Wrightson wrote a number of children's books. Recently I saw one for sale; her 1960 book *A Taste of Honey*, so I bought it and enjoyed it. But the thing which struck me very much this time around was the very sympathetic portrayal of the little Aboriginal boy in it.

I know I tend to think that it was people like 'Nugget' Coombs, Charles Perkins, Faith Bandler, Ronald Wilson, Patrick Dodson and other heavyweights who changed a nation's attitudes to race relations. But when I put Wrightson's book aside I found myself wondering if writers like Wrightson quietly did more to change the old embarrassing and humiliating stereotypes and help us to see the barriers where none should exist than the more obviously 'political' players. Wrightson and her fellow authors gently, almost subversively, without preaching or polemics, steered whole generations of schoolchildren towards a more sympathetic understanding ...

Certainly she did not always find it plain sailing. As Brenda Niall writes in *The New Literary History of Australia*; "Two books published in 1960 made an imaginative breakthrough: Nan Chauncy's *Tangara* and Patricia Wrightson's *The Rocks of Honey*. In these a white child's perspective on the Aboriginal tradition is managed with skill and subtlety." And she goes on to say, "The developments in Australian fantasy are much more impressive, with the novels of Patricia Wrightson being the most influential and original. Her most ambitious work, the Wirrun Trilogy of the late 1970s, took her further into the controversial territory of

Aboriginal life and legend. This work is much admired and justly so; and Wrightson has shown herself to be well aware of the skill and sensitivity needed in her enterprise. Nevertheless there has been some concern, not merely from those who, like Lee Harding, see the past as escape from the ‘real’, but from Aborigines who want their heritage of folklore to be interpreted from within their own tradition.”

\* \* \* \* \*

So what of our own Australian Ida? Ida Rentoul Outhwaite?

Educationist Susan Isaacs wrote in her 1930 book *Intellectual growth in young children*, “As soon as we came to realise what a rich fantasy life the young child has, and how inevitably he looks out upon the world from the centre of his own personal feelings, we have behaved as if he did this all the time, and wanted nothing *but* fairies and fantasies ... The events of the real world are, indeed, often a joy to the child, as to us, just because they offer an escape from the pressures of fantasy.”

Ida and her sister Annie were famous in early twentieth century Australia for their fairy books, their illustrations and their stories, but then slowly fairies went out of fashion. Annie mostly wrote the text and Ida did the illustrations. Their first book to be printed in colour, *Elves and Fairies*, came out in 1926 and was snapped up and reproductions of the illustrations “could be found mounted and framed in many Australian homes and schools for decades to come”. The Depression killed off the de-luxe illustrated book and Ida did a comic strip, *Benjamin Bear*, for the *Weekly Times* in Melbourne during the 1930s. Her husband died, her two sons were killed in WW2, and the two sisters lived together again in old age. Their last book was *Nursery Rhymes* in 1948.

But I don’t think it was ‘events of the real world’ in book form which drove them from the book shelves; I think it was the idealised bush creatures, Norman Lindsay’s Bunyip Bluegum and his friends, May Gibbs’ Gumnut Babies, Dorothy Wall’s Blinky Bill, which caught the fancy of Australian children. They were magically unreal too but they belonged in a way that elves and fairies could never quite fit into the Australian landscape.

Yet I have kept an enduring fondness for those old fairy books. I remember my mother had Cicely Barker’s *Autumn Fairies* and an aunt gave me her copy of *About Fairies Old and New* which unfortunately is missing its key first page with details of author and illustrator. I think part of their attraction was their daintiness, their ethereal beauty, so in contrast to life on a dairy farm. Cows are good and worthy creatures but they are large and lumpy, they smell of cow, they are not exactly *clean*—and farm life seems to see-saw between too much mud and too much dust. Fairies were something impossibly beautiful in a misty gauzy way and yet with something cheeky in their stance as they peeped round stems and out of flowers and made human ponderousness and pretensions something to laugh at. Fairies were very much their own selves. They never did homework nor had to sit and pick grass seeds out of their socks.

When a friend in her eighties told me she still had two Ida pictures which she loved I knew the feeling; fairy books came in for criticism as pointless escapism but I think this overlooks the point that children need beauty in their lives and if we are not prepared to create it in our built environment then beautiful books are a partial alternative.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wrightson collected up short pieces for children in *Emu Stew* and included Colin Thiele’s poem ‘Dorothy Duck’ which ends—

Tumbling and stumbling, afraid she’ll be late,  
Frantic feet pedaling at a furious rate,  
Chest low to the ground, the tears on her cheek,  
She ploughs up the wheat with a scoop of her beak.

A frightful example of how *not* to feed —

A duck of bad manners and gobble-billed greed —  
Scooping and scraping, a dredge of a duck,

Digging deep in the mush and the slush of the muck.

But then, when she's dashed and dithered a treat,  
When she's gobbled each dollop and dirtied her feet,  
Devoured demented her desperate needs ...  
She waddles back slowly to her pool by the reeds.

And there, I confess, as she preens and careens,  
And sails by the sedges and water-weed greens,  
I'd give quite a lot, like Tom Sawyer or Huck  
To dabble and dawdle with Dorothy Duck.

It always seems to me that it is adults rather than children who appreciate Colin Thiele's novels like *The Sun on the Stubble* or *Storm Boy*. I have the sneaking suspicion that children find them too lacking in humour and engagement. I hadn't known that Colin Thiele ever wrote poetry and I couldn't help thinking when I came on this piece—'what a pity he didn't develop his talents as a comic poet for children'. It would be more correct to say 'what a pity his poems for children, gathered into his collections *Songs for My Thongs* and *Poems in My Luggage*, did not come out much earlier in his writing career'; a generation of children who found his stories too calm and serious might've had reason to re-think ...

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November 17: Auberon Waugh  
Alison Lester

November 18: Margaret Atwood

\* \* \* \* \*

"All writers are double, for the simple reason that you can never actually meet the author of the book you have just read. Too much time has elapsed between composition and publication, and the person who wrote the book is now a different person or so goes the alibi. On the one hand, this is a convenient way for a writer to wriggle out of responsibility, and you should pay no attention to it. Yet on the other hand, it is quite true."

Margaret Atwood in *A Writer on Writing*.

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Patti Miller in *Writing Your Life* says, "In fact, many people feel that they do have memories stored somewhere—if only they could release them. The written responses to memory exercises I have given in workshops have convinced me that you can recall memories you believe are lost. Even people who are sure they have no recollection of a particular period or person are astonished and delighted to find memories flooding back.

"This observation is backed up by what little scientific knowledge we have about the workings of memory. The basic operations of memory are the gathering, storing and recalling of impressions of events, people and sensations. The first, easily lost imprint of memory is recorded by the cells' bioelectrical action. Storing, the changeover to long-term memory, is probably a chemical operation. Our memories thus become part of our biological make-up. We are, literally, made of our memories.

"For all that, our memories are notoriously unreliable. We are sometimes sure we remember events that can be proved not to have happened. The American writer Mary McCarthy told of how for years one of her children believed Mussolini had been thrown off a bus in Connecticut! When she was older and realized it couldn't have happened she questioned her mother about the incident. It turned out that she had been waiting at a bus stop with her mother when a bus pulled up and a man got out. At the same time, the bus driver leaned over and called out, 'Mussolini has been thrown out.'

"I suspect that in your own family there are contradictory versions of the same event, and everyone is sure their version is the correct one. 'I can see it now,' the person exclaims, and becomes irritated when the picture in their mind is questioned or denied. Unlike Mary

McCarthy's story, few family memories can be verified. You can argue for hours but you will not persuade someone to change what they 'remember'."

\* \* \* \* \*

David Malouf said in his interview with Candida Baker in *Yacker*: "Think of the things that you are told about that happened to you when you were a child. Over and over again people tell you how such and such happened, when you were two say, or three, and you 'remember' it. You don't in fact, but you have been told so often, 'when you were little you did this', it's become so much a part of your history, that you can actually 'remember' being there physically—and you were. Then too, as soon as we start 'remembering' things that happened to us, we change their shape. We re-work them each time in the telling. We shape them differently. So even people who are not writers are dealing with their real experience and shaping and re-shaping it, so that in the end it would be difficult for anybody to know or swear that what they 'remember' is what actually happened. Of course, that is even more true of writing, because you let happen at least some of the things that didn't happen but ought to have. In the world of creation you let them occur." He goes on to say that he thinks "we're all compulsive *shapers*"; and that we in the West tend to shape our lives according to the conventions of the novel. I am not sure that I find that a comforting thought ...

\* \* \* \* \*

This sense of writing as an act of change interests me. Other things, basket-making, knitting, a day at the seaside, have all been put forward as therapeutic. But autobiographical writing is both therapy and a kind of dismay—for who can be truly satisfied with the person they find on that journey back in time?

John Colmer in *Australian Autobiography* writes in his chapter on Hal Porter, 'Porter's *The Watcher* raises a further issue relating to temporal perspective in autobiography. This concerns duration. The person who finishes an autobiography is not the same person who began it. He or she may be changed by outward events, but also and more importantly by the process of writing. In atomic physics Heisenberg enunciated the principle that scientific objectivity could never be achieved because the instruments of atomic measurement, in the very process of measuring, changed what was to be measured. In autobiography there is a process of double indeterminacy at work. Firstly, the observer who is a measurer of his or her past self changes the object in the very process of observing and recreating. And secondly, the transformed past self changes the nature of the observer, who is certainly not the same at the end of the work as at the moment of writing the first page. The recreation of the past self or selves must inevitably change the writer's idea of his or her present self. The process of interaction, transformation and recreations of the self is a continuous one.'

