

**A
SETTLED
FACT**

**compiled by
J. L. Herrera**

To the Memory of

My Grandmother

Hilda Clarke (née Colgan) who loved books.

And with Special Thanks to

Madge Portwin, Cheryl Perriman,

Isla McGregor, Margaret Clarke,

Laurie Zambon, Jane Walker,

Sue Wilson, Edwin Clarke,

and Cris Henderson.

INTRODUCTION

Every so often I say to myself ‘I’ve done enough writer’s calendars—it’s time to do something else’. But the simple fact is—they are a kind of addiction. All those interesting little snippets that aren’t a story in themselves (well, maybe they are but I am content to leave them as fragments) but which seem to beg me to do something more than jot them on the back of an envelope or piece of junk mail.

So I thought I would do some shorter calendars. Instead of massive things that seem to go on for ever and which can’t be fitted on a disk without being fiddled round with or turned into a zip file and such worries I would be content with something of a hundred pages or so. Instead of doing one book in three years—what if I were to do one book in one year and three books in three years? Would it substantially change anything other than the length?

And yet, what is it about the form or the idea that is so disarmingly attractive? It might be that I was brought up on a stern regimen of ‘waste not, want not’ though wasting not never stops people from wanting; they just turn their smug sense of being good and conscientious into the corollary: ‘I really think I deserve to let my hair down now’. It might be something a little sorrowful in the idea that something written with such care gets no more response than me saying ‘well, that was interesting’ as I close a book and put it in a box for a market stall or op-shop; the feeling that some things deserve more. And it might be the sense that writers’ calendars invite didacticism whereas that is usually a death knell to novels. I can divert this aspect of myself into my calendars and, with luck, leave imagination to flow untrammelled in more creative work.

Perhaps it is all of those things. It doesn’t matter.

My hope is always that joy in compilation translates
into pleasure in reading.

J. L. Herrera

A SETTLED FACT

January 1: J. D. Salinger

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There is the authorised biography where friends and relatives come round the writer, breathe down his neck, make sure he keeps the halo shining, the pay-off being the promised land of access to letters and diaries fiercely guarded by those same friends and relatives ... and its opposite, the unauthorised biography where unnamed 'friends' provide the scurrilous, the scandalous, the titbit which is never properly sourced and remains to hang over all subsequent work. And then there is plain biography, usually of the long dead, and purporting to be calmly accurate.

J. D. Salinger was possibly luckier than he deserved to be when his daughter Margaret Salinger wrote her memoir *Dream Catcher*. At first I thought she had probably decided to write in response to one of those dreaded unauthorised—when she says, 'My father's nickname, Sonny, was given to him at birth by his parents. Ian Hamilton, in his book *In Search of J.D. Salinger*, claimed that it was at the McBurney School, which my father attended in ninth grade, that "he was nick-named 'Sonny' by his chums, perhaps with a hint of sarcasm." Please, *chums*. On the West Side of Manhattan, perhaps? Several of my dad's army buddies in the foxholes and bloody battlefields of World War II were referred to, by the same scholar, as his *colleagues*. "Let me confer with my colleagues, Rocco," Jerry said. "Oh, Rocco, would you be so kind as to pass me the ammo?" "Right-o, Sonny old chum," Rocco expostulated laconically.... I can't stand it.'

(The J. D. stood for Jerome David.)

She sets up the reader's sympathy in the early pages, 'In mainstream magazines, such as those in which my father published his first stories, as well as in daily newspapers and other forms of mass entertainment, anti-Semitism ran rampant. That bastion of the mythical "good old days" Americana, *The Saturday Evening Post* (which would later publish several of my father's early stories), published a series of articles from 1920 to 1921 alleging that the Jews of Poland (such as my grandfather) were, among other things, "human parasites ... mongoloids not fit to govern themselves."'

(I suppose it is something that they *did* publish his stories ... something they might not have done if his name had been Barack Obama ... but I was interested to see Marion Maddox's assertion in *God under Howard* that *The Saturday Evening Post* was a staple of the Howard household and did a lot to formulate his view of the world. It would seem to have quite a lot to answer for!)

When he married he insisted that his teenage wife give up all contact with her friends and family and he took her away to a remote house in New Hampshire with no mod cons where he demanded five-star-hotel type service whilst constantly changing his adherence to various strange cults and demanding that she constantly change her views in line with his. In this abusive relationship it is not surprising that she slipped into severe and damaging post natal depression. The one amazing thing to come out of the whole saga is that every player in Salinger's life survived, reasonably intact, though needing varying amounts of therapy to pull through ...

The trouble was, at the end of it, I realised I *didn't* want to go back and re-read *Catcher in the Rye* ... nor did I want to read a biography, authorised or not, of him.

I can remember people who loved his famous character and saw *Catcher in the Rye* as a coming-of-age book. I know others who invested Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* with this same halo. It is a fascinating question: do young people *need* a coming-of-age book in the way that other rituals and ceremonies have been used down the centuries? And if they do—should the book be more than a 'good read' or does it just need a sense of speaking to that deep desire to cut loose and live as an independent being? And if its influence can be profound then what might we hope young readers get from such a book?

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- January 2: Isaac Asimov
- January 3: J.R. Tolkien
- January 4: David Allen
Brian Mackness
- January 5: Umberto Eco
- January 6: Kahlil Gibran
- January 7: Stewart Fraser
- January 8: Wilkie Collins
- January 9: Morris Gleitzman
Robert Drewe
- January 10: Robinson Jeffers
- January 11: Alan Paton
- January 12: Dorothy Wall
- January 13: Michael Bond
- January 14: Hugh Lofting

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“Cher Ami was the most famous pigeon of World War I, perhaps of history. During the war, a battalion had been cut off. No one knew where it was, so it became the “Lost Battalion”. The Lost Battalion sent pigeons out with word of its location, but the birds were all shot down. However, Cher Ami, with part of her leg shot off, managed to get through to headquarters. What drove Cher Ami on no one will ever know. Perhaps she ate a better brand of birdseed. But she saved many lives. The only birdbrains in that entire operation belonged to those gentlemen who managed to misplace an entire battalion in the first place.”

(*How to Live with a Pampered Pet* by Eric Gurney.)

And on a more serious note; R.V. Jones in *Most Secret War* wrote, “Another wartime experience that made me wonder was the ability of pigeons which had spent their entire lives in England to home back to their bases after we had dropped them on the Continent. I spent some time with the Air Ministry Pigeon Service in the months after the war, learning from the experts what pigeons could do. There was evidence that the last twenty or thirty miles of their journeys were made by visual means, and that they used landmarks such as coastlines: the Norwich fanciers, for example, complained that in pre-war races from France their birds were always about twenty minutes later than those of the Lowestoft fanciers, the theory being that all the pigeons flew up the coast of Suffolk and Norfolk, when the Lowestoft birds could simply drop into their lofts, while the Norwich birds had another twenty minutes flying overland once they left the coast. Geographical landmarks, though, could not explain a good deal of the wartime flying, and I began to wonder whether the birds had developed a form of inertial navigation, based on the semicircular canals in their heads, which were known to be accelerometers. We tried to keep the Air Ministry Pigeon Service in being after the war, with a view to organizing a prolonged series of experiments, but the scheme fell through when both the pigeons and I left the Air Ministry.”

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“If I could only write a book I would write one on men, and I would call it *Rats, Rape and Rheumatism*. Oh, what fun I would have with that book, Foster! Imagine the face of a publisher when I took him a book with that title! He would say: ‘Eh — but — eh — we cannot publish a book like this, you know!’ And I would say: ‘And why not, pray? Look at Mrs. Asquith.’ And after we had looked at Mrs Asquith he would publish my book at once, and I would go into Hatchard’s in Piccadilly and ask Mr. Humphreys: ‘And how is my book going. Mr. Humphreys?’ ‘I beg your pardon?’ he would say. ‘Yes, Mr. Humphreys, my book, *Rats, Rape and Rheumatism*.’ And I would say that very loud, you see, Foster, and every one in the shop would look at me, whispering among themselves: ‘There is that terrible woman who wrote that terrible book!’ And with one accord, in fact one might almost say in a body, they would drop the trash they had thought of buying and buy my book, for it is not every day, Foster, that a woman writes a book called *Rats, Rape and Rheumatism*.”

From ‘Shelmerdene was Late for Dinner’ by Michael Arlen. Rats, rape, and rheumatism seem to sum up a lot of aspects of war.

To the list could be added: lice. George Orwell wrote in *Homage to Catalonia*, “All of us were lousy by this time; though still cold it was warm enough for that. I have had a big experience of body vermin of various kinds, and for sheer beastliness the louse beats everything I have encountered. Other insects, mosquitoes for instance, make you suffer more, but at least they aren’t *resident* vermin. The human louse somewhat resembles a tiny lobster, and he lives chiefly in your trousers. Short of burning all your clothes there is no known way of getting rid of him. Down the seams of your trousers he lays his glittering white eggs, like tiny grains of rice, which hatch out and breed families of their own at horrible speed. I think the pacifists might find it helpful to illustrate their pamphlets with enlarged photographs of lice. Glory of war, indeed! in war *all* soldiers are lousy, at least when it is warm enough. The men who fought at Verdun, at Waterloo, at Flodden, at Senlac, at Thermopylae — every one of them had lice crawling over his testicles. We kept the brutes down to some extent by burning out the eggs and by bathing as often as we could face it. Nothing short of lice could have driven me into the ice-cold river.”

Hans Zinsser in his famous book, *Rats, Lice and History*, has a rather curious take on the role that rats, lice, and disease have played in invasion, war, overcrowding and colonialism. “This book, if it is ever written, and — if written — it finds a publisher, and — if published — anyone reads it, will be recognized with some difficulty as a biography. We are living in an age of biography. We can no longer say with Carlyle that a well-written life is as rare as a well-spent one. Our bookstalls are filled with stories of the great and near-great of all ages, and each month’s publishers’ lists announce a new crop. The biographical form of writing has largely displaced the novel, it has poached upon the territory that was once spoken of as criticism, it has gone into successful competition with the detective story and the erotic memoir, and it has even entered the realm of the psychopathic clinic.”

Why the difficulty in recognition? Because he set out in a rambling discursive rather odd style to write the biography of a disease, typhus fever, in the 1930s. But it might equally be called a foray into parasitism—with the wonderful throwaway line: “In the last analysis, man may be defined as a parasite on a vegetable.” Or a quick journey through forgotten wars and invasions. Or a discussion on various related diseases and their insect hosts.

And his style is not that of most bacteriologists. “The louse shares with us the misfortune of being prey to the typhus virus. If lice can dread, the nightmare of their lives is the fear of some day inhabiting an infected rat or human being. For the host may survive; but the ill-starred louse that sticks his haustellum through an infected skin, and imbibes the loathsome virus with his nourishment, is doomed beyond succour. In eight days he sickens, in ten days he is *in extremis*, on the eleventh or twelfth his tiny body turns red with blood extravasated from his bowel, and he gives up his little ghost. Man is too prone to look upon all nature through egocentric eyes. To the louse, *we* are the dreaded emissaries of death. He leads a relatively harmless life — the result of centuries of adaptations; then, out of the blue, an epidemic occurs;

his host sickens, and the only world he has ever known becomes pestilential and deadly; and if, as a result of circumstances not under his control, his stricken body is transferred to another host whom he, in turn, infects, he does so without guile, from the uncontrollable need for nourishment, with death already in his own entrails. If only for his fellowship with us in suffering, he should command a degree of sympathetic consideration.”

He ends a gloomy subject on a relatively buoyant note. “Typhus is not dead. It will live on for centuries, and it will continue to break into the open whenever human stupidity and brutality give it a chance, as most likely they occasionally will. But its freedom of action is being restricted, and more and more it will be confined, like other savage creatures, in the zoological gardens of controlled diseases.”

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Peter Haran wrote a book he called *Trackers: The Untold Story of the Australian Dogs of War* in which he said, “I was dragged through the Vietnam War on the end of a 20-foot dog leash. Some combatants packed a butt-busting backpack, rifle and bandoliers of ammunition. Others loaded shells into 105 howitzers, or lugged explosives and blew up enemy bunkers. Troopers grunted inside steel-hulled armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and tanks, some fretted over maps figuring where Charlie would be this time tomorrow. Special Air Service (SAS) super-soldiers stalked through the forest on a ghost-who-walks mission looking for the Viet Cong. Then there was me. I was pulled through the bush at the end of a tracking lead.

“I was a dog handler in a combat tracking team who spent the war watching a dog’s rear end bobbing ahead of me. My life depended on a wet nose and the uncanny instinct of a black Labrador-kelpie cross smart arse called Caesar.

“This tracking dog thought he had the wood on any digger. He did. He could see, smell and hear Charlie long before we walked into a firefight. He knew where the mines were, where the trip wires were strung, and he could cover ground chasing the enemy at speeds which literally took your breath away. He had the shit scared out of him by the odd big bang. That was when he wasn’t out scaring the shit out of us.

“War was a ball for Caesar; the ultimate game for the mongrel who once called a Sydney dog refuge his home.

“When I went to Vietnam with Caesar I cursed the day I volunteered to become a tracking dog handler. The day I left him there broke my heart.

“Somewhere in the middle of an old rubber plantation in South Vietnam are the remains of two blocks of dog kennels. Those who have been there in recent years say nothing remains of the First Australian Task Force Base (IATF Base) in Phuoc Tuy province. That’s understandable — it has been more than 30 years since 6000 men and machines stirred up choking red dust and created rivers of mud at a place called Nui Dat.”

Even though dog lovers in Australia raised more than enough to bring all the dogs home to Australia and to cover the costs of their quarantine period the Australian Army refused. All the dogs were left in Vietnam and the fate of most of them is not known.

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But the animal that was used most and suffered most in war was of course the horse. Anna Sewall in *Black Beauty* has her fictional old cab-horse Captain tell of his experiences in the Crimean War. “Just then, a soldier whose horse had been killed under him caught my bridle and mounted me; and with this new master I was again going forward; but our gallant company was cruelly overpowered, and those who remained alive after the fierce fight for the guns came galloping back over the same ground. Some of the horses had been so badly wounded that they could scarcely move from the loss of blood; other noble creatures were trying on three legs to drag themselves along, and others were struggling to rise on their fore feet, when their hind legs had been shattered by shot. Their groans were piteous to hear, and the beseeching look in their eyes as those who escaped passed by and left them to their fate, I shall never forget. After the battle the wounded men were brought in, and the dead were buried.”

“And what about the wounded horses?” I said; “were they left to die?”

“No, the army farriers went over the field with their pistols, and shot all that were ruined; some that had only slight wounds were brought back and attended to, but the greater part of the noble willing creatures that went out that morning never came back! In our stables there was only about one in four that returned.”

The real stories were often even more horrifying. J. M. Brereton in *The Horse in War* says, “The horse is by nature one of the most timid and nervous species of our animal world. ... Yet, throughout recorded history the horse has been man’s most loyal and steadfast ally in battle. He has patiently suffered untold terror, and dreadful mutilation; he has galloped unflinchingly into valleys of death; he has borne the captains and the kings and their armed cohorts to the ends of the earth, enabling them to carve out their empires. No other animal has exerted such profound influence on the affairs of mankind; without the horse the pattern of world history would surely have been otherwise.” And yet horses, had they evolved differently, might have been saved a great deal of suffering. Because horses (and their close relatives) have the one thing no other animal has: a backbone which curves down and is padded on both sides.

Hugh Lofting was inspired to create Doctor Dolittle by seeing the suffering of horses in World War One. Serving in the Irish Guards, he felt when he sat down to write to his children Elizabeth and Colin “the news was either too horrible or dull” wrote, “If we made the animals take the same chances we did ourselves, why did we not give them similar attention when wounded? But obviously to develop a horse surgery as good as that of our Casualty Clearing Station would necessitate a knowledge of horse language.” So John Dolittle M.D. was created. He sent home stories and drawings of the Doctor’s adventures. His children loved them, his son insisting that people call him John Dolittle, and on his way back to New York (his wife was American) in 1919 he showed them to novelist Cecil Roberts on board ship. Roberts was captivated and introduced Lofting to his publisher. *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* came out the following year.

Brereton says the British Army lost 256,000 horses on the Western Front mainly because “Picketed out in the open in the Flanders winters, often standing in liquid mud over the fetlocks, even the hardiest ‘good doers’ rapidly lost condition and succumbed to lung and digestive troubles. During the winter of 1916 a single veterinary hospital in France was losing an average of fifty horses per week through a virulent form of influenza.” There were vets there, in fact WWI was the first war in which veterinary care for horses became a part of planning, before that horses were simply shot where they fell, but it did not prevent horrific suffering; those pictures of horses and mules drowning in mud or shattered by artillery fire are a vivid reminder of a dreadful aspect of war ...

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I do not think I was a fan of Hugh Lofting’s Doctor Dolittle books as a child but I did love one little bit: the place in *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* where he suddenly has a door opened to him. His parrot Polynesia says to him, “Did you know that animals can talk?” She explains that she has two languages, people’s language and bird-language, and he sits down and starts to fill a notebook with ‘bird words’. “At tea-time, when the dog, Jip, came in, the parrot said to the Doctor, “See, *he’s* talking to you.”

“Looks to me as though he were scratching his ear,” said the Doctor.

Polynesia points out that animals don’t only talk with their mouths. “They talk with their ears, with their feet, with their tails — with everything.” I think it met that secret desire children have to be able to understand the animals around them—or to believe understanding and communication is possible.

But the other day I noticed *Doctor Dolittle’s Zoo* on a stall and thought I would try it. I think I can understand better now the reasons for which it failed to grab me as a child; his pleasure in explanations and organising things, its deep sense of Englishness, a wry rather understated humour rather than an obvious need to laugh, a sense of meandering through anecdotes and related stories which slow the plot action, and an almost Biblical sense of allegory which gives it an old-fashioned and rather adult feel.

They are perhaps books to be read to small children by someone who knows when to stop and has an ability to do lively animal voices ... and by older children interested in the ideas expressed via the animals ...

Yet the books are infused by a sense of kindness, an aspect which is missing in many more modern books for children, and this is also an aspect which was a feature of Lofting's life. Although he used racial stereotypes in the early stories (including words like 'coon' and 'nigger') and in his simple distinctive drawings, he wrote later, "If we make children see that all races, given equal physical and mental chances for development, have about the same batting averages of good and bad, we shall have laid another very substantial foundation stone in the edifice of peace and internationalism." He used both his stories and his essays to speak out against things such as fox-hunting, and against the way the classics and sagas were dumped on children as 'must read' books, writing:

"The boy may not have heard his father boasting of the genius of a crack regiment, but he has read a whole heap of so-called children's classics in which highly painted heroes galloped, glorious and victorious, across bloody battlefields. That kind of battlefield has gone for good—it is still bloody, but we don't gallop. And since that kind of battlefield has gone, that kind of book—for children—should go too ... "

"The beauty of the sagas is something none of us would like to see disappear. Yet their aesthetic burden includes many things beside beauty. Bloodthirstiness, superstition, bigotry, and primitive ignorance are among them."

He did not want them banned. He simply did not feel they were suitable reading for children.

From his childhood when "he kept in his mother's linen closet what has been described as 'a combination zoo and natural history museum' " he never ceased caring passionately about animals but after bringing out one *Dr Dolittle* book a year in the 1920s he gradually grew tired of the good doctor, although he continued to write about him up until his death in California in 1947. He wrote other things for children, such as *Porridge Poetry* in 1925 ...

'Twas in the tropic latitudes
That we were talking platitudes,
Just sailor-like chit-chatitudes,
As any ship-mates might.

We forgot to take our longitude
(Which was a grievous wrongitude)
So we didn't reach Hong-Kongitude
Till very late that night. ...

As well as essays and stories for adults ...

But perhaps the thing he cared most passionately about was the cause of peace. His children's books are infused by the desire to see people (and animals) resolve conflict and disharmony but they rarely speak bluntly against war—though he does have a wasp say in *Doctor Dolittle's Garden*, 'It seemed such a stupid waste. From one end of our beautiful valley armies would come with cannons and horses and everything ... Then ... they would go away again, leaving hundreds of dead men and horses on the ground which smelt horribly for a few days ... ' (the ultimate perhaps in litterbugging)—so it is his writings for adults which are most strongly anti-war.

Edward Blishen in his memoir *Hugh Lofting* writes of his 1942 poem *Victory to the Slain*, "Lofting cannot be taken seriously as a poet (other than a comic one), but the passionate despair that marked the end of his life, and that lay its shadow on the character of John Dolittle himself, is here seen in most moving nakedness. The poet, out walking sees

a soldier all alone
Here seated on the High Street's curb of stone.
The blue of hospital he wears.

Around his feet lie matches' embers.
If we forget he still remembers.
His features pale show no regret;
But with his mates—and thousands yet,
 Can he forget?

Thinking that 'in war the only victors are the slain', the poet walks on and enters a church. Even here he is reminded of battle by the tattered banners and standards that hang on the walls. The sight of the poor-box reminds him of the malign power of money:

What has money, in its essence
Or as an instrument of power, consigned us?
To hoard is not to earn
Money-power in Past, as now,
 Made continents in devastation burn.

In his head he hears the marching of feet, and cannot tell one army from another—that of his own war, that of the new one:

It's every score of years and five
 That they return.

He imagines war following war, in a fearful sequence:

 When nation against nation
Shall at last lay down their arms,
Will class against another come—
The Reds against the Whites”
 And faiths and races, too ...?

The poem ends with a scream—the poet's, and that of a bomb falling from an aeroplane overhead:

At last with whistling scream, it strikes
Cutting through the chancel-roof, it strikes.
The bomb
Explodes before the tabernacle of our dreams.

Against the scream he set a tiny hope, symbolised by a small door in one wall of the church : such a door must remain for Man as

His ultimate escape
From this returning curse,
 His malady of mind ...

Reading *Victory for the Slain*, a poem of pure anguish : and remembering that behind it lies the long, high-spirited, inventive saga of John Dolittle, that gentle comedy for children through which Hugh Lofting sought to give them a vision of man's most serious problems; doing this, one is bound to think of Doctor Dolittle himself, in his last phase, weary and saddened, and to feel the profoundest compassion for a writer who, working for so long with such hope, came at the end of his own days to such desolate hopelessness.

Planes!—Planes over playgrounds,
Over prayers for the dead—the freshly dead!
Useless! ... Uselessness! ”

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January 15: Mazo de la Roche
January 16: Susan Sontag
January 17: Anton Chekhov
 May Gibbs
January 18: Sally Morgan
 A. A. Milne
January 19: Edgar Allan Poe
January 20: Harold Gray

January 21: John Cheney
January 22: Ian Austin
January 23: Derek Walcott
January 24: Ethel Turner
January 25: Russell Braddon
January 26: Brian Garfield
January 27: Lewis Carroll

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Lewis Carroll wrote in *‘Wise Words about Letter Writing’*, “Don’t fill *more* than a page and a half with apologies for not having written sooner.” This tradition is still alive and ... reasonably well. But I think the brevity of emails, text messages, and their ilk, will soon drive such long-winded courtesies right out the window.

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“Often, when we had a letter to write when we were very young, we would go to our parents or to some older person and ask: “What will I say?” And many of us, perhaps indeed most of us, remain like that all our lives. In the East the letter-writer was a professional figure. There he sat with his little desk and his pot of ink and his pen, and, if anyone wanted a letter written, it was to the letter-writer that he went. People needed some one to tell them what to say. In our countries we can go into a shop and buy a manual of letter-writing, a handbook which will give us specimen letters to show us what to say on different occasions.

When we ask: “What will I say?” we do not really mean quite that. We know quite well *what* we want to say. We may want to send a word of thanks for a gift or for a kindness; we may want to send a request for help or for information; we may want to send a message of friendship or good-will or love; we may want to send our good wishes or our sympathy or our congratulations or even our complaints. This much we know. The problem that most people have is not to know *what* to say but to know *how* to say it. Very few people are really articulate; most people have a real difficulty in putting their thoughts into words, and still more difficulty in putting their feelings into words.”

(from *The Plain Man Looks at the Lord’s Prayer* by William Barclay.)

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‘HINTS ON WRITING FOR THE PRESS.—It would be a great service to editors and printers if all who write for the press would observe the following reasonable rules:—

- i. Write with black ink, on white paper, wide ruled.
- ii. Make the pages or folios small, one-fourth of a foolscap sheet is large enough.
- iii. Leave the second page of each leaf blank; or, in other words, write on one side of the paper only.
- iv. Give to the written page an ample margin *all round*; or fold down the left-hand side to the extent of one-fourth the width of the entire paper so as to leave a broad margin on the left side of the paper.
- v. Number the pages in the order of their succession.
- vi. Write in a plain, bold, legible hand, without regard to beauty of appearance.
- vii. Use no abbreviations which are not to appear in print.
- viii. Punctuate the manuscript as it should be printed.
- ix. For italics underscore one line; for small capitals, two; capitals, three.
- x. Never interline without the caret (A) to show its place.
- xi. Take special pains with every letter in proper names.
- xii. Review every word, to be sure that none is illegible.
- xiii. Put directions to the printer at the head of the first page.
- xiv. Never write a private letter to the editor on the printer’s copy, but always on a separate sheet.’

(*Enquire Within upon Everything*. 1899.)

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I brought down the wrath of an aunt and a cousin on my head for passing on a letter to the family member damagingly criticised in it. It is an interesting question: the legalities of such an action. Because a letter belongs to the person it has been sent to. But the copyright remains with the writer. So I can legally show the letter to anyone I want to—but should I want to publish I would need the permission of the writer; which, in this instance, obviously would not have been forthcoming. But my aunt and my cousin were not concerned with the legalities of the matter (nor did I want to publish it); they felt I had been profoundly discourteous. I felt that spreading damaging rumour and innuendo behind the back of a family member was worse.

In the old days it was common practice to pass letters from an absent relative round the family circle. It must at times have raised hackles. It also must've been inhibiting. You couldn't very well describe Uncle Sam's shonky business dealings to your family if you knew there was a good chance that Uncle Sam would get to see the letter. At least you could—if you didn't mind Uncle Sam immediately declaring you were never to darken his door again and that he was going to cut you out of his will. I'm not sure how we should read this kind of inhibition into correspondence from the past. But I think one reason why people often spent years refusing to speak to a relative or a neighbour was because they had no means to physically remove themselves from the presence of someone who had cheated or hurt them. To refuse to enter into conversation, to cut them dead in the street, to pretend they were invisible was the only alternative—apart from apologising or demanding an apology.

Diaries, of course, were seen as more private (notwithstanding Cecily in *The Importance of Being Earnest* saying to Algernon when he wants to read her diary: 'Oh no, you see, it is simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication. When it appears in volume form I hope you will order a copy') but never totally private. Parents saw themselves as having a right to read their children's diaries and husbands saw nothing wrong in believing they had a right to their wives' secret ponderings (though not necessarily vice versa). This is the point L.M. Montgomery makes in *Emily of New Moon*: 'And yet there was a difference—a very vital difference. Elizabeth Murray had learned an important lesson—that there was not one law of fairness for children and another for grown-ups. She continued to be as autocratic as ever—but she did not do or say to Emily anything she would not have done or said to Laura had occasion called for it.' (Emily is their orphan niece and she writes out some of her loneliness and grief in 'letters' to her dead father ... which her Aunt Elizabeth finds and reads.)

And no one has ever engaged with the question of whether Anne Frank's diary should have been published without Anne's permission. Saying something is an important document, that it gives an insight into history, is usually enough to over-ride any questions about privacy, copyright, and permission.

A friend of my mother's, Mary Brice, wrote in 'Glimpse of Amsterdam', "Across the road Anne Frank's Huis stands solid and tall, its top windows catching the late sunlight. The last tourists have wandered away. And there are few people abroad in the quiet of the November afternoon. Yet fifty-odd years ago there was unbelievable violence in this peaceful street by the canal.

"In the annexe behind this house, the Frank family and four other Jewish friends spent over two years hidden from the Germans. In 1944 they were betrayed and sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, travelling in the last convoy of cattle trucks before Brussels was liberated. Only Mr. Frank survived. Fortunately Anne's diary was found (on) the floor of her room, trampled by the police but intact.

"One night, unable to sleep. Anne sat at one of the windows. In her diary she wrote:

"The dark rainy evening, the gale, the scudding clouds held me entirely in their power. It was the first time in the year and a half that I'd seen the night face to face. After that the longing to see it again was greater than my fear of burglars, rats or raids on the house."

"Poor Anne, who was thirteen, and at that age should have known the joy of playing in the sun and running in the rain!

“The chestnut tree, which so delighted Anne with its new green dress in spring, is bare again. Across the water the old clock still relentlessly booms out the hour. The shadows are long on the canal. Although the annexe is empty now the feeling persists that it is still occupied in some way. There is a sudden draught as if a door had been flung open, a rustle as if someone paused by the window.”

* * * * *

In theory, letters do give a useful insight into the writer, but I always remember the salutary experience my mother sometimes referred to: she had managed to save only one letter written by her grandmother and she always said she was deeply grateful that she had personal memories of the old lady because the letter was so full of whinge and whine and complaint that it suggested someone quite different to the kind and gracious woman she remembered. She always felt the letter must've been written when her grandmother was feeling unwell or it was a terribly hot dry dusty day or something. It is a useful reminder not to extrapolate too much from one letter from the past.

But what of other written sources? Files, memos, lists, account books, classified information, legal cases, dispatches, notes for speeches, and more ... Fiona Capp wrote in *Writers Defiled*: “When we pick up a novel, a collection of poems or a history we know how to read them. With fiction, we suspend our disbelief, with poetry we tune into the shorthand of symbolic language and with history we re-imagine the past, or at least a version of it. But reading something like Pitt-Rivers’ report or ASIO file that does not belong to a recognised genre is a much trickier business. It is a dilemma that every writer must confront when considering primary documents before she or he begins to form a narrative. What are the documents’ relations to actual events? How do they influence the events or lives they document? What do they tell us about the people who wrote them? What is the nature of the narrative they construct? By tackling this final question first, the others can then be addressed because it is only when we decide what kind of story we are reading that the words on the page become meaningful.”

An ASIO file exists, I assume, to provide information. Richard Mason, Florence Mason and Mary Culnan wrote in *Ethics of Information Management*, “Unlike weapons, money, and many other sources of power, however, information is *not* a thing. It is not materialistic. Information obeys different laws. It is, as the eminent political scientist Harlan Cleveland observes, “unique among resources”.

“As is clear from its definition, information is essentially human in its origin and is inherently intangible. Most resources, most other bases of power, are, in contrast, basically tangible. Guns, tanks, ships, and bombers are clearly tangible. Buildings, machines, industrial plants, and other sources of wealth are tangible. For most of its historical existence, money has also been tangible: Stones, jewels, cows, grain, gold. All have served as a medium of exchange. Paper money and coins, of course, are also tangible. This distinction, however, becomes murky in an information-based economy in which money takes the form of credit or “bits” of binary data traversing in the form of electronic pulses through an electronic funds transfer system. Management theorist Peter Drucker (1989) refers to this as the “symbol economy” and notes that the evolution to this unique economic realm is a crucial aspect of the new reality of doing business in the modern world. When money and information become one, a powerful force is at work.”

And if modern files are fraught with problems of accuracy, interpretation, and relevance—what about stepping back in time? Joan Cadden in an article in the *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* writes, “If the difficulties of navigating manuscript collections with no subject catalogues (as well as uncertain attributions and changing titles) are grave, those of navigating the archival sources are graver still. Yet it is in local court summaries, records of royal pardons, private acts and other such series of documents that evidence about the actual involvement of medicine (and, to a lesser extent, natural philosophy) in the sexual lives of medieval people will come to light. The prosecution of a practitioner for charging large sums

for various charms, potions, and baths to cure impotence and infertility suggests the rewards that await the patient researcher. Ecclesiastical records may also reveal the involvement of medical experts in cases regarding marriage law, although the significance of “midwives” testimony has perhaps been exaggerated.

“Likewise inadequately charted for the history of sexuality (and indeed for most purposes) are the territories beyond the elite, male, and Latin. The example of Isolde’s love philter holds out the promise of discovering women’s, vernacular, and popular beliefs and practices, but the enterprise is fraught with difficulties. As Monica Green has persistently pointed out, not all medicine practiced by women was about women’s health (much less about sexual subjects), nor do the presumed correlations between men and Latin, women and vernacular withstand scrutiny, nor do the associations of Latin with learnedness and vernacular with popular traditions. The permeability between Latin and vernaculars, folk and academic traditions, and women’s and men’s beliefs, practices, and articulations all complicate and enrich the enterprise of locating and distinguishing medieval sexual constructs and sensibilities.”

* * * * *

‘That evening, I took up the book that Sarkis had left — *Colophons of Armenian Manuscripts, 1301 – 1480*. It was in English, and handsomely designed, although at first glance it seemed an obdurate and unlikely thing to read. Colophons, after all, were short notes or messages “written, as a rule, by the scribes upon the conclusion of the production of a manuscript,” according to their translator, Professor Avedis Sanjian. “Occasionally, they were written at the end of long sections of a text; there are also brief colophons which appear on the margins.” My wife was sitting on the bed reading a book about the California Gold Rush. Outside in the square, there was the familiar sound of loudspeaker music. A casual crowd of people had gathered by the fountains—men and women idling in the warm summer’s night. I began to read:

VILLAGE OF SERKWILI: At this time there occurred a massacre of innocent Christians. ... For, instigated by Satan, Djihanshah Mirza, of the Scythian race, assembled many legions of troops, besieged the citadel for four months, and caused them much anguish, for many died of grief.

MONASTERY OF SEWERAK: ... The accursed dog [from the nation of] archers, Shahrugh Mirza, arrived with numerous ... troops. He devastated Armenia, carried off many into captivity, and slaughtered them, he demolished and burned, and forced many to renounce their faith.

MONASTERY OF HERMON:

*... In bitter and grievous times,
When many in the land were persecuted,
Some dwelt among bushes;
Some fell prey to the wolves,
Many became victims of the famine,
Fathers disavowed their children.*

VILLAGE OF SORI: ... This holy Gospel was copied ... in bitter and anxious times, during the khanate of Uzun Hasan, who in this year ... shed much blood.

ALT‘AMAR: ... [This was copied] during the khanate of Iskander Mirza of the nation of the archers, a Turk by race, who ... caused ineffable and uncountable bitterness throughout our land, and I cannot describe in writing the destruction of our country and the decimation of its population. For this is the tenth year that the tempest of God’s wrath has visited our country on account of my multitudinous sins.

Page after page was filled with such notations. Brief jottings, as it were, from a bygone time: from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries—that period, known to us in the West as the

Renaissance, when in the East the plains of Asia Minor and the Armenian plateau were at the mercy of various Turkish, Mongol, and Arab invaders.”

Michael J. Arlen in *Passage to Ararat*.

Not all jottings in the margin are so grim; sometimes they express boredom, the longing to be away from the scribe’s desk, sometimes they are playful or suggest the covert and the clandestine. An attractive little book is *Scratches in the Margin* by Caiseal Mor. He writes, ‘By the ninth century the Roman Church had begun to outlaw the copying of anything but religious texts in the monasteries. This drove many of the great Irish scribes underground, writing their books in defiance of the orders of their bishops. The copying of bibles was by this time the main work that the scribes engaged in. They often wrote notes to each other scratches in the margins of whichever great book they were copying at the time. Usually these few lines were written in Old Irish. Though the book might travel as far as Rome, only another Irish monk would be able to understand what had been written. Between the seventh and thirteenth centuries countless Irish monks roamed Europe working as missionaries and establishing great monasteries. They took their books with them and their habit of making notes about daily life. In the ninth century one brother scrawled beside the beautiful letters in a copy of the gospels, ‘Let no reader curse this writing. My arm is cramped from too much work to do.’ Another scribbled across the bottom of a page, ‘At last it is time for dinner.’

A better known ‘scratch’ was: ‘To go to Rome is little profit, endless pain;
The master that you seek in Rome you find at home
Or seek in vain.’

And sometimes they were longer pieces such as this poem found in a manuscript, written in Irish, in Austria.

I and Pangur Ban my cat,
’Tis a like task we are at:
Hunting mice in his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men
’Tis to sit with book and pen:
Pangur bears me no ill will,
He too plies his simple skill.

’Tis a merry thing to see
At our tasks how glad are we,
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray
In the hero Pangur’s way:
Oftentimes my keen thought set
Takes a meaning in its net.

