

**A  
WRITER'S  
CALENDAR**

**Compiled  
by  
J. L. Herrera**

## **for my mother**

and with special thanks to  
Rose Brown, Peter Jones,  
Eve Masterman, Yvonne Stadler,  
Marie-France Sagot, Jo Cauffman,  
Tom Errey and Gianni Ferrara

## **INTRODUCTION**

I began the original calendar simply as a present for my mother, thinking it would be an easy matter to fill up 365 spaces. Instead it turned into an ongoing habit. Every time I did some tidying up out would flutter more grubby little notes to myself, written on the backs of envelopes, bank withdrawal forms, anything, and containing yet more names and dates.

It seemed, then, a small step from filling in blank squares to letting myself run wild with the myriad little interesting snippets picked up in my hunting and adding the occasional opinion or memory.

The beginning and the end were obvious enough. The trouble was the middle; the book was like a concertina — infinitely expandable. And I found, so much fun had the exercise become, that I was reluctant to say to myself, no more.

Understandably, I've been dependent on other people's memories and record-keeping and have learnt that even the weightiest of tomes do not always agree on such basic 'facts' as people's birthdays. So my apologies for the discrepancies which may have crept in.

In the meantime — Many Happy Returns!

Jennie Herrera  
1995

## A Writer's Calendar

January 1st: Ouida  
J. D. Salinger  
Maria Edgeworth  
E. M. Forster  
Camara Laye  
Iain Crichton Smith  
Larry King  
Sembene Ousmane  
Jean Ure  
John Fuller

January 2nd: Isaac Asimov  
Henry Kingsley  
Jean Little  
Peter Redgrove  
Gerhard Amanshauser

\* \* \* \* \*

Is prolific writing good writing? Carter Brown? Barbara Cartland? Ursula Bloom? Enid Blyton? Not necessarily, but it does tend to be clear, simple, lucid, overlapping, and sometimes repetitive. All this could be said of Asimov's books but he is also a happy reminder that the well of invention far from running dry has a Malthusian element to it: the more you create the more creative you become.

Asimov came to the United States as a boy with his Russian parents and he says of himself: "I had planned to make my living as a teacher and scientist. I wrote for pleasure and didn't care whether I published or not; or, if published, whether I sold or not. When I received a check for a royalty from a single book that was equal to 3½ times my annual teaching salary, I rather got the idea that I had made it as a writer.

If you don't enjoy writing, there are other ways of making a living. If you are easily discouraged, there are other ways of making a living. If you don't want to spend your life working in more or less isolation, there are other ways of making a living."

When he died he had written nearly five hundred books which ranged from humour to science fiction, from natural science to whodunnits, from short stories to limericks—yes, limericks. I was astonished to discover that Asimov had written seven books of limericks, starting with *Lecherous Limericks* in 1975.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir Edward Appleton, discoverer of the atmospheric layer named after him, expressed what could be taken as the underlying principle in Asimov's work: "If you cannot put it down in simple language you have not got to the bottom of the subject yourself."

\* \* \* \* \*

Asimov, on his card, had nothing but—

ISAAC ASIMOV  
NATURAL RESOURCE

It reminds me of a committee meeting where someone suggested inviting Gwen Harwood to speak, saying, "Now that she's a National Treasure". Someone else, a popular politician with several books to his credit, said, "Excuse me—but who is Gwen Harwood?"

Is there such a thing as a nationally-known writer, let alone one whose name sparks recognition anywhere? I doubt it.

James Herriot in *The Lord God Made Them All* writes:

The wind whistled and once I heard the plaintive cry of a curlew, but the group around that prostrate animal might have been Trappist monks. I began to feel embarrassed. It wasn't a difficult job, I didn't need a hundred per cent concentration. With all my heart I wished somebody would say something.

Then, like a glorious flash of inspiration I remembered the recent clamour in the newspapers. I could start things off, at least.

'Just like Bernard Shaw, eh?' I said with a light laugh.

The silence remained impenetrable and for about half a minute it seemed that I was going to receive no reply. Then Mr Casling cleared his throat.

'oo?' he enquired.

'Bernard Shaw, George Bernard Shaw, you know. He's broken his leg, too.' I was trying not to gabble.

The silence descended again and I had a strong feeling that I had better leave it that way. I got on with my job, dousing the white cast with water and smoothing it over while the plaster worked its way under my fingernails.

It was Harold who came in next. 'Does 'e live about 'ere?'

'No ... no ... not really.' I decided to put on one more layer of bandage, wishing fervently that I had never started this topic.

I was tipping the bandage from the tin when Alan chipped in.

'Darrowby feller is 'e?'

Things were becoming more difficult. 'No,' I replied airily 'I believe he spends most of his time in London.'

'London!' The conversation, such as it was, had been carried on without any movement of the heads but now the three faces jerked up towards me with undisguised astonishment and the three voices spoke as one.

After the initial shock had worn off the men looked down at the calf again and I was hoping that the subject was dead when Mr Casling muttered from the corner of his mouth.

'He won't be in t'farmin' line, then?'

'Well, no ... he writes plays.'

\* \* \* \* \*

But surely a prize for being one of the most prolific authors in history should go to Martin Luther.

H. G. Haile, in his biography of Luther, writes: "The sixteenth century had witnessed the concentration of enormous wealth. In this sense, the most influential European was certainly Jacob Fugger, by whose immense capital Charles V had attained to his outward show of authority. But to these sources of power, economic and political, a third was added around 1520, which no one yet fully appreciated: the power lent by technology. The printing press, in use for about three generations, quite suddenly became one of the major forces to be reckoned with in Europe. Historians often say it made the Protestant Reformation possible. They like to quote Francis Bacon's remark that the printing press (together with the compass and gunpowder) transformed the whole face of the world. Such statements, though true, are misleading. By attributing everything to mere physical tools, they distract us from the forces which inspired their design, use, and change. Printing is history's best example of a tool which was transformed by its employment. In the first heat of religious pluralism in Germany (1517-23) something entirely new in human affairs sprang into existence: general literacy. Print was used to bring it about, and the printing establishment was itself transformed in the process.

Reading had been spreading among Europeans for some centuries, though only an infinitesimal fraction of the populace was involved. Growth had been gradual,

accelerated little by technological advances, such as printing from wooden blocks. The really decisive limit on book production in the early Middle Ages was the high cost of the page. A hundred head of sheep went to produce a vellum book. The success of paper mills in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries permitted a rapid and steady decline in cost of materials for about the next three hundred years (until the runaway inflation of the Thirty Years' War). Still, the cost of paper remained larger than all the other factors in the price of a book. As people became more well-to-do, the expansion of trade and commerce quickened the spread of reading, but the most effective limit to book production was the relatively small readership ...

The question posed by many authors is: what can have so long *delayed* the use of print for books? A "Moslem barrier" is sometimes cited, the Islamic objection to printing holy writings. A better explanation may be that the printing of books was simply not perceived as economical. The massive effort required to produce movable type wanted a mass readership.

The "invention" attributed to Guttenberg was a marvel of synthesizing genius. Many technical problems had to be solved in such disparate fields as metallurgy, paper manufacture, and ink preparation (old scribal materials were not suited to the new process). An entirely new theory of mass production and the idea of interchangeability of parts had to be adapted, like the screw press from its use in laundry and vineyard. What can have motivated such an energetic breakthrough, probably by several collaborators? It is not at all to detract from the nobility of Guttenberg's vision to observe that the use of movable type to produce books could not itself *create* a mass audience, but was rather predicated on one. Reciprocal interaction between available technology and social forces characterizes the history of the book. Literacy rates of the Middle Ages are anybody's guess, but by the year 1500 they had grown to perhaps 3 to 4 per cent in Germany. The printing press had brought no explosion in literacy during its first half century ...

The explosion in German book production was simultaneous with Luther's sensational rejection of papal authority. He appealed over the heads of bureaucrats to the written word. He claimed that anyone could form his own judgment of the issues under contention. In 1500 the press had been turning out about 40 German titles a year. By 1517 (Luther questioned indulgence sales in the fall of that year), no great change was apparent. In 1518, 71 German titles came off the presses, of which Luther himself had written 20. That was the start. In 1519, there were 111 titles, of which he had written 51. In 1520 the figures were 208 and 133. By 1523, 498 German titles were being printed, 180 of these by Luther. Of course, these "books" were not the ponderous tomes to which people had been accustomed, but relatively cheap, aesthetically most attractive pamphlets. It was a new literary form. Families and friends read them together, delighting in the sport of sounding out the unfamiliar symbols on the page, puzzling over the many difficulties, roaring at the puns, guffawing at hitherto sacrosanct personages."

As German roads and transport systems did not permit the mass movement of books printers took copies of their books to book fairs and exchanged them for other books they wanted to bring out; this re-printing of books as printers gradually spread them, hand-to-hand, across the country allowed changes and additions to creep in. As Luther put it: "The printers add what they will, and so corrupt my sermons I cannot understand them myself, even though they bear my name."

More pernicious was the allure of Luther's name—books and pamphlets by other authors were sometimes sent out under Luther's name by printers desiring quick sales. And of course royalties weren't paid ...

But Luther was achieving what he'd hoped to do—to bypass papal and princely control and allow people to read and think for themselves.

\* \* \* \* \*

Interesting too is Haile's contention: "It is safe to say that the modern science of bibliography arises in large part from the centuries of scholarly effort with Luther's work ..."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mrs Lynde says that when a man has to eat sour bread two weeks out of three his theology is bound to get a kink in it somewhere."

(*Anne of Avonlea* by L. M. Montgomery)

Poor Luther had far worse than sour bread to contend with. Suffering from life-threatening kidney-stones he was fed a mixture of ground-up horse manure and garlic but it seems to have been the jolting of the coach, as he went home to die, that saved him from the horrible fate of a ruptured bladder; even so, he may have continued to suffer from a condition called uremic psychosis. Certainly, his later writings show an increase in pessimism and irascibility. But, then, that can be said of many of us without the excuse of bladder trouble.

\* \* \* \* \*

January 3rd: J. R. Tolkien  
Henry Handel Richardson  
Blanche d'Alpuget  
Rosa Montero  
Agnes Nemes Nagy  
Henry Holt  
Colin Legum

\* \* \* \* \*

The US Book-of-the-Month Club ran a questionnaire for people to say what books had made a difference to their lives.

This is the list they compiled:

1. *The Bible*
2. *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand
3. *The Road Less Travelled* by M. Scott Peck
4. *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
5. *The Lord of the Rings* by J. R. Tolkien
6. *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell
7. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie
8. *The Book of Mormon*
9. and 10. tied:
  - The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan
  - Gift from the Sea* by Anne Morrow Lindbergh
  - Man's Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl
  - Passages* by Gail Sheehy
  - When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold S. Kushner

I thought it would be a simple matter to come up with 10 books which had influenced my life—and put them in order. Dear me. Still, here goes—roughly chronological ...

1. *The Magic Pudding* by Norman Lindsay
2. *The Lark in the Morn* by Elfrida Vipont
3. *Emily Climbs* by L. M. Montgomery
4. *The Douglas Affair* by Alistair Mair
5. *The Bible*
6. *1965 Q'ld Yearling Sales Catalogue*
7. *Christina Rossetti's Poems*
8. *Antarctic Housewife* by Nan Brown

9. *Timor A People Betrayed* by James Dunn

10. *Freedom in the Modern World* by John MacMurray

Several people have asked me how *The Lord of the Rings* could have influenced anyone's life; not having ever gone beyond *The Hobbit* I could not say. So I was interested to see Peter Grant who writes the Religion column for *The Sunday Tasmanian* devoting a Sunday to 'Books and writers that matter' and putting, alongside C. S. Lewis and Tim Winton, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. He says of it, "One of the few books I've read and re-read many times. Whether you can stand all the fantasy pulp that followed it or not, *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the most profoundly Christian books ever written. Good is real but vulnerable and needs to be continually chosen. Evil is also real and at times deceptively attractive but is neither irresistible nor invincible. Of his other work, Tolkien's short story *Leaf by Niggle* is one of the loveliest fables you'll read anywhere."

\* \* \* \* \*

January 4th: Alfred Edgar Coppard

Michele Turner

Jacob Grimm

January 5th: Stella Gibbons

Michael Wilding

Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Umberto Eco

January 6th: Kahlil Gibran

Francis M. Nevins

Patrick Kavanagh

Zoe Kanava

Feike Feikema

Peter Matthews

Cezary Lezenki

January 7th: David Freeman

Lolo Houbein

January 8th: Wilkie Collins

Storm Jameson

Alfred Russel Wallace

Dennis Wheatley

Stephen Hawking

\* \* \* \* \*

Wilkie Collins belongs in the tradition of writers who managed to turn their drug addiction or alcoholism to powerful account in their writing; not that that's meant to be a recommendation, it often ended by cutting their careers short. Yet Collins began his career in the most respectable way possible—by writing a biography of his father: *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins R.A.*

Wilkie himself was named for his father's friend, the artist Sir James Wilkie—who, when seeing the baby for the first time, was reported to be astonished that it could see! Perhaps he thought children were born blind like kittens.

The biographical note on Sir James from *The Wilkie Gallery* is Truly Turgid Victoriana and begins:

"From both parents he appears to have inherited that seriousness, sagacity, and habitual spirit of self-control, which besides being among the most honourable of national characteristics, were peculiarly called forth by the circumstances of the Scottish clergy. The father of Wilkie was bred in the school of privation, the descendant of a family long possessed of a humble independence; but reduced to become tenants of their patrimonial estate of Ratho Byers (a spot ever dear to the feelings of the painter,) it

was not without difficulty that they could bear even the comparatively trifling expense of an university education in Scotland, necessary for the sacred profession to which they destined him. The slender allowance afforded from their narrow means was increased by the trifling emoluments of a bursary to which he was honourably promoted, and by giving lessons to others in the studies which he himself long and zealously pursued. Years thus wore away in hopeless penury and the rigorous celibacy which it enforced ere any prospect appeared of his attaining even to humble distinction and modest independence as a parish clergyman. And thus perhaps he might have continued to the autumn of life, but for the assistance of a kinsman. The Rev. William Wilkie, a man of some poetical celebrity in his day, and Professor of Divinity at St. Andrews, through whose kindly influence some rays of prosperity began to cheer the long-neglected and despondent student; but although his worth and learning were now brought to the light, yet it was by slow steps that he emerged from obscurity; for it was five years longer before he was promoted to the vacant manse of Cults.

In about two years from his induction, he married a woman, one of the most beautiful of the land, whose society he might have fondly hoped, would have repaid him for the long years of youth passed in sordid celibacy; but this anticipated happiness fled like a dream, for only a few brief months elapsed ere he consigned this beloved partner to the tomb.”

The Reverend married again. His second wife died.

He tried a third time and finally achieved a family, the third child being the young David Wilkie, who, however much he may have loved Ratho Byers, spent most of his time in London or travelling to far away and exotic places in the Mediterranean and the Orient to paint and sketch.

It was not that Wilkie Collins needed to go abroad to establish his opium habit—even small children were given laudanum drops to make them sleep—yet there is throughout his writing something of this same yearning towards the exotic which inspired many of the paintings of his namesake.

\* \* \* \* \*

Many libraries only have *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, thus fostering the idea that these make up his entire output. But he was a prolific novelist and short story writer, contributing regularly to (and sometimes influencing) the magazines run by Charles Dickens. He was also an important influence on the mystery writers who came after him such as Sherlock Holmes’ creator, Arthur Conan Doyle.

\* \* \* \* \*

I’ve never heard of a parent locking away the Sherlock Holmes’ books on the grounds that Sherlock Holmes is not a good role model for children. I wonder why.

Just think—

He lives with another man and rarely expresses interest in that admirable thing—family life.

He takes cocaine and morphine and smokes a pipe. In fact, he shoots up three times a day and his arms were “all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks.”

When not working he sits round all day in his dressing-gown. (“Look, it’s eight o’clock—and you’re *still* not dressed!”)

He expresses little interest in regular work, saving, acquiring a “better” lifestyle (Baker Street was by no means a classy address), the work ethic, or personal discipline.

Far from enlisting the help of well-brought-up little children who know the ABC and can recite the Catechism he prefers to create the Baker Street Irregulars out of grubby little street urchins who almost certainly suffer from scabies and wipe their noses on their sleeves.

Watson says of him, “in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Wilkie Collins,” wrote Harriet, “was always handicapped in his treatment of the supernatural by the fatal itch” (could one be handicapped by an itch? Yes, why not? Let it go, anyway, for the moment) “the fatal itch to explain everything. His legal training—” Bother! Too long. “... was handicapped by the lawyer’s fatal habit of explaining everything. His ghaisties and ghoulies”—No; worn-out humour—“His dream-phantasms and apparitions are too careful to tuck their shrouds neatly about them and leave no loose ends to trouble us. It is in Lefanu that we find the natural maker of—natural master of—the master of the uncanny whose mastery comes by nature. If we compare—”

*Gaudy Night* (Dorothy Sayers)

\* \* \* \* \*

January 9th: Simone de Beauvoir  
Robert Drewe  
Morris Gleitzman  
Wilbur Smith  
January 10th: Peter Barnes  
Philip Levine  
Paul Bennett  
January 11th: Alan Paton  
Duncan Glen  
James Delgado

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Paton, writing of the stories of B. Wongar, says “I do not know enough of the Aboriginal contribution to Australian literature to know how far these stories open up a new lode of wealth. But they open up a new world to me, and what is more, the writer who does it is a master of the ancient craft.”

It’s no wonder Australian readers, in droves, believed B. Wongar to be an Aboriginal writer. The piece doesn’t actually say so but it can certainly be taken to mean that. So I wonder what Alan Paton was told when he was invited to introduce *The Track to Bralgu*—or was he asked because he was also seen as a white writer able to deal sympathetically with ‘black’ issues?

But B. Wongar was the Yugoslav, now the Serb writer, Sreten Bozic—and this caused him to be criticised for ‘posing’ as Aboriginal or ‘exploiting’ Aboriginal themes. Now he has created a different dilemma for himself—by writing sympathetically of Serb nationalism. I haven’t read the book which has caused the latest furore with people now accusing him of ‘letting down’ Aboriginal people.

In 1989 he was interviewed by American academic Ray Willbanks: “Do you think you will continue in your writing to express yourself from an Aborigine’s point of view, or might your fictional stance become that of a European-Australian?”

Wongar replied: “I write because I have to answer certain things for myself. I am interested in the spiritual in the aboriginal culture. I don’t think that there’s anything in the white society that I am really passionate about.”

So what happened between then and now? Most obviously the break up of Yugoslavia but perhaps, too, the fact that when you reach a certain age understanding your roots often becomes more important.

Years ago, Serbia was always referred to as ‘poor little Serbia’ or ‘gallant little Serbia’; perhaps there came a moment when the Serbs, who inevitably seemed to get the wrong end of the stick, decided they would rather be feared, or even hated, rather than pitied.

And, as A. S. Byatt suggests, “You must say nothing you do not think”; this furore, though, is saying, “Even if you think it you have an obligation not to say it.”

The question here is—should you write for yourself (what you feel passionately about) or for your readers (what you think they feel passionately about)? Should you censor yourself in the hope of retaining the readership you have acquired? But is it the same people buying each book as it comes out—or new readers? Are the people who write in to say “I loved your book about such-and-such” representative of all your readers? Is there a fail-safe way to know who your readers are and how you can continue to please them?

Should you always *want* to please them?

\* \* \* \* \*

Writers, like everyone else, have their blind spots.

Harriet Beecher Stowe who wrote powerfully on the horrors of slavery could see nothing wrong with people being forcibly evicted in the Scottish Highlands to make way for sheep.

Anthony Trollope wrote: “Of the Australian black we may certainly say that he has to go. That he should perish without unnecessary suffering should be the aim of all who are concerned in the matter.”

Edmund Spenser, of *Faerie Queene* fame, advocated genocide as the solution to the ‘Irish problem’.

Ezra Pound blotted his copybook by making broadcasts in support of Mussolini.

Victorian writers, from Browning to Swinburne, were alike in their unqualified and enthusiastic support for Italian unification and independence but they saw no reason to extend this understanding to Ireland; Swinburne going so far as to kick a hopeful Fenian down the stairs.

Elie Wiesel has written movingly of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust but, as president of the US Holocaust Memorial Council, he refused to allow any Gypsy Holocaust survivors to become members of the Council.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once I came upon an entry in a dictionary (it was, fortunately, an old dictionary) “Sioux: A war-like tribe of—” The entry for Germany did not say “Germany: A war-like nation of—” nor did it say under “Campbell: A war-like clan of—”

So why have we allowed that very useful word “tribe” to be debased and made synonymous with machetes and blood-lust? Because we often feel the need to put someone or something down—and clan and nation are both seen as ‘white’ words in a way that tribe isn’t?

Or is it as Barbara Pym puts it: “How debased anthropology has become since Frazer’s day,” sighed the Bishop, “a mere matter of genealogies, meaningless definitions and jargon, *words, words, words*, as Hamlet has it; lineage, sib, kindred, extended family, ramage—one doesn’t know where one is. Even the good old term *clan* is suspect.”

Patricia Mamajun Torres says: “When writing about Indigenous Australians be aware that the previous notions of tribe, totem, chiefs, warrior, lubras, witchdoctor, picaninnies, bucks, gins, and walk-about are at times grossly inappropriate terminologies and laden with racist overtones that do nothing to present a positive and sensitive portrayal of Indigenous Australians.

Some words that are acceptable are language-groups, clan-groups, extended family groups instead of tribe—”

Yes, but I don’t think we should allow the racists to snatch from us that simple and very useful word ‘tribe’.

\* \* \* \* \*

We could reflect upon Albert Schweitzer’s deep distress at having to tell the Africans of the war in Europe—‘We were supposed to bring them the Gospel of Love and now we are murdering each other.’

One old African asked him ‘How many men have been killed? Ten?’

‘Many more than ten,’ Schweitzer had to reply.

The old man was puzzled. ‘In our warfare we have to pay for dead men. However will they pay for so many? Why don’t their tribes meet and have a palaver?’

\* \* \* \* \*

January 12th: Jack London  
Jennifer Johnston  
Dorothy Wall  
Charles Perrault

January 13th: Michael Bond  
Amanda Cross  
John Masterman  
A. B. Guthrie

\* \* \* \* \*

Amanda Cross has her detective, Kate Fansler, say “to this day, July 13th seems to me full of promise and nameless glee.” Naturally, I jumped to the conclusion that July 13th must be her birthday. I know now that, whether or not it was Kate Fansler’s fictional birthday, it wasn’t her creator’s birthday. So I find myself wondering—did something very special happen to her on July 13th or might it be a simple case of transference?

\* \* \* \* \*

January 14th: John Dos Passos  
Hugh Lofting  
Geraldine Kaye  
Tillie Olson

January 15th: Hugh Trevor-Roper  
Martin Luther King  
Kate Llewellyn  
Mazo De la Roche

January 16th: Susan Sontag  
Nigel Dennis  
Robert Service

January 17th: Anton Chekhov  
Mrs Henry Wood  
Douglas Hyde  
Compton Mackenzie  
Nevil Shute  
May Gibbs

\* \* \* \* \*

Should writers politic? Should politicians write? Whether or not they *should*, they determinedly *do*—and if they don’t manage it in their lifetimes they make sure their papers are all carefully stored and catalogued for those who will tackle the job for them. The Lyndon B. Johnson archives in Texas, I have read, contain 31,000,000 items. It’s hard to imagine any life generating thirty-one million anythings!

Douglas Hyde, as President of Ireland, took a determinedly non-political stance, believing his position should be above party politics and that what Ireland needed was less politics; he probably also believed ‘and more culture’ for, in his own life and writing, he had helped to found the Gaelic League (in 1893), to re-establish Gaelic as a literary language, and to record and extend the Irish literary tradition which was, increasingly, becoming unavailable as English replaced Gaelic in schools, public and everyday life.

Like so many 19th-century-born writers (whether Irish, English, Scots, or German)

he was the son of a clergyman—which always strikes me as a good argument in favour of a non-celibate priesthood. He was born and grew up in Frenchpark in Co. Roscommon, just ‘up the road’ from where my grandfather was born.

His writing was inspired by this need to gather in the beauty of Gaelic writing and make it accessible and attractive; *Love Songs of Connaught*, a *Literary History of Ireland*, a book of plays, *Legends of Saints and Sinners*, and, as Joseph Jacobs wrote: “Dr Douglas Hyde has published in *Beside the Fireside*, 1891, spirited English versions of some of the stories he had published in the original Irish in his *Leabhar Sgeulaighteachta*, Dublin, 1889.”

Though the Gaelic League attracted some of Ireland’s foremost intellectuals its roots were in the rich story-telling traditions of the remoter countryside ... oh, and you’ll be pleased to know, in passing, that Irish spelling was standardised and somewhat simplified in 1948; my only regret being their decision to do away with the old tradition of naming the letters after trees—as in—

A - *ailm* - elm

B - *beith* - birch

C - *coll* - hazel

\* \* \* \* \*

But if the desire to write poetry has something of the universal in it then why should politicians be exempt?

Senator Terry Aulich leapt to prominence when his libel case against Amanda Lohrey for her novel *The Reading Group* required the publisher to destroy all copies. The public could be forgiven for asking “What was so terrible in the book?” After all, it’s hard to keep anything secret in Tasmania, inside or outside politics.

And the day is coming when books will circulate electronically without the benefit of being ‘published’. It’s hard to see how the laws of libel will be enforced.

Senator Aulich brought out a book of poems in his youth and some kind person gave us a bundle to put on a stall. I’m afraid they failed to sell, even when we brought the price down to 20c. It may simply be that we failed to point out to prospective buyers that “the spirit of a decade is not caught in the slippery fingers of analytical historians but in the expansive arms of those poets who are part of the action itself.” (I quote Barrie de Blizzard from the blurb)— but I can’t help thinking, now, that it would’ve been much better if someone had taken Senator Aulich to court for libel. We could have furtively sold his books from a box under the stall and they would’ve gone like hot cakes.

And what did he choose to write about? A small sample—

In the diamond studded starlight

nations are aroused.

Their sweaty declarations

charge the hoar frost with flashes,

lighting courtyards of the famous,

catching them in devious conference

with mouths open.

(Fjord)

Delighting in numbers,

winning victories so esoteric

one could debate all night

the intricacies of Mormonism

and still be Left or Right

(Party Conference)

\* \* \* \* \*

Poetry is also a powerful tool for those who must liberate their nation before the

politicking and number-crunching can begin ...

My mother  
(black mothers whose sons depart)  
you taught me to wait and hope  
as you had learnt in bitter days.

But in me  
life killed that mystic hope.  
I am not the one who waits  
but the one who is awaited.

And we are hope  
your children  
bound for a faith that can nourish life ...

Your sons  
searching for life ...  
(Dr Agostinho Neto, first president of Angola)

This is the hopeful life that grows  
From life's release  
The life that every woman knows  
Who calls for peace  
With every waking breath  
But not the peace of death  
(Xanana Gusmão)

\* \* \* \* \*

Biography is usually preferable to autobiography—for how many of us can stand back and gaze with an unprejudiced eye upon our own lives? We slip and slide between excuse and glory—‘I could’ve handled that better’—‘so-and-so *was* in the wrong and I’m going to make sure everyone knows’—‘I really didn’t appreciate the help my aunt gave me that time’—‘I think I’ll leave out that old quarrel, it all sounds rather petty now’ ...

The bits Bob Hawke read from his memoirs sounded unmitigatedly awful—but was it his reading or his writing? Would it have sounded less pompous with Robert Dessaix reading it, more amusing coming from Paul Hogan?

I remember seeing Bob Hawke at his last ALP Conference at Wrest Point. I had some East Timor booklets to hand to him. Waiting with me was an elderly gentleman planning to give him some used golf balls (he’d given up golf).

Along came Hawke, surrounded by his wife and his minders. I handed over my stuff, saying “I hope you’ll take the time to read them”. He avoided looking at me and made no response. One of his minders took the booklets. The golf man stepped forward. He was warmly thanked and, as the little group passed on, I heard the Prime Minister telling someone to make sure the golf man’s name and address were taken so he could receive a letter.

So ...

Are Blanche and The Silver Bodgie out there busily knocking round those used balls?

\* \* \* \* \*

Michele Turner, in *Telling: East Timor*, wrote, “I noted how the erroneous slur by Nevil Shute (in the introduction to ‘Independent Company’), that the Timorese were ‘turncoats’, is repeated unquestioned through the literature to the extent that it had

become an unquestioned ‘truth’.”

I found Shute’s introduction to Bernard Callinan’s book so off-putting that I was reluctant to go ahead with *Independent Company: The Australian Army in Portuguese Timor 1941-43* and I have never felt any desire since then to read any more of Nevil Shute’s own work. In the initial introduction, he spoke of ‘Tamils’ in Timor and this was repeated unquestioned in M.R.D. Foot’s history of S.O.E. (Special Operations Executive)—“In Portuguese Timor SOA (Special Operations Australia) also found it possible to get a little done, with help from the local Tamils”; where Shute found his Tamils remains unexplained and Sir Bernard Callinan was dismayed by the introduction (he hadn’t had the chance to read it before the book went to print) and asked that it be modified for later re-issues of the book. I think it should’ve been dropped altogether.

*Independent Company* reflects the attitudes of White Australia in the 1940s—‘In many cases it did not require the surat to tell me that Mau Bessi, Antonio, Bera Hasi, or whatever his name, was “a good boong—treat him well, he deserves it.” Their feats of loyalty and courage were well known.’

Virtually all the books dealing with East Timor in World War Two divide the Timorese up into ‘good’ and ‘bad natives’, loyal and disloyal, ‘good boongs’ and ‘bad boongs’.

Justice Michael Kirby in his Foreword to *Telling: East Timor* says: “It is right that succeeding generations of Australians should be reminded of the support their beleaguered soldiers and country had, at a critical time for this nation’s history, from the ordinary people of Timor who owned them no loyalty yet gave their trust and fidelity.”

As the colonial subjects of a neutral power the Timorese owed no loyalty to Australia or the Australian people and the tremendous help they gave is diminished by the constant use of the word loyalty which implies they were meeting an obligation when, instead, they gave out of a sense of adventure, of shared faith, of generosity of heart, of hope that Australia might someday support their dream of freedom from colonialism ...

Kirby goes on to say: “But for the most part, the Australian response to the Timorese—during the war and after—was one of callous indifference and later cynical disregard.” The dispassionate observer could be forgiven for thinking that if there were any ‘turncoats’ around they lived in Australia.

\* \* \* \* \*

Media baron, Kerry Packer, went to East Timor in August 1975 on a Japanese fishing vessel, the *Konpira Maru*, which had been salvaged by John and Yvonne Chatterton. Paul Barry says he took a bodyguard and “an armoury of guns between them, enough to start their own war, as one fellow passenger put it, and Kerry was keen to try them out. As they cruised through the Timor Sea, John Whitehall and another man were deputed to throw cans off the stern while Packer attempted to blast them with his hi-tech buffalo rifle. Whitehall remembers that he wasn’t much of a shot, and kept missing but, even worse, the gun kept jamming so that Kerry was soon in a rage. The final straw was when the ship’s mate, John Chatterton, produced an old .303 with a back-sight fashioned out of a piece of tin and had a can thrown for him, which he hit first time. The game was then terminated as Kerry packed up his gun and stumped off.” I am not surprised that Chatterton was the better shot. He has been linked to the Mr Asia drug syndicate and in the 1980s he was detained on the French Indian Ocean island of Réunion, allegedly for gun-running to a group of ‘rebels’, but he escaped from prison there and made his way to Singapore.

More than twenty years ago I met a very attractive woman who had once been a dancer on ‘Bandstand’. She claimed that Kerry Packer had propositioned her with the offer of \$5,000 but that she’d turned him down because “he’s such a creep”. I hadn’t

heard of him then and I certainly could not foresee a time when I'd be surrounded in every bookshop by *The Rise and Rise of Kerry Packer*. Though I *had* heard of Sir Frank as I had a friend who worked in the reading room at the *Daily Telegraph*—but his stories were of the reading room (such as their troubles with The Man with the Smelly Pipe) rather than the board room.

In his late fifties my friend was made redundant by the introduction of computers to take over the 'reading'; a few months later he died suddenly. I have always felt that retrenchment at an age when he couldn't expect to find another job was particularly callous, though I know it happens all the time, and possibly contributed to his early death. (Murdoch, by then, had taken over the *Telegraph*.)

I see words as a means to an end; he saw words as wonderful things in themselves. He especially loved puns.

Theodore Hook in 'Cautionary Verses to Youth of Both Sexes' wrote:

My little dears, who learn to read, pray early learn to shun

That very silly thing indeed which people call a pun.

Now, I *like* puns—maybe because I'm hopeless at thinking them up myself—so I was delighted to acquire a penfriend in Philadelphia some years ago who is a marvellous punster.

I felt sure she must have writers in her family but she said, no, only her grandfather, Stanley Cauffman. I didn't think I'd ever come across the name and asked what he'd written.

She sent me a list and I was delighted to find I *had* read something of his. On board a ship between Singapore and Fremantle I had whiled away some of my time in the library; unfortunately it appeared to be filled with the dreariest selection of books ever gathered together in one room. I was about to give up when I came upon *The Witchfinders* and thought it looked interesting. It is not that the career of notorious Witchfinder General, Matthew Hopkins, is light reading (Sir Walter Scott called him an 'impudent and cruel wretch'), nor was I curious about his motives—20/- per witch was an appealing motive in the 17th century—but rather for the way in which, in troubled times, such people seem to surface and draw otherwise reputable citizens into their orbit. The blurb for the book says: "A story of love and adventure laid in England at the time when Matthew Hopkins, "Witchfinder General" swept through the land, terrorizing the inhabitants and leaving a wake of extortion, theft, torture and murder." Just the thing for a day when you aren't quite sick enough to justify retreating to your cabin but can't bear to sit looking out over the heaving sea!

As well as this novel Stanley Cauffman wrote at some length about colonial Philadelphia in novels such as *The Ghost of Gallows Hill* and *At the Sign of the Silver Ship*.

\* \* \* \* \*

January 18th: A. A. Milne  
Arthur Ransome  
David French  
Sally Morgan  
David Bellamy  
Raymond Briggs  
January 19th: Edgar Allan Poe  
Nina Bawden  
Patricia Highsmith  
Rex Ingamells  
Julian Barnes  
Ernesto Cardenal  
January 20th: Richard le Gallienne

Nigel Williams  
 Nancy Kress  
 Edward Hirsch  
 J. V. Jensen  
 Anna-Liisa Haakana  
 January 21st: Richard Palmer Blackmur  
 Emma Gad  
 January 22nd: Lord Byron  
 Bill Morrison  
 Claire Rayner  
 Blair Lent  
 Beatrice Webb  
 Ian Austin  
 Francis Bacon  
 Joseph Wambaugh  
 January 23rd: Stendhal  
 J. G. Farrell  
 Derek Walcott  
 Charles Harpur  
 January 24th: Ethel Turner  
 Edith Wharton  
 Desmond Morris

\* \* \* \* \*

Nineteenth century books which are now treated as children's classics were often not written specifically for children. Hans Christian Andersen did not see himself as a writer for the young. R. L. Stevenson and Mark Twain envisaged adult readers tucking into their books, as did Marryat and Rider Haggard. But as the century waned a remarkable wave of children's books began to appear.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was first published in 1901, *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Wind in the Willows* in 1908, *Daddy-Long-Legs* in 1912, *The Magic Pudding* in 1918; May Gibbs, Mary Grant Bruce, Dorothy Wall, Tolkien, A. A. Milne, Hugh Lofting, Frank Baum, 'The Hardy Boys', 'Biggles', the school stories of Angela Brazil and Enid Blyton ... at last the idea of books to mould children was giving way to the view of children as readers in their own right, deserving of a choice as rich and varied and exciting as that available to adults. The idea of children requiring a moral in all their reading like "a pill in a spoonful of jam" was being replaced by the idea that good could still overcome bad without bludgeoning young readers over the head with it. Reading, as an *entré* to the richness and variety of life, could encourage an open and questing mind.

It had taken adults centuries to gain the right to think for themselves; now this right was being extended to children.

Australian writer, Ethel Turner, was at the forefront of this exciting time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ethel Turner's granddaughter, Philippa Poole, brought out a book called *Of Love and War* which through the use of letters and diaries shared the experience of the whole family in World War Two. The Australian War Memorial magazine says of it: "*Of Love and War*, through the medium of the written language, allows the reader's imagination and introspective thoughts to enhance its portrayals. The fact that *Of Love and War* is a true unembellished account of one family's confrontation with war, and that family's survival and emotional growth, places the work in a unique and valuable category of its own.

The message of this book, like its filmed counterparts, is that war, which is

perpetuated to protect our way of life, will inexorably and inevitably change that way of life. But the love and warmth of the family for which the soldier fights can survive unscathed and, with nourishment, will provide the essential basis for the regrowth of humanity and peace.”

Philippa Poole then brought out her grandmother’s diaries which provide an interesting commentary on the Sydney of the 1890s. The ease with which Ethel Turner both wrote her books and had them accepted at first seems remarkable. But then this was the era when a sense of Australian nationalism was burgeoning and British children’s books, however attractive they might be in themselves, could not meet the need for books about Australian children. The diaries also give an interesting insight into Ethel Turner’s on-again-off-again relationship with Herbert Curlewis, true to real-life romance but not at all what Barbara Cartland would choose as a plot I’m sure. And I enjoyed her comments, on her visit to Hobart: “Watched the sun set behind Mt Wellington, orange and gold and pale yellow lights and a mist of purple over the mountains. I think I should be good if I lived here, very good. I should grow. One *can’t* be small with such a Mountain like that behind one always.” I can see Mt Wellington from my bedroom window. I’m so sorry it hasn’t made me good. Perhaps it’s a matter of familiarity ...

Ethel Turner, as Chief Sunbeamer for the *Sunday Sun*, was instrumental in bringing to fame that Australian institution, Ginger Meggs. Many of her children’s writings, too, retain an up-to-date quality such as her delightful little poem ‘Concerning Cables’ in her 1900 book *Gum Leaves*. The last three verses go:

Now, just when he thought he’d attained his desire,  
And was going to tackle it gaily,  
To Sydney was being transmitted a wire  
To appear in a great morning ‘daily’.

The shark took a bite with delight on his face,  
But quickly the morsel rejected,  
And with many a shudder and horrid grimace,  
Said, ‘To eat that I can’t be expected’.

‘The toughest of morsels I do not despise  
And to swallow most things I am able;  
But I’m shot if I’m going to swallow the lies  
That they put in a newspaper cable’.

\* \* \* \* \*

January 25th: Robert Burns  
Virginia Woolf  
W. Somerset Maugham  
Ted Allan  
Paavo Haavikko  
Marjorie Darke  
Russell Braddon  
January 26th: Jules Feiffer  
Christopher Hampton  
Ruby Langford Ginibi  
Brian Garfield  
January 27th: Lewis Carroll  
Mordecai Richler  
John Hopkins  
January 28th: Colette

Sabine Baring-Gould  
 Tim Heald  
 January 29th: Susan Coolidge  
 Bill Peet  
 Germaine Greer  
 Paddy Chayefsky  
 Thomas Paine  
 Romain Rolland  
 Allan Baillie  
 January 30th: Angela Thirkell  
 Shirley Hazzard  
 Margaret Yorke  
 January 31st: John O’Hara  
 Norman Mailer  
 Freya Stark  
 Barney Roberts  
 Zane Grey  
 Kenzaburo Oe

\* \* \* \* \*

Who is—or who was—Freya Stark? Her name suggests she should be adapting Viking Sagas for Young Readers, dutifully leaving out the goriest bits. But—not so. The real Freya was, and I cannot do better than quote from *The Sunday Tasmanian* in 1993, “Born into an age when women swanned around the house doing needlework, badgering servants and lying back and thinking of England, this small woman embarked on a series of adventures through countries isolated from the outside world.

A scholar and brilliant linguist, writer and correspondent, her inquisitive mind retained its edge right up to the day she died.

She was 100 years old.

She represented the last of that breed of doughty Englishwomen who wandered abroad in such intrepid fashion and chronicled her adventures in precise yet spirited writing.”

This is not to say that she moved outside the prejudices, inconsistencies, and forthright opinions of her time and class—but you have to admire someone who rode camels in corsets (or rode, in corsets, camels); nor did the success of her travel books ever go to her head. Writing to the novelist Paul Scott she said, “I am very happy and proud, dear Paul, that you should like my work because it is ant-like beside your Elephant so serenely pacing.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Of Baghdad in 1929 she wrote: “The people here are of all fascinating sorts—the beautiful ones being Kurds. Never have I seen more fine-looking men, so agile and strong with legs bare to the thigh and red turbans, and long hair under, and a wild aquiline handsomeness that is quite intoxicating ... ”

I plead guilty to much the same initial response. In 1971 someone gave me a bundle of the airmail edition of *The Economist*. Iran at that time was carrying out military operations against a number of Kurdish villages and the magazine saw fit to include a photo of several Kurdish men for me to look at and think mawkishly ‘What handsome men ... ’

But the situation of the Kurds is almost a staple of Amnesty International’s literature—just one mention from a 1989 report—

‘Kurds living in Iraq have suffered mass killings at the hands of the state. Among the victims have been children, infants and babies.

About 300 Kurdish children and youths were seized by Iraqi security forces in

1985, apparently as hostages to force relatives to turn themselves in. At least three are believed to have died as a result of torture that reportedly included beatings, whippings, sexual abuse and electric shocks.

Another 29 Kurds were executed without trial in January 1987. Later that year 150 Kurdish political prisoners were executed without trial in Abu Ghraib prison. Eight were school students, one was only 14 years old.

It is impossible to know how many children were among the estimated 5,000 victims of a chemical weapons attack by the Iraqi forces on the town of Halabja in northern Iraq in March 1988. Since then, despite world outrage at the use of chemical weapons, hundreds more Kurdish families in the area have been killed, and tens of thousands made homeless—their villages razed; their crops and orchards uprooted; and their springs blocked with cement.

In Turkey too Kurds of all ages suffer persecution. A 17-year-old schoolgirl from Konya was imprisoned in mid-April for two months earlier this year just for saying that she was of Kurdish origin. Safinaz Yilboga had been denounced by her teacher for this “crime” ... ’

(And the *National Geographic* had ‘Iraq’s Embattled Kurds’ in a 1975 edition and ‘Struggle of the Kurds’ in August 1992—)

I have just been reading Gerard Chaliand’s *People Without A Country* again; read in one sitting it gives the feeling of a Bosnia which has gone on for a hundred years ... remember for instance hearing about the time in 1965 when the Iraqi Army went into the village of Dakan where its people were taking refuge in a cave and lit a fire at the entrance? Remember this story “On 8 February 1974, the inhabitants of 15 Kurdish villages in the environs of the town of Kirkuk were forcibly evacuated. On 21 February, the same fate befell the Kurdish inhabitants of Kifri, a Kurdish and Turcoman town in Kirkuk Province”? Or this one on the Iranian border the same year “Signs of war are noticeable as soon as you cross the frontier. The very pass which marks the frontier is the site of a camp holding 25,000 people. Even the most elementary facilities are lacking. The people huddle here and there on either side of the road, with no shelter except their scanty baggage and a few blankets ... Ten to thirty people are buried there every morning, mainly children and old people who have succumbed to malnutrition, cold and exhaustion”? Remember how it filled our TV screens night after night, provoking outrage and the call for sanctions against Iraq? You don’t? No, I don’t either.

The history of Kurdistan is a long one. Mehrdad R. Izady in *The Kurds* says ‘Since before the dawn of recorded history the mountainous lands of the northern Middle East have been home to a distinct people whose cultural tradition is one of the most authentic and original in the world. Some vestiges of Kurdish life and culture can actually be traced back to burial rituals practiced over 50,000 years ago by people inhabiting the Shanidar Caves near Arbil in central Kurdistan.’ Kurdish writings are known from the 7th century; by the 13th century it was a well-defined country, though made up of a patchwork of principalities, beydoms, tribal areas, and nomadic pastoralists who owed few allegiances. But it faced not simply the threat of one large greedy neighbour but of three: Tsarist Russia pressed down upon its head, the Persian Empire nibbled away at its right hand and the Ottoman Empire tried to press its many small rulers into vassalage at its left hand. In the 20th century Britain and France pushed a new agenda in the region; Kendal says simply, “If Anglo-French imperialism had required an independent Kurdistan, they would have set one up, of their own accord—” They didn’t, and instead drew new borders, dividing Kurdistan between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

Kendal also says “Language is the cement of a national community and is thus a favourite target for those who seek to destroy that community.” And Kurdish has been banned in Turkey and Iran and exists within strict limits in Iraq and Syria. So extreme

were the restrictions that Kurdish peasants in Turkey could be fined five piastres every time they were heard to utter a Kurdish word and “Kurds are forced to use a language they cannot speak in all their dealings with the courts, the administration, etc.”

H. C. Armstrong wrote a book called *The Grey Wolf* in which he said: “Kurdistan was devastated by fire and set to the sword. The men were tortured and killed, the villages were burned, the harvests were torn up, the women and children were abducted or murdered. Mustafa Kemal’s Turks massacred the Kurds as ferociously as the Sultan’s Turks had massacred the Greeks, Armenians and Bulgars.”

Profoundly depressing. But language can also be a source of unity, of pride, a focus for struggle, a practical means of reclaiming identity.

Kendal says of Turkey—“The most important novelist in the whole history of Turkish literature, Yacher Kemal, whose works include *The Pillar* and *Memed My Hawk*, both of which have been translated into 20 or more foreign languages, is a Kurd.” And Ghassemlou says of Iran—“Given that Kurdish is banned and that Persian is the sole official language, many Kurdish intellectuals write and publish in Persian. The best received Persian language novel of recent years, *Mrs Ahou’s Husband*, was written by a Kurd from Kermanshah while he was in prison for a political offence.” One of the most profoundly inspiring things I have acquired over the years is the way in which people use language constantly—and it does not always matter whether they are using their own or subverting someone else’s—to reaffirm their human spirit, their dignity, their hope, their courage, their belief in a better future by holding a merciless mirror up to the failings of the present ...

*People Without A Country* says “Just as in the previous century the struggle for an independent Poland was a factor in the progress of Europe as a whole, so the struggle for a free, united, independent and socialist Kurdistan is a major force for progressive change throughout the Middle East, since it aims at a profound modification of the reactionary *status quo* which currently prevails in the area.”

I do not mind in the least what political stance the Kurds take—that is their business—but I feel sure that as the people of the Middle East, and indeed the people of the world, genuinely grapple with this issue they too will become a little wiser, a little kinder, a little more tolerant ...

\* \* \* \* \*

French writer, Jean-Richard Bloch, wrote *A Night in Kurdistan* but his Kurds, though they are Muslims, are Marco Polo’s Kurds—“And again in the mountains of this realm live a manner of people who are called Kurd, who are Nestorian and Jacobite Christians ... And they are valiant and good archers, but very evil people and rob the merchants gladly ...”

Bloch’s Kurds are brave, fierce, proud, obsessed with matters of honour, quick to take offence—and the scourge of soft, town-living Greek merchants whose only ‘crime’ is too much food, not enough exercise, and a complacent view of the world. Bloch traces the growth to manhood of a teenage boy, Saad, in one such raid and its tragic aftermath; and it is difficult to determine what is unvarnished Kurdish boy and what is Bloch rejecting his own civilised Western view of boyhood in favour of something less trammelled, less hedged round with inhibitions and manners and morals ...

Fearlessness and the respect of the older men is all—and the book is a reminder that courage is an amoral thing of itself.

It also suggests, though Bloch avoids setting his story in a wider context, that the Kurds in their disunity, (Prince Sharaf al-Din of Bitlis writing in his history *Sharafnâma* in 1596-97: “The Prophet Muhammad, disconcerted by the warlike and awesome looks of a Kurdish visitor, asked the Almighty to place a curse of disunity on the Kurds, since in unity, the Prophet feared, they will overcome the world”) their parochialism, their use of the *Koran* to underpin a very limited world view, have, in the

past, been their own worst enemies.

\* \* \* \* \*

I suspect Norman Mailer will be remembered for his extraordinary claim that what a writer needs is “balls”; personally, I would’ve thought a brain and a hand would be more useful.

And many men would disagree with him, suggesting that men with balls wrestle steers, climb mountains, drive fast cars—anything but sit peacefully pecking at a typewriter.

Years ago my mother found herself sitting beside a man whose name she thought she’d seen under some poetry in the paper. She said how much she’d enjoyed the pieces and was he the author. He turned and stared at her in something like horror. “Good God no!” he burst out. “The wife.”

Imagine, then, the turmoil in his house if his son had wanted to be a poet.

\* \* \* \* \*

L. M. Montgomery put this manly prejudice rather well:

“I am afraid that boy is going to be a poet, Mrs Dr. dear.”

“He *is* a poet now, Susan.”

“Well, you take it real calm, Mrs Dr. dear. I suppose it is the best way, when a person has the strength. I had an uncle who began by being a poet and ended up by being a tramp. Our family were dreadfully ashamed of him.”

“You don’t seem to think very highly of poets, Susan,” said Anne, laughing.

“Who does, Mrs Dr. dear?” asked Susan in genuine astonishment.

“What about Milton and Shakespeare? And the poets of the Bible?”

“They tell me Milton could not get along with his wife, and Shakespeare was no more than respectable by times. As for the Bible, of course things were different in those sacred days—although I never had a high opinion of King David, say what you will. I never knew any good to come of writing poetry, and I hope and pray that blessed boy will outgrow the tendency. If he does not—we must see what emulsion of cod-liver oil will do.”

P. G. Wodehouse also tackled this prejudice in *Meet Mr Mulliner*:

“The fact is, uncle,” he said, “I have mapped out a career for myself on far different lines. I am a poet.”

“A poet? When did you feel this coming on?”

“Shortly after my twenty-second birthday.”

“Well,” said the old man, overcoming his first natural feeling of repulsion, “I don’t see why that should stop us getting together. I use quite a lot of poetry in my business.”

“I fear I could not bring myself to commercialise my Muse.”

“Young man,” said Mr Briggs, “if an onion with a head like yours came into my factory, I would refuse to pickle it.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I wonder if the Ern Malley Hoax could’ve worked without this deep-seated sense, in some circles, that writing poetry is effete, time-wasting, decadent even? Given the kind of home young ‘Ern’ was represented as coming from it seems quite natural that he would’ve hidden his efforts to write poetry.

\* \* \* \* \*

Norman Mailer, like many American males, could not forego a ‘war book’ thus bolstering the perceived wisdom that men write about ‘big’ subjects such as war, whether or not they have experienced it at first hand. Of course it is a fallacy that women have not experienced war and therefore are debarred from writing about it. I would think that the women of Tibet, East Timor, Nagorno Karabakh, Bosnia or Kurdistan know more about war than most white Western males.

Florence Nightingale, in her first winter in the Crimea, witnessed two thousand deaths; Australia's death toll in the Vietnam War was five hundred.

So I can't help wondering if it is a 'rite of passage' or whether most men writers come, each in their turn, to the moment where they think 'Maybe I could do something as good as Hemingway?'

But I suspect that women, when they do write about war, resist having their book classified as a 'war book'—instead it comes out as a romance, a family saga, as oral history, drama, mainstream, even travel, anything but war—because war books, as a whole, do not have the reputation of being well-written. Certainly there are the Hemingways and the Tolstoys and the Mailers but the genre is leavened by the thousands of men who put pedantic pen to unwilling paper just so their experiences—and the experiences of their mates, their battalions, their country—will not be forgotten. Reviewing *Big-Noting: The Heroic Theme in Australian War Writing* by Robin Gerster, Michael McKernan says "Australian writing about war has failed to produce great literature and the best Australian writers have rarely turned to war for inspiration.

Therefore Robin Gerster's decision to examine Australian war literature was bound to pose difficulties for him, as much of the material of his study would be, frankly, second-rate ... He finds his troops a rather poor bunch and has written a book to tell us that, on the whole, Australian war literature is unexciting, unimaginative and exaggerated."

\* \* \* \* \*

- February 1st: Leonard Gribble  
H. C. Bailey  
Muriel Spark
- February 2nd: James Joyce  
Hannah More  
Havelock Ellis  
Ayn Rand
- February 3rd: Gertrude Stein  
James Michener  
Lao She  
Rosamund Lehmann  
Simone Weil
- February 4th: François Rabelais  
Edwin John Pratt  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer  
Sheila Kaye-Smith  
Jean Bedford  
Russell Hoban  
Betty Friedan  
Harry Whittington
- February 5th: Captain W. E. Johns  
Basil Copper  
Margaret Millar  
Susan Hill  
William Burroughs  
Andrew M. Greeley

\* \* \* \* \*

Captain W. E. Johns admitted to chafing under the restrictions imposed on his language by writing for children. 'Just think of the things I am not allowed. No sex. No hard liquor. The only time I made my chaps drink anything stronger than orange juice my sales fell by ten per cent. Then think of swear words. One publisher wouldn't let me

use any expletives at all at first. But he relented and agreed to ‘Oh dear’ and ‘Good gracious’. For stories about the Air Force, mind you! Imagine a chap messing up a landing, finishing up in a damned tree, and then simply saying—Good gracious! Well, it’s not lifelike, is it?’

Not that all servicemen swore. Admired New Zealander, Air Vice Marshal Sir Keith Park M.C. D.F.C., is remembered for various things including the invariable dignity of his language.

(Dr Spock was at pains to reassure parents that their children would probably grow out of ‘potty talk’ by about the age of four; what he didn’t think to mention was that it sometimes comes back later in life and with greater virulence.)

But it was not whether Biggles used stronger language off the page than on that intrigued me when I was young. No, it was the question: when did Biggles find the time to go to the toilet?

Now, I think Johns was quite right to leave his young readers guessing. I’ve just been reading a book set in the New York Police Department in which the reader is told in graphic detail exactly what the heroine produces every time she goes to the toilet. Distinctly off-putting to read over lunch.

And can you imagine it—

“Better go before we take off, Algie,” said Biggles, slipping on his gauntlets. “Don’t want you getting caught short if we run into von Stalhein again.”

Or—

“By jove, old chap, that’s the toughest recce I’ve ever been on,” said Lord ‘Bertie’ Lissie. “I never should have eaten all those figs last night.”

\* \* \* \* \*

That f--- word, which Johns of course never used, is said to have originated in the courts of England where it was legal shorthand when prostitutes were arraigned—For Use of Carnal Knowledge—so it is a bit hard to see it as the appropriate term to describe the weather, the people next door, the dog over the road, the car that won’t start, the spouse, or the hydro bill.

The advantage of that editorial rectitude which kept it all to a discreet d---d or bl-- -- was that it kept a brake on the more exuberant writer. Who wants their page to end up looking like a square of mattress ticking?

\* \* \* \* \*

Johns was a practical man and a keen gardener. He used his old typewriter ribbons to tie up his tomatoes.

\* \* \* \* \*

He is a condemned now for his racism but a blanket condemnation is not in order. He certainly didn’t subscribe to the English belief that “wogs begin at Calais” as he loved France and its people and spent most of his holidays there.

But he shared that British horror of anyone who might be designated ‘greasy’—by which he usually meant people from the Levant. (If Jesus had a hard time in Galilee I suspect he would’ve had a much harder time in suburban England.) His attitude to brown was more complex; the two Polynesian children in *Biggles in the South Seas* steal the book; the old rubber-tapper, Aaron Speakdetruf, in *Biggles and the Cruise of the Condor* was to my mind the most memorable character in the book (he hopes that if he walks for long enough he will eventually get home to Trinidad) but Johns treats the South American Indians without individuality and without sympathy ...

And where do we draw the line? Should we ban *A Town Like Alice* because of its repeated references to ‘boongs’? Should we keep Patrick White off our library shelves because he mentions a ‘big buck nigger’ in *The Ham Funeral* and refers to Alf Dubbo as an ‘abo’?

\* \* \* \* \*

Johns, like all writers who write of horrible things for children, faced the constant dilemma: if he took out the horrible parts so as not to give children nightmares he ran the risk of suggesting that war was all courage and excitement and glory. He had experienced Gallipoli, the Balkans, the trenches of the Western Front, and he had no illusions. He wrote: "Take ten million men at random from between those man-made boundaries which we call frontiers, and ask them if they want to leave their homes to fight, perhaps die. Not one will answer 'Yes'. Yet when the time comes they will go, straining to be at the throats of other poor fools as helpless as themselves. Why will they go? They will go because the handful of men who control their destinies will, by the subtle means at their disposal, by lies and lies, and still more lies, make it impossible for them to stay at home without appearing contemptible cravens. Being one of the fools, I shall probably go myself, and presently find myself destroying the home of a man who has done no more harm to me than I to him. Oh no; I have no delusions left about war. When you have seen such sights as I have, you won't either."

\* \* \* \* \*

February 6th: Keith Waterhouse  
Pramoedya Ananta Toer  
Lada Galina  
Irmgard Keun

February 7th: Charles Dickens  
Beverley Farmer  
Dom Hélder Câmara  
Sinclair Lewis

\* \* \* \* \*

Dickens and Tolstoy are beloved of feminist critics for the blatancy with which their wives poured out their children, hushed them at the great man's study door, and received little or no recognition for their sacrifices. Women writers, on the other hand, if they wanted to succeed were virtually condemned to forego families and Jane Austen, the Brontës, and George Eliot provide powerful ammunition to support this argument. Of course there was Elizabeth Gaskell who had six children (two of whom died) and managed half-a-dozen novels, an acclaimed biography, and dozens of short stories (short meaning fifty pages or more), though it was never easy.

But the thing which intrigued me when I came to look into it a bit was the number of men writers who also forewent family life. Even a hasty list of childless men includes—

Hans Christian Andersen  
D. H. Lawrence  
Jonathon Swift  
Congreve  
Patrick White  
John Keats  
Christopher Isherwood  
Edward Lear  
Henry James  
Guy de Maupassant  
Proust  
Raymond Chandler  
G. K. Chesterton  
Edgar Allan Poe  
Kahlil Gibran  
Voltaire  
J. M. Barrie

Lawrence Durrell  
Lytton Strachey  
Sumner Locke Elliot  
A. E. Housman  
Algernon Blackwood  
Randolph Stow  
Flaubert  
Noel Coward  
Gore Vidal  
E. M. Forster  
Stephen Crane

William Blake ... and I'm sure you can add to my list.

Of course the purist might argue that men sometimes have unacknowledged children. True. But unacknowledged children don't take up a lot of writing time.

And leaving aside Tolstoy and Dickens it doesn't become a great deal more quiverfull.

P. G. Wodehouse had an adopted daughter, George Orwell an adopted son. Captain W. E. Johns had a son, Erle Stanley Gardner had a daughter, Ibsen had a legitimate son and one he preferred not to know about. Banjo Paterson had two children, Shakespeare three.

Which all raises the intriguing question: are book characters in some way substitutes for family? Are childless *people* more likely to write? Do writers with families tend to write more (the economic imperative) or less (the lack of time)? And would they, childless writers, have written differently had they had a family?