I think all writing, autobiographical or not, changes the writer ...

\* \* \* \* \*

November 19: Nigel Krauth

Michael Lomonosov

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My sister gave me Nigel Krauth's *The Bathing Machine Called the Twentieth Century* (which I enjoyed) for a Christmas present. As I was putting it aside to go to a stall it suddenly occurred to me that the young writers who tend to win things and get published now are mostly those who write 'Australiana' as in Krauth's book or semi-autobiography as in Andrew McGahan's work; in other words 'safe' books, books that don't rock any boats and don't threaten the major figures of the literary establishment.

Is this part of the fall-out from the Helen Demidenko affair? Better to reward a good but unremarkable book? We don't want young people taking risks, doing strange things, hiding behind personas and masks. Fernando Pessoa can be as weird as he likes and we will even admire him in retrospect but we don't want that sort of thing here.

Perhaps. And understandable. Perhaps. We want them to serve their apprenticeships with the usual kind of expected book. Ten, twenty, years down the track they can blaze new trails ... when the Old Guard have fallen off their perches and into their final armchairs.

I don't know if this is so.

But I remember feeling uncomfortable and perturbed over the way some in the Tasmanian literary world talked and wrote about Chloe Hooper's *A Child's Book of True Crime*. It wasn't that it was deathless prose. Her style is very uneven. Sometimes grandiose. Sometimes slangy. The intrusion of very obvious American words such as 'cookies', 'dumpster', 'cupcakes', and 'peek' I found jarring. Despite its various limitations, I still felt that she had done something new and interesting in the crime genre and deserved to reap the benefits.

Yet people jumped up and down both criticising the book and criticising her use of Tasmania as a setting. I think it is legitimate to criticise a book if you have problems with language, plotting, characterisation or anything else ... but I could not understand the fury vented on her use of Tasmania as a setting for a crime story. True, her characters and settings are not beautiful beaches and boutique wines set against lovely old sandstone homes or lush bushland. But then she was not hired to write tourist brochures. And at the same time as people were criticising her for 'getting Tasmania wrong' people were sycophantically praising Nicholas Shakespeare's 'true' version of Tasmania with its greed, cruelty, horror, and banality. Why? I couldn't see that Shakespeare's writing style was more than readable and accessible. He has a story to tell and he goes ahead in a fairly straightforward if messily-constructed way and tells it. But he was seen to be an ideal person to write of his Tasmanian connections and experiences simply because he was already a well-known literary figure. He had gained a name for himself by setting a well-regarded novel in Peru (which the Peruvians may or may not have liked) but he clearly wasn't using Tasmania to help his career along.

But the sense I came away with was that you are not going to be admired for using Tasmania—unless you are a born and bred Tasmanian (or at least a long-time resident not a fly-by-night) or unless you are already famous. This worried me. Is a novelist to be required to set books only in their home town, their home state, even their street? Of course not! Surely not! Must I write solely about Queensland to have anything taken seriously and not tread on any toes? Are Tasmanian writers to be barred from setting novels in Sydney or Alice Springs? The whole business would become absurd ...

Chloe Hooper obviously didn't bow under the criticism. Who knows? Maybe she even remained unaware of it. And she has now gone on to write a quite different kind of book, *The Tall Man*, about the sad events on Palm Island. A death in custody precipitated Palm Island into the limelight but I recently came upon part of the genesis of the tragedy. In *Spouse I Die*, the memories of young Englishwoman Evelyn Maunsell on a cattle station in Queensland's Gulf Country in the early part of the twentieth century, she says: "It was soon after this (the flu epidemic) that the Government began to implement a policy of trying to make more employment for white men on the stations by taking a proportion of the blacks away and settling them on the Palm Island Aboriginal Reserve. The police would come round regularly and take away so many of the black stockmen and sometimes some of the house gins.

"It was a cruel business because it was the younger, experienced workers, who were supposed to be keeping white men out of jobs, that they took away, and this left their parents, and sometimes grandparents, who were living with them on the stations, without anyone to earn money and look after them.

"Old Sergeant Magee, who used to come out for them, was just as disgusted about it as we were. He knew our boys had been born on the station and belonged in that country, but his orders were to take so many blacks from each station and that was what he had to do. He used to come past the veranda at Wrotham Park with the poor things and they would look at me and call out, "Save me, Missus, save me." But there was nothing I could do about it and nothing Magee could do either."

As we have been told, times without number, our Government was doing what they believed was best for the indigenous people and it was all ‘for their own good’ and putting them on an island so there was no way they could ever walk home to see their parents and grandparents again was the best way of inculcating ‘family values’ and it is very hard to understand, apparently, why the people on Palm Island aren’t fussed on the police ...

Of course Hooper is not the sole victim of this kind of criticism, of this daring to poach on what other people regard as their territory. I came across this in Inez Baranay’s article on writing her PNG book *Rascal Rain* which she titled ‘Fraught Territory’: ‘It got ridiculous. A piece in the literary journal *LiNQ* slammed my book for not requesting permission before writing ‘these people’ into my narrative, as if I had no right to write an account of my time in Papua New Guinea that included any description of Papua New Guineans not authorised by them. In a reply (published in vol. 25, no. 1, 1998) I said: ‘It seems that the only permissible representation is none at all, or one couched in terms so carefully correct that a non-academic writer is forbidden the territory.’

There *are* questions of attribution and ownership when it comes to folk lore, indigenous myths, or doing adaptations. But a piece of fiction or travel writing or memoir should stand or fall on the quality of the writing and the story it tells. Nationalism may be a subject to write about. It should never determine who can write what and where. If someone comes from India or Mexico and sets a novel in Australia which makes us smile at an occasional infelicity—what does it matter? We don’t own the idea of Australia—even if we resent anyone else querying our concept of Australia and what it means to be Australian. I hope lots more ‘outsiders’ will come and write about Tasmania (and I hope Tasmanians will write about other places) ... and if Tasmanians are afraid that the market can take only so many books about Tasmania and therefore theirs may miss out ... then it is time to ask searching questions about quality and readership ...

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This morning I was chatting with the ladies in the little City Mission op-shop in Goodwood and I said how disappointing I found women’s magazines these days when it is all-celebrities-all-the-time. I had been talking about it the previous afternoon with the guide at Runnymede and she said she agreed absolutely but she still bought them for the crossword and an occasional recipe. The op-shop ladies also agreed with me, one of them saying she didn’t even know who the people promoted as celebrities all the time actually were. I said I used to enjoy women’s magazines for those little stories of ordinary women and their travels and experiences and ideas and lives. Women’s magazines were one of the few avenues women, particularly countrywomen, had to share with a wider audience. But that has all gone by the board. Now, I know publishers and festivals have very much also got on to the bandwagon of the-writer-as-celebrity and it drives the sale of ‘big books’ yet I think what a writer actually looks like or what they are like as a public speaker should be completely irrelevant; it is the excitement and quality of their writing ...

I remember reading Hal Porter’s account of going to the Edinburgh Writers’ Festival, in *The Extra*, and seeing Norman Mailer drive an Italian writer from the stage by a sustained campaign of abusive interjections and invading the platform. (Though Porter was certainly not an innocent bystander; Mary Lord in her biography *Hal Porter: Man of Many Parts* writes, “He deliberately behaved very badly, playing the simple, anti-intellectual colonial boy and, urged on by a rowdy element of Scots in the audience, repeatedly interjected the speakers; it was calculated rudeness aimed to draw attention, an enhanced version of the performance he gave at his first Adelaide Festival.”) I thought at the time ‘it couldn’t happen here’ but I later read in Julie Lewis’s biography of Olga Masters, *A Lot of Living*, of Masters’ time at the NSW Literary Awards; the events were marked by interjections, point-scoring, and rudeness. Lewis writes, ‘Olga was appalled and couldn’t understand the churlishness of writers who could carp about the donors while accepting their generosity.’ When Olga got up to speak at the launch of her own book *A Long Time Dying* she said, “I’ve entered this world of books late in life and I

must say sometimes I'm ashamed to be in it. I think it was disgusting behaviour and a lot of you should be quite ashamed of yourselves." Lewis writes, 'Anne Whitehead said later, "Everyone ... sort of blanched and looked thoroughly rebuked."'

I had a disconcerting time at a Writers' Festival in Hobart years ago. I was sitting waiting for the panel of speakers to arrive and several women were sitting behind me discussing Cassandra Pybus but in such vicious terms I felt deeply uncomfortable and seriously considered getting up and walking out. When I mentioned this to a friend later she said 'You know why, don't you? It's because Cassandra is about the only writer here who makes any money from her writing.'

Of course publishers and organisers want the sort of writers who do make money and who can be raised to celebrity status and booked in to festivals. But I wonder if writers want what readers want or are expected to want. I even wonder if anyone would have bothered to 'unmask' Norma Khouri if her book hadn't been successful. Most of the writers I know are wonderfully supportive and generous people. But then most of the writers I know, in world terms, are not markedly successful. I sometimes have the disconcerting feeling that the one thing some writers can't stand is another writer getting more of the limelight. Are writers' egos really that fragile?