So in peace our tasks we ply,
Pangur Ban, my cat, and I.
In our arts we find bliss,
I have mine and he has his.

Practice every day has made
Pangur perfect in his trade.
I get wisdom day and night

Turning darkness into light.

* * * * *

David Lodge in his novel *Changing Places* has two academics exchange places; the American to a university in the UK, Philip to the USA, where his wife Hilary writes to him: ‘Do you still want me to send on *Let’s Write a Novel?* What a funny little book it is. There’s a whole chapter on how to write an epistolary novel, but surely nobody’s done that since the eighteenth century?’

Perhaps she only admitted things of the highest literary quality under the term ‘epistolary novel’. But it isn’t hard to find novels of all kinds written as letters, diaries, emails, even files.

* * * * *

January 28: Colette

January 29: Allan Baillie

Susan Coolidge

January 30: Shirley Hazzard

January 31: Freya Stark

February 1: Muriel Spark

February 2: James Joyce

* * * * *

In all the debate over whether a civil union is a marriage and if it isn’t is this discrimination—no one really seems to want to come to grips with the question of the exact meaning of a word, the emotion invested in that meaning, and whether the meaning can be expanded without undermining or reducing the word. I sometimes think of this when people use ‘icon’ to refer to some foul-mouthed footballer, a natural phenomenon, a popular book or artist, even a politician or a brand of beer—and I find myself getting hot under the collar. No, that *isn’t* what an icon is, I want to get up and shout at the TV. When I mention that to people I find they nearly always have a word or words they hate to hear misused. I think we all do.

This description explains why I get upset. “An icon (properly ikón) is a representation of God, Christ, an angel, or a saint, or a sacred event, usually painted, enameled, or embossed.” So I do understand why what at first seems like an advantage in popularising and using a word more widely can, in the end, destroy it. It loses any real depth of meaning and the buzz cart rushes on to grab up another word and pump it full of air till it too ceases to retain any precision or worth.

* * * * *

It doesn’t matter if we simply refer to a flock of birds. Flock, mob, group; these are all nice general terms that can expand at the edges. But I also enjoy words which are used with a much more limited type of group in mind. I kept a column from a 2002 copy of *The Mercury* because I enjoyed Don Knowler’s descriptions of collective nouns. A reader wrote in with some wisdom from a book called *An Exaltation of Larks* by James Lipton; the term an “exaltation of larks” apparently coming from the Egerton Manuscript of 1450. This inspired Knowler to put together some unusual nouns: “Beyond the common ones — a gaggle of geese and a covey of partridge — are a murder or congress of crows, an unkindness of ravens, an ostentation of peacocks, a pitting of turtle doves, a murmuration of starlings, flight of swallows, bouquet of pheasants, cast of hawks, clamour of rooks, commotion of coots, congregation of plover, fall of woodcock, mustering of stalks (storks?), a paddle of ducks, rafter of turkeys, siege of herons, spring of teal, stand of flamingoes, tiding of magpies, troop of penguins and a watch of nightingales.”

Although these are predominantly non-Australian birds I am sure there are plenty of local ones—and if not, what fun there might be in creating some! A parade of parrots. An ear-split of galahs. A brood of brolgas. A jamboree of kookaburras. ... Your turn.

* * * * *

And it isn’t only changes in meaning, especially when done so apparently carelessly, that bother us. Changes in spelling can turn a discussion into a furious tirade.

“Why don’t we pronounce the *s* in *island*?

“Because it doesn’t belong there. For 900 years the word was *iland*. Then some pedant decided that was a misspelling of *isle* – *land* and stuck in the *s*. By 1700 his bumptious ignorance had overawed the feeble minority who knew how to write. This group proceeded to put it in when writing. But the common people determined not to be bullied by self-appointed oracles and kept on using the old pronunciation.” Dr Bergen Evans in ‘How words work’.

For instance, John Donne wrote:

I sacrifice this Iland unto thee,
And all whom I lov’d there, and who loved mee;
When I have put our seas twixt them and mee,
Put thou thy sea betwixt my sinnes and thee.
As the trees sap doth seeke the root below
In winter, in my winter, now I goe,
Where none but thee, th’Eternall root
Of true Love I may know.” Etc. (‘A Hymne to Christ’)

*

Words are a fluid entity; new words are created to deal with new chemical compounds, new syndromes, new ways of ordering the world. But words (and spellings) are also constantly changing. Take ‘carnal’ for instance. Cecil W. Sharman in *No more but my love* describes it: “*Sensual* related to the body, not *spiritual*. The word was used freely, with few of the limited and unfavourable overtones it has since acquired.” He was editing George Fox’s letters from the 1700s. To us, it now refers almost solely to sexual matters.

And then there is the ubiquitous euphemism. Take this piece from Terry Ryder’s *Confessions of a Real Estate Agent* in which he discusses the language of agents: ‘The name of the game for agents is a signed contract. As part of their ongoing desire not to place any emotional obstacles between buyers and the signing of a contract, agents have eliminated a lot of harsh words from their vocabulary.

“*Contract*”, for example, is a word seldom used by agents. It conjures up visions of legal obligations and financial danger (e.g. breach of contract). People learn to be suspicious about signing such things. The word “*contract*” sends a shiver up the average spine because it usually means dealing with a solicitor and nobody likes to do that. So agents prefer to talk about “*the paperwork*” or “*the agreement*” — a harmless standard document prepared for the buyer’s benefit.

“*Commission*” is another dirty word and is usually replaced by “*fees*” in the agent’s vocabulary.

“*Price*” conjures in purchasers’ minds commitment and loss of money; “*your investment*” is often substituted by the thinking agent. It gives a positive connotation to a scary set of numbers.

In a similar vein, “*deposit*” is replaced by “*your initial investment*”, “*mortgage*”, that 25-year-sentence, is referred to as “*the loan agreement*” and the 300 months of regular repayments are termed “*your monthly investment*”. An agent never asks buyers to “*sign*” anything, just to “*OK (or authorise) the paperwork*”. Asking the victim to “*sign the contract*” can terrify the buyer but a gentle request to “*OK the paperwork*” presents a fairly innocuous exercise.

When agents have an “*offer*” on the seller’s home they never refer to it as such because an offer implies a price reduction for the owners; they will mention they have a “*buyer*” for the home.

“*Deal*” is a nasty word which has all sorts of negative connotations. Agents tend to substitute less confronting words such as “*transaction*” or “*opportunity*”.

“*Dummybidding*” is usually referred to by agents as “*vendor bidding*” in an effort to put a kindly gloss upon it — but by any name this practice is shabby and unscrupulous.

Readers will notice that in the world of real estate people never walk anywhere, they “stroll”. Any property you buy, no matter where it is located, will be a *casual stroll* from somewhere desirable — shops, schools, cinemas, cafes. Buy this home and you will spend the rest of your life strolling.

So when you hear your agents say ...

“If you’d just OK the paperwork and let us have your initial investment, we can secure this opportunity for you as part of our professional service, and then you can go away and sort out your loan agreement.”

... what they really mean is ...

“If you’d sign this contract and pay the deposit based on the price we discussed we can conclude the deal and earn our hefty commission while you go away and mortgage yourself to the hilt.”

*

Nancy Mitford in *A Talent to Annoy* wrote, “Somebody, though not necessarily an academician, should compile a dictionary of all the French-English words which, as used on the other side of the Channel, mean either nothing at all or something quite different from their real sense.

Take *épergne* for instance. When the English use this word, always with a strong French accent, they mean a cluster of silver dishes dangling from a silver spray on the dining room table. It cannot be found in any French dictionary. Then we have *objet de vertu, savoir-faire, bon viveur*, which mean exactly nothing to the French but are full of meaning to us. *Blanc-mange* does not exist in France, either as a word or, thank goodness, as a pudding. *Salonnière* does not mean hostess, a *char-à-banc* is never motorised, a *brassiere* is a bodice for a small child. *Pot-pourri* is a medley of tunes, not musty dried rose leaves in a bowl; a *porte-manteau* is a coat hanger and a *chiffon* is a duster; what we call chiffon is *mousseline de soie*.

Raconteur, which in England connotes wit, really means one who insists upon telling long dull stories. *Cul-de-sac* has not been used here since the eighteenth century; a street with no exit is an *impasse*. *Bijou* is not an adjective. Nobody has ever heard a French audience shout ‘*Encore!*’ ”

I suspect since she wrote that in Paris in 1953 the English meanings have washed back across the Channel to annoy the French, along with all the more obvious imports, like ‘le weekend’ and ‘le hamburger’ ...

* * * * *

James Thurber was also a close watcher of language. He wrote, “The latest blight to afflict the spoken word in the United States is the rapidly spreading reiteration of the phrase “you know.” I don’t know just when it began moving like a rainstorm through the language, but I tremble at its increasing garbling of meaning, ruining of rhythm, and drumming upon my hapless ears. One man, in a phone conversation with me last summer, used the phrase thirty-four times in about five minutes, by my own count: a young matron in Chicago got seven “you knows” into one wavy sentence, and I have also heard it as far west as Denver, where an otherwise charming woman at a garden party in August said it almost as often as a whippoorwill says, “whippoorwill.” Once, speaking of whippoorwills, I was waked after midnight by one of those feathered hellions and lay there counting his chants. He got up to one hundred and fifty-eight and then suddenly said, “Whip—” and stopped dead. I like to believe that his mate, at the end of her patience finally let him have it.

“My unfortunate tendency to count “You knows” is practically making a female whippoorwill out of me. Listening to a radio commentator, not long ago, discussing the recent meeting of the United Nations, I thought I was going mad when I heard him using “you know” as a noun, until I realized that he had shortened United Nations Organization to UNO and was pronouncing it, you know, as if it were “you know”.”

* * * * *

And those American decisions which we sometimes overlook and at other times find intensely irritating? Take ‘tyres’ or ‘tires’ for instance: Anthony Bird wrote in *Roads & Vehicles*, “Most etymologists say the English spelling of ‘tyre’ is incorrect and the older form, ‘tire’, now regarded as American, is more appropriate because the word derives, they say, from ‘attire’. As the one-piece hoop tyre was a comparatively, late invention, and wheels were originally ‘attired’ or shod with curved plates or strakes the arguments seems valid. In the eighteenth century, however, although ‘tire’ was the usual form, one occasionally comes across ‘tyer’ and in the sense that the metal cladding not only provided a tough wearing surface but ‘tyed’ the wheel together it may be that the modern English spelling is correct.”

Except that we would normally write ‘tied’ these days rather than ‘tyed’. Yes, Johnny, spelling is a devil of a business ...

* * * * *

But what if no one ever played around? What if no one ever made howlers in spelling, meaning, grammar? What a lot of fun we would miss. Take this one from a church bulletin: “For those of you who have children and don’t know it, we have a nursery downstairs.” Or the delightful statement of a Hobart headmaster warning students to stay away from a grassy bank below the school because “snakes have been seen by teachers in holes”. When I read or hear such things I always want to roll around the floor howling ...

And there are other kinds of playing around which are equally attractive; I was just browsing in a little booklet *the Oak in an Egg* which contained poems done by schoolchildren from country NSW at a Writer’s Camp and one of their exercises was to replace ordinary English words with words from other languages, such as Spanish, and try them out in verse for the different sounds and forms and rhymes they offered. Some of the results were very attractive:

The pajaró is a quimera,
 a sueno in the noche,
 a cancion in the manana,
 with magia in its ojo
 and baile in its cancion.

Lisa Williams

The baile of the mariposa
 is like a sueno.
 It is amarillo in the shade
 like a flor
 as fresh as the manana estrella.
 The mariposa sparkles
 like an arroyo,
 and shines in the sol
 like plateado,
 the baile of the mariposa.

Greta von Gavel.

And more

* * * * *

But *Finnegan’s Wake* though essentially about words is not this kind of interest in words, sounds, meanings. Seamus Deane introduces it, “The first thing to say about *Finnegan’s Wake* is that it is, in an important sense, unreadable.” Really? I said—immediately determined to prove him wrong. But then he goes on to say, “The book is written in the English language and also against the English language; it converts itself into English and perverts itself from English, in the process it crosses and re-crosses the spectrum from sheer noise — the hundred-letter ‘word’ that signifies the annunciatory thunder that presages the fall into language and culture — to polyglottic babbling to lucid and lyric sense. It forces the reader to pay attention to the various genealogies of words and their functions — how they are, in the most basic sense, composed of letters and combined into syllables, how they are heard and how they are

seen, what historical weight and valencies they bear, what psychological, political and social functions they perform, their proximity to and their distance from grunts and noises, their liberating and their repressive effects, their dependence upon syntax and grammar and their capacity to generate meaning, wildly and anarchically, when freed from those systems of governance and communication.” And I began to have definite doubts. It isn’t that the book does not provide moments where I think ‘ah hah!’— all those odd but understandable spellings, like ‘astewte’ for ‘astute’ and ‘pleisure’ for ‘pleasure’; all those moments of alliteration ‘Singabed Sulks before slumber’ or play ‘the umpple does not fall very far from the dumpertree’ or images ‘the idlish tarriers’ umbrella of a showerproof wall’ or ‘In the house of breathings lies that word, all fairness. The walls are of rubinen and the glittergates of elfinbone’; I even found myself wondering if ‘tubberbunnies’ were an early version of ‘teletubbies’ ...

It has simple straightforward moments: ‘This Treacle Tom to whom reference has been made had been absent from his usual wild and woolly haunts in the land of counties capalleens for some time previous to that (he was, in fact, in the habit of frequenting common lodginghouses where he slept in a nude state, hailfellow with meth, in strange men’s cots) but on racenight, blotto after divers tots of hell fire, red biddy, bull dog, blue ruin and creeping jenny, Eglandine’s choicest herbage, supplied by the Duck and Doggies,’ etc ...

Moments when I am in the company of someone inebriated: ‘taking what he fondly thought was a short cut to Caer Fere, Soak Amerigas, vias the shipstream *Pridewin*, after having buried a hatchet not so long before, by the wrong goods exeunt, nummer desh to tren, into Patatapaveri’s, fruiterers and musical florists, with his *Ciaho, chavi! Sar shin, shillipen?*’ etc ...

And those sad moments: ‘And it’s old and old it’s sad and old it’s sad and weary I go back to you, my cold father, my cold mad father, my cold mad feary father, till the near sight of the mere size of him, the moyles and moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and I rush, my only, into your arms.’

—but they are far outweighed by the times when I feel I am truly the babe in his mysterious wood—

In a real sense *Finnegan’s Wake* is unreadable as a book because unless the reader is prepared to read it in short chunks, and preferably aloud, then the mind soon switches off and simply glosses the pages. (And my sympathies go out to the people who set the type to print the book.) But perhaps more daunting than the book itself is the clear understanding that Joyce could not have got this book, which took him sixteen years to write and which was clearly very important to him, published unless he had written his better-known handful of more conventional works first. And although I do not doubt that Joyce loved words, everything about them, with a passion—I cannot help thinking that if you take that rich delight away there isn’t much left; a few rather tedious men wandering round a very limited Dublin. None of his characters grip me. And his Dublin, though it is often presented as the quintessential Dublin, is nothing of the sort. It is not Dublin through the eyes of its women; nor its Protestants or its agnostics; nor is it slum Dublin, nor wealthy Dublin, nor is it really a place that seems to come alive, rather than a map to be traversed.

Perhaps there is a message in that; a passionate love of words and a passionate love of story rarely marry in comfort and even more rarely cherish one another ...

* * * * *

February 3: Simone Weil
February 4: François Rabelais
February 5: Captain W. E. Johns
February 6: Pramoedya Ananta Toer
February 7: Charles Dickens
February 8: Jules Verne
February 9: Duncan Ball

February 10: Boris Pasternak
 February 11: Jane Yolen
 February 12: Judy Blume
 February 13: Georges Simenon
 February 14: Daniel Corkery
 February 15: Bruce Dawe
 February 16: Peter Porter
 Hal Porter
 February 17: Ruth Rendell
 February 18: Toni Morrison
 February 19: Carson McCullers
 February 20: Bill Knox
 February 21: Anais Nin
 February 22: Arthur Schopenhauer
 John Shaw Nielson

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When Alec Chisholm wrote on John Shaw Neilson he drew on three connections in his poetry: “Sometimes as luminous as Blake or Traherne, sometimes with the companionable simplicity of W.H. Davies, and always as original as he is musical, Shaw Nielson has long been recognized as the finest and most delicate of Australia’s lyric poets.” He also notes the influence of the nature poets and French Symbolism. “For me, it is one of the miracles of poetry that a simple Australian bushman and manual worker like Shaw Nielson should often achieve, without knowing it, some of the effects which French Symbolists achieved by years of patient thought and by the elaboration of an extremely subtle technique.

“Symbolism, especially in the works of Stéphane Mallarmé (1842 – 1898), was, among other things, an attempt to transform the data of the senses into pure psychological experience; to strip the external world of its materiality and communicate only the essence of things, their inner reality as it is reflected in a human mind. As Mallarmé puts it, the poet’s task is “to paint, not the thing, but the effect that it produces”. And this is extraordinarily difficult, for how can one mind communicate to another its deep, mysterious, secret experience? Mallarmé’s answer is: by suggestion rather than by statement—and suggestion has to be strictly condensed, lest it develop into description or narration. But suggestion, which naturally depends upon the skilful use of imagery, never reveals the poet’s mind in its entirety; it communicates, as it were, only the *edges* of inner experience, and from these edges the reader has to deduce the whole, not by ordinary logic, but by finesse. Things, which provide the poet with his images, are not realities, they are symbols of a Reality experienced only by the mind.”

Geoffrey Brereton writing of Mallarmé said, “When he wrote, though in a slightly different context, that: *To name* an object is to destroy three quarters of the enjoyment of a poem, which is made up of the pleasure of guessing little by little; *to suggest it*—that is the ideal’, he was thinking not only of the reader. The poet also, given a sufficient respect for the possibilities of his medium, may always expect to have written more than he knew and to have the same pleasure afterwards of discovering new extensions of meaning. In this Mallarmé differs from the opposite type of laborious poet represented by Malherbe, who is clear and limited because of his determination to control the full implication of every word he puts down. To do this is to regard language primarily as a vehicle for communication. But Mallarmé considered it as potentially live material, which in certain combinations could bring into existence what had not existed before.” This does give an insight into Neilson and the way that such apparently simple little poems suggest more to be found at each reading ...

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Denys Watkins-Pitchford (‘BB’) wrote in *The Autumn Road to the Isles*, “As I pushed about among the rounded leaves, searching for the little polished helmets which so cleverly conceal themselves from all but a squirrel’s eye, W.H. Davies’ lines came into my head:

‘And the woodnuts rich to make us go
Into the loveliest lanes I know.’

My mind went back to a bright April day, with blue skies and puffed clouds sailing, when I was introduced to the poet in his pleasant garden in Worcestershire.

He struck me at once as an intensely shy man, not altogether happy in his surroundings. He had a quaint manner of looking at you sideways. As he limped round the garden paths, showing me his flowers and his bird-table, he said in his very deep voice, ‘D’you know, I’ve been asked to write a book on my “garden birds” and I know nothing about birds! What am I to do?’

Though I only met him that once I liked him immensely: he reminded me of some shy, rough-haired, bank vole. My uncle, who was a great friend of the poet, used to take him out to dine in London. Davies was terrified of smart ‘eating-places’ and went in horror of being presented with a menu written in French!”

Although he wrote many better and deeper poems his piece ‘Leisure’ with its simple happy theme remains W. H. Davies’ best-known poem.

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty’s glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

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“I want to say, in all seriousness, that a great deal of harm is being done in the modern world by belief in the virtuousness of WORK, and that the road to happiness and prosperity lies in an organised diminution of work.

First of all: what is work? Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth’s surface relating to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite expansion.”

Bertrand Russell in his *In Praise of Idleness*.

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All the strands, Celtic, Symbolic, Romantic, the poetry of nature, seem to come together effortlessly in Neilson’s poems, particularly his many bird poems. Yet even though he uses unforgettable Australian images, like his ‘Birds of the Thirsty Land’, the poems often seem to have more colour than anyone used to tramping over the dry brown countryside would use—or perhaps that is why—

It was a reign of roses,
Of blue flowers for the eye,
And the rustling of green girls
Under a white sky.

Alan Marshall wrote, ‘And then I think Shaw Neilson is part of me; what an extraordinary character, and what exquisite poetry. I love that line, ‘swallows swiftly home returning’. ‘The Orange Tree’ — that appeals to me most of all; that, and ‘Let your song be delicate’ — delicate, what a perfect word for poor Shaw Neilson.’

His writing is still delightfully readable but I think one of the nicest things about Neilson is that his poetry is never disfigured by the occasional misogyny or sarcasm which can be found even in the output of someone as apparently easygoing and tolerant as W. H. Davies. Shaw Neilson is one of those rare people who truly never made an enemy, never wrote a sour or caustic poem, found everyone his life touched worthy of respect.

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February 23: Norman Lindsay
Erich Kastner

February 24: David Williamson
Wilhelm Grimm

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I don’t normally turn to Doctor Who for my education but there was an interesting little comment by Romana in ‘State of Decay’ where she mentions the work the Brothers Grimm did in tracking ‘consonant shift’, in between collecting and adapting fairy tales. I always, vaguely, meant to go and read further in this matter. The other day, in another unexpected source (*The Night Attila Died* by Michael A. Babcock), I came upon this interesting introduction to the subject and thought again, yes, I really must find out more.

‘Philology is literally “the love of the word”—an etymology that evokes the classical reverence for written knowledge. In real terms, what philologists work with are ancient languages, ancient manuscripts, and ancient myths. Two types of reconstruction—internal and comparative—make up the toolbox of philology. Looking at the internal consistency of a text is really no different from cross-examining witnesses and poking holes in their testimony; some awkward wording or an outright contradiction in the text may point to the suppression of evidence in the historical record. Comparative reconstruction, the other common strategy, involves analyzing two texts side by side to determine which one is dependent on the other and thereby to reconstruct an earlier version of a story, myth, or language, with these two methods the philologist attempts to recover the lost layers of culture lying beneath the oldest manuscript evidence.’

The most famous success of the discipline, he notes, is that though we have no original Indo-European mother tongue it has been possible to show that languages as seemingly diverse as “Latin, Greek, Irish, Sanskrit, Persian, Russian, and English” all belong in this one language family.

“The most famous philologists were the Brothers Grimm. Some two hundred years ago Jakob and Wilhelm were pioneers of this new linguistic science; but they are most famous, of course, for collecting fairy tales in their spare time. Today we are likely to think of gingerbread houses when we hear their names, but philologists think immediately of Grimm’s Law, one of the fundamental discoveries of the discipline. Jakob showed, for example, how Latin *pater* and English *father*, Latin *piscis* and English *fish*, are related to each other through a simple, predictable sound change whereby the *p* sound evolved into the *f* sound we have in English and the other Germanic languages. It was a groundbreaking discovery that paved the way for even more linguistic “laws”. The credibility of philology as a method for reconstructing the past stands on this impressive foundation.”

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February 25: Anthony Burgess

February 26: Victor Hugo
George Barker
February 27: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
February 28: Ian Edwards
Robin Klein
March 1: Robert Lowell
March 2: Sholom Aleichem
March 3: Morag Loh
March 4: Dr Seuss
March 5: Marcie Muir
Mem Fox

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‘BB’ wrote: “This sudden bustling of waves on Rannoch’s shore put me in mind of some of the lovely Gaelic names which are so full of poetry and the wildness of this land.

Listen to them. Loch-na-gar means ‘outcry of the wind among the rocks’. Achnacarry, ‘field of the fish weir’, a’ Chaorainn, ‘hill of the rowan tree’, Elrick, ‘hill of the deer defile’.

They have something about them which remind one of the old Indian place names, many of which commemorate some successful hunt or dramatic episode of chase or battle, long-forgotten and buried in the past. Some stir the imagination in another way. One knows at once there was some strange legend about a certain hill, pass, burn or river. What, for instance, gave rise to Dun t-Soilcheig, ‘fort of the snail’? Glen Affric, where we were later to have one of our most delectable camps, means ‘glen of the dappled ford’; one can almost see the spotted stones, the glinting stars of sunlight catching the ripples, and the sound of it softly purling.

Some have a sinister ring such as Gobha Crom Bent or ‘stooping blacksmith’; Gleann Bualtachan, ‘glen of the striking’; and Bodach Lamh-dhearg, ‘old man of the red hand’.

What was the story behind Leac nan Cuarain, which means ‘flat rock of the sandals’? Sgor Ghaoith is descriptive for it means ‘pea of the wind’. What of Caisteal a Chuilein Chruta, ‘castle of the cursed whelp’? This almost smells of witchcraft, as does Leannan Sithean, ‘fairy lover’; and Sithean a’ Chatha, ‘fairy hillock of the flight’. How one would like to know the story of Deor a Bhearnain, ‘exile of the little gapped one’!

However, it is the better-known place names which really stir me; they ring on the ear like trumpet calls to battle and adventure. Staffa! Knoydart! Morven! Kylestrome! Badenoch! Listen to the music of the waves about the Skerries and smell the weed tangle in ‘the Isles of Treshnish’. There is a hint of darkness and storm in Morar. There is something remote and splendid when we read Wester Ross; we see snow and stern majesty in Torridon, and the calm of evening in Firth of Lorne. But most of all I like the districts which take their names from ancient chieftains, Lochiel’s Country, the Clanranald Country, and many more; and what pictures are conjured up by the Land of Moidart, and Brae Lochaber, which is that district east of Fort William!”

I think the value in children’s poetry which does more than tell the story or point a moral, from Mother Goose to Dr Seuss and to current practitioners like Mem Fox, comes when it encourages a sense of play; that words are not grim things waiting there to be spelled correctly and put in neat grammatical sentences but can conjure up the strange imaginary worlds of childhood ... of our ‘little gapped ones’ ...

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March 6: Ring Lardner
March 7: Eilis Dillon
March 8: Kenneth Grahame
March 9: Mickey Spillane
Keri Hulme
March 10: Frances Trollope
March 11: Nancy Cato

Douglas Adams
March 12: Kylie Tennant

* * * * *

“Diamond Head has its own special illusion. Anyone who comes there is seized with a wild resolution to stay for ever. No man but is possessed with the urges to bend Diamond Head to his secret longings, to make it his own. Diamond Head deals with them. It outlasts. Its great bulk of basalt was doing just this a few hundred years ago when Captain Cook and his crew of constipated heroes swept past, claiming the continent in a distant and gentlemanly manner. They heard the roar of the cliffs as so many cheers for their passing, a bombardment of welcome salutes. And Diamond Head will give a belch and a roar for the passing of all who come after him.

When Cook sailed past it was a grey May day as cold as the captain’s eye. There would be a steely light on the sea, the sails stretched by the following southerly wind. Coming round Crowdy Head they would have kept well out to avoid the tail of foam on the Mermaid Reef. So that Cook must have been looking through the spyglass to see the black stick figures of aborigines on our headland and log it as Indian Head.

“Of the aborigines and their manner of life,” he wrote elsewhere, “we know little as we have never been able to form the least connection with them.”

Kylie Tennant in *The Man on the Headland*.

It did not, of course, stop him claiming all their land in the name of King George III.

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Arthur Bayldon (1865 – 1958) remembered if at all for his prowess in running and swimming rather than his poetry nevertheless wrote several lively pieces including this poem called ‘The South Sea Islander’:

Far away in the coral sea-isles

That glisten like gems in the sea;

Where a tropical sun ever smiles

On groves of the cocoanut tree;

Where the beautiful, warm, sleepy waters

Rise and sink with the blue of the tides

Bask the good-humoured mothers and daughters,

The mirth-loving lovers and brides.

Their life is a circle of pleasure;

They hunt, fish, lounge at their ease;

Their freedom is their only treasure;

Food falls from the full-fruited trees.

They know not the sin and the sorrow

That hang round these kennels of ours;

They live for to-day, not to-morrow,

And drop off to sleep in their bowers.

Till we the selfish and the cruel,

By pressure of presents and lies,

Rob them of their only jewel—

The freedom of earth’s Paradise.

How their hearts must thrill with emotion

At thought’s of their purple-washed home,

Where they slept on the breast of the ocean

And paddled about in its foam.

How they silently cling to each other,
Outcasts in an alien land;
How I pity each poor dark-skinned brother
That meets me, for I understand.

* * * * *

Cook's Journal is peppered with spellings which would see any teacher frown (clowdy, squaly, allways, imidiately, oppertunity, pigions, peice, piggs, intirely, cloath, untill, salluted) though always easily understandable but it is the content which is so disquieting, bearing in mind his instructions before he left England were 'You are also with the consent of the natives to take possession of convenient situations in the country in the name of the King of Great Britain or: if you find the country uninhabited take possession for His Majesty by setting up proper marks and inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors' whereas he wrote: 'As I was now about to quit the eastern coast of New Holland, which I had coasted from latitude 38 degrees to this place and which I am confident no European had ever seen before, I once more hoisted English colours, and though I had already taken possession of several particular parts, I now took possession of the whole eastern coast from latitude 38 degrees to this place, latitude 10 degrees 30'S., in right of His Majesty King George the Third, by the name of New South Wales, with all the bays, harbours, rivers, and islands situated upon it. We then fired three volleys of small arms which were answered by the same number from the ship. Having performed this ceremony upon the island, which we called Possession Island, we reimbarcked in our boat.'

Glendwr Williams said of this 'Again, there is no reference to 'consent' though Cook may well have argued that there were no native inhabitants in sight to grant or refuse consent.' Perhaps. But Cook knew for absolutely certain that the land was inhabited. His Journal is peppered with references to sightings and contact. All across the Pacific his expedition left its mark: 'I ordered a musket to be fired with small-shot, which struck the eldest upon the leg', 'drew blood', 'the Man who took the Musquet was shott dead before he had got far from the Tent', 'Upon this Mr Gore fired a Musquet at them and from what I can learn kill'd the man who took the Cloth', 'In this skirmish only one or two of them was hurt with small shott, for I avoided killing any of them as much as possible.' Reams have been written about Cook's death but we know nothing about the people who died as a result of his invasion of their lives. Towards the end of his voyaging he seemed to come to an understanding that his intrusion was damaging as he wrote 'it's impossible for them to know our real design, we enter their Ports without their daring to make opposition, we attempt to land in a peaceable manner, if this succeeds it's well, if not we land nevertheless and maintain the footing we thus got by the superiority of our firearms, in what other light can they then at first look upon us but as invaders of their country' and the simple knowledge, never acted upon, 'All they seemed to want was for us to be gone'. Will we teach this to our children or will we continue to bring them Cook the Hero who died at the hands of some nasty natives? As a child I had no idea that Cook had killed or harmed anyone, let alone claimed a continent without the consent of its inhabitants. Will new generations of schoolchildren be given a more honest assessment?

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"When Cook sailed the *Endeavour* into Matavi Bay on 13 April 1769, it was by no means the first time the Tahitians had encountered white men. Bougainville in *La Boudeuse* had been there, or at any rate a little further round the coast, the year before; Wallis in the *Dolphin* had arrived in 1767, and Quiros was in these seas as early as 1606. But Quiros had long since been forgotten, Bougainville had stayed in Tahiti only thirteen days and Wallis five weeks. Cook was to be here three months, he was to live ashore and make meteorological observations, he was to chart the coast; this landfall was the first great object of his journey.

“It might be fairly said, therefore, that with the *Endeavour’s* arrival the penetration of the Pacific was only just beginning. From now on it was going to be no great wonder for the islanders to see a sailing ship beating into land; Cook himself was to return three times, and he was soon to be followed by the Spanish, and Bligh in the *Bounty*, and the English missionaries, and the Nantucket sealers and whalers calling in for ‘refreshments’ on their way south, and then the French. All these visitors — perhaps intruders is a better word — were going to make their separate contribution to the transformation of the Tahitians, whether by firearms, disease or alcohol, or by imposing an alien code of laws and morals that had nothing to do with the slow, natural rhythm of life on the island as it had been lived up till then.

“It was perfectly true that the Europeans were also going to import the antidotes to their poisons and diseases — the doctors, the priests, the administrators and the policemen — but the Tahitians had had no need for these people before; if they had been left undisturbed they might have gone on forever without them, and at the time of Cook’s arrival they were probably happier than they were ever to be again.”

Alan Moorehead in *The Fatal Impact*.

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March 13: Janeen Brian
March 14: Maxim Gorky
March 15: Hesba Brinsmead
March 16: Bruce Keller
March 17: Jean Ingelow
March 18: Di Morrissey
March 19: Philip Roth
March 20: Di Bates

David Malouf

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I was in a bus in Brisbane in June, while staying with friends, and a person sitting behind me said, “It was in Annerley that Hugh Lunn lived, wasn’t it? I wonder where their shop was?” In fact Hugh Lunn’s parents ran a cake shop in the suburb of Annerley, remembered for ‘Lunn’s buns’ if not for the lively language used between the Lunnns and their customers.

Hugh Lunn wrote about his life in Brisbane, about Vietnam, even his eye-witness reporting on the farcical UN plebiscite in West Papua in 1969: “In Indonesia, for six weeks in mid-1969 I witnessed the Indonesian takeover of the Stone Age people of West Irian (aka Irian Barat or West Papua) in what was called an Act of Free Choice held under UN auspices. Papuans, frightened of the Indonesian military, made furtive contact late at night; they hid blood-soaked letters inside seashells; they left messages in my motel wardrobe; they shoved letters under my arm in the dark and disappeared. As only two reporters—the foreign editor of Holland’s *De Telegraaf*, Otto Kuyk, and myself—were covering the entire Act of Free Choice we were the only chance for these Papuans to get their message out to the world. No wonder one letter shoved under my arm was addressed to ‘the nicest man in Merauke’. One midnight in the dark I told a Papuan that no one was going to come to their aid, that—despite their hopes that the UN would help them—they were going to become part of Indonesia. He cried on my shoulder. The UN coldly and deliberately handed these 800 000 Papuans to the Indonesians, with the active connivance of the United States and Australia: thus Irian Barat became Irian Jaya (successful Irian).

“There were no elections for this Free Choice. The decision was made in each of the eight provincial capitals by small groups of specially selected Papuans who, even so, had to raise their hands while being closely watched, not just by a couple of UN representatives but by Indonesian soldiers in the guise of civilians. And with armoured personnel carriers nearby.” (To add insult to injury no West Papuan women at all were ever contacted let alone asked to vote; it remains an appalling exercise in both sex and racial discrimination.) “At one time three Papuans who carried a sign saying ‘One One Vote’ were marched away at gunpoint despite my

protestations and in full view of the four UN team members. Regardless of my appeals, the UN four neither did nor said anything. Papuans who yelled out ‘*sendiri*’, for independence, outside one Act of Free Choice meeting in Manokwari were grabbed. Indonesians then tossed them into the back of military trucks and took them away. When I protested, an Indonesian policeman pulled out a revolver and waved it in the air. I ran inside the building and told the UN chief, Dr Ortiz Sans of Bolivia. He replied: ‘Our job is to observe what happens inside, not outside.’ Meanwhile, the Australian government wasn’t saying nothing. Or anything. Which was something.

“All I could do was write what I saw and send it out to the world. The stories went out by morse code: there were no phones, but plenty of mobile stone axes. And, when I realised Otto’s and my stories wouldn’t have any effect, I did one more thing; I taught a dozen Papuans to sing *We Shall Overcome* when we were accidentally left alone in a lifeboat in Tjenderawasih Bay for an hour. They were going to need the pride and the hope of that song, perhaps more than anyone else on earth: *Ohhhh deep in my heart, I do believe, that we shall overcome some day ...*” (from *Working for Rupert*). In fact he did something else: he broke the horrifying story that Australian officials in PNG had deliberately prevented two West Papuans from passing through Australian territory so as to get to the UN in New York to urge UN members not to accept the farcical plebiscite. Australia cold-bloodedly detained the two men until the vote had been taken. But again the world, and the Australian people, took no notice.

Far less dramatic and horrifying is his recent book *Lost for Words: Australia’s Lost Language in Words and Stories*. He explains his interest and his concern after talking to school students: “Unlike me when I was at school, these boys did not have to learn their poetry and times tables ‘off by heart’. But they were still rote learning: every morning and every evening they were absorbing the culture and idiom of American television programmes, computer games, and films. A sort of cargo cult worship, always passively waiting for more to arrive on our airwaves.