\* \* \* \* \*

Angus MacVicar writes: "I only wish that publishers of Scott and Dickens had stipulated in their contracts that each of their novels should consist of, say, 60,000 words instead of the hundreds of thousands which straggle endlessly across pages and cause most young people to stop reading before the narrative takes hold of them ... "

"A recent number of the Winchester College magazine has confirmed a suspicion that my youthful allergy to certain 'classical' authors is by no means unique. It published a census of home reading by fifth-formers who not only named their unfavourite authors in order of precedence but also listed the most boring books imposed upon them by well-meaning masters.

Dickens topped the poll of unfavourite authors, followed by Jane Austen, George Eliot, John Bunyan, Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, James Boswell and Tolkien."

\* \* \* \* \*

"What are you reading?"

"Pickwick."

"That's a book that always makes me hungry," said Phil. "There's so much good eating in it. The characters seem always to be revelling on ham and eggs and milk punch ... "

(*Anne of the Island* by L. M. Montgomery)

Are they? And how much of the book talks of food or drink? I decided to test it for myself. It has 602 parched pages and 143 which mention food or drink or both (give or take a page or two; my mind may have wandered). So what is average? It isn't something anyone ever seems to have researched.

Yet, somehow, I had expected more. I think it is rather that the *sense* of eating and drinking is always there, always on people's minds. Waiters hover. Characters, as soon as they rise, think of breakfast. When the day's business is done they repair to a meal. Milk punch is rarely mentioned but the reader comes away believing that it formed a necessary part of the characters' lives ...

\* \* \* \* \*

When I started the calendar I wondered if I would find thriller writers clustered under Leo and humourists under Sagittarius and the most complex novelists under Gemini. Not so. But Dickens, born in the Chinese Year of the Monkey, does seem to fit the description in many respects.

Such people are “forgiving, sportive, outgoing and sociable. At the same time they are quick-witted, flexible and innovative. In general they are helpful, but at times can be selfish and egotistical.”

Except that it’s hard to call him forgiving when it comes to his unfortunate wife.

\* \* \* \* \*

February 8th: John Ruskin  
Jules Verne  
Judson Jerome  
Elizabeth Bishop  
Martin Buber  
Nigel Krauth  
Henry Roth  
Elizabeth Harrower

\* \* \* \* \*

When East Timor first came up in the United Nations General Assembly several delegates had to send out for an atlas to know where it might be. They wouldn’t have needed to resort to this if they’d been brought up on Jules Verne’s *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. Captain Nemo passes by Murray Island, now famous as the birthplace of Eddie Mabo, voyages along the southern Papuan coast, and “On the 13th January Captain Nemo arrived in the Sea of Timor, and recognized the island of that name in 122° longitude.”

Despite his position in science-fiction I don’t really see this book as being about the development of the submarine. Instead, I think it is his panegyric to French exploration, French science, French museums ... this was the age when Europeans spread out across the world like locusts, gathering up plants and seed-pods, fossils, beetles, butterflies, birds (alive and stuffed), mammals and reptiles, even people were gathered into the net and brought back to Europe to go on display. How many note-taking hours did Verne spend in institutions devoted to natural history? The names roll off his pen in an endless litany—actinae, cydippes, medusae, balaenopterons, pteropods, palaemons, malacopterygians, odontognathes ...

And then there are the explorers—Dumont D’Urville, La Perouse, D’Entrecasteaux, Freycinet, Baudin, Bougainville ...

James Backhouse Walker in an 1888 paper says “It is probably no exaggeration to say that it is to the hostility of France, and her action in America, that we owe in no small measure the British colonisation of Australia” and “Nor were the English the first to entertain the design of colonising the new lands. So far back as the year 1756, an eminent and learned French advocate, M. le President Charles de Brosses, in his *Histoire des Navigations aux Terres Australes*, had strongly urged upon the Government of France the wisdom of establishing a French colony in the South seas” (de Brosses favoured a mixture of convicts and foundlings for the colony) but La Pérouse sailed into Botany Bay on the 26th January 1788, just days too late. Phillip was in Sydney Cove. But “Still France did not relinquish her dreams of colonisation ... There is reason to think that the French designs, if ever distinctly formulated, pointed to the southern extremity of Van Diemen’s Land as the locality for a settlement”; again the French were pipped on the post, this time by a panicky Governor King who, realising that as Tasmania was now known to be an island, “it might now be fairly contended that the island could not form part of the territory of New South Wales, and that the English,

having no prior right of discovery, could not make good their claim, while the French expeditions, by their explorations and surveys, had established a superior title.”

“The names which stud our southern coast, and are familiar in our mouths as household words,—Bruny Island, D’Entrecasteaux Channel, Recherche Bay, Port Esperance, River Huon, Cape Raoul, and others,—stand a perpetual monument to the memory of the French navigators” ... and Baudin has a cape, Freycinet a peninsula ...

Bougainville didn’t get as far as Australia.

Naturalist, Ian Strange, tells the story of Bougainville’s own settlement. “One young Frenchman particularly interested in the Malouines (Falkland Islands) was the nobleman Antoine Louis de Bougainville. Bitter after the loss of Quebec and the cession of Canada to Britain, he viewed the prospects of a new colony in the Malouines as recompense for the blow struck at France. Preparing an expedition in secret, de Bougainville left St Malo in September 1763 with two vessels, *Eagle* and *Sphinx*, bound for the islands. On their way south the little expedition called at Montevideo to load cattle, horses, pigs, goats, sheep and poultry for the new colony. On 31 January 1764 they sighted the Jason Island group and, following the coast to the east, came across ‘la grande baye des Iles Malouines’, known today as Berkeley Sound.

No other ship had sailed into this sound; what lay in store amidst the rolling landscape that now bordered their passage? If weather conditions were favourable, there would have been a cloudless sky, giving the sea a lovely blue-green cast, the surrounding hills an array of browns, reds and greys and the immediate coastline a rich green. The would-be settlers must have looked upon the islands with considerable excitement and expectations. Slowly feeling their way, the ships would have anchored at the head of what we now know as Berkeley Sound, perhaps in the lee of Long Island. From this anchorage a small boat would have pulled along the edge of the coast, through the narrow entrance and into the snug inner harbour or Careenage as it is known today. On 3 February 1764 a landing party inspected the new land.

Large flocks of birds flew over the landing party and ducks and geese walked the shores. Dom Pernety, botanist on the expedition, recorded that the land was covered with grass a foot or so high and that walking was difficult on account of the mounds of entangled roots and vegetation lying beneath the grass. The shores, Pernety noted, were covered with ‘bullrushes and cornflags’ which looked like small trees. Today there is little evidence of tussock grass on the shores of Berkeley Sound, but almost certainly this is what Pernety saw. The small boat party, which included de Bougainville and Pernety, made camp on the higher ground above a stream. Good water was plentiful, the land was covered with lush vegetation for the feeding of their stock and game was abundant.”

The little settlement of Port Louis thrived. In the meantime Britain set down its own settlement at Port Egmont on Saunders Island off West Falkland which was a less attractive site. But Bougainville was restless—and his King was reluctant to be drawn into growing British-Spanish rivalry in the Americas. The end came when Bougainville sold his small settlement, lock, stock and barrel, to Spain for the equivalent of about £24,000.

But, as Strange says, “The Spanish governor, Felipe Ruiz Puente, his commander and his minister, did not have the same enthusiasm as the departing French colonists for their new possession. With the summer over and the days shortening with the approach of winter, they were not impressed. They complained of the state of the settlement ... and of the islands themselves: ‘esta miserable tierra ... todos los dias son nublados’. (This miserable land ... every day is cloudy).”

It is a sentiment Spanish and Argentine visitors have been echoing ever since. To want to *own* land is not the same as *loving* it. And the French-built buildings in the settlement—well, some of them are still standing ...

Bougainville meanwhile sailed out into the Pacific to give his name to an island there, though it may have had a perfectly good one already, and a prickly purple climber which flourishes in thousands of Australian gardens.

\* \* \* \* \*

February 9th: Brendan Behan  
Alice Walker  
J. M. Coetzee  
Hugo Achugar  
Feng Jikai  
Amy Lowell

February 10th: Charles Lamb  
Bertolt Brecht  
Howard Spring  
Fleur Adcock  
Alex Comfort  
Julian Rathbone  
Boris Pasternak  
Frances Moore Lappe

February 11th: Mabel Esther Allen  
Jane Yolen  
Roy Fuller  
Maryse Conde

February 12th: Judy Blume  
Charles Darwin  
Lou Andreas-Salomé  
Mulk Raj Anand  
George Meredith  
Jan Willem van de Wetering  
Andrew Garve

\* \* \* \* \*

The thought of being descended from apes horrified people; even more horrible, to many, was the suggestion that evolution did away with the need for a Hand upon the Tiller. Of course it didn't do any such thing. If anything, it proved the opposite. Why did one ape, sharing the same physical and mental equipment, acquire the ability to speak and speculate, deduct and destruct, while others facing the same stresses of survival showed almost no change? Why did one acquire a measure of free will while the others remained, largely, the prisoners of instinct?

If survival was the key then it could be said that the chances of survival for the Mountain Gorilla would be marginally improved if it held a seat in the United Nations.

To give one species the chance to make real decisions about its destiny was a daunting step to take. How would it respond as its numbers increased and it truly acquired, by force of intellect, dominion over other creatures? Would it find the means to live in harmony or would it turn one small planet into a charnel-house? No computer program, no mind, no vision, could predict the outcome—because each human was to become more than the sum of its parts, it was also to become the sum of all its interactions.

What would happen?

Was it something of sufficient value to be developed *ad infinitum* across the universe (and an expanding universe at that) or would it be a disaster in microcosm and needing to be confined within time and space?

I wonder if Darwin would have dared suggest we might be the Primary Experiment—not only Evolved Apes but Cosmic Guinea Pigs?

\* \* \* \* \*

February 13th: Georges Simenon  
Leslie Greener  
Judith Rodriguez  
Eleanor Farjeon  
February 14th: Daniel Corkery  
Thomas Busse  
Leslie Grinsell  
February 15th: Jeremy Bentham  
Bruce Dawe  
Anthony Gilbert  
B. M. Gill  
Kenji Inoue  
February 16th: Hal Porter  
Tom Gallacher  
Peter Porter  
February 17th: Ruth Rendell  
A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson  
Chaim Potok  
Elleston Trevor  
Barry Humphries

\* \* \* \* \*

Banjo Paterson couldn't wait to get to the (Second) Boer War; he finally managed his passage as a war correspondent. But his joy in being at the scene of the action received a jolt when South Africa's best-known novelist, Olive Schreiner, took him to task.

"You Australians and New Zealanders and Canadians," she told him, "I cannot understand it at all, why you come here light-heartedly to shoot down other colonists of whom you know nothing—it is terrible. Such fine men, too—fine fellows. I went to Green Point, and saw your men in camp; oh, they were fine men, and to think that they are going out to kill and be killed, just to please the capitalists! There was one officer—oh, a fine man, so like a Boer, he might have been a Boer commandant. It is terrible—such men to come and fight against those fighting for their liberty and their country. The English Tommy Atkins goes where he is sent—he fights because he is ordered, but you people—you are all volunteers! Why have you come? ... You say that England was at war and you wished to show the world that when the mother country got into a war the Colonies were prepared to take their place beside her! Yes, but you ought to ask, you ought to make inquiries before you come over. You Australians do not understand. This is a capitalists' war! They want to get control of the Rand and the mines."

Conan Doyle's mother would have agreed; she took her son to task for rushing off with similar joy as a war correspondent. She too saw the underlying motive to be greed—and having recently read Geoffrey Wheatcroft's *The Randlords* I can now say that Mrs Doyle was a very sensible woman.

\* \* \* \* \*

Colin Roderick in his biography trails the fascinating coat-tail: Paterson's horse was called Myles na Gopaleen.

I jumped to the conclusion that Paterson must have been an admirer of caustic Irish novelist and columnist Brian O'Nolan *alias* Flann O'Brien *alias* Myles na Gopaleen.

Not so. He wasn't yet born.

I was in a second-hand bookshop one day and asked if they had any of Myles' collections from his column in the *Irish Times*; unfortunately not, but the man in the

shop said he much preferred his fiction such as *At-Swim-Two-Birds* whereas I preferred his—well, I hesitate to call it fact—but the fact remains that, after reading Myles na Gopaleen, most other columnists (today I might exempt Phillip Adams—tomorrow, well, perhaps Patsy Crawford—) seem either bland or twee or dull.

I still don't know what prompted Banjo Paterson to call his horse Myles na Gopaleen—and what did he call him for short, Goppy?—but I assume he went to the same source as Brian O'Nolan: a character in the 1860 play *The Colleen Bawn* by Dion Boucicault.

\* \* \* \* \*

Henrik Ibsen, when asked for his feelings on the Boer War, said: 'Remember that the Boers themselves took possession of the country illegally by driving out the original inhabitants. And they came only as a half-civilized people not with the purpose of spreading civilization. And now a more civilized people, the British, come and force their way in. That is no worse than—indeed, it is not as bad as—what the Boers have done. The British are simply taking what the Boers themselves have stolen.'

What a pity he wasn't asked to define 'civilization'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Was there a man writing at that time who did not aspire to be a correspondent and go to South Africa? Sometimes I think not. Also kicking up their heels in South Africa were Winston Churchill and Edgar Wallace.

Wallace later cast his eye on what he saw as Britain's civilizing mission in West Africa in *Sanders of the River*—'A wonderful people, the English,' he (Sanders) said airily. 'Old Man Limbrili steals British subjects, and I report it. "Very sad," says England. He makes me dance on the original good-intention stones of Hades. "Treat it as a joke," says England; but when I point out that these stones assay one ounce ten penny-weights of refined gold, and that we've hopped upon the richest reef in Central Africa, there's an army here in just six months!'

\* \* \* \* \*

February 18th: Len Deighton  
Toni Morrison  
Istvan Szabo  
February 19th: Jackie Curtin  
Lee Harding  
Carson McCullers  
Margaret Giordano  
February 20th: Bill Knox  
Dame Mary Durack  
Alex La Guma  
February 21st: Malcolm Saville  
George Birimisa  
W. H. Auden  
Erma Bombeck  
Anais Nin  
February 22nd: Fay Weldon  
Seán O'Faoláin  
John Shaw Nielson  
Edna St. Vincent Millay  
H. E. Todd  
Joanna Russ  
James Russell Lowell  
February 23rd: Samuel Pepys  
Norman Lindsay

Erich Kästner  
Carole Adler

\* \* \* \* \*

Norman Lindsay once described “the early passion every small boy has to build a small pleasure house, usually of chaff bags, and aspire to live in it in preference to his home.”

I think the passion comes gender-free.

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently, I was re-reading *The Magic Pudding*; I had forgotten the violence—if I’d ever noticed particularly. What impressed me so much as a child was the sense that ‘people’ (which included trouser-wearing penguins, bowler-hatted dogs and nattily-dressed koalas) can be gloriously happy with next to nothing, just goodwill, a campfire, and something to fill the hungry tum.

When friends say “Oh, you must get a freezer—or a fax—or an answering machine—or whatever—” I usually say apologetically that I can’t afford them.

True. But why do I apologise—instead of saying cheerfully “I believe in *The Magic Pudding*”?

Because, deep down, I have always believed that happiness resides in material simplicity—yet, saying that, suggests either presumption or a holier-than-thou attitude?

The young man in Margaret Kennedy’s *The Constant Nymph* says “Bowls lead to houses. Houses are mainly to keep bowls in.” So they are. But people who don’t want houses, let alone houses full of bowls, like John the Baptist, are out of fashion and, indeed, gravely misunderstood. Because we all came from cultures which were essentially ‘house cultures’ and all that involves, we have all come to Australia with the equation firmly fixed in our heads—shelter = house = home—so much so that we have never truly been able to empathise with the Aboriginal belief that shelter and home are two different things; a shelter is simply that and the land is home. What a revolution it would be if we were to begin to dismantle our equation!

\* \* \* \* \*

February 24th: George Moore  
David Williamson  
Karolina Svetlá  
Ralph McInerny  
Wilhelm Grimm  
February 25th: Anthony Burgess  
Mary Coyle  
February 26th: Paul White  
Chaim Bermant  
David Edgar  
Christopher Marlowe (chr)  
Lady Elizabeth Asquith  
Heinz Arndt  
Gabrielle Lord  
Victor Hugo  
February 27th: John Steinbeck  
Lawrence Durrell  
Irwin Shaw  
Kenneth Koch  
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow  
Peter De Vries

\* \* \* \* \*

Grahame Greene said in conversation with Marie-Francoise Allain “For me—

perhaps I shouldn't say this—Lawrence Durrell and his cloying prose is the Charles Morgan of his generation.”

I wonder, though, if the closed inward-looking rather decadent society Durrell chose to write about in his *Alexandria Quartet* would have been well-served by Greene's spare prose or would it have lost the quality Durrell seems to capture so well with his 'cloying prose' ... and who, I wondered, was Charles Morgan?

\* \* \* \* \*

Morgan wrote his first book *The Gunroom* while he was interned in Holland during the First World War; the manuscript went to the bottom of the North Sea when the ship taking him home to England hit a mine. He set to work and re-wrote his book and saw it published in 1919.

Edgar Wallace said of it: “We now have a novel, written by Mr. Charles Langbridge Morgan who shows the method of training the young midshipmen in a manner which both surprises and alarms.”

*The Gunroom* refers to the midshipmen's mess in the British Navy and the jargon by which the young men are referred to is unpleasant—snotties, warts—but even more unpleasant is the bullying to which they are subjected.

‘John began to crawl along the floor. They were shouting at him to go faster. “Get a move on. Good dog. Good dog. ---- ---- ! the beggar isn't trying. Let him have it Howdray.” A cane sang through the air and fell upon John's legs, sang and fell again.’ The book caused a furore in Navy circles, questions were asked about the treatment of young cadets, and *The Gunroom* is credited with improving life on board ship—but the problem has never gone away. Bullying at Duntroon, a young man killed at a military college in the USA ... it does not strike me as remarkable that the military is always going to attract more young men with a penchant for bullying than, for instance, veterinary science or accounting ...

Charles Morgan, talking to a Quaker friend after the Armistice said, “My sense of the moment tells me you were wrong—and even now I think I should volunteer again; but my sense of eternity tells me that you were right.”

Cloying prose though? It is not a description which would've leapt to my mind. His writing is very uneven, varying between unvarnished documentary or travelogue to moments of emotional strength to occasional soliloquies on the technique of writing—‘The wastepaper basket is a good, silent friend whom it is folly to despise’—but I would not be put off by Greene's put down ... and I wonder if there was not a *wee* bit of professional jealousy at work there as Morgan took out the James Tait Black with *The Voyage*, the Prix Femina with *Portrait in a Mirror*, and the Hawthornden Prize with *The Fountain*.

\* \* \* \* \*

February 28th: Michel de Montaigne  
Stephen Spender  
Glyn Jones  
John Montague  
Robin Klein  
James Mellon  
Eithne Strong  
February 29th: Liu Shaotang  
Howard Nemerov  
March 1st: Lytton Strachey  
F. Tennyson Jesse  
Robert Lowell  
March 2nd: Sholom Aleichem  
Sir Thomas Bodley

\* \* \* \* \*

Elizabeth I sent her fleet to sack Cadiz and, as we used to be told in school, ‘to singe the King of Spain’s beard’. Her ships then turned for home but, as Lytton Strachey writes: “As they coasted back along the shores of Portugal, they could not resist the raid upon the unlucky town of Faro (on the south coast of Portugal). The plunder was considerable, and it included one unexpected item—the priceless library of Bishop Jerome Osorius.”

Elizabeth looked around among her courtiers to see who had earned a favour, who might need placating, and “Bodley should have it—it was the very thing. And Bodley did have it: and such was the curious beginning of the great Library that bears his name.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Georgette Heyer, in *Arabella*, when an excursion to view the Elgin Marbles is mooted: Lord Bridlington, not averse from any aggrandizement to his audience, began in his consequential way to expound his views on the probable artistic value of the fragments, a recreation which would no doubt have occupied him for a considerable period of time had Mr Beaumaris not cut him short by saying, in his most languid way: “The pronouncements of West, and of Sir Thomas Laurence, must, I imagine, have established the aesthetic worth of these antiquities. As to the *propriety* of their acquisition, we may, each one of us, hold to our own opinion.”

Britain has resisted returning the Elgin Marbles to Greece on the grounds that the Athens’ smog is pitting and ruining those parts of the Parthenon they *didn’t* remove. But that is not a good or sufficient reason for Oxford to retain the good Bishop’s “priceless library”.

\* \* \* \* \*

Barbara Pym once wrote: “Good wine and old books seem to go together.” I will give the wine a miss but I have a weakness for old books. It’s not that I expect them to be better written; often they prove to be appallingly repetitive or long-winded or they bludgeon the poor reader with an out-of-date moral ... no, I think it’s something about their feel, their look, their mystery ...

St Francis was against his Order acquiring a library; not because he was against books or against knowledge but because he understood that acquiring knowledge could become an end in itself, and the library could become a retreat from the needs of the world or the struggle with the weaknesses within the self.

Clive Sanson wrote a poem on the ‘Librarian’ of Assisi—

I know, I know. It is a venial sin  
To give one’s heart to calf and vellum  
And love them more than what’s within.

Senses must be subdued to will  
As Francis says. They should be meek,  
They should be dutiful and still;

Or if they dance with will’s consent,  
Dance at God’s handiwork, not man’s.  
Brothers, I know, and I repent.

And yet one touch, one smell of leather,  
One sight of illuminated page,  
And they go leaping all together

Oh, I know! There is something about holding an old book. What did that

long-dead author feel when it appeared in brown calf, or maroon boards, with gold lettering, and illustrated frontispiece? The sudden leap of the senses, the hope, the knowledge that weary months with spluttering nibs were all worthwhile ... and then the waiting ... the public, will they like it ... readers, will they write ... publishers, will they request a second book, a third ...

\* \* \* \* \*

If reviews sell books then country areas (and Tasmania) could be expected to buy less books. But I'm not sure this is the case. Country people (and Tasmanians) may have less to spend on books but they still read.

I enjoy reviews but I must admit I've never bought a book on the strength of one. I try unknown writers in the library, sometimes I hunt for something on the strength of a friend saying "Oh, you must try so-and-so—her latest book is really good/very funny/I couldn't put it down". But most of my reading matter is picked up second-hand on stalls or bookshops. It's partly a question of money—\$19-95 is a fifth of my monthly income—and partly that I prefer to read a book before putting it on my shelf, because my shelf is made up of books I know I'll read again. So if I pay 20c at a stall I don't mind if it turns out to be something I don't want. I divide my books into friends (as L. M. Montgomery's Anne says—"All the books on our shelves are *friends*"), presents, which sometimes move on to become friends and sometimes get kept for sentimental reasons, and resources—those books I feel sure I will need to consult one day.

In passing, have you ever noticed what a lot you can learn from reviews? If someone says of a book that it has "lyrical sentences" or "brilliant use of language" you know it's going to be a dull read; after all, who passes on a favourite book to a friend with "you'll love it—it has lyrical sentences"?

\* \* \* \* \*

Michael Dirda once said: "It does seem to me that critics and reviewers can be loosely divided into two camps: those, like (Edmund) Wilson, who never let you forget that they are judge, jury and, if need be, executioner; and those, like V.S. Pritchett, who humble themselves before a poem or novel, hoping it will reveal its secrets to them. The first kind of reader aims to absorb the book; the second hopes to be absorbed *by* the book."

\* \* \* \* \*

A Polish friend living in Italy once said in a letter "Here there are much people who never buy and read books. And how is it in Australia?"

What to respond? Oh, not bad really. Of course our writers habitually grumble about the smallness of our market. It seems to be par for the course. Like the Great Pommy Whinge we also have the Great Writers' Whinge; whereas I think of Iceland and know we're really pretty well off.

In a *National Geographic* of November 1951 I came upon this information: "Today, all children between the ages of 7 and 15 in Iceland receive free instruction. Mobile schools travel through the sparsely settled farm areas. They prepare potential subscribers for the tremendous amount of reading material published in Iceland—more new books per capita than any other country in the world.

In Reykjavík five daily newspapers and many weeklies print enough copies to supply one for every man, woman, and child in the city. The Government's publishing society supplies books at cost price.

At that, each Icelander spends approximately \$50 a year for books in his native language. The ones I saw on local shelves included *Sagan af Huckleberry Finn*, *Robinson Kruso*, *Hans og Greta*, and *Mys og Menn* by Steinbeck.

In addition to books published in Icelandic, one of which, *Independent People*, by Halldór Laxness, was a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection, many foreign books are imported. (Halldór Laxness was to win the Nobel Prize in 1955.) The parlors of the

farmsteads often display, in addition to the Bible bound in sharkskin and silver, a well-used selection of world literature in the original languages.”

Maybe writers, instead of whingeing, should be doing more to ascertain how much people spend a year on books, what farmers like to read, whether the bulk of people’s reading is home-grown or imported.

\* \* \* \* \*

- March 3rd: Michael Molloy  
Edward Thomas
- March 4th: Alan Sillitoe  
Hans Eysenck
- March 5th: James Forsyth  
Lady Augusta Gregory  
Mem Fox  
Christopher Hibbert
- March 6th: Elizabeth Barrett Browning  
Ring Lardner  
Gabriel García Márquez

\* \* \* \* \*

Norman Lindsay believed that Robert Browning would’ve written more and written better if he had not been tied to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Lindsay said “The masculine imperative has no defence against the insidious compulsion imposed by feeble, sickly and very often infantile femininity”. I wonder what morsel of infantile femininity looked after the querulous and decrepit Lindsay? Equally, this is no real excuse for Browning. Undoubtedly he felt tied at times to his semi-invalid wife but he continued to write and publish for *twenty-eight years* after her death. So if he is not much read these days it cannot be blamed on his wife.

It could also be said that Elizabeth Barrett Browning would’ve written more and written better if she had not been coughing her life away on a sofa.

Her famous line “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways” is now, like Shakespeare’s “O Romeo, Romeo, Wherefore art thou Romeo?” more likely to be sniggered at than seen as romantic. Yet Robert Browning saw her ‘Sonnets from the Portuguese’ as too good not to publish. So, private emotions being seen as private business in Victorian times, they resorted to the fiction that the poems were a translation of a set of love poems written to absent sailor, adventurer, and poet Luis Camões (Camoens) by his alleged home-bound lover, Catarina de Ataíde (lady-in-waiting to Queen Catarina). Camões, author of the epic poem ‘Os Lusíads’, understood very well the effects of long absence, writing—“The lover transforms himself into the thing loved by virtue of long imagining—”

Even so, I don’t think anyone was fooled.

\* \* \* \* \*

More interesting to my way of thinking is a book written in 1971 called *New Portuguese Letters* by ‘the three Marias’—Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho da Costa. They all lived and worked in Lisbon and took as their centrepiece the five letters written by a young Portuguese nun Mariana Alcoforada (who was placed in a convent in Beja when she was sixteen years old by her widowed father) to a Frenchman Noel Bouton. He had come to Portugal with Louis XIV’s troops, ostensibly to liberate the country from Spain but in reality to further French influence. Bouton, after a brief love affair, abandoned Mariana and returned to life and honour, becoming Marshall of France.

The thread which runs through her letters, written in 1667 and 1668, is that love is not enough, women are made powerless to influence their destinies.

The three women met twice a week and shared poems, stories, letters, monologues,

‘reports’, and homilies, which draw on Mariana’s life and letters but range over the modern experience of Portuguese women left behind by men who emigrate in search of work, men away in the army, the still limited opportunities open to women, the fate of women who give in to passion; as the writers put it—“passion, feminine seclusion, and sisterhood; the act of writing; man and woman as strangers to each other; the couple; a national and personal sense of isolation and abandonment; hatred, separation, war; religious and moral prejudices and taboos; guilt; the pursuit of joy and pleasure; the community of the secluded; ingenuous love and sophisticated love letters; the constants of our national history” ...

The book was immediately banned and the women sent to trial—being rescued not by the legal process but by the coup of April 1974.

Not that banning books in Portugal was anything new; ‘subversion’, real or imagined, kept the censors busy.

In 1952 Henrique Galvão published *Império Ultramarina Português*, a critique of colonialism in Angola, which helped to send him to prison for life (though he later managed to escape). António de Figueiredo was exiled from Mozambique and his book *Portugal and its Empire: The Truth* was banned from the empire. General Spínola had his book *Portugal e o Futuro* banned and was sacked as Deputy Chief of Staff.

But *New Portuguese Letters* was not seen as subversive in this way. Instead it came to grief on the grounds of being an “outrage to public decency”—and, I suspect, because it poked fun at men and the Church—

—“The tumescent fruit is erect and enfevered, juicy, heavy-scented”—

—“Men are fragile creatures nonetheless—with their nostalgias, their fears, their entreaties, their feigned gentleness. Men are fragile creatures in this country of identical nostalgias and fears and depressions. A fragility they attempt in so many ways to disguise: fighting bulls in public plazas, for example”—

—“The Penitential Sisters of Saint Clare: a holocaust of women who for century after century have done penance, night and day, to make amends for the profanation of certain communion wafers. Were not the communion wafers intended to make amends for the profanation of persons?”

\* \* \* \* \*

The fifty year long dictatorship of António Salazar was cast in the mould of other Fascist regimes—Hitler, Mussolini, Franco—but it differed in two essential respects. It elevated nostalgia for Portugal’s past into an article of faith. This had occasional small benefits: Portugal as the first European nation to abolish the death penalty never sought to bring it back (though it used the notorious Tarafal camp for dissidents). But it also placed the dead hand of the past over the nation, stifling change and initiative and denying the possibility of dialogue between Portugal and her colonies.

But Salazar, unlike his colleagues in Fascism, was an austere and deeply devout man. He lived simply, his private life was irreproachable, no one has ever linked him to the sort of bizarre sexual practices or unbridled greed which permeated the Nazi hierarchy. (Len Deighton once called Portugal “a subtle land, without sign of Salazar on poster or postage stamp”.) He sought no new territories, being content with those the past had given him ...

If he could have, he would’ve fenced Portugal round—to keep out every influence, fad, and movement, from the Beatniks to Communism, from Free Trade to the Flower children ... as Thomas Gifford put it in *The Man from Lisbon*, “He had not trusted the twentieth century. He’d done as much as anyone to deny its existence.”

Salazar was dead by the time *New Portuguese Letters* was published but he had spent decades moulding his deputy, Marcelo Caetano, into the view that women, Portuguese women anyway, have no place in the world except as devout nuns, mothers and wives; there was no place in his canon for the resurrection of a foolish abandoned

creature who had brought dishonour to her family, publicity to her convent, shame upon her virgin womanhood ...

\* \* \* \* \*

*New Portuguese Letters* begins

... Granted, then, that all of literature is a long letter to an invisible other, a present, a possible, or a future passion that we rid ourselves of, feed, or seek. We have also agreed that what is of interest is not so much the object of our passion, which is a mere pretext, but passion itself; to which I add that what is of interest is not so much passion itself, which is a mere pretext, but its exercise.

Hence it will not be necessary to ask ourselves whether what brings us together is a common passion for different exercises, or the common exercise of different passions. The only question we need ask ourselves is what form our exercise will take—nostalgia or revenge. Yes, it is doubtless quite true that nostalgia is a form of revenge, and revenge a form of nostalgia; in both cases we are searching for something that will not force us to retreat, for something that will keep us from destroying. Nonetheless, passion is still the motive force and its exercise its meaning.

Only out of nostalgia will we make a sisterhood and a convent, Sister Mariana of the five letters. Only out of vengeance will we make an October, a May, and a new month to cover the entire calendar. And of ourselves: what will we make of ourselves

3/1/71

\* \* \* \* \*

March 7th: Eilís Dillon  
Piers Paul Reed  
Nance Donkin  
Sara Woods

March 8th: Kenneth Grahame  
Count Jan Potocki  
Caroline Leakey  
Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr  
Eric Linklater

\* \* \* \* \*

Tasmania is credited with Australia's first novel and first literary magazine; it also produced the first novel with a convict woman as the central character, indeed one of the first Australian novels with a woman in the premier position. Shirley Walker in *A Bright and Fiery Troop* says of it: "Immensely popular in its time and running through numerous editions in the late nineteenth century, *The Broad Arrow* by Oliné Keese (Caroline Leakey) has been out of print for over seventy years, yet the many copies still available in libraries and second-hand bookshops demonstrate its wide circulation. Its fall from favour is probably due to a publisher's notion that modern readers are out of tune with its melodramatic plot and passages of religious preaching. Yet to come for the first time to *The Broad Arrow* is, because of the experience it deals with, and because of the power of the writing, a stunning experience. The reader can see, beyond the melodrama and preaching, a powerful novel of female experience under extreme conditions. It is the only convict novel to have a female convict as its hero; the first to be based upon actual experience of a convict settlement; and the obvious precursor of Marcus Clarke's (For The Term of) *His Natural Life*, which is indebted to *The Broad Arrow* for a number of its key concepts. The hero, Maida Gwynnham, is undoubtedly the most powerful female creation in Australian colonial literature."

Caroline Leakey came out to Tasmania in the mid-nineteenth century to help her sister with her children; she could not cope with this and went, instead, to stay with the first Anglican Bishop of Tasmania, Bishop Francis Nixon, and his family at their home, Boa Vista. The house is gone now, all except the gate-house at the top of Argyle Street,

but it embodied both Caroline's unhappiness and the environment which led to her writing.

Her first production was a small book of poems, *Lyra Australis, or Attempts to Sing in a Strange Land*, which suggests both her immense homesickness—

Ye may tell me of flowers of crimson hue,  
And glorious tints of gold and blue,  
That summer heavens have brought to birth,  
And strewed like gems o'er thankless earth;  
Where the sevenfold dye of the rainbow rests  
On starried crowns and glowing crests.  
But oh! for the meadows of England's green,  
Set thick with the golden kingcups' sheen;  
That the grass might seem a hidden deep,  
Where the gods of Nature their treasure keep.

—and also a confusion of the desire for love and the guilt that can come with it. I began to wonder about this one day when I was talking about Bishop Nixon with the guide who is cataloguing the library at Runnymede (the Nixons moved from Boa Vista to Runnymede in 1850; Runnymede is now run by the National Trust) and she said “He really is a honey, isn't he?” More prosaically, Bishop Nixon was a handsome, clever, cultured man; a keen musician, photographer (he had his own darkroom), gardener, and writer. His first book *Lectures, Historical, Doctrinal and Practical, on the Catechism of the Church of England* ran to 6 editions, and he later wrote and illustrated *The Cruise of the Beacon*. In his household, she would have been in the thick of the agonies of the religious schisms which threatened to split the church in Tasmania; added to the conflict between Low and High Church (the Puseyites so beloved of Anthony Trollope) was a third factor: the government paid the convict chaplains so that some of them felt they could thumb their nose at the Bishop in his attempts to keep the church united. He himself said, “In Hobartton we have three clergymen. The Senior chaplain was ordained for the Colonies some six and twenty years ago upon the presumption that any ignoramus ... was good enough for the Colonies.

The second is a man whom the Bishop of London sent out in an evil hour as Rural Dean ... weak in voice, deficient in zeal and energy, and active only in scattering the tracts of the Religious Tract Society.”

The third man, an Irishman, “a man of purity, piety, and untiring zeal” fell foul of the congregation in regards to his orthodoxy “some, indeed, hold him as a Papist in disguise, but then I must say they consider me as a Jesuit so we share the honours in that way between us!”

In this time and place of religious and ethical ferment was the added torment for the young Caroline; from Boa Vista in those days she could look down on the grim stone walls of the prison, the depôt for female convicts, and the cemetery. The walls are gone now but something of the grimness can still be felt down below the penitentiary chapel and courts in the narrow cold cells. The cemetery too is gone, its place taken by the Campbell Street School; and the depôt is now a football oval. But there was no escape for Caroline who, despite occasional visits to the workhouse in Exeter at home, had been cushioned by her family life, the certainties of her faith, her sisters, her gentle settled surroundings of age-old farmland and mellow buildings ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A book of poems seems the obvious thing for this frail, pious young woman—but a great sprawling novel trying to come to grips with sex and evil, brutality, hopelessness, uncouthness?

I wonder if the Bishop's wife, Anna Maria Nixon, had something to do with encouraging her to write? Anna Maria was a talented woman in her own right—she

could play the organ, sketch, entertain, run a large household; she had eight children of her own as well as caring for the three surviving children from her husband's first marriage, and she was an indefatigable and entertaining letter writer, interested in everything around her.

21/7/1843—"The day was glorious—such a bright, warm sun and blue sky! It quite rejoiced our hearts to think of its being midwinter—" Becalmed in the Derwent they went ashore on Bruny Island—"We returned to our ship and rejoiced the children's hearts—as well as our good old cow's—with the dainties we had procured." The following year she was saying "Excuse a shabby note written under toothache. Everything is topsy-turvy in this country; generally, I have suffered from face and toothache before my confinement—this year I have had it after."

But my favourite story is of the time things did not go to plan—"Lady Franklin ... among other kind acts, has purchased a large tract of land on the Huon River which she lets out to respectable settlers and immigrants at a very low rent, and I believe it is a peculiarly well organised and interesting little settlement. She has built them a church, and the Bishop and Archdeacon were as anxious to see it as she was to show it to them. Accordingly, after finding from Mr Wilson that he heard nothing about Sir Eardley's passage even being taken when he left England on April 23rd, he thought it quite certain the new Governor could not arrive for some weeks, and it was settled that Lady Franklin, the Bishop, Archdeacon, Miss Cracroft (Sir John's niece) and her brother should all enjoy an expedition to the Huon in the Government schooner. They set sail about 11 pm. yesterday, leaving Sir John, Miss Franklin, Miss Williamson (her former governess) and me to take care of each other. About half past two am. I was roused and somewhat alarmed by a huge knocking, and afterwards the voice of the police magistrate Mr Price (who married another niece of Sir John's) in the hall. I instantly thought the house was on fire—and have often said nothing could save this miserable old place from burning down in an hour. (This was before they moved to Boa Vista.) I was puzzled, however, when I heard some talking about Lady Franklin and the schooner, and some means of overtaking her; so I jumped out of bed and begged to know what was the matter. "Nothing's the matter," replied the butler, very calmly, "only the new Governor has arrived!" ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I do not normally read *The Tasmanian Mason* but finding one at my elbow one day I picked it up and browsed through it and came upon this interesting piece in regard to Australia's earliest synagogues (York St in Sydney, Hobart, Launceston and Adelaide):

"It is interesting that Governor Franklin refused to grant land to the Jewish communities for synagogues. He did not approve of the use of government land for some non Christian purpose. In Hobart the land was provided by Bro Solomon.

The design and construction of the synagogues involved Gentiles because there were no Jewish architects available. The common bond of freemasonry led them to use King Solomon's Temple as a pattern and this reflects the Jewish experience in Egypt. The laying of the cornerstone of the Launceston synagogue by St John's Lodge is well documented.

They did make one error. Synagogues should face toward Jerusalem but they did not allow for the fact that they had moved from Britain to the southern hemisphere."

\* \* \* \* \*

I came across a much stranger story in Richard Deacon's history of the Kempei Tai: "An astonishing plan about which the Western world seemed to know nothing at all was that for settling refugee Jews in Manchuria under Japanese sponsorship."

Two Japanese officers, Norihiro Yasue and Koreshige Inuzuke, set to work to study the problem, taking in everything from white russian anti-semitic propaganda, intelligence reports from the Russo-Japanese war, Jewish achievements in everything

from science to commerce, even the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (which they decided were forgeries); Yasue went to Palestine to study the situation there; a Jewish office was set up to co-ordinate the flow of information—and out of all this grew the *Fugu* Plan (Fugu being Japan's infamous edible but poisonous puffer-fish) to settle 50,000 German Jews in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. The Jews, it was thought, would bring in capital and expertise and, possibly, though it does not seem to have been publicised, act as a buffer; they would have religious freedom and their own education system but otherwise would be under Japanese rule.

Deacon blames the lack of support from Rabbi Stephen Wise and the American Jewish Congress for the failure of the plan. But this raises more questions than it answers. Were German Jews aware of this offer? Did they see Japanese-occupied Manchuria as being as risky as remaining in Europe? Would it, as Deacon postulates, have possibly changed the nature of the Axis alliance and perhaps even kept Japan and the USA at peace? Were the Manchurians aware of the plan ... and what of the confirmation we now have through the partial opening of Japanese archives—that Japan used Manchuria as a testing-ground for biological warfare, killing several thousand people with bubonic plague ...

\* \* \* \* \*

March 9th: Keri Hulme  
Mickey Spillane  
Paul Wilson  
March 10th: David Rabe  
Rupert Lockwood  
Frances Trollope  
March 11th: Perseus Adams  
Torquato Tasso  
Ezra Jack Keats  
Louise Florence d'Epinau  
Jack Davis  
Nancy Cato  
Geoffrey Blainey  
Douglas Adams  
March 12th: Kylie Tenant  
Jack Kerouac  
Barbara Willard  
Edward Albee  
March 13th: Ronald Syme  
Kofi Awoonor  
Roy Bridges  
Bridget Boland  
Alberto Manguel  
George Seferis  
Zulfikar Ghose  
March 14th: Maxim Gorky  
Algernon Blackwood  
Suzanne Falkiner

\* \* \* \* \*

Some years ago I learned that the Indonesian writer, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, had been nominated six times for the Nobel Prize for Literature; my informant believed the Indonesian government was meddling with the selection process to make sure he didn't win.

Understandable—as his books are banned in Indonesia and his life is hedged round

with civil restrictions—but *can* governments influence the Nobel Committee? And if so—how?

Nobel protocol requires that until the Committee itself publicises the nominations no one else may do so. It would be easy enough to slip those who breach this courtesy a few slots down the list. But the Indonesian government certainly isn't guilty of surrounding his nomination with hype.

It's quite possible that this belief in behind-the-scenes meddling is mistaken. There are many other good writers who have failed to win, some of whom were nominated time and again. One such was the Brazilian poet Cecília Meireles. Was her work passed over as lacking in originality, did her themes make the Committee yawn, were the translated versions of her work unbearably pedantic and prosy?

Or did she lose because the Committee had recently given it to another woman writer from Latin America—Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral?

Questions crowd around. Is it coincidence that works in English seem to win most often—or is this simply a result of that pink empire on which the sun never set? Are works by writers from less-established literary traditions in the words of less-spoken languages put forward by less-influential literary establishments automatically disadvantaged? I feel sure they are—for, however cosmopolitan the Committee may be, there are many works they will never read in the original.

What translations can do justice to the patterns and rhythms of a poem brought to birth in another language? How do we render mythical concepts for which we lack the words? Of Japanese into English it has been said “the best of translations often constitute a brilliant paraphrase”. The elegant Portuguese of Meireles invites translation and pieces turn up in anthologies; even so, while ‘*madrugada*’ and ‘*nada*’ rhyme, ‘dawn’ and ‘nothing’ do not and the reader must be content with “a brilliant paraphrase” in translation.

So what if Meireles had written in Cape Verdean *patois*? Would she have found a translator at all? And if she had been Cape Verdean Portuguese instead of Brazilian Portuguese would she have found a publisher at all?

Patrick Chabal writes of the beginnings of literary awareness in Cape Verde—“This cultural movement, appropriately known as *Caboverdianidade*, had developed around the publication of a new journal, *Claridade*. This shift in cultural consciousness, which also occurred in Mozambique, had begun in Angola at the turn of the century with the publication of *A voz de Angola chamando no deserto*. The book, a collective effort by Angolans, set out to refute the facile generalisations made about Africans by ignorant colonialists. In the thirties, Cape Verdean writers and poets turned their attention to the realities of their islands and tried to break away from the classical European models. This generation of young *Claridade* writers focused on subjects of relevance to people's ordinary lives: drought, hunger, starvation, migration, and so on. Poetry too, was for the first time linked to the colonial situation.”

But it was only a first tentative shoot. With luck, she might have achieved a small edition in Portugal under the damning catch-all ‘colonial writer’ (she died in 1964) or her writing might have been circulated as smudgy roneoed copies to be read by homesick Africans. On the brighter side, she might have crept into one of those awkward hybrids, the ‘African anthology’, put together by an enthusiastic academic in Paris or Cambridge and achieving a wider audience but one which would not necessarily seek out any more of a writer's work than that one poem or story.

Certainly she would have had almost no literary tradition or establishment to influence and fertilise her work, promote her reputation, or review her books.

The mixed blessing of tokenism might have rescued her from total obscurity. But this charge still blights the reputation of her friend, Gabriela Mistral; the Committee, so it is claimed, felt it was time to choose as winner a writer who was female, brown, and

from a ‘developing’ country. That she might have sought new and innovative ways beyond the cloying poetic traditions of her past, that she might have written with power and beauty ...

This conjures up an image of the Committee deliberating—no, no, we’ve had an Italian and a Russian and an Arab—what about South Africa this year, it’s on people’s minds—true, but don’t you think it’s time we went for another Latin American?—what! another of those men with big moustaches?—no, I think what we want is a Pacific Islander, preferably hermaphroditic ...

Perhaps there is a points system, marks added, pocket calculators busy—and the books themselves lying unread on a side table.

But this would seem to suggest that it is time for the Committee to turn to South East Asia for their next Laureate. So—are soft diplomatic words whispered at soft diplomatic dinners—Indonesia might not perhaps be so ready to purchase Scandinavian sardines and submarines—they are a little—shall we say—

If they hoped to make Pramoedya win I can see the Committee being collectively dubious but to lose—ah, that is a simpler matter—and it is, after all, a glittering pile ...

Perhaps the explanation lies in the pile. Individual works are nominated and judged—and Pramoedya has been banned for so long and his best book, or arguably so, *Child of all Nations*, came out and was banned fifteen years ago. His last novel *Glasshouse* (1988) remains untranslated. His recent memoirs of the prison camp on Buru Island *Silent Song of a Mute* has just been banned, the Indonesian Attorney-General saying circulation “could cause commotion or restlessness, disturbing public order” and “could spread wrong ideas among the public about the Government”. Several of his 1950s books, *Labour* and *Tales from Blora*, are being quietly reprinted to test the water but his 1980s quartet remains unavailable in Indonesia except through clandestine means and two young Indonesians have gone to jail for eight years for possessing copies.

In the 1960s he was sent to the infamous prison camp on Buru Island where Australian journalist Brian May met him—“While the Dutch had no objection to his writing, his Indonesian captors took a different view. I asked Soegih Arto (Indonesian Attorney-General) whether Pramoedya was allowed to write on Buru Island. The general smiled and his eyes twinkled impishly. ‘He is allowed to write,’ he said. ‘But he has no pencil and paper.’ This became one of Soegih Arto’s favourite jokes; he was still repeating it with relish two years later—” International pressure eventually helped secure Pramoedya’s release in 1979 (no charges had ever been laid against him) but he was debilitated by the years of malaria, ulcers, heavy work and anxiety over the wellbeing of his wife and eight children who had remained in Jakarta and supported themselves by selling cakes. Perhaps even more undermining is the knowledge that he can never, freely, write Indonesian books for Indonesian readers; the process must always be furtive, clandestine; his readers must hide his books.

Yet why should his writing terrify the authorities? His 1980s quartet is set in the period 1900 to 1919 and deals with the sense of an awakening nationalism under the heavy hand of Dutch colonial rule. His best-known earlier work *Not an All-Night Market* might be regarded as timeless—the struggle of the poor to live with dignity—yet it is also somewhat dated. It details a world existing before most of Indonesia’s population were born. But maybe it is not dated enough—if people can see themselves in its characters ...

When his 1985 book *Footsteps* was banned its Social Realism was cited in the banning order; when its 1988 sequel was banned it became “the teachings of communism in a disguised and refined manner—”

If a writer’s books are not on library shelves, school curricula, book catalogues, airport stalls, they cannot be analysed and studied and quoted; they do not enter

people's interpretation of the world—and, concomitantly, people cannot decide for themselves whether or not they demonstrate Social Realism or “communism in a disguised and refined manner”. They cannot influence the development of a literary tradition; they cannot hold a public mirror to the nation's changing face.

It is hard to quantify the impact of a Nobel prize. It is a moment of focus and prestige. It encourages readers world-wide to seek out that country's literature. It is a firm statement that something exciting is happening in a particular place in the world.

A writer hemmed in at every turn can't help but seem a lonely figure. I used to think of Gabriela Mistral in that way. Her statue looks serenely down Chile's Valle de Elqui; a sleepy farming place where writers and writing are not everyday conversation. But this is misleading. Chile's other Nobel Laureate, Pablo Neruda, says in his memoirs he was at first frightened of her “But when I was taken to visit her, I found her to be very gracious. In her dark face, as Indian as a lovely Araucanian pitcher, her very white teeth flashed in a full, generous smile ... I was too young to be her friend, and too shy and taken up with myself. I saw her only a few times, but I always went away with some books she gave me. They were invariably Russian novels, which she considered the most extraordinary thing in world literature. I can say that Gabriela introduced me to the dark and terrifying vision of the Russian novelists and that Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov soon occupied a special place deep within me. They are with me still.”

In *The Silent Centre of Life's Day* Pramoedya wrote: *Perhaps I am weak. Perhaps I'm greedy. A writer should stay a bachelor, in total command of his own history. His own ruin. Without involving anyone else, without dragging a family into poverty.* He thought of Zola, Edgar Allan Poe, Jalalludin Rumi, Hafiz, Samsi Tabriz, Gogol, even Gorki, whose book lay on the pillow beside him. Finally he continued in his notebook: “Writing is a compulsion. One does it because one has no other available choice. I do not like being a writer but I accept it.”

Several years ago, students went on trial in the Indonesian city of Jogjakarta for reading a copy of *Mother* by the Russian novelist Maxim Gorky—even though *Mother* had been circulating amongst the city's student population for decades. Their defence might be Pavel's own words to his mother—“I am reading forbidden books. They are forbidden because they tell the truth about us working men. They are printed on the sly, in secret, and if they find me with them they'll put me in jail—in jail because I want to know the truth—”

It is a strange government which is afraid of the old woman who stood at the gates of Tzarist Russia, which is afraid of the first stirring of its own sense of nationhood ninety years ago.

But in the end the losers are more than a tired old man in a Jakarta suburb, more than the generations of students seeking “on the sly” for nourishment and understanding. The nation itself loses. Those hungry for insight must turn to the second-rate, the imported, the politically and socially bland.

And what happens to those who dream of following in Pramoedya's footsteps? Are they driving taxis, writing crammers, tellering in banks?

Perhaps these are not the right questions. Perhaps my answers are all wrong. And how long will Indonesia have to wait for the ultimate accolade?

\* \* \* \* \*

Some images are timeless; some know no national boundaries.

Gorky wrote: “Together you form one great chorus in which every heart sings its own song. And all the songs are like streams pouring into one river, and the river flows broad and free into the joyous sea of the new life.”

A Timorese song goes:

“Streams flowing together become rivers  
Rivers increase, whatever opposes them

So must the children of Timor unite,  
Unite against the wind blowing from the sea” ...

\* \* \* \* \*

March 15th: Hesba Brinsmead  
John Batchelor  
Chana Bloch  
Paul von Heyse

March 16th: William Mayne  
Sybille Bedford  
Barry England  
Ismith Khan  
Finola Moorhead  
Sully Prudhomme  
David Mowat

March 17th: Jean Ingelow  
Penelope Lively  
Paul Green  
Robin Knox-Johnston

March 18th: Wilfrid Owen  
Richard Condon  
Peter Kenna  
Shelley Phillips  
John Updike  
Christa Wolf

\* \* \* \* \*

Wilfrid Owen took the story of Abraham and Isaac—

“So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife”

—and turned it into ‘The Parable of the Old Men and the Young’ and this time  
when the Angel called—

“Behold,

A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.”

—it was a different world—

“But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.”

\* \* \* \* \*

If only people over fifty, people who had raised their families, enjoyed their careers,  
travelled, studied—if they were the only ones who could permissibly be conscripted or  
sent off to war—would we have war?

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1912 my great-uncle George Colgan came to Australia as an eighteen-year-old  
and worked for a couple of years on a station near Nyngan before joining up.

His letters from Australia to his sister are full of the small world which fascinated  
him:

“I hope you got the centipede I sent you all right. It was only a small one, I was  
sorry that I was not able to send you a bigger one ... It is an ugly looking beast is it  
not—”

“I sent you another animal not very long ago, (a pray mantis) it is a fairly good  
specimen.”

“I found a nest of nine emu eggs a couple of Sundays ago ... That reminds me that I  
promised to send you an egg some time ago.”

He also decided that Ireland has prettier butterflies than the central west of New South Wales ...

(His interests were family interests; his uncle was the author of *Flora of Dublin*, co-author of *Cybele Hibernica* and “When the Clare Island Biological Survey was commenced in 1909, Colgan undertook the Mollusca, and also an enquiry into the local Irish names of animals and plants.”)

War-torn France with its grey slime and birdless skies and gardens without butterflies and verges without beetles must have been for him, who was passionately interested in small creatures, a special kind of heartbreak.

I think he might have echoed Leslie Coulson—

“Who made the Law that Death should stalk the village?

Who spake the word to kill among the sheaves,

Who gave it forth that death should lurk in hedgerows,

Who flung the dead among the fallen leaves?”

... He was killed two months before the Armistice.

\* \* \* \* \*

Eighteen thousand four hundred and eighty-six of those who went from Australia have no known grave and many of them are remembered on the Villers-Bretonneux Memorial to the Missing near Amiens. Bruce Haigh writes: ‘Villers-Bretonneux, which has come to symbolise the AIF feat of arms on the Western Front, is situated on high ground falling away on the north to the Somme River Valley and surrounded on the south and east by a flat plateau.’

George Colgan is one of the names engraved here of the men ‘who lie, unrecognised, under the battlefields of the Somme, Arras, and the “Hundred Days”.’

The Missing in Action ... the ember of hope ...

Vance Palmer wrote of those who came home again—

I have returned to these:

The farm, and the kindly Bush, and the young calves lowing;

But all that my mind sees

Is a quaking bog in a mist—stark, snapped trees,

And the dark Somme flowing.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 19th: Irving Wallace  
Philip Roth  
Tobias Smollett (chr)

March 20th: David Malouf  
Henrik Ibsen  
Linda Aronson  
Ovid  
Rosemary Timperley  
Friedrich Hölderlin  
Ernest Bramah

March 21st: Frank Hardy  
Douglas Barbour  
Thomas Shapcott

March 22nd: Nicholas Monserrat  
Rosie Scott  
Louis L’Amour

March 23rd: Joseph Quincy Adams  
Erik Bergaust  
Roger Martin du Gard  
Alan Bleasdale

Francis Berry  
Bruce Bennett  
Rodney Castleden  
March 24th: Olive Schreiner  
William Morris  
Lawrence Ferlinghetti  
Wilson Harris

\* \* \* \* \*

Beatrix Potter wrote: ‘Most people, after one success, are so cringingly afraid of doing less well that they rub all the edge off their subsequent work.’

Olive Schreiner, though she had the time, the freedom, and the encouragement to write, had great difficulty finishing anything after her success with *The Story of an African Farm*; her following books, such as *Dreams* and *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland*, were barely novella-length. Did her early success inhibit her? Did her husband’s belief in her talent inhibit her? Margaret Mitchell, after the extraordinary success of *Gone With The Wind*, found every excuse *not* to write. Sensible are the writers who determinedly follow a ‘big’ book with a light-weight offering to allow the hype and expectations to die down.

Olive’s niece, Katie Stuart, writing of Olive’s husband who believed in her genius and constantly expected more books ... ‘Could you? Could I write a word if someone was ceaselessly planning, arranging and cajoling us to do so?—and then bitterly disappointed because we couldn’t!’

Denise Robins took a brave stand in the 1920s: if her husband would fund some household help she would put her time into getting her romantic stories accepted. He agreed and within six months she was getting her stories taken. Many of her stories are straight-forward formula romances but, at her best, she is able to capture that intense inward-looking moment of being ‘in love’, trivial, even inane to outsiders, but containing a white-hot excitement and beauty to the people involved. An acquaintance coming upon me in the library with a Denise Robins in my hand said “Surely you don’t read that sort of stuff?” I suppose I gave a weak grin and murmured something about needing to unwind with something light (I remember a teacher at a problem school telling me she unwound after a hard day with a Mills & Boon); but I’ve just been re-reading Robins’ 1958 novel *Betrayal* and thinking how modern it seems.

Schreiner is often described as neurotic; yet she tried hard to encompass and contain the contradictory strands in her life and upbringing and often succeeded. She was immersed in a religion which required constant attention to every thought and word and deed, its sinfulness, its appropriateness, in the belief that God was judging the minutiae—and yet, outside the door, was an immense world over which human beings crawled with the unimportance of ants. She went into church (her father was a missionary) and was told of the miserableness of the human condition, its frailty, its ‘worminess’, its vulnerability, its inherent sinfulness—and when she walked outside she belonged to a superior race, given dominion over the ‘inferior’ black and coloured peoples. She lived through a time of intense questioning of the role of women, whether they were prey also to sexual passions; she was torn between her love of South Africa, the conflict between white Boers and white British, the greater acceptance and stimulation she found in England. It was a hard row to hoe—and if, at times, her writings and actions are full of contradictions who can blame her?

\* \* \* \* \*

March 25th: Anne Brontë  
A. J. P. Taylor  
Mary Webb  
Paul Scott

Certain novels are put down by that vaguely contemptuous term 'the regional novel'. Yet, except for some science fiction and some novels which range so widely they cannot be said to belong anywhere, it might be argued that all novels are regional novels. A novel of Bloomsbury or the 87th Precinct of the New York Police Department is as much a regional novel as a story from Shropshire or Kakadu or Tamil Nadu.

Miles Franklin worried about the loss of the regional novel when she said, in 1947, "The book trade is now big business, with ramifications and competition on a "global" plane. Caught in its coils, publishers seek a formula by which the novel can be assembled to belong nowhere so as to apply anywhere so as to facilitate standardization and mass production."

Perhaps applying the put-down to Mary Webb's work was a way of side-lining her novels, just as some of the London luminaries (such as Virginia Woolf) side-lined Mary Webb as a person. And if you side-line a book you are freed from the worry that someone else may be tackling the issues or the ideas you, also, are tackling—but in a fresh and interesting way.

At an afternoon tea I heard someone say how much more harmonious the world would be if everyone would agree on a language—such as Esperanto—and really use it. "Yes," I said, "but we would probably cease to get books like *Precious Bane*." (Which I was reading at the time.) Immediately, several people said things like, "Oh yes, I love *Precious Bane*."

It is not that Mary Webb came up with more interesting plots than her contemporaries, not that it would be impossible to come up with a more interesting plot than *To the Lighthouse*, but rather that her stories intermingled the past and present, superstition and logic, rural narrowness and rural depth, into an interesting and often remarkable whole.

Our post-modern stories seem pallid beside the richness of the language of *Precious Bane* ... "all of a lantun-puff", "ripstitch-rantipole", "the leaves lapped up the silence like the tongues of little creatures drinking", "harroost, it being the old way of saying harvest", "the queenly gift of the scent of the corn", "We called the dragon-fly the ether's mon or ether's nild at Sarn, for it was supposed that where the adder, or ether, lay hid in the grass, there above hovered the ether's mon as a warning—"

Mary Webb invited 70 guests to her wedding who "were to be old and destitute people whom she knew, most of them from the Women's Ward at Cross Houses Workhouse."

The Workhouse rarely figures in fiction yet it lay like a sombre cloud over the lives of countless thousands of elderly poor. Howell and Ford give a clear account of its nature and working in *The True History of the Elephant Man*.