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November 20: Don DeLillo  
Nadine Gordimer  
November 21: Voltaire  
November 22: George Eliot  
Mary White  
November 23: Robert Barnard  
November 24: Laurence Sterne  
November 25: H. J. Samuel  
Merlinda Bobis  
November 26: Charles Schulz  
Simon French  
November 27: Frank Clune  
Lilith Norman  
November 28: Rosie Scott  
Randolph Stow  
Friedrich Engels  
November 29: Louisa May Alcott  
November 30: John Bunyan  
December 1: Henry Williamson  
December 2: Mary Elwyn Patchett  
Janice Galloway  
December 3: Joseph Conrad  
December 4: Thomas Carlyle  
Ted Greenwood  
December 5: Christina Rossetti  
December 6: Cliff Green  
December 7: Willa Cather  
December 8: Padraic Colum  
John Banville  
December 9: John Milton  
December 10: George Macdonald  
Melvil Dewey

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American librarian Melvil Dewey is remembered by posterity for the Dewey Decimal System and as the ‘father’ of library science. Now call me picky, but I am not convinced that libraries are, or should be, run as a science on scientific principles. We could, building on Dewey’s system, talk of library maths—but again I do not think that libraries have that kind of exactness. To list the books an easily understood way of listing makes a lot of sense. But it is still dependent on human decision making. Human opinions. Human prejudices. Human balancing. When Norma Khouri’s book *Forbidden Love* was treated as fact it was on one shelf. When it was ‘unmasked’ and seen as a work of fiction it was rapidly taken from one shelf and one classification and put on another. Or thrown out. Now biologists do the same with everything from microbes to plants to animals. And astronomers have recently demoted poor little Pluto from planet to mere lump of rock. But mathematicians and physicists rarely go public to tell us that they have finally found that  $2 + 2$  doesn’t always make 4.

So when the ‘father’ of library science chose those words for the title of his cornerstone book just how did he envisage libraries becoming temples to the new scientific impulse?

Library Science is defined as: the study of the principles and practices of library operation and administration. That sounds sensible and useful ... but not quite science. So how did it come to be elevated? The key aspects of its development came in the nineteenth century with the combined explosion in the numbers of books, periodicals, newspapers, and reports being published—and the explosion in the development of public libraries. Before then most libraries were private and people could arrange their books in any way they chose. But public libraries needed both staff and collections to be working to an easily identifiable system. This is where Melvil Dewey came to their aid. First as librarian at Columbia University where he came up with his famous system in 1876 published as *A Classification and Subject Index for Cataloguing and Arranging the Books and Pamphlets of a Library*, set up the first library school to train librarians (as the old criteria of simply being a well-read person was no longer adequate) and founded the American Library Association in 1887, then at the New York State Library he used the idea which had taken over the scientific world: *the need to classify*. Scientists from the time of Linnaeus and his system of botanical classification were busy drawing up tables and lists for animals and birds and insects, for chemistry, for geology, for remote tribes and cloud patterns. It was natural for libraries and their new-found methods of cataloguing and classifying to creep in under this ever-spreading umbrella.

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“A mathematician is a machine for turning coffee into theorems”. (Paul Erdos)  
Logarithms and theorems floated briefly and confusingly through my life when I was fourteen and fifteen; then, with great thankfulness, I left them behind, I assumed, forever ...

But the other day I was reading that search engines use algorithms to find things for us on the internet. Were algorithms mysterious children of logarithms, I wondered. My dictionary says “a logical arithmetical or computational procedure that if correctly applied ensures the solution of a problem” or “a recursive procedure whereby an infinite sequence of terms can be generated”. I cannot say I was any the wiser.

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I’ll take the “when” question historically and use it as an excuse to provide some context as to how we got to the present day in search. Humankind has searched for archived information ever since the dawn of symbolic language; the index and the archive are as ancient as the clay tablet. The technology of classification and information retrieval (IR), as the academic domain is known, did not really take flight until the rise of the printing press and the resultant explosion of widely available printed matter.

In the late nineteenth century Melvil Dewey, widely credited as the father of the modern library, introduced a universal classification system based in large part on a directory-like structure that identified books by their subject using a numeric code. The Dewey decimal system has been updated numerous times over the years and is still widely used, but its subject-based focus would be unable to scale to the enormity of the World Wide Web.

The “when” of Internet search can be traced to the rise of the digital computer in the 1940s and 1950s. As the computer began to take over back-office functions like inventory, payroll processing, financial calculations, and academic research, institutions started to collect large amounts of data, data that, because of the peculiar nature of digital computing, was searchable. This breakthrough led to a revolution in the field of information retrieval. How might one classify information in its most atomic form—the word—as opposed to a book or pamphlet?

Enter Gerard Salton, a Harvard- and Cornell-based mathematician often called the father of digital search. Salton was fascinated by the problem of digital information retrieval, and in the late 1960s developed SMART—Salton’s Magical Automatic Retriever of Text—or what might be considered the first digital search engine. Salton introduced many of the seminal concepts commonly used in search today, including concept identification based on statistical weighting, and relevance algorithms based on feedback from queries. Salton’s work sparked a renaissance in the IR field and inspired an annual conference on digital information retrieval known as the Text Retrieval Conference (TREC).”

From *The Search* by John Battelle.

\* \* \* \* \*

‘Upgrade’ by Gina Mercer

After a long day  
of poets and metaphors,  
she calls home.

He tells her he has:  
replaced her motherboard,  
upgraded her processor,  
created two new USB ports,  
defragged her hard drive,  
refreshed her virus protection,  
increased her memory,  
replaced her fan,  
consolidated her directory.

As the mobile phone  
flubbers his words,  
all she hears is  
the purest love poem.

(from the anthology of four Tasmanian poets: *Seasoned with Honey*)

I enjoyed this little poem and found myself thinking that despite the ubiquity of television sets, hi fi systems, computers, typewriters, freezers, and all the rest of our ‘technology in the home’ there aren’t a lot of poems about them. But no sooner had I thought that than I realised there were any number of poems out there. I just hadn’t particularly noticed. Probably because I am not a very techno-minded-person ...

So here is another one—inspired by a technology which *hasn’t* advanced very much—Christina Hindhaugh’s ‘The New Computer’ to be sung to the tune of ‘Click Go the Shears’ which begins:

Out in his office the young farmer sits,  
Lost in a world full of Ks, bytes and bits,  
Fixed is his gaze at the columns on the screen,  
Struggling to puzzle out just what the hell they mean?  
Click goes the keyboard, click! click! click!  
Wild is his gaze and his hands move quick;

His Missus looks around as she brings a cup of tea,  
And curses the inventor of the Apple IIe.

He struggles on, lost and desperate and increasingly angry and willing to curse it all  
comprehensively but then—

The afternoon is over, the kid home from school  
Runs to the computer, and draws up a stool,  
‘Having trouble, Dad?’ he says. ‘Can’t you make it go?  
Viscalc or Multiplan—what d’ya wanna know?’  
Click goes the keyboard, click! click! click!  
For kids it’s so simple it fair makes you sick!  
Computing when you’re older is medically a risk,  
Cursing at the curser may bring on a floppy disc!

\* \* \* \* \*

“A splendid example of a man whose imagination ran ahead of his age was the English mathematician, Charles Babbage (1792-1871). As long ago as 1819, Babbage had worked out the principles underlying automatic computing machines. He realized that all mathematical calculations could be broken down into a series of step-by-step operations that could, in theory, be carried out by a machine. With the aid of a government grant which eventually totalled £17,000 — a very substantial sum of money in the 1820s — he started to build his ‘analytical engine’.

“Though he devoted the rest of his life, and much of his private fortune, to the project, Babbage was unable to complete the machine. What defeated him was the fact that precision engineering of the standard he needed to build his cogs and gears simply did not exist at the time. By his efforts he helped to create the machine tool industry — so that in the long run the government got back very much more than its £17,000 — and today it would be a perfectly straightforward matter to complete Babbage’s computer, which now stands as one of the most fascinating exhibits in the London Science Museum. In his own lifetime, however, Babbage was only able to demonstrate the operation of a relatively small portion of the complete machine. A dozen years after his death, his biographer wrote: ‘This extraordinary monument of theoretical genius accordingly remains, and doubtless will for ever remain, a theoretical possibility.’

“There is not much left of that ‘doubtless’ today. At this moment there are thousands of computers working on the principles that Babbage clearly outlined more than a century ago — but with a range and a speed of which he could never have dreamed. For what makes the case of Charles Babbage so interesting, and so pathetic, is that he was not one but *two* technological revolutions ahead of his time. Had the precision tool industry existed in 1820, he could have built his ‘analytical engine’ and it would have worked, much faster than a human computer, but very slowly by the standards of today. For it would have been geared — literally — to the speed with which cogs and shafts and cams and ratchets can operate.

“Automatic calculating machines could not come into their own until electronics made possible speeds of operation thousands and millions of times swifter than could be achieved with purely mechanical devices. This level of technology was reached in the 1940s, and Babbage was then promptly vindicated. His failure was not one of imagination: it lay in being born a hundred years too soon.”

From *Profiles of the Future* by Arthur C. Clarke.