“How long since you last saw someone in a TV sitcom on our screens reach out across the coffee table and say, ‘Excuse pigs without tails’. Or heard a TV character tell someone to drop by: ‘Just toot and come in — you know, the Egyptian Pharaoh.’ Or a woman say: ‘Now **she** was an education.’

“Of course, the English language is always changing. That’s what makes it so evocative and is one of the reasons why it has come to so dominate the globe. But whereas overseas foods have arrived to join, expand and enrich our menu, the tongue of telly has stunted our slang. So that shades of meaning have almost disappeared.

“Change isn’t good if it happens in only one direction. That’s called being subsumed.

“The influx of American television could have added to our language, making it richer in nuance and colour. But instead it has taken over what we had, and inhibited expression. ‘You’d do a lot with a stick and a bucket of eggs!’ or ‘Don’t just stand around like a spare groom at a wedding!’ has been reduced to: **Get real!**”

He goes on to say, “At the same time as the language of the people has become impossibly simple, higher education has made the language of politics and the bureaucracy impossibly complex. The candid, plain-speaking colourful lingo we once spoke has been displaced by evasive obfuscating gobbledegook which has taken over government and bureaucracy.”

He sounds a sad note: “One night at a speech in Gympie, Queensland, I mentioned how we had lost our language. A woman stood up and said no, that’s wrong, we haven’t lost our language: ‘We gave it away.’”

The book is lots of fun and I must admit I have at times bemoaned the loss of some handy descriptions and lively expressions. But it isn’t a complete loss. Some words and descriptions simply die a natural death anyway. I love the rich and vivid slang that Georgette Heyer researched and used in her Regency novels. But no matter how much I enjoy it it can’t be reintegrated into modern life. It would sound artificial and out-of-place. I remember when

expressions like ‘Gee Whizzickers’ and ‘Hot Diggetty’ came out of Hollywood and kids tried to use them in the schoolyard but they really didn’t fit and soon everyone was using ‘Gosh’ and ‘Wow’ again.

Perhaps too we should take on board Rabindranath Tagore’s words, and the hope in them:

I find that your will knows no end in me.
And when old words die out on the tongue
New melodies break forth from the heart.

A lot of expressions, too, were euphemisms. People rarely said ‘she’s pregnant’ in public; instead it was ‘up the spout’, ‘increasing’, ‘expecting’, ‘in the family way’, talk of ‘the patter of little feet’ or ‘the pram in the hall’; no one ever mentioned bras or corsets in public and even petticoat or singlet was frowned on so descriptions like ‘it’s snowing down south’ (for a bit of petticoat showing) or ‘spring is busting out all over’ (for a popped button on a blouse) got around this. But in a way I’m glad we don’t need to blush over such things now. Which isn’t quite the same as saying I want lingerie advertised so blatantly. A little bit of discretion, rectitude, and mystery still has its place.

And however much we like to think of so much of our slang as being a truly Australian creation, Strine, the fact remains that a lot of it was imported from Britain and former British colonies. So if we could give past imports a twist and a brush-up what is stopping us from doing the same to more recent imports—rather than simply sitting round moaning?

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Joan Priest in *The Literary Precipice* wrote: “By 1945 the end of the war was at last in sight. People I was to come to know well later had been making an impact in the literary world in Brisbane. There was the government journalist Clem Christesen who, with the support of his gifted white Russian linguist (wife) Nina, had founded the literary magazine *Meanjin Papers*. The name is the Aboriginal name for Brisbane and stood for the neck of land bounded by the Brisbane River, reaching from the city proper to the Botanical Gardens. Initially, the journal was simply a vehicle for four poets; James Picot, Paul Grano, Brian Vrepon and Clem himself. But it filled a need and flourished quickly under his editorship, drawing contributors such as John Blight, Judith Wright and Max Harris. There were articles and comment on such subjects as “Poetry in Wartime” by Nettie Palmer and Robert D Fitzgerald, while Queensland academic, AK Thomson, gave one of the earliest interpretations of the extraordinary novel *Such is Life* by “Tom Collins” (Joseph Furphy). The journal received support from all over the country.”

“Importantly for Queensland, Christesen persuaded young poet Judith Wright (Armidale, NSW) to come and live in Brisbane, found her a job as Queensland statistician and introduced her to her future husband, scholar and playwright Jack McKinney.”

She goes on to say: “I have always felt that Queensland is under-rated in the arts.”
Perhaps.

But the curious thing is the way that different parts of Queensland produce distinctly different types of novels. Neither the works of Xavier Herbert nor of Steele Rudd have anything of a Brisbane ‘feel’ to them. And a further curious thing is that I tend to associate Brisbane writing with small shops.

Not just Hugh Lunn but also people like Tony Maniaty (*All Over the Shop*) and David Malouf. Yet when I came to think on this I realised I had never read the Malouf book someone told me was set in a small corner store in Brisbane, *Fly Away Peter*. I don’t know where they got that idea from. When I finally tracked down a copy I discovered that it was instead ‘young bird-watcher goes to war’ and only touches on Brisbane in passing. I wonder what they were actually thinking of? But as I read it, vaguely wondering if Malouf was inspired by that old rhyme ‘Two Little Dicky Birds Sitting on a Wall, One named Peter, One Named Paul—’, it seemed to reinforce the vague feeling that David Malouf isn’t comfortable in the Australian

landscape. Even when he names the trees and the birds, makes all the right noises about weather and space and colours, I still have the feeling that he drove past in a bus ...

It doesn't really matter. At heart he is writing about things other than the landscape and the soul ... but I felt a little pang of disappointment. I think, after all, I would've liked it to be that 'corner shop book' ...

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March 21: Jane Carroll
Thomas Shapcott

March 22: Rosie Scott

March 23: Joseph Quincy Adams

March 24: Olive Schreiner

March 25: Anne Brontë

March 26: David Lake

Dorothy Porter

Barcroft Boake

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Ted Hughes' second wife committed suicide in the same manner, and perhaps for the same reasons, as his first. Barcroft Boake was seemingly inspired to commit suicide because Adam Lindsay Gordon had committed suicide. He used a different method, hanging himself with his stockwhip in 1892, but he is a reminder that we can never know what in one life will influence another.

Boake is largely forgotten now but he was a lively and attractive poet in late nineteenth-century Australia. Yet his fixation on death and failure was clearly visible in his work. His posthumous book of verse (1897) was called *Where the Dead Men Lie* and possibly his best known poem 'From the Far West' reeks of suffering and death. Every verse ...

Where the cattle trample a dusty pad
Across the never-ending plain,
And come and go
With muttering low
In the time when the rivers cease to flow,
And the Drought King holds his reign

...

Where a placid, thirst-provoking lake
Clear in the flashing sunlight lies—
But the stockman knows
No water flows
Where the shifting mirage comes and goes
Like a special paradise;

And crouched in the saltbush's sickly shade,
Murmurs to Heaven a piteous prayer:
'O God! must I
Prepare to die?'
And, gazing up at the brazen sky,
Reads his death-warrant there.

And so on

It is a reminder that although many found luck, opportunity, a new beginning, for others, beyond personal or financial worries, there was a deep sense of depression and loneliness in the land itself which they could not handle. The new heroic vision of Australia with its bronzed Anzacs and its constantly reiterated themes of mateship and 'a fair go' seems to have left no

space in which to acknowledge the thousands of men and women who suffered depression, despair, loneliness, homesickness, failure, mental aberrations ... or committed suicide ...

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March 27: Kenneth Slessor
Maureen McCarthy

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‘The Night-Ride’ is not Slessor’s most famous poem but I always feel it captures something about little Australian country towns:

Gas flaring on the yellow platform; voices running up and down;
Milk-tins in cold dented silver; half-awake I stare,
Pull up the blind, blink out—all sounds are drugged;
The slow blowing of passengers asleep;
Engines yawning; water in heavy drips;
Black, sinister travelers, lumbering up the station,
One moment in the window, hooked over bags;
Hurrying, unknown faces—boxes with strange labels—
All groping clumsily to mysterious ends,
Out of the gaslight, dragged by private Fates.
Their echoes die—The dark train shakes and plunges;
Bells cry out; the night-ride starts again.
Soon I shall look out into nothing but blackness,
Pall, windy fields. The old roar and knock of the rails
Melts in dull fury. Pull down the blind. Sleep. Sleep.
Nothing but grey, rushing rivers of bush outside.
Gaslight and milk cans. Of Raptown I recall nothing else.

*

I had assumed that Raptown was a fictitious town, perhaps suggesting the rap and rattle of the trains coming through. But then I read a footnote in an anthology saying that Raptown was a real place, on the NSW central coast, and I wondered how it had got its name.

Eve Langley wrote in *The Pea Pickers*, ‘My sister and I, being of coarse and fertile earth, were more sensitive to the etymon than to anything else in the world. At night we sat down and wrote out columns of Australian place-names, glorying in their ancient autochthonousness. English names, in Australia, we despised. “Effete,” we said. “Unimaginative. But ... ah, Pinaroo ... Wahgunyah ... Eudarina ... Tallygaroopna ... Monaro ... Tumbarumba ... Bumberrah, and thousands of others! How fine they are! We must be in the towns and speak their names.”’

In fact the bulk of Australian towns with non-Aboriginal names are named after people. The British nabbed all the capitals except Canberra (and Adelaide by adoption; William IV’s German queen). These days it is getting harder for polities and governors; if they’re fortunate they get a street, if they’re around at the right time they might get a suburb ... or perhaps ‘a development’ ...

Farmers and graziers did quite well too. But Bendigo in Victoria is named for a British boxer Abednego William Thompson (though it spent some of its life known as Sandhurst) while Deniliquin in NSW was said to be named for a famous Aboriginal wrestler called Denilakoon.

And there are places named for people who do truly seem to deserve to be remembered, such as the Sydney municipality of Holroyd named after Arthur Todd Holroyd (1806 – 1887) “This remarkable man was born in London. He studied medicine but after practicing for only a year, he turned to law instead. From 1835 to 1838, Holroyd travelled through Egypt, the Sudan and Syria. On his return to London, he exposed the horrors of the slave trade. In 1843, he migrated to New Zealand. In 1845, he arrived in Sydney where he became one of the colony’s leading barristers.” He had various business interests but is also “remembered as the father of

lawn bowls in Australia.” He was the first mayor of the Prospect and Sherwood municipality which was renamed for him in 1927.

Then there are wives: Port Augusta, for instance, was “named in 1852 after Lady Augusta Young — wife of Sir Henry Fox Young, Deputy Governor of South Australia, and niece of Bishop Short, the first Anglican Bishop of Adelaide — who was a daughter of Captain Marryat, author of *Midshipman Easy* and several more schoolboy classics.” (Basil Fuller in *Nullabor Lifelines*.)

And Alice Springs was named for the wife of Charles Todd who was in charge of constructing the Overland Telegraph line. Its original name was Stuart.

A more unusual name from a wife is Adavale in Queensland; it was called Ada’s Veil because Ada Stevens lost her veil there in 1870 while crossing Blackwater Creek. It was Queensland Railways which shortened it

Then there is Mt Isa which is named for a sister of John Campbell Miles, the prospector who came upon the rich lode there in 1923 and commemorated his sister Isabella. And a far more obscure female connection; the little town of Nathalia in Victoria is said to be named for Nathalia, mother of Russian tsar Peter the Great.

And you didn’t need to be a saint to get a town. King O’Malley got both a Canberra suburb and a small siding on the Indian-Pacific. But he was loud, noisy, opinionated, mildly eccentric, and contentious rather than a bad hat. In fact after reading Larry Noye’s biography of him I felt a sneaking admiration. He was an old time evangelical ‘stump orator’ and temperance advocate. He was colourful in his language and his dress, even to wearing a lavender suit and carrying a scented handkerchief (though that might’ve had something to do with the lack of audience hygiene). There is an irony in the fact that if he had been honest about his American citizenship, rather than passing himself off as a Canadian, then he would not have been eligible to sit in an Australian parliament. Noye says of him, “He contributed much. As Minister for Home Affairs in the brisk Fisher Government of 1910-13, he launched the bold project to push a railway across the wastes to West Australia. He led in building Canberra; and through his quest for the Commonwealth Bank he quickened Australian economic life by lightening the burden of interest on loans.” But I think I liked him because he genuinely seemed to care about the battlers, the down-and-outs, the people doing it hard; a lot of politicians, even now, bring out the ‘li’l Aussie battler’ when some crocodile tears will help their re-election but that same little battler gets a good kick up the backside when the media has moved on to their next story. And I think O’Malley was being very wise when in 1939 he called “on all true Australians to swear by the tombs of their ancestors that they would never elect to Parliament men whose secret mission is to destroy the Commonwealth Bank.”

And ‘Red Ted’ Theodore got a coal town in central Queensland. E.G. ‘Red Ted’ Theodore was born in Port Adelaide in 1884 where his Rumanian father was a tugboat captain; he left school at twelve to work with him, then four years later lit out for the goldfields of Western Australia. It was via mines and the organising of mineworkers that he came to Queensland and rose to be Premier in 1919.

Less of a ‘character’ with mitigating qualities was Robert Towns who got Townsville as his lasting memorial. Edward Wybergh Docker begins his book *The Blackbirders*: “Forty miles south of Brisbane on the Logan River, Townsvale in 1864 was the cotton plantation of the prosperous Sydney businessman and shipowner, Robert Towns. Yet “plantation”, although it was used of Townsvale almost for the first time in Australia to describe any such establishment, is a misleading term. Black field hands toiled, bent between the hot rows, watched over by men on horseback. Otherwise the atmosphere that one tends to associate with the Old South, of cool porticos fragrant with orange blossom, of dusky retainers stooping to proffer, with exquisite tact, the mint julep, was quite starkly absent.” Towns was the pioneer of blackbirding round the Pacific Islands to grab by force, bribery, or false pretences thousands of unfortunate people who ended up as virtual slaves on Queensland “plantations”.

In fact, browsing through books on the origins of Australian place names is a pleasant way to while away a tedious journey. C. J. Dennison in *Where in Tasmania?* writes “One of my earliest recollections is of a train trip my mother took me. My grandparents lived at Weetah and we travelled from Hobart by rail to visit them. As a 7 year old, I was a very restless traveller.” His mother helped to pass the time by playing a game which involved remembering the last station they had passed. “I think that this is when my love of collecting their history and location started.” So what of Rapptown? I hadn’t been able to find it so I had begun to have doubts about its reality. I picked up Geoffrey Dutton’s biography of Slessor in which he says Rapptown was actually the town of Bargo which Slessor passed through on his way to Canberra. He quotes Slessor as saying “to avoid identification with the near-Sydney town of Bargo, once a small country district, now almost a metropolitan suburb. ‘Rapptown’ is an invented general name, is in the spirit of small Australian (and American) town-names and cannot be identified with any specific place.” Never mind ...

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Recipes and Reflections, a little book put out by the Range Writers in Toowoomba, said, “Several decades ago the Railway Refreshment Rooms were kept extremely busy catering for numerous mail trains including the Western, Southern, Thallon and Roma Mails. Also light refreshments were served daily for several rail motors.

“Dulcie, whose name is synonymous with the Refreshment Rooms has kindly given us a few of their recipes.” One staple Dulcie provided was Sausage Rolls: 8 lbs flour. 5 lbs pastry margarine. 1 lb cake margarine. 2 ozs cream of tartar. Salt to taste. Mixture (1½ lbs mixture per 1 lb flour) (1 lb mince plus breadcrumbs and cold vegetables) 4 eggs. Herbs and salt.

Roll pastry thin, add mixture and cut to size. Bake to golden brown.

And they of course used Defiance flour which the book also mentions: “In the late 1800s on the Darling Downs in south-east Queensland, a number of small mills took the produce of wheat farmers. The largest mill was the Brisbane Milling Company’s Dominion Mill in Toowoomba. The company had a monopoly in the milling business and was unpopular with the struggling farmers.

The farmers’ complaints were heard by George Crisp, the Dominion Mill manager, and Ellen and Patrick O’Brian, who ran a prosperous produce and grocery store which put them in constant touch with farmers.

In 1899, the three started a new mill to challenge the dominance of the Brisbane Milling Company. They had to overcome many obstacles to start their mill. In particular, banks would not lend them money. The three partners searched for a name for the new company. The name of their competition (Dominion) means authority, rule or control. So the name “Defiance” was selected, as it represented defying the authority, rule and control of the banks.”

Alas, Dulcie, like Railway Refreshment Rooms, has gone the same way as milk cans. Only Defiance still exists.

* * * * *

It struck me while I was musing on milk cans and their distinctive noise and ubiquity that if you go back fifty years many of the writers and poets active in that era had some connection to dairy farming. Was this purely coincidence or is it a reminder of just how important the small family farm was not only to the economy but also to the cultural life, even the vision of what it meant to be Australian?

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March 28: Jill Morris

William Howard Russell

March 29: Patricia Anthony

March 30: Rolf Harris

Anna Sewell

March 31: Nicolai Gogol

April 1: Jan Wahl

April 2: Jennifer Rowe
April 3: Pamela Allen
April 4: Michael Salmon
April 5: Arthur Hailey
April 6: Graeme Base
April 7: Jennifer Maiden
April 8: Ursula Curtiss
April 9: Nigel Gray
Charles Baudelaire

* * * * *

Michael Meyer wrote of being at a party in Graham Greene's house: "Once, at a party in Graham's home in Beaumont Street, Oxford, Enid Starkie, the biographer of Baudelaire and a great talker in the Irish tradition, suddenly asked: 'Which are the three greatest novels?' and everybody had to answer. She named *Madame Bovary*, *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *La Chartreuse de Parme*; mine were *Moby Dick*, *Crime and Punishment* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (and they still would be); and Graham chose *War and Peace*, *Tom Jones* and one out of three late Henry James books, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*, he could not decide which."

Enid Starkie (1897 – 1970) was sister to the great writer on Gypsy lore and history and music including his famous book *Raggle-Taggle*, Walter Starkie, and author in her own right of well-regarded biographies of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Gide. So I felt the sudden tug—why not go down that road? It's sure to be interesting. But no, I have made the firm decision to find out something about Baudelaire and I am going to stay firm ...

Geoffrey Brereton in *An Introduction to the French Poets* writes: "Until quite recently responsible historians of literature could present Baudelaire as a kind of early Toulouse-Lautrec, moving in a Parisian dream-underworld in which the criminal and the courtesan rub shoulders with the grave-digger. The back of the music-hall opens on to the cemetery, like the tavern in Villon. But before you get there you must pass through eye-splitting perspectives of pink and black, rooms of incredible dilapidation tenanted by moustached harpies, fungous alleys haunted by cats, boudoirs rancid with rotting flowers, the whole evening tour of tawdry vice. These, it is true, are the hallmarks of much of Baudelaire's poetry, and not only of the section which he grouped as *Tableaux parisiens*. Enlarging the quest a little, we find the vampire bat, Lucifer, and a majestically defiant Satan — all the trappings it would appear, of Black Romanticism. This gamey atmosphere of evil is Baudelaire's most immediately striking feature, particularly to the adolescent reader. (Adolescence is the time to begin reading him, provided he is not dropped afterwards, for recollection alone in later life will leave an entirely false impression.)" So I wonder what Enid Starkie made of him?

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April 10: Paul Theroux
April 11: Bernard O'Dowd
April 12: Jack Bennett
April 13: Samuel Beckett
Bill Pronzini
Seamus Heaney
April 14: Barbara Anderson
April 15: Henry James
April 16: Anatole France
April 17: Thornton Wilder
April 18: Henry Clarence Kendall
April 19: Richard Hughes
April 20: Richard McRoberts
April 21: Bill Condon

Writing a will, of course, is usually done to a form. All bases covered, everything set out neatly in lists, the expected information and declamations. Yet of all documents it has probably been the most fertile one for story ideas, human emotions, murder and mayhem. Lawyers spend their days drawing up other documents and deeds but I rarely come across passionate stories revolving around partnership agreements. Though anything to do with boundaries seems to have unexplored possibilities ...

*

“The group around the fireplace was nearly all composed of lawyers or those who had an interest in the law. There was Martindale the solicitor, Rufus Lord K.C., young Daniels who had made a name for himself in the Carstairs case, a sprinkling of other barristers, Mr. Justice Cleaver, Lewis of Lewis and Trench and old Mr. Treves. Mr. Treves was close on eighty, a very ripe and experienced eighty. He was a member of a famous firm of solicitors, and the most famous member of that firm, he was said to know more of backstairs history than any man in England and he was a specialist on criminology.

Unthinking people said Mr. Treves ought to write his memoirs. Mr. Treves knew better. He knew that he knew too much.”

(Agatha Christie in *Towards Zero*.)

It must've been a big fireplace! But Agatha Christie was right to suggest that knowing too much can be a good reason for not writing. Retired lawyers do need to watch out; people can read almost anything into anything. And ten or twenty years ago I would have had a job to home in on more than a handful of lawyers as well-known characters. In fact I might've said, “Oh, Rumpole!” and then my mind would probably go blank. Given a minute to think I would probably come back with my second wind. “Perry Mason!” I would cry. Then silence.

Now the courtroom drama is a major genre in its own right. It is a genre I enjoy. I've read Clifford Irving's *Trial* and Nancy Taylor Rosenberg's *Trial by Fire* (though not strictly a courtroom drama) along with several John Grisham's recently. But I have the impression that though they can all claim Perry Mason as a grandfather there isn't really anything which appears to be a descendant of Rumpole. There are good British practitioners of the courtroom drama but they are very rarely funny. I can understand the genre being serious. These are people's lives on the line. And yet ...

* * * * *

“Although I now feel I knew him so well he was remote to me then, a hard-working barrister with a flourishing practice in the Probate, Divorce and Admiralty Division of the High Court. There was nothing he enjoyed more than a good old-fashioned battle as to whether or not adultery had taken place. Often he would tell me of his triumphs and I must have been very young when he said, ‘Remarkable win today, old boy. Only evidence of adultery we had was a pair of footprints upside down on the dashboard of an Austin Seven parked in Hampstead Garden Suburb.’

But if Divorce was my father's daily bread, Probate was his special treat. Before I was born he had sat up night after night writing in lucid prose what became a standard textbook on the validity of Wills. When respectable relatives, red in tooth and claw, met to prove or disprove the sanity of an aged uncle who had left his entire fortune to the Matron of some doubtful nursing home, when it was a question of due execution, or partial revocation, or lucid intervals, whenever greed or disappointment and old family ill-will led middle-aged children to abuse each other in Court, *Mortimer on Probate* was the Bible by which the Judge regulated their ambitions and decided their disputes. When Wills were written, as Wills so often were, on blown duck eggs or in minute handwriting on the tails of kites, my father was there with an appropriate precedent. When testators were perfectly sensible, as testators often were, on every subject except for their nightly chats with the late Emperor Napoleon the Third, my father was there with his long experience of monomania and the lucid interval. He was good on Divorce,

but at Probate he became unbeatable. It was only when the Wills and incriminating hotel bills were put away, when nautical charts were unrolled and old Sea Dogs came clumping into the witness-box, when the Anchor was hung behind the Judge's chair and the Admiralty Court was in session, that my father discreetly withdrew. He knew absolutely nothing about ships."

From John Mortimer's *Clinging to the Wreckage*.

With a lawyer father and a long career in the law it is curious that Mortimer gives the impression he would rather write about the foibles of the English middle classes. Or is that the key? Earle Stanley Gardner wrote pulp fiction adventures and melodramas while he practiced as a lawyer. He retired from his practice to write Perry Mason. The best books about place and work are often those written in exile from it ...

*

"The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill lists these terms as offensive: *crazy, nuts, wacko, maniac, sicko, psycho, lunatic, demented, loony*." Karen Moscynski in a *Writers' Digest* article in 1996. She says "*Insanity* is a legal term, not a medical one."

D. P. Lyle in *Forensics for Dummies* wrote, "Psychiatrists can't diagnose insanity, because it's a legal term rather than a medical condition. Insanity, therefore, is determined only by a judge or jury. Psychiatrists diagnose mental disorders and advise the court as to their findings, but the final say comes from the law, not medicine.

"Insanity is a slippery, poorly defined term that means different things in different jurisdictions. However, most courts adhere to the *McNaughten rule*, which basically asks whether the suspect suffers from any mental disorder that prevents him or her from understanding the nature and the consequences of his or her actions. In other words, you can be found not guilty by reason of insanity if you didn't know at the time of the crime that your actions were illegal or if you were incapable of altering your illicit behavior.

"In 1984, Congress adopted the Omnibus Crime Code for Insanity, which states that people can be found not guilty by reason of insanity if they didn't *appreciate* the illegality of their behavior. The term *appreciate* differs vastly from the word *know*, implying a higher degree of understanding than simple knowledge.

"The *McNaughten* and the Omnibus definitions address the fact that a crime consists of two parts: the criminal activity, termed the *actus reus*, and criminal intent, known as the *mens rea*."

The question I found I had was that one that many writers, particularly of mysteries, skate over: challenging a person's will because that person is claimed either to be 'mentally incompetent' or under 'undue influence' when they wrote a will to dispose of their belongings. And yet—if we all had to undergo a test before being allowed to prepare a will a lot of people would not pass. When does eccentricity or senility become mental incompetence? And regardless of our strange wishes ... surely the key point is that they are *our* wishes, not our relatives' wishes, and therefore should be respected? And if a mentally incompetent person leaves their estate to their next-of-kin should that will be challenged on the grounds of incompetence? It seems very unlikely. In other words it *is* the wishes of family and relatives which are the key to deciding whether someone made a valid will or not.

Nearly all the 'Golden Age' writers drew on wills for plots at one time or another. But wills have gone out of fashion these days. Do we write less interesting wills? Are we more tolerant of the little foibles of our parents and grandparents? Or is it that the law has gradually closed up many fertile little loopholes? Take for instance Dorothy Sayers' novel *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*. The novel revolves round the intriguing question of two people dying almost at the same time, their money willed to each other, but with both dead—who will inherit? The money of the first to die goes to the survivor who dies soon after, leaving both estates to the survivor's choice of heir—who then collects two boodles. This is a good subject for murder, mayhem, and general skullduggery ... but the law now comes along and tidies things up. For instance Long and Coffey in *Rest Assured* say, 'If two or more people die at the same time and the order of death cannot be determined, the law in NSW presumes that

the oldest died first. The estates are divided accordingly.’ All very nice and simple for the heirs but a definite party-pooper when it comes to plots ...

* * * * *

The other day I was talking with a friend who collects books about true people wrongly convicted; I had just recommended John Grisham’s *The Innocent Man* to him. This is about a case in the USA where a man was only weeks away from getting his lethal injection. At every stage the police and lawyers did an abysmally bad job. It doesn’t mean that the innocent man came over as a particularly likeable person. He didn’t. But being unlikeable and being a murderer are two very different things. There are many reasons, moral and conceptual, why the death penalty should be made a thing of the past round the world. But the simplest most obvious one is simply that no human being is infallible and no system is infallible and no society is best protected by an idea which can lead to horrendous mistakes ...

I came upon a mention of John Thomas Barry in William Tallack’s biography of English reformer Peter Bedford—“Another friend of Peter Bedford’s, for many a long year, was the late John Thomas Barry, a chief labourer in efforts to abolish the punishment of death. He was also a co-operator in many of the Spitalfields charitable labours, but selected the amelioration of the penal code as his peculiar line of philanthropic service. And wonderfully did he work at it. Night and day he laboured with tongue and pen in his chosen cause. Whilst aided powerfully by men like Buxton, Lushington, Sydney Taylor, William Allan, William Ewart, M.P., Barrett Lennard, M.P., the brunt of the work devolved for some years upon himself. When he commenced his operation, there were between one and two hundred offences punishable with death, and the un-fortunate victims of inherited misery and vice were strung up like dogs by the dozen at a time, although these spectacles seemed to increase crime by hardening still further the hearts of those who witnessed such scenes, and by rendering the conviction of the guilty more and more a matter of difficulty. Then, again, under such a Draconian system, the awful contingency of taking away innocent lives by judicial mistakes was by no means of unfrequent occurrence. Harrowing instances of such cruel miscarriages of justice, from time to time, roused Mr. Barry to an intensity and permanence of exertion, which only terminated with his life. But meanwhile he had assaulted successively one capital enactment after another, until, at the period of his death in 1864, he had the satisfaction of knowing that, virtually, only one crime (certainly the most awful of all) remained punishable with the hateful rope of the hangman. Mr. Barry worked much in the background, yet not the less effectively. Many a public meeting, many an influential deputation to the Home office, many a petition, many a parliamentary motion, were initiated by his unseen action. Others better known to the public, and more influential in position, appeared to be the moving powers; but in reality the mainspring of the work was the quiet, unostentatious Mr. Barry”.

I had never heard of him. But I ‘tips me lid’. And it is good when best-selling authors take time out from their blockbusters to write about the poor, the over-looked, the wrongly-convicted, but usually in the background are people like Barry who devote their lives to their campaigns to bring such problems to the notice of the more powerful and influential ...

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April 22: Damien Broderick

April 23: William Shakespeare

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James Sutherland in *The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes* writes, “When Boswell was putting the finishing touches to his *Life of Johnson* he told a friend that it would be full of anecdotes; ‘which word’, he added, ‘Johnson always condemned as used in the sense that the French, and we from them, use it, as signifying particulars’. In his *Dictionary* (1755) Johnson had defined the word anecdote as ‘something yet unpublished; secret history’. By 1773, however, when he prepared the fourth edition, he realized that he must note a second meaning: ‘It is now used, after the French, for a biographical incident; a minute passage of private life.’ This second meaning, which Johnson had resisted but now felt he had to record, was only

gradually establishing itself during his lifetime, and the older sense of ‘something yet unpublished’ was still current, and was to remain so for some time after his death. When John Nichols published his well-known *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (1812-15) he was offering the public a voluminous collection of unpublished literary records. It is true that he occasionally included what would now be called an anecdote; but the bulk of his material consisted of lists of books, literary correspondence published for the first time, and biographical memoirs of authors, booksellers, and printers.”

So instead of a Secret Intelligence Organisation we could have a National Anecdote Organisation. Much nicer.

The book also gives several little anecdotes to show that William Shakespeare was a gay old dog.

‘Upon a time when Burbage played Richard III, there was a citizen grew so far in liking with him that before she went from the play she appointed him to come that night unto her by the name of Richard the Third. Shakespeare overhearing their conclusion went before, was entertained, and at his game ere Burbage came. Then message being brought that Richard the Third was at the door, Shakespeare caused return to be made that William the Conqueror was before Richard the Third.’

And. ‘Shakespeare, in his frequent journeys between London and his native place Stratford-upon-Avon, used to lie at Davenant’s, at the Crown, in Oxford. He was very well acquainted with Mrs. Davenant; and her son (afterwards Sir William) was supposed to be more nearly related to him than as a godson only.

‘One day, when Shakespeare was just arrived, and the boy sent for from school to him, a head of one of the colleges (who was pretty well acquainted with the affairs of the family) met the child running home, and asked him whither he was going in so much haste? The boy said, ‘To my godfather, Shakespeare.’ ‘Fie, child,’ says the old gentleman, ‘why are you so superfluous? Have not you learned yet that you should not use the name of God in vain?’

Both these stories were written down after Shakespeare was dead so it isn’t possible to know if they circulated about him during his lifetime—or even if he took pleasure in spreading such stories himself. But the thing that struck me is that the modern attitude is one of increasing reverence towards Shakespeare. If he had affairs then they were not quick tumbles with strangers. He has become ‘God, Father Shakespeare’ rather than, as he would’ve been seen in his lifetime, as merely one of the many who kept the theatres supplied with new material.

Is this kind of modern homage natural, healthy, even understandable? Or is it instead more like a flood marker still bravely standing above the swift murky waters rushing by and taking the language to its slipshod and unenvied doom?

Fortunately there is parody.

Simon Brett writes: ‘Parody, like revue writing, has been said to be a young man’s game, and there is some truth in this. Form parody, which is more of an intellectual recreation for lovers of literature, is produced by writers of all ages. Roger Woddis and many of the regular *New Statesman* competition winners, with their intriguing pseudonyms, have produced a consistently high standard of form parodies over some decades. But the very best examples of critical stylistic parody have been the products of young minds.

‘There are many reasons for this. Young writers are often more sensitive to the onset of self-indulgence and less tolerant of pomposity than their seniors. They may also have less patience with the literary establishment and be more prepared to challenge its values. Those who are learning their craft may, like painters, study technique by copying the acknowledged masters. This is what Alexander Pope did as a young man, and from copying it is not such a great step to parody. Most important of all, taking on the style of other writers is a valuable exercise for those who have yet to evolve their own. Michael Frayn and Alan Bennett, for instance, both produced parodies before finding their individual voices as playwrights.’

Parodies have a long pedigree. Henry Fielding, for instance, parodied Samuel Richardson's eighteenth century novel *Pamela* in his own story *Shamela*. And I suppose my favourite parody was Yeatman and Sellar in their poem 'How We Brought the Good News From Aix to Ghent, or Vice Versa' which parodied Robert Browning's nineteenth century poem 'How We Brought the Good News From Ghent to Aix'—but the thing about it was that I wasn't aware of it as a parody; I just thought it was a funny poem when I came on it as a child. So I suppose the question is: do you need to know the original to fully enjoy a parody? My feeling is: probably not, but it can deepen your enjoyment.

And among the Shakespearean parodies Brett has collected are:

To *print*, or not to *print*—that is the question.

Whether 'tis better in a trunk to bury

The quirks and crotchets of outrageous fancy,

Or send a well-wrote copy to the press,

And by disclosing, end them? To print, no doubt

No more; and by one act to say we end

The head-ache, and a thousand natural shocks

Of scribbling frenzy—'tis a consummation

Devoutly to be wish'd. To print—to beam

From the same shelf with Pope, in calf well bound:

To sleep, perchance, with Quarles—Ay, there's the rub—

For to what class a writer may be doom'd,

When he hath shuffled off some paltry stuff,

Must give us pause.—There's the respect that makes

Th' unwilling poet keep his piece nine years.

For who would bear th' impatient thirst of fame,

The pride of conscious merit, and 'bove all,

The tedious importunity of friends,

When as himself might his *quietus* make

With a bare inkhorn? Who would fardles bear

To groan and sweat under a load of wit?

But that the tread of steep Parnassus' hill,

That undiscover'd country, with whose bays

Few travellers return, puzzles the will,

And makes us rather bear to be known and damn'd.

Thus critics do make cowards of us all,

And thus the healthful face of many a poem

Is sickly'd o'er with a pale manuscript;

And enterprise of great fire and spirit,

With this regard from Dodsley turn away,

And lose the name of authors.

(Richard Jago, 'Hamlet's Soliloquy Imitated')

Or this:

Full fathom five thy father lies,

His aqualung was the wrong size.

(June Mercer Langfield)

* * * * *

April 24: R. M. Ballantyne

April 25: Libby Anderson

Walter de la Mare

Lilian Beckwith

April 26: Morris West

April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft

Hugh Lunn
April 28: Anna Clarke
April 29: Rafael Sabatini
April 30: Paul Jennings
Nadia Wheatley
May 1: Marie Corelli

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Marie Corelli wrote, “I must tell you I have a simple pharmacopoeia of my own — it contains twelve remedies, and only twelve. In fact there are no more that are of any use to the human mechanism.” (*A Romance of Two Worlds*)

I wonder what her twelve were? Hans Rausch wrote: “President Allende of Chile set up a committee to look into the huge number of pharmaceuticals on the market. The committee came back with twelve products they had found consistently and reliably to meet their manufacturers’ claims.” Perhaps American and multinational pharmaceutical companies played a role in bringing his government down? After all, you don’t want people to know that they could only find twelve products worth buying. Better to shut the government down before anything leaks out. And I wonder what *those* twelve were?

In fact Marie Corelli would now probably be seen as someone interested in alternative medicines and treatments as well as other modern preoccupations such as saving heritage and open spaces from ‘development’ ...

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“I also read Marie Corelli. Clunie and I agreed that she was the greatest writer who ever lived; and together, we wrote her a letter to this effect. If she would only send us her signature, we should cherish it until death. She never replied, and soon we grew critical of her work.