The workhouse was made "at least a degree less attractive than the life of the most lowly paid labourer. In many nineteenth-century parishes, rural as well as urban, such an ideal of harsh austerity must have been no easy thing to achieve." When Joseph Merrick, the terribly deformed young man who has gone down in history as The Elephant Man, arrived at the Leicester Union Workhouse he was issued with workhouse clothes of "heavy serge or fustian, drab in colour and undistinguished in pattern" and given a 'hot' bath which was in fact a very cold bath. The workhouse was built to accommodate 1,000 inmates of whom "Some were elderly, no longer able to fend for themselves; some were widows left without means of support; some were sick and infirm. Then there were the workmen, brought to poverty by unemployment or a sudden recession in their trade (Leicester had 19,000 people out of a total population of

60,000 out of work because of the downturn in the hosiery trade); the craftsmen forced to sell their tools before becoming eligible for admission; and the wives and children of these destitute men. Homeless, unmarried mothers would also be admitted to the workhouse for their lying-in. Orphans and abandoned children, tramps and vagrants, improvident paupers, even the mentally retarded and unsound of mind, also sought refuge there.

At the workhouse gates this unhappy tide of humanity was segregated into groups, according to age and sex. Husbands were parted from wives, children from parents, boys from girls, toddlers from infants ... Only at mealtimes or in chapel might there be a chance of a fleeting glimpse or a few snatched words.”

And “To step through any of the doorways was to step into a world of echoing stone corridors and draughty stairways”; it was also to step into a world where everyone worked—the men picked oakum, cut wood, chipped stone or gardened; the women laundered and mended and cleaned; the elderly looked after the children or the retarded; the children did their lessons; “Only for the infants was nothing arranged, but then, as late as 1905, a Royal Commission inspecting workhouses was distressed by the provisions it found for the care of infants in many institutions. It spoke with justifiable concern of young babies lying unchanged in cold, wet cots; of babies who had no hope of getting outside into the sunlight and fresh air, the only attendant present having no means of carrying them all down several flights of stairs from the nursery to the ground floor; of the helplessness of a single attendant faced with the task of feeding a roomful of toddlers from a bowl of rice pudding while armed with only one spoon.”

Stuck for a setting for your next horror novel ...

\* \* \* \* \*

When she died, from pernicious anaemia and Grave’s Disease, Mary Webb was still largely unknown and her entire fortune of £937 went to her husband as she left no will. Her last year, though, had been a very unhappy one because of her husband’s attraction to his young student Katherine Wilson—whom he eventually married. But after her death *Precious Bane* began to sell—and sell and sell and sell. When Henry Webb died in a fall on a hillside in Shropshire his estate, most of it acquired from Mary’s posthumous royalties, amounted to £36,000. His young widow then married Mary’s publisher Jonathon Cape—bringing with her this unexceptionable ‘dowry’. Jonathon Cape had dunned Mary for the return of £5 which he had lent her at a particularly hard-pressed time.

There is an added poignancy now in reading her work because of the sadnesses and difficulties of her own life; one of her deepest regrets being her childlessness, a regret which runs through her poem ‘The Neighbour’s Children’:

They run to meet me, clinging to my dress,  
The neighbour’s children. With a wild unrest  
And sobbings of a strange, fierce tenderness,  
I snatch them to my breast.  
But *my* baby, ah! *my* baby  
Weepeth—weepeth  
In the far loneliness of nonentity,  
And holds his little spirit hands to me,  
Crying ‘Mother!’ and nearer creepeth;  
Beats on my heart’s lit window anxiously,  
Shivering and sobbing, ‘Mother, let me in!  
Give me my rosy dress, my delicate dress  
Of apple-blossom flesh, dark eyes like flowers,  
And warm mouth kissed by a red anemone.  
Give me my toys—the hills, the seas, the sun,

Loud song, wild winds, the morning's cloudy towers.  
 Give hands to hold and ears to hear and feet to run.  
 Give me my lesson books—fear, love and sin—  
 All hell to brave, all heaven to win!  
 Then, shadowy, wild and wan,  
 A little face peers in,  
 Except in dreams unknown even to me,  
 And like a summer cloud is gone.  
 It is the neighbour's children, playing near,  
 With voices ringing clear.  
 But far in twilight, like a moon-awakened bird,  
 Was that another, fainter laugh I heard?

\* \* \* \* \*

Life *does* provide moments of felicity. I happened to mention to my friend Rose that these days libraries don't seem to stock anything but *Precious Bane*. "Oh," she said, "I think I have some more here that belonged to my mother." The next time she came by she handed me a box containing, besides *Precious Bane*, *Poems and Spring of Joy*, *Seven for a Secret*, *The House in Dormer Forest*, *Armour Wherein He Trusted*, and *Gone to Earth*.

All Mary Webb's work is informed by an unease which sometimes descends to melancholy, sometimes rises to a passion which is almost painful to read ...

And in all the stories are pieces that stay in the mind—

—'This is my name-tree,' she said. 'Do you know the old belief about name-trees? If the tree dies, you die. If you sicken, the tree withers. If you desert it, a curse falls.' ('The Name-Tree')

—'She was of a race that will come in the far future, when we shall have outgrown our egoism ... We shall attain philosophic detachment and emotional sympathy. We have even now far outgrown the age when a great genius like Shakespeare could be so clumsy in the interpretation of other than human life. We have left behind us the bloodshot centuries when killing was the only sport, and we have come to the slightly more reputable times when lovers of killing are conscious that a distinct effort is necessary in order to keep up "the good old English sports."' (*Gone to Earth*)

—'From the dining-room came Mrs Velindre's voice reading passages from *The Lion of the Tribe of Judah*, a paper which dealt exclusively with the vexed question of the lost tribes. She persisted in regarding the Jews not as one of the finest nations the world has seen, but as people requiring a missionary. This paper was her spiritual and intellectual fodder, and she read it nightly, with praiseworthy perseverance, to a totally indifferent family. She also read it to Sarah while she lit her fire on winter mornings, and Sarah had been heard to say that 'if the tribes must be daft and mislay themselves, she wished they'd mislay themselves for good and all, and not like hunt the thimble—no sooner lost than it's werrit, werrit, werrit to find it.'" (*The House in Dormer Forest*)

—'For youth is hard. It is not true that temptation is worse for young men. It is the middle-aged men, wistful with loss or unfulfilment, prone to melancholy, reverential of youth, glad of any music to sing them out of remembrance of the gathering silence—it is they who find it hard to say no.' (*Seven for a Secret*)

—And in 'Blessed are the Meek' the old workhouse women who have been whiling away the endless hours, in which they knit grey stockings, by remembering the flowers they liked in better days, are given a picture of heaven by the Bishop which suggests it as a larger and grander workhouse. One of the old women says 'And if the Lord, as was but a carpenter's prentice 'isself, and the Lord's Mother, as was but a carpenter's wife, canna give poor folk a bit o' comfort in the next world, I dunna want to go there.'

\* \* \* \* \*

March 26th: Robert Frost  
A. E. Housman  
Erica Jong  
Manfred Jurgensen  
Tennessee Williams  
Fiona Kidman

March 27th: Rosa Praed  
Joan Fleming  
Kenneth Slessor

\* \* \* \* \*

Kate Grenville once said of Erica Jong: “Women like her knew they were liberated.”

Rosa Praed didn’t have this advantage; yet, in many ways, she wrote as one liberated—tackling themes as various as bushrangers and tribal gatherings, Government House functions and the aspirations of colonial society.

She has been reclaimed to some extent by feminists; she might also be reclaimed by horror fans. A note on her career says she “wrote a number of novels about Australian life. Nearly forgotten are her weird works, starting with *The Brother of the Shadow* (1886) which shows a deep knowledge of the occult. It was followed by *The Soul of Countess Adrian* (1891), a tale of psychic vampirism, *The Insane Root* (1902), about the magic of the mandrake, *Fugitive Anne* (1903), about a lost race of Tortoise Worshippers in the Australian Bush, and *Nyria* (1904). This was later revised as *The Soul of Nyria* (1931), and is based on her companion Nancy who was believed to be the reincarnation of a Roman slave, Nyria.”

Of all the reasons which might be offered up for women writing, it is the freedom of their imaginary worlds which remains one of the most compelling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Undoubtedly, it was difficult in Praed’s time for women to be taken seriously by major newspapers, large magazines, prestigious publishing-houses. But one area where women came into their own was religious publishing. Glancing through a turn-of-the-century list of titles from The Religious Tract Society of London, I see that of the 96 titles on offer more than half were by women.

And for those of you who grumble about the cost of books—well, you would’ve had to pay 7/- for *Random Truths in Common Things: Occasional Papers from My Study Chair* whereas you could’ve had *Steps to the Throne of Grace* for only 2/-.

Leaping back a half century or so you could’ve had, from the list of Routledge, Warne & Routledge of London, *History of the Popes* by Leopold Ranke, for 9/- (“This translation of Ranke we consider to be very superior to any other in the English language”—Dublin Review) or *The Vicissitudes of Italy since the Congress of Vienna* for only 2/- or, if you had money to spend on your library or were a Candidate for the Government Civil Service, you would be wise to splurge on *Russell’s Modern Europe* in 4 Vols. price £1.10s.

The old steward, Gabriel Betteredge, in *The Moonstone* turns frequently to his copy of *Robinson Crusoe* for sustenance, said copy “Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.” Today, a copy of *Robinson Crusoe* can be picked up in the supermarket for a dollar or so.

All in all, we’re not too badly done by.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 28th: William Byrd  
Joyce Porter  
Saint Teresa of Avila  
Alain Bosquet

\* \* \* \* \*

Joyce Porter was a Flight Officer in the Women's Royal Air Force in Britain for 14 years before creating her detective, Wilfrid Dover. The eccentric amateurs of the thirties had given way to a new breed of detective such as Ngaio Marsh's cultured and intelligent Inspector Alleyn or, in the USA, the tough-talking hard-drinking private eye. Porter went in her own direction and created a man who was the ultimate slob—fat, lazy, greedy, inefficient—and Dover was a hit right from the start.

Julian Symons has criticised Dover for not developing book by book. In fact, Dover *does* develop. He gets worse. In the beginning he doesn't have a dandruff problem, further on it has become so bad even his armpits are affected.

But the Dover books nearly all share the same fault. They have poor endings. It is as though Joyce Porter gets to a point where even she can no longer bear the company of her creation and hurriedly finishes up her story.

Dover is English but he would be equally at home in Australia; the sort of incapable who hangs in there, by a mixture of bluff and luck, just long enough to collect his super package.

\* \* \* \* \*

The same cannot be said of Porter's female sleuth, the Hon. Con. She is peculiarly English in her combination of class consciousness, inherited wealth, and unthinking bossiness.

"The Hon. Con had been born not only into the purple but into considerable wealth as well. It would be naive to claim that these two blessings had ruined her life though they were certainly far from having enhanced it. The Hon. Con was a positive powerhouse of energy, inventiveness and intelligence and if she could have found an outlet for these qualities, she would have been an asset in any society. If she had married, for example, some of the verve and dash might have been soaked up in bossing a husband and kids around. If she had been an impoverished nobody, she could have worked off some of the surplus by carving out a career for herself. But, what do you do when you're an unplucked rose and already have an annual income many a county borough council would envy?"

Not that the Hon. Con took all this lying down. On the contrary, she tackled her problems with such enthusiasm and violence that the pieces haven't yet been put together. Plunging into voluntary work, the Hon. Con joined all the right societies and wrecked them in days rather than weeks. Looking for a hobby, she became a member of clubs which almost immediately sunk without trace and with all hands. Unfortunately, Totterbridge, where she lived, was only a small provincial town and its resources were limited. In a distressingly short space of time the Hon. Con had gone through the lot and there was no cultural, educational, recreational, sporting or charitable organisation which wasn't left licking its wounds. The Hon. Con, on the other hand, hadn't changed at all and was still frantically searching for something worthwhile to do."

*(The Package Included Murder)*

\* \* \* \* \*

March 29th: Maurice Christopher Hollis  
Helen Yglesias  
Sigurdur Magnusson  
March 30th: Sean O'Casey  
Anna Sewell  
Rolf Harris  
Warren Beatty

\* \* \* \* \*

Anna Sewell was born into a devout Quaker family—though, later in life, she

became an Anglican—and due to an accident in her teens she became dependent on horses for mobility. She, and her mother, reared in a tradition of discreet social service, promoted the Temperance cause, taught reading, writing and natural history at the Working Man's Evening Institute they established, and taught Sunday School. Her mother, though, preferred private charity to public institutions or social change; the family was preparing for their first seaside trip when they received news of the potato famine in Ireland and Mrs Sewell asked Anna and her brother Philip if they would be willing to send their holiday money to Ireland instead. Both children immediately agreed.

She is remembered for the one book, *Black Beauty*, which she wrote late in life as her tribute to the freedom horses had given her and as a way of drawing attention to a number of abuses—such as the use of the bearing-rein which held the horse's head up whereas it needed to be free to get its head down if it was pulling a heavy load. 'What I suffered with that rein for four long months in my lady's carriage, it would be hard to describe. I am quite sure that had it lasted much longer, either my health or my temper would have given way. Before that, I never knew what it was to foam at the mouth, but now the action of the sharp bit on my tongue and jaw and the constrained position of my head and throat always caused me to froth at the mouth more or less. Some people think it very fine to see this, and say, "What fine, spirited creatures!" But it is just as unnatural for horses as for men to foam at the mouth.' Her book was helpful in phasing out the more extreme use of the bearing-rein.

She also drew attention to the agony of horses used in war (the massive loss of horses in the Crimean War was still fresh in people's minds)—'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 forefeet, when their hind legs had been shattered by shot'; and, closer to home, she chronicled the sad plight of cab horses forced to pull maximum loads, stand long hours in freezing weather, and go home to poor food and poor stabling. The fate of Ginger was the fate of many work-horses owned or hired by poor families who saw themselves as having no option but to work their horses until they dropped. As 'Seedy Sam' says—"I am on the stand fourteen or sixteen hours a day and I haven't had a Sunday these ten or twelve weeks ... You know how quick some of the gentry are to suspect us of cheating, and over-charging ... I wish some of 'em had got to get a living out of it, and eighteen shillings besides (to pay for the hire of two cab-horses). And that in all weathers!"

Anna sold the copyright of *Black Beauty* for £20; it has since sold in excess of 30 million copies and has been described as 'probably the most successful animal story ever written'. Behind the pathos, the preaching, is a story which still grips and a fund of good practical 'horse sense' as relevant today as a hundred years ago. Harness expert, Edward Flower, said of the book: 'It is written by a veterinary surgeon, by a coachman, by a groom; there is not a mistake in the whole of it; not one thing I wish altered, except that the cabman should have taken that half-crown ...'

\* \* \* \* \*

Quakers, despite their tradition of silent worship, have always tended to wield facile pens; from George Fox's *Journal* in the late 1600s to Robert Barclay's famous defence of Quakerism, through countless tracts, advices, letters and journals. Quakers such as William and Mary Howitt brought out delightful poetry for children—

—The wind one morning sprung up from sleep,

Saying, 'Now for a frolic! Now for a leap!

Now for a mad-cap, galloping chase!' (William) —and—

—'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the Spider to the Fly (Mary)

—but—the one thing they

disapproved of was fiction-writing so it wasn't until well into the nineteenth century that Quaker novelists began to appear.

Of course they weren't the only people to see novel-reading as a time-wasting pursuit—many families forbade the reading of novels before noon—or to see it as a dangerous form of escapism by which the melodramas and happy-ever-after romances helped make people discontented with their more humdrum lives.

They were disturbed by the prurient aspect of novel reading; what Sven Birkets has described as: “every novel is, at root, an invasion of privacy—or, better yet, the illusion of such an invasion. The sensation of illicitness, faint or less faint, is the motor that moves the hand to turn the page. What is curious, though, is that this foraging among the precincts of the Other is most thrilling when it has a visual component. We don't so much want to get access to another's thoughts as to catch a glimpse of actual stocking—we want to know what people *do* behind closed doors.”

We would not dream, most of us, of peeping in a friend's bedroom window and yet that is what we do in novels; and we *want* to do it in the books where the writer has made us believe, temporarily, that these are living breathing people.

But most of all, perhaps, Friends were concerned that novels weren't true; that they were “all lies and storytelling”. There is no simple way around this. We can claim that our books are using imagined means to convey universal truths—yet it still may make us just that little bit less rigorous when it comes to matters of fundamental honesty.

The realm of the imagination is just as much a gift as a sense of humour or a delight in beauty. How to use it wisely is a more difficult question.

Probably the thing which most helped reconcile strict Friends to novels was the success of books like *Black Beauty* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; people who would not pick up a carefully-researched and meticulously-written pamphlet on the evils of slavery might read and be influenced by a novel; people could be reached through their hearts even if their minds might be closed to argument.

\* \* \* \* \*

Several years ago I had a letter from a woman in Florida who was compiling an international bibliography of Quaker novels. Was *Come in Spinner* a Quaker novel, she wanted to know.

Florence James became a Quaker in later life and Dymphna Cusack certainly had Quaker friends. But no, I think it would be stretching many points to call their famous novel of war-time Sydney a Quaker novel!

\* \* \* \* \*

Martin S. Day wrote of American Quaker John Woolman: “Living always by the light within, Woolman achieved perhaps the quietest and saintliest existence of any American.” He saw him as a major influence on Thoreau.

In 1772 Woolman arrived in England and he records in his *Journal*: “As my journey hath been without a horse, I have had several offers of being assisted on my way in these stage-coaches, but have not been in them, nor have I had freedom to send letters by these posts in the present way of their riding, the stages being so fixed and one boy so dependent on another as to time, and going at great speed, that in long cold winter nights the poor boys suffer much. I heard in America of the way of these posts, and cautioned Friends in the General Meeting of Ministers and Elders at Philadelphia, and in the Yearly Meeting of Ministers and Elders in London, not to send letters to me on any common by post. And though on this account I may be likely not to hear so often from my family left behind ... yet for righteousness sake I am content ... Stage-coaches frequently go upwards of one hundred miles in twenty-four hours; and I have heard Friends say in several places that it is common for horses to be killed with hard driving, and that many are driven till they grow blind. Post-boys pursue their business, each one to his stage, all night through the winter. Some boys who ride long stages suffer greatly

in winter nights, and at several places I have heard of their being frozen to death. So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth the creation at this day doth loudly groan.”

Passengers naturally hurried into the inns along the way to warm themselves by the fire and have a hot meal, not thinking about the boys or the horses.

Woolman registered his concern in a simple but very public way: he walked the length of England, instead of travelling in comfort, and explained to people as he went why it was that he was walking.

\* \* \* \* \*

March 31st: Nikolai Gogol

John Jakes

Andrew Lang

Robert Leeson

Israel Horovitz

John Fowles

Octavio Paz

René Descartes

April 1st: Jan Wahl

Edgar Wallace

Michel-Aimé Baudouy

Rolf Hochhuth

Milan Kundera

April 2nd: Hans Christian Andersen

Jennifer Rowe

Sue Townsend

Catherine Gaskin

Émile Zola

\* \* \* \* \*

Nowadays we think of Andersen as a writer for children but he saw himself more as bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood. He called his first book *Fairy Tales told to the Young* (*Eventyr fortalte for Born*) because he believed fairy tales were meant to be told by parents to their children; not because there were no literate children but because it was to be a shared family activity.

Part of his brilliance was that only a handful of his tales were adaptations or retellings; most of his stories which have passed into the public consciousness (to be adapted and re-told by others) were completely new. ‘The Ugly Duckling’ and ‘The Little Mermaid’ both drew on his own experience of being an outsider. Other stories, such as ‘The Red Shoes’, ‘The Little Match Girl’ and ‘The Wild Swans’, unlike the happy-ever-after endings of many traditional tales, present moral dilemmas, social inequities, and avoidable tragedies.

This kind of tension in his stories has been linked to his position as a brilliant but working class writer living upon the goodwill and patronage of the wealthy and the aristocratic in Danish society. He tended to hide the fact that his mother had been a washerwoman who became an alcoholic, drinking to dull the pain of standing long cold hours washing in the local stream. But his dilemmas, I think, go beyond questions of class and acceptance. His parents died when he was still a boy and it was natural that he always longed for the sense of home, of stability, of love, which his youth had denied him.

And he was faced in every new meeting, every new relationship, every invitation, with the disconcerting knowledge that people saw him as Edmund Gosse saw him at their first meeting—‘a very tall, elderly gentleman, dressed in a complete suit of brown, and in a curly wig of the same shade of snuff-colour. I was almost painfully struck, at

the first moment, by the grotesque ugliness of his face and hands, and by his enormously long and swinging arms'; Gosse also speaks of his 'amazingly long and bony hand—a great brown hand almost like that of a man of the wood' but he goes on to say 'the impression passed away as soon as he began to speak ... Gentleness and ingenuousness breathed from everything he said ... He had but to speak, almost to smile, and the man of genius stood revealed.'

When his statue was being planned he asked that they not put children clustering around, as had been part of the design. He said he was not a children's writer. He could also have said there had been few children in his life; his patrons and sponsors tended to keep theirs put away in nurseries. Perhaps he understood, too, the dangers in being called a 'children's writer' ... and, though no one has said so, children see and comment on ugliness and deformity with the sort of frank but hurtful honesty the ugly duckling found ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Looking over various fairy tales the most striking thing about them is that they reek of blood and sweat and fear. Characters are cut to pieces, eaten, drowned, burnt, imploded, lost, imprisoned, poisoned, terrified out of their wits, thrown off cliffs ...

But Jack Zipes in his *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* traces a different concern. (Yes, Virginia, it is hard to be a parent.) He writes: "There is a direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the culture industry" but "What we praise as our classical fairy-tale heritage, however, has a dark side to it which I should like to discuss in terms of the modern western civilizing process" and "My foremost concern is how fairy tales operate ideologically to indoctrinate children so that they will conform to dominant social standards which are not necessarily established in their behalf".

Put most simply, Perrault took earlier peasant tales and re-wrote them to make them accessible and useful to France's rising middle class. And the new burden of the civilising process as it applied in 18th century France came to rest most heavily on the daughters rather than the sons of the new bourgeoisie. Now "She must cloak her instinctual drives in polite speech, correct manners, and elegant clothes. If she is allowed to reveal anything, it is to demonstrate how submissive she can be"; she is to be modest, docile, rather stupid, obedient, sweet-natured, chaste, uncomplaining, self-denying—and *passive*. For instance, Perrault took an old peasant tale in which a little girl sent to visit her grandmother outwits the wolf and turned it into one in which his Little Red Riding Hood becomes the helpless victim. All *she* can do is scream for help.

The Brothers Grimm took this new passive woman and turned her into a good but equally stupid *hausfrau*. Snow White is told by the Dwarfs 'If you keep our house for us, and cook, sew, make the beds, wash and knit, and keep everything tidy and clean, you may stay with us, and you will have everything you want. In the evening, when we come home, dinner must be ready.'

Poor Snow White after her stint in the castle kitchens might have welcomed a spell of gold-digging for a change—and she, at least, could wield a full-size pick.

So the old terrors of the stories had not been taken away by the new writers. Rather the initiative of the girls in the stories had been removed. Now she must wait to be rescued—and it doesn't really matter whether she's screaming in grandma's cottage or Bluebeard's castle—she is still the victim waiting in hope for a man to come to the rescue. She is to have the terror without the glory.

What effect did this have on generations of girl-children? It seems impossible to say but I can't help wondering, when I ponder on the mysterious frequency with which nineteenth century women gave way to hysterics and fainting fits, whether they were moulded in childhood into something which would always be at war with their natural intelligence and the inherent free will so vital to their sense of being human.

As Zipes says: “We continue to enjoy this harmless pastime of telling classical fairy tales to our children not realizing the possible harm in harmlessness.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Jon Wiener writes: “MGM doesn’t care what kind of book you write about its founder, Louis B. Mayer, but the Disney Co. cares deeply what you say about Walt. For 60 years the company has maintained a vast army of PR people promoting Walt as a kindly, child-loving patriotic embodiment of all the true American virtues.”

But just as people who love children can feel uncomfortable in adult company, so too can child-loving patriots have uncomfortably rigid views on what other people should be allowed to say and do.

Marc Eliot planned to write a biography of Walt Disney and had his proposal accepted by Bantam books.

He was told Disney wasn’t happy with his proposal, then that they would like to work alongside him to “make sure he got it right”, then that they would want to have their legal department review it before it went to the publisher, then that they wanted final editorial control.

Bantam, which had a lucrative contract to publish the ‘Disney Library’ and the ‘Disney Choose Your Own Adventure’ series, gave in to pressure and killed Eliot’s book proposal.

So what was it that no one wanted made public about Walt Disney’s life?

Simply that his FBI file showed that he had spied on Hollywood for 25 years.

Eliot finally got his book *Walt Disney: Hollywood’s Dark Prince* published four years later by a small privately-owned company.

\* \* \* \* \*

Is the answer then to take Perrault and Grimm off our bookshelves (and Disney off our video list)? I don’t think so. It is precisely because the ‘classical fairy tales’ were adaptations and developments of earlier tales that they lend themselves so well to more adaptations, more development; in short, to the growth of the imagination. They are not set in concrete. They have ceased to belong to anyone.

Joseph Jacobs writes: “It is becoming more and more recognised, thanks chiefly to the admirable work of Mr. Alfred Nutt, in his *Studies on the Holy Grail*, that the outburst of European Romance in the twelfth century was due, in large measure, to an infusion of Celtic hero-tales into the literature of the Romance-speaking nations.” But just as tales could be carried eastward, endlessly changed and adapted, so too could they be carried westward again. Jacobs recounts an Irish version of the Brothers Grimm story ‘The Musicians of Bremen’ but now it includes a boy and does away with the music in ‘Jack and His Comrades’; even more intriguing is Jacobs’ view that the Japanese story ‘Kobutori; or, The Old Man and the Devils’ is a re-working of the Irish story of the poor man with a hump on his back. In the Japanese story he has a lump on the side of his face. Anne Wilson writes of the talking horse, Falada, in the Grimm story *The Goose-Girl*: “The horse’s name may be connected with that of Roland’s horse Veillantif or Valentine, while one version of the story calls him simply ‘Folle’, meaning ‘Fohlen’, foal.” But, interestingly, ‘falada’ in Portuguese means ‘spoken’, from ‘falar’ = to speak ...

It is said, and I have no idea if it is true, that an ancestor of mine killed the last wolf in Scotland. Today, in a world of dwindling wild creatures, we tend to feel that a new version of Little Red Riding Hood far from saving the people from the wolf should save the wolf from the people.

Peter Malkin, the man who captured Adolf Eichmann, often agonised over the seemingly simple question—what makes an Eichmann?

“Why is it that one person comes of age profoundly humane while someone else, of the same culture and social background, is seemingly impervious to the needs of others?

The conclusion I reached, though hardly original, nonetheless still seems far too little appreciated. It has everything to do with how one is regarded as a child. Those who as children are valued and nurtured, loved without expectation and listened to and heard, are likely to become compassionate adults who think for themselves and make moral choices. Those many others around whom regimentation is the norm and unconventionality is taken as aberrant are quickly made to understand—by parents, by teachers, by almost everyone in their universe—that they are of worth only as part of a larger whole. As second nature they learn passivity and obedience, not conscience.”

A romance writer, disconcerted by the number of people who came up and nod-nod-wink-wink asked her if she was writing about her latest affair, took to responding—“If I wrote crime fiction would you assume I’d gone out and done something bad just so I’d *know what it felt like?*”

Currently, there is, perhaps there has always been, the growing belief that young people deviating from the norms of ‘good behaviour’ need more discipline—which leads on to suggestions of boot camps, more police, tougher penalties, curfews, sergeant-majors instead of teachers ...

My own thought is what young people need, perhaps what we *all* need in an increasingly complex society, is more imagination—because a priceless gift of the imagination wisely used is the empathetic ability to ‘walk a mile in my shoes’ ...

\* \* \* \* \*

- April 3rd: Washington Irving  
Tony Allen  
Tony Benn  
Paul Beaver
- April 4th: Glen Rounds  
Mrs Oliphant  
Trevor Griffiths  
Giorgio Bassani
- April 5th: Algernon Charles Swinburne  
Robert Bloch  
Arthur Hailey
- April 6th: John Pepper Clark  
Wilson John Haire  
Willis Hall  
Graeme Base  
Furnley Maurice
- April 7th: William Wordsworth  
Jennifer Maiden  
Donald Barthelme  
Gabriela Mistral
- April 8th: Ursula Curtiss  
Michael Batterberry  
Gaetan Brulotte
- April 9th: Leonard Wibberley  
Lord David Cecil  
Lesbia Harford  
Johannes Bobrowski
- April 10th: A. E.  
Paul Theroux  
Norma Davis  
William Hazlitt

\* \* \* \* \*

Have you noticed how much travel books have changed over the years? Modern readers demand useful facts, snappy prose, a touch of scandal, a spice of danger. Gone are the days when John Murray could gently waffle through *The Ten Islands and Ireland* in 1919 and find a ready audience. (Even titles have felt the wind of change!)

My favourite travel books are those in which someone pits skill, courage, curiosity and ingenuity against the world—which isn't to say that I don't enjoy Paul Theroux, Bruce Chatwin, Eric Newby ... but—John Ridgway rowing the Atlantic, an Australian whose name I've forgotten crossing it in an amphibious jeep, Dervla Murphy cycling to India, Robyn Davidson crossing Australia with her camels, Sorrel Wilby's trek across Tibet ... and books like John Howard Griffin's account of crossing the southern United States disguised as a black man ("I sat in the monochrome gloom of dusk, scarcely believing that in this year of freedom any man could deprive another of anything so basic as the need to quench thirst or use the rest room.") which also lift a veil upon some aspect of society.

\* \* \* \* \*

The book I read again and again is *Shackleton's Boat Voyage*—the story of Sir Ernest Shackleton and six others crossing 1,200 miles of furious water from Elephant Island to South Georgia to get help after their ship had been crushed in the Antarctic pack ice. And when they made landfall in King Haakon Bay their troubles were far from over. All the whaling stations were on the other, more sheltered side of the island.

Captain James Cook recorded in his journal on the 16th January 1775: "The wild rocks raised their lofty summits till they were lost in clouds and the vallies lay buried in ever-lasting snow. Not a tree or a shrub was to be seen, no, not even big enough to make a toothpick. I landed in three different places, displayed our colours and took possession of the country in His Majesty's name under a discharge of small arms."

Clapperton and Sugden in their booklet *Scenery of the South* say more simply, "The Allardyce Range with a profusion of ice- and snow-clad peaks rising majestically above 1,700 m. forms a remarkable backbone of mountains of which Mount Paget at 2,960 m. is the highest."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Allardyce Range was named after W. L. Allardyce who was Governor of the Falkland Islands before becoming Governor of Tasmania. His daughters attended Collegiate School in Hobart where one of their fellow students was writer Nan Chauncy.

Governor Allardyce, like many public figures before and since, leapt into print, calling his small book *The Story of the Falkland Islands. Being an account of their Discovery and Early History, 1500-1842*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Shackleton and several of his men climbed the mountain range and reached the whaling station at Stromness safely and after three attempts all his comrades on Elephant Island were rescued. But the sad postscript to the rescue was that many of his men went on to be killed in the trenches of World War One.

Shackleton himself returned to South Georgia six years' later in a new Antarctic expedition but died whilst in Grytviken harbour. In the 1950s an Australian woman, Nan Brown, lived on South Georgia and wrote in her book *Antarctic Housewife*: "The bluff, covered by tussock grass, was surmounted by a cairn, topped by a large white painted wooden cross. Through Hans' binoculars I viewed the simple monument, erected to the memory of one of the greatest Antarctic explorers by his devoted comrades."

Shackleton was a brave man, in some ways an unlucky man, and an inspiring man. But he was also ordinary enough to come home from his voyages and complain that his wife was not disciplining the children strictly enough. I hope she responded with:

“Well, my dear, you are more than welcome to take them with you next time.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The Falkland Islands have their own home-grown poet, Des Peck. He is at his best when dealing humorously with small incidents rather than with larger themes. In fact, I am convinced a kind of malaise of the mind comes over poets when they turn to patriotic themes—for example, this piece, written in about 1980—

Why are these islands so peaceful  
the answer which surely must be  
They are really part of Heaven  
which came tumbling down to the sea.

Yet his words are a reminder that neither Britain nor Argentina in their sovereignty squabble have ever really understood the depth of feeling many Islanders have for their home, gale-force winds, isolation, grey skies, endless mutton and all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Argentina’s claim that Britain stole its land in the South Atlantic looks strangely irrational when set against the fact that it has, at least three times, sought Britain’s help in arbitrating its border disputes with Chile.

Queen Victoria was invited to draw the first border for the two countries—she is said to have drawn her finger down the Andes; imprecise but it gave Argentina the lion’s share of the ‘tail’ of South America. In 1901 Sir Thomas Holdich headed a British Royal Commission and ‘after extensive exploration and patient diplomacy, persuaded the two sides to accept the principle of “divortium aquarum”.’ And again in 1962 Britain was invited to arbitrate between the two countries. After some detailed survey work in the disputed area the McNair Commission, led by Lord McNair, sat in London to hear submissions from both Chile and Argentina. Again both nations expressed themselves satisfied with the outcome.

Now if Argentina was convinced that Britain had stolen its land why did it repeatedly seek Britain’s help? Why not The Hague or the United Nations or the Organisation of American States or the Non-Aligned Movement? Or going back to the earlier disputes why not a neutral country like Sweden or Switzerland? (At the turn of the century Holland and Portugal sought Swiss arbitration on their border in Timor.)

So—why Britain?

\* \* \* \* \*

April 11th: George Canning  
R. Austin Freeman  
Bernard O’Dowd  
Marguerite, Queen of Navarre  
David Westheimer

April 12th: Rutherford Montgomery  
Alan Ayckbourn  
Jack Gelber  
Henry Beissel  
William M. Hoffman  
Jack Hibberd  
Scott Turow  
Jerzy Laskowski

April 13th: Samuel Beckett  
Kathleen Graves  
Beverley Cross  
Eudora Welty  
John Braine  
Bill Pronzini

Seamus Heaney  
 April 14th: Arnold Toynbee  
 Péter Esterhazy  
 April 15th: Eva Fíges  
 Meriol Trevor  
 Jeffrey Archer  
 Kishore Jadav  
 Sterling Seagrave  
 April 16th: J. M. Synge  
 Anatole France  
 Kingsley Amis  
 Peter Ustinov  
 Marion Halligan  
 April 17th: Thornton Wilder  
 Isak Dinesen

\* \* \* \* \*

Almost my entire conception of South America, when I was young, was based on my mother's copy of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*—until I found in my aunt's bookshelf the story of Aimé Tschiffely's epic ride from Buenos Aires to New York with his Criollo ponies, Mancha and Gato.

Although Thornton Wilder hadn't been to South America when he wrote his famous book, I still think it makes quite a good way of beginning the study of a continent.

The book ends: "But soon we shall die and all memory of those five will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead, and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

\* \* \* \* \*

Have you ever been intrigued by the contrast between traditionally casual Latin American views about time and the precision with which it is presented in Latin American writing?

For instance Carlos Fuentes in *The Hydra Head* writes: "At exactly 8 a.m. Felix Maldonado arrived at the Sanbornson Madero—"

And what of stereotypes? One day I heard my husband say of a fellow South American—"She is a typical South American. She has a suspicious mind." Now, it may be significant that in most parts of South America you are guilty until proven innocent—but it is not a stereotype which leaps immediately to mind—

\* \* \* \* \*

I once heard Isabel Allende say how much she admired young Chileans for their ability to forgive at the time Pinochet relinquished power; I have heard the same said of the time when the Somozas were swept aside in Nicaragua. But with all due respects I don't think this is the moment which is crucial. When the future is new and shining and beckoning who wants to get bogged down in the cruelties and trials of the past? It is a year or two down the track, when reforms are being opposed, when the Old Guard is continually meddling, when people are less willing to make sacrifices—*that* is when forgiveness is so difficult.

It is sometimes said, too, that only the dead can forgive the manner and fact of their deaths but I think it is the survivors who must forgive, if they can. The dead are at peace. It is the widows left to struggle on alone, the traumatised and lonely children, the concentration camp survivors, who must begin each day by confronting their bitterness and anger and making of it what they will. For you don't forgive once, you must forgive endlessly; a word, a scent, an old photo, a scene in a book or a film, clothes at the back

of a wardrobe, blank spaces at family gatherings—suddenly it is all there again, as fresh as if the horror, the loss, had happened yesterday ...

\* \* \* \* \*

- April 18th: Henry Clarence Kendall  
Thomas Bender
- April 19th: Jean Latham  
Melville Post  
José Echegaray y Eizaguirre  
Richard Hughes  
Michael Bullock
- April 20th: Dinah Craik  
Alan Bold  
Charles Barber
- April 21st: Charlotte Brontë  
Alistair MacLean  
John Mortimer
- April 22nd: Henry Fielding  
Damien Broderick  
Kurt Wiese  
Madame de Staël
- April 23rd: Ngaio Marsh  
William Shakespeare  
Vladimir Nabokov  
J. P. Donleavy  
James Kirkup  
Victoria Glendinning  
Halldór Laxness

\* \* \* \* \*

I once heard someone suggesting that all we really need, so far as literature goes, is a knowledge of Shakespeare because he embodies ‘universal values’.

Maybe. But I disagree with the way this idea is put into practice. As soon as kids are seen as literate they are started on Shakespeare.

I was started, much as a baby is deemed ready for solid food, on Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* at the age of thirteen. We had to be able to write down the plot, name the characters, and dish up a few handy quotes. The main information I acquired from this exercise was that Jews (I had never met any) were horrible people who would think nothing of demanding a chunk out of some poor bloke’s leg.

And to back up this unthinking production of a nasty little lot of junior-sized anti-Semites we were given John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* as our required prose-reading. Remember the “little white-faced Jew in a bathchair with an eye like a rattlesnake” ...

And what the ‘universal values’ were I’m afraid no one saw fit to point out.

\* \* \* \* \*

Michael Meyer, in his biography of Ibsen, writes: “Who ever walked out of a Shakespeare play, in his time or since, feeling compelled to re-think their basic concepts of life.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Talk of ‘universal values’, ‘universal laws’, ‘universal truths’, ‘the fundamentals of human nature’ are all seductive phrases—as though by them we might impose order upon the chaos of diversity. But are any of them *true*?

I am fascinated by the records of the so-called wolf-children—such as Kamala and

Amala in India and Victor in France. Even things we have come to believe are integral to the state of being human are challenged. The children had to be taught (or forced) to stand upright, they *preferred* raw meat to cooked meat, they never learned to speak, they could not only endure but apparently not notice immense physical discomfort and hardship, they suggested no sense of self, of being individuals or of being different, they mostly appeared to be devoid of sexual impulses.

What their histories seem to suggest, to me, is quite drastic. Even things we believe to be instinctual—such as the impulse to stand on two legs—are, in fact, *learned* activities.

Immense amounts are written and speculated upon whether Mary was a Virgin, whether she saw an Angel, whether the heavenly hosts appeared to the shepherds, whether it was a stable, cowshed, barn or back-room—or whether they even came to Bethlehem. All this, I think, diverts attention from the vital symbolism of the Christmas story which is simply—babies are special. Every baby born represents new light, new hope, new potential, a new beginning.

I find myself wondering if we haven't got it all wrong. Maybe it's not remedial activities in high school, home tutoring, bigger budgets for universities, extra counselling for teenagers, which should be exercising our minds, our media, our budgets.

Maybe it is our new parents suddenly entrusted with babies and toddlers, often without family support, knowledge of parenting, burdened with the stress of more financial cares, tiredness, new strains on relationships, unexpected moments of depression, sudden isolation, the looming dilemma over whether to return to work, how to share the burden of care, whether to seek child-minding (and how soon) ...

My thought is—if we were to put immensely more care and nurturance into new parents with new babies—so that our children even before they arrive at play group or kindergarten are assured of being happy, healthy, lively, confident and cherished as themselves—well, then maybe we need do much less worrying later.

\* \* \* \* \*

'G.K. Chesterton, in one of his books, suggests that Shaw could not see the greatness of Shakespeare because he was looking for "that ghastly thing" which people call a Message—"and continue to call a Message even when they have become atheists and do not know who the Message is from".'

(Clive Sansom)

\* \* \* \* \*

Ngaio Marsh is always included as one of the Famous Four; yet, in many ways, she should be set apart and not only because she remained slim while the other three became markedly overweight!

She was born in New Zealand whereas the other three were English. More importantly, she was the one to break with tradition; the tradition of the brilliant but eccentric amateur. Christie could have her Marple and Poirot, Allingham her Albert Campion, Sayers her Wimsey and Montague Egg. Ngaio Marsh heralded the new era of the police novel. No longer would they be bumbling idiots needing to be put right by a handy amateur. Now they would be the main players in the increasingly sophisticated world of crime and detection; equally they would play as a team rather than as the Lone Ranger and Tonto.

She was sensible and far-sighted to do so. Of course, said the new readers, Christie is lots of fun (and they went on buying her) but it isn't real life. The CID and their counterparts are not cosily ensconced in armchairs busily employing their "little grey cells"; they are using the most up-to-date methods to check fingerprints, ballistics, blood-groupings; they are exchanging information with the FBI or Interpol—not calling upon Bunter or Mrs Oliver—and many readers enjoyed this insight into the changing

and expanding world of forensic science.

It is not that Ngaio Marsh goes into great technical detail in any of her books but she worked to create a *sense* of people able to draw on training, scientific expertise, and a growing array of organisational resources. It would be incorrect to call her books ‘police procedurals’ but she helped to give them birth, so that eventually they could challenge both the ‘cozy’ and the ‘private eye’ for a readership.

\* \* \* \* \*

April 24th: Clive King  
Marcus Clarke  
R. M. Ballantyne  
Anthony Trollope  
Robert Penn Warren  
Elizabeth Goudge  
Sue Grafton  
Don Norman  
Carl Spitteler

April 25th: Walter de la Mare  
Douglas Archibald  
Richard Deming  
Theodore Olsen  
Eric Rolls  
Lilian Beckwith

April 26th: Anita Loos  
Morris West  
Robert Herrick  
Wittgenstein  
Vicente Aleixandre  
Bruce Jay Friedman  
Beatrice Clarke  
Bernard Malamud  
Dorothy Davis

\* \* \* \* \*

Today is my mother’s birthday. Her writing history reminds me a little of Olga Masters; but she might be said to represent those thousands of people who enjoy writing, go to writers’ groups, judge competitions, encourage young writers, enter competitions—but don’t expect publishers and the literary world to take any notice of them.

She writes: “I’m sending my enrolment form for the CNRBC. We didn’t get a radio till 5 years after that, but I used to enter for a lot of the competitions and send letters and poems. Then that Club folded. Farmers owned Radio Station 2FC at that time. Next I (and my brothers) joined the Children’s Page in Dalgety’s Review and I was a regular supplier of things for that until it too folded.

All through the War (and in fact until my marriage) I was district correspondent for Biddeston to the Toowoomba Chronicle. I took that job on to get free publicity for the doings of our branch of the Comforts Fund, of which I was secretary for “the duration”. The pay (sixpence an inch) went into our ACF funds.

I haven’t kept any of the things I used to send to Women’s Mirror or The Bulletin. They weren’t stories or poems, only pars, and, for the Mirror, recipes and household hints. I got 9 *shillings* for an article in the Mirror on how to prepare horsehair for mattresses! That was a red-letter day.

I was Press secretary of the Rockmount branch of the CWA but after I came back to Biddeston I did no more writing till I enrolled for the short story writing course with

ICF in 1962. Under False Colours was my first win, in the Toowoomba Eisteddfod. Actually No Broccoli Tonight came 2nd the year before and was printed in The Chronicle but there was only one prize given then. I didn't keep a copy of it or various ones of my earlier stories; I didn't realise in those days how important it is to keep things."

(Her small book of prize-winning poems and stories is known irreverently in our family as A.L.W.O.O.T which stands for *A Little Way Out Of Town*.)

What she doesn't mention is that before she could sit down to write or study she had done the evening milking, got dinner for seven people, seen five children through baths and homework, cut school lunches, overseen the washing-up, laid the table for breakfast, shut the chooks, and put five children to bed before she could sit down to write in the now-quiet kitchen.

\* \* \* \* \*

A lot of writing competitions charge \$5 or \$10 as entry fees but give nothing back to the struggling writers who enter. Now it seems to me that if you've paid \$5 or more you deserve more individual attention than simply a result slip—or perhaps one of those all-inclusive judge's reports which say things like—

"The overall standard was fair with several excellent entries. A number of competitors were let down by their poor punctuation (I suppose I shouldn't have put in that semi-colon) and confused use of apostrophes (but I'm sure I was right to put who's not whose there). Endings, in general, tended to miss the right moment to finish and drag on unnecessarily (I really did think my ending was okay but perhaps I'm kidding myself). Presentation, though adequate, could in several cases be improved, especially by using newer ribbons (I honestly thought mine was dark enough—and, after all, I wear glasses) ... "

A brief but thoughtful comment on every entry doesn't seem all that much to ask and can be a tremendous help to the new or isolated writer.

It's not that judges are infallible—my mother once entered a poem about an antlion; on the bottom the judge wrote 'This writer doesn't seem to know much about lions'—but still ...

\* \* \* \* \*

My mother believes in the philosophy expressed by *Emily of New Moon*:

"Emily, *why* do you want to write? Give me your reason."

"I want to be famous and rich," said Emily coolly.

"Everybody does. Is that all?"

"No. I just *love* to write."

"A better reason—but not enough—not enough. Tell me this—if you knew you would be poor as a church mouse all your life—if you knew you'd never have a line published—would you still go on writing—*would* you?"

"Of course I would," said Emily disdainfully. "Why, I *have* to write—I can't help it by times—I've just *got* to."

If you have to write you'll find the time, make the opportunities—if you don't have to—well, somehow, other things will always seem to intervene.

\* \* \* \* \*

I remember the Society of Women Writers in their newsletter once urging their members not to throw away early drafts and notes—they may be wanted by archives some day—and for writers who work directly on to word processors to print out their early drafts. This to me vitiates the value of a computer—to save paper as well as time.

More fundamental is the sixty-four dollar question: how do you know you are going to become famous and have people clamouring for your early drafts and scribbles?

Marcia Biederman, writing for the *Writers' Digest*, looked into the way university archives in the USA work, and concluded that 'being collected' is not as attractive as it

appears at first glance (Who me? You really want *my* cartons of old paper? Wow!) and she ends up by saying: “As for me, I’m going to be setting up my own personal repository in a corner of my Brooklyn apartment. The modified “on-deposit” arrived from Bowling Green, but it turned out to have several requirements, including that I make a codicil to my will. I decided it’s cheaper to buy some fireproof storage boxes from Woolworth’s and remove the paper clips myself. Anyone who wants to examine my manuscripts is invited over for coffee.”

My system is even simpler. I compost everything.

\* \* \* \* \*

April 27th: C. Day Lewis  
Edward Gibbon  
Mary Wollstonecraft  
Helen Hodgman

April 28th: Robert Anderson  
Anna Clarke  
Hans Richter

April 29th: Rafael Sabatini  
John Tranter  
Rod McKuen  
Edward Blishen

\* \* \* \* \*

Would generations of schoolchildren have enjoyed their history lessons more if they’d been fed on the historical romances of Italian-born writer Rafael Sabatini instead of textbooks filled with dry dates and drier prose? Sabatini took the view that ‘The writer of historical fiction must inform himself as closely and accurately as possible of the realities of the life with which he deals. Before he can come to a book, he must have rendered himself so familiar with every phase and detail of the life of the period chosen that he can move with ease within it, and so produce his effects that his narrative, without being clogged by a parade of his knowledge, will yet be fully informed and enlivened by it. That, at least, is his ambitious aim.’

Certainly there is a limit to how many Godswounds! I can take in one story. But the writers of history textbooks, in my experience, seem to have been trained to expunge the tiniest sense that history might actually involve real people living real lives.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sir Winston Churchill said of George I—“A narrow, vindictive, humdrum German martinet, with dull brains, coarse tastes, crude appetites; a commonplace and ungenerous ruler, and a sluggish and incompetent commander in the field—that was all.”

Sabatini describes him as “A dull, undignified libertine, addicted to over-eating, heavy-drinking, and low conversation” and a man with a “white, flabby, frog-like face” and a “squat, ungainly figure”.

If the people of his new kingdom had known what was about to be foisted on them would they have gathered on the quayside, determined to send him right back where he belonged?

Sabatini chronicles the three decades it took for justice of a kind to catch up with George. He had kept his wife Sophia in prison for thirty-two years for alleged adultery. Upon reading her death-bed letter—in which she wrote that she was innocent and that they would stand side-by-side at the judgement seat of Heaven within a year of her death—he had a seizure and died. But this wasn’t much consolation to the people of Britain who were left to suffer his sons who were equally addicted to “over-eating, heavy-drinking, and low conversation”. Or as Oliver Wendell Holmes put it—

Seventeen hundred and fifty-five.

*Georgius Secundus* was then alive,—  
Snuffy old drone from the German hive!—

On the other hand, Sabatini's Torquemada was "tall and lean, stooping slightly at the shoulders, haggard and pale of countenance, with deep-set, luminous dark eyes, and a tender, wistful mouth." It is not too difficult to see *this* Torquemada presiding over the horrors of the rack and the stake, absolutely convinced he was saving heretics from the horror of eternal hellfire.

\* \* \* \* \*

American Quaker, Rufus M. Jones, wrote a book called *The Church's Debt to Heretics*, among whom he counted Pelagius, Abelard, Wyclif, Joan of Arc, Luther, Calvin and George Fox. He believed that heretics play a vital role in the life of the church by startling people into new ways of perceiving and understanding.

Heresy isn't something we think about much these days so I was astonished to learn that the Presbyterian Church was going ahead with the trial of a Sydney clergyman, the Rev. Peter Cameron, for heresy. My first thought was surprise—what could anyone *do* in these lax days to call forth such a charge. My second thought was irrelevant sympathy—I have a cousin called Peter Cameron—so what had *this* Peter Cameron done that was so terrible?

He himself says, "I was quite prepared to admit that I was a theological cyclops, but I didn't see why I should be judged by bats." What began as criticism of his stand on the ordination of women eventually expanded to take on board his supposed support for homosexuality, whether Paul actually wrote the Letters to Timothy and Titus, the relationship of the Westminster Confession of Faith to the *Bible*, and the final stumbling-block: the fallibility or otherwise of the *Bible*.

Dr Cameron drew attention to Chapter 19 of Genesis—and asked what position a Fundamentalist should take—"Before the guests went to bed, the men of Sodom surrounded the house. All the men of the city, both young and old, were there. They called out to Lot and asked, "Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out to us!" The men of Sodom wanted to have sex with them.

Lot went outside and closed the door behind him. He said to them, "Friends, I beg of you, don't do such a wicked thing! Look, I have two daughters who are still virgins. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do whatever you want with them. But don't do anything to these men; they are guests in my house, and I must protect them."

The Presbyterian Church, after supporting the ordination of women for a number of years, had reversed its decision. But this question somehow got lost in the furore, and the position of some men in the Church—that men have "authority over" women therefore women cannot become ministers—was not resolved. Yet the act of Jesus washing his disciples' grubby feet is, to me, a reminder that those who would speak in his name are not in "authority over" but take a position of humble service—and women have been humbly serving for millennia. The Religion column in *The Sunday Tasmanian* recorded this poem by a 17th century priest—

Did the woman say,  
When she held him for the first time in the dark dank of the stable,  
After the pain and the bleeding and the crying,  
"This is my body; this is my blood"?  
Did the woman say,  
When she held him for the last time in the dark rain on a hilltop,  
After the pain and the bleeding and the dying,  
"This is my body; this is my blood"?  
Well that she said it then  
For dry old men,  
Brocaded robes belying barrenness

Ordain that she not say it for him now.

And Jimmy Dow, a Scottish minister, wrote—  
The Church of Scotland is a place  
Fairly full of life,  
Where you'll find the Scottish working man  
Represented by his wife.

When I first came to Hobart I was invited to meet a woman named Esme Reid who'd been secretary to Governor Arrowsmith in the Falkland Islands in the 1960s and later worked for Gerald Durrell at his endangered species zoo in the Channel Islands. It was the only time I met her as she died soon afterwards so I was deeply touched to learn that she had left me a small book called *The Falkland Islands To-Day* by Forrest McWhan. To-Day was 1952 and McWhan had been the minister there of the United Free Church. The Free Church didn't endorse women candidates for the ministry but, like many churches in remote places, it sometimes found itself without a minister and had to draw upon the talents of its women to keep everything going. Far from damaging the church I think that women stepping into the breach in difficult circumstances draw on a reservoir of kindness and support which exists in every congregation but which often lies dormant in the presence of a charismatic, energetic, and forceful man.

\* \* \* \* \*

The nineteenth century gave England Sabatini and the gifted Rossetti family, Italian waiters, and the magnificent villain Count Fosco.

In return, England gave Italy countless numbers of tubercular and bronchial visitors who coughed and hacked and wheezed and gasped their way from Venice to Rome, from Florence to Naples ... and filled up 'English cemeteries' on gentle hillsides ...

\* \* \* \* \*

April 30th: Alexander Anderson  
Sir John Lubbock Avebury  
Nadia Wheatley  
Paul Jennings  
May 1st: Joseph Heller  
Marie Corelli  
Terry Southern  
Teilhard de Chardin  
Frank Parrish  
Giovanni Guareschi  
Victor Reid  
May 2nd: Edith OE. Somerville  
Ben Belitt  
Jerome K. Jerome  
Gavin Souter  
Alan Marshall  
John Tuohy  
Dr Spock

\* \* \* \* \*

When I was about eleven a favourite book of mine was *Jill's Gymkhana* by Ruby Ferguson. Jill's pony, Black Boy, was genuinely black but when I came upon a reprinted version recently I found he'd turned, possibly in the interests of race relations, into a "piebald pony". But it just didn't ring true. In the fifties and sixties there was a strong prejudice against piebalds and skewbalds in the show-ring. Also, whoever had done the changeover had been very slapdash—the new version still said he "looked as if he was made of patent leather" and "his coat was like black satin".

(And is 'race relations' a good enough explanation? James Baldwin said: 'This

friend of mine had a stallion, a young stallion, whom he called Black Boy ... It was named for *me*. That's one of the nice things about *living* in France, I must say. Somebody could get a horse—a beautiful, *beautiful* horse, and call it Black Boy, you know—out of *love* for you.' And he went on loving the horse even when it bolted with him and tried to throw him off.)

Edith Somerville and Martin Ross created a pack of hounds in *The Irish R.M.* and called them The Whiteboys and said “they chiefly differed from the established pattern ... in the human lawlessness of their expression.”

Someone once named a pony after me—which I must admit I took as a compliment (though I wasn't *quite* so sanguine on learning that a jenny is a female donkey)—but I'm not sure The Whiteboys could be said to be a compliment to anyone—

“Is it settling down they are?” said Michael derisively. “That's the fine settling down! Roaring and screeching every minute since they came into the place! And as for fighting! They weren't in the kennel three days before they had Rampant ate, and nothing only his paws left before me in the morning! I didn't give one night in my bed since, with running down to them. The like o' them trash isn't fit for a gentleman's kennels.”

I really think Black Boy could've been left black all over.

\* \* \* \* \*

Edith Somerville and her cousin Violet Martin of Ross created what must surely be the world's most enduring partnership because it continued even after Martin's death. Somerville believed she was receiving communications from her dead partner. Perhaps she was. Their years of partnership and friendship must have made them deeply sensitive to each other's ways of thinking and seeing their world.

Gifford Lewis says “It is generally agreed that Edith supplied the power and mass of raw material and that Martin controlled the finish and form of their work.”

Yet, surprisingly, they lived apart, only visiting every so often and doing much of their discussing through letters. They belonged to that strata of nineteenth century Irish society which also produced writers such as Maria Edgeworth, Lady Gregory, Elizabeth Bowen, Rebecca West, Oscar Wilde's mother and wife—tough, clever, observant, mildly eccentric ... Elizabeth Bowen records meeting Somerville at the Swift celebrations—“She is said to be 87, is a little lame but holds herself very straight and has a blue-eyed, expressive, obstinate face. She wore a mannish coat and skirt and a bright green tie and a hat with dashing bright green plumes in front ... ” One of her soberer outfits, no doubt, as she is also remembered as creating a hat for herself with a stuffed seagull on top ...

She turned down the opportunity to marry Oxford don, Herbert Greene, believing her home, her writing, her friendship with her cousin (who also remained unmarried), and her many other interests were sufficient for a happy life. She was a talented artist, she was M.F.H. of the West Carberry Hunt, she made enough to live on from her writing and from training and selling horses.

She was more progressive and forward-thinking in her ideas than her cousin and collaborator and many of her statements still read with power and relevance today.

—“Education is what women want. Practical education that shall arouse their constructive sense, shall make them want to improve things, shall make them critical ... You cannot reform a slave. Reform must have its feet set upon freedom. It is the sense of Power that creates the sense of responsibility, the desire to better things, that wakens the character to say ‘These things are wrong, let us make them right’.”

—“The outstanding fact, as it seems to me, among women who live by their brains, is friendship. A profound friendship that extends through every phase and aspect of life, intellectual, social, pecuniary. Anyone who has experience of the life of independent and artistic women knows this; and it is noteworthy that these friendships of women

will stand even the strain of matrimony for one or both of the friends. I gravely doubt that David saw very much of Jonathon after the death of Uriah.”

—“I half think of writing an article about the absurdity, if it were nothing else, of grinding and crushing Ireland to death. Oh yes, I admit the assassinations, but I still can’t see why the Irish should not wish for freedom as they have wished and struggled for it since Henry II’s time. If the English smash us to pulp, you will have nothing left to laugh at (yes, *you* and all the good and well-intentioned people, who think they know what is best for Ireland) ... In all these centuries of disaffection and disappointment one simple thing has never been tried—giving Ireland what she asks for.”

—As president of the Munster Women’s Franchise League she put forward these four reasons for the Vote.

1st. For the Good of the State—because the State has to make laws for women as well as men, and wants all the help it can get from both sexes.

2nd. For the Good of Women—To educate them. To give them equal pay for equal work and to raise their general status.

3rd. For the Good of Men. To enlarge their Mental Horizon and Sympathies.

And lastly, because Taxation without Representation is Injustice.

\* \* \* \* \*

Their books *The Real Charlotte* and *The Irish R.M.* have been filmed but *The Irish R.M.* still attracts criticism on the grounds that it puts down the Irish.

It is true that Major Yeates refers to the domestic staff as a “floundering, foundering ménage of incapables” but it is equally true that he says “Men, women, and children worked in a way that only Irish people can work in an emergency. All their cleverness, all their good-heartedness, and all their love of a ruction came to the front—” and “If to make a guest feel himself to be the one person in the world whose welfare is of any importance is the aim of hostesses, they can study the art in its perfection under the smoky rafters of Irish cabins.”

It would also be true to say that Somerville and Ross trawl widely as they poke gently sarcastic fun at their characters, both Irish and English and Anglo-Irish, Catholic and Protestant ...