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When people talk of modelling it still conjures up images, for me, of trying to glue bits of balsa wood together or pouring plaster-of-Paris into a rubber mould. But now everything, from climate change to our future prosperity, seems to depend on being modelled on someone’s computer. We are always asked to take their results on trust. But should we? Brian Martin in *Strip the Experts* writes: “These days, more and more experts are backing their claims by referring to mathematical models.” He points out that the decisions on what figures will be

factored in are human decisions. “But often it is more effective to attack the modeling process itself by exposing the assumptions underlying the model.” He puts these as:

“First, there are assumptions involved in representing reality by symbols.” A model can use projected deaths in a nuclear accident or a traffic pile-up but it can’t really model emotions like pain or fear or long-term disability; it cannot tell us how many children will have their childhood happiness undermined by nightmares.

“Second, there are assumptions involved in how the symbols relate to each other.” People bring emotional aspects to everything. Death in a nuclear accident may be processed differently to death in a traffic accident; even if they use the same formula. And most people would object to any model which suggested a limited number of deaths is an acceptable risk for any technology—and more so if the projected death is their own.

“Third, models always leave some things out. If they didn’t they wouldn’t be models — they would be reality itself.” But who decides which details are unimportant and can be left out? And what of details which don’t lend themselves to modelling—such as parents considering what level of risk is acceptable for their children’s health?

“Fourth, modellers make assumptions when they interpret the results.” By the time the results of a modelling exercise are presented as news they may have passed through a number of levels, each adding various assumptions and biases to the figures, and we are rarely told what the opinions and attitudes of everyone, from computer expert to head of department or think-tank CEO, really are or how they influenced the final pronouncements. “Mathematics is supposed to be rigorous, and so most people expect mathematical models to be much more objective than a set of opinions strung together. Undoubtedly, mathematical models do have their effective uses in all sorts of fields. When they become most subject to attack is when they are used in areas that have social implications. In these areas, modellers may unconsciously build in assumptions that give results they, or whoever funds them, find useful.”

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“Not even an industry as substantive and serious as publishing is immune.” (To the power of brands.) “Some observers suggest that prudent best-selling authors in the mass market ought no longer to think of themselves as producing books; rather, books produce mass market best-selling authors. It is the authors who are the new brands, whether they write fiction, nonfiction, or faction. Stephen King or Bob Woodward or Tom Clancy or Danielle Steel or Ann Coulter sell *themselves* first, and their books or book titles second. Things are not so different in France, with pop-cultural authors turning out a stream of books and memoirs and essays in which their brand names and *Vogue* magazine photos are what move the product.

“Celebrity branding trickles down and can compel less popular authors to think about their careers in antiliterary ways. In a 2005 Authors Guild symposium on “Platforms and Publicity in a Packed Marketplace” (the title alone tells the story), author E. Jean Carroll, already better known for her column in *Elle* magazine than her books, gushed not about fellow author George Carlin’s books but about his book tour (it “was great”) and his appearances (they “were great”), concluding that “the day is coming when the book will not be the platform. The book is starting to be ancillary to the platform.” As with the weather on news television, the book is beside the point. Speaking with casual spontaneity from the authoritative podium of the Authors Guild, Carroll sums up the spirit of the age of brands: “The book is like, eh, it’s out of print. Frrpp [sic]. Everybody wants to be on the websites and they want to get on the cable TV, they want to get on the radio, they want to get on Sirius [the satellite radio network]. The book is on the outside now. It used to be on the inside, everything swam around that, now the book is on the outside.” The product’s on the outside, the book producer and the producer’s brand are on the inside.”

From *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* by Benjamin R. Barber. It summons up the rather horrible image of authors in glass cases, like cryogenically-maintained corpses, and libraries humming with their life-support systems as we, the public, browse the eerie aisles between them ...

And Clifford Stoll wrote in *The Cuckoo's Egg*, "One of the more pernicious myths of the online world is that of a literary revival. ... Since the networks rely on the written word, you'd expect a rebirth of reading and writing. The Internet should be a garden for literate, well-trained users to take advantage of a new mode of communications ... The result should be the honing of literary skills and a new wave of creative literature." Alas ...

"But instead of an Internet-inspired renaissance, mediocre writing and poorly thought-out arguments pour into my modem. E-mail and postings to network newsgroups are frequently ungrammatical, misspelled, and poorly organized. After trolling up and down the Usenet ... I rarely find prose that's articulate and creative."

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The Dewey Decimal System appears quite simple at first glance:

000-099: This is for generalities such as encyclopaedias.

100-199: Philosophy and related disciplines.

200-299: Religion.

300-399: The social sciences such as economics and law.

400-499: Language materials such as grammars and dictionaries.

500-599: Pure science such as mathematics, astronomy and geology. Pluto might be seen as pure science, even if incorrect, as we have found no use for it so far but I would now think that geology straddles the barrier between pure and applied science.

600-699: Technology and applied sciences such as medicine, engineering, and agriculture.

700-799: The arts including painting, music, and photography. (Though I just noted magazines dealing with Computer Music in the newsagency. I wonder whether they are classified as an art or an applied science?)

800-899. Literature and fiction in general.

900-999: Geography and history and their ilk. I wonder where human degradation of the planet comes in? Is it seen as history, science, an art form perhaps ... or does it come under religion as we have merely been obeying an injunction to 'multiply' everything from ourselves to the number of our toxic waste dumps?

So useful insects like bees come under agriculture at 638 in the scale between 600 and 699 and beekeeping gets its sub-section at 638.1 and the production of silkworms and silk comes in at 638.2; and what could be simpler? My image of Mr Dewey is of a calm down-to-earth man dealing with a calm down-to-earth society ... and I wonder, if anyone had tried to explain Virtual Reality to him, whether he would've classified it under 500, 600, or out in the mysterious reaches of 800? Or whether he might simply have suggested it as a story idea to Jules Verne or H. G. Wells?

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December 11: Naguib Mahfouz

December 12: Louis Nowra

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When I came upon a novel called *The Dictionary of the Khazars* I thought 'what an intriguing way to write a novel'. But then, as so often happens, I seemed to find other people doing the same everywhere. Ciaran Carson writing *Fishing for Amber*; Eduardo Galeano and his *Memory of Fire (Memoria del fuego)*—but I had the vague thought, 'would this idea end up being used to death?' Maybe. But time went by and no more 'dictionaries' came my way and I wondered if the fashion had passed. Whether it had or not, I gave the matter no more thought. But the other day I was reminded of my curiosity when a friend gave me *A Dictionary of Maqiao* by Han Shaogong which purports to be the collection of unique word uses and descriptions by a young Chinese sent to a small and remote village during the Cultural Revolution. I did enjoy it and it reminded me that closer to home Louis Nowra was also said to have played with the form.

I had vaguely kept an eye out but nothing more ... So the other day I thought 'if it won't come to me—then I must go to it' and I tracked down a copy of his *Abaza* which he describes as an 'encyclopedia' rather than a 'dictionary'. It purports to be a collection of insights into a Pacific Island called Abaza which comes into the care of an academic Theo Porter, Chair of Pacific Studies, "This encyclopedia is unique. It is the only one on modern Abaza. How it came to be written is a story in itself. A colleague of mine, Golee Umaba, had been teaching at James Cook University for several years after being forced into exile from his native Abaza. One morning, he flung open my office door (which was a highly unusual act as he was gravely proud of his manners and always gave a few discreet though firm knocks before entering) and began to babble excitedly about the contents of a cardboard box he was cradling."

Abaza, which seems to owe more to places like Zimbabwe, Uganda, and West Africa, has a political regime which wants to wipe out the country's recent past. The scraps of paper in the cardboard box are a chaotic record of that past ...

The book has its moments and I thought it was a clever idea but I found it pretty grim and sordid. And it suffered in comparison with the 'dictionaries' which had preceded it. Although Abaza is an imaginary island, and Nowra can therefore do whatever he likes with it, my ideas of the Pacific got in the way. I think of Pacific Islanders as having a rich tradition in language, colourful creoles and pidgins combining with indigenous languages and the occasional startling intrusion of the latest jargons and buzz words of technology, diplomacy, economics, tourism, aid, and anthropology, not to mention the attempts to integrate languages by beachcombers, traveling salesmen, missionaries, and schoolchildren. I never doubted that the 'encyclopedia' was the work of an Australian, even when he inserts some 'Abazan' words, and that I felt was its fundamental weakness ...

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December 13: Heinrich Heine

December 14: Michael de Nostrodamus

Antony Beevor

December 15: Edna O'Brien

J. M. Whitfield

December 16: Jane Austen

Quentin Blake

December 17: John Greenleaf Whittier

Thomas Chandler Haliburton

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"In *The Clockmaker* (1836), Nova Scotian Thomas Chandler Haliburton (1796-1865) coined phrases such as 'the early bird gets the worm' and 'you can't get blood out of stone,' which have become part of the language, Haliburton characters like Sam Slick rivaled those of Charles Dickens in popularity, and Mark Twain called Haliburton the 'father of American humor.' " (*The Lonely Planet Guide to Canada's Maritime Provinces*)

"The dialogues between Sam Slick and the squire are satirical attacks on the shiftlessness of the Nova Scotians, mobocracy and the levelling tendencies of the age. They are enriched by the tremendous vitality of Sam's colloquial speech and by his fund of anecdotes and tall tales. Many of Sam Slick's sayings, such as "This country is going to the dogs" and "barking up the wrong tree," have become commonplaces in English idiom" (from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). So it would seem we owe the unknown Mr Haliburton quite a lot. In fact he was well known in his day. He became a lawyer, then a judge, as well as being in business in Canada but towards the end of his life he moved to England and became Tory MP for Launceston in the House of Commons. I wonder if anyone wanting to denigrate his speeches, his ideas, or his policies, derided him as 'Sam Slick from Slickville'?