“Today, when I get letters telling me that I am easily the greatest man alive, I always answer them, hypocritically disclaiming the compliment but wishing the senders all luck in their own futures. Marie Corelli lost two earnest admirers by not answering then; I have so few that I dare not lose any. If any youth thinks that I am greater than Shakespeare and Shaw rolled into one, it would be brutally unkind of me to contradict him. The heroes of my youth often let me down, but perhaps my tactics were all wrong. Had I written: Dear Miss Corelli, you can’t write for nuts, and your characters are dead sticks, and your philosophy is tripe’, I am sure I should have had an answer.”

A. S. Neill in *Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!*

The trouble with this was that Marie Corelli faced a barrage and chorus of criticism from journalists and the literary establishment; so much so that she refused to give out review copies, saying she saw no reason to give free copies to people who enjoyed tearing her work to pieces—and she trained her Yorkshire terrier to rip up the critical reviews ...

I knew next to nothing about Marie Corelli but I happened to notice Teresa Ransom’s *The Mysterious Miss Marie Corelli* in the library and I found I came away from it quite sympathetic to her and her struggle for acceptance.

At the heart of her mystery was that she didn’t know who she was although she knew she was almost certainly illegitimate. Her most likely parents were the Scottish journalist Charles Mackay who had an affair with a young woman, Elizabeth Mary Mills, in London, causing his wife to leave him. He certainly took Marie into his household and she always referred to him as her adoptive father but this paternity is by no means proven. She appears to have chosen the name Marie Corelli in the hope of being seen as interesting and unusual by editors and publishers. Although she had a little education at the hands of a governess or two she was like many Victorian women in being uneducated and unqualified so her rise to being the best-selling novelist of her generation, popular with women from Queen Victoria to poor shop-girls, did bring resentment and envy.

Her own feelings about her lack of background led her to invent constantly changing stories but they also led her to this impassioned plea, in Ransom’s words, “To be illegitimate in

Victorian society was a sin past forgiving, as Marie Corelli wrote in *Innocent*: ‘There’s many a piece of wicked injustice in the world, but nothing more wicked than to set shame or blame on a child that’s born without permit of law, or blessing of priest. For it’s not the child’s fault, — it’s brought into the world without its own consent. — and yet the world fastens a slur on it! That’s downright brutal and senseless! — for if there is any blame attached to the matter it should be fastened on the parents, and not on the child.’ ”

She used her writing for other pleas; against alcohol and tobacco, against corruption in the church, against snobbishness, against the destruction of old buildings. She pleaded for more opportunities for women though she did not support the suffragettes; and she was often generous with her money, though sometimes unwise in the way she went about helping ...

And like many women of her era who chose not to marry she lived all her life with a much-loved friend Bertha van der Vyver; it is unlikely that it was a lesbian relationship but rather the kind of warm and passionate friendship which many women in such circumstances developed ...

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“The novel which he was trying to read was called *Temporal Power* by Marie Corelli. One of the nurses had lent it to him because she thought that Father Smith would be even nicer as a Scottish Episcopalian clergyman than he was as a Roman Catholic priest and hoped that the book would convert him; but the priest found the book stupid and flamboyant and he let it fall on the coverlet and lay back on his pillow.

... Then he prayed for Marie Corelli, because he thought she really ought to have known better and thought that God would think so too.” Bruce Marshall in *All Glorious Within*.

As Marie Corelli was as critical of the Roman church as of other denominations I am not surprised that her work did not appeal to priests. But what did make it appeal to hundreds of thousands of readers? I have only read her first book *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886) and I think to call her a romantic novelist (with its image of Barbara Cartland in pink) is misleading. She was interested in many of the preoccupations of the late Victorian age: the claims of science, the fascination with Egypt, new discoveries in Asia, an interest in spiritualism and reincarnation, claims made for electricity, ‘eternal youth’, ‘life forces’ and the sense of a new age dawning. Ransom describes the book as a ‘pseudo-Christian fantasy’ and I think that mystical element is very important, the sense that beyond the commonplace there are doors which might yet open into strange new worlds.

Reading through Ransom’s collection of obituary pieces it seemed to me that other people had difficulty deciding whether she was a writer worthy of being read and remembered or a strange aberration.

“However one accounts for Miss Marie Corelli’s literary fame, no one who knew her can fail to recognize that her death removes from social life an outstanding personality, in which independence of mind, strength of will, and combativeness of spirit mingled with a genuine zeal for good causes.”

Sir Sidney Lee writing in *The Times*.

“Whatever may be the verdict of posterity, Marie Corelli was certainly a literary phenomenon. Her success was achieved in spite of the hostility of critics and the sneers of ‘superior persons.’ Her faults as a writer were unconcealed. She was emotional and well-informed, but lacking humour. Perhaps she was at her best when aroused to indignation or describing placid scenes of rural life. She failed when she pilloried society. She judged the many by the few. She attacked all women for the sins of the ‘smart set.’ She was in her time the greatest literary ‘protester.’ ”

Evening Standard 21 April 1924.

“She was never restrained from attacking either institutions or human types by the slightest consciousness of insufficient knowledge. Her full-blooded Turkey-carpet style of writing with its half dozen words where one would do, is, however, not peculiar to her but is equally characteristic of numerous writers who never succeed in reaching the great heart of the

public. Where, then, lay her secret? It will probably be found in her extraordinary power of telling a story, of dramatic, vivid narration, which atoned for all her lack of perspective, of sympathy, of humour.”

Morning Post 22 April 1924.

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May 2: Gavin Souter

Alan Marshall

May 3: Norman Thelwell

May 4: Thomas Kinsella

May 5: T. A. G. Hungerford

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Harry Freeman wrote in *Collingwood Coke*, ‘Having arrived in Melbourne a few weeks previously, with nostrils accustomed to the fresh country air of South Gippsland, some of our family were intrigued as to the origin of an acrid smell which “hung around” the City of Collingwood and seemed more noticeable at night time.

‘On the night mentioned my brothers John, Wilfred and I were walking along Hoddle Street on our way home to the parsonage in East Melbourne after attending a meeting at the Gipps Street church, which was the Headquarters of the Collingwood Methodist Mission. A pall of wispy smoke hung limply in the air and the smell, being stronger than usual, prompted us to enquire of a couple of local lads who accompanied us part of the way, what it was. “Oh that’s Collingwood Coke” came the reply and one went on to explain that many people who were unable to afford fire-wood, visited dumps at the numerous boot and shoe factories in the district to collect leather skives — generally in 70 lb. hessian sugar bags or “gunny sacks” as they were often called.

‘Skives are leather off-cuts from hides and dressed leather from which the various components of footwear have been cut — i.e. soles, heel lifts, vamps, uppers and toe caps.

‘It was difficult to set the skives burning, but once alight the red embers glowed under a layer of white ash though there was no flame. The burning skives gave out reasonable heat provided a person sat almost on top of the grate, and for hundreds of poor families and elderly people living alone, Collingwood Coke was their only means of warmth and fuel for cooking.’

Collingwood was then the centre of making shoes and boots in Melbourne. Niall Brennan in *John Wren: Gambler* wrote: ‘Collingwood was to become the centre of the Melbourne boot trade; boot and shoe factories and allied industries abounded, and as a result it became a hotbed of organized trade unionism. The ‘boot trade’ became a common guild, a freemasonry for whole families, for at twelve years of age, a girl could go to work with her father. The boot trade had a place for everybody. Factory owners came to work in carriages and later in motor cars; the workers arrived on foot, later on bicycles.

‘The people have always been loyal to their district. Those who have lived there all their lives want to stay there and many who have gone away return. Many of those who have not returned speak of the place of their childhood affectionately. It is difficult for a stranger to understand this, but then it is always difficult to appreciate someone else’s home. Nestling into the cliffs of Studley Park one can be conscious, in some parts of Collingwood, of an almost claustrophobic feeling. In times of depression, Collingwood sheds many of its citizens. It sheds them like any congested place where the opportunities are few; and it has known many periods of depression.’

One it did not shed in a time of depression; ‘It was in Collingwood, on 3 April 1871, that John Wren was born.’ Wren went to work at thirteen in a boot factory and at the age of nineteen lost his job in the depression of the 1890s. Rather than go away in search of work he established the famous, or infamous, ‘Collingwood Tote’, his off-course betting shop and the foundation of his gambling fortune.

Alan Marshall in *How Beautiful Were Thy Feet* chronicled the slow agonising demise of the boot factories through the years of a later depression, of the 1930s, a depression which spelt the beginning of the end for most of them.

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Modern scholarship has given the sense that the statistics do not bear out the long-held ideas about the horrors of the Depression years. It is true that few people died of starvation but statistics, regardless of their usefulness, cannot adequately demonstrate the sense of apprehension, worry, and humiliation which undermined many lives. I was thinking on this as I read John Kingsmill's *Australia Street*. "One year of the Great Depression turned into two, and three, and the band of door-to-door salesmen multiplied over and over. 'Mum!' we'd call down the hall, having answered the front doorbell to find a man there with a handful of ties or socks or a schoolcase opened to reveal stationary, mothballs, handkerchiefs, pencils, string, sometimes little things he and his family had made — 'Mum! There's a man at the door!' She knew we weren't expecting anyone, which meant the man was another salesman, maybe the third or fourth that day. She couldn't have afforded a ball of string much less a tie, but she would still pay the man the common courtesy of coming to the end of the hall, wiping her hands on her apron, perhaps advancing a few steps up the hallway, shaking her head and saying (over his tentative, desperate sales pitch): 'No. I'm sorry, I don't need ... no ... I am *sorry*, but ...' as she saw the man turn away and walk out the front gate. But not without raising his hat to her. You observed all the old proprieties, the courtesies, even when hungry, even when humiliated, as both of them were, as that man would be, time and again, up and down the streets of Bondi. Housewife, salesman (previously clerk, farmer, small businessman, bricklayer) humiliated by each other, wounded by each other ('I *am* sorry!') day after day."

No lists of people in or out of work, no history book with its grand sweep of an era, can do justice to that sense of a thousand little stabs of humiliation and regret and failure ...

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'For young people growing up in the age of the 'affluent society', much of what I am writing must seem incomprehensible. At least jobs are available in most countries and are plentiful in Australia, due to the special conditions of continuing economic expansion since World War II. Not just any job, but a choice of jobs is available, and within certain limits the future can be planned in advance.

'But to my generation of youth in Australia there seemed no future at all. During the first months of the Great Depression we thought the situation would soon improve. The newspapers kept assuring us that 'the corner was being turned' and 'prosperity was in sight', etc. But the months grew into years and the years followed each other, until many accepted chronic depression as the normal, permanent state of affairs.

'There was no discussion as to what sort of job or profession a lad would like to follow on leaving school. The only question was whether he would find a job at all. Young people grew up almost without knowing that a choice of jobs and careers had ever existed. Our world, many of us felt, would always be like that, a hand-to-mouth existence. I was convinced that I would never be able to marry and have my own family, for instance. I had seen too many desperate, unemployed young fathers, their faces prematurely lined with bitterness because they could neither feed nor clothe their children properly. Of course, there was no starvation as I came to know it later in Asia. But there was the desperate hopelessness which occurs when a breadwinner can no longer provide for his own. If there was no death in the physical sense, there was in the spiritual sense.'

Wilfred Burchett in *Passport*.

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I sometimes read of older writers bemoaning the lack of Australian literature in their childhoods; but I have gradually come to the belief that though there were not many self-consciously literary works around, there were many good writers of both fact and fiction to choose from. The other day I was in an op-shop and noticed they had several F. J. Thwaites

there; I knew nothing of Fred Thwaites but when I went to look him up I found he was the best-selling author in Australia for a number of years. Although I wasn't wild about the two books I bought, *Whispers in Tahiti*, and *No love to give*, they were conservative and slightly misogynist, yet I think I would've enjoyed them as a teenager for their exotic locations and very readable style. Are we dropping writers worth remembering off our lists of Australian authors simply because the books that appealed to a 1950s reader don't appeal to a 2007 reader?

And as you may know already, I am a fan of Alan Marshall. I think his books about Australia in the thirties and forties do more to make an era come alive than anything else we have. T. A. G. Hungerford also collected together many stories and anecdotes from his childhood and growing up in Western Australia. His collections, such as *Red Rover Come Over* and *Stories from Suburban Road* are very readable and attractive. But I had the curious feeling that he had somehow airbrushed out the worries and anxieties of the era. Or was he just very fortunate? Or was the real problem simply that I had read Alan Marshall with his much more tightly written and emotional prose before I read Hungerford?

Marshall writes, '*The liquidator is here ... slow up lads, it's all over ... the machines falter ... the erratic whine of starved machines ... what does it matter ... who gives a damn ... you can slacken up men, the liquidator is here ... off tonight ... tonight's the night ... the street corner for you now, Shorty ... the street corner tomorrow ... and the tramp and the tramp ... full up here, son ... full up here, girlie ... and the tramp and the tramp ...*'

It seems worth dwelling a moment on that downhill slide as boot-making and boot-makers become an endangered species in this country ... and all that skill and expertise, won so painfully, is thrown away ...

* * * * *

May 6: Lois Krok
May 7: Robert Browning
Peter Carey
May 8: Peter Corris
David Attenborough
May 9: J. M. Barrie
May 10: John Rowe Townsend
May 11: Camilo José Cela
May 12: Edward Lear
May 13: Daphne du Maurier
May 14: Steve Katz
Mary Delany
May 15: Xavier Herbert
Bill Peach

* * * * *

Randolph Stow wrote of Xavier Herbert: "This is not to say that it is a uniformly successful work. It is far from that. If the *enfant terrible* has not withered or staled neither has he matured very much." He was writing of Herbert's second massive tome *Poor Fellow My Country*. But I wonder if we are right to expect writers to develop book by book? And what of Randolph Stow. Did he mature? He probably did. *Girl Green as Elderflower* is probably a more profound and fascinating story than *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*. But people are more likely to know and remember his first book.

And Herbert was writing the books he wanted to write; big and brawling and sprawling and able to take in everything along the way, like things gathered on a relentless tide. History, humour, irony, drama, landscape, anger, love, but the bed on which everything rests is undoubtedly race relations. It underpins and informs every relationship, every event, every drama.

Stow may be the better writer in a literary sense. But Herbert is the better storyteller. He uses his wry humour in little asides such as: ‘The Judge was in one of his argumentative moods. Counsel (Defence was employed by the Aborigines Department) muttered behind hands. The Prosecutor at length made bold to suggest that since Elbert was likely to go to jail he would very soon lose the Franchise for a good while, so why not assume that he did not possess it and treat him as Aboriginal? The Judge talked at length about the Law of the Land, which was so constituted that an accused person was considered innocent till proved guilty, no matter what hopes a State Prosecutor might have of securing conviction; then he scolded the Prosecutor for having split an infinitive and fused a participle, and talked at length about English Usage’ and there are times when I felt Herbert was writing mainly to vent some anger: ‘Oscar at the cattle race watched the cataract of flesh and blood go brawling from the train to the ship. Men on the roofs of cars were prodding at the beasts and bellowing above their din; others on the rails of the race flogged savagely with stockwhips; others with electric goads connected with the power of the ship were prodding through the rails at atoms of the flood that caught by horns or fell. Legs and horns and ribs were broken, bodies lacerated, eyes gouged out. The sloping floor of the race was sloppy with dung and blood. On and on flowed the cataract, its atoms bellowing, slaving, mad with fear. Oh where is the carnivore that mauls its meat more savagely than man!’ but his writing is usually plain and straightforward. He rarely calls attention to his vocabulary or style. The narrative drives ahead in strong unvarnished prose.

But I think Herbert is the better writer in the sense that he has more important things to say. When we choose out books to give an insight into Australia then Herbert should come before Stow ... that is, if we really want our children to understand the world of mixed race children in Australia’s past. Do we? I wonder how many people actually read the ‘Bringing Them Home’ report?

Many people might have been relieved that there was an attempt to deal with the lives and miseries of mixed race children who were stolen away from their mothers, in abductions of appalling brutality and gross insensitivity, and given away or put into institutions, siblings separated, culture and language denied ... and the ongoing struggle to deal with the violence, trauma, misery and dislocation of those children and parents.

Many of the stories recorded made me both furiously angry and terribly sad.

‘The policeman, who no doubt was doing his duty, patted his handcuffs, which were in a leather case on his belt, and which May [my sister] and I thought was a revolver ... ‘I’ll have to use this if you do not let us take these children now’. Thinking that the policeman would shoot Mother, because she was trying to stop him, we screamed, ‘We’ll go with him, Mum, we’ll go’ ... Then the policeman sprang another shock. He said he had to go to the hospital to pick up Geraldine [my baby sister], who was to be taken as well. The horror on my mother’s face and her heartbroken cry!’ (NSW)

‘Remembering the 3 additional strikes to boy 28, the general opinion and the expressions used of coloured inmates in the punishment book, which were not only descriptive but contemptuous, such as ‘darkies’, ‘poor type of darky’, ‘aboriginal of poor colour’, ‘bad type of aboriginal’, ‘typical nigger’, ‘black waster’, and ‘black mongrel’, neither am I prepared to hold beyond reasonable doubt that there was not discrimination in punishment against the coloured inmates.’ (Q’LD)

‘I ran away from the home, I was going to try and find my family, it was impossible, I didn’t even know where to go. The only thing was to go back. I got a good belting and had to kneel at the altar everyday after school for two weeks. Then I had to go back to that farm to work. The anguish and humiliation of being sent back was bad enough but the worse was yet to come.

This time I was raped, bashed and slashed with a razor blade on both of my arms and legs because I would not stop struggling and screaming. The farmer and one of his workers raped me several times. I wanted to die. I wanted my mother to take me home where I would be safe

and wanted. Because I was bruised and in a state of shock I didn't have to do any work but wasn't allowed to leave the property.

When they returned me to the home I once again went to the Matron. I got a belting with a wet ironing cord, my mouth washed out with soap and put in a cottage by myself away from everyone so I couldn't talk to the other girls. They constantly told me I was bad and a disgrace and if anyone knew it would bring shame to Sister Kate's Home. They showed me no comfort which I desperately needed. I became more and more distant from everyone and tried to block everything out of my mind but couldn't. I ate rat poison to try and kill myself but became very sick and vomited. This meant another belting.

After several weeks of being kept away from everyone I was examined by a doctor who told the matron I was pregnant. Another belting, they blamed me for everything that had happened ... ' (WA)

'[Carol has tried to document her stay at Beagle Bay but has been told there is no record she was ever there.] I haven't got anything to say I've been to Beagle Bay. It's only memories and people that I was there with. I don't exist in this world. I haven't got anything, nothing to say who I am.' (WA)

'I've often thought, as old as I am, that it would have been lovely to have known a father and a mother, to know parents even for a little while, just to have had the opportunity of having a mother tuck you into bed and give you a good-night kiss — but it was never to be.' (TAS)

I have lost count of the number of people who have told me the forced removal of children was all done with the best and kindest and most compassionate of intentions. Baloney! This came out in 1938 as the manifesto, *Aborigines Claim Citizen Rights*:

'You have almost exterminated our people, but there are enough of us remaining to expose the humbug of your claim, as white Australians, to be a civilized, progressive, kindly and humane nation. By your cruelty and callousness towards the Aborigines you stand condemned ... If you would openly admit that the purpose of your Aborigines Legislation has been, and now is, to exterminate the Aborigines completely so that not a trace of them or of their descendants remains, we could describe you as brutal, but honest. But you dare not admit openly that what you hope and wish is for our death! You hypocritically claim that you are trying to 'protect' us but your modern policy of 'protection' (so-called) is killing us off just as surely as the pioneer policy of giving us poisoned damper and shooting us down like dingoes!'

My suggestion is: if you cannot bring yourself to read 'Bringing Them Home' with its anguish on every page then read Xavier Herbert ... at least he shows up something of the role of white men in the whole sorry saga ...

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"Australia is a misunderstood continent; gravely misunderstood by itself."

(George Mikes)

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May 16: Sigmund Freud

May 17: Robert Adamson

May 18: Bertrand Russell

May 19: Victoria Wood

May 20: Joan Dalglish

May O'Brien

May 21: Glen Tomasetti

May 22: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

May 23: Prudence Andrews

May 24: Mary Grant Bruce

William Whewell

May 25: Ralph Waldo Emerson

May 26: Denis Florence Macarthy

May 27: Max Brod
May 28: Patrick White
Nan Chauncy
May 29: André Brink
May 30: John Sligo
May 31: Patsy Adam-Smith
Judith Wright
Helen Waddell
June 1: John Masefield
June 2: Thomas Hardy
June 3: Allen Ginsberg
June 4: Elizabeth Jolley
Barbara Stack

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When Barbara Stack set out on what would prove to be a twenty-five year journey to produce her *Handbook of Mining and Tunnelling Machinery* and her three volume *Encyclopaedia of Tunnelling, Mining and Drilling Equipment* she had no idea that it would be a journey. Born in South Africa she left school at fourteen to go to work as a shorthand-typist; she came to live in Tasmania and brought up four boys here. In her spare time she tried writing a science fiction novel, then a mystery set in the London Underground, then a biography of a famous engineer and inventor. Nothing really came to fruition until it dawned on her that it was the machines involved in mining and tunnelling which fascinated her. But this was very much a male area and she entered it with trepidation. When her Handbook came out in 1982 and sold worldwide, eventually becoming a recognised textbook it didn't mean that she instantly became accepted. She still faced all kinds of prejudices.

When my great-great-grandfather George Johnston Allman wrote extensively on paraboloids and did the segments on Ptolemy, Pythagoras, and Thales for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* he was writing on subjects I would find daunting. But he didn't. This was his daily meat and drink. I think I find people who start out in a completely unfamiliar area, learning as they go along, and eventually produce something of great fascination or remarkable utility and sometimes both, as more interesting. (Not, of course that my gr-gr-grandfather isn't interesting ... but not in that particular way.)

I was thinking of this the other day when I found the Glenorchy Library had got in a copy of George Fraser Black's *The Surnames of Scotland*. His name is used as a shorthand for this area of research; 'look it up in Black's'. Yet he lived in New York and worked at the Public Library there, doing his research as a hobby in his spare time. After working on it for forty years the first installment came out in 1943 and it has stood as a benchmark ever since.

Yet if people knew they were taking a first step on a very long and sometimes weary journey I wonder how they would feel about it. Far from being planned and worked towards from Day One some of those most worthwhile things often have small careless inauspicious beginnings.

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June 5: Richard Scarry
Mrs Aeneas Gunn
June 6: Thomas Mann
June 7: R. D. Blackmore
E. W. Hornung
June 8: Ivan Southall
June 9: Brian Friel
June 10: Maurice Sendak
June 11: Ann Frank
Anna Akhmatova

Bertha van der Vyver
June 12: Charles Kingsley
Johanna Spyri
June 13: Dorothy Sayers

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Dorothy Sayers wrote in *Murder Must Advertise*: “Here those strange entities, the Thrifty Housewife, the Man of Discrimination, the Keen Buyer and the Good Judge, for ever young, for ever handsome, for ever virtuous, economical and inquisitive, moved to and fro upon their complicated orbits, comparing prices and values, making tests of purity, asking indiscreet questions about each other’s ailments, household expenses, bed-springs, shaving cream, diet, laundry work and boots, perpetually spending to save and saving to spend, cutting out coupons and collecting cartons, surprising husbands with margarine and wives with patent washers and vacuum cleaners, occupied from morning to night in washing, cooking, dusting, filing, saving their children from germs, their complexions from wind and weather, their teeth from decay and their stomachs from indigestion, and yet adding so many hours to the day by labour-saving appliances that they had always leisure for visiting the talkies, sprawling on the beach to picnic upon Potted Meats and Tinned Fruit, and (when adorned by So-and-so’s Silks, Blank’s Gloves, Dash’s Footwear, Whatnot’s Weatherproof Complexion Cream and Thingummy’s Beautifying Shampoos) even attending Ranelagh, Cowes, the Grand Stand at Ascot, Monte Carlo and the Queen’s Drawing-Rooms. Where, Bredon asked himself, did the money come from that was to be spent so variously and so lavishly? If this hell’s-dance of spending and saving were to stop for a moment, what would happen? If all the advertising in the world were to shut down tomorrow, would people still go on buying more soap, eating more apples, giving their children more vitamins, roughage, milk, olive oil, scooters and laxatives, learning more languages by gramophone, hearing more virtuosos by radio, re-decorating their houses, refreshing themselves with more non-alcoholic thirst-quenchers, cooking more new, appetising dishes, affording themselves that little extra touch which means so much? Or would the whole desperate whirligig slow down, and the exhausted public relapse upon plain grub and elbow-grease? He did not know. Like all rich men, he had never before paid any attention to advertisements. He had never realised the enormous commercial importance of the comparatively poor. Not on the wealthy, who buy only what they want when they want it, was the vast superstructure of industry founded and built up, but on those who, aching for a luxury beyond their reach and for a leisure for ever denied them, could be bullied or wheedled into spending their few hardly won shillings on whatever might give them, if only for a moment, a leisured and luxurious illusion. Phantasmagoria—a city of dreadful day, of crude shapes and colours piled Babel-like in a heaven of harsh cobalt and rocking over a void of bankruptcy—a Cloud Cuckooland, peopled by pitiful ghosts, from the Thrifty Housewife providing a Grand Family Meal for Fourpence with the aid of Dairyfields Butter Beans in Margarine, to the Typist capturing the affections of Prince Charming by a liberal use of Muggin’s Magnolia Face Cream” ... (1933)

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George Orwell wrote in his column ‘As I Please’ in the *Tribune*, 24 November 1944, ‘Examining recently a copy of *Old Moore’s Almanack*, I was reminded of the fun I used to extract in my boyhood from answering advertisements. Increase your height, earn five pounds a week in your spare time, drink habit conquered in three days, electric belts, bust-developers and cures for obesity, insomnia, bunions, backache, red noses, stammering, blushing, piles, bad legs, flat feet and baldness — all the old favourites were there or nearly all. Some of these advertisements have remained totally unchanged for at least thirty years.

You cannot, I imagine, get much benefit from any of these nostrums, but you can have a lot of fun by answering the advertisements and then, when you have drawn them out and made them waste a lot of stamps in sending successive wads of testimonials, suddenly leaving them cold. Many years ago I answered an advertisement from Winifred Grace Hartland (the

advertisement used to carry a photograph of her — a radiant woman with a sylph-like figure), who undertook to cure obesity. In replying to my letter she assumed that I was a woman — this surprised me at the time, though I realise now that the dupes of these advertisements are almost all female. She urged me to come and see her at once. ‘Do come,’ she wrote, ‘before ordering your summer frocks, as after taking my course your figure will have altered out of recognition.’ She was particularly insistent that I should make a personal visit, and gave an address somewhere in the London Docks. This went on for a long time, during which the fee gradually sank from two guineas to half a crown, and then I brought the matter to an end by writing to say that I had been cured of my obesity by a rival agency.

Years later I came across a copy of the cautionary list which *Truth* used to issue from time to time in order to warn the public against swindlers. It revealed that there was no such person as Winifred Grace Hartland, this swindle being run by two American crooks named Harry Sweet and Dave Little. It is curious that they should have been so anxious for a personal visit, and indeed I have since wondered whether Harry Sweet and Dave Little were actually engaged in shipping consignments of fat women to the harems of Istanbul.’

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I bought *The Prize Winner of Defiance Ohio* by Terry Ryan to send for a Christmas present but, as always, read it myself first. It is one of those unusual books that probably would not catch my eye in a bookshop but set out amidst the usual suspects on a stall stands out.

Evelyn Ryan converted to Catholicism on her marriage and had ten children. It was hard making do back in fifties America, more so as her husband was an alcoholic, and she turned to writing competition jingles to try to get things for her family. Companies promoted many such competitions because it meant people bought more of their products and they received thousands of slogans and jingles, rather than just a half-dozen from an advertising agency, to choose from. There were even magazines, such as *Contest Magazine* and *Contest Worksheet* with news and tips for competitors.

Many of her pieces were straightforward:

‘For picnic or party, Jell-O’s a boon—
Made by nine, all “set” by noon—
With taste and shimmer-shake appeal,
Jell-O jollies any meal.’

She won many things, even a sports car!, as well as practical things like groceries. She worked long hours at it and treated her entries in a professional manner. Her set of “rules” is still worth having. 1. Make your statement. 2. Use a conjunction like “yet,” “while,” or “so.” 3. Use a series of three nouns (“the mystic three.”) 4. Include an unusual word or turn of phrase, preferably at the end.

But it was her pieces of pithy home-spun wisdom which still suggest the warmth and good sense she brought to her busy life. As Terry says of her, “She had always told us that swearing was the sign of a lackluster vocabulary and, worse, a stunted imagination. “There are so many interesting words to use, alone or in combination,” she said, “that I don’t know why anyone would fall back on one-syllable obscenities.” ”

There is an often wry sound to her little pieces.

“Confined” to bi-ennial “vacations” in hospital these twenty years,
getting another little son and heir,
I need another vacation for a little sun and air!

Passed on a hill,
Lived through
Korea.
Met a guy
With the same idea.

Every time I pass the church
I stop and make a visit

So when I'm carried in feet first
God won't say, "Who is it?"

Real Thing

She tosses a pillow,
Poses a book,
To give her home
That lived-in look.
Six children spare me
Such sly biz:
My home looks lived-in
'Cause it IS!

And:

Writers' Resolution

Enough's enough! No more shall I
Pursue the Muse and scorch the pie;
Or dream of authoring a book
When I (unhappy soul) must cook;
Or burn the steak while I wool-gather,
And stir my spouse into a lather,
Invoking words like "darn!" and such
And others that are worse (oh, much!)
Concerning culinary knack
Which I (he says) completely lack.
I'll keep my mind upon my work;
I'll learn each boresome cooking quirk;
This day shall mark a new leaf's turning ...
That sm—! Oh H—! The beans are burning!

Many companies realised they could sell as many products without having to hire judges by making it the luck of the draw. It wasn't the end of an era but fewer competitions were on offer by the sixties. Mrs Ryan's jingles no longer found as many outlets. But she had helped her family through the tough years and left an enduring legacy of love and respect via all her children.

* * * * *

Advertising is the whip that gets us into the shop. What then? Bill Bryson wrote of fifties America in *The Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*: 'Dahl's, our neighbourhood supermarket, had a feature of inspired brilliance called the Kiddie Corral. This was a snug enclosure, built in the style of a cowboy corral and filled with comic books, where moms could park their kids while they shopped. Comics were produced in massive numbers in America in the 1950s — one billion of them in 1953 alone — and most of them ended up in the Kiddie Corral. It was *filled* with comic books. To enter the Kiddie Corral you climbed on to the top rail and dove in, then swam to the centre. You didn't care how long your mom took shopping because you had an infinite supply of comics to occupy you. I believe there were kids who lived in the Kiddie Corral. Sometimes when searching for the latest issue of *Rubber Man*, you would find a child buried under a foot or so of comics fast asleep or perhaps just enjoying their lovely papery smell. No institution has ever done a more thoughtful thing for children. Whoever dreamed up the Kiddie Corral is unquestionably in heaven now; he should have won a Nobel prize.' Perhaps it is time to bring back a comic corner. Children could do more reading and mothers could shop more carefully without kids screaming for lollies ...

He also said, 'People looked forward to the future, too, in ways they never would again. Soon, according to every magazine, we were going to have underwater cities off every coast, space colonies inside giant spheres of glass, atomic trains and airliners, personal jetpacks, a

gyrocopter in every driveway, cars that turned into boats or even submarines, moving sidewalks to whisk us effortlessly to schools and offices, dome-roofed automobiles that drove themselves along sleek superhighways allowing Mom, Dad and the two boys (Chip and Bud or Skip and Scooter) to play a board game or wave to a neighbour in a passing gyrocopter or just sit back and enjoy saying some of those delightful words that existed in the Fifties and are no longer heard: *mimeograph, rotisserie, ice box, rutabaga, pantry raid, bobby sox, sputnik, beatnik, canasta, Cinerama, Moose Lodge, pinochle, daddy-o* ...

There is something curiously evocative about the words that were common in the near past. Gradually they fall back and become archaic. But I only have to hear an expression like ‘Gee-whizzickers’ or ‘Jeepers-creepers!’ and memories come back. And I have noticed that it is only necessary to say something like ‘Aeroplane Jelly’ to have people immediately burst into song. People who probably hated an advertising jingle or an expression they heard nearly every day suddenly become nostalgic for it when it drops off the radar screen. Suddenly it contains more than it ever knew; now it is a symbol of an era, a time, all sorts of unrelated events and memories and emotions come and cluster around it.

* * * * *

I have heard it said that ex-journalists don’t make good novelists. I’m not sure how true this is but I suppose having years of editors saying ‘Keep it SHORT! Keep it SIMPLE! Make sure it’s TRUE!’ doesn’t help the imagination. But a number of well-known writers started out in advertising agencies, Peter Carey, Dorothy Sayers, Eric Ambler and Bryce Courtenay all spring to mind, so I wondered if advertising is a better training for writers? It still has to be short and simple (‘Every word COUNTS!’) but it doesn’t necessarily have to be true. Who actually comes round to check whether your social life has improved since you switched to X washing powder, Y toothpaste, or Z hair conditioner?

Nigel Marsh in *Fat, Forty and Fired* wrote, “Advertising is one of those professions that from the outside can often be seen as terribly glamorous. The truth rarely — if ever — lives up to the myth. The industry has long since had its heyday. Advertising agencies no longer pay well or offer an attractive working life full of long lunches and end-of-year bonuses. If you run an agency you not only have to deal on a daily basis with a long list of ever more demanding clients, but you also have to convince an often exhausted and underpaid workforce to work unreasonable hours for precious little reward. Ten or so 14-hour days in a row, a key client defection and a couple of unwanted resignations, topped off nicely by a call from your boss complaining about the firm’s lack of double-digit growth, can make you a very irritable and dull boy indeed.”

Still, in a debate on good ways to defeat writer’s block I remember the pithy contribution from an ad writer: ‘If you have to come up with a slogan by 4 pm or you’re out on your ear, or risk losing your best account, you don’t sit round worrying about writer’s block.’ Or words to that effect.

I’m not a fan of advertising. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who is—or willing to admit to it. No doubt it has its uses ...

E. S. Turner wrote in *The Shocking History of Advertising*, “Advertising is the whip which hustles humanity up the road to the Better Mousetrap. It is the vision which reproaches man for the paucity of his desires ... Its defenders claim that advertising has abolished heavy underwear, made people clean their teeth (which was more than the dentists could persuade them to do), and made them Nice to be Near. These gratifying results have been achieved, not only by informative, but by persuasive and indeed by intimidating advertisements. The prime object of the exercise was not, of course, to benefit humanity but to sell more fabrics, more toothpaste, more disinfectant.”

And of course to help Global Warming. Cold? Put on a sweater. Tut! Tut! No! Turn on you brand-new heating system which will make every room in your house cosy. How about some brisk exercise to get the body warm? We-ell, only if it involves paying your gym subscription and investing in a lot of expensive gadgetry. Advertising always has an answer—

and the answer always requires MONEY and money requires work of some kind, not always legal (which in turns sells a lot of home security packages), which in turn requires jobs manufacturing and selling goods that advertising has made us want. When we go down the gurgler, glug, glug, we can thank advertising ...

* * * * *

They hang the man and flog the woman
That steal the goose from off the common,
But let the greater villain loose
That steals the common from the goose.

The Law demands that we atone
When we take things we do not own
But leaves the lords and ladies fine
Who take things that are yours and mine.

The poor and wretched don't escape
If they conspire the law to break;
This must be so but they endure
Those who conspire to make the law.

The law locks up the man or woman
Who steals the goose from off the common,
And geese will still a common lack
Till they go and steal it back.

English folk poem circa 1764. It is now too late; the common is under a concrete car park or a new shopping centre ...

David Bollier wrote in *Silent Theft: The Private Plunder of our Common Wealth*: 'The increasing pace of market exploitation of the commons is troubling for five reasons.

First, enclosure needlessly siphons hundreds of billions of dollars away from the public purse every year that could be used for countless varieties of social investment, environmental protection, and other public initiatives. The public's assets and revenue streams are privatized, with only fractional benefits accruing to the public in return.

Second, enclosure tends to foster market concentration, reduce competition, and raise consumer prices. The power to enclose generally belongs to the largest companies, which have the market clout and political influence to acquire public resources on favorable terms. These gains are often leveraged by industry leaders, in turn, to extend their market dominance even further. Large ranchers are the heaviest users of federal grazing lands, for example. Biotechnology firms use proprietary seeds to dominate the market for a given crop. Pharmaceutical companies use federally sponsored drug research to gain control over specific drug treatment markets.