Flurry Knox, the Major's landlord, “looked like a stableboy among gentlemen, and a gentleman among stableboys”—

Mr McOstrich, the photographer, raises his “bleak northern voice”—

Old Mrs Knox “looked as if she had robbed a scarecrow”—

Dr Hickey has “the lethargic and pessimistic humour of his type”—

Of Leigh Kelway, private secretary to Lord Waterbury, the Major says “I had at the end of three days arrived at the conclusion that his society, when combined with a notebook and a thirst for statistics, was not what I used to find it at Oxford”—

And the friend of his wife’s youth, Mr Chichester, resembles “a well-fed and passé schoolboy”—

But the Major keeps the strongest dig for himself: “I have no objection to being called an idiot, but, that being so, I ought to be allowed the privileges and exemptions proper to idiots.”

\* \* \* \* \*

If I see someone chuckling over a book it is natural to say “What are you reading?” On one such occasion the reader turned her book cover towards me and said—*Three Men in a Boat*. Now, that’s a book I see everywhere—in libraries, on second-hand stalls, I seem to remember my parents having a copy—but I had never read it. Now, though, I had the best recommendation of all—laughter—and I got it from the library that same week.

And it *is* funny ...

“He put his leg into the jam, and he worried the teaspoons, and he pretended that the

lemons were rats, and got into the hamper and killed three of them before Harris could land him with the frying-pan.”

“And I am careful of my work, too. Why, some of the work that I have by me has been in my possession for years and years, and there isn’t a finger-mark on it. I take great pride in my work; I take it down now and then and dust it. No man keeps his work in a better state of preservation than I do.”

Dear me, yes, I know the feeling well.

But I dislike intensely blurbs which use that description “period charm”; it suggests that I should put my books away for a hundred years and then instead of curt rejections my descendants will find publishers willing to take everything because of its quaint “period charm” ... or as Jerome puts it, “Will rows of our willow-pattern dinner-plates be ranged above the chimney-pieces of the great in the years 2000 and odd?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Jerome might be said to be the patron saint of reluctant students—“What a boy learns in six years at school, he could, with the aid of an intelligent bookseller, learn at home in six months”—and intelligent booksellers might like to have him embossed on pendants.

He began his writing career in 1885 with a book of amusing experiences *On the Stage—and Off* which netted him £5. He went on to plays, personal reminiscences, a magazine *The Idler* (which he founded with Scottish journalist, Robert Barr, creator of the first parody of Sherlock Holmes in *Detective Stories Gone Wrong* and the first humorous detective to gain popularity, Eugene Valmont), then a 2d weekly *To-Day*, then his best-seller in 1889 *Three Men in a Boat*.

His 2d weekly, though, brought him close to bankruptcy. An article in it, not written by Jerome, queried the claim of a Leeds inventor, Mr Samuel Fox, who claimed domestic gas could be made from water (remember the claim of a car which would run on water which gained the support of certain members of the Queensland Government?). Mr Fox took out a libel suit against Jerome’s paper and won a farthing in damages. Court costs were £9,000 for Jerome, £11,000 for Fox.

At the conclusion of the case both men shook hands, Jerome had to sell his magazine to pay his costs, domestic gas users were no better off, and Fox said to Jerome that he “was going back to Leeds to strangle his solicitors and hoped I would do the same by mine”.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jerome’s famous companions on the boat were based on real life companions—a bank clerk, George Wingrave, and Carl Henschel, whose Polish father had introduced the process of photo-etching to Britain (Henschels did the pictures for the first Beatrix Potter books) and made a modest fortune. Henschel was about to become Lord Mayor of London in 1914 when war broke out and a vicious smear campaign suggesting he was German destroyed his chances of becoming Lord Mayor and ruined his business.

Jerome himself had lived in Dresden and loved Germany. He ‘did his bit’ in the way of encouraging people to buy war bonds. But he never came to terms with his personal heartbreak of seeing the two countries he loved best at war with one another.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jerome gives a different version of the story of the Grasshopper and the Ant.

“Once upon a time there lived a wise grasshopper and a foolish ant. All through the pleasant summer weather, the grasshopper sported and played, gambolling with his fellows in and out among the sunbeams, dining sumptuously each day on leaves and dewdrops, never troubling about the morrow, singing ever his one peaceful, droning song.

Then there came the cruel winter, and the grasshopper, looking round, saw that his friends, the flowers, lay dead, and knew thereby that his own little span was drawing

near its close.

Then he felt glad that he had been so happy, and had not wasted his life. ‘It has been very short,’ said he to himself; ‘but it has been very pleasant, and I think I made the best use of it. I have drunk in the sunshine, I have lain on the soft, warm air, I have tasted the juice of the sweet green leaves. I have done what I could. I have spread my wings, I have sung my song. Now I will thank God for the sunny days that are passed, and die.’”

Saying which, he crawled under a brown leaf and met his fate in the way that all brave grasshoppers should; and a little bird that was passing by picked him up tenderly and buried him.

Now when the foolish ant saw this, she was greatly puffed up with Pharisaical conceit. ‘How thankful I ought to be,’ said she, ‘that I am industrious and prudent, and not like this poor grasshopper. While he was flitting about from flower to flower, and enjoying himself, I was hard at work, putting by against the winter. Now he is dead, while I am about to make myself cosy in my warm home, and eat all the good things that I have been saving up.’

But, as she spoke, the gardener came along with his spade, and levelled the hill where she dwelt to the ground, and left her lying dead amidst the ruins.

Then the same kind little bird that had buried the grasshopper came and picked her out and buried her also; and afterwards he composed and sang a song, the burthen of which was ‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.’ ...”

\* \* \* \* \*

- May 3rd: May Sarton  
Edgar Lustgarten  
Norman Thelwell
- May 4th: Christopher Wilkinson  
Eric Wright  
Nick Joaquin  
Thomas Kinsella  
Amos Oz  
Gillian Tindall
- May 5th: Leo Lionni  
Miles Tripp  
Karl Marx  
Michael Palin  
Henryk Sienkiewicz  
Soren Kierkegaard  
Peter Jokostra
- May 6th: Rabindranath Tagore  
Debra Adelaide  
Chris Wallace-Crabbe  
Harry Martinson
- May 7th: Robert Browning  
Ruth Jhadvala  
Angela Carter  
Kenneth Bernard  
Wladyslaw Reymont  
Archibald Macleish  
Peter Carey

\* \* \* \* \*

Robert Browning was an ardent supporter of the anti-vivisection movement, writing, “I would rather submit to the worst of deaths, so far as pain goes, than have a single dog or cat tortured on the pretence of sparing me a twinge or two.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Other writers have dealt with this subject. Voltaire in his *Philosophical Dictionary*: To say that the animals are machines without knowledge and sentiment, that they always do everything in the same way, without learning and perfecting anything, is a sign of obtuseness ... Some brutes seize this dog, which so surpasses us in loyalty and friendship, they nail him to a table and vivisect him to show us the mesenteric veins and find in him the same organs of feeling that we have. Answer me, mechanist! Has nature endowed this animal with the well-springs of sentiment so that he should not feel? Has he got nerves in order to be insensitive?

And George Bernard Shaw: Whoever doesn't hesitate to vivisect will hardly hesitate to lie about it.

Swiss novelist Hans Ruesch, in his searing indictment of vivisection *Slaughter of the Innocent*, which should be in every laboratory, concludes with a story of a group of young people and a veterinarian who broke into the Neurophysiological Institute Marey in Paris which was researching pain by using cats. "Two of these unfortunate animals, which had been already so damaged that they couldn't be used for further experiments, had simply been left to starve to death in their cages. The vet estimated their martyrdom as having lasted between 30 and 40 days. The only thing their liberators could do for them was putting them to sleep. All the other cats were either nervous wrecks or totally insane. One kept hiding under the furniture and urinated constantly. All had electrodes implanted in their brains.

The laboratory could have brought charges of housebreaking and burglary, of course, but didn't. All they wanted was silence and oblivion. But the young people made sure to render the incident public. Thereupon the laboratory officials announced that their activity was "for the good of mankind," that they loved those animals and pampered them, and that *all the experiments on pain were totally painless for the animals involved*.

This called for an answer, so the commando broke into a laboratory of the CNRS—the so-called National Center of Scientific Research—located in Gif-sur-Yvette, a suburb of Paris. There they liberated more cats with part of their cranium sawed off and more electrodes implanted in the brain, and brought them to a Parisian weekly, *Charlie Hebdo*, which organized an exhibit of the stolen cats for representatives of the press, radio and TV. They all reacted in the same manner: at first, incredulity, then profound indignation and disgust. Whereupon Dr. André Berkaloff, the "scientific director" of the laboratory's biological department, issued among other memorable statements the following: "As a consequence of this theft, the health of those cats is in jeopardy .... I only hope that they are going to be returned to us promptly."

\* \* \* \* \*

More and more books come on the market dealing with the medicinal and other uses of plants. The one I'm reading at the moment is called *Wild Medicine in Australia* by A. B. & J. W. Cribb. It includes a long list of plants found useful by the indigenous people including: wattle-bark decoctions for coughs, musk basil for fevers, beach bean for rheumatism, "split Jack" for insect bites, tick-weed for worms, silky-heads for sore eyes, native yams for skin cancers, hop-bush for wounds and stonefish stings, iodine plant for sores and ulcers, ribbon gum for diarrhoea, native fig for ringworm, dog nuts for dysentery, cocky apple for prickly heat, camel bush for sores, vine tree for baldness and native cowpea for constipation—a pharmacopoeia acquired, not by testing on caged wombats and kangaroos, but by careful patient observation and self-trial.

The authors also obliquely question the 'scientific' method when they say: 'In the early decades of this century the use (of the asthma plant, *chamaesyce hirta*) was somewhat discredited as analysis failed to show any medicinally valuable principle. However, more recent experimental work has shown the tea has a definite effect of

depressing respiration and relaxing the bronchioles, which confirms what our forefathers and ‘old wives’ knew all the time.’

\* \* \* \* \*

- May 8th: John Meade Falkner  
Peter Corris  
Thomas Pynchon  
Ariel Dorfman  
Dorothy Chard  
David Attenborough
- May 9th: J. M. Barrie  
Baudelaire  
Richard Adams  
José Ortega y Gasset  
Alan Bennett  
Gavin Lyall
- May 10th: Monica Dickens  
Arthur Kopit  
John Rowe Townsend  
Ric Throssell  
Nayantara Sahgal  
Barbara Taylor Bradford
- May 11th: Charles Hyne  
Lotte Pol  
Isaac D’Israeli  
Camilo José Cela  
Stanley Elkin
- May 12th: Edward Lear  
Leslie Charteris  
Elechi Amadi  
Achmed Abdullah  
Miriam Stoppard  
Farley Mowat

\* \* \* \* \*

Years ago, I came upon a little Spanish grammar in which the author recounts a time when, sitting with several Spanish and English friends, he asked “Are you vermouthing or cognacking?”, then attempted to turn this into Spanish. His Spanish friends were mildly upset, saying he shouldn’t play with the Spanish language in that irreverent way.

So what would they have thought of Edward Lear with his Dolomphious Duck, his Fizzgiggious Fish, Mary Squeen of Cots, or ‘sufficient unto the day is the weevil thereof’? Would he have been gently reprovved and urged into more reverent channels—or did that particular grammarian have unusually stickling friends?

Oodgeroo Noonuccal told the story of the white missionaries preventing her people from speaking their own language, insisting they must speak English because it was a ‘pure’ language.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was browsing in *The Examiner* in search of something, I forget what, when I came upon an article in which Michael Krauss of the University of Alaska called it a “catastrophe” that the 10,000 to 15,000 languages of pre-history are now down to 6,000 and dropping fast. He was quoted as saying, “We should care about this. The world will be less interesting, less beautiful.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A missionary of a different ilk, the Reverend Thomas Bridges, set to work to collect the words and develop a dictionary of the language of the Yahgan people in Tierra del Fuego. Even though they had virtually no material possessions (stop and reflect how many of our words deal with possessions) he eventually had 32,000 words in his Yahgan-English dictionary and he was still collecting words when he died.

No more could the fiction be maintained that the world's most simple-living people communicated in grunts and ughs.

But although a knowledge of the sophistication of language might be thought to earn people some sort of respect, the history of the Yahgan after white contact is one of ever-increasing misery. Those who were taken to the small settlement on Keppel Island in the Falklands to learn Christianity and farming died of homesickness and heartbreak. Those who remained behind fell prey to European diseases, dispossession, and murder.

Their dictionary and the crumbling stones on Keppel Island are, today, the memorials to the genocide of the Yahgan.

\* \* \* \* \*

May 13th: Norma Klein  
Daphne du Maurier  
Jan Navratil

\* \* \* \* \*

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, when accused of plagiarising Shakespeare, responded with: "Is there no such thing as two men having similar thoughts on similar occasions?"

Daphne du Maurier might well have quoted this when she found herself caught up in the famous court case over *Rebecca*. It is a strange case. Her novel when it came out was compared by the *New York Times* Book Review to a novel in Portuguese, called *A Sucedora* (*The Successor*) by Carolina Nabuco. I assume it had been translated into English unless the Book Review trawls very widely in its reviewing. But it wasn't Nabuco who sued. Instead the review alerted the executors of the estate of Edwina L. Macdonald who had brought out a book called *Blind Windows* in 1927.

The difficulty with *Rebecca* is that it has a relatively simple plot and style, relying instead for its impact on its atmosphere and the sympathy the unnamed heroine arouses. It may well have had similarities to *Blind Windows*. But the prosecution was unable to prove that du Maurier had read *Blind Windows*, let alone copied parts of it, and du Maurier won the case.

But no one precisely *wins* a plagiarism case. It leaves a faint stain.

\* \* \* \* \*

May 14th: Denis Cannan  
María Irene Fornés  
Steve Katz  
May 15th: Frank Baum  
Katherine Anne Porter  
Bill Peach  
Xavier Herbert  
Rima Vallbona  
Nancy Garden  
Kim Jong-ik  
May 16th: Sigmund Freud

\* \* \* \* \*

Having trouble getting people to buy your first book? Don't despair. Sigmund Freud took 8 years to sell the 600 copies of his first book, *Interpretation of Dreams*; and Erma Bombeck says: 'Forget the first book. My relatives didn't even buy it. I went on a book tour and sold one desk, two copies of another author's book, and guided 36 people to a

restroom.’

\* \* \* \* \*

- May 17th: Robert Adamson  
Dorothy Richardson  
Alfonso Reyes
- May 18th: Bertrand Russell  
Rodney Ackland
- May 19th: Lorraine Hansberry  
Michael Balcon  
Mary O’Malley  
Victoria Wood  
Eugene Genovese  
Mel Calman
- May 20th: John Stuart Mill  
Ann Welch  
Sigrid Undset  
Margery Allingham  
Honoré de Balzac
- May 21st: Derek Marlowe  
James Plunkett  
Ana Diosdado  
Alexander Pope  
Dorothy Hewett  
Harold Robbins  
M. W. Wellman  
Francis Marion Beynon
- May 22nd: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
Arthur Lobel  
Peter Matthiessen  
Vance Packard  
M. Scott Peck

\* \* \* \* \*

Sherlock Holmes’ style of detection has been widely parodied, but never as well as in a story claimed to be completely true.

Conan Doyle: How on earth did you recognize me?

Boston Cabbie: If you will excuse me, your coat lapels are badly twisted downward, where they have been grasped by the pertinacious New York reporters. Your hair has the Quakerish cut of a Philadelphia barber, and your hat, battered at the brim in front, shows where you have tightly grasped it, in the struggle to stand your ground at a Chicago literary luncheon. Your right shoe has a large block of Buffalo mud just under the instep; the odor of a Utica cigar hangs about your clothing and the overcoat itself shows the slovenly brushing of the porters of the through sleepers from Albany. The crumbs of the doughnut on the top of your waistcoat could only have come there in Springfield.

Conan Doyle: Look of amazement.

Boston Cabbie: And stenciled on the very end of your walking stick in perfectly plain lettering is the name Conan Doyle.

Going by contemporary literature American cabbies aren’t what they used to be.

\* \* \* \* \*

Do writers of biographies of mystery writers become infected by the desire to deduce and infer and smell mysteries where no mysteries are?

Charles Higham, in his biography of Conan Doyle, draws several interesting

inferences from Silver Blaze’s breeding—given as being from “Somomy” stock in the USA and “Isonomy” stock in Britain. This, he says, is a very subtle reference to Oscar Wilde because the Marquess of Queensberry had dubbed him a “somidouite” and the word isonomy can also be regarded as a subtle reference to homosexuality because of its Greek meaning to “division equally, down the middle”.

I wonder.

Or did Conan Doyle, a keen racing man, simply use “of Isonomy stock” because the progeny of Isonomy were carrying all before them at that time—his filly Seabreeze winning the English Oaks in 1888, and his colts Common and Isinglass winning the Epsom Derby in 1891 and 1893 respectively.

\* \* \* \* \*

Conan Doyle handed a golden egg to his children and they proceeded to smear the yolk, drop the shell, and spill the white. Higham says, “It is now estimated that about a third of the income of the Doyle estate since 1930 has been absorbed by litigation.”

\* \* \* \* \*

- May 23rd: Margaret Wise Brown  
Matthew Anderson  
Pär Lagerkvist  
Susan Cooper  
Anne Brady
- May 24th: Mary Grant Bruce  
Joseph Brodsky  
Mikhail Sholokhov  
Gwyn Jones  
Maroula Klifa  
Bob Dylan
- May 25th: Ralph Waldo Emerson  
Robert Ludlum  
Margaret Forster  
Jamaica Kincaid  
Raymond Carver  
Lord Bulwer-Lytton
- May 26th: Denis Florence Macarthy  
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (chr)  
Jennifer Pringle-Jones  
Sarah De Araugo
- May 27th: Rachel Carson  
Herman Wouk  
Dashiehl Hammett  
J. K. Bangs  
Max Brod  
John Cheever  
John Barth  
Tony Hillerman  
Harlan Ellison

\* \* \* \* \*

Many people date the beginning of their environmental awareness from the day they read Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Suddenly, those faint niggling doubts that things weren’t quite what they used to be were given substance and linked firmly to human activities.

When I look back on it the carelessness with which everything was sprayed makes my toes curl. I can remember standing beside the road watching a plane crop-spray the

paddock just across the way. It was fascinating to watch the pilot zoom in, the white spirals suddenly appear, then the plane rising and turning again. How much of that spray did I breathe in? I don't think it even occurred to me then that it was poison being spewed all over that paddock and drifting over me. A teacher we had used to order us to put our heads down on our desks, then, using an old pump-action fly-spray, he would liberally encloud us. By the time he put his pump away we would have dripping hair, the droplets would glisten wetly on our arms ...

I don't know but I sometimes wonder if that vague feeling of malaise, of not having the energy I feel I should have, has to do with the same reason we used to pick up unhatched and abandoned birds' eggs so fragile they cracked at the touch.

D. W. Connell in *Water Pollution: Causes and Effects in Australia and New Zealand* Third edition, 1993, writes: "In 1962, Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, in which a number of undesirable effects were attributed to insecticides, appeared. These claims were strongly challenged by insecticide proponents but, irrespective of the true situation, there is little doubt that the book stimulated a valuable research effort which is continuing today."

And today, libraries have whole shelves, sometimes even whole sections, devoted to 'green' books; but it's a bit like watching the poor old frog on his greasy pole. One problem appears to be resolved, one product removed from the market, then doubts begin to be expressed about something which has been touted and sold as a safe alternative ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I was intrigued to learn, years ago, that a Green party in European politics earlier this century referred to a party which drew its support from country people. Apart from the fact that rural Australia is rarely green I'm none too sure how Mr Fischer feels about the colour Green.

\* \* \* \* \*

We tend to think of our concern for the environment as something relatively new, sparked off by crisis after crisis—Serveso and Love Canal, de-forestation, nuclear testing, loss of species, the Amoco Cadiz and the Exxon Valdez ...

But of course people have always noticed—and cared.

Mrs Oliphant writing of Scotland in the 1880s—"The river like so many in that district, had, however, in its earlier life been sacrificed to trade and was grimy with paper-making."

John Woolman writing of America in the 1770s—"Landholders who paid interest for large sums of money, and being intent on paying their debts by raising grain have by too much tilling ... robbed the earth of its natural fatness ... To impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age."

Marco Polo writing in the 13th century—"The Great Khan is only too happy to plant trees because diviners and astrologers have told him that anyone planting trees lives a long time."

And Mary Webb writing in the 1920s—"It is a surprisingly small company, that of the true children of the earth, in a world where everybody talks of "love of nature", everybody writes "nature books", everybody is "fond of the country". If you are a child of the earth you are not "fond" but impassioned, devastated, recreated by these things ... It is not an easy way."

\* \* \* \* \*

May 28th: Thomas Moore  
Nan Chauncy  
Patrick White  
Ian Fleming  
Eva Meleagrou

Olga Masters  
Antigone Kefalá  
Maeve Binchy

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1960 John Strugnell published *The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran* in which he translates: “The Cherubim bless the image of the Throne-Chariot above the firmament, and they praise the (majesty) of the fiery firmament beneath the seat of His Glory. And between the turning wheels, Angels of Holiness come and go, as it were a fiery vision of most holy spirits; and about them (flow) seeming rivulets of fire, like gleaming bronze, a radiance of many gorgeous colours, of marvellous pigments magnificently mingled.

The spirits of the Living God move perpetually with the glory of the wonderful Chariot. The small voice of blessing accompanies the tumult as they depart, and on the path of their return they worship the Holy One.”

Fascinating. And I immediately jumped to the conclusion that it was the publication of this material from the Dead Sea Scrolls which inspired Patrick White to write his *Riders in the Chariot* but there doesn't seem to be a connection; at least not that I've come across.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have become a saga of a different sort. They have been sold and re-sold, smuggled, hidden, burnt, lost, blown-away, broken, damaged ... and beyond that is the on-going saga in which Professor Strugnell and his team working on them were accused of a dog-in-the-manger attitude at best and deliberately suppressing parts of the scrolls at worst; so much so, that Strugnell was eventually sacked. Every so often we hear the claim that the scrolls will undermine Christianity, show it all to be built on sifting sand ... yet there is an air of anti-climax about such claims, they seem to fizzle out, like water on hot sand. I wonder why. Is it that, in the 1990s, people are more likely to look to Christianity for ethical standards in an increasingly amoral and complex world than for stories of virgin births or medical miracles? Is it that what has been published of the scrolls is often so dry and devoid of personality that it is not surprising that people continue to turn to the Gospels with the warmth and vividness and *immediacy* of their people? Is it that theologians and Biblical scholars have always tended to be removed from the needs of ordinary Christians—and the Dead Sea Scrolls have done nothing, so far, to bridge that gap?

\* \* \* \* \*

I never met Patrick White but I remember, in 1986, someone telling me with something close to awe that they'd been able to get White to sign a petition on East Timor which was to go to that year's ALP Conference. I thought, ‘well, and why shouldn't he support East Timor?’ but I didn't know, then, how difficult it was to approach Patrick White. He wasn't precisely a recluse but nor was his latch on the string. To get past the various barriers he'd placed round himself wasn't easy.

I once came upon a book by an English author which, among the first page credits, named the person who had ‘Americanised’ the text for the USA. How ridiculous I thought. How can Americans expect to understand other English-speaking peoples if they are moated from the spelling and idiosyncrasies and colloquialisms which make us different? So I felt like jumping up and crying Hear! Hear! when I came upon Patrick White saying, no doubt in his curmudgeonly way, in David Marr's biography: ‘There is a lot in the American language I have had to puzzle out for myself, and am none the worse for doing so. Why can't the Americans do the same when it comes to ours?’

Of course it is not only the Americans. Legion are the British publishers who have turned down books on the grounds that they are ‘too Australian’—and, no doubt, ‘too Indian’, ‘too Canadian’, ‘too Swazi’, ‘too Tongan’ ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Nan Chauncy, who wrote the beautiful children's book *Tangara*, was also a cousin of diplomat and cabinet member in the Asquith government, C.F.G. Masterman, who was a friend of writers such as Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford and wrote *The Condition of England*. Another cousin was Sir John Masterman who ran the Twenty Committee in World War Two to use captured German spies and wrote *The Double Cross System in the War of 1939-45*; he later became Vice-Chancellor of Oxford and wrote several attractive mysteries with university backgrounds such as *An Oxford Tragedy*. Then his publisher said to him that times were changeing and he must now put in some sex to beef things up. Masterman, a bachelor and a very shy man, refused and wrote no more mysteries. A biographical note says "It is a loss that Masterman turned so infrequently to Ernst Brendl, for he was an erudite, sophisticated and compassionate detective" ... yes, and strangely enough, mystery readers read for the mystery not the sex.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Nan Chauncy married, her sister Eve gave her a dairy cow as a wedding present.

\* \* \* \* \*

May 29th: André Brink  
G. K. Chesterton  
T. H. White  
Mary Louise Molesworth  
Frederick Faust  
May 30th: Cornelia Otis Skinner  
R. Chetwynd-Hayes  
Julian Symons  
John Sligo

\* \* \* \* \*

Does England produce a particular type of crime which draws the interest of crime writers; in particular, the 'respectable' crime which remains unsolved? Julian Symons has tackled several such cases in his fiction—or perhaps I should say faction—such as *The Blackheath Poisonings* and *Sweet Adelaide*.

A similar book which I found intriguing dealt with the three arsenic poisonings which horrified the residents of quiet Birdhurst Rise in suburban London in 1931. Twenty years later Browne and Tullett wrote: "The police may have, as they are said to have, definite opinions about all three deaths, but there the matter rests to this day." A writer named Michael Rillington wasn't content to let the matter rest there and came up with a sensible and well-researched solution in the manner of Julian Symons. Was it the truth? He did not need to worry about a vigorous Counsel for the Defence pulling his case to shreds. But what of the accused's still living family? How did they feel? Had they always had some suspicions or did it turn their lives upside-down? Rillington offered them the right of reply which they took up but in some ways it was pointless, the reader had already been seduced by the possibleness of Rillington's ideas. They might have been better to have maintained a discreet silence. But it raises an important question: is trial by book likely to be fairer than trial by jury?

\* \* \* \* \*

Yvonne Rousseau takes on a vastly different puzzle—The Murders at Hanging Rock—and leaves the conventional reader scrambling. First of all there is the unresolved question: did the girls really disappear? Was it based on a true story? Then, whether fact or fiction, she swoops through a range of esoteric possibilities, such as the workings of a parallel universe, before ending up with the staples of other books in this genre—the careful consideration of character, alibi, timing, motive ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Australian investigative journalist and lawyer Evan Whitton has brought out a book called *Trial by Voodoo* in which he argues for a legal system closer to the European model of civil law than our current system based on English common law; ie. the courts, rather than setting up an expensive tussle between competing lawyers, would operate in a more low-key manner with one aim in mind—to get at the truth of the matter. He says: “It (the European model) believes that judges and jurors are capable of giving proper weight to all the evidence, and that a criminal trial can, and should, be a rational investigation into the truth.” He also says: “In Europe, the judge does all the work at the trial. The lawyers can ask the judge to ask a question he might have forgotten but that’s about as far as it gets.

So you don’t get all this bullshit from lawyers who are charging \$5,000 a day and grandstanding and obscuring the truth.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It has been an unpleasant habit of crime writers to take cheap shots at juries.

—“But get twelve fat-headed fools in a jury-box, and God knows what they can be made to believe!”

Agatha Christie

—“Juries are thick”

Frances Fyfield

—“He turned to the jury, where they sat gaping at him like a double row of somebody’s stupid relations, and addressed them simply.”

Margery Allingham

—“ ... though what the jury make of it I don’t know, with faces like hams most of them ... ”

Dorothy Sayers

—“This was followed by a gross misdirection to a more than usually idiotic jury and after a painful interval, by a successful appeal.”

Ngaio Marsh

Now, being on a jury isn’t an easy business. Your name is picked at random and a demand to present yourself arrives at a most inconvenient time. You sit, tense, in the jury waiting-room for a week or more before your name is called. If you are not familiar with things legal you go stumbling into court, all hands and feet and feeling as though a hundred eyes are boring into you. You then discover that jury boxes are built for people with extremely short thighs ...

You have no idea whether it will be a fairly harmless fraud case lasting a day or two or a mass murder lasting several months. You find yourself confined day after day with eleven strangers. You agonise over whether the childcare you hastily arranged is suitable. You find yourself, completely unprepared, being asked to look at photos of a blood-spattered room and a dead body.

You listen to eminent psychiatrists disagreeing on fundamental points. You hear character witnesses apparently referring to half-a-dozen different people. You are terrified of losing concentration for a split second and missing something vital. You are blown if you can think how to spell psychoanalysis, psychological evaluation, schizophrenic, psychotic, forensic pathologist, or epileptic seizure. You worry that if you don’t write everything down you won’t have the important bits to refer back to but if you do write everything down you soon get left behind—and if you write too quickly you can’t read your scribble later ...

Personally, I think juries deserve a pat on the back.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hans Fantel provides a gripping account of the famous trial arising from King Charles II’s Conventicle Act—which forbade public assembly for the dissemination of anything but orthodox Anglican views. The Act was tested by two Quakers, William

Penn and William Meade, in 1670. They were arrested and brought before Sir Samuel Starling who adhered to the same recipe for keeping out of trouble as the Vicar of Bray. But as Starling had no intention of holding the Act up to scrutiny the charge instead was causing “unlawful and tumultuous assembly ... to the disturbance of the Peace of Lord and King ... to the great terror and disturbance of many of his Liege people and subjects, to the ill example of all others ...”

The Court then proceeded with a farce which makes most court-room dramas seem tame.

The judge was determined not to expose the Conventicle Act but his first witness could not say what Penn had said as the street had been so noisy. It then developed into a quagmire with Penn citing law and the Court Recorder calling him names, until the problem was ‘solved’ by forcing the accused into a cage and placing them both out of sight of the court. The judge then ordered the jury to retire even though they had not been permitted to hear anything in the prisoners’ defence.

An hour and a half later the jury returned and the foreman, Edward Bushel, gave the verdict that William Penn was guilty of ‘speaking’ in Gracechurch Street. As ‘speaking’ as opposed to ‘preaching’ was not a crime the judge, furious that the case was falling apart, threatened to have Bushel branded. But Bushel stayed firm, saying, “We have given our verdict and we can give no other.” He then insisted on writing down the verdict and all the jury signing it, fearing that the judge might seek to undermine a spoken verdict.

The judge then turned his invective on Bushel and suggested the jury should choose a better foreman. But the jurors insisted on staying with Bushel and their verdict. Instead of accepting this, Starling took a new line, saying, “Gentlemen, you shall not be dismissed till we have a verdict the court will accept; and you shall be locked up without meat, drink, fire, and tobacco. You shall not think thus to abuse the court; we will have a verdict, by the help of God, or you shall starve for it.”

William Penn tried to intervene but was gagged and dragged away.

The jurors were then crowded into a tiny room and as well as food, drink, heat and tobacco they were also denied a chamber pot.

Next morning, tired and grubby, they were returned to the court but again Edward Bushel reiterated their verdict of ‘speaking’ in Gracechurch Street. The judge tried a variety of threats including having Bushel’s throat cut. He turned then to the case of William Meade who had not spoken and was therefore charged with conspiracy. But with Penn found Not Guilty of ‘preaching’ the conspiracy charge fell apart. Sir Samuel changed tack and threatened to cut off Edward Bushel’s nose. The Court Recorder backed him up by suggesting that what England needed was “something like the Spanish Inquisition”.

Sir Samuel ordered the jury back into their tiny room, using the bailiffs to force them inside. Here they spent another miserable night without food, drink, warmth, tobacco, or chamber pot.

The third day was like a depressing replay. Again the jury, led by Bushel, refused to back down; in fact, they went further and found both Penn and Meade Not Guilty.

Sir Samuel, running out of options, fined each member of the jury forty marks—as a mark was equivalent to two-thirds of a £ this was a large fine—and he ordered the entire jury, plus Penn and Meade, off to Newgate until the fines were paid.

Penn refused to pay his fine, planning instead to sue for illegal imprisonment, but his dying father insisted on paying the fines for both Penn and Meade so he could see his son before he died. Eight of the jurors paid their own fines. But Edward Bushel and three others refused to pay and instead managed to secure their release by a writ of *habeas corpus*. They then brought a case of false arrest against Sir Samuel Starling and his Court Recorder. But this was such a hot potato it was tossed from judge to judge

until finally being heard before Sir John Vaughan, Lord Chief Justice of England, who handed down the opinion that judges “may try to open the eyes of the jurors, but not lead them by the nose.”

Edward Bushel may have felt that worse things had been done to his jury than being led by the nose. But his courageous stand had finally been vindicated.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the 1950s the strange case of the Kabaka of the Buganda came before a British court. The Kabaka (King) of this Ugandan tribe had been arbitrarily detained and deported by the Governor of Uganda, Sir Andrew Cohen, for refusing to fall in with the wishes of the British Administration. The Kabaka believed the British were trying to set up an East African Federation which would be controlled by white settlers.

While he was out of the country fighting his case, his people went into mourning, refusing to cut their hair and wearing only bark cloth.

Cyril Dunn covered the case for *The Observer*:

“For the facts, highly relevant to a study of nonviolent action, are that while in a technical sense you (the Rev. Michael Scott who organised the Kabaka’s defence) lost the case, or at least did not win it, the Baganda won the battle simply because they misinterpreted the judgment and *believed* they had won the case. In a nutshell the court decided that the Protectorate Government had made a mistake. It declared its withdrawal of recognition under Article 6 of the 1900 Agreement, but the court held that the right to do so under Article 6 had not arisen on 30 November 1953. But at the same time the court held that, because the Kabaka *had* shown disloyal intentions, the Government could have declared the Agreement at an end and withdrawn recognition *as an act of State*. But the Baganda, interpreting the judgment as a victory for the Kabaka (aided by concise versions of the judgment rushed out to them by African reporters of the vernacular press), poured out into the streets shouting ‘Gummint made mistake!’ and going mad with joy. It seemed to me *this* was what really swung the action your way—a massive and spontaneous demo—basically nonviolent, though it *sounded* otherwise. I’m pretty sure that if the Baganda had really understood the judgment, or had merely been bewildered by it, and had kept quiet, the Government would simply have corrected its mistake and withdrawn recognition as an act of State. But instead we had a classic instance of a colonial power being obliged to accept as true something the mass of its subject people *believed* to be true. I don’t know if you’d call this an Experiment with Truth, but for me it was certainly an illuminating experience of the *nature* of Truth and taught me that accuracy and Truth are not the same thing.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A case, which could find hundreds of counterparts in Australian courts when Aboriginal people went on trial, is recounted by Peter Beresford Ellis in *Wales A Nation Again*.

Three men stood accused of causing malicious damage to property to the value of £1,000 and came before the Caenarvon Assizes.

One of the defendants asked that the charges be read in Welsh; the judge over-ruled him, then said that if he did not understand English he could have it interpreted. The defendant pointed out that Welsh is the language of Wales and so the trial should be in Welsh. He was again over-ruled and the trial went ahead but when the Welsh jury failed to agree on a verdict the re-trial was moved to England.

Again the defendants insisted on speaking in Welsh.

The Judge: “Do you speak English?”

Defendant: “Yr wyf yn bwriadu siarad yn Gymraeg.” (I intend to speak in Welsh.)

The Judge: “I ask you again can you understand English?”

Defendant: “Nid wyf yn dymuno amddiffyn fy hun yn llys hyn gan nad wyf yn cydnabod hawl y llys hwn i drin yr achos ac am ei fod wedi ei symud o’r gwlad fy

lun.”

The Judge, annoyed, then ruled that he could have an interpreter but would have to pay for it; Welsh, unlike French or Czech, not being ‘recognised’ as a language in England.

The three men were then found guilty.

The Australian trials differed in that interpreters, up until very recent times, were not even offered.

\* \* \* \* \*

May 31st: Helen Waddell  
Walt Whitman  
Saint-John Perse  
Jay Williams  
Patsy Adam-Smith  
Judith Wright  
Janusz Przybysz  
June 1st: John Masefield  
Colleen McCullough  
June 2nd: Thomas Hardy  
Michael Underwood  
Charlotte Dorothea Biehl  
Barbara Pym  
Johnny Speight  
Ferenc Karinthy  
Karl Gjellerup

\* \* \* \* \*

In an interview with *The Writer* Michael Underwood said, “It’s a safe generalization that publishers prefer mysteries to have a continuing character.”

He tried several different detectives before settling, perhaps with a sigh of relief, upon attractive young solicitor Rosa Epton as his flag carrier. His books are all carefully written, neatly plotted, written with familiarity with the law, the ends tied up ... and yet ...

That ‘yet’ is a terrible thing.

It is as though the characters fulfil the expectations placed upon them but don’t really engage the reader’s mind. They lack passion, even when their motive is passion. They remind me of Grahame Greene saying he found the characters of Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster “flat” because they lack a spiritual dimension.

Of course it would be easy to reply, “Well, you can’t really expect a bit of light fiction to have a spiritual dimension.” But to say this is to confuse a spiritual dimension with a religious dimension and they are not necessarily the same thing.

But to say that is to face the terribly difficult question of defining a spiritual dimension. After discarding a half-dozen thoughts I think I might present it as being like two plates far beneath the visible knowable world whose activities can change our lives without our knowing what is happening or why. But, in life, it is perhaps where the visible knowable world rubs against, nudges, undermines, flows over, the invisible unknowable world—and our lives are changed in some way. In writing it is perhaps the way in which a writer presents characters living life in a visible world but the reader is always aware that there is more to these lives than the immediately chronicled events and introspections and trappings.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 3rd: William Douglas Home  
Ediriwira Sarachchandra  
Larry McMurtry

Jack Cope  
 Allen Ginsberg  
 June 4th: Maurice Shadbolt  
 Elizabeth Jolley  
 Zoltan Bertha  
 June 5th: Margaret Drabble  
 Federico Garcia Lorca  
 John Maynard Keynes  
 Richard Scarry  
 Adam Smith  
 David Campton  
 Ivy Compton-Burnett  
 Craig Rice  
 Rosemary Stanton  
 Ken Follett  
 Mrs Aeneas Gunn  
 June 6th: Thomas Mann  
 Elizabeth Yates  
 Violet Trefusis  
 Helen McCloy  
 June 7th: Elizabeth Bowen  
 R. D. Blackmore  
 Thomas Hendry  
 Freeman Wills Crofts  
 Aonghas Macneacail  
 E. W. Hornung

\* \* \* \* \*

I sometimes find myself thinking that if I were to immerse myself in Elizabeth Bowen for six months I, too, might begin to write controlled exquisite prose (after all, who else could make an appalling word like exteriorizing sound right). But then the knowledge creeps up on me. I have a mind like a sledgehammer. Elizabeth Bowen had a mind like a picklock. And, added to that, a faint doubt begins to take shape. She is *too* controlled. I begin to long for a character to say “So there!” and slam a door, or for the toast to land butter-side-down ...

Although she wrote of life, as she put it, “with the lid on” and although she frequently comes at her story from a tangent I find her much more satisfying than Virginia Woolf. People’s passions are never allowed to spill all over the place like too much rice in a saucepan yet there is the feeling that life is being lived rather than merely drifted through.

It suggests that no matter how much a writer is influenced by fashions in writing, social mores, class consciousness, personal tastes—a writer’s *character* will always squeeze through.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elizabeth Bowen saw herself as minutely chronicling the changes in attitudes and mores of the privileged section of society in which she moved. But, bearing in mind my sledgehammer mind, I think more interesting are the ways people struggle to change conditions or to adapt to changing conditions.

James Herriot writes: “When I first came to Yorkshire, every village had its blacksmith’s shop and Darrowby itself had several. But with the disappearance of the draught horse they had just melted away. The men who had spent their lives in them for generations had gone and their work places which had echoed to the clatter of horses’ feet and the clang of iron were deserted and silent.”

To them might be added dozens of other crafts and the people who lived by them—coopers and weavers, loriners and spinners, harpoon-makers and court-jesters, wheelwrights and tinkers and dairymaids; some jobs disappearing for ever, some coming back later as leisure activities or part of an alternative lifestyle. What happened to the thousands of Cobb & Co drivers? One motor coach could do the work of half-a-dozen horse-drawn vehicles. And the Cobb & Co coaches were made in Charleville; no one suggested making motor coaches in Charleville.

The great Chilean nitrate deposits provided work for thousands of men—miners, railway-men, stevedores, entire shipping-lines depended on the nitrate for their viability. But the discovery of artificial nitrate in a German laboratory doomed the trade. One by one the mines closed, the towns dwindled, the houses crumbled, the coastal towns saw the forest of ships ‘melt away’ ... a few of the men found work mining copper or sulfur but most had no choice but to pack and go for the desert is not kind to the unemployed ...

My brother, Ian, wrote the 75th anniversary booklet for the Biddeston State School *From Tent to Triumph* and he records the passing of dozens of co-operative cheese factories which once dotted the Darling Downs. Every hamlet—two houses—ten houses—had its factory when I was young. They brought employment, they were a daily meeting place as farmers brought their cans; their prize-winning cheeses brought pride to otherwise insignificant dots. Their names—Rockview, Aubigny, Yargullen, Crosshill, Linthorpe, Mt Tyson, Biddeston and dozens of other—are often merely names on an old map or an unexpected square of pepper trees without explanation. A few were lucky enough to be sidings on a rail-line; Biddeston survived and grew because it was close enough to Toowoomba for people to commute.

The changes—the takeover by the big companies like Paul’s or conversion to rearing vealers or growing grain—were hard for the farming families—and the results? “It is one of the beliefs of modern Western man that increased mechanisation necessarily brings a higher quality of life. Examination of some of the assumptions of our time should at least lead to a questioning of methods currently in vogue. Agriculturalists in particular have been led step by step into a spiralling cycle of debt—persuaded to invest in ever more complicated and expensive machinery (much of which stands idle for over 80% of the year), and locked into a cycle of dependence on hybrid crops designed to grow effectively only when heavily watered and fertilised. Though the physical labour aspect of farming has been reduced, the hours of work have increased, often to the point where every daylight hour is spent in debt servicing. Leisure time has in consequence been whittled away, to the point where social interaction among district residents has been severely curtailed.”

And there was no joy for the little towns and hamlets. With their heart dead they dwindled. Their factories, schools, churches and post offices were stripped and auctioned, their moveable buildings sold as barns or sheds or additions to living quarters, tacked on to the side of other buildings ... their young people went elsewhere to look for work ...

\* \* \* \* \*

“A great painter somehow *looks* like a great painter. But the great writer usually looks like the wages clerk in a cheese factory.”

Road Dahl in *My Uncle Oswald*.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 8th: Ivan Southall  
Gwen Harwood  
Sara Paretsky  
George Lamming  
Marguerite Yourcenar

June 9th: George Axelrod  
 Brian Friel  
 Lin Carter

June 10th: Saul Bellow  
 Terence Rattigan  
 Maurice Sendak  
 Richard Foreman  
 Arthur Shearly Cripps

June 11th: Violet Martin  
 Ann Frank  
 Ben Jonson  
 Mrs Humphrey Ward  
 Duncan Kyle  
 Athol Fugard  
 Anna Akhmatova  
 Kawabata Yasunari  
 William Styron  
 Michael Meyer  
 Karl Harding

\* \* \* \* \*

Clifton Bell in his biography of Virginia Woolf wrote: “It was almost certainly Vanessa—although the story is told of both sisters—who tried to hide from Mrs Humphrey Ward by standing behind a lamp post in the Piazza della Signoria (in Venice) ...”

H. G. Wells writing of his affair with Elizabeth von Arnim said: “One day we found in a copy of *The Times* we had brought with us, a letter from Mrs. Humphrey Ward denouncing the moral tone of the younger generation, apropos of a rising young writer, Rebecca West, and, having read it aloud, we decided we had to do something about it. So we stripped ourselves under the trees as though there was no one in the world but ourselves, and made love all over Mrs. Humphrey Ward”.

Freya Stark wrote: “Viva introduced me to Mrs Humphrey Ward who received us rather in the manner of an empress; a little too much so I thought; but she does give one rather the impression of one of England’s monuments.” But the monument was born in a little cottage on New Town Road in Hobart in 1851. The cottage is still there but has been incorporated into the Torquay Dry Cleaners and looks across the road to B.J’s Lunchbox.

\* \* \* \* \*

Governor Sorell arrived in Tasmania in 1817, bringing with him not his wife and seven children who continued to live in straitened circumstances in London but Mrs Louisa Kent whom he passed off as ‘my wife’; though he appears to have been an able, honest and for his times humane administrator, when news of his irregular private life leaked out the leading families of the colony shunned Government House. It was not until the arrival of Governor Arthur that it returned to their social calendar—and, had they but known, Arthur had left England hurriedly to avoid a lawsuit brought for wrongful imprisonment by an irate colonist from British Honduras (Belize) which had been Arthur’s previous posting—

Sorell’s oldest son William arrived from England just before his departure and decided to stay in Tasmania, becoming Registrar of the Supreme Court and marrying Elizabeth Kemp. But Elizabeth, taking their children for better schooling in Europe, decamped with a Colonel Deare, leaving her oldest daughter Julia to bring the children back to Tasmania and their father.

After two broken engagements, Julia married Thomas Arnold, brother of poet

Matthew Arnold and son of Dr Arnold of Rugby School. Thomas had come first to New Zealand but, failing there, had come on to Tasmania where he became Inspector of Schools (in which he, no doubt, influenced education in Tasmania—‘The Board of Education are prepared to receive applications for the establishment of Public Schools under the terms of—’ etc. T. Arnold, Secretary). Their first child died, their second was Mary, later to become famous as Mrs Humphrey Ward.

Governor Sorell’s triangle had been two women and a man; his son William’s had been two men and one woman; now Thomas, reared as an Anglican but growing increasingly agnostic, brought anguish to his wife by quite suddenly deciding to take the Catholic Church as his soul mate. Great perturbation entered the household. Thomas packed up his family and returned to the UK to take up a post at the new Catholic university in Dublin. A little later he returned to the Anglican church before again renouncing it and becoming a Catholic once more.

His daughter married Thomas Humphrey Ward, a fellow and tutor at Brasenose College, Oxford; she became secretary of Somerville College and brought out her first book, a children’s story *Milly and Olly*.

Thomas, for all his confusions and questionings, was a deeply compassionate man and his daughter undoubtedly inherited his concern—but she also drew deeply on the religious doubts which had torn her family apart and used it to good effect in her best-selling and controversial novel *Robert Elsemere*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Madge Archer, who wrote for *The Advocate* in Burnie under the names of J. M. Edwards and Femina, was a descendant of Governor Sorell and wrote of the family in her (unpublished) memoirs.

“Another visitor we had there (Deloraine) was interesting to us. A cousin of mother’s, a Mr Arnold, brother of Mrs Humphrey Ward the English novelist, was in Tasmania and wanted to see us. We arranged for him to stay the night at an hotel and father went down to meet him with a borrowed horse and trap. He was a gangly grey-haired man, very polite and gentle—and woolly-minded. His sister, father said, had grabbed all the talent in the family. I don’t know what he thought of us. Father talked big about sheep in front of one of our roaring fires and he might have been bemused into thinking our cottage was the usual farm building in this queer Australia, for I am sure father’s persuasive tongue must have led him to believe there were sheep and cattle up to our very door.

We heard father say, as he pointed out the dunny, ‘The—er—sanitary arrangements are rather primitive, I’m afraid.’ Mr Arnold answered politely, ‘Not at all, not at all.’ We wondered what he really did think of it, for it always looked a bit leery, like a drunk standing on one leg.

When he came back father remarked, ‘The ground’s pretty wet. Been raining a lot lately,’ and Mr Arnold replied, ‘Quite, quite.’ This seemed a favourite expression of his for he used it after almost anything that was said.

Both these remarks we children added to our repertoire.

For a long time after that when we played visiting you might hear, ‘I am sorry my little boy has dirty boots, Mrs Jones,’ and the answer, ‘Not at all, not at all.’ Or, ‘I haven’t got much for afternoon tea today,’ answered by, ‘Quite, quite.’

When Mr Arnold left to drive with father down the hill we pronounced him a funny old man. I expect he thought the horse and trap were ours too, for father drove with great style that day.

When father came back after leaving the horse and trap with their owner, the horse-trainer opposite, he said to mother, ‘You seem to have some rum old jokers in your family, I must say.’

I think it’s just as well Mrs Humphrey Ward never heard *that* pronouncement.

\* \* \* \* \*

Raymond Chapman in *The Victorian Debate* wrote: ‘Emancipation was gained not only by the few who campaigned directly for it. It came largely from the achievements of women who showed they could out do men in every field, who overcame the supposed inferiority of women simply by ignoring it. Emancipation was the gift to their sex of women as diverse in accomplishments as Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau, Mary Kingsley and Mrs Humphrey Ward. It also owed something to the growing popularity of the Queen, who had no patience with it at all.’

\* \* \* \* \*

It remains a puzzle as to why Mrs Humphrey was so opposed to votes for women, even going so far as to write a novel about it. Certainly she disapproved of the rowdy activities of the Women’s Social and Political Union but that isn’t a good enough reason—she could’ve joined Mrs Millicent Garrett Fawcett’s ladylike National Union Of Women’s Suffrage Societies whose members never sullied their gloves with a pebble or a suspect egg.

It has been suggested that like Florence Nightingale she saw other issues as having priority, particularly issues of women’s and children’s health and wellbeing (she founded Play Centres in Britain and became one of the country’s first female magistrates); but Nightingale certainly never *opposed* women’s suffrage, she just saw other things as being the issues she was called to work at. Whereas Mrs Humphrey actually put out a petition in 1889 saying “We are convinced that the pursuit of a mere outward equality with men is for women not only vain, but demoralising. It leads to a total misconception of women’s true dignity and special mission.”

The irony of it all is that, had Mrs Humphrey Ward remained in Tasmania, she would automatically have received the right to vote in all elections in 1902.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elsbeth Huxley records that: A passage from a newly-published book was read out to “one of the admired essayists of our time”—he said “That is perfect, whose is that?” He was asked to guess. He said “There are not many men in England who could have done it. It must be some new writer.”

It was a passage from *Notes on Matters affecting the Health, Efficiency and Hospital Administration of the British Army* by Florence Nightingale.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nightingale once remarked “It used to be said that people gave their *blood* to their country. Now they give their *ink*.”

She is indelibly impressed on the Crimean War and the development of the nursing profession—so it came as a surprise to me that the issue she wrote most about was the health of India. She began by looking at the health of the British Army there, acquiring and collating, from her sofa, immense amounts of statistics. But she soon realised that improving sanitation and health care for the army was impossible without improving the sanitation and health care of the Indians who lived inside or on the fringes of the army compounds; from there she moved outwards—the Indians *inside* the compounds were in constant contact with Indians *outside* the compounds, so their health and sanitation must also be attended to. But sanitation and clean water were not enough, her growing mountain of facts and figures told her, if people’s diets remained inadequate.

She bombarded colonial officials from vice-regality down about the need for irrigation, planned sanitation, clean water, health care, more food better stored ... Florence Nightingale never set foot in India but she demonstrated that statistics collected and interpreted with care and understanding can be more than the bane of minor clerks. They can be used to make practical improvements in the lives of the people who have been rendered mere figures on a page and numbers in a column.

\* \* \* \* \*

Anne Wiltsher in *Most Dangerous Women* tells the story of a remarkable Hungarian woman, Rosika Schwimmer, who challenged the idea that improved health for women and children must precede the granting of the vote. She collected statistics and prepared posters to go up in the London Underground to show that in those countries where women had the vote maternal and infant mortality was lower.

This is rather a chicken-and-egg question. Were women with the vote better able to push for action on women's issues—or were the countries enlightened in matters of suffrage also more progressive on other women's issues?

Rosika Schwimmer worked endlessly throughout World War One to try to get neutral nations to take up her idea of continuous mediation. Whenever I hear the media talk of the breakdown of a round of talks as being 'the last chance for peace' I think of Rosika Schwimmer and know she would have said firmly it is never the last chance; there are always openings, opportunities, chances ...

She urged nations such as the Scandinavian countries, Holland and the USA, to offer themselves as mediators, day after day, week after week, no matter how often they were rebuffed or ignored they must go on *offering*. They must not wait to be asked by the belligerents—whose egos had locked them into a war 'to the last man'—though not, significantly, 'to the last politician' or 'to the last monarch' or even 'to the last general'. Unfortunately, neutral nations can have just as problematical egos as countries at war. They all insisted that they would help only if asked.

(Perhaps politicians should learn the humbling lesson that beginning writers must learn: the message of the rejection slip.)

Rosika Schwimmer's troubles, at war's end, were far from over. On her return home she was attacked first by Béla Kun's communist government, then by Admiral Horthy's fascist government. She went to the United States and was accused of being a German spy. However, anti-German feeling gradually waned and she applied for US citizenship—only to be refused on the strange grounds that "she had refused to bear arms".

Rosika Schwimmer died stateless in 1948, the year that politicians from Hungary, Britain, Sweden, France and Italy had nominated her for the Nobel Peace Prize. No prize was given that year—perhaps because it cannot be given posthumously.

Just months before she died, she wrote:

"I hope that on this centennial, which falls in the third year of the atomic era, women will retrace their steps from the many paths and blind alleys to which they have strayed in imitation of the social, political and economic morass of what we once called the 'man-made world', and that they will remember that we sought equality for our half of the human race, not at the lowest, but at the highest level of human aspiration."

\* \* \* \* \*

War books tend to be written about the Great Horror or the Great Courage—but what people are as likely to remember is the Great Pettiness. Buster Lloyd-Jones in his autobiography says: "Then there were dachshunds. As soon as the war started the dachshund began to feature in political cartoons as wicked, cowardly, treacherous, evil German sausage dogs, opposing the gallant British bulldog. No one, you might think, could have taken this kind of routine propaganda literally—but a great many did. In an instant the clever, affectionate little dachshund became the most unpopular dog in the country. People threw things at them in the street, chased them, kicked them. Dachshund owners were looked upon as dangerously unpatriotic.

So they were brought to me every week, healthy, lively little dachshunds, no longer wanted and bewildered by the sudden withdrawal of affection.

They came to me to be destroyed and I couldn't bring myself to do it" ... he ended up looking after more than sixty unwanted dachshunds for the duration.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 12th: Brigid Brophy  
Charles Kingsley  
Harriet Martineau  
James A. Houston  
Djuna Barnes  
Johanna Spyri  
Bill Naughton

June 13th: W. B. Yeats  
Fanny Burney  
Paul Ableman  
Dorothy Sayers

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a truism, and a comforting one, that all writers make mistakes.

Jean Bedford has “black and white Jerseys” in a paddock on the NSW South Coast.

Amanda Cross calls William Sharp *alias* Fiona Macleod an “Irish writer”; in fact he was Scottish.

Georgette Heyer changes names and relationships in mid-book but was distressed to learn that she had placed the iron foundry in *Frederica* in London when it belonged in Birmingham.

The old lawyer in *A Town Like Alice* “never went back to Scotland again” on page 5 and heads off to Scotland again on page 7.

Richard Peyton points out that Conan Doyle’s famous story ‘Silver Blaze’ has four errors in it.

Kenneth Grahame says Toad “shook himself and combed the dry leaves out of his hair with his fingers”.

Robinson Crusoe says “I pulled off my clothes, for the weather was hot to extremity, and took to the water” but when he gets out to the ship he says “I went to the bread-room and filled my pockets with biscuit”.

Jane Austen’s brother Edward commented “I should like to know, Jane, where you got those apple trees of yours that blossom in July?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Agatha Christie in her autobiography says “From Australia we went to Tasmania, driving from Launceston to Hobart”—(she is also kind enough to add “Incredibly beautiful Hobart with its deep blue sea and harbour, and its flowers, trees and shrubs. I planned to come back and live there one day”)—Judith Krantz, in *I’ll Take Manhattan* speaks of there being no casinos in Australia but one in Tasmania, and Peter Isaac in *Which Pet?* says “The wombat is a native of Australia and Tasmania.” Dear me, perhaps we could secede and no one would notice?

\* \* \* \* \*

Some mistakes are only for the specialist.

Captain W.E. Johns said “In one of my books I mentioned a Mauser .32. Next thing I got a letter from a child telling me that Mausers never made a .32. Quite right, too.”

Natalie Foster turned a trained eye on Dorothy Sayers’ *The Documents in the Case*: “Two other small items are worthy of note: the synthesis of muscarine cited in the novel has an error (Trimethylamine not Triethyl), but whether the mistake is a conceptual one or merely typographical can not be ascertained. Another technical error, originally pointed out by Harold Hart, comes in the description of the scene in the forensic laboratory during the measurement of the optical activity of the evidence with a Polaroscope: “He snapped off the lights, and we were left with only the sodium flame.

In that green, sick glare... ” of course, a sodium flame is bright yellow-orange, but sick green does seem to set the tone more appropriately for a grisly investigation.’

\* \* \* \* \*

My query is much simpler and comes in her novel *Strong Poison* where Harriet Vane writes to Philip Boyes—

“Dear Phil,

You can come round at 9.30 etc etc—” and signs it M. Now, why should Miss Harriet D.Vane sign a letter with the letter M? Did she have the sort of rotten old typewriter which made its H’s look like M’s? Was it the printer’s fault? Or does it have some secret significance I haven’t yet tumbled to?

\* \* \* \* \*

Typos *do* slip in, even with the “best-laid schemes o’ mice and men” and writers; even with their sharpest eye, their most careful proof-reading ... I remember feeling a sense of horror when a manuscript came back and I discovered I’d typed “he felt her behind” instead of “he left her behind”.

\* \* \* \* \*

Typewriters were invented in 1867 and the early ones didn’t have a covering over the type. One day, after changing a ribbon, I left the top off out of curiosity and began to type. After only a few minutes I began to feel dizzy. Perhaps, in time, one would adjust—but I preferred not to prolong the experiment—and I wonder how long it took the typists to convince their bosses that they weren’t being hysterical when they claimed that these new machines were giving them headaches?

\* \* \* \* \*

Dorothy Sayers, like Peter Carey, began her writing career in an advertising agency—and is credited with that pervasive, if not necessarily true, quip: IT PAYS TO ADVERTISE.

But, alas, advertising seems to get pushier and blunter and cruder by the year. I doubt whether we will ever see the likes of this again—

As Sergeant Larke patrolled the Park  
He heard two sneezes in the dark,  
With staff gripped tight, he flashed his light,  
His stern tones echoed through the night;  
Kape ahf th’ grass! ye coople there;  
Yure dith av cowld ye’ll get, f’r shure!  
Come! hurry home, ye love-sick pair,  
And both take Woods’ Great Peppermint Cure

—or perhaps this war-time ad for Acme Wringers—

No one likes borrowing ...  
but in Acacia Crescent they’re getting quite good at it.  
For example, they’re mostly young newly-weds and there are  
only two Acmes between them—and don’t those Acmes get around!  
The makers are sorry they can’t make any more while the war’s on:  
but one day Acacia Crescent will be supplied as it deserves  
and borrowing (and lending) can once again be suitably discouraged!

—another war-time ad, this one for American Airlines—

The new factor that changes our world is the *use* of air as the only *universal* realm for transportation. In ratio as we *do* use it, we change the proximity and accessibility of all places, and effectively we make the world smaller.