In fact he was an interesting man. Douglas Lochhead in *The Canadian Encyclopedia* says of him, "Haliburton's reputation lies in the many substantial works in provincial history,

political pamphlets and fiction that he wrote from 1823 to 1860. His first book was published in 1823 when he was 27. *A General Description of Nova Scotia* (1823) was followed by a more ambitious 2-volume work, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia* (1829). His other historical writings include *The English in America* (1851) and *Rule and Misrule of the English in America* (1851). Two political works also demonstrated Haliburton's lifelong interest in Canadian affairs: *The Bubbles of Canada* (1839) and a shorter pamphlet, *A Reply to the Report of the Earl of Durham* (1839). It was *The Clockmaker, or the Sayings and Doings of Sam Slick of Slickville* that made Haliburton the first Canadian writer to gain an international reputation. Twenty-two installments of *The Clockmaker* appeared in the newspaper *Novascotian* before it was first published in book form by Joseph Howe in 1836. There soon followed *The Clockmaker*, 2<sup>nd</sup> series (1838), and in 1840 the 3<sup>rd</sup> series. It is estimated that as many as 80 editions of *The Clockmaker* appeared during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

"Perhaps Haliburton's finest and most enduring work is *The Old Judge; or Life in a Colony* (1849). This work reveals Haliburton in a more somber and reflective mood as he states with genuine feeling his farewell to Nova Scotia. *The Old Judge* lacks the wisecracking observations that made the adventures of Sam Slick so readable, but it is balanced and marked by a maturity not always present in Haliburton's other writings.

"Like his fellow Nova Scotians, Thomas McCulloch and John Young ("Agricola"), Haliburton provoked Nova Scotians to better themselves in agriculture and business to combat the depression of the 1820s. Despite his initial debt to McCulloch, he extended his writings to fight the political situation both at home and in England. *The Clockmaker* has been described as "a series of moral essays pointed by satire." There can be no doubt that Haliburton's extraordinary ability as a writer of social satire, which was heightened by his ear for local idiom, dialect and anecdote. No full bibliographical study of Haliburton's career has yet been made, nor is there a book-length biography."

(Thomas McCulloch was born in Scotland and became a Presbyterian minister, educator, journalist and noted letter writer in Pictou, Nova Scotia. His best known work was the *Letters of Meohibosheth Stepsure* later reprinted as *The Stepsure Letters*. "In an effort to arouse his fellow Pictonians to improve their farming practices—and style of life in general, he chided them in a humorous, satirical fashion." John Young, also born in Scotland, (and it isn't hard to see why it was renamed Nova Scotia, instead of Acadia) was a businessman and politician and wrote more directly on agriculture in the *Acadian Recorder* under the name of "Agricola".)

Having written all this I found myself wondering whether any of Haliburton's writings are still available. The library told me the Victorian and Edwardian collection in Launceston has several of his books—but only to be read there in a secure room and wearing white gloves. The Astrolabe bookshop said they occasionally get something of his in but not just lately ... So as I, like Mr Oates, may be awhile ... I thought I'd just give you this little bit from *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*: "Haliburton's finest picture of Nova Scotia, *The old judge; or, Life in a colony* (2 vols, London, 1849), is a sympathetic, rich canvas delineating vice-regal rituals, country picnics, and village court trials. It is the first literary collection of folklore, legends, and ghost tales, of which 'The Witch of Inky Dell' is one of the most evocative stories in nineteenth century Canada. Haliburton uses three narrators to give coherence to the loosely structured sketches and stories: the British traveller who opens the story; the Windsor judge, Barclay, who guides the visitor and explains the details of colonial life to him; and Stephen Richardson, a vigorous and enterprising farmer who acts as master of ceremonies at an inn when a group of friends entertain each other with stories."

Haliburton's 'Recollections of Nova Scotia' first appeared as sketches in *The Novascotian* before appearing in book form as *The Clockmaker*. "His satiric purpose was to show that actions, not complaints, were the only way to improve local conditions, and each sketch—composed mainly of dialogue—begins with an entertaining incident and ends with a pithy moral observation. He drew on his own experiences as a judge to send his fictional squire around Nova Scotia in company with Sam Slick, the brash Yankee clock pedlar whose

aggressive salesmanship is a compound of ‘soft sawder’ and ‘human natur’. Haliburton deliberately presents Slick with many inconsistencies, especially with regard to his ideals and actions, which on one level convey Haliburton’s own ambivalent attitudes towards Maritimers and, in later books, towards the British, and on another level represents Haliburton’s reservations about the directions of American society. Thus Slick praises American commercial know-how and attacks Nova Scotian apathy, yet he is suspicious of American demagoguery and praises Nova Scotia’s natural resources and its hardy inhabitants. But readers could ignore Haliburton’s message because Slick’s energetic high spirits and his Yankee dialect—an unceasing flow of homely aphorisms and epigrams—charmed audiences everywhere: Slick, the archetypal swaggering and sharp American trader, became one of the most popular comic figures of the century and turned the first series of *The Clockmaker* into the first Canadian best-seller.”

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December 18: ‘Saki’ H.H. Munro

Stephen Biko

December 19: Richard Leakey

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Richard Leakey, indeed the whole Leakey family, is forever bound up with scholarly articles and scientific debate on the origins of *homo sapiens*; but even that rarified world of delving into million-year-old fossils is not without its egos, its conflicts, its reluctance to let other people study the latest finds, its major disagreements. Roger Lewin’s book *Bones of Contention* charts the course of some of these quite fundamental disagreements. But the book also contains an unexpected little sidelight which interested me.

Lewin writes, “Misia Landau was sitting in Yale University’s Sterling Library, its leather-covered chairs and high book stacks imposing a palpable sense of Ivy League academia. It was the middle of her doctoral years, 1979, and she was reading intensely *The Morphology of a Folk Tale* by Vladimir Propp, a Russian literary critic. The occasional whispered exchange hung in the Gothic hush. Books placed on old oak made that curious muffled thud that happens only in such places. Something modern was being played on the University’s famous carillon. But Landau was hardly aware of any of this. She was preparing to run to the anthropology book stacks. But, restrained by centuries of tradition, she walked quickly instead, her heart thumping with excitement. “When I got to the shelves, the titles leaped out at me: *The Story of Man ... The Adventure of Humanity ... Adventures with the Missing Link ... Man Rises to Parnassus*. Looking at them, I knew I had made a discovery. It was like finding a fossil.” She had discovered a missing link between literature and paleoanthropology.”

Landau had been a student of human biology at Oxford, then came to Yale to do research in anthropology. Richard Leakey had found, in 1972, what was thought to be “a 3-million-year-old, large-brained human ancestor—code-named 1470—on the eastern shore of Lake Turkana in Kenya.” So students were keen to study brains and Landau set up an experimental project to look at chicken brains. But she found she wasn’t cut out to be that kind of clinical researcher and found herself wondering what direction she should take. Her thesis supervisor was David Pilbeam, a British anthropologist interested in the history of ideas in paleoanthropology. She began to think about looking at analysing early ideas in the field of paleoanthropology. But she was also a keen student of literature ...

“Every paleoanthropologist is familiar with the great names of the 1920s and ’30s— the Americans, Henry Fairfield Osborn, William King Gregory, Frederick Wood Jones, and the British school of Sir Arthur Keith, Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, Sir Arthur Smith Woodward—but few can claim more than a passing acquaintance with their words.” Landau immersed herself in their writing and found that they all used a four-stage-explanation but disagreed on the stages. A British sociologist at Yale, Keith Hart, suggested she look at aspects of French structuralism and Russian formalism as well. And a friend lent her Propp’s *Morphology of a Folk Tale*. The

book, she found, was an anatomical approach to literature and she began to think of a literary approach to anatomy. Propp mainly used Russian literature to come up with his basic structure: the hero enters, is challenged by, and overcomes, a series of tests, before he triumphs. “Propp was very systematic, and he broke this basic structure down into a sequence of separate functions; the precise identity of characters and activities at each point may differ, but the underlying structure remains the same.”

As she read she realised she was seeing the same structures in all the early writings on human evolution. “In other words, while Osborn, Gregory, and their colleagues considered themselves to have written scientific analyses of human evolution, they had in fact been telling stories. Scientific stories, to be sure, but stories nevertheless.”

The four stages the early paleoanthropologists described were: Terrestriality = shifting from the trees to the ground; Bipedalism = moving from four legs to two; Encephalization = the expansion of the brain and the development of intelligence and language; and Civilization = the development of technology, morals, and society. Osborn, like Darwin, took the four stages in that order. But Keith put bipedalism before terrestriality and Elliot Smith put encephalization first, while Gregory moved civilization into second place and Wood Jones largely agreed with Elliot Smith.

“Each author had his own reasons for casting the evolutionary scheme the way he did, but there is order in the apparent chaos, argues Landau, because all followed the same basic structures in their narratives: the form of the hero myth.”