Third, enclosure threatens the environment by favoring short-term exploitation over long-term stewardship. The familiar result is greater pollution of the earth, the air, and the water. Leading companies find it strategically useful to displace health and safety risks onto the public or shift them to future generations. The flagrant abuses of public lands by timber, mining, and agribusiness companies are prime examples.

Fourth, enclosure can also impose new limits on citizen rights and public accountability, as private decision-making supplants the open procedures of our democratic polity. Consider the privatization of Internet governance through the creation of ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers. Instead of a democratic process of open standards, openly arrived at through public participation, a quasi-private replica of democratic governance was invented to manage domain names in the interest of commercial users. Large companies have also learned that they can freeze out democratic and market accountability by

using sophisticated proprietary technologies. Microsoft's Windows operating system and Monsanto's bioengineered foods are two cases where companies have used exceedingly complicated technologies to confound democratic oversight and effectively prevent consumer choice.

And fifth, enclosure frequently imposes market values in realms that should be free from commodification. The character of community values, family life, public institutions, and democratic processes should not be blindly dictated by the market. Yet that is the effect when public schools sell their captive audience of youngsters to junk-food vendors; the Smithsonian Institution lets corporate donors determine the content of its museum exhibits; and cost-benefit equations are used to dictate acceptable levels of contaminants in food. The problem, too often, is that economic gains tend to be measurable and culturally esteemed (Gross National Product, rising quarterly profits), while the larger societal impacts are fuzzy and diffuse (community dislocations, ecological stress, public health risks). There are no simple yardsticks, no "bottom lines," for evaluating the pernicious effects of market enclosures. This naturally makes it easy to ignore them or dissociate them from market activity."

* * * * *

"Vacuum cleaners to ensure clean houses are praiseworthy and essential in our standard of living. Street cleaners to ensure clean streets are an unfortunate expense. Partly as a result, our houses are generally clean and our streets generally filthy." J. K. Galbraith in *The Affluent Society*.

But it is all in how you present the thing. You can hire more street cleaners. You can hire people to go round fining people on-the-spot for every bit of littering. You can ban all non-biodegradable substances. You can shame people into doing or not doing things, like wearing real leopard-skins. You can boycott towns with dirty streets. Or you can hire an advertising agency ...

But would it be more effective to spend taxpayers' money telling everyone litter gives a lovely 'homey' look to a town? Or would it be better to run it like a Big Brother ad? A 'Just Say No' quality. 'Quit Now: Be Proud Tomorrow'. That sort of thing. I always have my doubts about the massive amounts of money spent on official advertising. Twenty million to say domestic violence is wrong. Why not give every victim of domestic violence a million dollars to start a new life somewhere else? Or put tranquillisers in beer. Why spend fifty million praising individual contracts over general award rates. Would it not have been better to use the money to make the very poor a little less poor?

* * * * *

The fat men go about the streets,
The politicians play their game,
The prudent bishops sound retreats
And think the martyrs much to blame;
Honour and love are halt and lame
And Greed and Power deified,
The wild are harnessed by the tame;
For this the poets lived and died.

Shelley's trademark used on sheets:
Aloft the sky in words of flame
We read 'What porridge had John Keats?
Why, Brown's! A hundred years the same!
Arcadia's an umbrella frame,
Milton's a toothpaste; from the tide
Sappho's been dredged to rouge my Dame—
For this the poets lived and died.

And yet, to launch ideal fleets
Lost regions in the stars to claim,
To face all ruins and defeats,
To sing a beaten world to shame,
To hold each bright impossible aim
Deep in the heart; to starve in pride
For fame, and never know their fame—
For this the poets lived and died.

Envoi

Princess, inscribe beneath my name
'He never begged, he never sighed,
He took his medicine as it came'—
For this the poets lived—and died.

Sir John Squire's 'Ballade of the Poetic Life'.

* * * * *

I quite often read a book or two on 'How to Write' or even 'How to Market'. The unfortunate thing about most of them is that they tell you, the writer, to hook your readers in the first paragraph, but they are so abysmally boring themselves. The only thing that hooked you was that blurb on the cover. Do they believe that there is so much desperation out there in Writerland that anyone will read anything in the hope of getting published? But why should the imparting of information be dull? Surely a really good (and saleable) writer can make even a vacuum-cleaner manual sound interesting?

It is virtually de rigeur to urge your pupils to 'hook' an editor. Fair enough. It never hurts. But there is a danger in it I have never seen such manuals tackle. Years ago I used to wonder why, quite often, I would enjoy the first three chapters of a book then the plot and the writing would take a nose-dive. I thought it must be me, that I was losing concentration or expecting too much perhaps. Then it dawned on me that this was probably the result of publishers asking to see the first three chapters of a potential book. So they would receive three chapters of a book that had been polished and re-polished and would then sign up the author to complete the book. Whether they didn't provide enough time for this process or whether the book in the meantime had gone stale on the author I don't know but the results were often a dull middle and a hurried climax. These days publishers usually ask to see the whole book and the problem of Chapter Four is not so obvious. But I still have troubles with that dramatic first paragraph or first page. Breathless excitement. But what happens next? Either the author tries to keep going at that pace with the result that I end up feeling sorry for the exhausted characters or wonder if there will be anyone left standing by the end—or those inevitable 'dull bits' begin to intrude and the author resorts to bringing in another drama to stop the story flagging. You can almost feel the author's relief when the final dash comes in sight. The end result is that I come away feeling manipulated. Instead of being able to suspend my disbelief and want these people to succeed I am patently aware of their artificiality. The problem is particularly acute in the thriller genre but it can turn up anywhere.

So what I look for in an opening page if I am going to shell out \$29-95 (I am a little less picky when it comes to a 50c offering in an op-shop) is that whether there is a drama on page one or a quiet description of a place I want the sense that I am in the company of someone with real mastery, someone who will make the 'dull bits', the scenes of description, background, nuts-and-bolts, equally readable. I want the writer to be confident in his or her craft, to use language with skill and vividness, I want to feel that I am reading someone who deserves to be published and promoted and bought. If I want hack writing I can enjoy my own. When I spend my small income in a bookshop I want to feel I am buying a book I will enjoy reading ... and re-reading.

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June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe

June 15: Mario Cuomo

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Danny Danziger and John Gillingham wrote in *1215*, “The Treasures Gallery of the British Library is an extraordinary place. The hum of the humidifiers drowns out the endless roar of traffic along London’s Euston Road; it is calm and quiet in the Gallery. The lights are very low; it takes a little time to adjust your eyes to the gloom, but too bright a light would damage the priceless books and manuscripts that lie in cases and displays around the warren of rooms.

Shakespeare’s First Folio and Leonardo da Vinci’s note-book, with his extraordinary mirror-image right-to-left handwriting, are open to view, as well as dozens of books of such physical beauty as to rival any painting. There is the Lindisfarne Gospels, written and illuminated by the monk Eadfrith in honour of St Cuthbert around AD 698, in the monastery of Lindisfarne, on Holy Island, just off the coast of Northumbria. That was roughly around the time that Bede was writing his history of the English Church and its people. It is wonderfully illuminated, with incredible, vivid colours. At a time when most other books in Europe tended to use only three, this book has virtually every colour you could imagine: rich ruby reds and intense aquamarines along with deep majestic purples.

Beowulf is in the gallery too, and the Barcelona Hagadah, named after the heraldic shield it bears, an exquisite Hebrew service book from 1350, still read each year in Jewish homes at the Seder meal on the eve of Passover. The Sherborne Missal, the Roman Catholic book of prayers made for Sherborne Abbey in Dorset between 1400 and 1407, is there. It is a masterpiece of book painting, a massive volume of seven hundred pages, with lavishly decorated margins peopled by kings, nobles, bishops, monks, saints and angels in a celestial throng and, most unexpected of all, a choir of the native birds of the British Isles. It is possibly the only service book of stature to have survived the Reformation intact. Continuing around the Treasures Gallery, there are manuscript scores by Mozart, Handel, Chopin and Beethoven, handwritten lyrics of two of the Beatles’ most famous songs, ‘Ticket to Ride’ and ‘I Want To Hold Your Hand’, and there’s a Gutenberg Bible. In the mid-fifteenth century, Johannes Gutenberg invented a way of mechanizing the production of type, and the bible he printed in Mainz, around 1485, was the first major book printed in the West. About 180 copies were made, and significant parts of forty-eight copies still survive. The British Library has two complete copies, and the cover of the one on display is richly illuminated in gold; it is a thing of beauty.

But what we have come to see, laid out under a bullet-proof glass casing, isn’t illuminated: it has no drawings or illustrations in the margins, and, to be perfectly frank, is a dull, rather ugly-looking thing. There is, however, a bigger crowd here than at any other exhibit. There are Japanese tour-leaders waving umbrellas, and Americans who breathe reverentially over the glass. Even French schoolchildren are a little less boisterous in front of it. Everyone here, from these nations and many others, has come to see it before they see anything else, and believes it to be an important document.”

You will probably have guessed by now. The single sheet of parchment, now missing its seals, is of course Magna Carta, signed June 15, 1215.

* * * * *

David Crystal wrote in *Language Death*, “For mother-tongue English speakers, the nearest we can get to the ‘feel’ of this situation is with Old English: walk around a museum displaying Anglo-Saxon ruins, and there is an artefactual continuity with the present-day which we can recognize; but encounter an Anglo-Saxon manuscript, and the language barrier is almost total. Anyone who feels that the language is denying them access to their legitimate history is right; but at 1,000 years’ remove, the engaging of emotions tends to be more cerebral than heartfelt. By contrast, when we are unable to understand the letters of a dead grandfather

or grandmother, because we no longer share a language with them, the poignancy can be inexpressible.”

In an introduction to an edition of *Beowulf* I found this statement, “The only existing manuscript of *Beowulf* is contained in a volume of the Cottonian collection in the British Museum which is known as Vitellius A. xv. (A dozen book-cases in the original library happened to be surmounted by busts of Roman emperors; hence the catalog designations of Vitellius, Tiberius, Nero, etc.) That volume consists of two originally separate codices which were arbitrarily joined by the binder (early in the 17th century), and it holds nine different Old English texts, four of them belonging to the first part, and five to the second. *Beowulf* (folios 129a – 198b, or, according to the present foliation 132a – 201b) is the fourth number of the second codex, being preceded by three prose pieces and followed by the poem of *Judith*. We do not know where Sir Robert Bruce Cotton (1571 – 1631), to whose zealous efforts we are indebted for the previous collection of Cottonian manuscripts obtained that codex. But all name ‘Lawrence Newell’ (with date 1563) written at the top of its first page justifies the belief that Nowell, dean of Lichfield and one of the very earliest students of Anglo-Saxon (d. 1576) had something to do with its preservation in those years following the dissolution of monasteries which witnessed the wanton destruction of untold literary treasures. The date of the *Beowulf* codex is about the end of the tenth century, as is judged from the character of the handwriting exhibited by its two scribes. Thus it is not far removed in time from the three other great collections containing Old English poems, viz. the Exeter Book, the Vercelli Codex, and the so-called Caedmor manuscript.

“While the Cottonian library was lodged in Ashburnham House, in Little Deans Yard, Westminster, the manuscript, like numerous other volumes of the collection, was injured by a disastrous fire (in 1731) causing the scorching of margins and edges and then subsequent gradual crumbling away in many places. In Zupitza’s *Words* (1882). “the manuscript did not suffer so much from the fire of 1731 itself as from its consequences, which would, without doubt, have been avoided if the MS. had been at once rebound as carefully as it has been rebound in our days ... Further losses have been put a stop to by the new binding; but, admirably as this was done, the binder could not help covering some letters or portions of letters in every back page with the edge of the [transparent] paper which now surrounds every parchment leaf.” The great value of the two Thorkelin transcripts in supplying readings which in the meantime have been lost will become apparent to everyone that turns over the leaves of the excellent, annotated facsimile edition.”

I always feel nervous when I read those words ‘only existing’. But reprintings of *Beowulf* continue. Perhaps we don’t really need the original manuscript ... or do we?

* * * * *

Michael A. Babcock wrote, “Long before they ever migrated into Spain, however, the Visigoths had already produced their most enduring cultural legacy: the translation of the Bible into the Gothic language by a fourth-century Visigothic priest named Wulfila (Little Wolf). A large portion of Wulfila’s translation has survived, making this text the Rosetta Stone of Germanic philology—the oldest surviving specimen of any written Germanic dialect.”

The Visigoths were ‘noble’ or western Goths; the Ostrogoths were ‘eastern’ Goths. They both were part of the expanding Gothic movement. Babcock goes on to give this example. “Here’s how Wulfila rendered the familiar opening phrase of the Lord’s Prayer into Gothic: *Atta unsar thu in himinam*, “Our Father which art in heaven.” ” He is interested in that use of *Atta* = Father which he believes is the root of *Attila* = Little Father. Wulfila or Ulfila became a bishop in the 340s; Peter Heather says of him, “Sometimes labeled ‘Arian’ or ‘semi-Arian’, he actually belonged to a strand of educated Christian opinion which rejected the Nicene definition of faith — that the Son was of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father — on two grounds. First, it was non-Biblical (the term is nowhere mentioned in the sacred texts), and secondly, they felt it carried with it the danger of collapsing any real distinction between God the Father and God the Son.”

But I had a quite different curiosity. What do Wulfila's Bible, *Beowulf*, and Magna Carta have in common? They are all creations of people descended from the ancient Goths. In school we got a vague and muddled exposition of Goths and Vandals but no sense of who they were or what they believed or how they lived. Now Goths are those things who stare out fiercely in black outfits from the posters and games patronised by teenage youths; and vandals are those same teenage youths when they go out to pull up shrubs and run wild with black paint in spray cans. Gothic can refer to an ancient church or a melodrama replete with dungeons ... I even came upon one of the 'Missing Adventures' of Dr Who titled *Goth Opera* by Paul Cornell which has an extraordinary moment at a cricket match in Tasmania, 'Tegan stood up and stretched, getting between several of the other spectators and a fine cover drive from the Doctor's batting partner, a man called Boon who had a stupid moustache. 'Sorry,' she muttered to them.' The Doctor is out for 90. But I have forgotten where the Goths came into it ...

Yet once you start looking for Goths they are there everywhere in the shadows; the Guelphs and Ghibellines in Dante's Florence, the Viking settlers in Greenland, the new aristocracy in Scotland including their hero Robert the Bruce ...

As Nigel Tranter wrote in *Robert the Bruce*, "... And everywhere the cream of two nations bowed low, as Edward of England passed on.

"Or not perhaps quite the cream of two nations. For practically everyone in the church of Stracathro that July day of 1296, save some of the humble men-at-arms, was of one stock — Norman-French. Edward himself might be an Angevin, Baliol a Picard, Bec or de Bec, and Comyn were Flemings and Bruce sprang from the Cotentin; but all were basically Normans. Of the true English stock there were none present, though there had of course been some intermarriage. Of the indigenous Celtic Scots, none likewise. Possibly the young Robert Bruce was the nearest to a Scot, for his mother had been the daughter and heiress of the last Celtic Earl of Carrick, of the old stock, whose earldom he had inherited. A Norman-French military aristocracy had for two centuries been taking over both kingdoms, indeed much of northern Europe — but only at the great land-owning and government level. Every word spoken in that church had been in French."

But perhaps shadow is the key word because 'Goths' is a curiously rubbery term. Were the Goths the base of the various Scandinavian tribes who became the Vikings and thus the Normans ... or vice versa? Was Goth an all-inclusive term for various collections of Germanic tribes? I realised that Goth was a word which tended to be used very loosely. Peter Heather in *The Goths* says, "They were the first autonomous group of immigrants to force their way across an imperial frontier en masse and survive." I think autonomous is an important word. He says, "Goths are first mentioned occupying territory in what is now Poland in the first century AD. Visigothic Spain, the longest-lived of the western kingdoms, did not fall to Muslim, Arab conquerors until the second decade of the eighth century." For seven hundred years they swayed to and fro across Europe as an identifiable people but not a cohesive group in terms of ethnicity, religion, or even culture. The idea that they came from Scandinavia has a long history; Heather writes, "Modern approaches to the history of the Goths have been decisively shaped by the survival of one particular text: the *Origins and Acts of the Goths* or *Getica* of Jordanes. Written in Constantinople in about AD 550, it is a unique document. Although its author wrote in Latin he was of Gothic descent, and drew upon Gothic oral traditions. He explicitly claims personal acquaintance with such material and there is no reason to disbelieve him. He was also, by his own account, closely following the now lost *Gothic History* of the Roman Senator Cassiodorus, which was written in the 520s at the court of the Ostrogothic king of Italy, Theoderic the Great.' Heather believes they originated in northern Poland and it was poor soils and expanding populations which sent them in all directions; east into Ukraine and the Crimea (where they arrived in the third century AD and survived as a distinct people until the Ottoman Turks came storming in in 1475; yet curiously Neal Ascherson in *The Black Sea* says that Gothic as a language survived there "and the last Gothic-speakers seem to have died out in the seventeenth century"), south towards Constantinople, northwest into Scandinavia,

west into Germany and eventually down through France into Spain and of course the famous descent on Rome. But the determination of who might discernably be classed as Gothic depends on a number of shared characteristics, including dress, burial customs, and group structures, rather than ethnicity. They absorbed, fought, and allied themselves with many other tribes including the Vandals, the Alamanni, the Suevi, and despite first being pushed back from eastern Europe by the invading Huns they eventually came to absorb significant numbers of them. The Goths have a bad reputation for sacking, looting, and fighting, but it is debatable if they were worse than any other group; and archaeology is bringing to light their own exquisite metalwork and carving. But they were frequently their own worst enemies with endless feuding and in-fighting. If they had been able to restrain their warlike impulses their empires might well have lasted much longer ...

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John Pilger's new book *Freedom Next Time* has a fascinating little reminder that Magna Carta is not a dead piece of history. It was brought out in court in Britain as a means of upholding the rights of the Chagos people of Diego Garcia, forcibly and callously removed from their island to make way for a large American base, and virtually dumped into already over-crowded Mauritius. "On November 3, 2000, in the High Court, Lord Justice Laws and Mr Justice Gibbs stunned the government. Citing the Magna Carta, which proscribed 'Exile from the Realm' without due process, they unanimously squashed the 1965 ordinance used to deport the islanders as unlawful. Referring to the governments responsible, the judges quoted Tacitus, 'They make a desert and call it peace,' and added: 'He meant it as an irony; but here, it was an abject legal failure.'" The Islanders were delighted. But the Blair Government rushed through a new immigration ordinance denying the Islanders the right to return home. And when they sought compensation for the loss of their home the judge, Mr Justice Ouseley, was deaf to the echo of Magna Carta and threw the case out calling it 'unmeritorious' and 'hopeless'. Magna Carta did do one thing for the Islanders: it got them British passports, but the thing they most want—the right to go home—remains out of reach.

I do hope a new by-pass is planned to run right through Mr Justice Ouseley's front garden ...

* * * * *

June 16: Isabelle Carmody
Joyce Carol Oates
June 17: Henry Lawson
June 18: Robyn Archer
June 19: Patricia Wrightson
Salman Rushdie
June 20: Margaret Scott
June 21: Françoise Sagan
June 22: Tess Brady
H. Rider Haggard
June 23: Frank Dalby Davison
June 24: David Day
Lawrence Block
June 25: George Orwell
June 26: Pearl S. Buck
June 27: Helen Keller
June 28: Luigi Pirandello
June 29: June Epstein
June 30: Mollie Hunter
July 1: Dorothea MacKellar
July 2: Herman Hesse
King O'Malley

July 3: Franz Kafka
July 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne
July 5: George Borrow
July 6: Patricia Bernard
July 7: Max Dann
 Stephen Moline
July 8: Fergus Hume
July 9: Isobel Bennett
July 10: Marcel Proust

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“Then, in a tone of disgust, ‘All this burden of past experience one trails about with one!’ he added. ‘There ought to be some way of getting rid of one’s superfluous memories. How I hate old Proust! Really detest him.’ And with a really comic eloquence he proceeded to evoke the vision of that asthmatic seeker of lost time squatting, horribly white and flabby, with breasts almost female but fledged with long black hairs, for ever squatting in the tepid bath of his remembered past. And all the stale soapsuds of countless previous washings floated around him; all the accumulated dirt of years lay crusty on the sides of the tub or hung in dark suspension in the water. And there he sat, a pale repellent invalid, taking up spongefuls of his own thick soup and squeezing it over his face, scooping up cupfuls of it and appreciatively rolling the grey and gritty liquor round his mouth, gargling, rinsing his nostrils with it, like a pious Hindu in the Ganges

‘You talk about him,’ said Helen, ‘as if he were a personal enemy.’
Anthony only laughed.”

(from *Eyeless in Gaza* by Aldous Huxley)

* * * * *

One day I mentioned to a friend that I felt I really should go and read things like Proust. She disagreed, saying to read because you feel you should is being precious and artificial. ‘Everyone is talking about Proust, I must read him’, that kind of thing. Whereas she felt you should read the books you have been ‘led’ towards, like an organic sense of growth, or a donkey being drawn towards a haycock maybe ... I am sure there is a lot in this. But this week I have been being precious; I have been reading Proust.

And if ever there was a precious writer then I suspect it was Proust. But perhaps he was only doing for French readers what Henry James did for Anglo-American readers. My problem with my selection, *Swann’s Way*, is that, unlike my ascetic gentlemanly image of James, that dreadful ‘horribly white and flabby’ image of Proust kept getting in my way. My only relief was that, rather than a bathtub, he seemed to come like a flabby thing spreadeagled on an old tester bed in a musty old bedroom ...

It has been a struggle to remove the man from the text ... and more so in a book which is so strongly autobiographical. I think, after all, I will leave the enjoyment of Proust to others.

* * * * *

July 11: E. B. White
July 12: Pablo Neruda
July 13: Julie Hill

* * * * *

The lay author tends to write two kinds of medical book: the ‘aren’t doctors/medical science/new techniques/innovations wonderful’ usually dealing with people who have recovered from accidents, traumas, and life-threatening conditions such as Julie Hill in *Footprints in the Snow*: “I would become famous as the world’s first ever walking, talking, all-singing, all-dancing paraplegic”—and the ‘doctors who kill’ type of macabre fascination with doctors and medical staff who have abused their position.

Julie Hill chronicled her chance to walk again by a new treatment after she was left paralysed in a road accident. Many of the books in this genre are heartening, inspiring, medically interesting ...

James B. Stewart in *Blind Eye* chronicles a terrifying case of the second kind of book. His key figure, American doctor Michael Swango who may have caused the deaths of around twenty people, was very clearly a psychopath. But he was also an incompetent doctor. And in a way incompetence is more terrifying. It isn't the Buck Ruxtons of this world we are likely to encounter. It is the doctor who is incompetent, lazy, careless, drinks too much, takes drugs, doesn't keep his skills up to date, is not observant or simply doesn't take all due care.

Stewart writes, "The medical literature, not to mention the popular press, has been full of accounts of incompetent physicians. In 1986, *The New York Times* quoted medical officials to the effect that "five out of every 100 doctors are so incompetent, drunk, senile or otherwise impaired that they should not be practicing medicine without some form of restriction." A medical director of the Kaiser Foundation Health Plan testified in Congress in 1986 that 3 to 5 percent of the nation's 425,000 practicing physicians have an "impairment of some degree from a wide variety of causes."

"Even when hospitals or state licensing boards take action against incompetent doctors, they usually do so quietly, often in confidence, as they did with Swango. The result, concluded Robert Adler, counsel to the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, charged with regulating the medical profession, is "a group of 'rogue' physicians who are free to leave the immediate hospital or jurisdiction and continue their practice elsewhere."

All kinds of things contribute to the dangers; peer review, secrecy, a lack of central information, confidentiality clauses in both doctors' contracts and in compensation payouts to damaged patients or grieving families, fears of being sued, disbelief of patients and nursing staff, overwork and understaffing, and the simple fact that doctors can write death certificates for their own patients ... Gary Webb in the *Plain Dealer* chronicled some of the abject failures which led to patient deaths in Ohio.

- * The Ohio board allowed doctors convicted of felonies such as drug trafficking, insurance fraud, forgery, theft, sexual assault, and drug abuse to remain in practice.

- * The board allowed physicians with serious alcohol or drug problems to remain in practice—even perform surgery—while they were undergoing treatment, withdrawal, and psychotherapy.

- * The board allowed doctors diagnosed as suffering severe mental problems to remain in practice for years while their cases wended their way through the board's hearing process.

- * The board routinely allowed doctors convicted of felonies to continue practicing for years while their cases dragged on in appellate courts.

- * Even when a physician repeatedly violated the law, the board seemed loath to pull his or her licence; board members worried that the physician would be unable to earn a living.

- * While ignoring some physician crimes, the board kept its small staff of six investigators busy digging up evidence against nurse-midwives, physician's assistants, health-food stores, chiropractors, acupuncturists, masseuses, manicurists, and others suspected of practicing medicine without a licence.

But the thing that struck me most about the failures to stop a murdering doctor in Stewart's account was simply that the people who raised concerns were (female) nurses and the people who failed to take action were (male) doctors and administrators. Nurses who pointed the finger were said to be exaggerating, gossiping, weren't clear on what they had seen, even giving way to a form of mass hysteria. It doesn't surprise me that it was a nurse who blew the whistle at the Bundaberg Hospital or that it was female patients who complained of inappropriate sexual behaviour of a doctor here ... only to see him allowed to continue on his merry way 'because there is a doctor shortage'!

You think you might put off that little operation? You think you might ask around and seek a second opinion. You feel a wonderful idea for a horror story coming on ...

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July 14: Leon Garfield
Isaac Bashevis Singer
Susan Howatch
July 15: Gavin Maxwell
July 16: Christopher Koch
July 17: Christina Stead
July 18: William Makepeace Thackeray
July 19: Victor Kelleher
July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith
July 21: John Palmer
July 22: Betty Roland
July 23: Carol O'Dell
July 24: Jean Webster
July 25: Keith Suter
July 26: Terry Denton
Colin Wilson
July 27: Hilaire Belloc
July 28: Beatrix Potter
Gerard Manley Hopkins
July 29: Booth Tarkington
July 30: Darina Allen
July 31: Lynne Reid Banks
August 1: Herman Melville
August 2: Geoffrey Dutton
Isabel Allende

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Run a stall and people will donate diet books. Did these books work for them and they are now so svelte they do not need them any more? Or did they give up in despair? But the curious thing is that people rarely want *old* diet books. Old recipe books? Yes. Sometimes. Old diet books? A resounding no.

*

“Having matured over the centuries, French gastronomic culture is for the first time endangered because of globalization. With transnational fast-food outlets appearing in all our cities, it is becoming more difficult to transmit our proudly evolved values to our children. Sometimes it seems we are headed back to the Renaissance, where we ate with our fingers, helped ourselves unceremoniously from communal heaps of food, even gnawed on a bone before passing it to a neighbour, OK, *j'exagère*, but if anything could launch a French obesity epidemic such as that which has struck America and — if the statistics are to be believed — the UK, the loss of traditional values is the most likely culprit. For this reason tradition must be honoured and promoted for the betterment of all.”

Mireille Guiliano in *French Women Don't get Fat*.

The problem that immediately struck me was that the people who most loudly promote a ‘return’ to ‘traditional’ and ‘family’ values are the same people who most vigorously promote free trade, globalisation, the opportunity of multinationals to influence every aspect of our diets (from the way the food is produced, marketed, cooked, and sold, to the kinds of ads which are directed at our children), and want women to enter the workforce and ‘power’ the economy. You can't have it both ways. Either you have multinational fast food with immense clout and fat children—or you don't. And no one with power and influence is really grappling with the way the alternatives might be formulated. It is easier to criticise parents for giving in to their

children's importunities ... even though the latest in psychology, art, packaging, press-button words and opinion polling has gone into developing those importunities. And, strictly speaking, those same powerbrokers will have no difficulty in turning on women as soon as there is a downturn in the economy and telling them they shouldn't be taking other people's jobs and why aren't they home with their kids ...

The curious thing in this "glorious and irresistible progress of American mass culture through the French cultural heartland" in the wry words of Thomas Frank in *One Market Under God* is that the Americans go out of their way to rubbish France. "Even the most casual followers of the news in America know that France is a country that restricts American movies, periodically tries to stamp out English-derived words, and feels it must educate kindergartners about traditional French cuisine." And individually they are no better. "Whether the French person in question was a rude waiter mocking your request for ketchup, a skier turning up his nose at snowboarders, or a social planner seeking to soften the blows of the global economy, they were all one and the same for American observers, and the nifty possibility of mixing stereotypes with economic crusading was too great for the culture-warriors of the new global order to resist." Curiously, he goes on to say, "But by far the most significant American persecutor of France was the *New York Times*, where reporters joined columnists in banging out a steady if sometimes far-fetched anti-Gallic drumbeat. Virtually every week in 1997 there was some memorable image or hilarious French foul-up to report: The French intellectual, say, who was found writing a dissertation on the impact of the Internet—with a pen! Or that great photo of a French cabinet minister staring at a computer—with an astonished look on his face!"

It is almost enough to make me passionately pro-French!

But diet books are more about weighing food and counting kilojoules. Diet books don't deal with the fall-out from political decision-making and the push to globalise the world's food production and eating habits. This is probably a mistake. I remember a friend of mine who used to take university students as boarders every year. They nearly always smoked when they arrived. Within weeks they had given up. Her strategy was simple. She drew their attention to the immense profits tobacco companies made out of them, the way that directors and CEOs were all mind-bogglingly rich, and the way those same directors regarded their customers not as a valued resource but contemptuously as 'one born every minute'. Invariably the students gave up smoking. If overweight people could listen in to the way they are spoken of in board rooms and marketing meetings they would go away humiliated and distressed. They might even decide they would never eat certain brands again, no matter how attractively packaged and marketed ...

I think the reason why old diet books don't sell is that they aren't offering anything new diet books don't.

* * * * *

Basil Fuller in *Nullabor Lifelines* finds himself choosing between ham, beef, or cucumber sandwiches. "Wondering a little doubtfully whether the coffee that most of us added to this assorted sustenance really made for sympathetic internal blending, I recalled a comment of Dr Johnson's: 'A cucumber should be well sliced, dressed with vinegar, and then thrown out as good for nothing.' On the other hand, though, Dean Swift remarked in *Gulliver's Travels* on the efforts of someone who had spent 'eight years upon a project for extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers'. He cannot have thought so ill of the vegetable. And hadn't Oscar Wilde in *The Importance of Being Earnest* bestowed a ritualistic significance on the cucumber sandwich? I made a mental note to check the passage but felt that my memory was accurate — 'There were no cucumbers in the market this morning, sir ... not even for ready money'.

"In this matter Dr Johnson appeared to be outvoted. I reached for another cucumber sandwich."

Every so often a food or herb or spice or oil comes along and is touted as a wonder food. But I am inclined to think that it is usually humble things like cucumbers, brown bread, and castor oil (not necessarily eaten together but in the same household) which are the wonder

foods. Cucumbers are good for your stomach, they're good for your skin; I eat brown bread, I use it for poultices; castor oil is good for your insides, I also use it on all sorts of skin complaints and aching joints ...

Who needs the latest blare from companies who want to sell you some new wonder ingredient which they just *happen* to be promoting and selling at a very substantial price ...

* * * * *

Run a stall and people will donate old cookbooks. These have a mixed reception. I haven't done a survey but I am inclined to think those that sell best are those that have simple traditional recipes in them. I think this is because magazines, new recipe books, promotional handouts, recipes on cans and bottles, tend to be more elaborate and require more ingredients. People come along and ask if there is something which will tell them how to make chutney or jam or cream sponges or gingerbread or toad-in-the-hole or Yorkshire pudding 'the way mum made it' or grandmother or an old aunt. They don't mind the books being old if they can open a door to a sense of nostalgia.

The other consistent seller is the book that combines a sense of travel, adventure, exploration of a region, with recipes. All those books which laud the French or Tuscan countryside, for instance; or the attractive book my son just gave me to put on a stall called the *Alberta Pictorial Cookbook*. I don't happen to have any moose meat in my frig and I have never tasted Saskatoon berries but the book almost made me want to start planning a holiday in Alberta ...

Yet I sometimes wonder how well cookbooks actually sell. What makes one new one sell over another new one? What is the aspect which makes one leap from the crowded shelves and sale bins?

I always enjoyed the books of Georges Simenon, not because of his mysteries which were sometimes fairly pedestrian but because the books were permeated with a sense of food. Barges and carts bringing fresh food to the Paris markets, the fruit and vegetables and poultry lovingly described, stairwells rich with the smell of baking bread, the aroma of fresh-roasted coffee wafting out of the little cafés. The books made me want to go and make a snack. For me this is the key ingredient of a cookbook: that I look forward to eating the recipes when they have turned into food on the table. A lot of books depend on beautifully-photographed pictures of meals but these always seem to me to be about art rather than food. There is something a little stylised and cold about them. I would hate to spoil the lovely design by actually *eating* it.

One day I was wandering along the shelves and shelves of cookbooks in the library, pulling things out and putting them back, to see if anything grabbed me. Food from a variety of countries, food for the microwave, food for busy people, food for picnics, food for health. The offerings sparked off various responses. And then I came to one I couldn't resist taking out.

It was Isabel Allende's *Aphrodite A Memoir of the Senses*.

Would it provide those ingredients, nostalgia, warmth, aroma, simplicity, a sense of something that can be cooked and served in a loving way? She writes, "To justify yet one more collection of recipes or erotic instructions is not easy. Every year thousands are published, and frankly, I don't know who buys them, because I have never known anyone who cooks or makes love from a manual. People who work hard to earn a living and who pray in secret, like you and me, improvise in casseroles and bedroom romps as best we can, using what we have at hand, without brooding over it or making too much fuss, grateful for our remaining teeth and our enormous good fortune in having someone to embrace. All right, then, so why this book? Because the idea of poking about a bit in aphrodisiacs seems amusing to me and I hope it will be to you as well. In these pages I intend to approximate the truth, but that will not always be possible. What, for example, can one say about parsley? Some things scream for a little creativity ..."

I imagine you can say quite a lot about parsley. In one version of the old folk tale it is where babies are found. But no, I have never seen it as an aphrodisiac, only as something healthy and attractive. She says "Aphrodisiacs are the bridge between gluttony and lust."

Although the book is quite fun and the recipes, some re-named with titles like ‘Novice’s Nipples’, ‘Turkey Harem’, ‘Frisolous Prunes’, ‘Sybarite’, ‘Madame Bovary’ and ‘Venus Mousse’, look easy enough, and she provides some curious little titbits on supposed aphrodisiacs down through the ages, I am one of those odd people who prefer to keep the matter of eating and the matter of sex separate. I would trade all luscious food and erotic talk for plain food and good conversation.

Although she mainly depends on food, drink, even flowers for the erotic impact of the book, some of her aphrodisiacal information is of this order, “In some parts of Mexico, fried ants are the children’s favorite treat—sweet and hot—and in Chile the spider that lives in the sea urchin is thought to be aphrodisiac, as long as you eat it while it’s alive. You place it on the tip of your tongue, and when the innocent arachnid tiptoes toward the back of your mouth, you slowly crush it against your palate until it is smashed flat. These barbarities, which would break a vegetarian’s heart, are erotic for others. There are those who appreciate the remnants of cadaver of octopus, snail, snake, or spider in the kisses of their companion.

“The skink is a North African lizard that from times as remote as Greek and Roman antiquity has been said to have fantastic aphrodisiac powers. The snout, feet, and especially the genitals are soaked in wine and cooked in a bed of herbs. The Persians mixed the flesh of the skink with ground pearls and amber. An exquisite aphrodisiac was also prepared from the *hippomanes*, a small slice of flesh taken from the forehead of a newborn colt and mixed with the blood of the beloved. If the blood was from the menses, the effect could be fulminating. It is suspected that Caesonia gave Caligula a similar brew to win his love, causing the frenzied and arrogant madness that led him to commit so many crimes, but this explanation is typical of historians, who always find a way to blame the woman.”

This is mild compared to brains taken from live monkeys, live fish slowly filleted, and rare and endangered species killed barbarically (see for instance a book like *Operation Rhino* by John Gordon Davis if you want your blood to boil at the horror of the brutal snaring and poaching of rhinos for the sake of a couple of grams of ground-up keratin) and all so that some old fool can try to keep his pecker up for a minute or two ...