From this they drew the conclusion—

Since it is primarily the use of *air* that makes this a Global War, it must follow inevitably that a *dominant* use of air can maintain Global Peace.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 14th: Judith Kerr  
Harriet Beecher Stowe  
Kathleen Jessie Raine  
Jerzy Kosinski  
June 15th: Thomas Randolph  
Val Nichols  
Toss Gascoigne

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently I gave a friend a copy of Val Nichols' little poetry book *A Sort of Therapy*. When next she saw me she said she was sorry but she only read religious, not secular, poetry; by which she meant poetry specifically mentioning Jesus. But I can't help feeling that religious means something much wider—as in Val's—

Pale in the moonlight once, I saw the holy mountain,  
Dusky and unsubstantial, velvet on velvet laid,  
And with a crown of early snow, a diadem so fragile  
Limned against heaven, in pure clean line of light;

A vision of beauty beyond my power to tell ... or her story of the merchant's heavily-laden camel which could not fit through the narrow archway into the market—

Ho, ho! that day  
found him somewhat freed from the rich man's burden—Oh, ho, ho!

Val was a friend of Maureen who was murdered by her husband Rory Jack Thompson and I think Val never forgave herself for not taking Maureen's fear of her husband seriously enough.

She wrote two poems both called 'Maureen', partly to remember, partly to try to come to terms with the horror of what had happened, partly because even the best and fairest of reporting still somehow seems to demean the victims of violent and sordid crimes ...

Then, as you neared the great rocks which gate the valley of darkness,  
Lightning! Flashing, flaring, nearing, and the din of horror,  
and your way through—alone.

My loved friend, He has spoken softly to us, telling us how He held you  
close—  
closer than life and death—  
how He went through with you to the place of infinite Light.

\* \* \* \* \*

Val suffered from motor-neurone disease which caused a creeping paralysis; first she lost the power to write by hand, then she had to give up her little electric typewriter, then, slowly, as it became harder to speak so too did it become harder to dictate her poems. My friend Rose and I often had to resort to an alphabet board to unravel the last poems; Val would blink when we came to the right letter.

I never ceased to admire her ability to hold her words so calmly and clearly in her mind until we arrived to take her words down for her—and how frustrating it must have been to see our blank looks after the struggle to get a word out ... and after we had exhausted her with poetry, we would take turns to read aloud. The books we read have stayed clearly in my mind in the years since—*Lark Rise to Candleford*, a history of the Old Vic Theatre, *The Singing Ship* (which chronicles the voyage of child refugees to Australia in World War Two), *My Place*, and the story I finished reading to her the day before she died—Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 16th: Joyce Carol Oates  
 Isobelle Carmody  
 Idries Shah

June 17th: Henry Lawson  
 Allen Curnow  
 Kerry Greenwood  
 John Hersey

June 18th: Robyn Archer  
 Rosemary Dobson  
 Gail Godwin  
 Tanar Baybars  
 Denis Johnston  
 Annabell Johnson  
 Carolyn Wells  
 Louis Becke

June 19th: Salman Rushdie  
 Sorrel Wilby  
 Roger Howard  
 Patricia Wrightson  
 Tobias Wolff

\* \* \* \* \*

Salman Rushdie remains in semi-hiding. Non-Muslims, by his agony, have been given the impression that blasphemy looms large in the *Koran*. Does it though? I went to see for myself. Surprisingly, in 600 pages, I could only find 4 references to it—

“What! Has your Lord blessed *you* with sons and Himself adopted daughters from among the angels? A monstrous blasphemy is that which you utter.”

“Surely of this they could have no knowledge, neither they nor their fathers; a monstrous blasphemy is that which they utter.”

“We put courage in their hearts when they stood up and said: ‘Our Lord is the Lord of the heaven and the earth. We call on no other God besides Him,’ for if we did we should be blaspheming.”

“The Blaspheming One among us has uttered a wanton falsehood against God, although we had supposed no man or jinnee could tell of Him what is untrue.”

But this fury all appears to be directed at the Christian belief in Jesus as the ‘Son of God’. Though the *Koran* also says “When He decrees a thing He need only say” ‘Be,’ and it is,” and “And of the woman who kept her chastity—We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and made her and her son a sign to all men.”

Of course there is also unbelief, evil-doing, idolatry, transgressing—all lying in wait to trip up the writer and most terrible of all—for writers and people who travel in buses—the horrible fate of eavesdroppers—

“Eavesdroppers are pursued by fiery comets”—and—

“eavesdroppers find flaming darts in waiting for them”—

but what is undoubtedly true is that the right to punish or be merciful for unbelief and idolatry is left in God’s hands. Unfortunately humankind has rarely been content to leave it there ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Of course Islamic teaching has involved a slow accretion of dogmas which are not in the *Koran* just as Christianity has laid layer upon layer over the original. Voltaire’s ‘Huron’ puzzles over the gap between Catholic strictures and Catholic scriptures ...

But although we have legislation dealing with sexual and racial discrimination—should we seek legislation dealing with credal villification? I find it distressing when people casually use Christ’s name to swear with but I do not see any place for

legislation, not least because it would be unenforceable. As Don Quixote says to Sancho Panza, “Do not make many statutes, but if you make them, try to make good ones and, particularly, see that they are kept and fulfilled; for if statutes are not kept they might as well not exist. Besides, they show that though the prince had the wisdom and the authority to make them, he had not the courage to see that they were observed. And laws which threaten but are not carried out come to be like that log which was king of the frogs. He frightened them at first, but in time they despised him and climbed upon his back.”

\* \* \* \* \*

June 20th: Anthony Buckeridge

Lillian Hellman  
Margaret Scott  
Dorothy Simpson  
Celia Fremlin  
Vikram Seth

June 21st: Robert Kraus

Jean-Paul Sartre  
Clive Sansom  
Françoise Sagan  
Reinhold Niebuhr

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently I was astonished to find that Les Murray’s *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry* included Clive James but not Clive Sansom. Yet if anyone should say to me ‘Australian religious poetry’ in a word-association-test I’m sure I would immediately respond: ‘Clive Sansom’.

He devoted a verse cycle to St Francis of Assisi, a man with whom he obviously felt a degree of affinity as indeed he also felt for Sister Clare whose departure from home to join the Franciscans earned a 19th century rebuke: “It is an incident which we can hardly record with satisfaction”—but Sansom writes—

Dear Francis! How they tried to divide us,  
Building rules like hurdles to keep us apart.  
They little knew how lightly our spirits could leap them,  
Being (praise God!) inseparable at heart.

I saw him first from the roof of my father’s palace  
As he gave Bernardo’s gold in the street below.  
Watching him come was a careless indifferent girl:  
A woman shaken by life had seen him go.

She founded the Poor Clares, who began as itinerant preachers and helpers but were eventually confined within convent walls, so the Franciscans would not have to struggle with the sin of lust.

The Franciscans also faced a more intractable problem. As they grew, the Friars wished to make their Order match the respectability, security, comfort and efficiency of the Dominicans and Benedictines. Sansom says: “Among those like Leo, Masseo and Angelo, who remained true to his beliefs, was Sister Clare. She put his ideals into practice, lived them and fought for them long after he died. To her, perhaps, more than to any other person, we owe their survival to this day. Even though, at this period of his life, Francis seems rarely to have seen her, she never wavered in her loyalty to absolute poverty.”

Of St Francis, Sansom says “though he helped the poor he was not mainly concerned with the alleviation of poverty. He was far more concerned with the

alleviation of wealth.”

This remains an uncomfortable idea.

As Sansom puts it: “Rather than accept him as he is, we try to remake him in our own image” and “We may not be able or willing to follow him. We may object to his methods, or ignore them. We may attempt to disguise him as a kindly bird-watcher ... ”

The discomfort, in the form of the Basilica built over his grave, is there for ever. As Laurence Housman sums it up: “With lavish expenditure and magnificent ostentation, the Church forgave Francis his love of poverty.”

Sansom returns to the theme of simplicity in other verse dramas—

*When Adam delved and Eve span,*

*Who was then the gentleman?*

And who the prelate in rich attire

Eating magnificently the labour of others,

Returning but a few poor chants

And lighted candles? Did our Lord,

The Lord of Heaven, do such things?

When he set his disciples upon their road

To wander as I do, did he not tell them

To take no purse, not even a staff

For the journey, trusting their Father

To know their needs, like birds in the air

Or flowers of the field? Yet these his friends

Were called as equals to the throne of Heaven.

He also poked fun at ecclesiastical pretension—

No modern German

Ever turned out

A more tortuous sermon.

Dissecting all

The Thirty-Nine Articles,

He could preach for hours

On each of the particles.

While he admonished

His hurdled flock,

Chimes went unheard

From the chancel clock.

Half hour, one hour,

Two went by

As they gazed at their shepherd

With glazing eye,

Easing buttock

In anguished pew—

And what he was driving at

No-one knew.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Clive’s widow Ruth was clearing out some books I bought several. Many of their books dealt with Christian mysticism but I was more drawn to those which looked at Christianity from a Levantine perspective.

George Lamsa’s *Gospel Light* makes sense of some of the non-sense I learnt by heart as a child. On “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” Lamsa wrote—“The Aramaic word *gamla* means camel, a large rope and a beam. The meaning of the word is determined by its context. If the word riding or burden occurs then *gamla* means a camel, but when the

eye of a needle is mentioned *gamla* more correctly means a rope. There is no connection anywhere in Aramaic speech or literature between camel and needle, but there is a definite connection between rope and needle. Eastern women when purchasing thread often say, "It is a rope. I cannot use it", which means it is too thick. Then again, there are ropes in every Eastern home, used to tie up burdens on the backs of men and of animals. When not used, the rope is hung on the wall or laid in a corner of the house.

The discussion about the rich man probably took place in the house. Jesus pointed to the rope in the house to illustrate what he was saying in condemning the greed of Eastern rich men, who had acquired their wealth unjustly. He said, "It is easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God". Then again there are different kinds of needles in use in the East: the tiny needle for fine embroidery, the common needle for sewing which is larger, and the big needle about five or seven inches long, which working men often carry fastened to their garments or attached to the rope. A good sized cord could easily be passed through this needle, which is used chiefly for sewing large bags, rugs and tents woven of goat's hair."

\* \* \* \* \*

Another book was *The Syrian Christ* by Abraham Rihbany who wrote: Parabolic speech is dear to the Oriental heart. It is poetical, mystical, sociable. In showing the reason why Jesus taught in parables, Biblical writers speak of the indirect method, the picture language, the concealing of the truth from those "who had not the understanding", and so forth. But those writers fail to mention a most important reason, namely, the *sociable* nature of such a method of teaching, which is so dear to the Syrian heart. In view of the small value Orientals place upon time, the story-teller, the speaker in parables, is to them the most charming conversationalist. Why be so prosy, brief, and abstract? ...

And: one of the most beautiful parables I know, and which I often heard my father relate, bears on the subject of partiality, and is as follows:

Once upon a time there were two men, the one named Ibrahim, the other Yusuf. Each of the men had a camel. It came to pass that when Yusuf fell sick he asked of his neighbour Ibrahim, who was about to journey to Aleppo, to take his camel with him also, with a load of merchandise. Yusuf begged Ibrahim to treat the camel in exactly the same manner as he did his own, and promised him that if God kept him alive until he came back he would repay him both the good deed, and the cost of the camel's keep. Ibrahim accepted the trust, and took his journey to Aleppo, with the two camels. Upon his return Yusuf saw that his own camel did not look so well as Ibrahim's. So he spoke to his friend: 'Ibrahim, by the life of God, what has happened to my camel? He is not as good as your camel?' Then Ibrahim answered and said, 'By the life of God, O Yusuf, I fed, and watered, and groomed your camel as I did my camel. God witnesseth between us, Yusuf, this is the truth. But I will say to you, you my eyes, my heart, that when Night came and I lay me down on my cloak to sleep between the two camels, I placed my head nearer to my camel than to yours'.

\* \* \* \* \*

Clive Sansom wrote a poem called 'Judas' which is deeply moving in its anguish of misunderstood and different dreams—

There was a time, I believe,  
When it might have come,  
Had not Peter warped his soul  
Towards martyrdom.

...

They only half-understood

Where belief must lead him;  
I knew he purposed his death,  
And my will denied him—

Denied him because his dying  
Meant Israel's too,  
An end to dreams of dominion  
Where Jew ruled Jew.

...  
It came to me, too, that night  
His death would sever  
His hold on my life, destroy  
That power for ever

But Judas learns  
I was wrong  
because—  
I who had brought him there  
To these indignities:  
Till the sky falls and the world ends  
My life will be his ...

Rihbany also writes on this: “in the Judas episode is involved one of the most tender, most touching acts of Jesus’ whole life. To one familiar with the customs of the East, Jesus’ handing of the “sop” to his betrayer was an act of surpassing beauty and significance. In all my life in America I have not heard a preacher interpret this simple deed, probably because of lack of knowledge of its meaning in Syrian social intercourse.”

“Sops” are choice morsels of food, shared between friends. “Jesus handed the sop of friendship, the morsel which is never offered to an enemy.”

\* \* \* \* \*

June 22nd: H. Rider Haggard  
Hillary Waugh  
Tom Howard  
Erich Maria Remarque  
Zulu Sofola  
Geza Vermes

\* \* \* \* \*

*She* was a book of its time; along with the Antarctic, the Himalayas, and the Tibetan plateau, parts of Africa were about the only mysterious places left on the planet—making them ideal if you wanted a mysterious and dramatic backdrop with the added advantage that few people were in a position to query anything you said. Sherlock Holmes got dispatched to Tibet after the debacle at the Reichenbach Falls. Guy Boothby’s sinister Dr Nikola seeks out a strange monastery there. And Rider Haggard, after setting *She* in an unexplored Africa, places *Ayesha: The Return of She* in a mysterious land to the north-west of Tibet.

The influence of *She* lives on. Elizabeth Bowen took the Mysterious Kôr for inspiration for a short story; L. M. Montgomery calls the landlady in *Kilmeny of the Orchard* She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed; and John Mortimer took her to comic heights in his Rumpole series.

\* \* \* \* \*

Although Henry Rider Haggard’s father, William Meybohm Rider Haggard, was actually born in Russia it was his mother who seems to have made the most impact on

his development as a writer. Ella Doveton belonged to the clan which became intimately associated with the island of St Helena. The first to arrive was William who was only twenty when he disembarked in 1673 and was given, like all respectable new arrivals, ten acres and a cow. Upon his marriage, he acquired a further ten acres; just as well as large families were almost invariable among the Dovetons.

My introduction to St Helena came through the set of Newnes encyclopaedias my parents bought with sacrifice and in the touching belief they were aiding our education. According to this source, Vasco da Gama was denied the chance to gain fresh water on St Helena by the “hostile natives”. I think “hostile natives” were virtually *de rigueur* in books of that era but in the case of St Helena it was mere wishful thinking: the island was uninhabited when Vasco da Gama came by on his way home from India.

It acquired its first inhabitant nearly thirty years later—in the words of Antonio Pigafetta: “This island is in sixteen degrees south latitude, and there is no habitation except that of a Portuguese man who has but one hand and one foot, no nose, and no ears, and is called Fornam Lopez”. This unfortunate man (his name was actually Fernão) had fallen foul of Afonso de Albuquerque in Goa and it is a tribute to his toughness that he survived his brutal punishment but he couldn’t bring himself to go home and face his family in his mutilated condition so he asked to be set ashore on St Helena where he lived for thirty years, hiding in the bushes whenever a ship called to leave him food and small comforts.

I came upon a much more dramatic rendering of this story in a strange way. (Lopes actually lost his nose, his ears, his right hand and the thumb of his left hand—“Many perished in the prison but those who remained were released and allowed to go where they wished and they departed and were not seen again”—) One sleepy Sunday afternoon a stranger rang up to ask if I could translate some 16th century Portuguese. I asked what did she want it for. She said she was writing a history of St Helena. And to make a long story short I sent the piece to Melbourne to be translated, Yvonne and I became friends, and I have since taken great interest in the progress of her book and the history of St Helena.

The Dovetons thrived on St Helena. It had been a Doveton house ‘The Briars’ in which Napoleon stayed while ‘Longwood’ was readied for his occupation. But there was little room for them to expand, especially given their large families. Up till 1834 St Helena was run as a colony and re-victualling port for the British East India Company—so it was natural for young men, looking for opportunities and adventure to go to India. Later, after the takeover by the British crown, St Helena’s fortunes declined and young men, including young Dovetons, turned to South Africa in the hope of improving their prospects.

Edward Carter, in *The Dovetons of St Helena*, chronicles

—David Edwin Doveton as a director of the Malmani Primrose Gold Mining Company and later of the New Rietfontein Estate Gold Mining Company

—William Loudon Doveton as a director of the Langlaagte Prospecting and Gold Mining Company and the Leeuwpoort Gold Mining Company

—and his brother, Charles Louis Ellert Doveton, went north to what is now Zimbabwe to manage the Shamva Mine ...

Of course Rider Haggard himself travelled in many exotic places but I suspect his fascination with treasure and mysterious places was already bright and full-formed in his childhood.

\* \* \* \* \*

Among the exotic places he visited were Constantinople where he met Tasmanian writer, Tasma, who said of him ‘very amusing with his monocle—but not, I should say, a model of all the virtues’, and Brazil, where Roy Norvill says: ‘Colonel P.H. Fawcett was given a “curious idol”, “black basalt, about ten inches high, with

strange hieroglyphics carved into a plaque on the idol's chest" by Sir Henry Rider Haggard who had acquired it in Brazil. Fawcett swore that it had an electric quality to the touch, strong enough to impel more sensitive people to put it down immediately. When the experts at the British Museum were unable to tell him anything about the idol's origin, he took it to a psychometrist.

The medium claimed to "see" a continent in the Atlantic which was destroyed by an immense cataclysm and sank but not before some of its people had managed to escape—some to North Africa, some to the Americas. Other mediums said they "saw" similar things.'

Was Rider Haggard influenced by this to ponder on lost civilizations? And where is the idol now?

\* \* \* \* \*

A friend lent me a novel by Simon Leys in which Napoleon on St Helena is whisked away secretly and his place taken by a look-alike—but just as he gets back to Europe and on his way to glorious re-instatement in Paris the terrible news arrives: his substitute has died on St Helena.

An intriguing idea—except that Napoleon was doomed from the moment he set foot on St Helena.

As Brian Marriner puts it: "When the hair of Napoleon was analysed in the 1960s, some hundred and fifty years after his death, it was found to contain over thirteen times the normal quantity of arsenic."

(A new book just out, *The Fall of Napoleon: The Final Betrayal* by David Hamilton-Williams, suggests that the French plot to poison Napoleon was actually financed by the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Bathurst, who has a Hobart street named after him.)

The poisoning was done slowly—he had to appear to die of natural causes—and in the meantime he whiled away his boredom by inventing a new variety of Patience in which you 'build' upon your Aces and Kings and 'marry' off your less important cards. I wonder if he was trying to send a message to his still faithful followers?

\* \* \* \* \*

Closely related to Rider Haggard was Admiral F. C. Doveton Sturdee who commanded the British Navy in the South Atlantic in World War One.

The arrival of the German Navy off the Falkland Islands was sighted early on the morning of the 8th December 1914 by two young women who took the news, post-haste, to their mistress, Mrs Creamer, who phoned it through to Port Stanley. Forrest McWhan writes "Admiral Sturdee never tired of telling his friends in later years how he received the warning of the approach of the enemy transports through the young women riding over the country to tell their mistress what they had seen. For their watchfulness, the mistress, Mrs Creamer, was awarded the Order of the British Empire, while Miss McLeod and Mrs Bender received inscribed silver teapots."

\* \* \* \* \*

One German ship, the *Dresden*, escaped and took refuge in the Juan Fernandez Islands, which include Isla Alejandro Selkirk and Isla Robinson Crusoe—"The scene of Robinson Crusoe's literary adventures, this group was partly uninhabited, but the main island of Más a Tierra boasted a canning factory for crayfish". Though Chile was neutral, the British caught up with the Germans. So the *Dresden's* commander sent a young man across to divert the British while he managed to scuttle his ship. The Chileans then, under pressure from Britain, interned the German crew on Quiriquina island, off Concepción. But the same enterprising young man was aided to escape by his compatriots and a local fisherman, then borrowed a horse from a German landowner near Concepción. After riding for two weeks over the Andes he reached a German farm in Argentina and from there made his way to Buenos Aires. The German Embassy

provided him with a fake Chilean passport in the name of Señor Rosas. He then took passage in a Dutch ship bound for Amsterdam. “He is reputed to have played the part of a Chilean so perfectly and made such friends with the British on board that the Royal Navy intelligence officers who examined the *Frisia’s* crew and passengers at Plymouth passed him without hesitation—” And so home safely to Germany.

And the name of the enterprising young man?

Wilhelm Canaris, destined to become head of German Intelligence in World War Two—

\* \* \* \* \*

June 23rd: Irwin Shrewsbury Cobb

Winifred Holtby

Frank Dalby Davison

June 24th: Lawrence Block

Anita Desai

Isabel Dick

Betty Birskys

Bruce Marshall

June 25th: George Orwell

Erskine Childers

George Abbott

Philip Toynbee

Aimé Césaire

Alistair Campbell

\* \* \* \* \*

Some writers of the dramatic, some writers who have lived dramatic lives (such as Alexandre Dumas who was said to have been in thirteen duels), die peacefully in bed.

Some do not.

Jacques Futrelle, creator of *The Thinking Machine*, Professor S.F.X. van Dusen, went down in the Titanic.

East Timor’s best-known poet, Francisco Borja da Costa, was shot by the Indonesian Army.

Erskine Childers was shot by the Irish Free State Army.

Pablo Neruda died in “mysterious circumstances” at the hands of the Chilean junta and poet Victor Jarra was tortured and killed soon afterwards.

W. S. Gilbert, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame, suffered a heart attack from the cold water whilst going to the aid of two people in difficulties.

Virginia Woolf drowned herself in a garden pond.

Adam Lindsay Gordon shot himself.

Dr John Polidori, who wrote the first vampire story in English, poisoned himself.

Mishimo Yukio committed hara-kiri.

Margaret Fuller, author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, drowned off Long Island.

Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned off the coast of Italy.

\* \* \* \* \*

Erskine Childers is remembered for one book *The Riddle of the Sands*—which the Naval Institute Press has spoilt with intrusive footnotes—yet his other books such as *German Influence on Cavalry*, *The Framework of Home Rule* and *In the Ranks of the CIV*, chart the uneven development of his ideas and his loyalties. From being an English country gentleman he became an ardent Irish patriot; whilst serving Britain in the First World War he was also running guns to the Irish resistance. From this distance the two things do not seem incompatible—to want Germany out of Belgium was not

inconsistent with wanting Britain out of Ireland—but the suspicions and misunderstandings of his contemporaries led inexorably to the stage where his loyalties were always in question.

Though *The Riddle of the Sands* is not a particularly well-plotted mystery it is a book of beautifully-created atmosphere; which suggests that although Childers collected and interpreted his information with care he was really responding to the less tangible changes in Germany, the changes in mood and outlook, which prompted him to speak and write on the theme of the gathering storm.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 26th: Pearl S. Buck  
Charlotte Zolotow  
Colin Wilson  
Luis Valdez  
Laurie Lee

June 27th: Efua Sutherland  
David Mercer  
Helen Keller  
Lia Karavia

June 28th: Eric Ambler  
Stan Barstow  
Luigi Pirandello  
Howard Barker

June 29th: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry  
Oriana Fallaci  
Lusila Hosillo

\* \* \* \* \*

“I want my country to exist both in the flesh and in the spirit when day dawns” wrote Saint-Exupéry. “Therefore I shall fight against all those who strive to impose a particular way of life upon other ways of life, a particular people upon other peoples, a particular race upon other races, a particular system of thought upon other systems of thought ...”

Words to make the heart beat faster, the eye gleam brighter, the head hold higher—but not, unfortunately, words to be engraved on the contract of every French official setting off for the colonies.

\* \* \* \* \*

June 30th: Eleanor Lattimore  
James Goldman  
Mollie Hunter  
Emanuel Litvinoff  
Barry Hines  
Ken Rivard  
Czeslaw Milosz  
Winston Graham

\* \* \* \* \*

A friend looked at her birth date and said, “I’ve never heard of any of those writers.” She sounded disappointed and I was sorry I hadn’t done better for her but I said there *were* some Mollie Hunter’s in the Glenorchy Library if she’d like to try one. (And I kept on looking—and I came up with Winston Graham)—

The other day I took up my own suggestion. Mollie Hunter is a Scottish writer who produces prize-winning novels for older children; her stories being strongly influenced by Scottish folk tales and legends. I enjoyed *The Mermaid Summer*; even so, and she is keen on ‘even so’, I think it would be a book that adults might buy for young

relatives rather than a book the young relatives would choose for themselves; not, of course, that you can trust young relatives to choose the books that will be good for them—

She uses unnecessarily long-winded sentences—“Robert decided eventually to allow him to get accustomed to using this fearsomely sharp knife—but only once he had been properly warned about it”—which is swallowable in *Treasure Island* but less so in the 1990s.

\* \* \* \* \*

Usually when I try a new author it’s because a friend has said “Oh, you must read so-and-so.” I always obediently do. But there is that awful nagging worry—what if I don’t like so-and-so—and when I later say (politely), “I’m afraid she wasn’t quite my cup of tea” sometimes there comes a hurt look and “Oh, you couldn’t possibly *not* like her, she really is wonderful!” So, then, there’s nothing for it but to say, apologetically, “I s’pose it was just me, I’m a bit hard to please” or “Well, you know what an old Philistine I am ...”

The other day—a nice general lead-in as I can’t remember exactly when—I was looking for something in the library and noticed a whole shelf of Rosemary Timperley. So who was or is Ms Timperley, I wondered, as I took one down. It was called *A Face in the Leaves* and proved to be a pleasant little story about an old Polish lady who lives in a caravan, mysteriously, in the middle of an English forest. But a whole shelf—when many better known writers are represented by only one or two books—seemed rather generous.

\* \* \* \* \*

I once came upon the advice of an American editor suggesting that there is an editorial bias against books set in the Middle East, Latin America, and South Africa. Well, I know we all have our little prejudices—but to cut out a large section of the known world? ... and O. Henry would turn in his grave ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Mollie Hunter, like many writers, turned her hand to instructing would-be writers in *Talent is Not Enough: Mollie Hunter on Writing for Children*. Now, I have a vague suspicion that writers, between plots, turn to writing manuals to keep the pot boiling. In theory, writers should be better at writing about writing than anyone else; but a number of the books I have browsed in seemed merely to be re-hashes of re-hashes, as though the author was taking advantage of the hope which springs eternal in the lives of us lesser writers (the hope that *this* manual, *this* article, will contain the magic password to publication, to success ...).

Of course handy tips are lying around, just for the picking up—and, at the risk of re-hashing, here are a few I’ve jotted down over the years:

1. Read your stories aloud, especially the dialogue. If you’re gasping at the end of a speech—or cringe under its pomposity—well, so will your readers.

2. If you’re not happy with a story, an ending, a chapter—re-write it if humanly possible. If you’re not happy with it, why should editors be?

3. ‘When you are not in the mood to write,’ Henrik Ibsen told his son Sigurd, ‘you must nevertheless sit down calmly at your desk, and the inspiration will come of itself.’

4. An impassioned plea from an elderly writer—don’t wait till you ‘have time’. Make time. Squeeze your writing in somehow. If you keep putting it off your ideas and your inspirations may lose their freshness and their excitement.

5. Whole books are written about writer’s block. But part of the problem, I think, is editors who say constantly ‘Grab the reader with your first page’. One day, I went into a book exchange and read the first and last pages of a dozen best-sellers. I wouldn’t have bought any of them on that basis. Forget that advice. It paralyses. Write with

confidence and enjoyment and, if necessary, tighten up later. And, if you're having difficulty beginning, start in the middle, start anywhere, write your ending first. Who cares? It's only your first draft.

A wag typed up and sent the first three chapters of Tolstoy's *War and Peace* round to a number of New York publishers. None of them recognised it. Most of them said it was 'unpublishable' as it stood.

The feeling of moving into your 'big scene' can similarly have a paralysing effect. Again, it's your first draft. Don't worry. If things are really bad, write it as an outline and gradually expand it.

If you're still having problems, then maybe there's something wrong with your idea. Maybe your subconscious is resisting a story which it dislikes, finds dull, or feels is somehow contrived or pointless. Maybe, you would be better to put that story aside for a month and come back to it with a fresh eye.

6. Beatrix Potter wrote 'I polish! polish! polish!—to the last revise.'

7. Agatha Christie kept two novels going at the same time; so when one went stale on her she could turn to the other.

8. Stephen King says: 'Stories come at different times and places for me—in the car, in the shower, while walking, even while standing around at parties. On a couple of occasions, stories have come to me in dreams. But it's very rare for me to write one as soon as the idea comes, and I don't keep an 'idea notebook'. Not writing ideas down is an exercise in self-preservation. I get a lot of them, but only a small percentage are any good, so I tuck them all into a kind of mental file. The bad ones eventually self-destruct in there, like the tape from control at the beginning of every *Mission: Impossible* episode. The good ones don't do that. Every now and then, when I open the file drawer to peek at what's left inside, this small handful of ideas looks up at me, each with its own bright central image.'

I once heard a writer say that it wasn't the remembering that was important, it was the forgetting. The stories which refuse to let you forget are the ones demanding that you sit down and write them.

9. Mary Webb wrote "You never find a cold book becoming popular ... the ordinary person cannot bear frigidity."

10. Andrew M. Greeley suggests that if you cannot provide a happy ending, provide an ending of *hope*.

11. TV scriptwriter, George Lowther, said: 'Once you realize you can write, your life will become a purgatory—an exciting purgatory with doubtless many moments of fun and satisfaction and possible profit in it, but a purgatory nonetheless. It'll ruin your bridge game; instead of analyzing your hand you'll find yourself analyzing your friends, making secret notes of their personality traits to use in creating characters of your own. Your golf game will go to pot; you'll be more interested in jotting your partners' speech patterns on your score card than your score. You'll no longer enjoy good, clean, wholesome kaffeeklatch gossip; you'll be too busy wondering how to work it into your next play. As for just watching TV to pass the time, that ends for you here and now, if you go on with this madness.

You insist on going on?

Well, you've been warned.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Story starters are popular in some writers' groups. One day, I sat down and tried to write a few for a friend; to my surprise, they flowed effortlessly and addictively—perhaps in the knowledge that I wouldn't have to beat my brains over 'what comes next'—so here they are, and if you'd like to use them—all power to your pen—

1. "That's the fourth anonymous letter we've had," said Sergeant Woodruffe wearily, "and all claiming Prince Popper is a ring-in."

“Is it possible?” His superior was non-committal.

“I checked. After the second letter. Brands, photos—even the jocks are willing to swear it’s the same horse.”

“Disgruntled punter then. Put them in the bin.”

Woodruffe nodded. There was nothing more to be done. But he wished he could lay to rest the feeling he’d had whilst talking with Prince Popper’s trainer. Was it only fancy on his part—or was the man afraid?

2. For thirty years I have walked on this small beach at dusk. That unvarying routine suggests a life of dullness and restriction. But the funeral is over, the will has been read—and now I must face the knowledge that my years of unremitting care have counted for nothing.

3. “I’m warning you, Kate. You walk out and I’ll fight you for the kids—and I’ll damn well make sure they grow up knowing just what sort of callous and irresponsible mother you were!”

“You try and stop me having them and I’ll use those letters. Oh, yes I will! I’d just love to see the expressions on all your important friends when they learn the truth about dear old Derek—”

“I’m sure you would. But you’ve left it too late. I found where you’d hidden them—and I burnt them.”

4. Mrs Pinter sipped her tea before saying, “Any news of Sarah, love?”

“No, not a peep out of her, Meg. It’s six weeks now since she wrote and I’m starting to get worried. I know she’s a big girl now—and very down-to-earth and sensible—but you just don’t know about those countries, do you? Anything could’ve happened to her and the police just wouldn’t care—”

5. The whitewashed inn was old, its stone flags worn by the passage of myriad feet. Its very air seemed to smell of parchment scrolls and funerary urns.

But the men in battle-green outside, riot shields raised and ready, belonged to present turmoil not to the gentle passage of unnumbered centuries.

Peter Aldiss came downstairs quietly, hesitated in the deep shadow of the doorway, then stepped back. It was only a matter of time before they came looking for him. Enough time for what he’d come to do?

\* \* \* \* \*

As well as books devoted to instruction there are books devoted to bloopers, to malapropisms and Spoonerisms, there are books of Famous Last Words, books of ‘amusing’ rejection slips, even books of unusual dedications (who, I wonder, was Hommy Beg?)

My favourite dedication comes in Fougasse and McCullough’s *You Have Been Warned*—

Dedication

To

.....

in remembrance of that  
never-to-be-forgotten

.....

in

.....

down at

.....

or was it

.....?

followed by—

“According to statistics, there is in Great Britain one car to every 33

persons—that is to say, one to drive it, two to give advice from the back seat, one to oil and grease thoroughly and remove all tools, three to step in front of it and one to visit them and eat their grapes, one to devise means for speeding it up and four to devise means for slowing it down, one to draw pictures in the dust on the back, one to keep taking it in part exchange, two to salute at cross-roads, fifteen to lean their bicycles against it at traffic stops, and one to fail to understand what’s come over everybody nowadays.

It is to the last of these that this book is addressed.”

\* \* \* \* \*

July 1st: James Cain  
Dorothea MacKellar  
James Reeves  
Ahmed Ali  
Patricia Matthews  
Anthony West  
George Sand  
July 2nd: Herman Hesse  
John Antrobus  
Ed Bullins  
William Le Queux  
July 3rd: Franz Kafka  
Evelyn Anthony  
Elfrida Vipont  
Tom Stoppard  
Gwen Moffat

\* \* \* \* \*

Colin MacInnes has written that “what makes English writers rather different from those of other countries, is that their boy or girlhood stories are so often set in schools.” Elfrida Vipont’s book *The Lark in the Morn* has been described as a new departure in schoolgirl fiction because it did away with many of the staples of such fiction—the new girl, the midnight feast in the dorm, the lacrosse match won by the unexpected girl, the breaking of certain rules—and, instead, tackled the more difficult questions of the early flowering of ambition, the awareness of spiritual needs, the sense of nascent talent which doesn’t fit with family expectations ...

This, I think, is why I find Enid Bagnold’s *National Velvet* such an appalling book even though it is better written than many juvenile books. The good things which happen come about through unbelievable luck or coincidence. A man turns up out of the blue and *gives* the family three ponies, the heroine just casually *wins* a horse in a raffle—and then she goes out, unfit and untried, to ride a horse which is equally unfit and inexperienced and just casually wins the world’s toughest steeplechase ...

No, gone are the days when children’s books preached—thank goodness!—but going too (thank goodness) are books dependent on luck or unlikely coincidences.

Kit, in *The Lark in the Morn*, faces one of the most agonising of problems for a young singer. She has been wrongly taught. It brings to mind the many rules that were put on young writers (a letter should never begin with I, a sentence should never begin with ‘And’, ‘nice’ was a no-no, etc). But writing unlike singing has a lot more scope for change and development later.

\* \* \* \* \*

As well as school stories, Elfrida Vipont wrote a number of children’s books in which her fascination with her imaginary genealogies over-runs all bounds and even with a family tree provided still confuses. She also wrote some fine ghost stories,

usually based on real events, and several historical dramas, also linked to odd little incidents.

Probably the grimmest book she wrote—and I'm not really sure that it should be classed as a children's book—was *Bed in Hell*. The hero, Maurice Lydiard, is a man with a spite against the world. He says "Pity is a despicable thing, enough to take the marrow from a man's bones" but it is the only mild response he provokes in the reader.

The book is set in the time of the 'Old Pretender', the Stuart denied the British throne by William, Mary and then Anne—but I cannot help thinking the Stuarts brought many of their disasters on their heads by continuing to covet both thrones. As Vipont puts it—

'But this is your quarrel, surely,' I reminded him.

He shook his head emphatically.

'The Devil may sit on the English throne for all I care,' he said. 'I'm for Scotland.'

Maurice Lydiard grows up in the gloom of the Essex marshes but he seems to take the gloom with him, as well as finding it always along the way. As he looks out upon Sheriffmuir: 'Who can describe the desolation of a battlefield, snow-covered, and still strewn with such evidence of battle as marauding thieves had left untouched? It was a wild place, with enfolding hills about it, and everywhere a deathly silence which laid cold fingers on the heart.'

The Essex marshes also gave rise to a true horror, the career of Matthew Hopkins, known to history as the Witchfinder-General. He is the sort of man who flourishes in times of uncertainty, unrest, depression, civil war ...

Richard Deacon, as well as chronicling his career brings another aspect of the English Civil War to light—the struggle by women on both sides (Cavalier and Roundhead) to form what we would now call a peace movement. 'In January 1643 the Venetian Secretary to the Doge of Venice visiting London reported that "all sorts of persons unite in supporting the demand for peace ... to leave no moderate means of persuasion untried, the women are preparing to appear, in the hope that their sex may meet a more courteous hearing and a more pitiful heart, for repairing the ruin of this now wretched kingdom" and Sir Simonds D'Awes recorded "A multitude of women came down to the very door of the House of Commons and there cried as in divers other places, Peace, Peace, Peace ..."' Deacon adds that this 'Women's Liberation died an early death because pro-Royalist and pro-Parliamentary factions were kept apart by the men. There are indications that this was skilfully exploited on the Parliamentary side by branding Royalist feminists as "whores of Babylon" or witches.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Roy Norvill provides this small sidelight to a much used word:

'The Biblical word 'hell' is translated from the Hebrew *sheol*, but as with the word 'angels', *sheol* is made to fit more than one aspect of the nether world, being various translated as hell, pit, grave or death. The most important fact is that, at the time when the Bible was translated into English, the word 'hell' was generally thought of as representing a fiery torment. This is a somewhat exaggerated version of the original Old Testament meaning of the word *sheol*, which was simply 'abode of the dead'. In much earlier times, however, hell was regarded as a place of spiritual cleansing—something to be aspired to. The word 'hell' is derived from 'helan', which means to cover, or conceal. Thus, the original meaning of hell was that it was an unseen place in the spirit world.'

The Norse used the word *Hel* to refer to a place of the dead, characterised instead by the torment of furious *cold*.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 4th: Neil Simon

Nathaniel Hawthorne  
 Guy Endore  
 Diniz da Cruz e Silva  
 Fay Zwicky  
 Gavin Black  
 July 5th: Jean Cocteau  
 Mario Fratti  
 George Borrow  
 July 6th: Mrs Mignon Eberhart  
 Bessie Head  
 Carl von Heidenstam  
 Pierre Benoît  
 July 7th: Oliver Hailey  
 Lion Feuchtwanger  
 Robert Heinlein  
 Max Dann  
 July 8th: Alec Waugh  
 Fergus Hume  
 John Ball  
 Jean de La Fontaine  
 July 9th: Ann Radcliffe  
 Barbara Cartland  
 Dean R. Koontz  
 July 10th: Frederick Marryat  
 Mary O'Hara  
 Marcel Proust  
 Alice Munro  
 E. C. Bentley  
 July 11th: E. B. White  
 Daphne Marlatt  
 Jane Mary Gardam  
 Pierre Boisdeffre  
 July 12th: Pablo Neruda  
 Henry David Thoreau  
 Donald E. Westlake  
 Elin-Kai Toona  
 Lucy Fitch Perkins  
 Hans Koning  
 Phillip Adams  
 Charles Rowcroft  
 'Weary' Dunlop  
 July 13th: Sidney Webb  
 Wole Soyinka  
 Sir Kenneth Clark  
 John Clare  
 David Storey  
 Jeanne Hersch  
 Derek Brewer  
 Archie Weller

\* \* \* \* \*

African writing doesn't catch our eyes, leap off our library shelves, demand to be read ... it's usually not on the shelves in the first place. Yet, in the unexpected times and

places where it appears ... of course, you may already be saying—‘What’s she on about? What of Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Alan Paton, Laurens van der Post, André Brink—aren’t they African—or is this some kind of reverse discrimination?’ Perhaps. But I am not going to backtrack and say Black African any more than I would want to speak of White African or bog down in the difference between Aboriginal writing and what we simply call Australian writing; even though the purists might wish that we speak of Australian writing and non-Aboriginal writing ...

Lines which have always intrigued me come from the Ghanaian poet, Albert Kayper Mensah—

... And as I walked, I saw a Lazarus  
 Emerge from the tomb, his dead clothes o’er his shoulder.  
 His powerful body freed from bandages,  
 A rising flame of life, from the night of death.  
 Uncertain yet how long the ravages,  
 The germs, and the million killing ways of earth  
 Will spare his new-found Life, his radiant grace.  
 And as he walked past me, I saw my face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Long before the best known South African writers were dealing sympathetically with race relations, an unusual Anglican clergyman, Arthur Shearly Cripps, was annoying his superiors in what is now Zimbabwe by writing things like ‘An Ode to the Hut Tax’ (1903)—

Go glean in the fields of the harvest bare,  
 From Famine meat a four-fold-share!  
 Apply a text as best you may—  
 From him that hath not, take away!  
 or his ‘A Mashona Husbandman’—  
 You find him listless, of but little worth  
 To drudge for you, and dull to understand?  
 Come watch him hoe his own rain-mellowed land ...  
 or his thoughts on the work of a friend—Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar—  
 Whence was his Faith? A rushing mighty wind  
 First hurled her fierce infections among men ...  
 But we, inoculating heart and mind  
 With spilth of pulpit and with spray of pen,  
 Shiver immune from Faith’s contagion ...  
 Not so he served. For him Emmanuel glowed  
 In gleaming Hosts: in faces dark and wild  
 The Burning Babe of Bethlehem on him smiles:  
 The Christ, Faith hides from us, to him she showed—  
 A Black Christ bow’d beneath a Heart-break load.

Cripps brought out his first book of poems at the age of 15 and Douglas V. Steere in his biography says ‘Writing in *The Scotsman* in November 1940, J.C. Smith recalls that he found in Oxford in 1888 a nest of singing birds:

The best of whom was in my own college, Trinity. This was Laurence Binyon. In his second year having won the Newdigate (Poetry Prize) Binyon conspired with three other undergraduates to bring out a slim volume of verse *Primavera*. His collaborators were Ghose, the Indian poet, Arthur Shearly Cripps and Stephen Phillips. Cripps was a saint who spent his life in Mashonaland.’

I don’t think we would use the word ‘saint’ so easily but Cripps used his spare time, if it can be called spare, to write poetry, children’s stories and ‘African tales’ in the hope of raising money to buy back land for the Africans of his parish ... and I like

the story—‘Although he was approaching his seventieth year, Cripps was still given to making his travels by foot, though now on occasion he was not above accepting some other form of transport when it was offered. It was in this period that the story is told of Cripps, with an African companion, being offered a lift in a car for the last leg of their ninety-five mile journey to Salisbury. Cripps accepted the offer gratefully and took his seat. But before his African friend could get in, the door was slammed shut and the car swept off. During the journey there was a polite silence and when some miles later they reached Salisbury, Cripps thanked the man for the lift and asked to be let out. The white driver asked him where he was going and Cripps said quietly that he was walking back to rejoin his African companion on their journey to Salisbury’ ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Another unusual Anglican clergyman, the Reverend Michael Scott, writes, “It was in South West Africa (Namibia) that the doctrine of the *herrenvolk* was first practised and preached. It was an English writer, H.S. Chamberlain, who formulated the doctrine of a superior race of people. This was taken up by Hermann Goering’s father who was one of the administrators of South West Africa.”

Scott was invited by the Herero people of Namibia to visit them in 1947 and see at first hand their problems. He said: Who shall say that a people who have maintained their spirit against all the horrors that have been perpetrated against them—who can sing as they sang, and pray as they prayed—are uncivilized? The prayers of Chief Hosea, as he stood erect in the strong sun with his hat in his hand, were quite unforgettable:

‘You are the Great God of all the Earth and the Heavens. We are so insignificant. In us there are many defects. But the Power is yours to make and to do what we cannot do. You know all about us. For coming down to earth you were despised, and mocked, and brutally treated because of those same defects in the men of those days. And for those men you prayed because they did not understand what they were doing, and that you came only for what was right. Give us the courage to struggle in that way for what is right.

‘O Lord, help us who roam about. Help us who have been placed in Africa and have no dwelling place of our own ... ’

Hosea was chief of the Herero people who had been reduced by the German administration from 80,000 to a mere 15,000 people. Things had not improved under the South African administration; it refused to allow any of the tribal people to travel to New York to put their case before the United Nations Decolonization Committee—so Michael Scott agreed to go to represent the Hereros, the Berg Damaras, the Namas, and other tribal people, and press the United Nations to honour its mandate to end South African colonialism.

But the problem, he came to understand, was that although the United Nations Charter begins ‘We, the peoples of the world’ what it really means is ‘We, the governments of the world’; it may seek to balance the demands of competing nations but it has never found the ways in which it might truly give voice to the voiceless.

Year after year, Michael Scott returned to New York. In 1978 he said, “A few weeks ago I hoped that this would be my last request to be heard, at the beginning of the thirty-third year of appealing to this Committee against the incorporation of the land and people of South West Africa into the sovereign State of South Africa ... ”

Many things had happened in the meantime: Ethiopia and Liberia had taken the case to the International Court of Justice and, after four years, had received, in 1966, the judgement that as they had no legal interest in the case the Court could not pronounce upon its merits—a judgement which put the issue firmly into the international arena: “In October 1966 the General Assembly passed a resolution which began with a declaration that, since South Africa had persistently flouted the Mandate, it was

henceforth terminated”; the surrounding nations of Angola, Botswana and Zambia were independent, with Rhodesia on its painful way to majority rule and independence. Michael Scott’s hope that independence for Namibia was close is understandable but it would be another twelve years of struggle before South Africa finally loosed its grip.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, was an accomplished writer of short stories with a mildly Orwellian flavour. In one story, the animals take on the mantle of the imperialists—“they were gentlemen chosen by God to look after the interests of races less adequately endowed with bill and claws” whilst the man who builds a hut for himself represents the African.

But because he has not filled all the available space the Elephant moves in too and squeezes him out; he gets permission to move and re-build—but each time there is an animal waiting to fill up the excess space. Finally he builds an enormous hut into which crowd all the greedy animals. He then slips out and burns down the hut.

“Peace is costly,” he remarks philosophically, “but it’s worth the expense.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I was interested to learn that two of Africa’s best-known writers—Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka—are both Biafrans; as also was the man who brought out in 1789, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*. They both wrote about the conflict with deep sympathy and without skirting the horrors, as in Achebe’s article ‘The African Writer and the Biafran Cause’ (in which he says ‘Biafra stands in opposition to the murder and rape of Africa by whites and blacks alike because she has tasted both and found them equally bitter. No government, black or white, has the right to stigmatise and destroy groups of its own citizens without undermining the basis of its own existence. The government of Nigeria failed to protect the fourteen million people of its former Eastern Nigeria from wanton destruction and rightly lost their allegiance’), but occasionally in a lighter vein such as Achebe’s short story dealing with the ex-gratia payments made at the end of the war—

‘I count it was nothing,’ he told his sympathizers, his eyes on the rope he was tying. ‘What is *egg-rasher*? Did I depend on it last week? Or is it greater than other things that went with the war? I say, let *egg-rasher* perish in the flames! Let it go where everything else has gone. Nothing puzzles God.’

Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize in 1986, writes poetry, plays and novels; he has organised theatre and taught literature and drama. And through his writing runs the conflict common to post-colonial peoples: the conflict between tribal traditions, colonial impositions, and the demands of the modern nation-state and the global economy. But Biafra informs his work—he spent 1967 to 1969 in prison for his support for the Biafran cause—in its reminder that the process of identity and the attainment of real peace rather than imposed peace is far from complete ...

He also wrote a delightful book *Aké, The Years of Childhood*. It chronicles the inspiring rise of the women’s movement in Nigeria: Soyinka’s mother is involved with a small women’s group which begins teaching other women to read and write; from this grows the Egba Women’s Union which takes up the question of the taxation of market traders; then comes the Nigerian Women’s Union—and as women come together in larger numbers they find their leaders are strong enough to stand up to the men, both black and white. When the English District Officer tells Mrs Kuti, leader of the Egba Women, to ‘SHUT UP YOUR WOMEN’ she responds—‘You may have been born, you were not bred. Could you speak to your mother like that?’—and with the rout of both the District Officer and the African tax-gatherers it is a natural step to go on to talking about things like independence ...

Sometimes it is a world so totally different—as when he writes of a young playmate who is *âbikú* and falls into trances and has unseen playmates in the spirit

world, ‘She glided over the earth like a being who barely deigned to accommodate the presence of others’; at other times it is the world of children everywhere—

‘I knew where I had encountered such a funnel. It was the same as the picture on our gramophone into which a dog barked, below which was written: HIS MASTER’S VOICE. Tinu and I had long rejected the story that the music which came from the gramophone was made by a special singing dog locked in the machine. We never saw it fed, so it would have long starved to death. I had not yet found the means of opening up the machine, so the mystery remained.’

I remember my father making a corn-shelling machine from bits and pieces round the farm. I was convinced he had *invented* this wonderful machine and the thought that he belonged with Watt and Stephenson helped while away the dull hours of husking and feeding in the cobs. I was rather sad to learn, years later, that lots of farms had similar machines.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 14th: Irving Stone  
Isaac Bashevis Singer  
Louis Kaye  
Jerome Lawrence  
Arthur Laurents  
Natalia Ginzburg  
Susan Howatch  
Ingmar Bergman  
Leon Garfield

July 15th: Iris Murdoch  
Hammond Innes  
Ann Jellicoe  
Gavin Maxwell  
Driss Chraibi  
Clement Clarke Moore  
Robert Conquest

July 16th: Christopher Koch  
Anita Brookner  
Abdul-Wahid Lulua  
Eve Titus

July 17th: Isaac Watts  
Christina Stead  
Erle Stanley Gardner  
Charles Dyer  
Shmuel Yosef Agnon  
Colin Spencer  
Michael Gilbert

\* \* \* \* \*

The Dowager Duchess in Dorothy Sayers’ *Strong Poison* says, “I don’t suppose detective writers detect much in real life, do they, except Edgar Wallace of course, who always seems to be everywhere and dear Conan Doyle and the black man what was his name and of course the Slater person, such a scandal, though now I come to think of it that was in Scotland where they have such very odd laws about everything particularly getting married.”

It seems natural to expect mystery writers to notice things while the rest of us go blandly by—and Conan Doyle, for all the dull respectability his everyday life and pronouncements exude, was a bloodhound on the trail of perceived injustice. He worked hard and long to prove the innocence of George Edalji, convicted of night-time

disembowelings of horses, cows and sheep. His sympathy with the accused shines through and he was probably quite right to believe that racism played a considerable part (Edalji's father was a Parsee) in the conviction. Doyle writes: "Now, I have no doubt Captain Anson (the Chief Constable of Staffordshire) was quite honest in his dislike, and unconscious of his own prejudice. It would be folly to think otherwise. But men in his position have no right to yield to such feelings. They are too powerful, others are too weak, and the consequences are too terrible."

He claimed, with his own knowledge as an oculist, that Edalji would have been too short-sighted to make his way across country at night and carry out attacks on animals in the open of their paddocks. After doing three years of a seven-year-sentence Edalji was freed but not pardoned; perhaps also for reasons of prejudice ... and Doyle turned his attention to a different miscarriage of justice.

The case of Oskar Slater, though, never engaged his sympathy. Slater was a pimp and small-time thief. But not a murderer, Doyle believed, and Slater after spending nearly eighteen years behind bars finally received a pardon and a small payout in compensation.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Roberts Rinehart also took an interest in a real-life case. A number of brutal axe murders had taken place on a lumber schooner, the *Herbert Fuller*, and the mate (a man named Bram) had gone to prison. But Rinehart became sceptical of the evidence used to convict him and wrote a fictionalised version of the story, moving the action to a pleasure yacht. When her story was serialised it led to renewed interest in the case. More than twenty years after his incarceration the mate was paroled and finally pardoned in 1914.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nancy Ellen Talburt writes of Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time*—"Nothing else in Tey equals her audacity in bringing to the bar of accusation Henry VII of England, whom Grant accuses of complicity in the murder of the princes in the tower ... Henry has, if guilty, cold-bloodedly eliminated two nearer claimants to the throne, claimants who happened to be his wife's brothers. The only justice which could reach him now is the justice of truth in the historical accounts of his life—"

"Just as King Henry VII is an exceptionally bold stroke as villain, so Richard III is a particularly long-suffering suspect, and a very good example of the damage that occurs when a crime is not solved and the innocent remains under suspicion."

Talburt also says—"The novel contains a second use of history, the examination of the process of history-making. By considering Scottish martyrs, the Boston Massacre, and the invasion of Tonypandy, Wales, by British troops, Tey organizes support for her central idea, the innocence of Richard III. As she illustrates, there is a human tendency in the collecting and preserving of information to create heroes, martyrs and villains in the historical accounts so that the truth of an occurrence is altered to fit a mythic theory. Those who know the truth do not speak up, and fiction prevails as history. Grant's cousin observes that people do not like to have their views of history changed. Historians have been proving her point ever since the publication of the book. Tey's complaint is that much of history is fiction; historians complain that her fiction is not history, but the debate is intriguing."

\* \* \* \* \*

Equally deserving to be remembered is the hard work Erle Stanley Gardner put in, firstly on the case of William Marvin Lindley who was on Death Row in San Quentin for the rape and murder of a young woman.

Gardner managed to persuade the Governor to stay the execution, only hours before Lindley was due to die, and with the extra time granted was able to bring forward a compelling alibi for the prisoner. But all his hard work was unable to gain a

re-trial for Lindley who, already in a parlous mental state from living on Death Row for months, broke down completely and was declared insane.

Gardner then took up the case of Clarence Boggie, a lumberjack, who had already spent thirteen years in prison for the manslaughter of an old man. The evidence was not particularly strong, being based on an overcoat bought by Boggie in a second-hand clothes shop, the say-so of another convict, and an indeterminate identification.

With the help of several professional colleagues and two newspapers, the *Argosy* and the *Times* of Seattle, and after months of solid work Gardner brought forward a compelling case for Boggie's innocence. Even so it was several more years before Boggie finally walked free to try and take up life again. He married his childhood sweetheart and returned to lumberjacking—but in a misguided attempt to prove he was as strong as he'd been before his imprisonment he over-strained his heart and died.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gardner did not write compelling or beautiful prose. His strength, rather, lay in his plain clear writing and the marriage of fast-paced detection and a courtroom climax.

But he comes across as a kind practical down-to-earth man with a genuine concern for the unfortunate and the underdog.

Of the much-maligned coyote he says: "They are the most daring, saucy, impudent, lovable rascals in the world—"

Of the sometimes-maligned prison chaplains he says: "A book could—and should—be written about the activities of these men. They sacrifice their own time, their own funds, pile up mileage on their automobiles—"

Of death, maligned or embraced, he says: "In the first place death is not unwelcome to the inner self. It is the conscious mind which clings to life. Neither is death a permanent parting. I am not certain as to the retention of individuality in the hereafter, but I do feel certain the cosmic scheme of things is fitted for the best of man's needs, and that individuality is the most precious possession a person has, is developed as the result of much suffering, and is not given up for no good reason. Death is the postulate of birth. We do not regard the coming of life as evil. Therefore we should not regard the reverse phase of the same process as evil. We can't have a flood tide without also having an ebb."

\* \* \* \* \*

Writers of whodunnits, like writers of everything else, agonise over titles. The trouble is—when they're all squashed together in the small section of a library labelled 'Crime Fiction' or 'Mystery' they cease to stand out.

Murder on Trial, Murder in Washington, Murder and Chips, Murder at Moose Jaw, Murder in the Mews, Murder Unprompted, Murder on the Orient Express, Murder Among the Personal Ads, Death Elsewhere, Death in Green, Death of a Dancing Lady, Death of a Minor Character, Death of an Old Goat, Death in Purple Prose, Death on the Rocks ...

Gardner's titling of his Perry Mason stories—The Case of—followed by a nice spot of alliteration—was, wittingly or unwittingly, a stroke of small genius.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 18th: William Makepeace Thackeray  
Edward Bond  
Margaret Laurence  
July 19th: A. J. Cronin  
Edgar Snow  
Victor Kelleher  
Gottfried Keller  
Dom Moraes

\* \* \* \* \*

Speaking of titles, I was curious to discover that both Agatha Christie and A. J. Cronin called a novel *A Pocketful of Rye* even though they must surely have been aware of each other's work—and editors have a habit of compelling writers to change titles on the flimsiest of excuses.

But—does it really matter?

*The Eye of the Storm* (Patrick White) *In the Eye of the Storm* (Basil Davidson)  
*The Eye of the Storm* (Susan Dodson) *Eye of the Storm* (Marcia Muller)

*The Pale Horse* (Agatha Christie) *The Pale Horse* (Boris Savinkov)

*Palomino* (Elizabeth Jolley) *Palomino* (Danielle Steel)

*A Question of Survival* (Robin Hanbury-Tenison) *A Question of Survival* (William Oats)

*My Place* (Sally Morgan) *My Place* (Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins)

*Tracks* (Robyn Davidson) *Tracks* (Louise Erdrich) *Tracks* (Max Jones)

*Metamorphoses* (Ovid) *Metamorphosis* (Franz Kafka) *Metamorphoses* (Lucius Apulius)

*The Birds* (Frank Baker) *The Birds* (Daphne Du Maurier)

*The Foundling* (Lloyd Alexander) *The Foundling* (Georgette Heyer)

*A Pattern of Islands* (Arthur Grimble) *A Pattern of Peoples* (Robin Hanbury-Tenison)

*Jig-Saw* (Barbara Cartland) *Jigsaw* (Sybille Bedford) *Jigsaw* (Derek Townsend)  
*Jigsaw* (Ed McBain)

Indeed it is quite likely that, barring remarkable titles like *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *Bring on the Empty Horses*, *The Beastly Beatitudes of Balthazar B.* and *Surfeit of Lampreys*, most books have a double somewhere. And even if they're not exact replicas it's still quite likely someone's confused them—such as the readers who confuse *The Quiet American* with *The Ugly American* or *Faultline* for *Faultlines*—but never mind, sometimes it brings an interesting new book into your reading life ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A name which has always stayed with me is Norman Macswan's *The Man Who Read The East Wind* about the life of China-watcher, Richard Hughes; and a story in the book which has always stayed with me goes like this:

In Urumchi too he saw a street scene that made him reflect on differing reactions to violence from South East Asian people and the varying attitudes of authorities.

The scene was 'the street of grey-eyed men'—Hughes never could find out how it got its name—and involved a Chinese bus driver and a Kazakh tribesman riding a nervous white mare. The driver tooted his horn stridently and the mare reared and fell. The tribesman landed on his feet, quietened the mare, then handed the reins with quiet dignity to a bystander. He walked across to the bus, measured the driver calmly and whacked him across the nose with a huge backhander. Still without visible anger he remounted and rode off, leaving the stunned driver to pick himself out of the gutter. The driver wiped the blood from his nose, bowed to the silent spectators, bowed to his passengers and resumed his interrupted journey.

In Peking, Hughes reflected, excited bystanders would have swarmed to the scene shouting encouragement to the brawlers. Two traffic policemen would try patiently to effect a compromise so that neither the horseman nor the bus driver would lose face. Each of the protagonists would compliment the other on some aspect of their behaviour, the horse would be left to fend for itself in the gutter and traffic would back up for miles until militiamen chanting Mao's thoughts restored order.