Landau simplified Propp’s 31 functions down to 9: “These include the introduction of the humble hero (an ape, a monkey, or a diminutive prosimian) in an initially stable environment; our hero is then expelled from this safety (because of climate change) and is forced to embark on a hazardous journey during which he must overcome a series of tests (new environmental conditions) and thereby display his worth (develop intelligence, bipedalism etc); thus endowed, our hero develops further advantages (tools, for Osborn; reason, for Keith) only to be tested again (the rigors of Ice Age Europe); the ultimate triumphs the achievement of humanity.”

But—“There is a final irony,” says Landau. “Again and again we hear how a hero, having accomplished great deeds, succumbs to pride or hubris and is destroyed. In many narratives of human evolution there is a similar sense that man may be doomed, that although civilization evolved as a means of protecting man from nature, it is now his greatest threat.”

But Osborn and the early researchers were much more confident and “frequently expressed themselves in the language of epic tales.” Keith wrote “Why, then, has evolutionary fate treated ape and man so differently? The one has been left in the obscurity of its native jungle, while the other has been given a glorious exodus leading to the domination of earth, sea and sky.” Roy Chapman Andrews, a colleague of Osborn’s at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, said “Hurry has always been the tempo of human evolution. Hurry to get out of the primordial ape stage, to change body, brain, hands and feet faster than it had ever been done in the history of creation. Hurry on to the time when man could conquer the land and the sea and the air; when he could stand as Lord of all the Earth.”

But was it because all these men had absorbed folk tales from childhood and they naturally cast their narratives in this form? Or did it go deeper and the human brain was structured in such a way that it sought narrative and staged development? Or was it because the idea of progress had entered every aspect of society and evolution was the prime example of progress? Or was it the beauty of story-telling where the end result is known, where each step is in a way a preparation for the next step, all coming together to build to a climax? Or is it that we are the inevitable outcome of evolution, in effect the “purpose of it all” and therefore the story already exists before the story-teller appears to tell it? Evolution was a story waiting to supplant all previous stories and myths.

And as other scientists began looking at Misia Landau’s conclusions they started to see the impact of epic and narrative and folk tale even in ‘hard sciences’ like physics and biochemistry. The folk tale was intruding even into areas where it was not thought to belong

and subtly shaping and rearranging the way people plan their research and the way they present that research ...

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December 20: Bob Graham  
Alain de Botton  
December 21: Nat Gould  
December 22: David Martin  
December 23: Giuseppe di Lampedusa  
Anthony Cronin  
December 24: Matthew Arnold  
December 25: Rebecca West  
December 26: Robert Leroy Ripley

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Tom Gilling in his amusing little novel *The Sooterkin* set in Hobart Town in the early nineteenth century draws on that human fascination with the strange, the bizarre, the abnormal, the monstrous, the unexplained. Perhaps we aren't quite as blatant about it now; people with obvious disfigurements do not get put on show in traveling circuses (though they may turn up on 'A Current Affair'). But we are still as fascinated by the unexplained or the unfortunate. Stories, for instance, about Siamese twins still turn up regularly in the media. Simon Welfare and John Fairley in *Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World* give the place of 'Father' of collecting such items to an American; "No book of mysteries should fail to acknowledge the work of Charles Fort, an American who devoted his life to collecting reports of bizarre happenings. Fort was born in the Bronx district of New York in August 1874 and for many years worked as a journalist with a notable lack of success. However, a small inheritance which came his way at the age of forty-two gave him the freedom to devote himself full-time to the work for which he is now remembered.

"For almost a quarter of a century, Fort sat in the New York Public Library or, when he was living in London, in the Reading Room of the British Museum, scouring scientific journals and newspapers for reports of anything that could not easily be explained or did not fit into accepted categories of knowledge. From this eye-straining labour and the almost indecipherable notes he made, came four exotic books published between 1919 and 1932: *The Book of the Damned*, *New Lands*, *Lo!* and *Wild Talents*.

"Near the beginning of *The Book of the Damned*, he proclaims his method: 'I have gone into the outer darkness of scientific and philosophical transactions and proceedings, ultra-respectable, but covered with the dust of disregard. I have descended into journalism. I have come back with the quasi-souls of lost data.'

"Fort is true to his word; his books are bizarre catalogues of unexplained events which have become known in memory of their recorder as *Fortean*. Within the pages of *The Book of the Damned*, for example he records falls from the sky of red dust, frogs, 'manna', nitric acid, limestone, grain, coke, cinders, snakes, ants, worms and cannon balls.

"Today, more than sixty thousand of Fort's notes are preserved in the New York Public Library. They contain accounts of UFOs collected decades before the terms 'flying saucer' or 'UFO' were coined, like the 'splendidly illuminated aeroplane' which passed over the English village of Warmley in 1912, or the triangular shapes reported in the sky over Bermuda in 1885, a strange fore-taste of this century's alleged discovery of a Bermuda triangle said to be fatal to ships and aircraft. There are phantom soldiers, luminous owls, mirages, 'new' stars and planets, extraordinary coincidences, and strange booming sounds.

"Fort died in 1932, but his work is continued by dedicated followers throughout the world. Many of them publish magazines crammed with *Fortean*, gathered, according to Fort's method, from newspapers and scientific journals."

Charles Fort didn't try to explain his mysteries though he light-heartedly suggested that things that fall might come from a 'Super-Sargasso Sea' in the sky which he called

‘Genesistrine’. Welfare and Fairley say of him, “It is a truism to say that we live in a strange and unpredictable universe, but Fort believed so with a passion tempered by a sense of humour and of wonder. He was not against science, he was against scientific dogmatism, and opposed to scientists who are quick to reject accounts of strange phenomena out of hand. Things have changed little since the days of early in this century when Fort sat poring over ancient journals in reading rooms. His books and the events in them are a warning against the belief that modern science has begun to comprehend the total complexity of the universe, in his books and notes, Fort celebrates the natural world’s unpredictability and any rationalist tempted to dismiss reports of extraordinary happenings should pause and think again, lest he should hear the wise laughter of Charles Fort as that great archivist of the world’s mysteries rests from his labours among the falling frogs and leaping fishes on the ice-strewn shores of his Super-Sargasso Sea.”

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I am grateful to Charles Fort for collecting one story of an ‘underground’ mystery for Welfare and Fairley to recount: “Strangest of all these is undoubtedly the collection of ancient Chinese porcelain seals found all over Ireland in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were, as Fort puts it, ‘not the things with big, wistful eyes that lie on ice, and that are taught to balance objects on their noses, but inscribed stamps, with which to make impressions.’

The seals are tiny, consisting of a cube measuring about 1 1/8 in (28 mm) surmounted by the figure of an animal, and are made of a type of hard porcelain known as *blanc de chine*. It is now known that such seals were made for Chinese scholars. Each seal bore an auspicious message, and the scholar, who would have owned twenty or thirty, would have sealed his letter with the one he deemed to be the most appropriate. They were common in the East, but what were they doing in Ireland? Especially as they were found at a time when there were no known direct trading links between China and Ireland. Moreover, such seals have never turned up in a similar manner elsewhere in the British Isles.

It was a Mr Joseph Huband Smith of Dublin who first brought the seals to the attention of his countrymen in a paper he read to the Royal Irish Academy in 1839.

He had an extraordinary story to tell. For several years, Chinese seals had come to light in obscure places in the towns and countryside of Ireland. The first seems to have been found in about 1780, when a turf cutter found one buried in a bog at Mountrath near Portlaoise in what was then called Queen’s County. Another was discovered in about 1805 in a cave near Cork harbour; yet another by some men who were digging up the roots of an old pear tree in an orchard in County Down. Then there was the seal found at Clonliffe Parade near the Dublin Circular Road in 1816. A sixth seal was turned up by a plough in a field in County Tipperary, and two more, in the bed of the River Boyne in County Meath, and in Killead, County Down, respectively.

In the years that followed Huband Smith’s revelations, the mystery of the Chinese seals stirred fierce passions among Irish antiquarians. None of them could agree where the seals came from, what the animal on top of them was, whether the inscription on the underside actually meant something in Chinese, or how it was that such exotic objects had seemingly been scattered years before in such unlikely places. Smith lost little time in informing the Academy of his own theory: ‘It is therefore, at least, possible that they may have arrived hither from the East, along with the weapons, ornaments, and other articles of commerce, which were brought to these islands by the ships of the great merchant-princes of antiquity, the Phoenicians, to whom our ports and harbours were well known.’

In the 1840s, a man named Edmund Getty from Belfast decided to try and answer some of the questions about the seals. He consulted a naturalist who confirmed suspicions that the ape-like animal on the top of them had been modeled to look like a Chinese monkey. He then decided to take impressions of all the seals that had so far turned up — there were now about twenty-six of them — to determine whether they bore an inscription in Chinese. This was quite

an undertaking, but fortunately one of his friends was appointed to a job in Hong Kong, and he was able to ask two groups of Chinese scholars to attempt to translate them.

Such was the pace of communication between Ireland and the East in Victorian times, that two years went by before Getty received the answer to his question. It was that the seals were undoubtedly Chinese and that the type of script on them was in use in about 500 BC, the time of Confucius. The scholars agreed on the meaning of many of the inscriptions; one seal, for example, bore the legend: 'A pure Heart', and another 'The Heart though small, most generous'. Sometimes, however, the Chinese scholars disagreed with each other as to meaning. According to a group of scholars in Nanking, one seal's inscription read 'Some Friend'. While Shanghai academics maintained that it meant 'Plum trees and Bamboos'.