* * * * *

Strictly speaking there is a lot to be said about parsley. It is far more than that curly green stuff decorating your plate of sandwiches. I love the look and smell of parsley. And I have found it suggested for an extraordinary range of ailments; ranging from asthma to diabetes to poor digestion to gallstones to hypertension, jaundice, constipation, painful periods and reproductive and prostate troubles, not to mention having some mild antibacterial properties. Anne McIntyre writes in *The Apothecary’s Garden*, “Parsley was also popular among the ancient Greeks and Romans and was dedicated to Persephone, Queen of the Underworld.

“It was eaten at funeral banquets and planted on graves to bring good luck to the departed. The Romans carried parsley for protection and gave it to gladiators to eat before a fight to promote strength, cunning and agility. In early European traditions parsley was a well known remedy for liver problems, jaundice, fluid retention, urinary stress and malaria.”

You still don’t think parsley is sexy? Perhaps not. But it is hard to enjoy sex if your waterworks are playing up.

* * * * *

- August 3: P. D. James
- August 4: Tim Winton
- August 5: Guy de Maupassant
- August 6: Rolf Boldrewood
- August 7: Dean Farrar
- August 8: Marjorie Rawlings
- August 9: Tove Jansson
- August 10: Laurence Binyon
- August 11: Enid Blyton

August 12: Robert Southey
August 13: Ridgwell Cullum
August 14: Penny Bundy
August 15: Sir Walter Scott
Garry Disher
Nan McNab

* * * * *

When Scott wrote in *Rob Roy*:

“My father read the lines sometimes with an affectation of not being able to understand the sense; sometimes in a mouthing tone of mock heroic; always with an emphasis of the most bitter irony, most irritating to the nerves of an author:—

‘“Oh for the voice of that wild horn,
On Fontarabian echoes borne,
The dying hero’s call,
That told imperial Charlemagne
How Paynim sons of swarthy Spain
Had wrought his champion’s fall.”

‘*Fontarabian echoes!*’ continued my father, interrupting himself; ‘the Fontarabian Fair would have been more to the purpose. — *Paynim?* — What’s Paynim? Could you not say Pagan as well, and write English, at least, if you must needs write nonsense?

‘Sad over earth and ocean sounding,
And England’s distant cliffs astounding,
Such are the notes should say
How Britain’s hope, and France’s fear,
Victor of Cressy and Poitier,
In Bordeaux dying lay.

‘*Poitiers*, by the way,’ is always spelt with an s; and I know no reason why orthography should give place to rhyme.

‘“Raise my faint head, my squires,” he said,
“And let the casement be displayed,
That I may see once more
The splendour of the setting sun,
Gleam on they mirrored wave, Garonne,
And Blaye’s empurpled shore.”

‘*Garonne* and *sun* is a bad rhyme. Why, Frank, you do not even understand the beggarly trade you have chosen.

‘“Like me, he sinks to Glory’s sleep
His fall the dews of evening steep,
As if in sorrow shed.
So soft shall fall the trickling tear
When England’s maids and matrons hear
Of their Black Edward dead.

‘“And though my sun of glory set,
Nor France nor England shall forget
The terror of my name;
And oft shall Britain’s heroes rise,
New planets in these southern skies,
Through clouds of blood and flame.”

‘A cloud of flame is something new. Good-morrow, my masters all, and a merry Christmas to you! Why, the bellman writes better lines.’ He then tossed the paper from him

with an air of superlative contempt, and concluded, ‘Upon my credit, Frank, you are a greater blockhead than I took you for.’

I couldn’t help wondering if Scott was either poking fun at the pretentiousness of a lot of early nineteenth century poetry with its pompous and bombastic use of classical and historical themes or whether this was what his own father had said to him when he announced his ambition to be a poet.

* * * * *

Robertson Davies wrote in *The Lyre of Orpheus*: “Operas devour incident,” said the Doctor. “Nobody wants to listen to people going into musical ecstasies about love for two hours and a half. Go on, Powell. What next? You have killed Arthur. That is bad. The character who gives the name to the opera should not peg out until the end. Look at *Lucia di Lammermoor*; the last act is tedious. No Lucia. You’ll have to arrange something different.”

John Cargher in *The Good Opera CD Guide* wrote of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, “It exemplifies the early romantic period to perfection, even to being based on a novel by Sir Walter Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Scott was incredibly popular all over Europe. About eighty operas used his books as a source and Scotland was considered the ideal location for any opera plot.”

But Alastair Scott in *Native Stranger* says of it: “In 1819 Scott lay on a sofa in this library suffering from gallstones and jaundice. Too weak to hold a pen, he dictated to a secretary who later recalled, ‘though he often turned himself on his pillow with a groan of torment, he usually continued the sentence in the same breath.’ Scott dictated *The Bride of Lammermuir* from start to finish without notes in a fortnight. Later that year, still in the grip of the same illness, he dictated *Ivanhoe*.”

Although I cannot call myself a Scott fan I do admire his stoicism, determination, and integrity. (And perhaps he should’ve tried parsley ...)

I always feel I should be an opera buff, what with a mother called Beatrice and a mother-in-law called Aida, yet I always find myself struggling with operas. I much prefer carefully selected excerpts! Yet behind every opera is a plot, a setting, characters, drama, pathos, comic moments, incident after incident; the stuff of all fiction. And someone writes all those words.

* * * * *

Leopold von Ranke is remembered for his history books. But Ann Curthoys and John Docker in *Is history fiction?* raise some curious questions about his status as ‘Father’ of this type of writing. “The crucial moment of the development of modern professional ‘scientific’ history occurred in the 1820s, and the crucial figure of that moment is Leopold von Ranke.

“In the 1820s Ranke was a young man with vast ambition, and in his own life-time would go on to attain a worldwide reputation. Ranke’s life is a story of success heaped on success, worldly and professional. His work was pivotal in the emergence of many of history’s distinctive theories, methods, philosophy, sensibility, procedures, inflections of gender, and rewards in terms of professional identity and esteem.” And, “In many ways, Ranke — renowned for research into the facts, with a reputation for scholarly impartiality and objectivity that transcends any particular political commitments, close to state power, an adviser to governments — did indeed become exemplary of the new professional historian, in England, the United States and elsewhere in an increasingly history-hungry world. Ranke influenced the new profession in crucial aspects. At the University of Berlin he instituted the historical seminar, the origin of the modern way of training scholars in history. He encouraged the critical inspection of original documents and the narratives of eyewitnesses.” This all sounds admirable. Except that although he claimed in his first book *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations* “it seeks only to show what actually happened” and that good history writing would therefore be “colourless” they describe him as “idiosyncratic, inconsistent, and contradictory” and his writing as both racist and sexist. And there were aspects to his work which suggests he might not fit the modern humanist perspective on history. Herbert Butterfield wrote in *Christianity and History*, “The technique of historical study itself demands that we shall look

upon each generation as, so to speak, an end in itself, a world of people existing in their own right. All of which led the great German historian Ranke a hundred years ago to the important thesis that every generation is equidistant from eternity.” But even stranger was that Leopold von Ranke set up as his whipping boy Sir Walter Scott’s novel *Quentin Durward*, a story of swashbuckling adventure in the 15th century. That a serious historian should see a need to debunk what was a work of fiction is a reminder that most people got their knowledge of history from novels, plays, poems, and newspapers, not to mention cheap broadsheets, ballads, and town criers. To get large tomes of history colour accepted as a more reliable alternative meant weaning people away from the vivid life and colour of such sources.

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August 16: Georgette Heyer
Charles Bukowski
August 17: V. S. Naipaul
August 18: Brian Aldiss
August 19: Ogden Nash
August 20: Helen Barrett
August 21: Christopher Robin Milne

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I know that people like Dale Spender have criticised male writers for taking from their wives’ material, lifting from their diaries and letters, possibly in the hope of appearing to ‘understand’ women. She particularly takes F. Scott Fitzgerald to task for his unacknowledged use of his wife Zelda’s writings.

But worse than adults using adults I think is the way that adults have sometimes used the lives of children. I remember feeling uncomfortable when I realised that Christopher Robin in A. A. Milne’s immortal ‘Winnie the Pooh’ stories was a real person and his son. I thought of the dreadful teasing and intrusive questions he must have faced when he went off to school.

And it was an association he then had to carry through life—unless he cut all ties with his father and changed his name. But he wrote of not minding about this in his childhood, in *The Enchanted Places*, because as a small boy he was called Billy Moon (Moon being his mispronunciation of Milne) at home. Christopher Robin was a bit like Eeyore’s tail; just something spare hanging round for his father to pick up and use. The real problems came when he went off to school. But he says it was actually the poem ‘Vespers’ which has that verse ‘*Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,/Droops on the little hands little gold head./Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!/Christopher Robin is saying his prayers*’ which “has brought me over the years more toe-curling, fist-clenching, lip-biting embarrassment than any other.” In a way the Pooh books were damaging to both father and son; to A. A. Milne because it was hard to get his plays and novels taken seriously afterwards, and to Christopher Robin Milne because of all the teasing, because it kept him in a kind of time-warp, and because he found the publicity and attention paid to him as a very shy person difficult to handle.

He says of his father: “My father was a creative writer and so it was precisely because he was *not* able to play with his small son that his longings sought and found satisfaction in another direction. He wrote about him instead.”

I was thinking on this when I came upon Alastair Scott’s account of the family Sir James Barrie used for his inspiration for Peter Pan. What Sylvia and Arthur Llewelyn Davies thought of Barrie isn’t known though they accepted his generosity and interest in their boys as being harmless. “‘There never was a simpler, happier family until the coming of Peter Pan,’ Barrie wrote about the Darlings in an early draft of his play.”

Both Arthur and Sylvia died while their boys were still young. Barrie was extremely indulgent and generous to them yet there was a darker side. “But the tragedy as far as Barrie was concerned was that their youth passed, they grew up, and one by one he struggled to hold onto their childhoods which were inextricably his own. He surrounded himself with their photographs and pinned their redundant school caps to his wall.”

Of the boys, Jack resented Barrie and called him ‘the interfering little baronet’, George who uttered the words ‘To die will be an awfully big adventure,’ which Barrie used in the play died on the Western Front in 1915, Michael was found drowned in the Thames in 1921 along with a close friend in what was secretly believed to be a homosexual suicide pact, and Peter ...

“Peter, who gave his name to the play, ‘that terrible masterpiece’, as he called it, rued the association all his life. He wished Peter Pan had been called George, Jack, Michael, Nico, *anything*, and thus have spared him the misery of his sobriquet and the suppression of his own identity and character. When he compiled a family history (not for publication) he entitled it ‘Morgue’ for it seemed to him the Llewelyn Davieses had done more dying than living. And when, as a depressed publisher in 1957, he threw himself under a train in the London Underground, the press seized the opportunity and ran the headlines he himself would have predicted, and seen as justification of his despair. ‘PETER PAN COMMITS SUICIDE.’ ‘THE BOY WHO NEVER GREW UP IS DEAD.’ ”

There seems to be a moral in there. Adults do not have the right to treat children’s lives and words as the stuff of their fiction. Or if they do they must accept the responsibilities to protect that go with that choice.

In fact Christopher Robin Milne was able to work through his mixed feelings, not least because of the deep affection father and son shared, and to forgive what needed to be forgiven and to enjoy what was of timeless quality, and to write of his own memories out of his own love for the places immortalised in the books.

Perhaps this process was helped along by his decision to run a bookshop; a lot of the people who come into bookshops live their lives on a vaguer less earthy plane perhaps. I have sometimes thought I would like to run a bookshop but I must admit my image of myself is more like that of James Herriot when he wrote, “I had often thought it must be fun to run a secondhand book shop and now that I began to consider it seriously I felt sure there was an opening for one in Darrowby. I experienced a comfortable glow at the vision of myself sitting under the rows of dusty volumes, pulling one down from the shelf when I felt like it—” whereas Milne writes firmly in *The Path Through the Trees*: “A girl who likes people — who is friendly and helpful and makes them feel welcome — is far more use to us than one who likes books. Books don’t need to be liked: people do. Books don’t mind if you are rude to them or offhand in your manner: people do. A bookshop is like a marriage bureau: it arranges meetings between likely partners — likely book and likely buyer. The introduction may be a formal one. ‘Mr Smith, I would like you to meet this book: I think you might enjoy it.’ Or it might be more casual — so placing the book that Mr Smith’s eye will fall on it and his hand will reach out towards it ... This is the art of bookbuying and bookselling: knowing your customers, knowing their tastes, realizing that their tastes are constantly changing, anticipating what they will be next season, choosing your stock accordingly and then so displaying it that you achieve the maximum number of introductions leading to the maximum number of happy marriages.

“Consequently when people say to us: ‘What lovely, lovely books. If I had a bookshop I would just read and read all day: I’d never want to sell a thing,’ we smile politely — and change the subject. There is immense pleasure in book reading, but it has nothing to do with bookselling.”

Yet I like dealing with someone who is friendly and helpful but also very clearly loves books. I bought several the other day from a Hobart bookseller who said he felt having a bookshop was like being a little boy in a chocolate shop. It didn’t stop him being helpful and willing to look out for hard-to-come-by books ...

I think the best bookshops are those in which the staff and owners love books, love reading—and love sharing and helping their potential customers find things they too will enjoy.

* * * * *

August 22: Maurice Gee

August 23: W. E. Henley

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And the times when adults use other adults, and the inspiration is unmistakable, can also be fraught ...

Keith Alldritt in his biography of W. B. Yeats writes, "Another older man, about the same age as York Powell and likewise a Bedford Park neighbour, took a liking to Willie and helped him greatly, though he also shocked Willie by a certain coarseness in conversation. This was the famous journalist William Ernest Henley, a distinctive and well-known figure in and around Bedford Park. Having lost his left leg during his teens he clumped about the curved, tree-lined streets with the aid of a heavy crutch. He was the inspiration behind the one-legged Long John Silver, the character in *Treasure Island* written by his one-time close friend and exact contemporary, Robert Louis Stevenson. As a journalist and editor Henley knew many writers. He assisted the careers of Joseph Conrad, Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells along with that of his young neighbour, Willie Yeats. Things Henley said often horrified him, and on occasion he determined to flee the older man's company, but he did not. For here was a new literary patron, a poet and an experienced editor who could help his career. Syphilitic, often foul-mouthed, coarse and yet at the same time highly sensitive, Henley had a considerable reputation as a poet and a literary journalist." Henley liked to surround himself with young male writers he could both challenge and mould. Kipling said "he is not going to come the bullying cripple over me" but Yeats was much kinder to the "visionary, illiberal, vehement" man saying "I think we listened to him, and often obeyed him, partly because he was quite plainly not upon the side of our parents".

Yeats was later to write of "the hard, cold energy of Henley's verse" ...

Apart from being the inspiration for Stevenson's Long John Silver Henley used a phrase in his poem 'Invictus', "declaiming his Victorian belief in self-reliance and individualism"—

It matters not how strait the gate

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate:

I am the captain of my soul.

—which continues to resonate. From Francis Thompson writing,

In the aspect of those known eyes

My soul's a captain weatherwise. ('Threatened Tears')

to Gwen Harwood who used it as the title of a poem which begins—

But the Captain is drunk, and the crew

hauling hard on his windlass of fury are whipped

by his know-nothing rage.

Perhaps she was thinking of Henley the person rather than Henley the poet or Henley the inspiration ...

* * * * *

I'm not sure that I would have wanted to take liberties with Henley and his temper. But far more fraught was the situation Klaus Mann found himself in when he used his brother-in-law Gustaf Gründgens as the fictional actor Hendrik Höfgen in his novel *Mephisto*. Gustaf had been a communist but with the coming to power of Hitler he changed so he could continue his career and play Mephistopheles in *Faust* under the patronage of Hermann Göring. Robin Smyth says of the book, "Originally published in Amsterdam, *Mephisto* has been published in Austria, Switzerland, Yugoslavia and, most recently, France. It was published in Germany in the late fifties, only to be met by the longest lawsuit in the history of German publishing. The suit, brought by Gründgens' adopted son, dragged on for ten years, until the Supreme Court of Germany banned the book in a five-to-four decision."

* * * * *

The father of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti, Gabriele Rossetti, believed that Dante's muse Beatrice did not actually exist. She was a fantasy. A muse. An inspiration. In fact we know Beatrice Portinari existed and married Simone de' Bardi while Dante Alighieri

married Gemma Donati and had three sons and a daughter. The curious thing is that Dante never mentions Gemma in any of his writings. Yet the indications we can gather, from this distant perspective, is that it was a happy marriage. So perhaps that is the key point: with a safe comfortable place to write from Dante could recreate his longings and his imaginings of the perfect woman in the person of Beatrice. She was real but she was also a fantasy.

Frances Thomas says of Gabriele Rossetti's household: 'There was another ghostly inhabitant of the Charlotte Street house, the poet Dante. What with their father's endless studies, they began to think of Dante almost as a neighbour, a bit awe-inspiring, a bit of a bore, but undoubtedly *there*; the young Gabriel used to believe he might one day put in an appearance with the other Italian visitors, and there was a particular dark corner of the upper landing that he used to rush past in terror, in case Dante was lurking there. On the whole, the children were not too keen on this person who devoured so much of their father's time and attention. He was 'a sort of banshee' in the house. Not until they were older could the children bear to read the works of Dante for themselves. But they knew there was something fascinating in their father's studies, which they contemplated with 'a certain hushed feeling.' For Gabriel, a certain copy of the *Vita Nuova* upon his father's shelves seemed to glow with a mysterious light.'

* * * * *

I am not a fan of Christopher Isherwood; nor do I have fantasies about Berlin in the early 1930s ... yet I have an unreasoning affection for Isherwood's novel *Mr Norris Changes Trains*. I really don't know why. John Lehmann in his memoir of Isherwood says, "Christopher, who had many friends and contacts in the left-wing groups and their sympathizers, did what he could to help those in hiding and those in flight, including Gerald Hamilton (the prototype for Mr Norris)."

Isherwood wrote the book in a banana plantation in the Canary Islands. "Christopher had a strong feeling that he could work on his novel there. He had abandoned his original attempts to make it a hold-all for all the Berlin characters he wanted to write about, and decided to concentrate on Gerald Hamilton as Arthur Norris. I think, but I am not certain, that he had read Proust by then; Mr Norris has unmistakable likenesses to the Baron de Charlus: both snobs, both given to special perversions, both homosexuals (though Christopher concealed Mr Norris's homosexuality), with one important difference — Charlus was not a rogue, while Hamilton/Norris was a crook of the deepest dye."

Hamilton was apparently a con man, a cheat, a liar, a swindler, a man who would betray his friends at the drop of a hat. Isherwood asked Jean Ross, the singer who became 'Sally Bowles' if she would mind being used in that way. (And 'Sally Bowles' has become a character in her own right; not just in films and musicals but in later books such as Hilary Bailey's *After the Cabaret* which purports to be her career after leaving Berlin.) I doubt if Isherwood worried about using Hamilton.

But the puzzling thing is ... why should a character I would probably hate in real life delight me in fiction? I don't know the answer but it probably has something to do with the fact that Arthur Norris fails in his chosen life but with such quirky panache and humour and style.

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August 24: Ruth Park
August 25: Thea Astley
August 26: Sheryn Dee
August 27: Ira Levin
August 28: Pam Blashki
August 29: Margaret Clark
 Gillian Rubinstein
August 30: Mary Shelley
August 31: Josephine Crosier
September 1: Edgar Rice Burroughs

Ruth Park in her autobiography *A Fence Around the Cuckoo* wrote of meeting Eve Langley in Auckland: ‘Occasionally a new friend visited the Reading Room. In that ceaseless hurly burly we were not allowed to have visitors, but rules were not made for Eve Langley. A waifish creature with black hair and crooked legs, about which she was sensitive and always hid with trousers, she had taken a fancy to me because of some story of mine she had read. She had not yet written *The Pea Pickers*, the stunning picaresque novel of two bold girls afoot in Gippsland; she wasn’t famous yet. But she was famous to me, for well I knew her massive cloudy poems, and an infrequent strange glittering short story. I didn’t know she was an Australian, a dazzling autodidact with a head full of classic literature, other languages, and uncontrollable creativity the frustration of which was eventually to drive her mad; I knew nothing. But to me she was a living example of all that was rapturous, exciting, literary. She even lived in Partington’s Windmill, or so I understood, a circumstance that enchanted me. If only I could live in a windmill, a stairless turret, where no one else could climb! To know that Eve Langley believed I could write, and would some day write better, made me strong.’

But this was more admiration from a distance than a developed friendship. The friendship came later. When Park needed somewhere to stay she decided to go round to the mill and ask Eve for help. ‘The mill was dank, cold and Gothic, and my admiration for my friend Eve increased as I climbed tortuously upward. What dedication, what endurance, to live in this place and write, write — would I have the same strength of will and spirit?’ She goes bursting into the little room at the top, startling a strange woman, and demanding to know where Eve was. ‘She’d heard of Eve Langley, yes, she had, but not for years. Eve’s young man, called himself an artist, had a studio on top of the old storehouse next door to the mill, and Eve had lived with him there. Donkey’s years ago, really. What had happened to that weird girl?’ The woman, Muriel, did some bookkeeping at the mill in return for the room. ‘Once quite a few people dossed down in the mill, and they had great old times, but the old codger was a bit crochety now and took umbrage at all kinds of things.’

Ironically ‘the old codger’ was the person who introduced Eve to artist and future husband Hilary Clark; a relationship which exhausted and damaged them both, which resulted in Eve spending seven years in a psychiatric hospital in Auckland and, saddest of all, meant that their three children spent most of their childhoods in an orphanage ...

* * * * *

‘They politely put on the gramophone (which makes it sound like an apéritif), and the bane of Australia at that time, Hawaiian music, sobbed out mournfully. That most glorious sound! Ah, I loved it. I lay back, weeping within, and making poems that shifted around the guitars and the natives, disregarding their pipe-clayed boots, white socks and bow ties.’

From *The Pea-Pickers* by Eve Langley.

It is a curious book because it does not play by anyone else’s rules. It does not rise to a climax. It is not precisely picaresque or episodic in the sense of rising and falling over and over again. Rather, it reads at a level of almost frenetic emotional intensity. The tiniest things, someone seen on a train, a passing conversation, a view on a country road, are presented as intensely as a major scene. I think this is part of its attraction but it also has those delightful little moments of remembrance like the bit about Hawaiian music. I can remember going to a birthday party as a child and someone there had begun learning. She brought out her lovely new Hawaiian guitar and there we stood in a dusty yard listening to her play and play ... and play. I think she played quite competently but it was supposed to be a party with games and fun. It rather put me off Hawaiian music for the rest of my childhood.

‘However, although grand with loneliness I was not above a trick of the meaner sort. Blue saw a piece of scarlet Paisley lying in the passage and picked it up to take it away. Blind with longing for it, I begged her, in the sacred name of ghostly hospitality, not to do so.’

“For,” said I, “who knows—not even He who lit the torch in the first rose—how long this has lain here, or to what end it is destined. This rag, perhaps, on which the blood of old Scotch art has bled, gives out to the night the spirit of love; for since it was torn from the breast of some young girl as she in haste fled down the years....”

“Don’t,” expostulated Blue. “That’s almost pure Francis Thompson.”

“Anyhow,” I continued, “don’t take it. It might have all sorts of germs on it, you never know.”

Steve manages to cheat Blue out of the coveted piece of cloth. The two sisters are travelling round Gippsland disguised, though not very well, as men. Steve is Eve who was actually christened Ethel. Blue is real life June who was actually christened Lillian. The book has been described as a search for love but I think it is more about the search for the independence that jobs found and done successfully might provide two young women. And it is full of questions about what young women without much education, money, or family support can grab from life. But I liked it for its tiny vignettes of rural people, attitudes, work, and life, rather than for the bigger issues that can be read into it.

I also think that the reference to Francis Thompson’s famous poem ‘The Hound of Heaven’ suggests that Eve Langley found her inspiration in writers like Thompson and perhaps Mary Webb who invest every sentence with this sense of an intense emotional need to grasp the moment. There are no quiet sleepy moments, no dull middle reaches, no time to get your breath back. When Thompson writes verses like—

When she lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day’s dead sanctities.
I laughed in the morning’s eyes.
I triumphed and I saddened with all weather,
Heaven and I wept together,
And its sweet tears were salt with mortal mine;
Against the red throb of its sunset-heart
I laid my own to beat,
And share commingling heat;
But not by that, by that, was eased my human smart.
In vain my tears were wet on Heaven’s grey cheek.
For ah! we know not what each other says,
These things and I; in sound *I* speak—
Their sound is but their stir, they speak by silences.
Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
The breasts o’ her tenderness:
Never did any milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth.
Nigh and nigh draws the chase,
With unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy;
And past those noisèd Feet
A Voice comes yet more fleet—
‘Lo! Naught contents thee, who content’st not Me.’

—it isn’t hard to imagine it resonating with Eve Langley.

Paul Glynn in *Healing Fire from Frozen Earth* mentions Francis Thompson briefly, “The English poet Francis Thompson has a special message for modern youth. His father was a Manchester doctor and Francis went to university to study medicine. He fought with his father, dropped out of medical school and became hooked on drugs. He ended up destitute, living on the streets of London, craving only opium. First an Evangelical minister and then the Meynell

couple helped him, very compassionately, face reality. He broke free of his addiction and became a recognised poet, leaving some enduring verse. You may have read his *Hound of Heaven*. Another of his fine poems is *In No Strange Land*. One stanza goes:

The angels keep their ancient places —

Turn but a stone and start a wing!

'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces

That miss the many splendour'd thing." I am not sure what messages either Eve Langley or modern youth might take from his life; and towards the end of hers she probably wasn't capable of facing what other people called reality. But her liking for Thompson's work does seem natural.

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Joy L. Thwaite wrote a biography, *The Importance of Being Eve Langley*, in which she struggles to chart Langley's complex relationship to just about everything but particularly her life as a woman. What was probably a wish to be a man because of the greater freedom and independence it provided gradually grew into a belief that she was a reincarnation of Oscar Wilde. She changed her name by deed poll. She dressed and increasingly believed herself to be a man. But she continued to use the character of Blue in her later books; creating a strange surreal attitude to a character she both inhabited but also stood outside of and manipulated. And she continued to look for men she could look up to, love, and admire.

Apart from her two published novels *The Pea-Pickers* and *White Topee* and a number of short stories and poems she left ten unpublished and possibly unpublishable novels, typed single space on coloured paper, and with increasingly erratic construction and punctuation: *Wild Australia*; *The Victorians*; *Bancroft House*; *The Land of the Long White Cloud*; *Demeter of Dublin Street*; *The Old Mill*; *Last, Loveliest, Loneliest*; *Remote Apart*; *Portrait of the Artist*; *The Saunterer*. She also wrote other books which have been lost. Perhaps, some day, someone will struggle to edit, cut, adapt, and finally publish some of them. After all, even such sacrosanct writers as Jane Austen have not been immune to this process.

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September 2: D. K. Broster

September 3: Alison Lurie

September 4: Joan Aiken

September 5: Arthur Koestler

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Arthur Koestler jumped into that beguiling pool and wrote his autobiography *Arrow in the Blue* but he shared some of his difficulties: 'With an aching, loving, bitter-sweet nostalgia, the author bends over his past like a woman over the cradle of her child; he whispers to it and rocks it in his arms, blind to the fact that the smiles, and howls, and wriggings of his budding ego lack for his readers that unique fascination which they hold for him. Even experienced authors who know that the reader is a cold fish who has to be tickled behind the gills to make him respond, become victims of this fallacy as soon as they embark on the first chapter with the heading: 'Childhood'. The smell of lavender in mother's linen closet is so intimate; the smile on granny's face so comforting; the water in the brook behind the watercress patch by the garden fence so cool and fresh that it still caresses his fingers holding the pen; and on and on he goes about his linen closets, grannies, ponies, and watercress brooks as if they were a collective memory of all mankind and not, alas, his separate and incommunicable own. Never is the isolation of the self so acutely painful as in the frustrated attempt to share memories of those earliest and most vivid days, when out of the still fluid oneness of the inside and outside world, out of the original mix-up of fact and fantasy, the sharp boundaries of the self were formed.' This, of course, is only the beginning of the agony. How frank? How modest? Is autobiography about answering your own questions about routes taken and decisions made—or should the questions and answers be those assumed to belong to the reader? And there were things about his own life I suspect he was always going to fudge ...

But instead of a horoscope for his birth he did something much more interesting: he went to look at old newspapers to see what was going on in the world at the time he was born. I thought this would be an interesting exercise. Was it a good year for news when I was born—or a year for good news? What was happening on the local stage, nation-wide, all around the world, when I made my appearance? Was the news unadulterated misery? Or were things so quiet editors had to resort to making up little stories of the ‘man bites dog’ variety? Was it all bus crashes and aeroplanes ploughing into mountainsides? Was it disease outbreaks and famine and yet more war? Was it sport, sport, sport? Or Hollywood stars marrying in Monte Carlo? Was it hope of breakthroughs or regret that relations between East and West were worsening?

Have I wetted your appetite? Do you too now want to know what was happening at that moment in your life?

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September 6: Barbara Hanrahan
September 7: C. J. Dennis
September 8: Jeanie Adams
September 9: Phyllis Whitney
September 10: Franz Werfel
September 11: Jessica Mitford
September 12: Max Walker
September 13: Roald Dahl
September 14: Eric Bentley
September 15: Agatha Christie
September 16: Rodney Martin
September 17: David McRobbie
September 18: Samuel Johnson
September 19: Libby Gleeson
 Michael Noonan
September 20: Upton Sinclair
September 21: Hazel Edwards
September 22: Murray Bail
 Dale Spender
September 23: Jan Ormerod
September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald
September 25: T. S. Eliot
September 26: John Aldridge
September 27: John Marsden
September 28: Ellis Peters
September 29: Cassandra Pybus
 Colin Dexter
September 30: Nette Hilton
October 1: Louis Untermeyer
October 2: Graham Greene
October 3: Gore Vidal
October 4: Garrie Hutchinson
 Bill Scott
October 5: James Porter
 Flann O’Brien
 Peter Ackroyd
October 6: Val Biro
October 7: Tom Keneally
October 8: John Cowper Powys
October 9: Michael Dugan

Perhaps the most famous slave was Miguel Cervantes. He joins a centuries-long list of people, some known like St Vincent de Paul, others completely unknown and forgotten, who were captured by the Muslim pirates operating out of what are now Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. Ships in the Mediterranean were hijacked and looted, crews and passengers were taken as slaves or to be ransomed. Stephen Clissold in *The Barbary Slaves* estimates at least a million Europeans ended up as slaves in North Africa. At first the slavers operated in small boats round the coasts. Jewish merchants, as well as the Lomellini family in Genoa acted as middlemen in the ransoming of captives; in 1198 the Vatican sanctioned The Order of the Most Holy Trinity for the Ransom of Captives, followed by The Order of Our Lady of Mercy in 1218. Some governments paid ransoms for most of their nationals captured, though often only after years had passed. Others left their people to their fate. By the time of Elizabeth I the pirates had grown much more confident. The Canary Islands were raided in 1586, an Irish town was carried off in 1631, eight hundred people were kidnapped from far away Iceland in 1627.

Captives might be ransomed, sometimes they managed to escape, many died far from home often worked to death (not least because slaves for whom no ransom was forthcoming were seen as having no value), some converted to Islam which meant they were no longer considered as slaves but neither did they have the freedom to leave. But the fate of many people, once they were taken, became a mystery.

Clissold writes, “Quite other qualities were needed — fortitude, resourcefulness and unshakeable faith — to lift men above the brutalizing effect of slavery and inspire others. Haedo recognized just such qualities in a certain young soldier, unknown as yet to literature, but already himself a man ‘of whom a whole book could be written’. A fellow slave describes how, ‘with the little he possessed, Miguel de Cervantes would relieve poor Christians, helping them to perform their daily tasks and live their lives ... a man very discreet of habits and tastes so good that all were glad to treat and speak with him, his society being sought by leading captives, both soldiers and priests, and withal amiable, courteous and open with all the world.’ Another spoke of his ‘worthy and Christian conduct ... how he relieved poor Christians and kept up their spirits, comforting them in their afflictions and keeping them steadfast in their faith.’ A new-comer declared how he had found in Cervantes ‘both father and mother.’ All expressed admiration at the spirited answers he gave when questioned by Dey Hassan.”

He tried several times to escape but was always caught; in the end he was ransomed and came home to Spain. “It is possible that Cervantes himself may have written pieces for the entertainment of his fellow slaves. The earliest of his extant comedies, written after his return to Spain, had Algiers as its setting, and he drew constantly on his African experiences in his later plays, his short stories, and for the lengthy *Captive’s Tale* in *Don Quixote*.”

“When I think of antiquity, the detail that frightens me is that those hundreds of millions of slaves on whose backs civilization rested generation after generation have left behind them no record whatever. We do not even know their names. In the whole of Greek and Roman history, how many slaves’ names are known to you? I can think of two, or possibly three. One is Spartacus and the other is Epictetus. Also, in the Roman room at the British Museum there is a glass jar with the maker’s name inscribed on the bottom, ‘Felix fecit’. I have a mental picture of poor Felix (a Gaul with red hair and a metal collar round his neck), but in fact he may not have been a slave; so there are only two slaves whose names I definitely know, and probably few people can remember more. The rest have gone down into utter silence.”

George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*.

Because “the laws of the Scandinavian peoples were unrecorded till after the end of the Viking Age we know less about the slave’s life and status than we could wish, but a long succession of English laws and a considerable number of references to thralls in Icelandic

literature provide us with information which if cautiously interpreted will serve for homeland Scandinavia, too. The thrall might be an undischarged debtor or a man otherwise condemned to death; he might be the son (or a woman slave the daughter) of slaves, as much his master's property as the calf from his master's cow or the colt from his mare; but the great recruiting grounds for slaves were war, piracy, and trade. They came in great numbers from the British Isles, either caught in the dragnet of the Viking raids and invasions or as straightforward objects of commerce; they came from all other countries where Viking power reached; and above all they came from slave-hunts among the Slavonic peoples whose countries bordered on the Baltic. The very name Slav (*Sclavus*) became confused with the medieval Latin *sclavus*, a slave. Drovers of human cattle came to the pens of Magdeburg, ready for their transfer west; there was a big clearing-house later at Regensburg on the Danube; and Hedeby in southern Jutland was well sited for its share of this northern traffic in men. Southwards the burghers of Lyons grew fat on slaves. The demand from Spain and the remoter Muslim world was insatiable: men and girls for labour and lust, eunuchs for sad service. By 850 the Swedes had opened up the Volga and Dnieper as slave-routes to the eastern market. And just as the slave-trade was essential to Viking commerce, the slave himself was the foundation-stone of Viking life at home. The Frostathing Law thought three thralls the proper complement for a Norwegian farm of twelve cows and two horses; a lord's estate might well require thirty or more. In the eyes of the law-makers a thrall counted as a superior kind of cow or horse. He commanded no wergild, but in England if you killed him you had normally to pay his owner the worth of eight cows; in Iceland you paid eight ounces of silver (one and a half marks), and if this was paid within three days his master took no further action. He could be bought and sold like any other chattel. Hoskuld Dala-Kilsson of Laxardal in Iceland is said to have paid three marks of silver, thrice the price of a common concubine, for the Irish girl he purchased from a trader in a Russian hat in the Brenneyjar (*Laxdaela Saga*, 12). She was one of twelve on sale in the slaver's booth. In theory, and sometimes in practice, the thrall could be put down like a horse or dog once his usefulness was past. The male, and still more frequently the female, thrall could be sacrificed or executed to follow a dead owner, as we know from the most famous of all Norwegian graves, that at Oseberg, where a slave woman was buried with her mistress, from Birka in Sweden and Ballateare on Man, from the 'beheaded slave's grave' at Lejre in Zealand, and as we read in Ibn Fadlan's account of a Rus burial ceremony on the Volga. Rights he had none. Since he had no property, he was exempt from fines; instead he was beaten, maimed, or killed. The mutineer or runaway could expect no quarter: the owning class would as soon tolerate a wolf on the foldwall as a slave on the run, and his end was a wolf's end, quick and bloody. For the slave born and bred life was hard. For a freeborn warrior taken in the wars, or a well-nurtured girl ravished from her burned home, it could be hell itself, and Icelandic sources record many a doom-laden attempt to wrest an impossible release from unbearable circumstance.