In Tokyo, there would be a gaggle of policemen denouncing the horseman because he was a peasant; the horseman would bow respectfully to the bus driver because he wore a uniform and then regain face by whacking the unfortunate horse.

In Singapore, a single policeman would take the number of the bus before waving it on; arrest the horseman for suspected careless riding; arrest a bystander for spitting in the street, before mounting the horse and cantering off to the nearest police station with the arrested men jogging along behind.

In Manila, a mob would assemble, pickpockets would have a field day and by the time armed police had stopped a riot, someone would have stolen the horse.

Hughes decided he liked the Urumchi way best. It was basic yet dignified and had all the appearance of justice, swiftly administered.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 20th: Louisa Anne Meredith

John Breen  
Petrarch  
Ernest Bolt  
Erik Axel Karlfeldt  
Erich Biberger

July 21st: Ernest Hemingway

Catherine Storr  
John B. Keane  
Arthur Mee  
Buchi Emecheta  
Gillian Mears  
A. D. Hope

July 22nd: Betty Roland

Tom Robbins  
Margery Bianco  
Rosemary Weir  
Steve Gooch  
Stephen Benét  
Adrian Cole

July 23rd: Raymond Chandler

Alexander Buzo  
Gwynedd Roe  
Elspeth Huxley  
Ronald Ridout

July 24th: Jean Webster

Henrik Pontoppidan  
John D. Macdonald  
Alexandre Dumas  
Lord Dunsany  
Aaron Elkins  
Elizabeth Wolff-Bekker

July 25th: Lee Kalcheim

Elias Canetti  
David Belasco  
Arthur James Balfour  
Keith Suter  
Maria Komornicka

July 26th: Austin Clarke

George Bernard Shaw  
Robert Graves  
Aldous Huxley  
Paul Gallico

Colin Wilson  
Stanley Kubrick  
Bernice Rubens

\* \* \* \* \*

Sybille Bedford in her autobiography *Jigsaw* writes of Aldous Huxley and his wife Maria: “In all those years and years of driving him—which he could not do himself because of his poor sight—to doctors, to meetings, to gurus and quacks, she always waited for his return by the very front door to save him a wait or a walk, however short, when he came out. She had a great regard for his time, which was to be used for his work and his thoughts, not for hanging about while she might have nipped into a café or a shop. (Yet with all her care—her life-long care—for Aldous, there was always time, money, strength—she was physically frail—to give to, to help, others, her family, her friends, the person at the door.)”

Bedford also says: “She was his eyes and ears for what was going on in the human world; for his books, she would explain, any odds and ends came in useful.”

(It was Maria Huxley who came to the rescue when Sybille Bedford’s mother was suffering from heroin addiction.)

Tolstoy’s wife, it is said, sat up to all hours of the night copying the mess of his day into beautiful readable script.

James Herriot said it was his wife’s comment that he’d been *going* to write a book for twenty-five years which finally made him put pen to paper.

The Reverend William Awdry, of Thomas the Tank Engine fame, said he would never have tried to publish his work but for his wife—“She kept sticking pins in me to do something about it.”

Of course there are supportive husbands. The Rev. William Gaskell supported his wife’s writing—even though he kept the study and she had the dining-room table. George Lewes undoubtedly supported George Eliot but I don’t think it led him to organise the household or plan the menus or pack the suitcases.

I notice that a lot of tips for women writers suggest leaving the housework till last as the writing is more important. But, obviously, the writers who write tips like that already have very accommodating husbands.

\* \* \* \* \*

The thought came to me one day—shouldn’t virago be the masculine form and viraga the feminine? I looked first in my dictionary which said:

1. a loud, violent, and ill-tempered woman; scold, shrew. 2. Archaic. a strong, brave, or warlike woman; amazon. (Old English, from Latin: a manlike maiden, from *vir* a man)

George Borrow, in *Wild Wales*, says the ‘ancient Hindus’ used the word *vira* to signify both a strong man, a hero, and fire. He then expands on the idea: ‘That *vira* at one time meant man in general, as well as fire, there can be no doubt. It is singular how this word, or something strikingly like it, occurs in various European languages, sometimes as man, sometimes as fire. *Vir* in Latin signifies man, but *vuur* in Dutch signifies fire. In like manner *fear* in Irish signifies man, but *fire* in English signifies the consuming, or, as the Hindus would call it, the producing element.’

Then I turned to the Spanish-English version which said simply:  
a mannish woman.

The English-Spanish version said

*fiera*, *arpía*

So:

*arpía*: harpy, shrew, hag

*fiera*: 1. wild beast, wild animal; bull

2. fiend; virago, dragon; ball of fire, highly energetic person

So what is a virago? Be my guest.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 27th: Hilaire Belloc  
Giosuè Carducci  
Jack Higgins  
Bharati Mukherjee

July 28th: John Ashberry  
Malcolm Lowry  
Beatrix Potter  
Gerard Manley Hopkins

\* \* \* \* \*

Late in life Beatrix Potter wrote: 'I am written out for story books, and my eyes are tired for painting.'

I'm sure she was saying what she believed but it was also true that a new life was opening up for her as a farmer and sheep-breeder and she could not be blamed for wanting to cut loose from the strings of her 'previous' life and devote herself to her new world. After all, she didn't need the money and she was in the position of a writer who is assured of new readers becoming old enough, constantly, to read her books or have them read aloud; there was no absolute need to produce new work to please a body of devoted life-long fans. Also her work, because it was set outside time and the real world, was also in a sense devoid of development. She could keep writing new stories on old themes, she could ask 'what will it be this time—a stoat, a vole, a shrew—or another kitten?' ... she was probably very sensible to retire before her writing became a burden. But it leaves an unanswered question: can a writer become 'written out'?

I personally don't think so. Ideas are like the sand on the seashore—endless. But whether you should write simply for the sake of writing is another matter.

When I go into a bookstore (with, on the one hand, the 'No 1 bestseller', 'a million copies sold', 'by the author of the remarkable bestseller'—and, on the other hand, 'the true exposé of police corruption', the 'look behind the scenes', the 'book that will change your life' *ad infinitum*) I always find myself thinking 'does the world really need another book?'

I read once that each new paperback edition of an Agatha Christie clearfells hundreds of hectares of forest. More and more people are saying (and I don't think it's just my friends who say so) that they don't buy books or magazines that aren't on recycled paper—which, except perhaps for a few prestigious art books, makes good sense—and the new recycled papers are virtually indistinguishable from non-recycled papers.

Should we write books if we don't really care deeply about our story? Should we buy books if we don't really want, deeply, a particular book?

\* \* \* \* \*

Beatrix Potter put all her youthful diary entries into code-writing. Code-alphabets, invented languages, are extremely common. So much so, that I sometimes wonder whether the profoundly serious linguists discussing their theories have given enough attention to the elements of play and fun and individualism and secrecy involved in speaking and writing.

When I was about twenty I invented my own alphabet and wrote my diaries in it. Not long ago I hunted some of these old books out, wondering whether to keep them or throw them away; I didn't feel up to translating everything back into readable stuff, especially as the non-secret stuff was marked by an appalling facetiousness; it was full of dated slang like 'groovey', 'pad' and 'dit'; and there were those cryptic mysteries like 'saw S', 'letter from M', 'had coffee with C' ...

Miles Franklin invented a number of words (such as 'squashation', 'dumppedes')

and ‘opuscule’) for use in her own books. Edith Somerville and her family also created their own words which she, and her cousin ‘Martin Ross’, put in ‘The Buddh Dictionary’. Among their words were—

‘grawley’ n. fem. unformed child; generally a species of agile restless outlaw, the terror of the well-doing and the scourge of the domestic

‘absquatulate’ v.1. Generally used in the imperative tense as a command to children to remove their superfluous presence. 2. To retire

‘doldromizer’ n. One having a foolish and stupefied demeanour (I hope that one doesn’t catch on)

‘white-eye’ n. A significant and chilling glance calculated to awake the fatuous to a sense of their folly

\* \* \* \* \*

Have you ever had a manuscript come back only to realise you’ve written something dreadful like “her eyes flew to the door”?

Take heart—I’m not sure whose or how—because even successful writers get away with some physical oddities—

“Meredith’s heart descended to her toes” (Ann Granger)

“I put in the last stitch with my fingers crossed” (James Herriot)

“Her tongue was small and round and hard” (Patrick White)

“Her eyes nearly fell out of her head” (Enid Blyton)

“the hair on his scalp stirred and went icy cold with terror” (D. H. Lawrence)

—nor are reviewers exempt—“She sees everything with an eye full of relish” (Hilary Bailey)

That little fox puppet, Basil Brush, made a career out of picking up on some of the oddities we pass unnoticed.

“Her eyes flew to the door”—“Dear me,” says impudent Basil, “did she get them back again?”—no, and I’m afraid she didn’t sell her manuscript either.

\* \* \* \* \*

July 29th: William Beebe  
Harry Mulisch  
Eyvind Johnson  
Eric Clark

July 30th: Anne Ridler  
Bogdan Pasternak  
Peter Bogdanovich  
W. H. Gass  
Reginald Bretnor

July 31st: Lynne Reid Banks  
David Halliwell  
Fay Kellerman  
Jonathon Dimpleby  
Eugenio Aguirre  
Primo Levi

August 1st: Carter Brown  
Anne Hébert  
Herman Melville  
Julie Bovasso  
M. R. James  
Rose Macaulay  
Yvonne Rousseau  
Julio Herrera y Reissig

August 2nd: James Baldwin

Stephen Berg  
Ethel Mary Dell  
Eliza Orme White  
Geoffrey Dutton  
Nancy Phelan  
Isabel Allende  
August 3rd: Rupert Brooke  
Juliana Horatia Ewing  
P. D. James  
Leon Uris  
Marvin Bell  
Steven Berkoff

\* \* \* \* \*

Rupert Brooke, with his Adonis looks, his golden halo hardly dimmed by the years, seems to head the tragic roll call for what might truly be called The Dead Poets' Society. A list of English and Scottish poets, already published, who died in the Great War—

Rupert Brooke  
David Westcott Brown  
Leslie Coulson  
Julian Grenfell  
W. N. Hodgson  
W. S. Lyon  
John McCrae  
Wilfrid Owen  
Isaac Rosenberg  
Alan Seeger  
C. H. Sorley  
Edward Thomas  
R. E. Vernède  
Arthur Graeme West

T. P. Cameron Wilson ... and even in gold letters, alphabetically, on shining oak, the only possible response is regret.

Yet the list is misleading in that it suggests only Britain lost the flowering of its young writers; other countries ... well, they somehow get glossed over ... how often do we ask whether there might have been another W. B. Yeats among the 50,000 young Irishmen who died in the trenches—and what of the young colonials, not merely white colonials, but the young men who came from Senegal and Kenya, Mauritius and India and the Straits Settlements?

\* \* \* \* \*

Among those who died in the early months of the war was French writer Henri Alain-Fournier.

His career, short as it was, and his writing, scanty as it is, have fascinated English academic Robert Gibson who has written at great length and depth on Alain-Fournier; so much so that he has probably written more about Alain-Fournier than Fournier produced to be written about.

Alain-Fournier is remembered for the one novel *Le Grand Meulnes* (translated, though not literally, as *The Lost Domain* or *The Wanderer*); and it is largely the mystique surrounding and contained within this novel which has created the continuing interest in its author.

In the beginning, I thought of it as thinly-disguised autobiography but then doubts began to creep in—was it really an allegory, a fairy tale, a cry for what might-have-

been, but couched in the outward being of French village life?

Jacques Vier asks ‘Why shouldn’t *Le Grand Meulnes* be the novel of chivalry of which each century provides its own particular version? Every age gets the Grail it deserves and it matters little if, at his Round Table, Alain-Fournier has seated two or three prosaic knights.’

But I think Robert Gibson sees it essentially as a *cri de coeur* for all that childhood meant to Alain-Fournier; adulthood is inescapable, there is no going back, but the present never has the beauty or the innocence or the *possibilities* that childhood had.

Gibson writes: ‘his long and painful struggle to complete his only novel is part of that conflict too, because to write effectively of one’s past is, in a very real sense, to exorcise it. For Fournier, this meant to eradicate, or very seriously to dilute, the richest source of his literary inspiration: his powerful sense of nostalgia.’

It could be argued that there are writers who go again and again to the well of childhood and find it inexhaustible. François Mauriac says ‘childhood and youth alone is enough to provide a born novelist with an immense amount of literary nourishment. Nobody can stop the flow of the river that flows from us.’ But I think that part of the still-fresh curiosity about Alain-Fournier is this question—would he have gone on dipping into that well or would he have chosen new directions—and what would they have been?

*Le Grand Meaulnes* returns at the end of the book to carry off his motherless daughter and the narrator says “already I pictured him, in the night, wrapping his daughter in a cloak, to carry her off with him on some new adventure.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Rupert Brooke didn’t confine himself to poetry. He wrote travel articles for the *Westminster Gazette* and had this to say from Canada in 1913: “Most tribes are very healthy, and some fine-looking. Such were the remarkable people who hunted, fought, feasted, and lived here until the light came, and all was changed. Other qualities they had even more remarkable to a European, such as utter honesty, and complete devotion to the truth among themselves. Civilization, disease, alcohol, and vice have reduced them to a few scattered communities and some stragglers, and a legend, the admiration of boyhood ... Some of the men, especially the older ones, have wonderful dignity and beauty of face and body. Their physique is superb; their features shaped and lined by weather and experience into a Roman nobility that demands respect ... What will happen? Will they be entirely swallowed by that ugliness of shops and trousers with which we encircle the earth, and become a memory and less than a memory? They are that already. The Indians have passed. They left no arts, no tradition, no buildings or roads or laws; only a story or two, and a few names, strange and beautiful.”

But there was more to draw upon than ‘a story or two’ and a few names; in the 1790s Iroquois Joseph Brant could write to Thomas Eddy in these words: ‘I was, Sir, born of Indian parents, and lived while a child among those whom you are pleased to call savages; I was afterwards sent to live among the white people, and educated at one of your schools since which period I have been honored much beyond my deserts ... and after much exertion to divest myself of my prejudice, I am obliged to give my opinion in favor of my own people ... In the government you call civilized, the happiness of the people is constantly sacrificed to the splendor of empire ...’ Rupert Brooke went off to sacrifice himself for the ‘splendor of empire’ and Canada’s indigenous people have fought their way back from the twilight imposed upon them.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I was young I read *Mrs Overtheway’s Remembrances*; I don’t know if children in the nineteenth century lapped it up but it made little impact on me. So that, although I seem to remember *Jackanapes* also being among my mother’s books, my

reading of Mrs Ewing went no further.

Yet I feel sure Mrs Overthway must have been meant for children—after coming upon a biographical note which said Mrs Ewing was a “member of one of the most happy of literary families, second of the eight children of Margaret Gatty, who herself was an author, as well as founder, in 1866 of the fine children’s monthly Aunt Judy’s Magazine. ‘Aunt Judy’ had been the nursery nickname the Gatty children had for their story-telling sister, Juliana, and predictably Juliana who married Major Alexander Ewing in 1867 and subsequently lived mostly at Aldershot became the magazine’s mainstay contributing both tales and verses. The Burial of the Linnet appeared in the September number, 1866, The Willow-Man in December 1872, A Friend in the Garden in January 1873, The Dolls’ Wash in September 1874 and Garden Lore in March 1879.”

‘A Friend in the Garden’ places Mrs Ewing squarely in the ranks of The Fraternal Grand Hedge of Organic Gardeners—

But in a sunny flower bed

He has a fixed abode;

He eats the things that eat my plants—

He is a friendly TOAD.

It’s nice to see toads getting a good press, although I think cane toads would help their cause if they did actually get busy eating the things that eat our plants—

\* \* \* \* \*

August 4th: Henry Savery  
Percy Bysshe Shelley  
Knut Hamsen  
Stanley Eveling  
Tim Winton

\* \* \* \* \*

Paul Foot in his book *Red Shelley* says: “In the Penguin edition of Shelley, published in my last year at school (1956) the editor, a celebrated lady of letters called Isobel Quigly, writes: ‘No poet better repays cutting; no great poet was ever less worth reading in his entirety.’ She sets to her scissors with a will, extracting with devoted thoroughness every trace of political or social thought from Shelley’s work.”

Isobel Quigly is only one in a long line of men and women who helped reduce Shelley (and others) to the pap served up to schoolkids.

I am glad, though, that I started reading before the era of Dick and Jane, Nip and Fluff. Our reading books were a hodge-podge. Horatius defending the bridge, John Gilpin taking his famous ride, Basil being asked ‘When did you last see your father?’ the elves making the shoes, Atalanta stooping for the golden apples, Pandora opening that box, Shakespeare’s bee sucking and ‘There (mysteriously) suck I’, ‘I love a sunburnt country’ (although we all thought ‘love’ was coming it a bit strong), and “all the blathering stuff Shelley wrote, twittering on about skylarks, and Wordsworth going all potty over some silly daffodils” ...

The view stayed with me for decades—most poetry was a rather pointless and insipid exercise, my only exceptions being ballads and poems which told a good yarn. Certainly, no one was suggesting that poetry might convey important and inspiring ideas ...

My Shelley was the man who married the author of *Frankenstein*; Paul Foot’s Shelley was a thinker and a radical whose keen mind ranged over everything from the tragedy of women dying in childbirth, the evils of the press gang, the greater evil of Irish colonisation, the need for universal suffrage, the abolishing of extreme wealth, the burden of the national debt (and after the American War of Independence and the Napoleonic Wars the national debt was costing £44 million a year just in interest), the

need for birth control, the hypocrisy which leads to prostitution, and his dislike of dirty jokes and bawdy plays. He was expelled from Oxford for his profession of atheism, not because he'd heard of evolution or because he could see nothing miraculous in the world around him but because of the disastrous state classism, hypocrisy and cant had brought organised religion to, the religion of which Lord Ellenborough said "In this country the Christian religion is fenced about by the laws of libel". Clearly, anything which needs to be "fenced about" is not in good heart.

Some of Shelley's writing seems as applicable today as at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

—"for so dear is power that the tyrants themselves neither then, nor now, nor ever, left or leave a path to freedom but through their own blood."

Tyrants, it is true, from Franco to Marcos, frequently die in bed, but the path remains no less fraught.

—"The common people lived their lives through royalty; they glorified the passions, loves and griefs of royalty, and as a result devalued the passions, loves and griefs of 'ordinary' people."

And what if the Queensland Education Department in the 1950s had known of this decidedly different Shelley?

\* \* \* \* \*

I remember a little story told by George Moore (the jockey not the novelist) in which he'd given his sons a toy carpentry set for Christmas; when he and his wife came downstairs on Christmas morning they found the boys had sawn a leg off the antique dining-table.

In mythology, Pandora is always presented as being a woman. I strongly suspect her of being a man.

John Fowles, on the other hand, has his doubts about Homer. In *Islands* he writes: "I am one of the heretics who believe the Odyssey must have been written by a woman. The heresy is not new among authors. Samuel Butler believed it, and produced some convincing circumstantial evidence; and so does Robert Graves, in our own time. Whoever did write it seems markedly more knowledgeable about domestic matters, the running of a large household, than about nautical ones. The one bit of showing-off in the latter field—the description of the boat Odysseus builds to escape from Calypso's island—is shipyard stuff, not sea-going expertise; and in the very first pages nothing is more striking than the loving detail bestowed on the *provisions* for Telemachus' voyage and the total absence of such detail when it comes to the craft itself. Throughout history it has been man who worships and polishes the vehicle, and woman who packs the suitcase.

... There is that repeated, vivid eye for the interior decor and life of the palaces of Nestor, Menelaus and Alcinous—how guests are received, how they are bathed, how dressed, how fed, even how the laundry is done; that ubiquitous sympathy for the feminine ego, from the glittering *grande-dame* entry given Helen of Troy to Calypso's sadness; the love of describing clothes and jewellery; the sympathy shown older women, the flagrant greater interest, in the Land of the Dead, taken in the female ghosts" ...

\* \* \* \* \*

If, at school, we had been asked why Captain Arthur Phillip was chosen to lead the First Fleet I suppose we would have replied with something inane like "They thought he would be all right" or "because he was a captain in the navy"; if we had been brave enough to ask the teacher we would probably have been told "he was seen as the best man for the job".

Kenneth Gordon McIntyre in *The Rebello Transcripts* writes that Phillip had gone to a seaman's school rather than a naval college and "his service in the British Navy

was quite undistinguished. He started on a low rung of the ladder, as officer's servant; and was not given much opportunity to rise. Twice in periods of retrenchment he was laid off, and once it seems that he rejoined as an ordinary seaman. He rose to midshipman, and then saw action under Rodney in the West Indies, being present at the capture of Havana. Eventually, towards the end of the War, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant."

But at the end of the Seven Years' War "He was retired on half-pay, and went farming in the New Forest." He tried again and again to get back into the Navy but without success so he began to look around to see if there might be opportunities in other navies.

"In fact, today, most Australians seem surprised to learn two salient facts about their first governor—first, that he was German by birth, secondly that he reached the rank of Captain not in the British, but in the Portuguese Navy. Sentiment and legend both picture him as such a typical English empire-builder that these two facts seem inconsistent with his image. Indeed, in the last half of the 19th century and in the earlier years of this century, when English nationalism was at its peak, these foreign strains in Phillip's heritage were thought of as flaws in an otherwise excellent character; and historian after historian either ignored them, or rapidly glossed them over in one line of text or in the obscurity of a footnote. For the same reason the then disturbing suggestion that Portuguese navigators had reached the east coast of Australia 200 years before Captain Cook was also ignored. After 1914 Germany's unpopularity drove Phillip's German ancestry out of the text-books altogether."

Phillip was promoted to Captain in Lisbon, given command of a frigate *Nossa Senhora do Pilar*, and sent to South America to defend the tiny outpost of Colônia do Sacramento. Spain and Portugal constantly warred over this segment of land called the Banda Oriental—Spain trying to drive north from Buenos Aires, Portugal trying to drive the borders of Brazil ever southward. Colônia was a small fortified town far inside Spanish territory and just across the river from Buenos Aires; it was a marker for the land Portugal claimed and a provocation. Ultimately, it was indefensible—though Phillip and the small Portuguese Navy did their best—and Spain razed much of it to the ground. Under the Treaty of Santo Ildefonso Portugal finally gave up its territorial claim. Both Brazilian and Argentine histories then suggest that the Banda Oriental was turned, peacefully, into the buffer state of Uruguay. It wasn't quite that easy. The people of the Banda, tired of the faraway unhelpfulness of Rio de Janeiro and unenthusiastic about the close embrace of Buenos Aires just across the river, proved so unruly and difficult to govern that they gained their independence from Buenos Aires in 1828.

\* \* \* \* \*

A 1990s Fodor guide to Uruguay says: "Colonia del Sacramento, about two-and-a-half hours by car from Montevideo, is a hub of traffic toward Buenos Aires and up the Uruguay River. A hydrofoil operates to Buenos Aires three times daily. This 17th century Portuguese settlement retains more of its colonial atmosphere than other Uruguayan communities. Old houses with barred windows line narrow cobblestone streets. Sights to see include the historic parochial church, municipal museum, viceroy's mansion, and the lighthouse. San Carlos, a warm-weather resort is four miles from Colonia. The community's bullring (Plaza de Toros) stands in ruins as a memory of bullfights that attracted many Argentines from across the river before the sport was outlawed a half-century ago."

\* \* \* \* \*

So why was Phillip chosen?

M. Barnard Eldershaw suggested the job description was so unpleasant that Phillip may well have been the only applicant.

McIntyre suggests that Phillip's experience in the southern hemisphere (Colónia has an almost identical climate and latitude to Sydney), combined with his adaptability, toughness, resourcefulness and good credentials from the Governor of Brazil may have tipped the scales in his favour.

There is another suggestion. Mine. Phillip was expendable (as, of course, were the convicts); "He did not belong to the nobility or the Establishment ... He had little money, influence or social standing", his mother was a poor widow, he had none of his German relations in England. If the expedition failed—as seemed likely given its poor and hurried planning, its lack of back-up, and its lack of expertise—then there was no one to make a fuss back in London and if blame needed to be meted, then Phillip was a convenient scapegoat. But Phillip *was* experienced, adaptable, tough and resourceful ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A sentence in Alain Labrousse's book about the Tupamaros, the revolutionary movement in Uruguay, has always stayed in my mind—"Uruguay is a developed country that is undeveloping at speed."

We tend to believe, sometimes it is almost an article of faith, that developed countries stay developed, developing go on developing. History, though, has a different message. The Roman and the Assyrian Empires are long gone; the Sphinx and the city of Zimbabwe, the temples of the Mayas, the Angkor Wat complex, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Borobudur—often, who built them and why is little more than an educated guess. They demonstrate a moment of power and *confidence* but they are never the outcome of happiness, of spontaneity, of harmony, of equality.

The Hopi Indians have an interesting word for life out of balance—KOYANNISQATSI—which they use for people out of harmony with nature ... and despite the many reasons given for the decline of various 'great' civilisations, one always seems to surface: the fact that such communities demanded more from their environment, their land, than it could provide without sustaining damage.

But along with the harmony of people with nature there is also the fascinating question of the harmony of people with people (which exists outside the definitions of developed and developing and underdeveloped and primitive).

We still hear people, including politicians, putting down Australia's indigenous people because they produced no Beethoven, no Mona Lisa, no Pyramids, no Ming pottery. How often are we reminded that they produced no dungeons, no Tower of London, no rack, no Iron Maiden, no Bastille, no chain gangs, no Inquisition, no stake or thumbscrew, no press gang or galley slaves ... nor did their conflicts lead to scorched earths, slave populations, concentration camps, ever stronger fortifications, ever more powerful catapults, ever more boiling oil ... as Dr Keith Suter says, "For over 40,000 years, prior to the late 18th century, Australia was the world's most tranquil of all inhabited continents."

The Sermon on the Mount says unequivocally "The meek shall inherit the earth." No ifs or buts, no whys or wherefores or heretofores; just that. Yet, if we are honest, most societies, including our own, despise meekness. It's wimpy, it's weak, it's wet. We say 'If only she'd assert herself, stand up to him—', we tell our children when they're being bullied at school to 'hit right back'.

Yet one of the happiest, most caring, most equal, most peaceful societies the earth has ever produced was that of the Tasmanian Aborigines. It was also, by my understanding, a *meek* society. I would translate meek not as poor or weak or humble, nor as foregoing natural rights to self-determination and sovereignty, but as *accepting*—of others, of the created world as it is, rather than always wishing for change, wishing to dominate, to impose the self on people or places—

On and on we go, generation after generation, looking outward in unmeek places, and urging our children down the same track, for examples, heroes, idols, understanding

of The Meek shall Inherit the Earth—

\* \* \* \* \*

August 5th: Guy de Maupassant  
A. Alvarez  
Errol Hill  
Conrad Aiken  
Ruaraidh MacThòmais  
August 6th: Alfred Lord Tennyson  
Ronald Duncan  
Rolf Boldrewood  
Martin Duberman  
Piers Anthony  
Frank Asch

\* \* \* \* \*

A. S. Byatt used the early death of Arthur Hallam as the pivot of an intriguing novella, *Angels*; the theme is one I've heard other people discuss in more mundane ways—does prolonged grieving tie the spirit of the departed to the earth instead of allowing it to break free?

It is a nerve-wracking question for we can never know the 'right' amount of grieving.

Think of Albert tied decade after decade by the silken black cord of Victoria's mourning. Though there is the question of outward and inward grieving. She remained in eternal black like a peasant woman of the Mediterranean but it is hard, reading through a large portion of her letters in a couple of sittings, not to reach the conclusion that her mourning had more to do with relieving herself of unpleasant ceremonial duties and seeing as little of her subjects as possible. In fact, taken at the flood, her letters convey the image of an extraordinarily selfish and self-centred woman.

It suggests that letters, royally-crested or not, *are* better burnt in the incinerator at the bottom of the garden.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm sure it's very nice to die with your loved ones around you—

"His Majesty breathed his last at 11.45 tonight in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Princess Royal (Duchess of Fife) the Princess Victoria and the Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyle)."

(6/5/1910)

—but you would need to die with a smile upon your face and disciplined bowels.

\* \* \* \* \*

August 7th: Maia Wojciechowska  
Dornford Yates  
August 8th: Frank Richards  
F. Anstey  
August 9th: John Dryden  
Tove Jansson  
Izaak Walton  
Jean Piaget  
W. H. Dawson  
August 10th: Laurence Binyon  
Alfred Döblin  
Karin Anckarsvärd  
Jorge Amado

\* \* \* \* \*

Some years, when I was young, we went to the RSL Christmas party in Oakey

and I was under the impression that the RSL itself had written those famous words about the going down of the sun. So it was a surprise, years later, to learn they came from the pen of English writer Laurence Binyon—and that another verse goes:

With proud thanksgiving, a mother for her children,  
England mourns for her dead across the sea.  
Flesh of her flesh they were, spirit of her spirit,  
Fallen in the cause of the free.

Binyon had two loves in his life (well, he probably had more; they just don't get mentioned): poetry and oriental art. He began his career by winning the Newdigate Prize for his poem 'Persephone' and went on to translate Dante, bring out his 'Collected Poems' in 1931, write verse dramas such as 'Attila' and 'The Young King' and become Professor of Poetry at Harvard; his other love saw him take charge of Oriental prints and drawings at the British Museum and publish several books including *Painting in the Far East*, *The Flight of the Dragon*, and *The Spirit of Man in Asian Art*. Somehow, he doesn't seem quite the sort of man Bruce Ruxton would have home for dinner.

\* \* \* \* \*

Major Robert Hall, in a book which goes far to set the record straight, *The Black Diggers*, says: "Although the exact number of Aborigines in the First AIF will never be known, there were at least 300 from Queensland, NSW and Victoria. Almost one-third of the group became casualties—a rate similar to that of the First AIF as a whole, indicating that Aboriginal and Islander soldiers shared the rigours of the First World War in equal measure with their white comrades. Yet despite their service and their competence as soldiers, Aborigines were excluded from the 'digger legend'.

... "Although the Aboriginal veterans of the First World War may have expected a new order on their return from the war, they were to be disappointed. The inter-war period, instead, was marked by increased repression of Aborigines. In New South Wales the period saw the segregation of schools, the Aborigines Protection Board acquire the power to remove Aboriginal children from their parents, arbitrary movement of Aboriginal families between reserves and perhaps the most bitter of all, the loss of Aboriginal land to the 'soldier settlement' scheme—a system of rewarding veterans of the First World War with blocks of land. Although there was no formal discrimination, some Aboriginal ex-servicemen were effectively barred from acquiring land through this scheme."

\* \* \* \* \*

Patsy Adam-Smith in *Islands of Bass Strait* writes: "It has been claimed that per head of population, Cape Barren Island sent more men to both world wars than any other area in Australia. On the stone war memorial at 'The Corner' are eighteen names, three of them 'white' men, seven of them Mansells."

\* \* \* \* \*

Patricia Shaw in her book about the five Sullivan boys from Toowoomba, *Brother Digger*, also mentions, in passing, two Aboriginal POWs.

In Germany—

'At one stage Foxlee was in a work party watching a column pass by when some Aussies came over to the fence. Among them was an Australian Aborigine whose classic remark has become a famous joke among the Aussies. Someone asked him how he was holding up on the march and he replied: 'Just a walkabout mate.'

Unfortunately I do not know his name but he was from Western Australia.'

(Frank Sullivan)

And on the Burma Railway—

'The hero of the march was Bill Lawson. He was as strong as old boot leather and he hauled three sick men at a time over the rougher trails. Every step of the way on that long and painful trek he heaved and carried and supported weaker men but he gave too

much of his strength to his comrades. By the time we reached Songkurai, Lawson was done. He couldn't have taken himself on another step. As a result his resistance was at a minimum and he was the first of our men to die of cholera a few days later. Bill Lawson was an Aborigine from out St George-Surat way.'

(Eugene Sullivan)

\* \* \* \* \*

Major Hall raises an intriguing question—why are we familiar with Sapper 'Bert' Beros' 'The Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels' as a poem or immortalised in song by Peter Dawson but most likely we've never heard of his poem 'The Coloured Digger'?

—It includes the lines—

He came and joined the colours  
When the War God's anvil rang,  
He took up modern weapons  
To replace his boomerang

—and ends—

One day he'll leave the Army  
Then join the League he shall,  
And he hopes we'll give a better deal  
To the Aboriginal.

Not great poetry—but a challenge to the RSL ...

\* \* \* \* \*

August 11th: Enid Blyton

Geoffrey Trease  
Charlotte Yonge  
Bapsi Sidhwa

August 12th: Robert Southey

Peter Luke  
Jacinto Benavente y Martínez  
Mary Roberts Rinehart  
Radclyffe Hall

August 13th: Ridgwell Cullum

Celeste Galilei  
Sir William Alexander Craigie

August 14th: Tom Eyen

John Galsworthy  
Bryce Courtenay  
Trevor Byard  
Walter Besant

August 15th: Garry Disher

Edith Nesbit  
Sir Walter Scott  
Benedict Kiely  
Thomas de Quincy  
Michael Rutter  
Frank Knight  
Robert Bolt  
Steve Biddulph

August 16th: Georgette Heyer

Charles Bukowski  
William Alfred  
Dame Mary Gilmore

\* \* \* \* \*

Georgette Heyer refused to agree to further interviews after one with Marghanita Laski for *The Times* which she felt had distorted and misrepresented what she'd said and put down her work.

The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism looked at the question of 'Accuracy in Australian Newspapers' (1990) and quotes Crispin Hull of *The Canberra Times*—"If we published more corrections, the public would see newspapers in a far more benevolent light, and we would remove a rod from our backs." His deputy editor, Jack Waterford, agreed. "Like all journalists, I fervently believe that we need more liberal libel laws ... but ... I am increasingly inclined to agree that the media cannot be said to deserve them until it is seen to have cleaned up its act on privacy, on accuracy and on corrections, particularly so far as it affects the little guy or gal."

I'm not sure, though, that Georgette Heyer would like to have been classed as a "little gal".

\* \* \* \* \*

Georgette Heyer also had trouble with fans and their "silly letters". Now I'm sure fans *can* be a terrible nuisance. They want your autograph when you've got spaghetti hanging off your chin, they take your photo when you're smacking your toddler, they souvenir your garden and bribe your housekeeper for scandalous titbits. Sometimes they do even worse things. Agatha Christie's novel *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* is based on a tragic true event.

But fans also put the caviar from Fortnum and Mason on the table, the Rolls Royce in the garage—yes, and pay for that tittle-tattling housekeeper. They have their uses.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Gilmore, as a young woman, went with William Lane's famous expedition to set up an Australian commune in Paraguay in 1897. She eventually returned to Australia—though a few stayed on and their descendants still live there—and turned to editing the Women's Page in the *Worker* and writing poetry on almost every subject including Aboriginal people—such as in 'The Waradgerry Tribe'—

We are the lost who went,  
Like the cranes, crying;  
Hunted, lonely, and spent;  
Broken and dying.

She also became an encouragement, though not a member, to the interesting poetry movement in the late 1930s called the 'Jindyworobaks'. The prime mover was Rex Ingamells who said: "Jindyworobak" is an aboriginal word meaning "to annex, to join," and I propose to coin it for a particular use. The Jindyworobaks, I say, are those individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it, that is, bring it into proper contact with its material. They are the few who seriously realize that an Australian culture depends on the fulfilment and sublimation of certain definite conditions, namely:

1. A clear recognition of environmental values.
2. The debunking of much nonsense.
3. An understanding of Australia's history and traditions, primaeval, colonial and modern.

Instead of looking to the Ramayana epic or Arthurian legends they would look to the Song Cycles of the Arunta (something which Les Murray has continued with); instead of looking to French or Latin for descriptive words they would look to Aboriginal languages ... Many people had difficulties with the name and Ingamells said, "It is (or was) *outlandish* according to fashionable literary tastes, which deserved a shock." And another leading light, W. Flexmore Hudson, said, "The term Jindyworobak offends many people's ears." But we have moved on since the days when F. J. Letters

wrote critically “The Aboriginal question must be thrashed out completely before we are likely to accept or practise the Jindyworobak dialectic. Make the masses really fond of the “abo”; that is the first step, and the hardest.”

Despite this sort of discouragement, the Jindyworobaks provided some thought-provoking and genuinely *good* poetry. A couple of pieces I like which attempt to grapple with what we would now call Land Rights issues were by Ian Mudie—

They’re trying to convince you you don’t belong  
where the wireless drowns your corroboree song;  
they’re trying to kick you out of the city;  
they talk of your whole dark race as a “pity”.  
They seem to forget that it all is yours  
as long as their “home” land drags and draws,  
that while old Europe’s the whole of their song  
—damn it, Jacky, *they* don’t belong.

(Belong)

When I walk  
I do not know  
What ancient sacred place  
My foot may desecrate

(Intruder)

It is a sobering thought that the vast majority of us are *still* more familiar with the Ramayana epic and the Arthurian legends than the Song Cycles of the Arunta ...

\* \* \* \* \*

August 17th: V. S. Naipaul  
Elsie Locke  
Karin Sveen  
Ted Hughes  
Oliver St John Gogarty

\* \* \* \* \*

So much depends on the book by which you meet a new writer. Imagine coming at Agatha Christie by way of *Postern of Fate*—you would wonder what all the fuss was about. I thoroughly enjoyed Naipaul’s *The Mystic Masseur* and if you’d met me that week you would have found me with an armful of Naipaul. On the other hand I came at Doris Lessing through a tedious book about a tedious woman who has a tedious affair with a tedious young man in an unexpectedly tedious Spain. Now, I’m quite willing to believe—given the number of people suggesting she, rather than Nardine Gordimer, should have received the Nobel Prize for Literature—that she has written vastly better books. Perhaps this one was her postern-of-fate. The problem is—I don’t feel compelled to seek them out. I had trouble too with Penelope Lively’s *Moon Tiger* which a friend said I “must read”. It just didn’t make sense to me that a vigorous, intelligent and interesting woman was going through old age with absolutely no other women in her life apart from her daughter and her sister-in-law.

Someone once gave as their reason for not reading much modern literature that it was mainly about middle class people having affairs—and there is just enough truth in this to awake echoes; or maybe the trouble is the one Dorothy Sayers felt—

As years come in and years go out  
I totter toward the tomb,  
Still caring less and less about  
Who goes to bed with whom.

—and although she was referring to the gossip within her ‘circle’ fictionalised gossip isn’t necessarily more entertaining, let alone more edifying.

Talking of modern literature, I remember Rosemary Sorenson once talking about

a writers' festival and book fair in Sydney and mentioning the "trashy end of the market" such as "Danielle Steel"; now, I don't wait with bated breath for each new Danielle Steel but the couple I have read were solidly plotted, well-written and with a satisfying ending. But "trashy" books imply "trashy" writers (and "trashy" readers) and this, I think, is the means by which quite a number of literary writers put down the writers of popular fiction. Is it jealousy?

After all, popular fiction is not claiming for itself anything beyond a readable and fast-moving story, an exciting climax, and well-plotted action—and when it achieves this should it be criticised for achieving its goal?

The problem I think is that popular fiction is, or can be, read by anyone literate. It doesn't require a knowledge of Shakespeare or classical mythology or Freud or Jung. Literary fiction because it retains the invisible cloth-of-gold round its shoulders is praised by its peers, the hoi-polloi meanwhile and modestly acquiesces in its beauty (we say things like "I'm not really bright enough to understand a book like that" or "so-and-so says it's the book-of-the-decade and I s'pose he must know; it seemed rather dull to me but then I left school at fifteen—") ... and there is very seldom a little boy to point out that flesh and blood though there might be in abundance there is not always sign of its claimed beauty or brilliance ...

\* \* \* \* \*

- August 18th: Brian Aldiss  
Alain Robbe-Grillet  
Susan Chitty
- August 19th: Ogden Nash  
Kurt Baumann  
John Clark Pratt  
Jonathon Coe
- August 20th: Emily Brontë  
H. P. Lovecraft  
Salvatore Quasimodo
- August 21st: Mart Crowley  
Mudrooroo Narogin  
Christopher Robin Milne
- August 22nd: Ray Bradbury  
Maurice Gee
- August 23rd: George Walker  
Mary Clarke  
Joan Clarke
- August 24th: Jorge Luis Borges  
Jean Rhys  
David Ireland  
Sir Max Beerbohm  
A. S. Byatt  
Orson Scott Card
- August 25th: Martin Amis  
Thea Astley  
Mollie Panter-Downes  
Carol Bolt  
Brian Moore
- August 26th: John Buchan  
Christopher Isherwood  
Eleanor Dark  
Colin Mackerras

August 27th: Ira Levin  
Hegel  
Lady Antonia Fraser  
Theodore Dreiser  
Peter Vansittart

August 28th: Leo Tolstoy  
Liam O'Flaherty  
Vance Palmer  
Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu  
Robertson Davies  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe  
Janet Frame  
Sir Rupert Hart-Davis  
Masa Hal'amová  
A. G. Stephens  
Francis Ebejer  
Bruno Bettelheim  
Sir John Betjeman

\* \* \* \* \*

Recently I heard Canadian writer Robertson Davies suggest that his life had not been interesting enough to warrant a biography. But I don't think living an interesting life is ever the deciding factor.

Elizabeth Gray Vining writes: "The new biographies, which are so appallingly frank and detailed, give scandalous pictures of the lives: the selfishness and bad temper of Robert Frost, the promiscuousness of Katherine Mansfield, the homosexual affairs of others. I am reading Quentin Bell's biography of Virginia Woolf. He was her nephew, and I must say it offends me to see him discoursing so explicitly on his aunt's sexuality, or lack of it, and his mother's extramarital affairs. I wish he had said more about his aunt's books and the writing of them, the sources of themes and characters and so on. There's no doubt that the book is interesting, but is a writer justified in invading another's privacy in order to entertain the general reader? Ten years ago I wrote a novel about John Donne, using my imagination to fill in the gaps in the known facts. I had the feeling at the time that the lapse of three hundred years put him in the public domain, so to speak, but should I have done this, really?"

Conversely, there is in the air an implication that a blameless life is a passionless one and that the work is weaker because of this essential lack in the writer. It is also arguable that understanding of the life makes possible a better understanding of the work.

But fundamentally I do believe that the work is the artist's contribution to the world and that his life is his own. I see little value in exposing Frost's night fears, for instance. His poems speak for themselves. Cassandra Austen has been reviled for burning Jane's more revealing letters and saving only those that showed the lighter side of her nature. But the novels stand on their own feet. What matter whom Jane loved or how she really felt about the Napoleonic wars? How fortunate for us—and for him—that Shakespeare's plays are produced by generation after generation and Shakespeare himself is a mystery!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Hugh Greene gives this description of Ernest Bramah, who was for a time Jerome K. Jerome's secretary: 'Ernest Bramah Smith (to give him his full name) was probably born in 1869 ... and died in 1942. I say 'probably born' because the exact date of his birth is not known. Not for nothing is he described in one work of reference as 'one of the most self-effacing of modern authors'. His first book, published in 1894, was called

*English Farming and Why I Turned it up.* He went on to create the characters of Kai Lung and Max Carrados, the blind detective, about whom he wrote three volumes of short stories. Otherwise all he seems to have left behind him is a description of him as a ‘small bald man with twinkly black eyes’ and a reputation for immense kindness of heart.’

Not much perhaps—but enough?

\* \* \* \* \*

August 29th: Maurice Maeterlinck  
Gillian Rubinstein  
Oliver Wendell Holmes  
August 30th: Mary Shelley  
Carmel Bird  
August 31st: Elizabeth von Arnim  
William Saroyan  
Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey  
Maria Montessori  
September 1st: Arthur Upfield  
Jozef Kot  
Edgar Rice Burroughs

\* \* \* \* \*

Do you remember the children’s adventure stories (and some adult ones as well) which so often seemed to have a ‘villainous half-breed’—or it might be a ‘treacherous half-caste’ or a ‘scar-faced’ person of mixed race hiding behind a tree waiting to do some dastardly deed to the nice little white boys?

I have the feeling authors were attracted to such villains simply because they believed they would not be hurting anyone; or even because they believed that people who were denied membership (and therefore loyalty) of a particular group, whether European, Indian, Aboriginal, Fijian or whatever, *would* be more likely to turn to crime.

Yet, apart from the fact that ‘half-breed’ or ‘half-caste’ is both cruel and meaningless—you can be half-and-half, I don’t see how you can be half—such authors were putting down the most vulnerable group who might read them—children of mixed race.

Zane Grey wrote a book called *The Vanishing American* but as his son, Loren, says: “Even though what he wrote was based on factual information given to him by friends and relatives who had lived on the Navajo reservation for many years, after the serialization of the book in 1922 by *The Ladies Home Journal*, so much pressure was put on his publisher by a number of individuals and religious groups that they refused to publish the book unless substantial portions of it had been cut.”

This was probably because it is the missionary who fires on the Indian—Nophaie—who has come to try and save him and several others shut inside a burning building. (Grey also aroused religious controversy with *Riders of the Purple Sage*.) But the cut chapters also dealt with the question of mixed marriages; it had long been accepted that white men on the frontier would ‘use’ Indian women out of need but for a self-respecting well-brought-up young white woman to *choose* an Indian husband over a white one ...

Nophaie says: “Don’t you know the world? If we ever had a child—a little Nophaie—people would call him a half-breed.”

“Who? What people?” demanded Marian, passionately. “You mean the white people who have damned the Indian? The civilization that sends out men like Blucher and Morgan to *improve* Indians? So they would call our child a half-breed. Let them! And I would fling in their faces that I thanked God he *was* half Indian—that his red blood might be proof against the white blood he must inherit from me. For I am white. I

belong to this greedy, pagan, merciless world, and though I am a Christian—though I hate with all my soul its sordid materialism, I may have in me much of its evil.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Arthur Upfield was born in England but failing to meet his father’s expectations he was shipped off to Australia at the age of nineteen. An American note on his Australian career says “He worked as a cowhand, cook, and shepherd until war broke out” then, after five years in the AIF, “he worked at fur-trapping, opal hunting, and gold mining.”

The Twenties are seen as the Golden Years of Detective Fiction so it is not so surprising that Upfield, too, should try his hand at writing such a book. He created a white detective and had nearly finished his story *The Barrakee Mystery* when he met up with a ‘mestizo’ friend, Tracker Leon. He went back to his book and completely re-wrote it with a new sleuth—Detective-Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, Bony to his friends, child of an unknown white father and an Aboriginal mother. The book came out in 1929 and was immediately popular.

Bony opened up unusual possibilities—to comment on racism (“The gentleman stared with expressionless eyes deep-set in a pasty face ... and turned away”), to turn the nation’s eye upon the situation of Aboriginal people living both tribal and non-tribal lives, to comment on a land and a society which he observed from the standpoint of considerable knowledge gleaned in his varied working life, yet also as an outsider.

Bony “whose maternal forebears had bequeathed him patience which has no limitations” comments: “Eighty per cent of tribal strife has its origins in white interference” and “In spite of my parentage, I am unusual. Or is it because of my parentage?”; and “Bony couldn’t but feel sorry for these nomads in a changing world, when the way of life of the white man had meant that the lands over which once they hunted and roamed at will had been fenced and reduced to private ownership. From hunting their own food the aborigines had been brought down to relying on white men who largely despised them.”

Upfield often takes refuge in stereotypes—Bony gets patience, understanding of the land, and superstition from his mother, reason and logic from his father—and there is the feeling that he created a character who was somehow too large for his talents (and indeed for the Australia of the thirties and forties) yet, at other times, he demeans Bony the man for the sake of his readership. Even so, I think the Bony books should have been available in every school and institution to off-set the unending whiteness of the examples available. Unfortunately, the Bony books were treated as adult fiction and I had not heard of them until I was grown up.

The Bony books are interesting too for the way in which they frequently use the landscape almost as a third character, intervening between hunter and hunted, sometimes helpfully but more often not. Australia itself becomes a protagonist.

“The march-slaying Plain took them instantly to itself, for they were like mariners leaving safe anchorage when leaving the belt of blue-bush. No ship under them, no steel walls about them. Soon there was no place to leave astern and no place to steam ahead” and “the mirage receding before him, and ever flowing after him” ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I notice new editions of Upfield often have an Editorial Note to disclaim: “In reprinting these books the publisher does not endorse the attitudes or opinions they express.” But surely it is enough to state when a book was first published? Most of us have noticed some changes in attitudes since the fifties. But if we’re going to have little notes in Upfield then shouldn’t we have little notes in just about everything from the *Bible* down to Enid Blyton, Rudyard Kipling, Agatha Christie, Edgar Rice Burroughs *et al*—because who hasn’t expressed an attitude or an opinion at some time which would be kindest left unendorsed?

Or is it not his attitudes which bothered editors and publishers but the possibility that criminals might turn to him for ideas? The controversy which broke around him in the early thirties concerned a man called Snowy Rowles who is thought to have killed three men in Western Australia. Jacquetta Hawkes in her biography writes, ‘The question of Upfield’s responsibility might be answered by General Leane, then Chief Commissioner of the South Australian Police Department, who, when asked by the *Adelaide Advertiser* did he think detective-crime stories encouraged criminals, replied: “Not as much as razors.”’ The problem was not that Upfield had given Rowles a way to commit murder (and Rowles appears to have done so because he envied the three men their car) but that he had given him an idea on how to totally destroy the bodies of his victims, an idea he used in *Mr Jelly’s Business*. The bodies were never found but Rowles was hanged on the 13th June 1932.

\* \* \* \* \*

After his death, a romantic mystery was published called *Breakaway House* which, although it was written in the 1930s (and therefore unendorseable), sounds quite modern at times.

“Cocaine from Java! Of course! Along that two thousand miles of unguarded coast they could land anything. As the colonel had said an army could invade unobserved. No wonder there had been agitation to have modern seaplanes stationed at Port Darwin” ...

\* \* \* \* \*

It was probably Sax Rohmer’s creation of Dr Fu-Manchu which caused Ronald Knox, when he was drawing up his tongue-in-cheek Decalogue for mystery and thriller writers, to make Rule 5 “No Chinaman must figure in the story”.

For all their pace and action Rohmer’s books drip with racism.

“Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.”

“The purposeful cruelty of the man was inherent;”

“the malignant, emotionless countenance of Dr Fu-Manchu”

The words fall unendingly from his pen: “dreadful animals”, “bared teeth”, “simian”, “yellow paw”, “yellow Satan”, “singularly evil smile”, “hideous”, “sinister” ... But—how did the ultimate Chinese villain come by his “brilliant green eyes”?

Earl Derr Biggars probably enjoyed coming up with the enigmatic aphorisms he put in the mouth of Charlie Chan but he was also motivated by the desire to portray Chinese people in a positive way, as heroes rather than villains.

It seems to me that the mystery story provides an ideal way in which to gently change people’s perceptions. It reaches more people, with luck, than most pamphlets or Hansard reports; the needs of the mystery prevent any long-winded and sleep-making ‘proselytising’; the reader reading a good story doesn’t feel preached at ...

\* \* \* \* \*

But the key difficulty never goes away. Crime fiction needs a person or persons to commit the crime or crimes.

W. E. Johns wrote a book in which he made the Americans the bad guys, the Chinese the good guys, put some Malays on either side of the fence—and just for good measure had the Indonesians landing on the Malay coast (this was 1965) ...

One of the Americans says—

‘The forest is swarming with savages.’

Algy snaps back—

‘Savages, my foot. Do you mean Indonesians?’

But it is not realistic for white writers to have white villains and black writers to have black villains and Chinese writers to have Chinese villains; life is not so neat. Writing of a drug cartel, even if you make everyone Colombian, doesn’t determine their

colour nor how they identify. Colombia is very much a multi-racial country—and they may feel that only Colombian writers should have Colombian villains anyway—

I'm sorry I'm not being very helpful—and I know this is a question which *does* come up in writers' groups and writers' workshops.

But then that is partly what being a writer is; to write in that vortex of change and confusion and altering perceptions and expanding sensitivities; to mirror change even while it is hunting for its new forms. It is like being a funny long-legged creature with waving antennae, stuck at a junction where the signposts have been vandalised or blown down ...

\* \* \* \* \*

My mother, after reading a story my son had written at school about robots running amok on a satellite, said it reminded her of Zane Grey's *To the Last Man*. I hadn't thought of my mother as reading westerns. But in that area where genre fiction bursts its banks there are often some excellent books.

People tend to criticise genre writers, particularly writers of westerns and romances, but I think the problem lies with the publishers. The framework for so long was kept so rigid. Who, I wonder, decreed that heroines of romances should be orphans? One or two might excite the reader's pity—but thousands? It became more a matter of reading to find out how yet another set of parents had been done away with. And wittingly or unwittingly the requirements led to an underlying thread of sado-masochism in many formula romances and the belief in westerns that he-men invariably shoot it out instead of talking it out. For many writers, becoming sufficiently popular to stand up to their publishers must have felt like coming out of the padded cell into the exercise yard—and for a few like Zane Grey, Louis L'Amour and Denise Robins they finally had the freedom of the paddock and wrote some stories which deserve to be remembered.

Loren Grey later wrote of his father: "Zane Grey has been considered by many as the greatest western storywriter who ever lived. Indeed all his thrilling novels about the pioneer settlers, the cowboys, and the frontier gunmen are among the most exciting ever written. However, not many knew him as one of the earliest conservationists and champions of the rights of the Indian whose lands were stolen from him and who suffered discrimination, torture, and death at the hands of the white men who invaded the West."

Loren Grey chronicled "courage, honor, fortitude, and a sense of justice that we could all well emulate today" as characteristics of Indian society and went on to say: "It was this side of my father—and one which I think ultimately will change the conception of his stature as a writer—of which I have always been most proud" and Zane Grey, in his Indian stories, "was not only speaking out for Indians but for oppressed minorities everywhere."

Eat your heart out, Barbara Cartland—and yet, she too deserves to be remembered for her campaigns to end Council discrimination against Gipsy families in Britain. I just wish she'd allowed her social conscience to permeate her stories—

\* \* \* \* \*

September 2nd: D. K. Broster  
Will Lawson  
Michael Hastings  
David Daiches  
Allen Drury

\* \* \* \* \*

When I began work on the calendar a friend said "Don't forget to put lots of women in." Yes ... but ... women are less likely to publicise their birthdays and are more likely to write under pseudonyms. (I had similar problems with writers outside the

English-language canon; I could find the year of their birth usually but not the date.)

A note on the back of *The Flight of the Heron* says—"A considerable portion of her large public imagined that D.K. Broster was a man, and she took no steps to correct the assumption as she was always averse to personal publicity in any form."

I spent forty years under the impression that Cecil Frances Alexander (author of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful', 'There is a Green Hill Far Away' and 'Once in Royal David's City') was a man. And had anyone thought to bring it to my attention I would unhesitatingly said that poet Laurence Alma-Tadema was the son not the daughter of Dutch-born painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema.

G. B. Lancaster, who conjures up bomber aircraft and Hollywood actors, was in fact a self-effacing Tasmanian woman called Edith Lyttleton. And popular crime writer Anthony Gilbert was Lucy Beatrice Malleson.

An entry for horror writer Bassett Morgan says: A popular contributor to *Weird Tales* ... It is believed the name hid the identity of a female writer.

Most intriguing of all is the entry in H. R. F. Keating's encyclopaedia of detective writers *Whodunit*:

HADDAD C.A. American mystery writer. Haddad is so well hidden behind his/her pseudonym that the anonymity has not yet been breached.

I like that, a mysterious writer of mysteries, but it raises intriguing questions about identifying male and female writing without external clues ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Gwen Harwood, in an interview with Candida Baker, ascribes her writing of the famous rude acrostic in *The Bulletin* to 'natural mischief'; but she gave a different version to a friend. Work she sent in under male pseudonyms got taken, work sent under female names didn't. So she went ahead with another male name and was accepted. Annoyed, she wrote her famous piece and sent it in, also under a male name, and saw it accepted. It was only when the magazine was actually on the news-stands and counters that someone pointed it out.

The flurry in the board-room! The red editorial ears! In hindsight it surely would have been better—and certainly more dignified—to leave it be.

\* \* \* \* \*

Readers of library books have an awful habit of underlining, circling, querying, scribbling, even cutting bits out of library books.

It's a very irritating habit.

Even when I sympathise with their questions or corrections.

The other day I came across this bit underlined in Ibsen's notes for *A Doll's House*—"There are two kinds of moral laws, two kinds of conscience, one for men and one, quite different, for women. They don't understand each other; but in practical life, woman is judged by masculine law, as though she weren't a woman but a man."

Oh, I'm bursting with sympathy—but I still wish people wouldn't do it.

\* \* \* \* \*

- September 3rd: Lettice Cooper  
Sarah Orme Jewett  
Carol Churchill  
Lennie Lower  
Alison Lurie
- September 4th: Joan Aiken  
Mary Renault  
Cyril Hare  
Nitsa-Athina Georgeoglou
- September 5th: Arthur Koestler  
Frank Yerby

September 6th: Victor Daley  
 Elizabeth Ferrars  
 Barbara Hanrahan  
 September 7th: C. J. Dennis  
 Edith Sitwell  
 Malcolm Bradbury  
 Peter Gill  
 Lawrence Collinson  
 Nancy Keesing  
 Dr John Polidori  
 Elia Kazan  
 September 8th: Siegfried Sassoon  
 Michael Frayn  
 Martha Albrand  
 Frédéric Mistral  
 September 9th: Phyllis Whitney  
 Cesare Pavese  
 Alexander Cordell  
 September 10th: Anne Beresford  
 Peter Lovesey  
 Henry Wade  
 Franz Werfel  
 September 11th: O. Henry  
 D. H. Lawrence  
 Jessica Mitford

\* \* \* \* \*

I found myself required to read Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* at one stage of school. Each time I read it I suffered several days of depression afterwards; at last, it dawned on me that it was the character of Miriam which was throwing me into the doldrums. But could anyone be so misery-making, even in fiction, that they could do this? Recently I came upon the information that Lawrence used his friend Jessie Chambers in his writing of this book.

Dale Spender in *The Writing or the Sex* says: 'For Jessie Chambers' grievance was not simply that she thought her words were being taken from her: There were times when she felt that her own words were being used directly against her. This was certainly her reaction to Lawrence's representation of Miriam in *Sons and Lovers*: Purported to be an authenticated portrayal of Jessie, the character of Miriam was a distortion which caused Jessie considerable dismay. She felt betrayed by D. H. Lawrence's depiction of her and said of her relationship that "the shock of *Sons and Lovers* gave the death blow to our friendship".'

I'm not surprised.

The thought had been with me—should I re-read the book to see whether it still had the same impact? But depression is something which always hovers; I didn't feel masochistic enough to invite it in.

And perhaps it is not Lawrence's writing; perhaps it is the spirit of Jessie deeply distressed by that 'distortion' which passes through to women readers.

\* \* \* \* \*

Elizabeth Bowen commented on the Lawrence marriage "I see more than ever how Frieda broke him *as a man*—not as a writer perhaps."

As Lawrence was not averse to helping himself to the writings of just about every woman he met—Jessie Chambers, Louie Burrows, Helen Corke and Mollie Skinner—this statement opens up all sorts of possibilities. John Lehmann comes up with the

ambiguous statement that Rupert Brooke admired Lawrence “at least as a novelist”.