Still, some progress had been made, and by 1853, at least fifty seals had been found. By 1868, the Royal Irish Academy learned from a Dr Frazer that there were now sixty-one seals but he believed that they were relatively modern, probably dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, or even later.

But the mystery of how the seals got to Ireland still remains. A few of the seals are to be found on the top shelf of a glass case in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. With them are four seals which the museum's catalogue says were 'bought at Canton, 1864', and were ordered by Dr Frazer for comparison.

At our request, they were examined for the first time in many years by Jan Chapman, an orientalist from Dublin's Chester Beatty Library. To begin with, she noted that the fact that the seals were made of porcelain was very unusual, since they are usually carved from minerals. Their size, too, surprised her, for most Chinese seals, including some on other shelves in the museum are much larger. She was, however, able to identify the porcelain itself as the product of a factory situated near one of China's main trading ports, Amoy. Although the factory started making porcelain in the twelfth century, Miss Chapman believes the seals found in Ireland date from the early eighteenth century, which is when the factory exported porcelain of that type. But, beyond that, she can shed no light on the mystery. All the seals were, it is true, found east of a line drawn from Lough Foyle to Cape Clear, and it may be that they entered Ireland at Cork. But this is too vague a pattern to be of any real use, and the Chinese seals of Ireland remain as puzzling as they were in Fort's day."

Joseph Huband Smith was a Dublin barrister but a markedly unsuccessful one. A square peg in a round hole, a dreamer, a man who would much rather be traipsing through bogs or hunting in caves for strange items from the past, he wrote a book called *A memoir of the name of O'Gowan or Smith* in 1837 as well as occasional articles, he had various money troubles and ended his days in near poverty. He leaves the impression of a man who would rather do almost anything, no matter how poorly remunerated, than tout for legal work. But at least he will forever be linked to one enduring little mystery.

How do I know and why do I care? Joseph Huband Smith was my great-great-grandfather.

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Charles Hoy Fort I found described as a "journalist and author acclaimed by enthusiasts who organized The Fortean Society (1931) and founded its magazine *Doubt*. His books containing esoteric theories on psychic and other phenomena, *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932), are based on library research and presumably agree with scientific facts; they deal, according to one reader, with "portents, the horrors and mysteries of Nature, disappearances, strange forms of demise". His work of collection of obscure anomalies has continued in the *Fortean Times* ...

His better known colleague in the realms of strange information is Robert Ripley with his famous "Believe It or Not" columns and books. Ripley (1893 – 1949) was born in California but came to New York to make his name as a cartoonist, radio broadcaster, and surprisingly a sports writer. He began writing his syndicated pieces "Believe It or Not!" and these were so

popular that the first collection was published in 1928; and his oddities have continued to be reprinted in newspapers and books ever since. But the obvious question that comes to mind is: how much was Ripley influenced by Fort?

\* \* \* \* \*

December 27: Elizabeth Smart

December 28: Leslie Rees

December 29: Dobrika Cosic

December 30: Timothy Mo

Elyne Mitchell

December 31: Fumiko Hayashi

Hiroto Goto

Simon Forman

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“In some ways, Forman’s situation resembles that of his contemporary, John Dee. Frozen in the mid-seventeenth century by Meric Casaubon’s publication of his conversations with angels, Dee’s reputation remained that of a quack and a dupe until I.R.F. Calder and Frances Yates began his rehabilitation in the middle of the twentieth century by taking seriously his Neoplatonic occultism.” So wrote Barbara Howard Traister in *The Notorious Astrological Physician of London*. This was Simon Forman, a ‘quack’ doctor in London in the late 1500s.

I came upon the story of Emilia Bassano, an Italian musician who was said to have been both mistress to Henry Carey, Baron Hunsdon, and Shakespeare’s Dark Lady and at the time I simply accepted the story; presuming people had done some research into both claims. But since then I have begun to doubt: are they both true, is one true and not the other, are both concoctions for quite other purposes?

Henry Carey was said to have had an affair with Emilia in about 1592 resulting in the birth of a son. The problem with this is that Henry was already in his late sixties, very old in Tudor terms; his younger wife was still alive and would outlive him by ten years and although I have not found any information on her as a person she didn’t bring him a title, important connections, or an impressive dowry, so it is very likely that he simply found her an attractive and charming person. In more than forty years of marriage there is no sign of another mistress (which doesn’t mean there weren’t any; just that Henry may have been very discreet or conducted his affairs well away from London; perhaps taking advantage of when he was away in the Scottish Borders) and his daughter Catherine married Charles Howard, credited with defeating the Spanish Armada, who unlike many Howards seems to have had a reputation as a rather cool, cautious, and correct man who would not want to embroil himself with the sort of gossip which might besmirch his rising star or damage his standing with the Queen. It was Henry’s son George who was entrusted with the job of riding to Edinburgh to tell the young King James that he was now King of England in 1603; a job for someone both tough and trustworthy. (It is also George who seems to have had contact with Forman—though whether for his medical or astrological services isn’t certain.)

Henry Carey by then was a patriarch, a grandfather, indeed probably a great-grandfather. Taking a little avuncular interest in a pretty young musician with the novelty of being a woman in a man’s sphere seems possible and old men do sometimes act uncharacteristically in their dotage—but would he want to heave his possibly gouty frame out of his chair, hurt his wife, embarrass his children and grandchildren, make him, the Queen’s cousin, the butt of gossip? Perhaps. And would he have wanted an illegitimate son called Henry when he had chosen not to name any of his seven sons after himself? George MacDonald Fraser in *The Steel Bonnets* describes Carey as “Tough, bluff, brave and blunt-spoken, Hunsdon’s ‘custom of swearing and obscenity in speaking made him seem a worse Christian than he was’.” And the DNB describes him as a blunt man popular with his soldiers but lacking in cultural interests, although he was quite a keen amateur botanist. He was said to suffer from gallstones—which might make anyone swear. I have a picture of a man’s man who gave his name and patronage to the

Chamberlain's Men but took little real interest in them or the cultural life of London; undoubtedly there were concerts and masques and soirées he couldn't avoid but it is hard to see him seeking out the sort of musical occasions where he might meet someone from Emilia's milieu. And the sort of intimate little feminine boudoir Judith Cook conjures up in *Dr Simon Forman* suggests the sort of place in which he would feel most uncomfortable.

The situation is also problematic with the second claim. Emilia reportedly married an Italian musician Alfonso Lanier who apparently had no objection to her not being a virgin, calmly took on the care of another man's child, and then complacently looked the other way while both Shakespeare and Dr Forman cuckolded him. This all sounds very un-Italian. It seems very much more likely that Emilia simply married the father of her baby ... though it doesn't necessarily stop her having a lively imagination and an unfettered desire to drop 'names' and equally it doesn't stop Dr Forman having an equally lively imagination and an even more pressing desire to feel himself the confidante of the more famous ...

(Emilia later ran a school for girls; something for which such an apparently notorious reputation would not be an asset. Emilia complained of men's perfidy in her later writings but did she mean they promised much and delivered little—or did she mean they had blackened her precious reputation merely to make themselves sound more fascinating, more the gay dog? As she refers to men as spiteful—I would incline to the second idea.)

And I began to wonder more when I realised that the origin of both stories was apparently in the records kept by Simon Forman. Would Henry Carey, if he genuinely cared about this young woman, want her to go to a doctor seen as a 'quack' rather than to a member of the Royal College of Physicians? It might be argued that he would want to keep the matter quiet—but Forman was hardly a model of discretion and confidentiality.

There were only about thirty licensed doctors in London at that time. Most people went to apothecaries, herbalists, barbers, bone-setters, anyone known to have a little knowledge, as there simply weren't enough doctors available and many people couldn't afford them anyway. Although the College tried to raise standards they clearly couldn't prosecute everyone who claimed to be able to help or cure. But they were in almost constant conflict with Forman which suggests that his claims and his self-aggrandisement also played a part in the heated situation. And with the College likely to descend at any time to hunt through his records and papers he probably saw any claim to a connection with the Queen's cousins as a kind of insurance.

There is also a problem with the diaries kept by both Forman and Dee. What level of trust should we put in them? Various writers stress that these were their private records and they had no reason to exaggerate, fantasise, or misrepresent things. I would disagree. The people who truly wish to keep their lives private usually avoid putting private notes to paper or take the few minutes necessary to consign their diaries, letters, and private papers to the flames before they die. Both Dee and Forman went to considerable trouble to make sure their diaries and papers survived. They very clearly had an eye out for posterity—which inevitably, subtly or not-so-subtly, would have influenced their presentation of their lives in their diaries ...

And what of the information in them? Forman says Lady Norreys came to see him but using the name of her maid Bridget Kingsmill. But Bridget Kingsmill was her sister-in-law not her maid and was almost certainly in Ireland at that time where her husband Sir Thomas Norreys had been campaigning (and died horribly of gangrene); so in the complexities of discretion and subterfuge facts are slippery things—and Forman may have obscured and changed things further ...

I was reading Benjamin Woolley's *The Queen's Conjurer: The Life of John Dee* at the same time as I had Judith Cook's *Dr Simon Forman* and I wondered if there was an important point I had initially missed. Dr Dee was getting old by the 1590s. The Queen would soon be in need of another astrologer. Forman had no obvious entrée to the Queen—so did he instead look for ways in which he might insinuate himself into the lives of the Carey family, who along with the Knollys and Brandons, were the Queen's closest relatives?