"And yet the northern thrall was better off than his fellow in Mediterranean and eastern lands. Where a master was bad or a thrall irreconcilable little could be hoped for; but there is evidence to suggest that most masters were reasonable and most thralls prepared to make the best of their lot. The ill-treatment of thralls was at least as bad a mark as the neglect of stock, and in so far as he was a member of a household the thrall could expect to benefit from the kindlier impulses of humanity. As the Viking Age wore on, and under the influence of Christianity, an increasing disquietude was felt about the ownership and sale of men. It operated most strongly on behalf of those of one's own nationality, and then those of one's own religion, but was a leaven in the whole situation."

From *A History of the Vikings* by Gwyn Jones.

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"The existence of planned villages demonstrates the capacity of lords to assess the economic situation and calculate the levels of investment needed to make radical innovations. In this climate of financial rationality, it was possible to reckon that using slave labour was not

cost-effective and should be abandoned. Slavery in Britain had not disappeared with the fall of the Roman Empire in the West. On the contrary it was still flourishing when William I conquered England in 1066. As in Roman times much of the hardest work was done by slaves: ploughing by male slaves, grinding corn with hand mills by slave women. In a slave-owning society, such as Anglo-Saxon England, a master who killed his own slave was guilty of a sin, but not of a crime. Slaves were bought and sold at market — human flexibility meant that one healthy male might cost as much as a plough team of eight oxen. Captured slaves were among the most desirable profits of war. But William I came from Normandy, where slavery was already a thing of the past and he disapproved. He put an end to the slave trade. Gradually slaves became more expensive to acquire. For centuries an occasional rich lord on his deathbed had been moved to free slaves as an act of Christian piety, but now — at long last — traditional notions of piety went hand in hand with the profit motive. In return for burdensome, often full-time services as ploughmen and shepherds, slaves were freed and given small tenements. By the 1120s Englishmen looked upon slavery as a barbarous custom happily no longer practised in their modern and civilised society. A hundred years before Magna Carta granted rights to freemen, an even more fundamental kind of freedom had been established.”

From *1215* by Danny Danziger and John Gillingham.

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“Not until 1833 was slavery finally ended throughout Britain and its colonies — twenty-seven years after the slave trade itself had been outlawed. Only in Scotland had slavery been illegal since 1778, as a result of the case *Knight v. Wedderburn*. Joseph Knight had been purchased in Jamaica by John Wedderburn and had been brought by him to Scotland at the age of twelve or thirteen to act as a personal servant. Eventually Knight married, left Wedderburn, and declared himself free, perhaps encouraged by the publicity surrounding the Somerset case in England. Wedderburn had him arrested, and although the local justice of the peace declared he must continue as a slave, Knight appealed to the Sheriff of Perthshire, where he was residing. The sheriff ruled ‘that the state of slavery [was] not recognized’ by the laws of Scotland, thereby setting Knight at liberty. Wedderburn appealed to Scotland’s highest court, the Court of Session, but in January 1778 it upheld the sheriff’s judgment. In the rest of Britain the outlawing of slavery had to wait a further fifty-five years.”

From *Flunkeys and Scullions* by Pamela Horn.

(The Somerset case did not outlaw slavery in England but only denied the right of a master to remove a slave by force from the country.)

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“The Atlantic slave trade depended on the fact that most of the societies of Africa—chiefdoms and kingdoms large and small, even groups of nomads—had their own systems of slavery. People were enslaved for crimes, as payment for a debt, or, most commonly of all, as prisoners of war. Slaves were often less important as labor than as prized status objects. This had its horrific side when they were killed in human sacrifice rituals, but it meant that African slave systems were in other ways sometimes less harsh than those that would come into being in the Americas: some slaves could earn their freedom in a generation or two, and sometimes could intermarry with free people. But they were still slaves. Once European ships started cruising the African coast offering all kinds of tempting goods for slaves, kings and chiefs began selling their human property to African dealers who roamed far into the interior. Groups of captives, ranging from a few dozen to six or eight hundred, were force-marched to the coast, the prisoners’ hands bound behind their backs, their necks connected by wooden yokes. Along the coast itself, a scattering of whites, blacks, and mulattos worked as middlemen for the Atlantic trade. They bought slaves from these traveling dealers or nearby African chiefs, held them until a ship appeared, and sold them to a European or American captain.”

From *Bury The Chains* by Adam Hochschild.

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A.M.R. Wright wrote a boys' adventure story called *Sons of the Sea*. The story starts in 1797. "The corsair had come alongside with her guns hidden when suddenly her long lateen boom swung over the *Dauphin's* deck and in the blink of an eye a swarm of pirates with cutlasses dropped on board.

"By this time we were near enough to make out the *Dauphin's* deck black with the savages in murderous onslaught on the crew, but, fearing to fire lest we cripple the *Dauphin* herself, we were manoeuvring for position, when the Turk opened on us with her stern-chasers and blew away our tops.

"To make a long story short, she raked out decks, hulled us and left us to sink, making off with the *Dauphin* which was still in good shape to refit as a pirate ship. One seaman from the *Dauphin*, in spite of his wounds, escaped by swimming to our ship, and from him we learned that the crew had their clothes stripped from them, were tossed a few rags to cover their nakedness, and taken in irons to Tripoli to be sold as slaves."

The youthful captain swears that someday "I shall strike a mortal blow at the Barbary pirates!" The youngsters on board want to know what are the Barbary pirates and get a brief history lesson. The famous Barbarossa and his brother Horuk, the horrors of branding with hot irons, bastinado on their feet, quarrying stone, scarred and weary slaves—and the spinelessness of European monarchs who merely pay ransom, effectively encouraging piracy and slavery to continue. Then a strong sideswipe at England: "It suits England's purpose to let them choke all trade but hers upon the Mediterranean. She uses them for her own ends. On the day the *Dauphin* was lost, two English ships entered the Strait with a hundred thousand dollars worth of naval supplies as a little gift for the Bey of Tripoli. So, you see, she too pays tribute, but her policy really amounts to hiring them to prey on other nations' commerce." You have guessed it. The young Americans fired with burning enthusiasm to bring the pirates' reign to an end plan and urge and pressure—and eventually they are successful. Other nations occasionally made a foray on the North African coast with the aim of liberating slaves, such as the French king Charles V and Lord Exmouth, but the Americans in the nineteenth century played a major role in the ending of centuries of piracy and slave-raiding out of North Africa. The *World Book* encyclopedia says, "From 1795 to 1801, the United States paid large sums of money to the Barbary States for protection against their corsairs. After Thomas Jefferson became president the United States fought against Tripoli (1801-1805), and later against Algeria. In 1815, the Barbary rulers promised to stop the raids against United States ships." It seems strange to me that the Americans could so clearly see one kind of slavery was wrong but not another ...

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October 10: Harold Pinter
October 11: Elmore Leonard
October 12: Peter Goldsworthy
October 13: Robert Ingpen
October 14: Kate Grenville
October 15: C. P. Snow

* * * * *

You may remember that scene in Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night*, a mystery set in an Oxford women's college in the 1930s:

"I've no objection to scientific pot-boilers," said Miss Edwards. "I mean, a popular book isn't necessarily unscientific."

"So long," said Wimsey, "as it doesn't falsify the facts. But it might be a different kind of thing. To take a concrete instance—somebody wrote a novel called *The Search*—"

"C.P. Snow," said Miss Burrows. "It's funny you should mention that. It was the book that the—"

"I know," said Peter. "That's possibly why it was in my mind."

"I never read the book," said the Warden.

“Oh, I did,” said the Dean. “It’s about a man who starts out to be a scientist and gets on very well till, just as he’s going to be appointed to an important executive post, he finds he’s made a careless error in a scientific paper. He didn’t check his assistant’s results, or something. Somebody finds out, and he doesn’t get the job. So he decides he doesn’t really care about science after all.”

“Obviously not,” said Miss Edwards. “He only cared about the post.”

“But,” said Miss Chilperic, “if it was only a mistake—”

“The point about it,” said Wimsey, “is what an elderly scientist says to him. He tells him: ‘The only ethical principle which has made science possible is that the truth shall be told all the time. If we do not penalize false statements made in error, we open up the way for false statements by intention. And a false statement of fact, made deliberately, is the most serious crime a scientist can commit.’ Words to that effect. I may not be quoting quite correctly.”

“Well, that’s true, of course. Nothing could possibly excuse deliberate falsification.”

“There’s no sense in deliberate falsification, anyhow,” said the Bursar. “What could anybody gain by it?”

“It has been done,” said Miss Hillyard, “frequently. To get the better of an argument. Or out of ambition.”

“Ambition to be what?” cried Miss Lydgate. “What satisfaction could one possibly get out of a reputation one knew one didn’t deserve? It would be horrible.”

Her innocent indignation upset everybody’s gravity.

“How about the Forged Decretals ... Chatterton ... Ossian ... Henry Ireland ... those Nineteenth-Century Pamphlets the other day ...?”

“I know,” said Miss Lydgate, perplexed. “I know people do it. But why? They must be mad.”

“In the same novel,” said the Dean, “somebody deliberately falsifies a result—later on, I mean—in order to get a job. And the man who made the original mistake finds it out. But he says nothing, because the other man is very badly off and has a wife and family to keep.”

“These wives and families!” said Peter.

“Does the author approve?” inquired the Warden.

“Well,” said the Dean, “the book ends there, so I suppose he does.”

* * * * *

The other day I came on an old copy of Snow’s *Science and Government*. This is a book of a lecture, rather than a novel, and deals with the consequences of the conflict between two scientists in Britain before and during World War II. Henry Tizard and F.A. Lindemann were both on the committee looking into the development of defences such as radar. Because the committee met in secret other countries were not well-versed in where the development was at, nor did the public know that they were going to be defended by some new ‘gadgets’—but neither did anyone know about the fights and bad feeling that literally tore the committee apart and led to outside intervention to reconstruct it. The fundamental conflict is between the values of secrecy and the values of openness and transparency. But because of the nature of secrecy ordinary people are denied the means to judge the worth of what is being kept secret. They are asked to take the views of a tiny minority of people on trust.

In this case Snow does appear to be clear on where he stands. “The euphoria of secrecy goes to the head very much like the euphoria of gadgets. I have known men, prudent in other respects, who became drunk with it. It induces an unbalancing sense of power. It is not of consequence whether one is hugging to oneself a secret about one’s own side or about the other. It is not uncommon to run across men superficially commonplace and unextravagant, who are letting their judgment run wild because they are hoarding a secret about the other side—quite forgetting that someone on the other side, almost indistinguishable from themselves, is hoarding a precisely similar secret about them. It takes a very strong head to keep secrets for years, and not go slightly mad. It isn’t wise to be advised by anyone slightly mad.”

* * * * *

Several times I thought vaguely of looking out for a copy of *The Search* without actually doing anything about it. Because I had read a couple of his novels without being engrossed; a bit like reading John Galsworthy with more science and academia but without that lightness of touch and attraction of the dialogue. I know libraries are keen on those slips and promos that say ‘If you liked Georgette Heyer try—’ It might be Dick Francis or John Grisham or Morris West. I’m sure people find them helpful at times in discovering a new author. But they have that vaguely second-best feel to them. ‘If you liked John Galsworthy try C. P. Snow—’

And libraries might give up that habit if they took on board Gregory McDonald’s words: ‘Too often have I heard a writer, an agent, editor, publisher, critic say, “Such and such book is great. It’s just like such and such book.”’

I yawn.

What I need to hear is that such and such novel, story, is *unlike* anything I’ve ever read before, has some new element in it, something truly creative, original enough to justify its existence, and to arouse my interest in it.’

And, yes, I did finally find a copy of *The Search* and found that I enjoyed it the most of any of his books; perhaps because it has a strongly autobiographical feel. This, I couldn’t help thinking, has more of Snow in it. Many of his other books seem too detached and cold ...

And that statement by the elderly scientist, Hulme, is the crux of the story:

“And I expect you feel as I did, that you’re being unjustly treated? I mean, not by fate, by human beings. You must feel they should have appointed you.”

I murmured an assent.

“Naturally you do, and so did I. My case was a little different, but I felt the same. But, Miles”—he smiled—“I think maybe we were wrong, I in my youth, you now, I mean, this Committee of yours, those electors of mine, may be right judged by the wider interests of science. I know your Committee were not acting in the wider interests of science; I’m not altogether blind, even yet, you know. I don’t think my electors were. But it is possible they do better than they know, perhaps. Because, you see, we both committed a crime against the truth. A crime in good faith, admittedly, honest, simply a mistake. Your mistake, if I may say so, was even stupider than mine. But there we were; we issued false statements. Now if false statements are to be allowed, if they are not to be discouraged by every means we have, science will lose its one virtue, truth. The only ethical principle which has made science possible is that the truth shall be told all the time. If we do not penalise false statements in error, we open up the way, don’t you see, for false statements by intention. And of course a false statement of fact, made deliberately, is the most serious crime a scientist can commit. There are such, we both know, but they’re few. As competition gets keener, possibly they will become more common. Unless that is stopped, science will lose a great deal. And so it seems to me that false statements, whatever the circumstances, must be punished as severely as is possible. From the wide point of view, from the justice of science as a whole, it is right that I should have been treated badly, and that you should now. It is expedient that you should suffer for the common good,” he said.

Snow’s theme, I feel sure, is that science is a human activity—and no human activity can banish the personal, just as it cannot be done except by flawed and fallible human beings ...

* * * * *

“The word *science* once meant knowledge acquired by study. Not until the nineteenth century did its meaning tend to be restricted to the systematic study of the material and natural universe. Early scientists were usually called ‘natural philosophers’ but in 1840 William Whewell wrote in his *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* ‘We need very much a name to describe a cultivator of science in general. I should incline to call him a Scientist.’ Incredible as it may now seem, that is the very first use of the word *scientist* cited in the Oxford English

Dictionary. Whewell had actually used it some years earlier, when reviewing Mary Somerville's *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*. He describes what must have been a lively discussion at the third annual meeting of the newly founded British Association for the Advancement of Science, held at Cambridge in 1833:

Philosophers was felt to be too wide and too lofty a term, and was very properly forbidden them by Mr. Coleridge, both in his capacity of philologist and metaphysician; *savants* was rather assuming, besides being French instead of English; some ingenious gentleman proposed that, by analogy with *artist*, they might form *scientist*, and added that there could be no scruple in making free with this termination when we have such word as *sciolist*, *economist*, and *atheist* — but this was not generally palatable;

Quarterly Review, Vol. 51, 1834, p.59.

(Interestingly Neal Ascherson writes. ‘ ‘Science’ is the word Russian archaeologists use to describe the whole profession of knowledge to which they belong. The word in Russian has none of the limitation to physical sciences or technology which it has acquired in English; a philologist or an art historian is as much a scientist as a molecular biologist, in the sense of the French word *savant*.’)

Coleridge had at one time used the words *philosopher* and *bard* for ‘scientist’ and ‘poet’, but long before, in his poem ‘Religious Musings’ of 1794. Whewell’s learned fun — he may well have been the ‘ingenious gentleman’ who ironically raised scientists to the dignity of artists but then forced them to associate with mere pretenders to knowledge, economists and atheists — does not disguise from us the felt need for a word that would express a growing sense of professional independence amongst ‘men of science’ and, if we look back in Whewell’s review and reflect upon the title of Mrs Somerville’s book, help compensate for what Whewell called the ‘disintegration’ of physical science as it fell into apparently endless, insulated sub-divisions. Attacked much later as an American barbarism by T. H. Huxley, who thought it ‘about as pleasing a word as “Electrocution”’, and considered to be a colloquialism even into this century, *scientist* survived.”

(from *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* by J. A. V. Chapple.)

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I had not heard of either Mary Somerville or William Whewell. But Chapple says of Mary Somerville, “She was, in fact, not so much a populariser as an expositor, capable of the very highest quality work, though a sad little manuscript draft of her *Personal Recollections* (1873) avows, ‘I was conscious that I had never made a discovery myself, that I had no originality. I have perseverance and intelligence but no genius, that spark from heaven is not granted to the sex’ ... ” This is somewhat misleading. The DNB says that a sentence in the book *The Connections of the Physical Sciences* “pointing out that the perturbation of Uranus might disclose the existence of an unseen planet, suggested, as Professor Adams afterwards declared, the calculations from which he deduced the orbit of Neptune.” The DNB says of her: “Her grasp of scientific truth in all branches of knowledge, combined with an exceptional power of exposition, made her the most remarkable woman of her generation. Nor did her abstruse studies exclude the cultivation of lighter gifts, and she excelled in music, in painting, and in the use of the needle. Her endowments were enhanced by rare charm and geniality of manner, while the fair hair, delicate complexion, and small proportions which had obtained for her in her girlhood the sobriquet of ‘the rose of Jedburgh,’ formed a piquant contrast to her masculine breadth of intellect.” No wonder she could not exult in her extraordinary achievements; not when they were seen as somehow unfeminine.

William Whewell (1794 – 1866) was Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and a prolific author on scientific subjects. But the DNB says of him “Whewell was rather a critic than an original investigator in science” nevertheless he will “always rank among the great investigators of the theory of tides”. He was one of those men of many parts; clergyman, poet, translator, mathematician, astronomer, mineralogist ... which was impressive given that he was

the son of a carpenter who had planned to apprentice his son to himself. Whewell apparently spent so much time on his own experiments and writings that he neglected his students. John Willis Clark in a book called *Old Friends at Cambridge and Elsewhere* said of him, “He could not give the requisite time to his pupils, and, in fact, hardly knew some of them by sight One day he gave his servant a list of names of certain of his pupils whom he wished to see at a wine-party after Hall, a form of entertainment then much in fashion. Among the names was that of an undergraduate who had died some weeks before. ‘Mr. Smith, sir; why, he died last term, sir!’ objected the man. ‘You ought to tell me when my pupils die’, replied the tutor sternly; and Whewell could be stern when he was vexed.”

The saddest part of this is that Mary Somerville’s books, such as *Mechanism of the Heavens* (1831), were “used in the advanced mathematical classes at Cambridge” and elsewhere ... but she herself, as a woman, was barred from teaching at the university. And eventually having a women’s college named after her was probably inadequate compensation.

* * * * *

C. P. Snow wrote of his book *Corridors of Power*, “By some fluke, the title of this novel seems to have passed into circulation during the time the book itself was being written. I have watched the phenomenon with mild consternation. The phrase was first used, so far as I know, in *Homecomings* (1956). Mr Rayner Heppenstall noticed it, and adopted it as a title of an article about my work. If he had not done this, I doubt if I should have remembered the phrase myself; but when I saw it in Mr Heppenstall’s hands, so to speak, it seemed the appropriate name for this present novel, which was already in my mind. So I announced the title, and since have been stuck with it, while the phrase has kept swimming in print before my eyes about twice a week and four times on Sundays, and has, in fact, turned into a cliché. But I cannot help using it myself, without too much inconvenience. I console myself with the reflection that, if a man hasn’t the right to his own cliché, who has?”

* * * * *

- October 16: Ron Pretty
- October 17: Les Murray
- October 18: Heinrich von Kleist
- October 19: John le Carré
- October 20: Thomas Hughes
Arthur Rimbaud
- October 21: Eleanor Spence
- October 22: Doris Lessing
- October 23: Robert Bridges
- October 24: John Marsden
- October 25: Valerie Krantz
- October 26: Christobel Mattingley
John Romeril
- October 27: Dylan Thomas
- October 28: Simon Brett
- October 29: Desmond Bagley
- October 30: Geoff Dean
Paul Valéry
- October 31: Dick Francis
- November 1: Diana Chase
Andrew Lansdown
- November 2: Jenny Pausacker
- November 3: J. E. Macdonnell
- November 4: Eden Phillpotts
- November 5: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox
- November 6: Roger Vaughan Carr

Barry Dickins
 November 7: Helen Garner
 November 8: Bram Stoker
 November 9: Hugh Leonard
 November 10: Natalie Jane Prior
 November 11: Fyodor Dostoyevsky
 November 12: Bill Hornadge
 November 13: R. L. Stevenson
 November 14: R. G. B. Morrison
 November 15: James Kemsley
 November 16: Joan Phipson
 Colin Thiele
 November 17: Alison Lester
 November 18: Margaret Atwood
 November 19: Nigel Krauth
 Wendy Orr
 November 20: Nadine Gordimer
 November 21: Beryl Bainbridge
 November 22: Jon Cleary
 November 23: Nigel Tranter
 November 24: Frances Hodgson Burnett
 November 25: Brenda Niall
 November 26: Sally Farrell Odgers
 Charles Schulz
 November 27: Charles Austin Beard
 November 28: William Blake
 November 29: C. S. Lewis
 Louisa May Alcott
 November 30: Jackie French
 L. M. Montgomery
 December 1: Max Stout
 December 2: Mary Elwyn-Patchett
 December 3: Joseph Conrad
 December 4: Thomas Carlyle
 December 5: Christina Rossetti
 December 6: Cliff Green
 December 7: Joanna Kraus
 December 8: Padraic Colum
 December 9: Joel Chandler Harris
 December 10: Emily Dickinson
 December 11: Naguib Mahfouz
 December 12: Louis Nowra
 December 13: Heinrich Heine
 December 14: Rosemary Sutcliffe
 December 15: Edna O'Brien
 December 16: Jane Austen

* * * * *

Thom Jones wrote, "I don't think normal, happy people make good fiction writers." I have read and heard this idea in many different guises but all implying that some tormented alcoholic who has had a miserable abused childhood will make a better fiction writer than an 'ordinary' person. I used to be tempted to agree. It somehow seems to include a greater sense

of struggle, of romance, of climbing impossible hills and triumphing over impossible odds. But a cool calm look around at the facts suggests it just isn't true.

Jane Austen had various ups and down in her life. She suffered the restrictions all women then suffered. But all the evidence points to a normal woman who enjoyed life and had a safe and happy childhood. It is possible to look at many writers and find a particular problem but they rarely defined their life by it. The bankruptcy that threatened Sir Walter Scott, the depression that dogged Les Murray, the poverty that rode alongside numberless writers, the racism, the political oppression, the problems of gender and class. Those for whom their misery or obsession or addiction eventually overwhelmed them got ever less fiction writing done. Charles Bukowski comes to mind. I heard him reading some of his poems on the radio not long ago. I couldn't understand what he was on about, his voice was so slurred, and I couldn't understand why people were cheering him. Was it done out of kindness, a kind of sympathy for a man whom alcoholism had turned from poet to shambling wreck, or out of affection for some of his poems and novels? I don't know. But give me a normal happy person reading his or her work any time.

Take Liz Winfield for instance. Here is someone disabled by a painful and rare illness. But her poems are strong, clear, rarely defined by the troubles life has thrown at her. Liz is a normal happy person who happens to have a medical problem. Thom Jones can go out and listen to his miserable disturbed writers. I'll have normal happy people writing and performing fiction, poetry, essays, short stories, any day of the week.

And, in passing, I admire Liz enormously, not only for her work, her courage, but also for all the help she has given other writers. Whereas Howard Sounes in his biography of Bukowski *Locked in the Arms of a Crazy Life* wrote of him, 'Bukowski was no better dealing with submissions than he had been back in the 1950s, when he co-edited *Harlequin* with Barbara Frye. Most of the stuff sent in was very bad and Bukowski began defacing manuscripts, scrawling insults like 'These won't do, baby' or 'Shove it, man.' He poured beer over poems he didn't like, or dipped them in egg, before mailing the rejected work back to the authors.'

Although young poets sometimes regarded themselves as disciples of Bukowski, as in Jewel Kilcher writing in 'Bukowsky's Widow', 'My prince the stars have/fallen from your crown/And I can not fathom/their fading—/some things should be forever!' I doubt whether Charles Bukowski ever put himself out to encourage and nurture those new writers and young poets.

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December 17: Alison Uttley

December 18: Dmytro Nytczenko

'Saki' (H. H. Munro)

* * * * *

"But good gracious, you've got to educate him first. You can't expect a boy to be vicious till he's been to a good school." ('Saki')

* * * * *

Samuel G. Freedman wrote of an American slum school in *Small Victories*: "When the Congressional Budget Office investigated the decline in standardized test scores, for instance, it concluded, in a 102-page analysis, that the descent derived more from social, cultural, and demographic factors than from educational policies.

Such common sense was welcome and all too rare. Since its founding, America had been torn between its belief in the perfectability of all citizens and its longing for a British-style elite: It wanted to be both Eton and Eden. Already saddled with those impossible and irreconcilable expectations, the public school system from the 1960s on was handed every problem being abdicated by family, church, and community. The public school was seen as a bathosphere, tethered to the ship of society but bobbing peacefully undersea, somehow

unaffected by whatever mutinies or hurricanes wracked the vessel. As Diane Ravitch wrote in *The Schools We Deserve*:

Horace Mann, Henry Barnard, and other founders of the common school movement could not have imagined the social situation of the schools in the 1980s; could not have imagined the condition of the family, the divorce rate, the rise of child abuse, the widespread neglect of young children by their parents; could not have imagined the spread of addictive drugs to young children barely in their teens; could not have imagined the soporific and powerful effect of television. ... How could they have foreseen the social disintegration that would force upon the school the roles of parent, minister, policeman, social worker, psychiatrist and babysitter?"

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"When I was a child it was far easier to resist education than it is nowadays. There were no 'A' levels opening the door to perpetual boredom in an institutionalised world. I left school at sixteen with an unfilled mind, sublimely unconscious of what others had written in the English language and with a profound ignorance of the classics, of mathematics, geography, history and foreign tongues. I had a hatred of solving problems to which others already knew the answer. In what proved to be my last term at school I was given some substance to analyse by the Chemistry master and was flogged for refusing even to light the Bunsen burner. 'You know what it is,' I told him, 'I don't, and what's more I don't bloody well care.' "

(From *A Musing Morley* by Robert Morley.)

But there is the other side of that question of hated teachers (and hated schools). For instance it isn't uncommon to open books and find something like this: To my former teacher HATTIE GORDON SMITH in grateful remembrance of her sympathy and encouragement. (L.M. Montgomery). Or "My favourite teacher, Mr Kennedy, a delightful Scot who had entered the teaching profession directly from the navy, taught English. He opened to me the riches of literature, and I borrowed book after book from him. To this day I owe him so much—for teaching me, with his softly-spoken Scottish accent, the power of literature and the need for precision in language." (George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, in *Know the Truth*.) As William Arthur Ward said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." I always feel faintly envious. I don't think back on anyone for their 'sympathy and encouragement'. I was put off anything to do with English, literature, and books, by an English teacher who used to say to me 'you're a nasty sly little girl'. It took years for that memory to fade. If it really has.

So it almost came as a relief, when I came upon Catherine Hurley's compilation of school reports *Can Do Even Better*, to know that teachers can get it very wrong; their assessments of children's ability can be wildly misleading.

Michael Aspel: 'Aspel possesses a certain maturity. Whether it is a superficial maturity, or indeed, a mature superficiality, remains to be seen.'

Sheridan Morley: 'Morley is trying in every sense of the word.'

Daphne du Maurier: 'Daphne has written the best story but with the worst handwriting and the worst spelling.'

Gavin Maxwell: 'He appears utterly incapable of any form of concentration.'

Alexander Pushkin: 'Empty-headed and thoughtless. Excellent at French and Drawing, lazy and backward at Arithmetic.'

Richard Dawkins: 'Dawkins has only three speeds: slow, very slow, and stop.'

Sir Georg Solti: 'We're passing you as a favour both to you and ourselves. We don't want you to come back.'

So take heart ...

* * * * *

"I seem to have been talking to kids most of my adult life, and as I've got older I think I've talked more and more, but now and then parents are disappointed that I haven't taught

them anything, as if I were a teacher. Sometimes people think I don't talk intelligently enough to children.

"Now I don't think I ever talk down to kids but at the same time I'm not interested in trying to lift them up to some sort of adult level, whatever that is. I'm not trying to pump information into children, I'm not going to forcefeed them. I hate the idea of children growing up too rapidly and being able to do things that adults can, as if it's a sort of race to get out of childhood.

"I suppose you could do it the way you bring plants on with fertilizer; produce a nice big plant quickly, but it's never strong. Now the plant that grows naturally, in his own time, it's got to struggle with its own environment, it grows tough and hardy and it survives. I think it's the same with kids."

(Alan Marshall in 'For the Psychologists'.)

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John Rowe Townsend in *Written for Children* mentions early American writer Jack Abbott who wrote around 180 books for children including his 'Rollo' and 'Lucy' series. He says of him, "The strangest of these, and to my mind one of the oddest books ever written for children, was *Jonas a Judge, or Law Among the Boys* (1840), in which a boy named Jonas, who has studied for some months in a lawyer's office, sorts out for a group of smaller boys, on strictly legalistic lines, their squabbles involving such matters as consideration, binding promise, testimony, warranty of title, tenure and possession. It is a curious idea, but Abbott makes a remarkably good job of putting difficult legal concepts into very simple words. His delight in getting things organized, worked out, tabulated, agreed, is as notable in his books as is his calm common sense."

It actually sounds a very sensible idea to introduce children to legal concepts long before they find themselves in a magistrate's court for being little horrors. But I think the strangest description of a children's book I have ever come across was Henry Drummond's account, in *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, "There used to be a children's book which bore the fascinating title of "The Chance World." It described a world in which everything happened by chance. The sun might rise or it might not; or it might appear at any hour, or the moon might come up instead. When children were born they might have one head or a dozen heads, and those heads might not be on their shoulders—there might be no shoulders—but arranged about the limbs. If one jumped up in the air it was impossible to predict whether he would ever come down again. That he came down yesterday was no guarantee that he would do it next time. For every day antecedent and consequent varied, and gravitation and everything else changed from hour to hour. To-day a child's body might be so light that it was impossible for it to descend from its chair to the floor; but tomorrow, in attempting the experiment again, the impetus might drive it through a three-storey house and dash it to pieces somewhere near the centre of the earth. In this chance world cause and effect were abolished. Law was annihilated. And the result to the inhabitants of such a world could only be that reason would be impossible. It would be a lunatic world with a population of lunatics." That is the tricky bit: we want some chance, but we want it neatly contained. We want cause to have identifiable and consistent effect. We want the opportunities for growth and excitement chance seems to offer. But we don't really want the sort of chaos in which the world can offer us no certainties.

* * * * *

"Today's children are the subjects of a vast and optimistic experiment. It is well financed and enthusiastically supported by major corporations, the public at large, and government officials around the world. If it is successful, our youngsters' minds and lives will be enriched, society will benefit, and education will be permanently changed for the better. But there is no proof—or even convincing evidence—that it will work.

"The experiment, of course, involves getting kids "on computers" at school and at home in hopes that technology will improve the quality of learning and prepare our young for the future. But will it? Are the new technologies a magic bullet aimed straight at success and

power? Or are we simply grasping at a technocentric “quick fix” for a multitude of problems we have failed to address?”

Jane M. Healy in *Failure to Connect*.

A man called Beauchamp Colclough in a book called *Tomorrow I'll Be Different* gave a little test to find out if you have a drink problem. The crux of it was that if you got invited to the wedding of two friends who said it was going to be a dry wedding your response to this news would tell you a lot about yourself. If your first response was that you didn't want to go to a dry wedding—then chances were that you had a problem and should seek help.

I think it is worth adapting. If all your technology has gone down with the ship and you have struggled ashore on the desert island in nothing but your underwear ... will you be able to survive and make something of your life there until another ship comes by? If the prospect terrifies you what is it about the scenario which is most frightening? Starvation? Lack of company? Loneliness? Solitude? Or the lack of connection to all your technology?

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Every little local history, of a town, a hamlet, a district, a suburb, always seems to have an old-timer musing on schooldays. I was reminded of this as I browsed through *A History of Campbell Town* and came upon Jack Branagan's offering:

“Life certainly has changed. About sixty years ago the lives of children in this area were basically the same, carry water, gather cows, work in the garden, milk the cows up early in the morning, do the same work, go to school. You could say that life was all work. Yet the children of those years now refer to them as the “Good Old Days”. When you sit back and take a look at their situation it is often hard to reason why. Wages were nothing near what they are today, life was harder, food was basically the same all year round except for very special dates. How could anyone really consider that to be the good old days.

“Seventy years ago when I went to school, there were two rooms, the big room and the little room. Class one and two were in the little room. Miss Ellie Bergen taught in the little room. Her father owned all three hotels in Campbell Town. Mr. Brown taught class 3, 4, 5, & 6 in the big room. A lot of children had to walk all the way from Truelands and Rosedale, to go to school. Of a morning there was an assembly, we had our fingernails and shoes checked, also we had to have a handkerchief. There was a drum and fife band for us to walk into school by.

When we were in school, class one had a slate and a slate pencil. All we did was reading, ‘riting’ and ‘rithmetic’. We didn't have the things that they have now at school. We had to sit on hard chairs, work hard and at lunchtime we could only play rounders and hopscotch.

In class two we had a copy book. These helped us with our handwriting, we had to copy the letters on each page. When I was in class two, some of the big boys tied the brooms together in the broom patch, they were the cheeky to Mr. Brown, who chased them through the broom patch and tripped over. The boys went home that day and didn't come back for a week.

In class three there was a hockey team. One day when we were practising, I was hit with a hockey stick and had the skin taken off my nose. Only the well-off children could afford sticks, the others would get the roots of a willow and carve out one, Mr. Brown was very hard to work for.

In classes four, five and six, the girls would have sewing lessons for half a day, once a week. The boys had to do school work. We never had any sport lessons except at lunch times. Things certainly were different but we managed to enjoy ourselves.”

The small details vary. The writers and reminiscencers may be more or less articulate. But it is a view of life in which children were expected to work hard both in and out of school and to make their own fun. Good or bad depends on what you want to prove or what your agenda is ...

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William K. Parke wrote in *A Fermanagh Childhood*, “My aunt took over the little farm and my father leased it from her so I could now stop at Cashel without whispering. I spent many happy days here in peace and tranquility. I wandered over the hills which looked out to

Blackslee mountain to the west and Lower Lough Erne, studded with its little islands, to the north. I still remember, and savour, the tasty meals cooked on the hearth fire and sitting around the fire at night chatting in the lamplight. I never heard her utter an angry word; she was a very Christian, generous, tolerant person who spoke with wisdom on many subjects and encouraged me to express my views. She read the Bible to me and explained and interpreted many important passages. Looking back, I see how significant good conversation is to children and she was a great influence on a growing boy.”

* * * * *

Speaking of ‘good’ schools, I came upon this little footnote in Andrew Motion’s book *Wainwright The Poisoner*: ‘There were mass uprisings against unpopular teaching methods at Eton in 1810 and 1832, Winchester in 1818, and Rugby in 1822. The eighteenth century had seen an even greater number of these mutinies.’

* * * * *

December 19: Margaret Barbalet
Eleanor Porter
December 20: Zoe Fairbairns
December 21: Frank Moorhouse
Robert Brown
Leopold von Ranke

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“Botanists can sound pleasantly archaic or irritatingly pompous. They may know the common name of a flower, a blackfoot daisy, but they say Asteraceae instead. They love the jangle of Latin and vie for the prize of most fluent. Is that a *Melampodium leucanthum*? A *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*? A *Monoptilon belliodes*? A *Bellis perennis*?

No, not an *Eregeron divergens*?

The adults talk. The children are excluded.

“It’s a *daisy*,” the layperson mutters under her breath.

In traditional taxonomy, the daisy belongs in the kingdom Plantae, in the division Angiopermophyta, in the class Dicotyledoneae, in the order Asterales and in the family Asteraceae, in which there are over one thousand genera. These genera contain some nineteen thousand species. Each grouping (kingdom, division, class) is a taxon, the plural of which is taxa.

Taxonomists are people who group things together. Taxonomists belong in the kingdom Animalia, in the phylum Chordata, in the class Vertebrata, in the order Primata, in the family Homonoidea, in the genus *Homo*, in which there remains only one living species, *sapiens*.

The taxonomist scolds the layperson: There are too many daisies in the world. We need to be more specific.”

From *Anatomy of a Rose* by Sharman Apt Russell.