Katherine Mansfield says of Lawrence: “He’s quite “lost”. He has become fond of sewing, especially hemming, and of making little copies of pictures. When he is doing these things he is quiet and kind, but once you start talking I cannot describe the frenzy that comes over him. He simply *raves*, roars, beats the table, abuses everybody ... It is impossible to be anything to him but a kind of playful acquaintance.”

Maybe it was the spirit of Miriam having her revenge?

\* \* \* \* \*

I was on a stall once and things were pretty quiet; I picked up a little booklet of mystery fiction and began reading a story called ‘Lady Patterley’s Lover’. It was a send-up of Lawrence’s story. The gamekeeper convinces Lady Patterley to do away with her invalid husband—but so as not to arouse the husband’s suspicions she must spend more time with him before giving him the fatal drink. As she spends more time with him, though, she begins to rekindle some of her old feelings for him while the gamekeeper begins to seem more and more tiresome and uncouth by contrast—and, remarkably, with her greater attention, her husband’s health begins to improve. (Maybe it was psychosomatic all along—)

The upshot? Lady Patterley poisons the gamekeeper and lives happily ever after.

\* \* \* \* \*

D. H. Lawrence is always listed among ‘nature novelists’ which I, for one, tended to think of as a particularly English phenomenon. Till I picked up a small book on a stall called *Land of Stone* by Geo Bogza. The introduction said: ‘Our literary history records the names of many authors who wrote about nature. Let us mention but a few: Alecsandri, Eminescu, Creanga, Slavici, Cosbuc, Hogas and Vlahuta, and among contemporary writers: Sadoveanu, Arghezi and Galaction ... In order to characterize Bogza’s description of nature, a comparison with Sadoveanu is necessary, both because the latter has been the recognized master of literary landscape-painting for the last four or five decades, and because he embodies the typical attitude to nature of the writers mentioned above. The many splendid pages devoted by our great master to the Rumanian landscape and particularly to his native Moldavia ... clearly show that his conception of nature is plastic, descriptive, familiar and somewhat romantic. Hence those great pastel-like pictures, transparent and subtle, in which man moves at his ease and on a perfectly equal footing with nature.

In Geo Bogza’s works we shall meet, for the first time, a vision resting on an entirely different conception of nature which is internal, resulting from the reaction of his whole nervous system.’

The book deals with the Motzi people who live in the Apuseni mountains of Transylvania and mine gold—“They are the oldest mines in Europe. Before the Dacians, they belonged to the Agathyrsi. And before them to others. All gold seekers.” ... “In Herodutus’ time it was the only place in Europe where gold was extracted ... Herodutus describes the narrow galleries, particularly those which could be worked only by slim young boys of thirteen or fourteen.” Down the mines are the mysterious beings, the *holongari*; are they merely clever gold thieves, are they the spirits of dead miners ... we never find out for sure. Life for the women is equally grim. “They are the Motzi women, who, seeing the moon was up, have come near the windows to spin the hemp on their distaff. They are clad in coarse hempen shirts. Grim women, beaten by the winds, with callous hands and furrowed brows, grown old before their time.” But the people are caught up in that dilemma between a landscape they love and a place which can offer only poverty.

—“They invented the *tulnic* (a kind of horn) and the shepherd’s pipe to express their sorrow without words, just as they created the custom of planting a fir-tree on the grave of any young person who has died. The wind will pass through its branches and

sing a lovelier song than theirs.”

—A man who had been lost in the mines for 10 days is finally brought out—“And then the man with the earth-stained face on which the tears had changed into mud, heaved a deep sigh, and finding his voice at last said: “Oh my beautiful firs, I thought I’d never see you again.”

—And Nicolae Giura who is sent with the Austro-Hungarian army to the Russian front in World War One—

“What I suffered there!” he would say with a deep sigh.

“Were you wounded again?”

“No, nothing happened to me in that way, but the country is nothing but an endless plain.”

“Don’t you like the plain?”

“It isn’t that I don’t like it ... but I can’t, I can’t do without the mountains.”

I was tempted to say, but this isn’t a ‘nature novel’, not in the sense that Lawrence writes ‘nature novels’—but by the end, the character of the land, which overwhelms its people, had stamped itself irresistibly on the book; ‘nature novel’ which always makes me think of sheep in gentle green paddocks seems almost too tame a description.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 12th: Han Suyin  
Vincent Eri  
Max Walker  
Michael Ondaatje  
September 13th: Roald Dahl  
Jocelyn Burt  
J. B. Priestley  
Sherwood Anderson  
Adrienne Kennedy  
Christiane Naubert  
Miroslav Holub  
Natalia Correia  
September 14th: Eric Bentley  
Martin Caidan  
Michael Butor  
Alan Ebert  
Elizabeth Frank  
September 15th: Agatha Christie  
James Fenimore Cooper  
Ron Cowen  
Loren D. Estleman

\* \* \* \* \*

Who wrote that famous line about Petra—A rose-red city ‘half as old as time’? Shelley I thought, or maybe Keats. But no—it comes from the pen of a Mr Burgon. So who was he? A minor 19th century poet I assumed, very minor perhaps, as I couldn’t find him. There *was* a John Burgoyne (and Burgon, not surprisingly, comes from Burgoyne which derives from the French province of Burgundy) but he was obviously not the one as Petra was only ‘discovered’ by the West in 1812 and he died in 1792. I ranged over archaeologists and explorers, painters and collectors. But no Burgon.

Was he perhaps a minor Consul? An importer of dates?

Or merely modest.

When I had accepted that he was destined to remain a mystery I suddenly, in the happy way such things happen, came upon him—in a Simon Brett whodunnit. A shortened version of the conversation goes like this:

‘It sounds sort of reminiscent of ‘Ozymandias’, doesn’t it? It isn’t Shelley, is it?’

‘You are right. It isn’t Shelley.’

‘Give me a clue.’

‘Hmm. What clue can I give you? I’ll tell you this—the author is not famous for anything else except that one line.’

‘Oh, thank you. That’s *really* helpful. No, I’m sorry. It’s just one of those things I don’t know. I’m never going to get it. You’d better tell me.’

‘It was written by a gentleman who was born in 1813 and died in 1888 ... He was a clergyman ...’

‘Oh, do get on with it. I don’t know the answer. You can just tell me.’

‘It was the Reverend John William Burgon.’

‘Well, fancy that.’ Her tone was ironic.

‘Exactly. Totally unheard of, except for the one line.’

\* \* \* \* \*

What is, to my mind, one of Agatha Christie’s best books is one she wrote under the pseudonym of Mary Westmacott called *Absent in the Spring* and she wrote it, extraordinarily, in three days.

The book has Joan Scudamore coming back from Baghdad when she is held up at the tiny rest station of Tell Abu Hamid because there has been a washaway on the railway line. Joan is a complacent middle-class Englishwoman and, at first meeting, is quite unlike me—but gradually the disturbing sense creeps in—

She doesn’t have to be.

The book is about the relationship of sacrifice to responsibility.

Of the way we hold the happiness of others in our hands.

As Joan thinks ‘One can do so much by influence’ ...

And about new leaves, new perspectives, new resolutions ...

The first day she reads, writes a few letters, reviews her life with a certain satisfaction. The second day she reads, writes another letter, but, somehow, her thoughts are less satisfying. The third day she has nothing left to read, nothing to say in letters, but she determines to keep her thoughts disciplined. And so she does, for a little while, but the desert, the loneliness—she blames agoraphobia, fever, nerves, for her growing incoherence.

She isn’t the person she has always believed herself to be.

She is someone different, someone far more smug, selfish, unlikeable ...

The train comes. She finds herself, uncharacteristically, unburdening herself to the Russian woman who shares her compartment and who says to her “Your experience was real—it has happened to many—to St Paul—to others of the Saints of God—and to ordinary mortals and sinners. It is conversion. It is vision. It is the soul knowing its own bitterness.”

And then she is home. Home closes round her. She is Joan, the old Joan. She cannot think what came over her for that brief space of time in Tell Abu Hamid ... the desert ... the loneliness ...

She is not the Nicodemus who says

And can I help being I?

Is it possible to cast one’s nature like a snakeskin

By desire and will, by an act of the imagination?

It is also a disconcerting insight into our much-remarked ‘If only I could have a few days to myself’, ‘If I could just have some time out of the rat-race’, ‘some peace and quiet’, ‘some time to think’ ... but if you have not lived your life frequently within your imagination and know it and its quirks—then it can become a frightening room to suddenly be thrust inside, a solitary cell ... it is free, yes, (and people who live in it, I think, need less of the outer trappings) but it can exact different kinds of tribute ...

\* \* \* \* \*

P. D. James once asked whether there was something in Christie's character which perhaps needed to be expressed or exorcised which kept her writing crime, decade after decade. The same question might be asked of P. D. James. And the answer is probably very simple—apart from providing a regular income it is very hard for a writer to turn her back on an admiring public and a demanding publisher.

It is true that Dorothy Sayers did so—but she felt that the religious reasons compelling her to take that step could not be denied.

Christie went through a phase of doubt when it was discovered that an unstable young man working in a laboratory was using the method she had described in *The Pale Horse* to kill his co-workers.

But perhaps this isn't the real anguish which underlies the decision to write or not to write about crime because it is probably true that if someone feels sufficiently strongly to kill another person then the means will come to hand. Rather it might be said—if a writer deals always with the dark side of human nature will the potentials and possibilities within that nature gradually begin to blur and recede?

More concretely, crime writing, no matter how heroic the detection, inevitably invests killing and the killer with an inverse glamour. Just as people flocked in their thousands to the gallows at Tyburn so do the TV networks, publishing companies and newspaper magnates pay out large sums for the exclusive life stories of the perpetrators of the most abhorrent crimes.

We tell ourselves, understandably, that it is important to probe the minds of the Ted Bundys and the Sons of Sams, the Charles Mansons and the Yorkshire Rippers; that way we might prevent the creation of others. But the probing of forensic psychiatrists is a matter separate (we rarely read their scholarly conclusions—and probably wouldn't understand the jargon anyway) to the avidity with which we follow high profile manhunts and trials. There will always be more. Our pervasive and unflagging interest has seen to that.

The answers lie within ourselves.

If we see crime fiction as a quick and easy way to make money in a time when crime fiction is an exceedingly popular genre then are we so different from the crowds flocking to Tyburn?

Yet crime fiction, like romantic fiction, contains immense and largely unexplored possibilities to increase our understanding of ourselves, our society, the way we relate to one another, how society changes, how it forms black holes; the way we learn to interact with the material and the personal long before we reach adulthood, the ways we are encouraged to deal with our emotions, our wants, our perceived needs, our rages ...

\* \* \* \* \*

September 16th: Robert Barr  
Alfred Noyes  
Andrew Sant  
Patrick O'Farrell  
Breyten Breytenbach  
Frans Sillanpää  
September 17th: Frank O'Connor  
Ken Kesey  
Mary Stewart  
John Creasey  
Johann August Apel  
William Carlos Williams  
September 18th: Dr Johnson  
Paul Zimmer

\* \* \* \* \*

Dr Johnson produced a dictionary. End, or perhaps I should say beginning, of story. I had never thought to enquire what sort of dictionary it was. Did people regard it as an accurate and reliable dictionary or did they write letters to him—‘I regret, sir, to draw your attention to ...’

Alan Villiers took this question up: “But who was this Dr Johnson? Had he ever been at sea? He had produced a wonderful dictionary, I was told. So I had a look at this dictionary. It was obvious at a glance, even with just the background of ship knowledge that I had then acquired, that the pompous doctor knew nothing about ships at all, whatever else he might have known. His definitions of the simplest shipboard terms were so inaccurate as to be stupid.

“*Topsail*, the highest sail,” I read, and for *Topgallant* precisely the same definition. How could they both be the highest sail? Topgallant is not the name of a sail anyway but of a mast: *topgallant-sail* is the name of the sail and, even in the loquacious doctor’s day there had been another sail above it—the royal—for at least a century. I read on under “T”. “*Tiller*, the rudder of a boat.” Tiller a *rudder*? What was the old ass talking about? Any sea scout on Albert Park Lake could do better than he was doing! His guesses for “S” were no better. *Shrouds*, I saw, were for him “the sail-ropes. It seems to be taken sometimes for the sails”. What! Hadn’t he ever talked with a sailor? Shrouds are part of the standing rigging.

To belay, to luff, to overhaul—he understands none of the terms but lays down an erroneous definition for them all ... ”

Dear me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dr Johnson, to his credit, was against slavery, saying that ‘no man is by nature the property of another’. Boswell argued back saying: ‘To abolish a *status*, which in all ages God has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be *robbery* to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects; but it would be extreme cruelty to the African Savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life, especially now when their passage to the West Indies and the treatment there is humanely regulated. To abolish that trade would be to “shut the gates of mercy on mankind”.’ Dear me.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 19th: William Golding  
Jones Koonts  
Laurie King  
Hames Haskins  
Penelope Mortimer  
Peggy Woodford  
September 20th: Upton Sinclair  
Henry Livings  
Stevie Smith  
Bob Bottom  
Ion L. Idriess  
September 21st: H. G. Wells  
Hazel Edwards  
Stephen King  
Leonard Cohen  
Marsha Norman  
Sumiko Davies  
September 22nd: Murray Bail

Danny Abse  
James Hebblethwaite  
Alice Meynell  
Morley Callaghan  
Dale Spender  
September 23rd: Baroness Orczy  
Alan Villiers  
Joan Tate  
Jan Ormerod  
Jaroslav Seifert

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Villiers began his writing career on *The Mercury* in Hobart but it was sailing ships and the sea which called him irresistibly. Sail was disappearing but he hunted worldwide for opportunities to sail, for old sea captains to talk with, for unwanted ships' logs and charts to pore over. By the time he died he had become, arguably, the world's most knowledgeable writer and chronicler of the sailing ship era. To him was given the job of captaining the *Mayflower* on its tri-centennial re-enactment voyage. He was called upon by Hollywood for advice on movies featuring sailing ships such as *Mutiny on the Bounty* ...

His love for the ships themselves shines through his narratives.

—"She listened to the wind better than any ship I ever had," he said, very quietly. I liked the expression, which I had not heard before. I had a vision of a beautiful great ship, well-balanced, utterly responsive no matter what the sea and the storms might do to her, faithfully fighting it out off the Horn—" ('She' was the Pitlochry.)

—Through the blue sea the keen cutwater of the sleek, big Peking rips day after beautiful day scaring the wide-eyed flying fish with the roll of foaming water that forever races at her bow.

—The big square-rigged ship can be compared to a great orchestra, needing an inspired conductor really to bring it to full life. The wind was the score and the sails the instruments.

So it is not surprising that he returns again and again to his regret that the modern world can find no place for the big sailing ships (the *Preussen*, for instance, carried 8,000 tons, a crew of 47 and averaged 13 knots)—

—The obliteration of the deep-sea sailing ship was in the last analysis due to the blindness and stupidity of men. There was work for both types of ships to do. It was foolish to throw away a great art deliberately.

—His (Captain Jarvis') view was that the sailing ship, in some form or another, need not go, that there was work for her to do and that the wind was too good a source of motive power—and the science of its use too well developed—just to be thrown away.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was a man's world, yet many wives sailed and many children were born on board ship. Villiers gives the story of a Mrs Wilson, wife of the captain of the four-masted barque, *Primrose Hill*—bound round Cape Horn from Rio to Tacoma—who had to take over when the captain, her small baby, and most of the crew came down with the smallpox. Not only did she nurse the victims but sailed the ship, bringing it into port on its scheduled date.

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Villiers went wherever he could sail; he went on Arab dhows, on the last of the Cape Horners, on replicas, on Portuguese cod-fishing schooners, on his own ship which he acquired in Denmark and re-named the *Joseph Conrad*.

In 1950 he sailed to the Grand Banks of Greenland (I always thought of it as a

bank but in fact there are a number with delightful Norse names—Great and Little Hellefiske Banks, Fyllas, Danas) with the Portuguese fleet which still used sailing vessels and hand-lines.

It was a hard life. Up at 4 am. Fishing all day out in tiny dories in the cold Arctic sea. Then cleaning and salting the day's catch. Brief sleep. Up again. And, as Villiers said, "For a hundred days we had eaten cod and daily supped of the midnight soup of codfish faces. The dorymen call it the "soup of sorrow", for they say that, once having eaten it, you are bound to come back to the Banks again. One hundred days of the soup of sorrow were days enough for me."

A hard life, yes, but it helped to keep people and fish in some sort of equilibrium, before the coming of trawlers and nets.

\* \* \* \* \*

H. W. Tilman, if he is remembered at all, is remembered for his 'Mischief' books. Mischief was an old Bristol pilot cutter which he sailed to some of the most inhospitable places on earth, including Greenland, Spitsbergen, Kerguelen, and the South Shetlands, finally losing her in the Arctic.

He didn't like women (he stormed out of the Alpine Club when it decided to accept women members), he didn't like coloured people, he regularly rubbed people in positions of influence or authority up the wrong way; in fact he was an austere, eccentric and difficult man. That said, it must also be admitted that he retained the capacity under difficult conditions to look upon his own foibles and mistakes with a caustic eye.

Of his visit to the French scientific base on Kerguelen Island he noted that the scientists were going to great lengths (measuring the hours of sunlight, scientifically checking diets) because their ducks were not hatching any eggs; it was left to a French peasant working at the base as a handyman to point out that the scientists had eaten all the drakes.

When he ran into the jetty at Punta Arenas in southern Chile he merely hoped he had livened up a sleepy Sunday afternoon for the townsfolk.

When he was coming up to his eightieth birthday Tilman was invited to captain the yacht *En Avant* taking a party of mountaineers to climb Mt Foster on Smith Island in the Antarctic. The yacht disappeared and no trace of it has ever been found.

I was reminded of another Tilman foible when Isabelle Autissier capsized south of Tasmania: he refused to carry a radio. His belief was that a radio would foster hope and therefore prolong the agony of people wrecked in remote and inhospitable parts of the globe.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are, naturally, more likely to remember successful writers. But we might like to remember Captain William Parker Snow for his unsuccess.

He was born in England and worked his way up in the Merchant Navy before arriving in eastern Australia in the 1850s where he began writing of his voyages. His first book *Journal of a Voyage along the Coast, and Sojourn amongst the Natives* was unpublished; nor could he find a publisher for his second one about his stint at running a pub in Melbourne. He tried to sell his collection of newspaper clippings to the Royal Geographical Society in London but they turned him down (but bought them after his death for £75). He managed to publish *Patagonia Missionary Society and some troubles connected with it. Addressed to the Subscribers and Friends of Missionaries* (price 24/-) which sold a few copies. He failed with *Remarks on the maps and plans of the northern part of the Falkland Islands* but the Hydrographic Office accepted some of his work in *Remarks on Baffin Bay* by R.C. Allen, W.P. Snow and Commander E.A. Inglefield, and he also managed to publish *British Columbia, Emigration and our Colonies considered practically, socially and politically* though it wasn't a big seller.

He was interested in virtually everything from total abstinence, emigration (he ran the London-Venezuela-Guyana Mutual Emigration Society), ocean relief depôts, floating telegraph wires, early shop closing, and missionaries. He published *The Death of Christ* (also not a big seller), a *Catalogue of the Arctic Collection in the British Museum*, he abandoned his *The People's Illustrated Cyclopaedia of the Bible* and never finished his *People's Arctic Encyclopedia and Commentary* or his *Arctic Roll of Honour* but managed to do reasonably well with his *Southern Generals, their lives and campaigns* in the United States.

However it was the loss of the Franklin expedition in the Arctic which spurred his pen to its greatest activity. Sir John Franklin had, previous to his expedition to the Arctic, been Governor of Tasmania and is remembered in the town of Franklin, Hobart's Franklin Square, an electorate, a number of Franklin streets and, of course, the Franklin River which focussed world attention on Tasmania in the 1980s.

Snow went as first mate, purser and medical man in the *Prince Albert* in search of Franklin's lost expedition. (Recent research suggests that the men died from hypothermia and lead poisoning, also, according to an article in *The Mercury*, 'Franklin's ill-fated men ate each other'.)

Snow wrote and published *Voyage of the Prince Albert* (which was popular with readers but not with critics—who complained because he referred to the *Prince Albert* as a "bonnie wee pet"; no doubt he was taking his cue from the Queen), then the *Second Life; or, the lost ones of the Arctic Seas* which wasn't published, followed by *The Franklin Mystery, Plain Facts and Arguments* which was published but ignored.

He believed passionately that the truth about the Franklin Expedition had been suppressed and he continued to write and speak wherever people could be found to listen.

A. G. E. Jones says of his poetry, such as 'Ode to an Iceberg' that it "was so bad that it deserves not to be forgotten". Perhaps. But Snow and his vigorous questing irascible life have largely been forgotten.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 24th: F. Scott Fitzgerald  
Ian Serraillier  
Barbara Ker Wilson  
September 25th: William Faulkner  
John Howard Lawson  
Jessica Anderson  
Felicia Hemans

\* \* \* \* \*

Felicia Hemans used to be seen as a sweet poet suitable for giving to girls; it probably put a lot of people off reading her. Certainly I was astonished when I came upon her collected works. She wrote too much, too quickly—her husband had gone off and left her with five children and although he seems to have sent some support it was undoubtedly not often enough and not enough—but her range of interest is extraordinary. She was born in Liverpool in 1793 and her mother was Italian so that she grew up able to speak Italian but she obviously expanded her language skills along the way as she translated Camões, Lope de Vega, Lorenzo de Medici and others.

Is there anything she didn't write on?

The 'Brandenburgh Harvest-Song'; Welsh melodies such as 'Owen Glyndwr's War-Song' and 'The Hall of Cynddylan'; 'The King of Arragon's Lament for his Brother'; 'The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers'; 'Carolan's Prophecy' (about the famous Irish harpist); 'Properzia Rossia' (about "a celebrated female sculptor of Bologna, possessed also of talents for poetry and music"); 'The Vespers of Palermo'; 'The Siege of Valencia'; from Dartmoor to Scotland to Switzerland—'The Cavern of the Three

Tells' ("The three founders of the Helvetic Confederacy are thought to sleep in a cavern near the Lake of Lucerne. The herdsmen call them the Three Tells and say that they lie there, in their antique garb, in quiet slumber; and when Switzerland is in her utmost need, they will awaken and regain the liberties of the land"); 'The Sword of the Tomb'—an idea sparked off by Danish poet Oehlenschläger—

Voice of the gifted older time!

Voice of the charm and the Runic rhyme!

Speak! from the shades and the depths disclose

How Sigurd may vanquish his mortal foes;

Voice of the buried past!—

'The Tomb of Plataea'; 'The Burial of William the Conqueror'; 'Ivan the Czar';

'The Guerilla's Vow', 'Guerilla Song'—

For the spoilers had passed, like the poison-wind's breath,

And the loved of his bosom lay silent in death.

Oh! forget not that hour—let its image be near,

In the light of our mirth, in the dreams of our rest,

Let its tale awake feelings too deep for a tear

And rouse into vengeance each arm and each breast,

Till cloudless the dayspring of liberty shine ...

—and a poem which appealed to me 'The Indian with his Dead Child' ("An Indian, who has established himself in a township of Maine, feeling indignantly the want of sympathy evinced towards him by the white inhabitants, particularly on the death of his only child, gave up his farm soon afterwards, dug up the body of this child, and went to join the Canadian Indians—

In the silence of the midnight

I journey with my dead;

In the darkness of the forest-boughs,

A lonely path I tread.

But my heart is high and fearless,

As by mighty wings upborne!

The mountain eagle hath not plumes

So strong as Love and Scorn.

I have raised thee from the grave-sod,

By the white man's path defiled;

On to the ancestral wilderness,

I bear thy dust, my child!

I have asked the ancient deserts

To give my dead a place,

Where the stately footsteps of the free

Alone should leave a trace.

And so the tossing pines may answer—

"So, bring us back thine own!"

And the streams from all the hunters' hills,

Rushed with an echoing tone.

Thou shalt rest by sounding waters

That yet untamed may roll;  
The voices of that chainless host  
With joy shall fill thy soul.

—I don't know if girls got an expurgated edition but, personally, I think that would have done me more good as a child than the expurgated 'Hiawatha' we got in our reading books.

Felicia Hemans died in Dublin in 1835.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 26th: Joseph Furphy  
T. S. Eliot

\* \* \* \* \*

Noel Stock writes: "Eliot had been marked out by his teachers for a post in philosophy but thanks largely to (Ezra) Pound, who gave him encouragement and helped him with editors at the right moment, he remained in London and began to publish criticism and was saved for poetry."

It has an evangelical ring about it, doesn't it?

\* \* \* \* \*

More intriguing is the way he took other people's prose:

It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey and especially a long journey in. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, *in solstitio brumali*, 'the very dead of winter'.

(Lancelot Andrewes)

"A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey :  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter."

(T. S. Eliot)

Now if I hadn't known of Eliot being 'saved for poetry', and even though Lancelot Andrewes was a 17th century cleric, I might have been tempted to see that as a bit of common or garden plagiarism ...

Eliot, I think, is at his best with the banal—"And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads"—and at his worst in 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar'—

On the Rialto once.

The rats are underneath the piles.

The Jew is underneath the lot.

Money in furs. The boatman smiles.

And he is inspired, much nicer word 'inspired', by Hermann Hesse's *Blick ins Chaos* (A Look into Chaos) 'Already half Europe, or at least the Eastern half of Europe, is on the way to chaos, walks drunkenly in holy madness towards the abyss and sings as it goes, sings in drunkenness and rhapsody as Dmitri Karamazov sang. The bourgeois laughs painfully at such songs, the saint and the prophet listens to them with tears'—which he turns into—

What is that sound high in the air  
Murmur of maternal lamentation  
Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth  
Ringed by the flat horizon only  
What is the city over the mountains  
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air  
Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London  
Unreal

\* \* \* \* \*

Clive Sansom gathered up poets talking about poetry in his *World of Poetry*.

—The true literary mind is likely to develop slowly; it needs a more comprehensive and more varied diet, a more miscellaneous knowledge of facts, a greater experience of men and of ideas, than the kind required for the practice of the other arts. It therefore presents a more baffling educational problem.

(T. S. Eliot)

—It is the poets' business not to save man's soul, but to make it worth saving.

(James Elroy Flecker)

—'Sensation' of this kind involves the whole being of man;

(John Middleton Murry)

—As Mr Middleton Murry has said, great poets are 'men who have uttered a truth so mysterious that it cannot be wrenched apart from the words in which they uttered it.'

(C. Day Lewis)

—Poetry ... is the attempt to imagine, in terms of the transitory forms of the present in which a generation lives, the universal nature of man's being.

(Stephen Spender)

—It shares the life that is common to all men, but it possesses life in this kind more acutely and abundantly, and it has the faculty of communicating it.

(Walter de la Mare)

—The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the soul of man into activity.

(Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

—Poetry is a precision instrument for recording a man's reactions to life.

(Louis Macniece)

—Poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth.

(Matthew Arnold)

—It is the activity which brought man out of original darkness and differentiates him from the beasts, and we must continue to practice and respect it through the darkness of today.

(E. M. Forster)

—Poetry is not assumed by man as he puts on a ceremonial dress. It is the outcrop of a movement and harmony in his nature, a true response to a true cause.

(Christopher Fry)

—What is a Poet? He is a man speaking to men.

(William Wordsworth)

I had never really stopped to think on what a *manly* activity writing and reading poetry is—more, perhaps, in the nature of riding Brahman bulls or rowing the Atlantic with a bucket. Oh, I know that women, fine antennae eternally and sensitively sifting, are supposed to know exactly when Man means man and when Man means everybody—even if it is always followed by 'his' or 'him' and I defy anyone to convince me that they actually mean 'his and hers' and 'him and her'.

If we expected men to know when Woman means woman and when Woman means everybody would there not be a great outcry and would we not be told to stop being ridiculous?

Surely the English-speaking peoples of the world with the facility for creating new words can turn their undoubted talents to this problem? My antennae are tired.

\* \* \* \* \*

September 27th: Robert Patrick

Grazia Deledda  
 Francis Adams  
 Faith Bandler  
 September 28th: ‘Sapper’  
 Kate Douglas Wiggin  
 Ellis Peters  
 September 29th: Elizabeth Gaskell  
 Miguel de Unamuno  
 Jerzy Peterkiewicz  
 Elizabeth Peters  
 Julio Ortega  
 Colin Dexter  
 Cassandra Pybus

\* \* \* \* \*

I like that image from Spanish writer and philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, “Sow yourself, sow the living part of yourself into the furrows of life.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Unitarians in Britain, I hear, have recently been refused admission to the British Council of Churches because their creed does not encompass belief in the Trinity. The Unitarian church suggests something as solid and respectable as the Manchester businessmen who formed its mainstay in Elizabeth Gaskell’s day. But solidity and respectability it would seem are not enough.

I came into contact with two admirable Unitarians years ago by way of a tiny footnote in Noam Chomsky’s book *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (co-authored with Edward Herman); they had been part of an American church delegation to Indonesia in the late 1970s—and there they had learnt that several of the men involved in the killing of the five Western journalists at Balibo in East Timor in 1975 had later sought counselling in Jakarta for psychological trauma.

Noam Chomsky has managed to annoy a lot of people with his unrelenting criticism of the American establishment and media. But he is not actually saying very much that is new.

William Lederer, way back in 1961 in *A Nation of Sheep*, turned a calm eye on the way that Senator Joseph McCarthy had used the media for his own ends:

“McCarthy succeeded because he discovered and made full use of a tradition of American journalism—that most newspapermen report the news “straight”. This means that if a prominent person says something sensational—even if untrue—the Press normally will report the statement exactly as spoken. The substance of the speech will not be challenged; and no discussion of its veracity (or lack of veracity) is given to the reader ... Therefore the irrational blatherings of a fool get as much publicity as the studied wisdom of a patriotic genius, if the fool is “news” at the time of his blather. The more violent and impossible the speech, usually the larger the headline and the more space it gets on page one.

... When McCarthy, from the floor of the Senate, said he had in his hand a list of 205 card-carrying State Department Communists—we were offered no reason to doubt that he really had such a list. It said so in the papers. If our journalists had asked McCarthy for a look at the names and he had refused, we assumed that the Press would expose the faker in headlines.

No such thing happened. McCarthy dramatically said he had the 205 Communists’ names written on a piece of paper (which he did not); and the Press gave us his speech “straight”—thus compounding the deception.

McCarthy knew this would happen; and it was this well-placed confidence which permitted him to shoot his mouth off for several years—always getting publicity from

his accusations and ravings. His speeches were news; and the press built McCarthyism into prominence.

It did more than influence us. When one side of an issue is plastered all over the papers day after day, a dangerous phenomenon can take place: The continuous publishing of a viewpoint unconsciously persuades the government that the viewpoint is true; and that it represents a mandate from the people.

What screams from TV, radio, and Press is interpreted as public opinion. Which, of course, it is not.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1987 I saw this phenomenon in action. I was busy fund-raising to send a Tasmanian nun to the U.N. Decolonization Committee Hearings on East Timor in New York. *The Mercury* ran a front-page story in which Prime Minister Hawke stated that Libya was training East Timorese—what for, was not explained; perhaps to run amok in The Lodge?—but this was the time when Libya was being beaten up as Number One Enemy in the Pacific. The story was quite untrue: Libya has always been notable for its absence of support for East Timor. But Hawke was not asked to provide his ‘proof’, nor did he ever apologise to the East Timorese community.

Were people influenced to keep their hands out of their pockets? I have no way of knowing.

When Sister Philip arrived in New York she stayed at a convent which also provided accommodation to a number of international students; one of whom, a young Indonesian man, came up to her the first evening to ask what had brought her to New York. ‘How will he respond when I tell him?’ she wondered.

He said in fact “So you are my enemy?”

She, naturally, said although she disapproved of the actions of the Suharto government she certainly felt no enmity towards the people of Indonesia—and they talked for a while on this. Then, suddenly, he said, “My brother was with the Indonesian Army in East Timor. When he came home we asked him if he had been asked to kill anyone? He said yes, when they were told to go into a village and kill its people he saw no choice but to obey.”

There was a brief pause, then the young man went on—“Every night my brother goes to bed and he just cries and cries.”

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just been reading *Cranford*. It used to be seen as an ideal book for schoolgirls but I’m glad no one thought it would be an ideal book for me. I’m sure I wouldn’t have appreciated it then.

Ladylike and sentimental it occasionally *is*. But it is also possessed of a wit and acerbity and delightful understanding of that state sometimes called ‘genteel poverty’ but which the ladies of the book refer to as ‘elegant economy’. It reminds me of my mother getting out her good wedding-present-china when someone came for tea—then carefully putting it all away again before climbing into her old boots and going off to the muddy milking yards.

Just as, I think, there are two kinds of ‘doers’ in the world—those whom you simply don’t know how they manage to do all they do and those whom you don’t know what they do all day—so, too, perhaps, are there two kinds of ‘havers’—those who go to immense lengths to hide their lack of things and those who plead their poverty anytime having anything is mentioned.

A little comment I like is “Many people talked of hiding themselves in the salt mines—and meat would have kept capitally down there, only perhaps we should have been thirsty.” (As someone once pointed out we talk of Alexander the Great and, admiringly, of Napoleon’s campaigns; but we forget the misery and fear they brought to ordinary people; as John Clare put it “every mouth was filld with the terrors which

Bouneparte had spread in other co[u]ntrys”—and perhaps it would be more appropriate if we spoke of Fleming the Great or the campaigns of Lister and Semmelweis ... )

I'm sure Mrs Gaskell found writing *Cranford* restful.

She had been abused for her attacks on Victorian capitalism and Victorian hypocrisy in previous books—it could be said that her novel *Ruth* began the slow process of removing the stigma of illegitimacy—and she faced a different sort of stress when she came to write the biography of her friend Charlotte Brontë, caught as she was between the differing views of Charlotte's father and Charlotte's husband and what they wanted put in and, more importantly, left out.

Charlotte and her sisters lived to a considerable extent in a fantasy world and have come to epitomise the romance of tragedy and, perhaps, the tragedy of romance; for the practical and down-to-earth Mrs Gaskell doing justice to Charlotte's world must have been extremely difficult but her biography, despite the many produced since then, remains one of the most available and widely read.

Oh, and have you noticed the trend towards doorstep biographies? Patrick White, Daphne du Maurier, Christina Stead, Margery Allingham ... I just cracked my pen by putting Elizabeth Gaskell down carelessly ...

\* \* \* \* \*

September 30th: Michael Innes  
Truman Capote  
David Cregan  
Alvin Tressault  
October 1st: Faith Baldwin  
Fletcher Knebel  
Louis Untermeyer  
Anna Brigadere  
Jacques Oriol  
October 2nd: Graham Greene  
Edmund Crispin

\* \* \* \* \*

Undoubtedly Graham Greene deserves his reputation. But he does have one very annoying habit which, once it struck me, subtly undermined my enjoyment of subsequent novels.

Almost invariably he kills off his crucial character, his catalyst.

Their ends are various—old age, suicide, firing squad, bombs, gang warfare—but they are all doomed.

It would not be correct to say he uses the one plot dressed up in infinite guises; it is rather that there is an underlying direction which impels the central character, sometimes with their obvious acquiescence, sometimes without their apparent permission—and the direction may arise out of integrity, courage, weakness, patriotism, a death wish, even stupidity ...

\* \* \* \* \*

I remember being told that Erle Stanley Gardner had hidden his hero behind a curtain in the Saigon Opera House during a performance of *Aida* (I have never checked this)—the problem being that the Saigon Opera House never had an opera performed in it, being used instead as the National Assembly.

A little closer to the truth might be the claim that Graham Greene wrote some of *The Quiet American* in the inner courtyard of the Continental Palace Hotel just across from the National Assembly, no doubt while he was enjoying their coffee and croissants.

Sterling Seagrave writes: “America's new proconsul in the Philippines was Edward G. Lansdale, the Walt Disney of covert action. Lansdale was a peculiarly

American mixture of naivete and aggressiveness; some thought him a dangerous adolescent (Graham Greene characterised him as such in his Saigon novel, *The Quiet American*). Lansdale was the first in a long line of postwar secret agents totally dedicated to apple pie laced with blowfish toxin. He was a pleasant, warm, good-natured man, with a sincerity that disarmed all but his most determined critics. A former advertising executive, Lansdale had the spontaneous imagination of a copy writer, an instinctive grasp of modern psychology, behaviour modification, and psychological warfare. Many of his ideas now seem hairbrained, but on unsophisticated people they sometimes had surprising effect. The age of media mystification made him a guru to those looking for a quick fix overseas. His techniques were so admired in the CIA and the Pentagon that they became routine procedure a decade later in the Vietnam War. He tried them out first in the Philippines. There was a straight line leading from Lansdale's persecution of the Huks in the 1950s to William Colby's Operation Phoenix in Vietnam, which resulted in assassinating perhaps as many as forty thousand civilians."

(Graham Greene says Pyle was *not* based on anyone. True, writers are notoriously bad at seeing the similarities which seem obvious to everyone else. There was also the problem that Lansdale was still alive. More likely that Greene had in mind a *type*—youngish, well-fed, pink-cheeked, sure that as America was the richest and most powerful country in the world it must have got the equation right, and who saw the world not as a rainbow but as 'couple-colour'.)

Lansdale in the Philippines, set up his psychological warfare under the name of the Civil Affairs Office—and one of its strange and cruel actions involved kidnapping a peasant, killing him, puncturing his neck with two holes to suggest an attack by a vampire; then the body was hung upside-down to drain it of blood and the corpse was laid on a path where it would be seen by the local peasants. The local Huk unit moved away.

(He distilled his Philippine experiences into his 1959 memorandum "Civil Activities of the Military, Southeast Asia" in which he advocated the region's military taking on civic, which included economic and political roles, as well as purely military functions; a belief which found its most ardent disciples amongst Indonesia's generals.)

Lansdale was moved to Saigon in 1954 to carry on with his 'dirty tricks'. Graham Greene's young American is a softer character but, yes, the similarities are very definitely there.

\* \* \* \* \*

I remember an Indian friend of mine being annoyed by Greene having his narrator say to Alden Pyle: 'Love's a Western word,' I said. 'We use it for sentimental reasons or to cover up an obsession with one woman. These people don't suffer from obsessions.'

Indeed?

The Taj Mahal was built out of altruism towards unemployed builders perhaps? And I can't imagine what those Japanese poets were on about—'Even nowadays love is not an unknown complaint' (*The Three Priests*) and 'Do you desire our love to endure' (*Lady Otomo*)—let alone the millions of Asian women who buy the movie fanzines for the sake of a vicarious, and sometimes obsessive, love affair with their favourite stars ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Peter Benenson, putting together the ideas that would grow into Amnesty International, wrestled with the case of Luis Taruc in 1961.

'In a clearing in a forest, in 1942, a great gathering of peasants occurred and formed the People's Anti-Japanese Army or Huk-ba-la-hac. They followed the process of a regular army, made Taruc Chairman of the Military Committee, and set out guidelines which hastened the growth of peasant support—

Clean the houses provided by the people ... Speak in a friendly tone ... Buy and

sell things fairly ... Return the things we borrow ... Pay for the things we destroy ... Do not do, even refuse to do, things which may harm the people ... Help the people in ploughing, transplanting, harvesting, or in cutting wood whenever it does not hinder the actions of the Army.'

While Macarthur was posturing in Australia and Ferdinand Marcos was claiming to have defended Bataan single-handed the Huks got on with the business of trying to free the Philippines from foreign occupation and declare its independence. They were far more effective in this than they have ever been given credit for.

But after the war with the Japanese gone and the Americans showing every sign of remaining, there was no space for a Luis Taruc. Winning a seat in Congress (defeating his opponent by 38,000 votes) he was denied the right to take up his seat because of his communist background. In 1954 he was sent to prison for life.

(In 1949 he wrote his own account, *Born of the People*, "from a small *nipa* hut somewhere on the slope of a mountain above the central plain of the island of Luzon" and "with his notebook balanced on his knee, awaiting the alarm from a sentry lower down the slope, ready to move—")

But getting one thorn out of the way didn't make life all that much easier for the Americans; they were always able to find others.

Consider this extraordinary order from the Subic Provost Marshall's Office in 1983—"To all Negritos residing on Naval Reservation—Be it known that the office of the Provost Marshall has noted many Negritos walking, talking and just being seen in public places in and around the golf course area. Also, let this serve as a notice that Negritos are to live *in* the jungle area and are *not* to be seen by the public walking on the roads or on the golf course area. If voluntary action by the Negritos is not taken to hide themselves in the jungle, OPM will be required to enforce stricter measures."

\* \* \* \* \*

- October 3rd: Gore Vidal  
M. Y. Lermontov  
Henri Alain-Fournier
- October 4th: Damon Runyon  
Robert Lawson  
Alvin Toffler
- October 5th: Michael Smith  
Betty Bates  
Magda Szabo  
Vaclav Hável  
José Donoso  
Peter Ackroyd  
Denis Diderot  
Marie-Claire Blais  
Flann O'Brien  
Agnes Gergely
- October 6th: Val Biro  
Elizabeth Gray Vining  
Lee Kingman  
Melvyn Bragg  
David Pinner  
Thor Heyerdahl

\* \* \* \* \*

Elizabeth Gray Vining writes books for children, biographies (John Donne, Rufus M. Jones, John Greenleaf Whittier), novels, even a book on *Being Seventy*, but it is most likely that she will be remembered for *Windows for the Crown Prince*; a Quaker,

she was appointed as English tutor to Crown Prince (now Emperor) Akihito in 1946.

“For four years from 1946 to 1950, he was my pupil ... I thought of that day in October 1946 when I first came to Japan to teach him English and incidentally Western civilization. He was twelve years old, nearly thirteen, such a sturdy, honest, earnest, lovable little boy. All around us then lay the ruins of Tokyo, miles of burned-over land and make-shift wooden shelters, with here and there scarred brick or concrete buildings that had survived the B-29 fire raids.”

She taught not only the Crown Prince but other children at the Peers and Peeresses school. It would be interesting to know what went on behind the scenes—she simply saw the position advertised and applied—but were American Friends asked to find someone who could help curb Japan’s ‘warlike instincts’ and train the young heir up in an atmosphere of the negation of war, the same belief which led to the Americans insisting on a ‘peace clause’ in the new Japanese Constitution; something which many Americans have regretted and tried to overturn since then—not least because, freed of the expense of anything more than a small home army and civil defence force, Japan could turn all its energies to reconstruction, new technology, new business techniques, the export of nippy small cars ... and leave America wondering what had gone wrong this time ...

\* \* \* \* \*

In one of those moments when a new road, a signpost, beckons I made myself a list of well-known Japanese novels, under the heading of Must Read, and went out to hunt for them.

The State Library.

A blank.

The Glenorchy Library.

Another blank.

The State-wide computer lending system, TALIS.

Another blank.

The novels I wanted—

*The Setting Sun*—

*Snow Country*—

*Silence*.

\* \* \* \* \*

Donald Keene writes: “one of the most unusual features of Heian literature is that such works as the *Kogero Nikki*, *The Pillow Book* of Sei Shonagon, *The Tale of Genji* and most of the diaries, and much of the poetry were written by women. The usual explanation for this curious fact is that men considered writing in Japanese to be beneath them and devoted themselves to the composition of poetry and prose in Chinese, leaving the women to write master-pieces in the native language.”

Of *The Tale of Genji* (Genji Monogatari) by Lady Murasaki, he says: “*The Tale of Genji* probably written during the first decade of the eleventh century, is the great masterpiece of Japanese literature. It is a novel of complexity and magnitude ... ”

(So why are we still being told that the novel is an Anglo-Saxon invention of the 17th and 18th centuries?)

Elizabeth Gray Vining writes: “down the ages Lady Murasaki’s novel has been doctored—by the Confucians, by the nationalists, and, during the last war, by the militarists—all to make it morally instructive. The relations of Genji with his stepmother were actually not allowed to be known to the general reader in Japan until after World War II. No wonder I have heard English-speaking Japanese say that they preferred to read it in Arthur Waley’s brilliant and unexpurgated translation!”

\* \* \* \* \*

J. Thomas Rimer provides four English translations of the same Japanese *waka* or

thirty-one syllabled Japanese poem, by Ki no Tsurayuki.

Mists rise, tree buds swell  
and when the spring snow falls,  
even in villages with no blossoms  
blossoms come whirling down

(Burton Watson)

When snow comes in spring —  
fair season of layered haze  
and burgeoning buds —  
flowers fall in villages  
where flowers have yet to bloom.

(Helen McCullough)

when the warm mists veil  
all and buds swell while yet the  
spring snows drift downward  
even in the hibernal  
village crystal blossoms fall

(Rodd and Henkenius)

With the spreading mists  
The treebuds swell in early spring  
And wet snow petals fall—  
So even my flowerless country village  
Already lies beneath its fallen flowers.

(Brower and Miner)

\* \* \* \* \*

Ivan Morris says of *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*: Sei Shonagon is among the greatest writers of prose in the long history of Japanese literature; *The Pillow Book* is an exceedingly rich source of information concerning the halcyon period in which she lived ... She was born approximately a thousand years ago (965 is a likely date) and served as lady-in-waiting to Empress Sadako during the last decade of the tenth century.

I couldn't help thinking that starting students on a 'pillow book' would be far better than starting them on essays and short stories; before they have the confidence of their creativity they are burdened by rules of beginning-middle-end, outlines, structures, themes—whereas if they could write of the little things that come to mind, in the form that comes to mind, as Sei Shonagon did, writing might begin as a joy.

(And what if Princess Di's personal staff were to write poems on lotus petals instead of running to the tabloids with their gossip?)

It is fascinating to think that Sei Shonagon was contemporaneous with Saint Stephen of Hungary, the Golden Age of the Celtic world, the collecting of the miscellaneous Indian, Persian and Arabian tales which make up *The Arabian Nights*; she came before *The Rubáiyát*; she lived centuries before Angkor Wat, or the Aztec and Inca civilizations; she pre-dates Shakespeare by more than 500 years ...

\* \* \* \* \*

October 7th: LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka  
Helen Macinnes  
Thomas Keneally  
George Johnston  
Clive James  
October 8th: Alice Cockburn  
John Cowper Powys  
Michael Korda  
October 9th: Elizabeth Akers

Miguel Cervantes (chr)  
 John Pilger  
 October 10th: Harold Pinter  
               Max Colwell  
               R. K. Narayan  
               Ivo Andric  
               Claude Simon  
 October 11th: Samuel Clarke  
               Elmore Leonard  
               François Mauriac  
 October 12th: James McAuley  
               Charles Gordone  
               Eugenio Montale  
               Peter Goldsworthy  
               Drusilla Modjeska  
               Magnus Magnusson  
               Angela Rippon  
 October 13th: Frank D. Gilroy  
               John Herbert  
               Guy Boothby  
               Philip McCutchan  
               Rosemary Anne Sisson  
 October 14th: Thomas Davis  
               Tibor Ebert  
               William Penn  
               Katherine Mansfield  
               e. e. cummings  
               Miles Franklin  
               Lois Lenski  
               Kate Grenville  
               Hannah Arendt  
               Anne Rice

\* \* \* \* \*

John Canning, in *100 Great Lives*, writes: “The greatly improved maps and charts of the fourteenth century and the direct trading contacts made between Europe and the Far East, were the immediate result of Marco Polo’s work. He had brought home a wide store of new knowledge about the world in which they lived, he had broadened their conception of the earth, he had inspired others with the desire to travel and explore ... ” (It has been asked why he didn’t mention the Great Wall of China, tea, or the women’s bound feet; perhaps he did and removed it later because of people’s unbelief; perhaps he didn’t because he preferred to dwell on other astonishing things such as 5,000 elephants bringing in the Khan’s gold and silver plates or the 10,000 falconers, or the cups which flew mysteriously through the air.) “Among the books of Columbus, who went into the unknown to discover the New World, was a well-thumbed and annotated copy of Marco Polo’s story of the men who went into the unknown to discover the Old.”

Columbus always knew he hadn’t discovered India. Where were the lands needing to be skirted by those who approached India from the East—Malaya (which Marco Polo calls Lokak) and Sumatra—and where were the things Marco Polo found in India—the sesame-seeds and pearl-divers and Brahmins and horses (‘fed on meat cooked with rice—’) and the relics of St Thomas and Monastries and dancing girls and Yogis ... and why didn’t he try to find Ceylon, said to contain the world’s largest ruby,

as well as sapphires and emeralds and other precious stones ...

So why did he insist till the end of his life and through disgrace and trouble that he *had* discovered India? It has been suggested that he wanted to retain the inheritance of his sons Fernando and Diego. It has been suggested that having brought about the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas in 1494 which ‘gave’ most of the Americas to Spain he could not now back down and suggest he had made a mistake. It has been suggested that the immense pressures on him emanating from the Spanish monarchs caused what we would call a nervous breakdown.

Mascarenhas Barreto comes up with a far more intriguing answer. Columbus was never Genoese. He was a Portuguese spy who had gained the confidence of Ferdinand and Isabella and proceeded to divert Spanish interest westward. Why? Pero da Covilha reached India by way of the Red Sea in 1488 and Bartolomeu Dias had found the way round Southern Africa that same year; the sea route to India from the west was now open. But what would happen as the Portuguese caravels came wearily up the last leg of the journey off North Africa, laden with the silks and spices of the Orient? Spanish ships need only lie in wait, as the English did in the Caribbean a century later, and plunder the Portuguese ships of their wealth.

King John II of Portugal had a better idea: send the Spaniards off exploring to the west. Columbus had been on the Luso-Danish voyage of 1477 to Greenland; the Portuguese knew there was land to the west but just *what* could be safely left to Spain to discover.

But Columbus could not offer silks and spices; so he set the Spaniards on the quest for gold. If it could not be bartered then it must be found or mined. Why did Columbus stay determinedly in the Caribbean instead of exploring the mainland of the Americas—where there *was* gold for the stealing? He lived in a terrible bind. He did not know there was a mainland—and if he sailed on and came to an open sea how, then, could he maintain his terrible fiction that he had reached India?

He is blamed for bringing down the miseries of European diseases and European greed on the Americas, but we cannot put all the burden on Columbus’ frail and uneasy shoulders. Each generation must take up its own responsibilities. Columbus, if Barreto is right, lived not only with the fearful knowledge of what discovery of his imposture would mean; if he was really Salvador Fernandes Zarco and a New Christian (a converted Jew) then he lived with another terrible sword hanging over him, the sword of the Inquisition. We know that Columbus knew Torquemada and had no illusions as to what was happening in Spain. Barreto suggests that Columbus had a personal secret agenda beneath his official secret agenda—to find a land where the Jews would finally be safe.

But, if so, he failed. There *are* millions of Jews in the Americas—from Argentina to Colombia, from Mexico to Canada—but Columbus failed to save any of Torquemada’s victims ...

\* \* \* \* \*

William Penn when he reached Pennsylvania believed that the indigenous people were the ‘lost tribes’ of Israel. I don’t know when he decided that this wasn’t so but the relations of the Europeans he had brought with him to the local Indians remained warm and friendly for many years; even so, he ushered in a tragedy just as terrible as that which Columbus unwittingly unleashed. The Quaker community would only buy that land which the local tribes were willing to sell and they offered a choice between money and trade goods (knives, hatchets, and other useful manufactured items). Many Indian communities, finding life so much easier with these items, sold their land—only to realise, too late, that they had sold their heritage. They could work on white land, they could work in the budding towns, they could retreat into the hills making the land increasingly crowded and the game increasingly scarce—

Whilst the Quakers had acted very honestly in the matter of land sales I believe that one vital further step should have been taken. If they had *rented* land from the Indian communities for the time it took for the nature of the new relationships to become clear then the tide of dispossession might have been prevented before it began. Because of the European and Indian harmony and the religious tolerance of Pennsylvania, it became the focus of wave after wave of European arrivals—people seeking refuge from religious persecution, families seeking land, seeking their fortune, seeking the openness and safety of this new colony ... the Indians were overwhelmed by the arrivals, the Quakers too were overwhelmed by the pressures on them.

Chief Papunahung and his people at Wyalusing (of the Algonquin group) were wiped out by a land-hungry gang called the Paxton Boys. Yet it was Papunahung, Janet Whitney writes, ‘who had found God, the Great Spirit, all alone in the forest long before he saw any Christians, and had become inwardly “fully persuaded that when God made men he never intended they should kill and destroy one another”,’ and, after learning Christian doctrine, “I have often thought it strange that the Christians are such great warriors.”

She goes on to say “The hatchet, drenched in both white and Indian blood, was never again buried. The most dangerous of human emotions, fear, had been let loose. The Quakers, with all their fearless friendly policy, the fundamental precept of which was settlement by Indian consent, had withdrawn from their dominating position in the leading colony. That bulwark removed, the way was cleared for unmitigated violence and militarism in Indian dealing. Useless for the Quakers to salve their consciences with their Friendly Associations, their Indian reservation, their beautifully worded letters of protest to Governor or general. They had taken their thumb out of the dike.”

The Pennsylvania Quakers had also opposed the increase in taxation. Their withdrawal allowed the Stamp Act to be passed, the act proposed by London to raise revenue in its American colonies. But it was bitterly resented by ordinary people and finally repealed but not before it had helped foster a sense of an American identity, of unity, of anger at decisions taken in faraway London—and thus moved the colonists towards their War of Independence ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Janet Whitney also wrote of a dilemma faced by John Woolman. As the American colonists, including Quaker colonists, grew in prosperity so too did they aspire to silver tableware instead of pewter or wood. He recorded in his *Journal* a dream he had: I was then carried in spirit to the mines where poor oppressed people were digging rich treasures for those called Christians, and heard them blaspheme the name of Christ, at which I was grieved, for his name to me was precious. I was then informed that these heathens were told that those who oppressed them were the followers of Christ, and they said among themselves; “If Christ directed them to use us in this sort then Christ is a cruel tyrant.”

It was almost certainly Potosí in the highlands of Bolivia that Woolman had been hearing about. The wealth of its silver mines had made it the largest city in the Americas by the seventeenth century.

A recent visitor, Jimmy Burns, writing in *Beyond the Silver River*: ‘The streets with the palaces and grand mansions recalled past glories, but there were places too that served as a lasting reminder of the hardship and exploitation. In the Casa de la Moneda or Royal Mint the stone floors had been eroded by the naked feet of the slaves.’

And: ‘The company won’t let you go down there. They say the miners don’t want to be part of a tourist spectacle. But the truth is that if you didn’t die you’d come away denouncing to the world that teenagers were still working as slaves,’ said Francisco. (The wage was thirty dollars a month for a forty-eight-hour week.) ‘If they do not suffer or die in an accident in the first two years, they contract silicosis in the next two,’ he

said.

And further: ‘There is perhaps no more accurate way of describing a Bolivian mine than as a living hell,’ said Francisco, his eyes watering as he fought off his first coughing fit of the day. ‘In Potosí there is a popular saying that God graces the town with thirty churches but the devil laughs in its three thousand mines.’

\* \* \* \* \*

I have been re-reading ‘The Well’, not the novel by Elizabeth Jolley but the short story by Bolivian writer Augusto Céspedes. It is narrated by a Bolivian army sergeant, Miguel Najaya, at the time of the Chaco War which dragged on from 1932 to 1935. He, like most of the Bolivian army, has come down from the cold thin air of the Altiplano to the hot plains of the Chaco. He says of their torment—“We live, wasted, unhappy, aged before our time, the trees with more branches than leaves, the men with more thirst than hate.”

He sets his men to digging a well.

At forty feet down it becomes damp. Hope. But the dampness passes, the soil is dry again and they dig on. Ninety-eight feet. No good. They are ordered to dig on. One hundred and thirty feet. It is almost totally dark down there. Soundless. Suffocating. They begin to have visions of water. One hundred and forty-eight feet—“my men dig on and on, digging air, earth, and life with the slow, spiritless activity of gnomes.” One hundred and sixty-eight feet and the air “closes in on the body”, the men faint.

Finally they are ordered to stop digging. They take up arms in a sudden Paraguayan attack. They are driven back. The well becomes the deep sad grave for the men left lying dead.

I’m not a short story reader by preference but ‘The Well’ is one I come back to.

\* \* \* \* \*

October 15th: C. P. Snow  
P. G. Wodehouse  
Virgil  
Robert E. Lee  
Ed McBain  
Mario Puzo  
J. K. Galbraith  
Italo Calvino  
Pixie O’Harris  
Friedrich Nietzsche

\* \* \* \* \*

David Jansen tells this story of a famous novelist who found himself in an awkward situation: “I was seated next to an elderly woman at a dinner party given by Ethel,” he recalled, “when she turned and spoke to me. ‘This is a great moment for me,’ she said. ‘I can’t tell you how proud I am. I think I have read everything you have ever written. We all love your books. My eldest son reads nothing else. And so do my grandsons. The table in their room is piled high with them. And when I go home tonight,’ she added, ‘and tell them that I have actually been sitting at dinner next to Edgar Wallace, I don’t know what they will say’.”

The only problem was—she was sitting next to P. G. Wodehouse.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mary Roberts Rinehart said “the more easily anything reads, the harder it has been to write.”

And Jansen says of P. G. Wodehouse’s writing: “It is significant that the toil and turmoil that attended the writing of his novels, evidenced in so many of his letters to Townend, is never apparent in Plum’s finished work. Each of his books reads as though the words had streamed uninterrupted from an inspired pen—”

I cringe when I hear a novelist saying “I expect my readers to work”; now, if I buy a book called *How to Build a Log Cabin in Ten Weeks* or *Learn Mapuche in Ten Easy Lessons* (Easy?—‘*Lanëmlaian. Iñche e’eltuayu mi kachilla. Fëreneaqen, l’anëmlaian. Epuwe nepaiyai mi chau, pepaiyai ñi kachilla, doy kümetuai*’—) then I know I’m in for a spot of hard work—but most readers, barring students of English Literature courses, tend to read primarily for enjoyment—and the harder the book is to *read* the more likely it will find only a miniscule market. I once heard a person say she’d been reading a book which chopped to and fro, backwards and forwards, so much so that the thought of picking it up again was just too tiring—and “the story wasn’t any better for all that.” That is the nub, I think. Readers will stay with flashbacks, rapid changes of scene and so on, only if they feel that the story could not have been told in a simpler way.

\* \* \* \* \*

The nice thing about being a writer is that you can do a first draft—and a second and a third. Pity the reporter, the after-dinner speaker, the off-the-cuff interviewee ... in ‘Did I really say that?’ ...

‘The grouse are in absolutely no danger from people who shoot grouse’ (Prince Philip)

‘The shitty sheriff, I mean the city sheriff, was kept busy last night with three buglers—I mean burglars’ (Radio KUTY, California)

‘We are now close enough to see Argentinians in their houses eating their dinner through binoculars’ (BBC)

‘The President returned today looked fanned and tit’ (Walter Cronkite)

‘We are sitting on a powderkeg that could explode in our faces’ (Archbishop Tutu)

‘The outside toilets are out of order. Please use platform six’ (York Railway Station)

\* \* \* \* \*

October 16th: Oscar Wilde  
Eugene O’Niell  
Edward Ardizzone  
Robert Ardrey  
Günter Grass

October 17th: Les Murray  
Arthur Miller  
Nicholas Hasluck  
C. K. Stead

\* \* \* \* \*

I have just been listening to Les Murray (the poet not the soccer commentator) propound the belief that the Anglo-Celtic-male-writer is an endangered species—and certainly in regard to Literature Board priorities. Well, I don’t know. If, as he says, he has received \$25,000 every year for 20 years, that doesn’t seem too bad to me.