But Dee, although he was visited by the Queen in his laboratory and she asked him for advice, probably should not be seen in such specific terms as her astrologer. Peter Brimacombe in *All the Queen's Men* says, "he was able to find favour with the new sovereign when he selected a propitious date for her coronation, as a result of which she made him her official Court Astrologer" but he was neither paid nor consulted on a regular basis. Yet as I read Woolley's biography I realised there was an even more tantalising possibility beneath all the outward business of their lives. Both John Dee and George Carey were members of Sir Walter Raleigh's secretive 'School of the Night', a group which dabbled in the occult. It would not surprise me in the least if Forman hoped to be invited into this mysterious circle.

None of Forman's writings, even his medical treatments, can be seen as simple facts. The Elizabethan era did not subscribe to the idea of 'the facts and nothing but the facts'. And Forman created various family trees for himself, he recreated his past and his education to suit the moment, and he was a man who was desperately trying to claw himself up from an uneducated nobody to a position of some importance. Truth was not some ideal he clung to.

The real interest in Forman's life to a modern reader, I would think, is in the treatments he jotted down—though we cannot know for certain if he used them all or if his patients were amenable to his experiments—or whether they went away cured.

And for Forman, known to be a keen playgoer, the claim to have the titled patron of a theatre troupe, the musicians who entertained at both public and private court masques and balls and plays, and a key figure in the theatre world all in some way beholden to him would probably have appealed greatly to his view of himself. Even if the connections were very slim, very dubious, or very remote I don't think he would have had any difficulty in expanding them in his own imagination and conversation ...

But, however interesting his life and times, I don't think we should trust him implicitly as a source for details on the lives of Henry Carey and Emilia Lanier, or clues to Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady' ...

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Forman was almost as busy casting horoscopes as he was giving people strange draughts and debatable ointments. It is hard now to envisage a world where people placed such faith in astrology and where the person who set their broken leg was also the person who told them what to expect in their future.

John Dee is remembered as an astrologer. Woolley's book is very interesting for the light it throws on his complex life as both astrologer and astronomer, mathematician, map-maker, antiquarian, philosopher, psychic, scholar, traveller and cryptographer. Some of his works which were originally thought to be spells and incantations have now been shown to be early studies in ciphers. More problematic are the séances where he believed he was being put in touch with angels—even though many of the recorded conversations are very unangelic ...

But probably the best known astrologer and prophet of that era was a Frenchman.

"Michel de Nostredame (1503-66) was born in St. Rémy, Provence, into a Jewish family which had converted to Catholicism to avoid religious persecution by the Church. France had officially expelled its Jews in 1394, and converts were regarded with suspicion, particularly those arriving from Spain and Portugal. The institution of the Inquisition in France in 1558 officially constituted a formal method of punishing heresy. Nostredamus transgressed the law of the Church in more ways than one—first as a "New Christian" (one who had converted from Judaism) and second as an alchemist, astrologer and prophet, performing activities which were considered to be in the realm of God alone." (*Nostradamus: Prophecies for Women* by Manuela Dunn Mascetti and Peter Lorie)

He trained as a medical doctor and made a living from it. But his prophecies came to him in rhyming quatrains while he was in a trance state and he often did not know what they meant himself—and this has allowed people ever since to make their own interpretations and link his words to their own particular beliefs. He destroyed quite a lot of his own writings in an excess of caution. But enough has come down to us to puzzle over.

And there is always that question in there: can foreseeing the future enable you to change it? The answer, probably, is yes. But I think there is a very real danger lurking. Being warned that you will die a horrible death is a swift way of destroying the happiness of the time remaining to you—and doesn't necessarily provide you with any realistic means of avoiding that horrible death ...

So what of his prophecies about women? He prophesied disaster before Elizabeth came to the throne but I wondered if this one might also refer to her:

'The female change will be very difficult:

City and province will gain by the change:

The heart will count most, prudence well established, chasing out cunning,

Sea, land, people will change their whole state.'

Or might we see it as something more general and more modern?

Dee lost many of his ancient books to the ravages and greed of his supposed friends. He buried some of his materials in his garden for safe-keeping (from where they were rescued by Elias Ashmole), and Woolley also tells the story of a London couple, Robert and Susannah Jones, buying an old chest in 1642 and discovering that it contained a secret drawer with mysterious papers written in Latin in it. Forman's materials came safely to Elias Ashmole via Richard Napier but these hidden papers were first used by the maid for lining pie tins. The remaining papers were then saved from both the kitchen and the great Fire of London. Mrs Jones was widowed and then remarried—to Thomas Wale, a warder in the Tower of London and an acquaintance of Elias Ashmole. He swapped the papers for a book on the Order of the Garter. Ashmole was thrilled with his newly acquired papers because they were part of John Dee's *Liber Mysteriorum*, his book of mysteries. If anyone had 'lucky stars' then it seems to have been Mr Ashmole ...

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The world of the sixteenth century saw study of the occult as something which could be expected to lead to secret knowledge and power. Alchemy was still seen as possible, even realistic. Knowledge without a full inventory of spells and incantations and readings was of little interest. But the gradual growth of the scientific process which believed that even the greatest of mysteries would prove to have a natural explanation and even the most terrible of diseases might some day have a cure saw fewer people like Forman able to make a living.

Implicit belief in witches and spells gradually faded. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries study of the occult had turned to the investigation of phenomena like ghosts and clairvoyance which science couldn't explain and mainly responded to by suggesting people were making it all up or suffering delusions—which, I'm sure, was quite often the right explanation.

But this changed world brought forward a number of very interesting but often eccentric characters who thought they might be able to come up with answers to the unsolved mysteries of life ... Madam Blavatsky, Oliver Lodge, F. W. H. Myers, George Gurdjieff ... and one who gets overlooked now but who was well-known in his time: P. D. Ouspensky. I still come upon interesting and thought-provoking quotes and ideas sourced to him in all kinds of places.

"One history passes by in full view and, strictly speaking, is the *history of crime*, for if there were no crime there would be no history. All the most important turning-points and shapes of this history are marked by crimes: murder, acts of violence, robberies, wars, rebellions, massacres, tortures, executions ... This is one history, the history of which everybody knows, the history which is taught in schools.

The other history is the history which is known to very few. For the majority it is not seen at all behind the history of crime. But what is created by the hidden history exists long afterwards, sometimes for many centuries, as does Notre-Dame. The visible history, the history proceeding on the surface, the history of crime, attributes to itself what the hidden history has

created. But actually the visible history is always deceived by what the hidden history has created.” P.D. Ouspensky in ‘A New Model of the Universe’.

“It was in the Wimbledon Public Library that I came across a book called *In Search of the Miraculous* by P. D. Ouspensky, and knew at once that this was one of the most important books I had ever read. It describes, of course, how the young Moscow journalist Ouspensky is introduced to an exotic-looking stranger whom he calls G, a man with the ‘face of an Indian rajah’. G explains that he and his pupils are engaged in a task which they call ‘the work’, but offers no further explanation. It is only after several meetings, when Ouspensky complains that people are turning into machines, that G tells Ouspensky that the simple truth is that we are all machines, possessing virtually no free will, and that moreover we are all asleep. It is only gradually that Ouspensky begins to understand what G means when he says that our lives are lived on an entirely mechanical level, and that only with a tremendous effort can we cease to be machines. This effort is what G calls ‘the work’.

The book influenced me so deeply because I had long recognised that a large part of me was ‘mechanical’. T. S. Eliot has a line in *The Family Reunion*: ‘partial observation of one’s own automatism’. Of course, what really interested me was the question Ouspensky asked G: how is it possible to become free?

I was even more delighted when I discovered in the library a book called *Venture with Ideas*, which explained it all in far simpler language, and which made clear that G was George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.”

(*Dreaming to Some Purpose* by Colin Wilson)

Ouspensky, writer, mathematician, and mystic, was born in Moscow in 1878 where he wrote several books and formulated various theories before meeting George Gurdjieff and became his best known ‘disciple’. But Ouspensky was not so much interested in occult and unexplained phenomena as in the intrinsic but mostly untapped abilities of human beings and the world beyond our current state of knowledge, including his theory of the six-dimensional continuum ... Today, physicists theorise more dimensions beyond the accepted four, but Ouspensky’s ideas were radical in their time and still thought-provoking ...

He died in England in 1947, followed by Gurdjieff in 1949, and his widow Sophia Ouspensky died in 1961. But death did not prevent his publishers continuing to bring out his books. I found Faber advertising his *Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* in these words “This is the only novel by the author of that great work *Tertium Organum*, and it deals with the ever-fascinating problem: if you had your life to live again, what would you do with it?” And later his *In Search of the Miraculous* came out, puffed as “Ouspensky describes the conversations between Gurdjieff and his pupils with an exactness which conveys a vivid picture of two of the most extraordinary men of our generation.” All very intriguing. But I felt I wanted to read something of Ouspensky’s myself before I endorsed other people’s views.

So this week I have been in the State Library reading *The Psychology of Man’s Possible Evolution*, *The Symbolism of the Tarot*, *Tertium Organum*, and very briefly *The Fourth Way*. He is easy to read but challenging to take on board ...

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“If intelligence exists in the world, then intelligence must exist in everything, although it may be different in its manifestations.”

“The way of eternity is a curve.”

“The meaning of life lies in eternal seeking, and *only by seeking* shall we ever find new reality.”

THE END