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A very different kind of look at the anatomy of roses and other flowers came my way recently with a delightful book called *Mrs Delany: her life and her flowers* by Ruth Hayden. I had never heard of her. Born in England in 1700 she was married off at seventeen to a man of nearly sixty and had several unpleasant years with him. He died but she was left in that limbo in which women received no training and skills but neither, if they were from ‘good families’, could they take unskilled or menial work. She was fortunate in that she had family and friends. And she gradually developed a remarkable talent in needlework, drawing, shellwork, and creating flower pictures from tiny built-up scraps of coloured paper, which she called ‘paper mosaicks’. In middle age she married an Irish clergyman, Patrick Delany, Dean of Down, who was a keen gardener and encouraged her in her hobbies. Life brought her friendships with people such as Jonathon Swift and Joshua Reynolds, with people at court including the king and queen, and, as her knowledge and skill in botany grew, with some of the greatest botanists of her era: Joseph Banks, Daniel Solander, and John Fothergill. In her lively correspondence

she wrote to her sister, “Your mind is ever turned to help, relieve, and bless your neighbours and acquaintance; whilst mine I fear (however I may sometimes flatter my self that I have a contrary disposition), is *too much filled* with amusements of no real estimation; and when people commend any of my performances I feel a consciousness that my time might have been better employed.” But later she wrote to her great-niece, “Now I know you smile, and say what can take up so much of A.D.’s [Aunt Delany’s] time? No children to teach or play with; no house matters to torment her; no books to publish; no politicks to work her brains? All this is true but idleness never grew in my soil, tho’ I can’t boast of any very useful employments, only such as keep me from being a burthen to my friends, and banish the spleen; and therefore are as important for the present use as matters of higher nature.” Perhaps. But she was a lively and observant watcher of her era. Her exquisite works, both designed and worked by her, sometimes with her own use of dyes and interesting combinations of natural objects, and showing a remarkable eye for colour and composition, eventually resulted in a book of her productions which she called *Hortus siccus* and gave to Queen Charlotte.

It is not hard to see why her work was overlooked. It wasn’t the big sprawling canvases of a Hogarth or a Reynolds. It wasn’t Swift’s social satire. She did not design famous buildings or famous gardens. Yet an amazing amount of her work has survived—for the simple reason that anyone who was fortunate enough to own any of it could not help but treasure it.

* * * * *

Alastair Scott in his travels round Scotland met an old man called Lawrence Edwards in Strontian, the little mining town which indirectly gave its name to strontium. Fascinated with both geometry and Chaos theory the eighty-two-year-old had spent more than 40 years measuring things in nature; hen and duck eggs, pine cones, buds of many kinds ... ‘When I set out on this research, I had no idea what to expect. I wasn’t looking to prove anything. I was simply measuring, recording and writing. But I believe I’ve found something different from Chaos Researchers: that in all of nature there’s a governing order which fits mathematical exactness. This order is a miracle, quite beyond wonder. There’s no possible way that life’s forms are a product of chance or coincidence. I’m afraid Neo-Darwinism is not credible. There’s too much wonder left unaccounted for ...’ What he found when he looked at dormant buds on oak trees was that they were not dormant. He ‘found that *every fourteen days* they became less pointed, as if trying to open, and bulging with the effort. Possibly they were testing the conditions and then deciding that the time wasn’t right and reverting to their more pointed form. I drew graphs and found a startling regularity.’ He found other species had cycles, some a little less than 14 days, but all showing a regularity. ‘I believe, as (Rudolf) Steiner believed, that each little part of us mirrors the whole. In us are the wonders of the universe.’ Even though he had measured huge quantities of buds he couldn’t get scientists interested. ‘But you’re up against it when you start trying to introduce *cosmic* elements into the *earthly* sciences.’ He put it into his book *The Vortex of Life*. ‘I’ve explained my evidence and my conviction that the rhythms of the heavens, the planets, and the plant garment on Earth, all mirror one another. When I examined my findings in more detail, I found that it was all more complex than I’d first thought. The plants mirror the planets, yes, ... *but not quite*. The plants tend to hurry ahead a little bit. Their cycle is a little bit out of synch with that of the planets, a little bit faster. Now, we all know that the planets are immersed in mathematical formulae but what few people realize is that their cycles never exactly fit the formulae. There’s always something left over, a precise imprecision, you could say. Thus the universe’s movements are *not* clockwork, and it’s this irregularity, this little gap in mechanical efficiency, which enables change to take place, the universe to progress.’

But when Scott suggested this would mean that ‘effect is coming before the cause’ Edwards agreed with an excited shout. ‘*Effect overtakes its Cause*. This is one mystery. But the biggest was yet to come.’ He said, ‘I didn’t want this result. I wasn’t looking for it. It’s just what I found. Every *seven years* the cycles of the planets and their plants come back together again — they once more coincide.’ He made it clear that he was the chronicler of what happens

but that he had no idea of the why. I found the whole concept of plants pulsing in near-synchronicity with the planets quite believable. Why should it only be the Moon and Sun which contain the ability to influence life? And I assume the problem for Neo-Darwinism is the question: if mathematical formulae are intrinsic to every aspect of the universe then can Chance be the prime mover?

Reading about Lawrence Edwards' work reminded me of the work of D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson and his famous book *On Growth and Form*. Everything is grist to his mill; teeth, shells, bones, wings, scales, soap film, milk droplets, creatures from fairy flies to whales, from reindeer beetles to children; it is a book in which nothing is too dull, too small, too everyday, not to be worth wondering about, observing, measuring, studying. The pattern on different species of zebras. Why everything from children to maize has identifiable growth spurts. The way physics impacts on the growth of shells. He writes, "For the harmony of the world is made manifest in Form and Number, and the heart and soul and all its poetry of Natural Philosophy are embodied in the concept of mathematical beauty." And not unlike Lawrence Edwards he writes, "More curious and still more obscure is the moon's influence on growth, as on the growth and ripening of the eggs of oysters, sea-urchins and crabs. Belief in such lunar influence is as old as Egypt; it is confirmed and justified in certain cases, nowadays, but the way in which the influence is exerted is quite unknown."

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One day I was in the library vaguely thinking of forests, trees, the fate of ... that sense of the commonweal, the idea that something which has been growing for more than two hundred years can be cut down, chipped up and sold on for a few dollars a tonne, its only apparent value to us its *weight*. Its price doesn't reflect all those years of development, all the things it has done in those years, from holding soil to attracting rain to being home to birds to exchanging gases. But because it is *publicly* owned those centuries are not factored in to its final price. All the things we hold in commonweal and for future generations, air, water, forests, species, heritage, traditions, are being eroded and destroyed unless someone can put a value on their continued preservation. And I noticed that there seemed to be a lot of books which appeared to be questioning the survival of capitalism as we currently know it and despite the fact we seem to think it is one of the givens of life like breathing and eating ...

I wasn't sure that it was a detour I really wanted to take. But I took four books off the shelf and brought them home. They proved to be quite an interesting collective insight.

1. *False Dawn* by John Gray on 'The deepening instability of global capital'; the thing we have been encouraged to think of as monolithic, capitalism is capitalism, is in fact changing under the impact of different societies and different cultures. This can be a re-invigoration as well as a source of increasing problems.

2. *One Market Under God* by Thomas Frank, subtitled 'Extreme capitalism, Market Populism and the End of Economic Democracy'; by equating capitalism with democracy there is an increasing inability particularly in the USA to see that the deification of the market is increasing the gap between rich and poor by transferring rather than creating wealth, it is undermining necessary democratic institutions, and it is hiding the increasing sense of rootlessness, depression, and failure in many communities under a layer of almost impenetrable spin.

3. *The Mystery of Capital* by Hernando de Soto or 'Why Capitalism triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else'. His key point is not that the West works harder or invests more cleverly but that most Third World countries are let down by the failure to achieve the type of underlying structures which would enable people to turn their hard work and entrepreneurial skills into capital; eg. he looks at poor people who build shanties on unused land belonging to someone else, public or private. The house is a shelter and a home but it cannot be used as an asset. In a legal sense it doesn't exist. It may have increasing value as more work is done on it but it cannot be used as collateral, it is not a postal address, it cannot be hooked up to services; it can only be sold to someone else living outside the legal network we take for granted in

which titles, registries, property law, patents, and so on, are an integral part of protecting our assets. And living in this extralegal world makes people very vulnerable to bribery and corruption. Not to mention forcible removal and the destruction of that one vital possession and what surely should be a fundamental right: their home.

4. *A Land on Fire* by James David Fahn, ‘The Environmental Consequences of the Southeast Asian Boom’, in which he takes Thailand as his test subject in looking at the squandering of natural resources in times of rapid development and the societal and cultural factors that both help and hinder.

What does all this have to do with trees—apart from being written on paper? Fahn deals with an important question. An open democratic society may be better for its *people* but is it better for its *trees*?

“The answer isn’t obvious. We tend to assume that democracy is good for the environment because it allows environmentalism to flourish. People in Thailand, for instance, are far freer than the Burmese to express their green concerns, and to defend common resources that would otherwise suffer from exploitation or neglect by centralized governments. On the other hand, authoritarian countries such as Singapore are better able to order citizens to obey (sometimes onerous) environmental regulations. And the poorest countries, which generally have weaker democratic institutions, tend to have the most resources left pristine and intact. Half of Burma is still covered in forest, after all, while forest coverage in Thailand has been decimated. This is the result of many factors besides the two countries’ differing political situations. But democratization does seem to bring deforestation in its wake; after all, logging picked up dramatically in Indonesia and Cambodia following their transitions to democracy in the 1990s.”

He quotes a study by Neal Englehart who looked at the pace of deforestation in 8 Southeast Asian countries. “Between 1990 and 1995, the Philippines and Thailand, Southeast Asia’s two most democratic countries, suffered the highest annual loss of forest coverage, and Malaysia and Cambodia were next. Meanwhile, the four most authoritarian countries in the study—Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Indonesia—had the four lowest rates of deforestation.

“This result is unexpected, but it doesn’t mean the dictators and single-party systems ruling these countries have nobly set out to protect their forests. Englehart concludes that the relatively rapid demise of Thailand’s forests stems from greater *economic* freedom, particularly within its timber market. In Indonesia, by comparison, the timber sector was largely a closed market; the concessions were handed out to a few well-connected businessmen, but they have not been efficient in overexploiting the country’s under-valued forests. Englehart concludes that although political freedom does allow green groups and communities to mobilize in defense of common resources, the effect is “swamped” when it comes to maintaining forests because economic freedom leads to greater environmental degradation. In Thailand, as opposed to Indonesia, he argues, “privately mobilized capital distributed among a large number of competitors has created highly efficient firms which very efficiently destroy forests.”

“It’s an intriguing argument, but it needs a caveat: The rate of deforestation also depends on the property rights regime governing the concession. In theory, it’s possible for Thailand or Indonesia to design concessions so that loggers have incentives to carry out reforestation or use techniques such as reduced-impact logging, which is more sustainable than conventional clear-cutting and, according to some analysts, cheaper to operate. In practice, however, such incentives either aren’t included—because concessions are often given out as rewards by politicians to their supporters—or don’t work. Even loggers given long-term leases for forestland may hurriedly clear-cut it for fear they will be taken away by a future administration, or simply because the loggers are too shortsighted to adopt strategies that yield more long-term benefits.

“The conclusion that the environment benefits from the presence of authoritarian governments also has to be tempered by looking at different kinds of environmental issues. By limiting economic freedom and access to valuable resource concessions, autocrats may

indirectly help conserve those resources; but, because they are not held accountable, authoritarian or highly centralized governments are also notoriously bad at controlling pollution and responding to citizens' concerns about quality of life. Consider, for instance, the abysmal environmental record of Communist governments in Eastern Europe. Their pell-mell rush for industrial development, combined with their lack of democratic accountability, turned large swathes of the region into polluted wastelands. The toxic effect of these policies is now frighteningly evident in the sorry state of public health in the region, particularly in the mortality rates of people living in the former Soviet Union.

"It is sometimes convenient to split environmental issues into two kinds of problems. On the one hand there is the consumption and conservation of valuable resources such as forests and fisheries (sometimes called "green" issues); and on the other, there are issues of pollution and environmental quality ("brown" issues). The latter are generally the side effects of industrial or other activities that harm people in a way not mediated by the market. In the long run, democracies can generally take steps to combat these "negative externalities," so long as aggrieved victims have recourse to sit down and negotiate with the people or companies doing them harm. But liberalism also tends to unleash the buzz-saw-like power of the market on resources that were previously untapped or being used sustainably. Markets have the potential to help promote conservation—through mechanisms such as eco-tourism, bioprospecting, and carbon sequestration—when it proves to be more profitable than logging. But with a few exceptions, this potential has yet to be realized, and so it seems that emerging democracies have a tough time grappling with conservation, which usually requires governments (or some type of public sector organization) to step in and say: "The market does not rule here."

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The other day I was pondering on the thought that although we have immortal works about animals and birds no one seems to have attempted to do this for a plant or plants en masse. There are of course zillions of books *about* plants; growing them, classifying them, genetically modifying them, pruning them, crossing them ... but they are rarely given any sense of individuality. So I enjoyed coming across a book called *Mythic Woods* by Jonathon Roberts. It might be better termed *Mythic Remnants* but don't let that put you off. Yet every saved forest, every place of magnificent trees is under threat, from the strange mangrove environment of the Sunderbands of India and Bangladesh to the baobabs of Madagascar to the little bit of woodland in the Highlands of Scotland to the dwindling cloud forests of the Andes; dwindling in fact is the word which needs to be placed in front of everything. "The forest Indians of South America believe in a goblin who punishes those who abuse Nature. They call it *curupira*, the father of game. It is small, hairy and runt-like, with feet turned backwards. It lives in headwater forests and protects animals like white-lipped peccaries (a pig-like creature) and deer; on whose heads it sometimes rides around. If an Indian kills too many peccaries at one go, or wastefully cuts down a tree, *curupira* whistles him into the dark woods, to his death. We should beware lest our own and future generations of man are whistled away to oblivion."

The book also includes the Styx Valley in Tasmania: "At the beginning of the nineteenth century, when British settlers from New South Wales sailed across the Bass Strait to colonise Tasmania, *regnans* was fairly common throughout the island. Now, only about 13 per cent of the original old-growth trees remain. Their scarcity makes it difficult to understand why, even as I write, some of these marvelous old giants are still being cut down for woodchips. Five hundred years of growth destroyed by a chainsaw in fifteen minutes. Down to the ocean on a lorry, chipped into a huge heap on the dockside, away in a ship's hold to Japan, and back again as newsprint for the tabloids."

At the same time I was reading Peter Dauvergne's *Loggers and Degradation in the Asia-Pacific*; one book about what remains, if on death row, the other about the already lost. And it truly is loss on an awesome scale. "In Thailand between mid-1996 and early 1998 loggers cut as much as 30 percent of the Salween Wildlife Reserve and the Salween National Park. By the mid-1990s half of Cambodia's Phnom Kulen National Park had already been logged." And,

“Even the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry during the Suharto administration estimated that less than 15 percent of loggers were obeying forest management rules. A study of logging in Sarawak found that bulldozers would typically traverse 30-40 percent of a concession. When loggers finished, 40-70 percent of the trees left behind were damaged, leaving little chance that natural regeneration could ever restore the original ecosystem.” The book makes depressing reading; corruption, greed, bad management, poor science, patronage, nepotism, secrecy, waste, illegal activities, population pressures, carelessness, the list goes on. But one point struck me in all this: the aim of all timber-cutters is to go in and take the largest trees first, the giants, and once they are gone the remains are seen as less valuable; the roads in dry out the land, erode the soil, allow the movement of people in, and generally downgrade the value of a place as ‘forest’; it then becomes so much easier to earmark whole areas for cutting.

So what if the world was to place a ban on the cutting of any tree over fifty metres tall? To leave a few giants in isolated splendour might be better than nothing. But what is needed are the patriarchs and matriarchs to be left surrounded by their children and grandchildren and the careful removal of an occasional tree in the way that the old bullock-hauled timber was sniggled out with the least damage ... while we all turn to the committed recycling of every scrap of paper in our lives.

Perhaps our tragedy is that hard-nosed corporations see nothing wrong with a belief in the Biblical injunction to ‘have dominion over’ but would regard *curupira* as mere superstition.

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It is only quite recently that anyone has got around to writing about Scottish botanist Robert Brown. His background is a little reminiscent of that of Robert Burns; not well off, with a father who was a Presbyterian clergyman but not an accepted and respectable one. He went to Edinburgh to study medicine but found he preferred walking, exploring, collecting, classifying. He was sent to Ireland in the Fifeshire Fencibles to fight against the United Irishmen but seems to have spent most of his time botanising. His life was changed by his voyage to Australia, not with Cook as many sources suggest but with Mathew Flinders in the *Investigator* from 1801 to 1804. Where, among his exploits, was his ascent of Table Mountain, now Mount Wellington, behind Hobart. 18 February 1804. ‘Ascended Table Mountain/Montagne de Plateau of the French. It is composed of Hornslate, coarse graind, rudely columnar in some places. The rounds hills resting on its base consist of Stout Marl containing numerous shells especially Pectines & [blank] and coral. Colour grayish white.’ He intrigued scientists by noting what became known as Brownian Movement; the way tiny particles move in liquid which is now seen as ‘due to the impact of solvent molecules on suspended particles’; he was the librarian of the Linnaen Society and a cataloguer of Joseph Banks’s collections. He was a prolific writer and classifier, particularly of the huge numbers of plants, insects and birds brought back from Australia (and a live wombat) but he was too shy and reserved to force himself on the notice of both the scientific community and the public. D. J. Mabberley has written his biography *Jupiter Botanicus* and Vallance, Moore and Groves printed his diary as *Nature’s Investigator*, though with great difficulty as he had written in pen and pencil on poor quality scraps of paper and without punctuation, obviously seeing it for his own use only.

But I first became interested in him because of a small note to do with the career of my gr-gr-gr-grandfather, William Allman, who was Professor of Botany at Trinity College, Dublin, (and uncle of D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson’s stepmother who brought him up after the early death of his mother) and was said to have been inspired to use the ‘Natural System’ of classification by Robert Brown. Who was Robert Brown I wondered—and what was the Natural System?

I could not find anything to suggest that the two men actually met, though it is certainly possible, but the Natural System grew up in competition with the Linnaen System of classifying plants. Linnaeus used description of the sex organs of plants whereas the Natural System looked at many more characteristics and attempted to create families on the basis of this affinity and similarity. Mabberley says, “While England gardened, Buffon had been

pointing out that there was a possibility of recognizing families in nature, but it was the dynasty of Jussieu in Paris that pursued the Natural System. Bernard de Jussieu is remembered for his teaching and for his arrangement of Louis XV's Trianon garden, which illustrated a natural system in 1759, and was the basis of his nephew's *Genera plantarum* of 1789, although it had been expounded verbally as early as 1747." Of course, systems of classification were not the only thing that botanists argued over. Who found what first? Was something correctly classified in this family? Who would get to be remembered by having their name pinned to a plant? And the equally vexed question of how to actually make a living from a passion for plants ... Robert Brown was never wealthy but he has several Mount Browns named after him as well as scores of plants, and by the time he died he had been recognised as the pre-eminent botanist of his era.

* * * * *

Francis Thompson wrote a poem 'To Daisies' (no nonsense there about Asteraceae) which ends:

Vain does my touch your petals graze,
I touch you not; and, though ye blossom here,
Your roots are fast in alienated days.
Ye there are anchored, while Time's stream
Has swept me past them: your white ways
And infantile delights do seem
To look in on me like a face,
Dead and sweet, come back through dream,
With tears, because for old embrace
It has no arms. Those hands did toy,
Children, with you when I was child,
And in each other's eyes we smiled:
Not yours, not yours the grievous-fair
Apparelling
With which you wet mine eyes; you wear,
Ah me, the garment of the grace
I wove you when I was a boy;
O mine, and not the year's, your stolen Spring!
And since ye wear it,
Hide your sweet selves! I cannot bear it.
For, when ye break the cloven earth
With your young laughter and endearment,
No blossomy carillon 'tis of mirth
To me; I see my slaughtered joy
Bursting its cerement.

It is a curious thing that daisies inspire happiness, a sense of peace, a sense that life goes on, that beyond the obstacles the lovely starry sweep of daisies always seems to be waiting ...

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December 22: David Martin
December 23: Antonio Damarko
December 24: Matthew Arnold
December 25: Rebecca West
December 26: Shirley Shackleton
December 27: Elizabeth Smart

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Someone once rang me specially to tell me he had just read this mind-blowing book called *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*—and had I read it? I had never even heard of it. Nor did the title precisely grip me. But to him it had been a revelation. The depth of female angst and unhappiness in it. Or more particularly the way Elizabeth Smart had written about love and unhappiness.

I remember as a child we had an ancient copy of Eleanor Porter's *Cross Currents*. The last few pages were missing. But I read and re-read the first part of it. It is set in New York. In it the little girl is left waiting while her mother just ducks over the road to pick up something. She tells her little daughter not to move and she will be back in a couple of minutes. Instead she is struck while crossing the road. Her handbag is stolen by a street urchin. And she is taken away to hospital. No one knows about the little girl left waiting ...

After waiting obediently hour after hour in Grand Central Station she is taken home by a young lad who promises to try and help find her mother. Instead she is drawn into the world of poverty and 'piecework' in New York tenements and sweat shops. This world both fascinated and terrified me.

Of course Elizabeth Smart's book, I assumed, would be much better written and the strong evangelical resolution of Porter's book probably wouldn't appeal to many modern readers. But then Porter brought *Cross Currents* out in 1907 and her better known *Pollyanna* in 1913. The world was changing and Grand Central Station, no doubt, along with it ...

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One day I was going through some old papers trying to decide what to keep. Many of them were photocopies from magazines a friend had sent me; she was interested in writing How To and Self-Help books and had collected a lot of material. She had co-authored a popular book on resources and help for cancer patients and their families. She was thinking of doing something else in this area. (Eventually she turned to a more New Age style of self-help for women.)

But as I read through the material, and there never was a problem you couldn't turn to a book to find help—from more orgasms to better bathrooms to writing a best-seller to getting promoted—I realised the key ingredient was the conviction that you can SUCCEED. You can be a success. It came with neon lights round it. Success. It sells books. It grabs buyers. It keeps people hoping. I have no problem with this. If you are going to do something why not try to do it better? 'She'll be jake, mate,' has its uses but why have a slipshod new kitchen, with cupboard doors that don't close and tiles that threaten to lift, when you can have a beautiful one?

And yet ...

It is all about outcomes. But most of our lives are about processes. Books can tell you how to dress for love and success. They can tell you how to plan a great wedding. They can give tips on balancing motherhood and work. But they never really engage with the nuts and bolts of married life. You are going to spend more time talking, or not talking, over the dinner table than making love or seeking promotions or judging child care. But this doesn't really interest anyone, it seems. Lots and lots of books on how to give toasts at that wedding, how to speak effectively in public, but most talking is talk, not speech, and it doesn't fit neatly into that effective public presentation, it doesn't have an effective opening, a rich body, a neat and strong and memorable conclusion. It jerks, it fails, it loses momentum, it is interrupted by eating and complaints and requests. Sometimes it isn't even listened to. And yet it helps to define life and marriage.

I used to read lots of How To books and articles for writers. I still do. I don't know whether they did me any good. But I often enjoyed reading them. After twenty-two years and sending more than thirty book manuscripts around the traps I decided I was never going to be a writer and I would instead stop worrying about outcomes and just enjoy the process. Writing would be a pleasant hobby and I wouldn't worry about publishing any more. I would cease troubling about the need to succeed and I would revel in the joys of failure. Never again would

I have that dreadful image hovering, book tours, interviews, promotion, that need to be a public figure. I tried very hard to be a public figure in a modest way to help the East Timorese achieve self-determination. I did interviews, I spoke on radio and television, I rang into this, that, and the other thing, I wrote letters and media releases and went round trying to get people to sign petitions. I got nasty anonymous letters and phone calls (and occasionally non-anon calls and letters) threatening me or annoying me or waking me up at midnight. I always said I would never give up until the Timorese got their chance to choose. But that sort of struggle to be anywhere, no matter how modestly, in the public eye is exhausting, stressful, something I cannot imagine anyone doing for pleasure. Never again, I said to myself.

One of those collections from *The Times* and its correspondence columns has this:

David Holbrook: Sir, In the last week I have had six books rejected by publishers. Is this a record?

Two days later Paul Bonner replied: Sir, Readers of David Holbrook's letter ... might reasonably feel that one rejection by a publisher may be accounted as literary misfortune. Two rejections in a week smacks of carelessness. Three might conceivably be seen as prejudice by publishers against the author. Four must surely begin to look like intellectual bankruptcy. Five is certainly a pointer towards the need for discreet retirement from the literary scene. Six rejections obviously represent an attempt to join that other world of letters—those written to *The Times*.

Oscar Wilde wrote of the joys of pessimism. Bertrand Russell wrote of the joys of idleness. I would like to write of the joys of failure, of the person who simply writes for the joy of writing, of making imagined worlds real, of stumbling round in that maze I call my mind. I am so grateful now that publishers weren't interested in my offerings. They gave me the freedom and the opportunity to revel in my own special brand of failure. To write things which have no obvious readership. If anyone had told me all those years ago that success would be a poisoned chalice and that what I should really be working towards was the rousing excitement of failure I would have thought they were sun-touched. Now I know better.

* * * * *

Talking about success or at least dressing for I came on this curious mention in Susan Faludi's book *Backlash*. She wrote of the development of the business suit for women and the way the fashion industry initially leapt on the concept. "The fashion press inherited these ideas not from the women's movement but from the writings of a male fashion consultant. John T. Molloy's *The Woman's Dress for Success Book* became an instant hit in 1977, remaining on the *New York Times* bestseller list for more than five months. The book offered simple tips on professional dressing for aspiring businesswomen, just as his first work, *Dress for Success*, had dispensed clothing advice to men. That earlier book, published in 1975, was hugely popular, too. But when the fashion media turned against 'dress for success' a decade later, they directed their verbal assault solely against the women's edition."

Molloy, a former teacher, had talked to large numbers of women and his ideas and tips appealed and proved immensely attractive; both his book and the sort of style he promoted were big sellers. Then the fashion industry, at first supportive, came to see that success for women wasn't the same thing as success for them. "But in their enthusiasm fashion merchants overlooked the bottom line of Molloy's book: dress-for-success could save women money and liberate them from fashion-victim status. Business suits weren't subject to wild swings in fashion and women could get away (as men always have) with wearing the same suit for several days and just varying the blouse and accessories — more economical than buying a dress for every day of the week. Once women made the initial investment in a set of suits, they could even take a breather from shopping."

The manufacturers cut back on their production of suits and tried to get women to return to constantly changing fashions. From praising the idea the fashion magazines turned on it with a snarl. "All the anti-dress-for-success crusade needed to be complete was a villain. John Molloy was the obvious choice. The fashion press soon served him with a three-count

indictment; he was charged with promoting ‘that dreadful little bow tie’, pushing ‘the boring navy blue suit’, and making women look like ‘imitation men.’ When his book first came out, Molloy was so popular that newspapers fought to bid for his syndicated column, ‘Making It’. But with Molloy’s name on the fashion blacklist, newspapers cancelled their orders. A major daily paper, which had initially approached Molloy about publishing the column, pulled out with this explanation: ‘The fashion people won’t allow it.’ ”

Yet, curiously, Molloy didn’t mention bow ties nor promote navy suits nor put his sole focus on suits at all. He had made a lot of money out of women. So had the fashion industry. But whether women felt better, happier, more successful, more comfortable, for being the invariable milch cow ...

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My question was whether I didn’t want to read Elizabeth Smart because her book sounded as though it was all about failure, or whether I didn’t want to wallow in tears and fictional misery, or because my image of Grand Central Station was formed long ago in childhood and I didn’t want to be asked to change it. My image of that little girl was of a child bravely holding back tears as the long lonely hours went past, as the uncaring crowds surged to and fro. I went through that waiting with a shared empathy for that child. She wore a big picture hat, her mother had a long dress and a parasol, but at ten I shared that childish fear of abandonment, of trust apparently not returned, of a growing sense of loss. I knew, I thought, all about misery in Grand Central Station.

But perhaps there was another aspect at work. I say this with caution. I know a lot of women will berate me with those hurt statements which begin ‘Oh, but you *must* like—’ Yet I find the writings of a lot of academic women in North America curiously flat. Margaret Atwood, Joyce Carol Oats, Gail Godwin, Donna Tartt, Annie Proulx etc ... They have good vocabularies, they have the nuts and bolts of constructing novels down to a fine art, they sometimes have good characters and important things to say. And yet I come away with a vague sense of disappointment. For such highly touted books and writers I think I am expecting that little extra spark that makes a truly good book. I find it hard to pin down. Is it something about the lives they lead and the worlds they know, and which therefore they write about, which doesn’t resonate with me? I’m not sure.

And so, in the end, I tracked down Elizabeth Smart’s book. I think the thing which influenced me was writing the above paragraph; because I feel a kind of caution has entered the field of literary fiction. A fear of emotion. A fear of melodrama. A fear that a serious contribution might end up being mistaken for a soap opera. I did want a serious literary novel which, if it couldn’t make me laugh, could at least make me cry. Having just waded through Donna Tartt’s *The Little Friend* and Annie Proulx’s *That Old Ace in the Hole* I found myself thinking ‘no wonder Jane Austen and Charles Dickens have gained a new lease of life—if you are going to *wade* you might as well be in a pool with lively reflections and dancing waves—’. So I came to *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* because I found myself hoping for something, anything, so long as it didn’t have that sense of flatness ...

And it is true that it brings a zest and vigour to the writing of loss and angst which is worth having. But what I hadn’t realised was that this, though called a novel, was based on her real life affair with English poet George Barker. She fell in love with him through reading a book of his poems. Perhaps, with such a beginning, she could not write the highs and lows of their affair in anything but an outpouring of poetic prose. But George Barker was married. His wife is the invisible person who sits in the waiting room and wonders if she will ever have her husband back again ...

“By Grand Central Station I sat down and wept:

I will *not* be placated by the mechanical motions of existence, nor find consolation in the solicitude of waiters who notice my devastated face. Sleep tries to seduce me by promising a more reasonable tomorrow. But I will not be betrayed by such a Judas of fallacy: it betrays everyone: it leads them into death. Everyone acquiesces: everyone compromises.

They say, As we grow older we embrace resignation.

But O, they totter into it blind and unprotesting. And from their sin, the sin of accepting such a pimp to death, there is no redemption. It is the sin of damnation.”

Out of failure, if she saw this as failure, comes powerful writing, yes, that is true. But perhaps behind failure there is always, for me, that shadowy figure: resignation. And resignation is as worthy and powerful a subject as everything else.

*

So if George Barker’s poems could inspire love—what then of his poetry?

The curious thing, when I went looking for a sample, was how hard it was to find. Anthology after anthology made no mention of him. I began to wonder if Elizabeth Smart had been in love with a ghost. But at last, in *The Oxford Book of Garden Verse*, I came upon a single poem of his. George Barker. 1913 – 1991. Taken from his *Collected Poems* is his 1976 piece: ‘The Gardens of Ravished Psyche’:

Do not speak to us of dreams, speak to us of autumn in
the garden of ravished Psyche where the golden haired
laburnum
has long since burnt itself to ashes and the old apple tree
stands blackened and rotten and the ground around it lies
covered with dead fruit and the salt of the dead sea.

Now those arbours are forsaken and the trellis vines
decaying:
the rats huddle and nibble in the skulls of the demigods;
the lake has taken wing and the lovers have forgotten
why they were born, and the golden apples from the
branches
have long since fallen, my love, long since fallen.

Not a poem to provoke love but perhaps a poem pregnant with meaning.

* * * * *

December 28: Leslie Rees

December 29: Vera Brittain

Gerard Windsor

December 30: Elyne Mitchell

Rudyard Kipling

Glenda Adams

December 31: Mathilde Fibiger

THE END

Note: The other night I was invited to have dinner in Marti Zucco's in North Hobart. As I was sitting there waiting for my meal to arrive I looked up at the large framed photograph on the wall in front of me and realised it was a picture of Grand Central Station. I just thought you might be interested.

APPENDIX 1:

When I had finished *A Settled Fact* and was about to start printing it out I came, in the odd and interesting way such things happen, on a biography of George Barker, *The Chameleon Poet* by Robert Fraser, and felt that I would stretch a point and give him an appendix.

Sadly, I found myself completely unable to find the attractions of either the man or the poetry. He had fifteen children, none of whom he seems to have given the material or emotional support children deserve, and he belonged in that misogynist tradition of male poets who believe that women not only cannot and should not write poetry but that women exist to support the male genius. Even that idea: I am a poet—I can do what I want.

I had found the suggestion disconcerting that while Barker was off having his affair with Elizabeth Smart his wife Jessica was virtually abandoned in America, a place where she knew almost no one and had almost nothing to live on, but his later relationship with Betty Cass was even more fraught. She finally had to resort to secrecy and subterfuge to escape his violent and jealous possessiveness. She wrote of the relationship later, 'Two images of it will continue to haunt me: one is of a physically strong man beating up a not physically strong woman. The other is of Shelley's first wife, Harriet (a beautiful simple soul, perhaps a Jessica?) some few years after his abandonment of her and their young children, wandering in unraveled despair through Kensington Gardens and jumping into the Serpentine to drown herself.'

After five hundred pages I was no closer to finding the aspects of his personality or his writing which drew people to him. Barker has faded as a poet, his style is out of fashion, and I am not the person to suggest he deserves a renaissance. I think too, on balance, I would have liked him to remain the unnamed man of mystery who winds through the pages of Elizabeth Smart's lyrical book ...

But having gone on there is no way back. That is a hazard I face every time I think 'I'd like to know more about so-and-so' and there is no clairvoyant fairy to tap me on the shoulder and say 'that is a door you might like to leave shut' ...

APPENDIX 2:

MY STRUGGLE TO WRITE MORE BOOKS THAN MRS CARTLAND

Two years ago I set out to break Barbara Cartland's record of writing 24 books in a year. I didn't succeed but, now and then, I found myself thinking 'I'm sure it can be done'. Now that I know what is involved. Now that I know what to do and what not to do. Now that I can see that using the idea to resurrect things which had died on me wasn't really the best way to go.

Now that I know just how lazy I am. Now that I know how useful it is to have short stories and poems and novels to hand as needed for competitions ...

So I thought I'd give it one more attempt. Regardless of whether I get there or not this would be my last attempt—not least because of the danger of drowning under the pile of results. I thought I would plan at least 25 book ideas and have them zooming round in my head begging to be written on New Year's Day. Perhaps that way I would start out bubbling with enthusiasm. And it is enthusiasm which makes Barbara Cartland more than a very limited genre writer. She loved what she did. I think loving what you do really matters.

New Year's Day 2007: I set up files for lots of new books. Now to see what works ...

1. Gift Horse (8th set of Bob Creighton mystery novellas)
2. Space (poems)
3. 'A Rose By Any Other Name—' (poems)
4. Country Casebook (No 2) (mystery)
5. Horses for Courses (9th set of Bob Creighton mystery novellas)
6. Clutter (poems of meditation)
7. Documents in Foreign Policy (novel of farce)
8. Country Casebook (No 3) (mystery)
9. Dark Horse (10th set of Bob Creighton mystery novellas)
10. A Settled Fact (short writer's calendar)
11. Homo Suburbanus (weather journal-as-fiction)
12. Country Casebook (No 4) (mystery)
13. Variations on a Theme of Good Friday (novel)
14. Country Casebook (No 5) (mystery)
15. Country Casebook (No 6) (mystery)
16. Family History Journal No. 5
17. Country Casebook (No 7) (mystery)
18. Country Casebook (No 8) (mystery)
19. Country Casebook (No 9) (mystery)
20. Country Casebook (No 10) (mystery)
21. Country Casebook (No 11) (mystery)
22. Country Casebook (No 12) (mystery)
23. Country Casebook (No 13) (mystery)
24. The Cabal (novel)
25. Country Casebook (No 14) (mystery)
26. Mrs Mop Thinks ... (op-ed pieces)
27. Country Casebook (No 15) (mystery)

And partly done:

28. The Long Interval (short stories)
29. Bricks and Mortar (short stories)
30. This World (poems and stories)
31. Dummy (novel)
32. Aunts, Uncles, and Hangers-On (novel)

I also finished *Between the Covers* (my 5th Writer's Calendar). Having worn myself out with another writer's calendar and umpteen eat-my-dust-Mrs-Cartland-books I feel I can now sit back and relax. And so I'll leave you once more, book in hand, in that comfortable armchair ...