Now what if he’d been a jockey instead of a poet?

Take an average week for an average country jock. You’ve got three rides at Meeting X on the Saturday arve. Horse A is a good ride but fades at the finish. Horse B is a stinker, runs wide on the home turn, falls, and you are stretchered off with minor concussion. But your luck is in—you’re passed fit enough to ride Horse C forty minutes later and you come in second. You take home your fees, a gigantic headache, and a ripped boot—and tuck into a small chop with salad. You’ve missed out on a ride for the holiday meeting of the long weekend but feel you have to turn up, just in case—and again you’re in luck: a fellow rider is down with the ’flu and you pick up two non-winning rides. Two small fees.

On Wednesday you've got a good ride but it involves driving sixty kilometres and sweating off another kilo; even so, you can't quite make the weight and you are on tenterhooks in case the owner jibs and demands a lighter rider.

All goes well and you win. The owner, not a generous man and times are hard, weighs in with a small bonus.

Thursday you're back to your part time job at the local abattoir as a stockman; again on tenterhooks as there's a rumour going around that the company is suffering a takeover bid and the new owners have a reputation for 'consolidating' their businesses—and, more to the point, will they allow you the time off to ride mid-week meetings?

Saturday, you've got two rides but on the Friday you hear the best of them has been scratched as there's a cough going round the stables and you are faced with another long drive for one ride and the hope of picking something else up.

A pretty average week—and I haven't mentioned getting up before dawn to ride trackwork or having to refuse that delicious trifle your wife made for Sunday dinner while your kids gobble down second helpings ...

Now, I don't pretend that writing poetry is a lucrative way to make a living but, still, I think \$500,000 is quite a good back-up ... and you *can* eat that trifle ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Les Murray was also concerned that the Literature Board has a political agenda in regard to how they divide the cake; it seems quite likely—most things these days are influenced by politics—but I am not privy to what is said in their board meetings, and I mightn't be any the wiser if I was. Books and writers don't usually come with neat little labels on them, saying white, green, black, 'parlour pink' ...

Years ago, Michele Turner told me that someone from the Board had told her the Board had given three grants to 'East Timor books'—but she could only think of two: her own, and Andrew McMillan's *Death in Dili*. The third one was a book called *The Children Must Dance* by Tony Maniaty. The blurb certainly says—'An island off Australia's north, the year 1975. The colonial Portuguese have gone, the revolutionary Fragas cling to power while their enemy regroups'—but the book gave me no sense of Timor, either the place or its people, and it may be that the author didn't want it taken as such anyway. Various people have told me it was a disappointment, that it didn't seem to be "about Timor", but then, when it comes to fiction, a writer is under no obligation to make his book "about anywhere" or to give it more than a cursory link with real people, real places, or real events. The imagination takes over. But I think the disappointment was understandable. In 1981, when the book came out, East Timor was closed to the outside world and people interested in the issue were desperate for information of any kind.

\* \* \* \* \*

The grant of Literature Board money to write a novel does not seem absolutely and vitally necessary; people go on writing without grants. *The Children Must Dance* at 222 pages and not requiring travel, interviews, in-depth research, seems like the sort of book which could be written in quiet moments. Did it need taxpayers' money to get the words on to the page?

The world is full of people who write on planes and trains and camel caravans; who write in tents and prison cells and caravan parks; who write after work, before work, in their lunchbreaks.

Harriet Beecher Stowe put a half-dozen children to bed before sitting down at the kitchen table to write; Pramoedya Ananta Toer wrote short stories, a novelette, and a novel, in a Dutch prison; John Bunyan wrote his autobiography and part of *Pilgrim's Progress* in prison; Erle Stanley Gardner put in a ten-hour-day in his law practice before sitting down to write; Ibsen said "My play (Catiline) was written at night. From

my employer, a good and able man who, however, had no interests outside his work, I had virtually to steal free time in which to study, and from these purloined hours I thieved further moments in which to write. So I had little time left to me but the hours of the night. I think this must be the unconscious reason why almost the whole action of the play takes place at night ... ”

And P. D. James put it very sensibly when she said of her life and writing: “ ... then my husband went away to war; he was a doctor. He came back ill; I had to look after him and two children and find a good safe job that would really bring in a wage check. In my mid-thirties I realized that these were excuses because there is never an absolutely propitious time to starting down to write.”

I think the real value of a writer’s grant lies in the boost it gives to the confidence and self-respect of a new writer. It says in effect “Now, you are a writer. Not a would-be, hope-to-be, might-be, one-day-will-be ... but a writer.”

\* \* \* \* \*

October 18th: Fannie Hurst  
James Truslow Adams  
Heinrich von Kleist  
October 19th: Adam Lindsay Gordon  
John le Carré  
John Woolman  
Aaron Judah  
Leigh Hunt  
Hilda Bridges  
Miguel Asturias  
October 20th: Thomas Hughes  
Frederic Dannay  
Michael McClure  
F. M. Mayor  
Arthur Rimbaud  
Jack Lindsay  
Art Buchwald

\* \* \* \* \*

Frederic Dannay, whose real name was Daniel Nathan, was with his cousin Manfred B. Lee the famous writing team of ‘Ellery Queen’. One of them was a copywriter and art director, the other did publicity for a film studio. They saw a competition offering \$7,500 for a detective novel and gave it a try. Their story won but the magazine changed hands and the prize actually went to someone else. But they got their story published and their joint writing career was launched.

I have many questions: how did they collaborate, who did the bulk of the writing, how did they meld their different styles, did they do chapter and chapter about, did they brainstorm or did one of them come up with most of the ideas, who did the research ... after his cousin and partner died, Dannay kept on editing the *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* but he wrote no more novels.

The United States has also produced the very talented mystery writing partnership called ‘Emma Lathen’ which is made up of economist Mary Jane Latsis and attorney Martha Henissart. Jeanne F. Bedell says of their partnership “But the financial is always paramount; Lathen is the only writer I know who uses revolution, nationalism and racism as red herrings!”

There have been many very successful partnerships down the years—friends such as Florence James and Dymphna Cusack, cousins such as Somerville and Ross, even a mother and son partnership Kate and Hesketh Prichard who wrote as E. and H. Heron.

I once tried to write a book with someone but it was a disaster.

There were so many problems that we hadn't considered.

1. The problem of getting material together, discussing things, if you don't live in the same house.

2. Styles. Should one dominate if you obviously have very different styles. How do you create consistency.

3. Ways of working. If one starts at the beginning and works neatly through, the one who works like a mad-dog's-breakfast is a pain. If one works with a sense of discovery and the other with a neat outline; if one likes to get a chapter 'perfect' before moving on ...

4. Ethics and beliefs. The large and small things you believe in inform your writing in myriad ways. And even if you share a religious background you do not necessarily see eye to eye. Even trivial things—such as always giving your characters handkerchiefs because you dislike tissues—can cause friction.

5. You get passionate about different things at different times. Suddenly wanting to re-write a chapter because you want to give a key character another emotion aroused by a particular event ... Wanting to play down someone's political beliefs because you can't share those beliefs ...

6. Possessiveness. Things like whose name will come first, whose choice of title—that never bothered me. But I found I was possessive in a subtle way of my inspiration. If an idea was 'running' I wanted to run with it, not stop at the end of the chapter and hand it over to someone else. This caused me insoluble problems—because to write the book I had to, at some level, think of it as 'my book'.

\* \* \* \* \*

- October 21st: Ursula Le Guin  
Patrick Kavanagh  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
Simon Gray  
Maureen Duffy  
Eleanor Spence  
Thomas Fitzsimmons
- October 22nd: Doris Lessing  
Ivan Bunin  
Sidney Kingsley  
William Hanley  
Bhabani Bhattacharya  
E. Phillips Oppenheim  
Tohr Yamaguchi
- October 23rd: Robert Bridges  
Celia Lucas  
John Headley
- October 24th: Sir James Mackintosh  
Nairda Lyne
- October 25th: Thomas Macauley  
Alison Broinowski  
Lonnie Carter  
Joe Khatena
- October 26th: Christobel Mattingley  
Paul O'Niell  
John Arden  
Alfred Draper
- October 27th: Dylan Thomas  
Sylvia Plath

A. N. Wilson  
Albert Wendt  
Maxine Hong Kingston  
Graciliano Ramos  
October 28th: Angus MacVicar  
Tasma  
Catherine Shepherd  
Simon Brett

\* \* \* \* \*

Angus MacVicar took the famous story of the murder in 1752 of Colin Campbell of Glenure and the subsequent trial of James Stewart of the Glen (Seumas a Ghlinne) and turned it into a popular story, *Murder in Lettermore*, as had Robert Louis Stevenson before him in both *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*: ‘Risk? ay, I take over-many: but to be tried in court before a Campbell jury and a Campbell judge, and that in a Campbell country and upon a Campbell quarrel—think what you like of me, Balfour, it’s beyond me.’

There were three judges, of which one was Archibald, 3rd Duke of Argyll, head of the Clan Campbell, and fifteen jurors of which eleven were Campbells.

The killing undoubtedly arose out of the deep anger felt by the Clan Stewart at the behaviour of Colin Campbell, landlord and petty tyrant, and the murder was undoubtedly done by a young Stewart.

But James Stewart was chief, and he felt it to be a matter of clan honour to take the blame for what had happened. He was hanged for the murder.

It is a moving story and it sits uneasily with modern ideas of the relationship of family head to family members, of the moment when responsibility for the actions of younger family members ceases, of the responsibilities which go hand in hand with respect and power ...

\* \* \* \* \*

The successful 19th century writer Tasma, author of *Uncle Piper of Piper’s Hill*, (who took her name from Tasmania as Dame Nellie Melba took hers from Melbourne) might be called a multicultural person: her background was English, French and Flemish; she married a Belgian; her brother Eddie spoke eight languages; her sister Edith married a French sculptor and later an Italian-American; her brother John became involved in the Greek independence movement through a friendship; her sister Maria-Theresa married a Portuguese artist (who has a picture ‘Boy with Apple’ in the National Gallery of Victoria and did a delightful portrait of Georgiana McCrae); and she lived her life in Britain, Australia, France and Belgium. But a multicultural person, then, was someone who sought out the places where the most exciting cultural things were happening and sort of immersed themselves in that *milieu*.

In fact I have never come upon a good definition of ‘multicultural writing’. There are many things that it isn’t. It isn’t New Chum writing. It isn’t yet another version of *They’re a Weird Mob*. It isn’t tarted-up travelogue, history or documentary. It isn’t novels with bits of Tamil or Spanish in the way that older novels have bits of French or Latin. It isn’t a novel which translates easily. It isn’t a book which has sold in forty countries. I think of it as writing, a life, lives, existing at a point of tension between cultures, beliefs, languages, ways of seeing the world. An exciting place but also a place fraught with difficulties, dangers, potentials ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Tasma, and I think this is something many anaemic people feel, was horrified by the thought of eternity. The immensity of it, the *weariness* of it. Although many books are written about death, decay, reincarnation, superstition, life-after-death, heaven, hell, purgatory ... I found it hard to think of anything written about eternity. After you’ve

arrived—what then, what next week, what next millennia, does time cease to exist? The only stories I could think of were two Dr Who stories—‘Mawdryn Undead’ (in which a group of people steal the secret of endless regeneration and find they have created a living hell for themselves) and ‘Enlightenment’ (in which the Eternals, beings without emotions but who can read minds in order to shape matter to while away the endless boredom of eternity, create strange races between themselves) ... so why don’t more writers tackle this subject?

\* \* \* \* \*

October 29th: Desmond Bagley  
Hallberg Hallmundsson  
Carl Djerassi  
Nathan Divinsky

October 30th: Ezra Pound  
Richard Sheridan  
Morris Lurie  
Geoffrey Dean  
Timothy Findley

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1925, Ernest Hemingway wrote of Ezra Pound—who, among other things, had raised the money so that James Joyce could complete *Ulysses*: “So then, so far, we have Pound the major poet devoting, say, one fifth of his time to his poetry. With the rest of his time he tries to advance the fortunes, both material and artistic, of his friends. He defends them when they are attacked, he gets them into magazines and out of jail. He loans them money. He sells their pictures. He arranges concerts for them. He writes articles about them. He introduces them to wealthy women. He gets publishers to take their books. He sits up all night with them when they claim to be dying and witnesses their wills. He advances them hospital expenses and dissuades them from suicide. And in the end a few of them refrain from knifing at the first opportunity.”

\* \* \* \* \*

After World War II came a spate of trials of people accused of collaborating, in various ways, with the Japanese. One of these was Major Charles Cousens who had been an announcer on 2GB in Sydney before being captured by the Japanese at the Fall of Singapore and forced to work for Radio Tokyo. He was to be charged with treason but the NSW Attorney-General “was unimpressed by the Crown’s case and threw the charge out of court”. The Army was not so forgiving and Cousens was stripped of his commission—an action which angered many of the men who had served with him. They pointed out that they had built the Burma Railway under duress for the Japanese, Cousens had broadcast under duress for the Japanese; where was the difference?

Norway arraigned its Nobel Laureate Knut Hamsen for his support for Hitler. But Hamsen was in his late eighties and going senile and the case never came to trial. Hamsen, like many before and after him, had been seduced by the Nietzschean ‘Superman’ philosophy and had believed that Hitler, whom he met in 1943, was the embodiment of this myth. Famous Swedish explorer, writer and orientalist, Sven Hedin, also supported the Nazis, saying of Hitler and Himmler “I knew them both—they were gentle, humble men.”

But when Ezra Pound went on trial in America for broadcasting on behalf of Mussolini the defence claimed, successfully, that he had not been in his right mind and he was condemned to life in an asylum.

It all began innocently enough. Pound, like thousands of other writers and poets, fell in love with Italy. So much so that he persuaded his parents to leave the United States and join him in Italy.

From loving Italy he moved to loving the Italian people and developing an early

admiration for the efficiency and social programs of Mussolini's Blackshirts. He met Mussolini and was impressed. He had become enamoured of the theories of the Social Credit movement and believed that Mussolini shared his enthusiasm and would implement them.

Insanity doesn't seem the right word; but certainly Pound lived in an increasingly cut-off world in which he distanced himself or refused to listen to those of his friends and colleagues who disagreed with his views or regretted that he was writing less poetry or that he was increasingly disillusioned with America.

Charles Cousens attempted to burlesque his programs, believing rightly or wrongly, that people treat propaganda like advertising: with a sceptical and disbelieving mind. He hoped that people would be able to read between his lines and know that he believed the opposite to what he was reporting.

Ezra Pound's programs on Italian radio were a rambling, discursive and sometimes incoherent mishmash of thoughts on literature, his poetry, American poetry, Social Credit, international finance, Mussolini, the beauty of the Italian lakes, medieval history and poetry ... what messages, if any, did his listeners draw from his broadcasts?

I remember receiving a reader's report on a novel I had written; the report interpreted the ending to the book in a way that was the absolute opposite to what I had intended. I was quite shocked. Would that be the way other people would also see it? Or had that particular reader read into it what he or she found most comforting? In the end, it didn't matter. I didn't change my ending (I still felt it was *right*)—but neither did I ever find a publisher for the book. After more than twenty rejections I put it away under the house.

But the thought has stayed with me. The way we accept, interpret, and perhaps *use* other people's words, whether spoken or written, even though it may seem identical to the way other people treat those same words, is always different, infinitesimally different, importantly different.

Pound, by his stance, embarrassed many of his friends, such as Hemingway and T. S. Eliot, but far from 'knifing' him they stood by him and continued to promote his poetry and the belief that his long incarceration helped nobody.

\* \* \* \* \*

October 31st: John Keats  
Dick Francis  
H. R. F. Keating  
Axel Munthe  
John Evelyn  
Catherine Helen Spence

\* \* \* \* \*

Graham Greene in an interview was asked "You say 'one', not 'I'. Why is that?" To which he replied, "Yes, I know; it's a habit, one of those tics I often have to suppress when I'm writing. I suppose I don't like being too personal. In the collection of articles contained in *Ways of Escape*, I never wanted to use the first person; as a result, in my new version I have had to suppress all the *ones* even though they're more precise than *we*, with all its connotation of several individuals sharing an identical view of things. *One* presumes a single individual—a more abstract one, I'll grant you. I'll admit, too, that it's a way of escaping from myself."

Dick Francis said in an interview: "I write in the first person because that's how I like to describe things. I had great difficulty in writing the Lester Piggott biography because I had to write in the third person."

He also had the problem that Lester Piggott, after the book appeared, ran into tax problems and came out of retirement to resume his race-riding—giving the book, now, a sense of incompleteness. Perhaps an appendix?

\* \* \* \* \*

- November 1st: Stephen Crane  
Naomi Mitchison  
C. J. Brennan  
Ronald Gow  
A. R. Gurney Jnr.  
Nigel Dempster  
Tassos Athanassiadis
- November 2nd: Roger Lancelyn Green  
Jenny Pausacker  
Albert Guerard  
Odysseus Elytis
- November 3rd: André Malraux  
Oodgeroo Noonuccal  
Martin Cruz Smith  
J. E. Macdonnell  
Ludovic Kennedy
- November 4th: Patricia Beer  
Eden Phillpotts
- November 5th: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox  
John Bowen  
Stewart Conn  
Donald Howarth  
Sam Shepard
- November 6th: Lucy Aiken  
Cecil P. Taylor  
Jonas Lie  
Michelle Magorian  
Raymond Postgate  
Barry Dickins
- November 7th: Helen Garner  
Wolf Mankowitz  
Armstrong Sperry  
Barry Bermange  
Albert Camus

\* \* \* \* \*

Helen Garner belongs in that select club of authors who got their first book published by the first publisher they sent it to. We tend to concentrate on the tribulations of books which went round and round—and forget that not every writer has had to travel that path of rejection with the despairing thought “Should I keep going?”

Yet quick acceptance is, sometimes, a two-edged sword.

The young Robert Browning received a letter from his aunt saying: “I hear, Robert, that you have written a poem; here is the money to print it”; heady temptation to the novice poet—but he came to regret that he had published what he later saw as very juvenile work.

Georgette Heyer was nineteen when the first publisher accepted her first book. But she withdrew, later, four of her early books (*Instead of the Thorn*, *Helen*, *Pastel*, and *Barren Corn*) from sale in the belief that she had failed in her efforts to deal with the subject—class consciousness and conflict—she had made central to her stories.

\* \* \* \* \*

- November 8th: Bram Stoker  
Margaret Mitchell

Kazuo Ishiguro  
Paul Foot

\* \* \* \* \*

One Christmas my aunt remarked that her mother had always used the word ‘heel-taps’ and did we know what it meant. I said it sounded rather like something caught on your shoe and dragging—but no, heel-taps, in my grandmother’s vocabulary, simply referred to left-overs.

At the time I assumed it was just one of those little idiosyncratic family sayings but not long afterwards I came across the word in Bram Stoker’s tragic story, set in the Scotland of 1893, called *The Watter’s Mou’*; so, perhaps, it was an old Gaelic saying, I pondered, and took down the dictionary.

Far from it. Heel-taps originally referred to leaving a tot of grog in your glass—a wasteful habit certainly—and its genesis was unknown. But Dickens had used the expression. Fancy that! And he had too—in *Pickwick Papers*—but why heel-taps in the first place? Were cobblers notorious for not finishing up their drinks?

\* \* \* \* \*

Legion are the writers who have put great effort into something—and been remembered for something quite different. Hugh C. Weir poured out tomes on the building of the Panama Canal—and is remembered for his creation of Miss Madelyn Mack, one of the first women detectives; Dr Rodriguez Ottolengui devoted himself to his opus *Methods of Filling Teeth* and is, instead, remembered for his few bits of light fiction; Havelock Ellis, remembered for his works on human sexuality, began his career with a forgotten novel set in Australia called *Kanga Creek*; Jules Verne, the Father of Science Fiction, started out by writing libretti for comic operas; and of course Bram Stoker started out with *Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland ...*

Nancy Garden writes: “Not too many people would disagree with the statement that Dracula is the most famous fictional vampire of all time. The black-caped Transylvanian Count, created by author Bram Stoker, has made his chilling undead way through more books, stories, plays, movies, and comic books than any other vampire. Toy cars have been named for him; play teeth and bats have been modelled after him; his picture has appeared on stickers, notebooks, and even cereal boxes. There are clubs devoted to his memory, and tours booked to his castle in Transylvania. He hasn’t yet had his one hundredth anniversary ... but all signs point to his surviving as a favourite horror character long beyond that time and in many countries of the world. Before the book Dracula was published in 1897, vampires were of many different kinds, as we have seen. After Dracula, so powerful was Stoker’s tale, all vampires tended to be very like the famous Count.”

Stoker’s vampire is described thus—‘His face was a strong—a very strong—aquiline, with high bridge of the thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils; with lofty domed forehead ... The mouth, so far as I could see it under the heavy moustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth; these protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality in a man of his years’—but did Stoker *create* his vampire or did he *find* him, readymade, so to speak? In 1929 Walter Starkie camped in a Hungarian graveyard and an old peasant, coming to investigate his campfire, tells him how his two children, Sándor and Julcsa, came to be buried there. Sándor was a wild young man and the family hoped the army would tame him. But he meets and brings home with him an older man who ‘had something Mephistophelian about his appearance : he was tall and thin, with aquiline features and a small pointed beard. His eyes were strained and had a wild look in them like those of a cigány : his mouth coarse and brutal with very red lips, and when he spoke he would frequently lick them and show his teeth, which were brilliantly white and sharply pointed like those of a dog or wolf.’ The stranger with his carriage and four black

horses also takes Julcsa away with him. The story follows the classic vampire pattern and the old peasant is left to mourn the loss of his son and daughter.

Had he been reading *Dracula* or was he drawing on an age old superstitious fear: the fear of being buried alive, the fear of the hectic complexion heralding the onset of tuberculosis ... or was his story true?

\* \* \* \* \*

Victoria Holt/Jean Plaidy said ‘Those who don’t write for money—can’t!’ Is this fair? The best-selling mystery of the 19th century was self-published before being taken up by a publisher; Frank Dalby Davison couldn’t find a publisher for his first books *Forever Morning* and *Man-Shy* so he hawked them door to door himself; Frank Hardy self-published *Power Without Glory*. And think of all the famous books which went round and round—the books that took 30 tries, 50 tries, even 70 tries and more before being accepted. Why didn’t the first publisher they went to see their good points, their saleability—and how many writers gave up after 32 tries, believing their book to be no good, when perhaps the 33rd publisher might have accepted it ... and Xavier Herbert wrote “You mustn’t worry about getting published. You mustn’t even worry about making a living. It’s the only way you can hope to write about the terrible, beautiful and powerful thing that life is.”

A book called *Rotten Rejections: A Literary Companion* gives the thumbs-down to various household words.

Rudyard Kipling was told—‘I’m sorry, Mr Kipling, but you just don’t know how to use the English language.’ Herman Melville was told—‘We regret to say that our united opinion is entirely against the book as we do not think it would be at all suitable for the Juvenile Market in (England).’ Vladimir Nabokov had *Lolita* turned down with ‘It will not sell, and it will do immeasurable harm to a growing reputation’ ... and *The Diary of Anne Frank* was dismissed with ‘The girl doesn’t, it seems to me, have a special perception or feeling which would lift that book above the “curiosity” level.’

The assumption is—if a book is good enough a publisher will take it.

Maybe.

But it doesn’t answer that agonising question—when to stop touting a particular book and go on with something else—or even to give up writing altogether? Writer’s magazines are full of exhortations to keep trying. Publishers and agents wonder why writers can’t see that their work is hopeless and go away and breed cocker-spaniels instead. Who is to say? I worked it out that an average book rejection works out at about \$5 a pop. So after 20 rejections it might be better value to get half-a-dozen copies printed out to lend around amongst your friends and relatives on the proviso that you want people’s honest comments. There are people who offer editing and ‘book-doctoring’ at a price. There are agents—but getting taken on by an agent is frequently harder than finding a publisher in the first place; most want writers who’ve sold something already so it becomes a sort of Catch 22.

Self-publishing is increasingly the road that writers are going down. But there are many pitfalls. So here are a few hard-won tips. Find a book that you really like and use that as you go round printers getting quotes. Don’t let printers put you off by saying that recycled papers aren’t as good; there are some excellent ones on the market and, at the time of writing, they are not burdened with sales tax. The typesetting and layout are the biggest expenses so if you can do this yourself it will bring costs down. Keep your back-cover blurb simple but if it’s a novel tell where and when the story is set. Shiny covers are more likely to show fingerprints; if you’re going for expensive paper get the printer to give you a small sample and subject it to some wear and tear—if it marks easily give it a miss. If you’re aiming at older readers try your typeface out on several; some are harder to read than others. Glossy paper is more tiring to read at night. Don’t forget to get several quotes. And unless you’ve got a reliable outlet for your book don’t

go for a large initial printing—500 at the most. Oh, and good luck. I've got at least a dozen self-published books on my shelves and I'm glad their authors didn't give up when endless publishers knocked them back ...

\* \* \* \* \*

- November 9th: Hugh Leonard  
Rhys Davies  
Goronwy Rees  
Ivan Turgenev  
Basil Davidson
- November 10th: Oliver Goldsmith  
Mildred Lawrence  
Johann von Schiller  
John P. Marquand  
Arnold Zweig  
Einar Palsson  
José Hernández
- November 11th: Kurt Vonnegut  
Anna Katherine Green  
José Sanchez-Silva  
Carlos Fuentes  
Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- November 12th: Ben Travers  
Wallace Shawn  
Janette Turner Hospital  
Amelia Opie  
Dahlov Ipcar
- November 13th: Robert Louis Stevenson  
William Gibson  
George V. Higgins
- November 14th: Jacob Abbott  
Steele Rudd  
Serge Liberman

\* \* \* \* \*

Steele Rudd's reputation went into decline after his death. This, I think, had quite a lot to do with the rise of hillbilly humour in the USA (and the export thereof); readers who disliked it avoided Rudd's stories, believing them to be in a similar vein; readers who liked it were disappointed in Rudd's Selection stories. People who enjoyed 'Dad and Dave' on the radio, like people who had china ducks on their walls, avoided saying so in intellectual company.

It was left to small groups like the Ladies Literary Society in Toowoomba to keep his reputation bright with their annual pilgrimages to his birthplace and readings from his works. But gradually the tide turned. Reprints of many of his books were brought out; a major literary competition was named in his honour; a new film starring Dame Joan Sutherland has just come out; and a Nobby pub has had the good idea of doing Steele Rudd nights with fireside re-tellings from his books—and many of his stories lend themselves to reading aloud; Chapter Seven from the *Green Grey Homestead* is rather a favourite of mine ...

The simplicity of his style and the apparent ordinariness of his subject matter has tended to divert readers from the understanding that he was giving voice to the small farmer and farm labourer at a time when most fiction still dealt with squatter or drover, Governor or convict, bushranger or larrikin. But ordinary readers bought his stories in their thousands, in their tens of thousands, finally in their hundreds of thousands, (*The*

*Old Homestead*, one of his lesser-known books, sold 50,000 copies) at a time when Australia's total population was less than that of the larger European cities.

The sense of day-to-day struggle, of gentle pathos, of a sense of God but a rather casual attitude to religion, of large and boisterous family life, of just getting by, of neighbourhood help and neighbourhood feuding; these were all things people could relate to.

He rarely stepped outside the so-called Anglo-Celtic community, although he touched briefly on other European lives in a couple of short pieces and turned to the relationship of black and white in *Romance of the Runnibede*. If he had written it in the 1890s it would probably be seen as a landmark book but by the late 1920s it went largely unremarked. Mary Grant Bruce was writing more adventurous bush stories. Dame Mary Gilmore was tackling black-white relations in her poetry and paving the way for Judith Wright, Rex Ingamells and others. Alan Marshall was beginning his talks and articles about country life. Rudd had left it too late to really make much impact on this important area. It is a readable and pleasant book in many ways but it is a chronicle not an exploration, a record not an adventure. Perhaps this is what Rudd intended but it tends to slip over many interesting areas rather than develop them. It is told by the son of an English family which has taken up a large chunk of land west of the Condamine in the 19th century. The father is one of those with 'His hopes of treasure in Australia, and his heart in England.'

Rudd touches on the vexed question of race relations:

'The Governor nodded coldly. Then: "Do you think it justice or a fair deal to shoot these people without giving them a trial or the chance of a word being said in their defence?"

To which the Sub-Inspector responds:

"No, Mr Winchester, I do not ... Nor do I think it justice or a fair deal that whites should take this country from the blacks without giving them some compensation or a voice in the matter."

But he takes it no further.

He also touches on some interesting real people:

"Glennie, in years after, became an archbishop. He was the thinnest, leanest, and toughest man I ever remember, and could walk like a world-beater"; he did all his rounds of his parish on foot and "How many hundred miles it was ... the Lord only could tell." Glennie, who baptised the infant Steele Rudd, has a girls' school in Toowoomba named after him.

He also refers to another aspect when he says "Those prickly pear cuttings McLean gave me, I believe are doing well." Rather too well in fact.

McLean was J. D. (Jock) McLean who, with William Beit, bought Westbrook Station in 1852. My mother once met a woman who as a girl had gone there to work as a housemaid but "I wasn't there next morning—I'd seen all those floors!" McLean died fifteen years later after a fall from a horse. A neighbour of his, Pemberton Hodgson (who has Hodgson Vale and Hodgson's Creek named after him), wrote in his reminscences: "The earliest, the primitive inroads of the settlers, were marked with blood, the forests were ruthlessly seized, and the native tenants hunted down like their native dogs." These were probably the Giabal people—but Steele Rudd never disturbed his readers by dealing with the fate of those who had tenanted the Selections long before Dad and Dave and Grandad Rudd ...

And the prickly pear given away so casually brought tragedy to thousands of small farmers. (Rudd deals with this briefly in a story about unemployed men set to cutting the pear.) In the 1930s my grandfather gained a block near Millmerran in a land ballot but when he came to see his new land he found that from boundary to boundary it was an impenetrable thicket of prickly pear, higher than his head! But he was one of the

luckier ones. The cactoblastis moth was being trialled successfully. At that time he was living on the outskirts of Warwick so he was able to pick up some of the eggs which came glued to small sticks. But he was a man who never did anything today if he could do it tomorrow. When he finally set out for his new land the hundreds of eggs began hatching into grubs and crawling everywhere inside his car ...

\* \* \* \* \*

A. D. Hope in a 1956 *Meanjin* article compared Henry Lawson with Steele Rudd.

‘It is time now to say something on the other side of our comparison of Steele Rudd with Lawson, which has so far been all in Lawson’s favour. The main point against Rudd is his crudity of method. Lawson’s work is limited, but it is limited by the monotony of the bush life he describes. Within this limitation there is great freedom and variety of treatment of incident and people. In Rudd you have in addition to Lawson’s limitations a *creative* limitation which may be fatal to him in the end. But one thing Rudd has which Lawson lacks is tremendous vitality and gusto. Lawson’s world in the end is rather depressing, and Lawson himself is usually depressed about it. When you have said all the worst you can say about Steele Rudd, and you can be pretty damning, you find yourself returning to the inimitable bouyancy and vitality of the Selection stories.

There is another remarkable difference between the two men: for all their artistry Lawson’s characters remain characters in literature: Rudd’s have burst the bounds of literature and have become household names, household images in the minds of thousands of Australians who have never read the books at all. They have had numberless imitators, and if all the Dad and Dave stories now in circulation were laid end to end they would stretch to infinity; for there would be just as many more before we had finished with those already in existence.’

\* \* \* \* \*

I was last down that way in 1968 to go to the dispersal of a Greenmount stud, which stood the stallion Rycroft; I didn’t buy anything, not having that sort of money, but I confess to a fascination with auctions; as ‘Major Yeates’ puts it—“Several things combine in the spell that an auction casts upon my wife, as upon many others of her sex; the gamble, the competition, the lure of the second-hand, the thrill of possible treasure-trove. We proceeded along the coast road towards the mines, and I could hear Philippa expounding to her first-born the nature and functions of auctions, even as the maternal carnivore instructs her young in the art of slaughter.” It isn’t only women though. James Herriot, instead of bringing back something useful like a kitchen chair, comes home with *The Geography of the World in 24 Volumes*; Pa Sloane in the L. M. Montgomery story ‘Pa Sloane’s Purchase’ comes home with a baby; and Farley Mowat begins *The Boat Who Wouldn’t Float* with “I have an ingrained fear of auctions dating back to the third year of my life. In that year my father attended an auction as a means of passing an aimless afternoon, and he came away from it the bewildered possessor of thirty hives of bees—”

Towards the end of the day my mother, who had come too, was called to the microphone. I immediately, in kin with all ladybirds, thought our house must have burnt down—but no, she had won the raffle: a set of towels.

The Greenmount-Nobby area is also associated, although not so intimately, with a remarkable woman. Sister Kenny. Victor Cohn in his biography has her as a young woman with minimal experience and no certification visiting a number of polio patients on the Downs in 1911. Unsure what to do she telegraphed Dr McDonnell in Toowoomba who told her there was no known treatment and to do the best she could. Several months later she met him in Toowoomba.

“What about those polio cases?”

“There were more—worse than the first lot. But they’re all well now.”

“Splendid!” he said. “How badly are the children crippled?”

“Why, they’re not crippled. They’re entirely normal.”

“Do you mean to tell me they’re recovered?” He was shouting a little. People had to raise their voices so he could hear them, and he habitually shouted back.

“Why, of course!”

He looked at her skeptically and went to a file for her telegrams. “These read like severe cases, some of them already in the paralytic stage. Good heavens, nurse, such cases don’t just recover as completely as that!”

“But they’re all right. Should they be otherwise?”

“What did you do?”

“I used what I had—water, heat, blankets and my own hands. The children recovered.”

McDonnell calmed down a little and took her to Toowoomba Hospital. On a white bed lay a small boy, a recent poliomyelitis victim, undergoing immobilization treatment. Both his legs had been strapped on to splints, but he was still in pain.

“Here is a new case,” McDonnell told her. “Now show us what you did.”

His young country woman stepped forward. Patiently she removed the splints and the bandages that held them. She asked for hot water and a blanket, cut the blanket into sections, heated the strips and began packing them around the boy’s limbs. As the strips cooled she replaced them, and the child seemed to be getting more comfortable. Doctor and nurses watched with intense curiosity and strong disbelief. Later she told them how the stricken muscles looked to her—“in spasm”, contracting in pain, suddenly and involuntarily. To ease this, she used the moist heat. Then when the pain was relieved, she was able to begin reteaching movements that she told him were “forgotten”.

“Elizabeth,” McDonnell said, “you have treated those youngsters for symptoms exactly the opposite of the symptoms recognized by orthodox medical men.”

“You told me to do the best I could with the symptoms that presented themselves,” she answered.

“Yes, I know.”

\* \* \* \* \*

- November 15th: William Cowper  
Richmal Crompton  
W. H. Hodgson  
J. G. Ballard  
Aaron Marc Stein  
Gerhart Hauptmann  
Heinz Piontek  
Chen Jo-Hsi  
Anna De Noailles  
Gesualdo Bufalino  
Marianne Moore
- November 16th: Chinua Achebe  
Colin Thiele  
Joan Phipson  
Michael Arlen
- November 17th: Auberon Waugh  
Alison Lester  
Gregorio Lopez y Fuentes
- November 18th: Margaret Atwood  
Frank Gagliano  
Rodney Hall  
W. S. Gilbert

Mirosav Sasek  
 November 19th: John Burrows  
 Phyllis Bentley  
 Penelope Leach  
 Thomas Cook  
 November 20th: Nadine Gordimer  
 Balbir Singh Momi  
 Dulcie Gray  
 Deborah Eisenberg  
 Alistair Cook  
 Selma Lagerlöf  
 Miriam Akavia  
 Bai Hua  
 November 21st: François Voltaire  
 Charles Baretski  
 Beryl Bainbridge  
 November 22nd: Donagh McDonagh  
 George Eliot  
 André Gide  
 Jon Cleary  
 Richard Clutterbuck  
 Miguel Barbosa  
 November 23rd: Norman Hunter  
 Robert Barnard  
 Christopher Logue  
 Dorothy Sterling  
 Nigel Tranter  
 November 24th: Laurence Sterne  
 Harry Kemelman  
 Yoshika Uchida  
 Frances Hodgson Burnett  
 Garson Kanin  
 Carlos Bulosan  
 James Hogg  
 Nuruddin Farah  
 Manilo Argueta  
 Evangeline Walton  
 Maria Bashkirtseff

\* \* \* \* \*

To gird up sufficient courage to send out your first manuscript, to find sufficient funds to pay for paper and postage ... these were the two problems facing Frances Hodgson Burnett as a teenage girl in the mountains of East Tennessee. The family had moved from Manchester to the United States but their fortunes had steadily worsened. The first hurdle was overcome by her younger sister's encouragement, the second by two little girls, known as 'Aunt Cynthey's girls', who went out into the woods to pick and sell wild grapes. She says in her autobiography: 'It was Edith who arranged the detail. She saw the little mulatto girls and talked with them. They were greatly pleased at the idea of selling the grapes. They would pilot the party to places where they believed there were vines, and they would help in the gathering, themselves' ... "We shall get two or three dollars for these," said one of the pilots. "Me an' Ser'phine didn't have nigh onto as many that other time." The grapes bought paper and stamps. The second magazine Frances tried asked for a second story before deciding. She obliged.

The paper then bought both for the wonderful amount of \$35 and her career—which was to introduce ‘Little Lord Fauntleroy’ into our vocabularies—was launched.

\* \* \* \* \*

- November 25th: Murray Schisgal  
Rosalyn Drexler  
Brenda Niall
- November 26th: Charles Schulz  
Sally Farrell Odgers
- November 27th: Charles Austin Beard  
L. Sprague De Camp  
Jimmie Omura
- November 28th: William Blake  
Bernard Kops  
Nancy Mitford  
Stefan Zweig  
Randolph Stow  
Rita Mae Brown  
Alberto Moravia  
Claude Lévi-Strauss
- November 29th: C. S. Lewis  
Louisa May Alcott  
John Grillo  
Madelaine L’Engle  
José Yglesias
- November 30th: Jonathon Swift  
Mark Twain  
L. M. Montgomery  
Angela Brazil  
Theodor Mommsen  
Sir Winston Churchill  
Geoffrey Household  
John Dickson Carr

\* \* \* \* \*

If you were to ask The Man in the Street (is he still around?) what Sir Winston Churchill wrote he would quite likely say, oh well, that bit about ‘We will fight them on the beaches—’ or ‘Never has so much been owed to so few etc etc’ ... Churchill’s *words* live on—but what about his writing for which he gained a Nobel Prize for Literature?

His writing career began when he was only twenty when he went on behalf of the *Daily Graphic* to report on the war of independence in Cuba. He was twenty-three when he brought out his first book *The Malakand Field Force* about the war on the North-West Frontier; an area which would give the USSR just as many headaches seventy years later. He followed this up with another book about war, this time the war in the Sudan, *The River War*, then his *fin-de-siecle* novel *Savrola* of which he said “I have worked into the hero’s part a good deal of that sad cynical evolutionary philosophy which is so characteristic of modern thought—”

Churchill, as a young man, was very ‘modern’ in many of his attitudes. He chose as his agent the notorious writer, Frank Harris. Harris was a capable writer in his own right—editing *The Fortnightly Review*, *The Saturday Review*, and *Vanity Fair*, and writing *The Man Shakespeare*, *The Women of Shakespeare* and a major biography of Oscar Wilde. But it is his autobiographical *My Life and Loves* which is best remembered. One biographical note says: “Harris was one of the most accomplished

and polished liars of his time. It has been suggested that the erotic elements of this book are possibly more accurate than the rest; and certainly many of his sexual adventures have the breathless ring of truth about them” while another note says: “the sexual detail is unconvincing, unstimulating and boastful.”

Still, he possibly made a good literary agent.

The young Winston chose as his secretary the homosexual poet Edward Marsh who remained with him all his life. It was perhaps through Marsh that Winston had a brief affair with Ivor Novello, not because he felt that way inclined but because he wondered “what it would be like with a man.”

His writing is always influenced by his belief in Britain as the centre of an Empire, and a sense of ‘my country right or wrong’ but there are intriguing moments when his admiration for courage enables him to pay tribute in remote places—

“These guerilla forces are containing as many (German) divisions as are the British and American Armies put together” he wrote admiringly of the Albanian partisans and, elsewhere, he managed to admire the courage and tenacity of the Boers and the Dervishes of Sudan.

\* \* \* \* \*

José Martí was born in Cuba in 1853 and went to prison when he was only sixteen for working for Cuban independence. He began his writing career by founding a literary magazine in Venezuela and bringing out his first poetry collection in 1882, *Ismaelillo*, followed by two more collections, *Versos Libres* and *Versos Sencillos* (in which he expressed his philosophy of poetry ‘amo la sencillez, y creo en la necesidad de poner el sentimiento en formas llanas y sinceras—I love simplicity and I believe in the necessity of putting feeling into plain and sincere forms’). But his poetry went hand in hand with his dreams and his remarkable work in uniting the often-disagreeing factions of the independence movement. He has been described as “poet, intellectual and revolutionary” and it has also been said of his prose writing “His articles on American identity, on its literature and race problems looked far to the future and are often remarkably prophetic.” Professor Jean Franco supports this view—“His writings on race were profound and prophetic, for he realised that the white racist bred the black racist. He refused to identify men by their colour, believing that true man, white or black, will ‘treat each other with faith and kindness because they love virtue’.”

He was killed in the Cuban struggle to end Spanish rule in 1895; Spanish rule ended with the entry of the United States into the struggle but the Cubans then found themselves under American military occupation for four years then with a limited independence in which the United States, under the Platt Amendment, retained the right to naval bases as well as the right to interfere in most aspects of Cuban life. “The amendment was not repealed until 1934 and its psychological effect lingered on until 1959 (and beyond) as a powerful stimulus to the anti-American nationalism of Castro’s revolution.”

Almost running parallel to Martí’s career and hopes was the life of another remarkable poet: José Rizal in the Philippines.

He went to Spain to study medicine but in 1886 brought out his first and best-known novel *Noli Me Tangere* (which comes from the words Christ is supposed to have said to Mary Magdalene ‘Touch me not’); his second novel *El Filibusterismo* was banned in the Philippines. Rizal believed passionately in the cause of Philippine independence and in 1896 the Spanish authorities executed him for treason. But the effort to throw off Spain’s yoke was again frustrated by America’s entry into the struggle. With the Spanish departing the USA annexed the Philippines as a colony (after three years of bitter fighting in which the American general, Jacob Smith, expressed his philosophy: ‘I wish you to kill and burn: the more you kill and burn the better you will please me’; and of the casualties: “only 883 Americans died in battle, 3,349 more of disease. Of the 1

million dead Filipinos (out of a population of 6 million), 16,000 were guerrillas, 984,000 civilians.”) and retained the country as a colony until after the Second World War.

Not long before his death, Rizal had written the poem by which he is remembered: ‘El Ultimo Adios’—The Last Goodbye.

Imelda Marcos in her beautification drive in Metro Manila created a small museum to Rizal in Fort Santiago. No doubt she was thankful that it was the Spaniards rather than the Americans who had executed Rizal—but it is a pleasant innocuous little museum. Less innocuous is the continuing rumour that below the Fort, in the closed-up dungeons and subterranean passages, is buried some of Japan’s looted treasure from World War II—and the skeletons of the Allied POWs who were forced to extend the tunnels before being buried alive with the looted artifacts and bullion.

\* \* \* \* \*

Do you remember the outcry when it was suggested that Colleen McCullough had plagiarised L. M. Montgomery’s lesser-known story *The Blue Castle* in her book set in the Blue Mountains, *The Ladies of Missalonghi*?

It was suggested she’d pinched both plot and details. I don’t believe she’d done anything of the kind—though, in the end, the controversy probably gave both books a bit of a boost.

George Polti suggests that there are only thirty-six dramatic situations—so I suppose we all have to double up somewhere. It is true that McCullough and Montgomery use the same plot device—but one as fantasy and the other as the sort of simple spelling mix-up that can occur. They both draw on the same sort of turn-of-the-century society with its restricting conventions; the women wear similar colours and styles—but this was the fault of far-away fashion arbiters who decreed what women, ageing spinsters, widows, women of different classes, should be seen wearing. Nor is it so strange that both families kept their money in a Bushell’s coffee jar. My husband keeps his small change in an International Roast tin—but the only brands I remember from my childhood are Bushells and Turk’s Head—and keeping their money in a Turk’s Head might be misinterpreted by later generations.

But, undoubtedly, *The Blue Castle* is the better book. In it, Montgomery demonstrates her acute understanding of the malice and misery which were often the lot of the unmarried woman, the constant little digs and slurs and pinpricks, the use of the spinster daughter as the butt of family humour or the person to be put upon in times of family troubles or financial embarrassments.

A biographical note on Harriet Beecher Stowe says: “one of her sons drowned in 1857, another became an ex-army drunkard, her twin daughters were old maids and another daughter a morphine addict.” With spinsterhood made to sound like a form of moral degeneracy is it any wonder that women entered into unsuitable and unhappy marriages to escape its stigma?

McCullough’s book lacks the consistency and inner coherence of Montgomery’s book. Her characters ‘partake’ of their meals but equally they ‘give Bach another belting’. The American Civil War is seen as something in the far past even though it would have come within the lifetime of Missy’s mother and aunt. The ladies are beset by mice but got rid of Missy’s kitten because it would be ‘another mouth to feed’. The supposedly lady-like Missy after hearing a stranger say ‘Bloody hell, it’s colder than a stepmother’s tits out there!’ ends up thinking ‘Oh, such a *nice* man!’ Americanisms like ‘front stoop’ creep in, as well as Australian slang—‘spot on’, ‘lairy’, ‘boss-chook’, ‘go bite your bum’—which sit uneasily upon the supposed class and nature of the ladies of Missalonghi.

\* \* \* \* \*

A list of popular books for teenagers in *The Writer* said: “It’s interesting to note,

however, that classics like *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery and *The Yearling* by Marjorie Rawlings, are also on the list—proof that along with “nitty-gritty” books, teenagers are reading sentimental stories.”

My dictionary defines sentimental as: tending to indulge the emotions excessively or making a direct appeal to the emotions, esp. to romantic feelings.

Now I would query whether *Anne of Green Gables* is sentimental in that sense; its continuing popularity (and its ability to cross deep cultural divides) is directly attributable to its sense of universality. Girls may no longer want puffed sleeves but they can yearn for psychaedelic tank-tops. They may not long to go to a Sunday School picnic but they may yearn to be allowed to go with their friends to see Arnie Schwarzenegger in *True Lies*. And loneliness, death, discrimination and poverty are hardly modern inventions.

Miss Cornelia in *Anne’s House of Dreams* says “He was a home boy, ten years old, and Millison just about worked him to death. The poor little creature was always so tired he fell asleep right off whenever he went to church or anywhere he could sit still for a few minutes.”

It’s hard now to imagine the casualness with which couples (and sometimes single people) could adopt children or gain the free labour of children in return for a little bit of food and a hayloft to sleep in. The enduring appeal of *Anne* is partly because she comes out of a life where she is passed unwanted from family to family, useful only in that she can help with children and do housework, and into a home where eventually she is loved and happy. But a century comes between us and a world where children were treated with such casual unconcern for the hours they worked, for their health, their well-being, their moral welfare and their education.

The trend is away from growing-up books to single-issue books—divorce, death, moving house, learning to swim—but I am profoundly grateful that I grew up with the older kind of book; not because they were necessarily better written but because stories which covered years of a young person’s life helped provide a greater sense of perspective.

Emily in *Emily of New Moon* loses her father at the beginning of the book and her relatives draw lots to see who will take her. So the book is largely about her new life in a new place with its different habits, requirements, and traditions—and the constant adjustments she must make and that her relatives must make to her. But, equally importantly, it is a book about healing; the healing power of kindness, generosity, time, being busy, meeting new people, discovering new kinds of friendships, learning new skills, seeing family and inheritance in wider perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

Lucy Maud Montgomery was born in Prince Edward Island; then, as now, a small and not very important Canadian province. But she took the remote rural community she’d been born into and made it world famous.

One Saturday I was selling old books and other odds and ends on a Salamanca market stall—and I happened to have 2 L. M. Montgomerys and 2 Louisa M. Alcotts. The Montgomerys were snapped up immediately by a woman who told me her granddaughter had just discovered her and couldn’t get enough of her books. A little while later two women stopped and looked at the Alcott books—*Little Women* and *Jo’s Boys*. Naturally I hoped for a sale but they shook their heads after a minute or two and sighed and one of them said “The kids these days don’t go for her any more. I suppose she’s too old-fashioned.”

Yet for many years the women were seen almost as national counterparts; Montgomery was doing for Canadian girls what Alcott had done for American girls. Though *Little Women* was almost *de rigueur* for birthdays when I was young she seemed to fade—while Montgomery continued to find new devotees; a friend in her

thirties recently told me she'd just discovered Montgomery in the library and was 'lapping them up'.

So what is it that helps a book cross time?

The Montgomery books mostly have dresses to the feet and people riding in buggies, they refer to long forgotten happenings such as the visit by the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII). But perhaps because Montgomery was largely writing for the American market—and Americans, then as now, were not particularly interested in the minutiae of Canadian life—she had to choose carefully between those aspects of life which would be understood and enjoyed by readers who would never see Prince Edward Island and those which would find ready understanding only among local readers.

Her background props are very ordinary—there are no magnificent mountains, glaciers, historical buildings, volcanoes, waterfalls (when Mr Carpenter asks “where did you see a mountain cascade in Prince Edward Island?” Emily has to reply “Nowhere—there's a picture of one in Dr Burnley's library”)—but they take on an added importance because of their accessibility. The bark of a tree, a frosted fern, mice tracks in some spilt flour, the changing seasons, the sound of the wind, lichen on a fence, old gravestones, sunset, the sky after rain—and her message is a vital one for children who will never see mountains or glaciers or other grandeurs: find beauty in the things you have.

There is another important message in the books—though it is never belaboured. Know your talents. Aspire to use them.

Anne must have been born in the 1860s to have a teenage daughter (the youngest of seven children) in 1914 but she attends university, and becomes the principal of a high school. Montgomery presents no overt arguments in favour of higher education for women or equal opportunities—but she gets the message over very readably.

As in *Anne of the Island*—

“But I'm disgruntled because six women have been here to say good-bye to me, and every one of the six managed to say something that seemed to take the colour right out of life and leave it as grey and dismal and cheerless as a November morning.”

“Spiteful old cats!” was Gilbert's elegant comment.

“Oh, no, they weren't,” said Anne seriously. “That is just the trouble. If they had been spiteful I wouldn't have minded them. But they are all nice kind, motherly souls, who like me and whom I like, and that is why what they said, or hinted, had such undue weight with me. They let me see they thought I was crazy going to Redmond and trying to take a B.A., and ever since I've been wondering if I am. Mrs Peter Sloane sighed and said she hoped my strength would hold out till I got through; and at once I saw myself a hopeless victim of nervous prostration at the end of my third year; Mrs Eben Wright said it must cost an awful lot to put in four years at Redmond; and I felt all over me that is was unpardonable in me to squander Marilla's money and my own on such a folly; Mrs Jasper Bell said she hoped I wouldn't let college spoil me, as it did some people; and I felt in my bones that the end of my four Redmond years would see me a most insufferable creature, thinking I knew it all, and looking down on everything and everybody in Avonlea; Mrs Elisha Wright said she understood that Redmond girls, especially those who belonged to Kingsport, were 'dreadful dressy and stuck-up', and she guessed I wouldn't feel much at home among them; and I saw myself, a snubbed, dowdy, humiliated country girl, shuffling through Redmond's classic halls in copper-toed boots.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Montgomery, and she wasn't alone in this, dreamed of having the time, the skill, the opportunity, to write *The Great Canadian Novel*—and had to watch her dream ever-retreating under pressure from her publishers and readers not to mention two small

boys, a busy parish, and a husband suffering from religious melancholia.

So who did write The Great Canadian Novel? I have no idea. I'm not even sure there is one. The first Margaret Atwood I read, *Surfacing*, had two full pages of laudatory reviews before I could get down to reading the book which, understandably, came as a bit of an anti-climax—and I'm not sure that two full pages of laudatory reviews automatically made it The Great Canadian Novel anyway. Nor could I put my finger on The Great Australian Novel ...

And it just might be that the pressures on Montgomery saved her from a pointless rushing down the forest path after that Holy Grail. If she'd had fewer pressures she might have *enjoyed* her writing more—but how many Canadian writers of adult fiction get thousands of fan letters each year—and how many writers, full stop, have been able to provide a bridge over that dangerous gap between childhood and adolescent reading?

\* \* \* \* \*

December 1st: Ernst Toller  
Max Stout  
Woody Allen  
December 2nd: Mary Elwyn Patchett  
Helen Adam  
December 3rd: Joseph Conrad  
Kate O'Brien  
José Sionil

\* \* \* \* \*

Alan Villiers writes: "Conrad himself, when he commanded the iron barque Otago—a sweet-hulled little sailing beauty—once determined to north-about through Torres Straits on some passage which should not have taken him that way at all: Melbourne towards Mauritius, I think it was. To go the Torres Straits way he had to negotiate the Coral Sea, then very poorly charted, and the Torres Strait itself was a maze of sand-banks and ill-defined reefs. But he made it." Villiers admired Conrad and named his own ship after him.

Harry O'May in his 1954 *Wrecks in Tasmanian Waters* gives the history of the Otago.

"The Otago was an iron barque of 367 tons, built in Glasgow in 1869. She had a very interesting history. She sailed out of Adelaide for some years owned by Henry Simpson & Sons, Snadden & Taylor. At that time she was trading to Mauritius and the East. In 1887 her master, Captain Snadden, was buried at sea in the Gulf of Siam. The Mate took her into Bangkok. Joseph Conrad, who was then an officer on S.S. Vida, trading in Eastern waters, was instructed to proceed to Bangkok and take command of the Otago. After getting her in a seaworthy condition he sailed her to Singapore and thence to Sydney and Melbourne. From the latter port he took her through Torres Strait to Mauritius, then back to Adelaide. There Joseph Conrad left her and returned to England. The Otago was his only command and it was about this little vessel that he wrote his story "The Shadow-Line".'

Conrad presents the story of his command in these words:

The next thing I saw was the top-knot of silver hair surmounting Captain Ellis's smooth red face, which would have been apoplectic if it hadn't had such a fresh appearance.

Our deputy-Neptune had no beard on his chin, and there was no trident to be seen standing in a corner anywhere, like an umbrella. But his hand was holding a pen—the official pen, far mightier than the sword in making or marring the fortune of simple toiling men. He was looking over his shoulder at my advance.

When I came well within range he saluted me by a nerve-shattering, 'Where have you been all this time?'

As it was no concern of his I did not take the slightest notice of the shot. I said simply that I had heard there was a master needed for some vessel, and being a sailing-ship man I thought I would apply ...

He interrupted me. 'Why! Hang it! *You* are the right man for that job—if there had been twenty others after it. But no fear of that. They are all afraid to catch hold. That's what's the matter.'

He was irritated. I said innocently, 'Are they, sir? I wonder why?'

'Why!' he fumed. 'Afraid of the sails. Afraid of a white crew. Too much trouble. Too much work. Too long out here. Easy life and deck-chairs more their mark. Here I sit with the Consul-General's cable before me, and the only man fit for the job not to be found anywhere. I began to think you were funking it too ...'

O'May continues the history of the Otago:

"Later, about 1900, Huddart Parker & Company purchased the Otago and she, like many another smart vessel, joined the shabby sisterhood and was towed to Hobart. There she served as a coal hulk until 1931. Then she was sold under the hammer to highest bidder, Captain Dodge, for £1, and on January 25th of that year she was towed to her last resting place, alongside the old brigantine Silver Cloud, on the Eastern bank of the Derwent seven miles above Hobart. Many Conrad fans, visiting Hobart, take a trip by car to gaze upon her remains. A short time ago one of Joseph Conrad's American fans instructed a friend about to sail for Australia to visit Hobart and see if he could find any data on the Otago. He did so and was taken up to inspect her and was successful in rescuing her steering wheel for his friend. It was packed and forwarded to America and was generously dispatched to England. It is now in a Nautical Museum.

There has been much controversy of late over the hulk at Hobart. Some people maintain that this is not Conrad's Otago. This doubt should be set at rest for, cut into her main beam, are the figures of 60.463 which correspond with the figures 60.463 in the Marine Underwriters Register of Australian and New Zealand Shipping."

Many years ago Nan Chauncy's sister, Eve, went to Otago Bay and climbed up on to the old hulk (which, then, still had its decking and wheelhouse); an old man came out of a little shack in the bush along the shoreline and roared at her to get down from his ship. She said she hadn't known it was his ship. He waved a hand round the bay and said "They are *all* my ships!"

Was this Captain Dodge who had bought the Otago for £1? And was it after his death that the process of "rescuing" parts of the Otago by Conrad fans finally reduced the old ship to nothing more than a few ribs in the water?

\* \* \* \* \*

I have trouble with *Heart of Darkness*. Oh, I know it has been called "among the half-dozen greatest short novels in the English language". But I have problems with the idea of a group sitting hour after hour listening in silence to one man speak. Did they never say "He sounds a rum sort of cove, doesn't he?" or "Cor lumme, you wouldn't get me out there if you paid me!" Still, this is an accepted literary device so I won't quibble.

No, the heart of my trouble is the book's racism.

In a book of 69 pages (some formats make it a little longer) Conrad describes the Africans as 'niggers' 8 times, 'black' 12 times, 'savages' 9 times, 'brutes' twice, and 'cannibals' twice. The interstices are then filled up with words and phrases like 'sinister', 'grotesque', 'despair', 'nightmares', 'miserable', 'decaying', 'fiendishly', 'a violent babble of uncouth sounds', 'treacherous appeal', 'hidden evil', 'fierce nostrils', 'savage discords', 'savage clamour', 'fool-nigger', 'unspeakable rites' and 'unspeakable secrets', 'barbarous ornaments', 'weird incantation', 'mysterious frenzy', 'strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language', 'wild glances and savage movements' and 'diabolical love and unearthly hate'.

Most essays skirt this matter but two main excuses seem to be on offer—a) Marlowe is not Conrad and fiction cannot be taken as fact, and b) the words are symbols, suggestions, not straightforward explanations and descriptions.

Perhaps.

An old cow bell may symbolise and suggest many things but if you get beaten over the head often enough by an old cow bell it ends up being nothing but an old cow bell.

It is the *relentlessness* with which Conrad caricatures the Africans. It could be said that Conrad belonged to his place and time; colonialism required a particular mind-set and to say that *Heart of Darkness* is actually an anti-colonial novel doesn't really stand up. We accept that kind of put down of non-white people because it occurs with such monstrous regularity in good books and bad, published alongside *Heart of Darkness*. But I find myself musing on a book written nearly 400 years before it—Antonio Pigafetta's *First Voyage Round the World, By Magellan*. Pigafetta was young, of knightly birth but not particularly well-educated, he hadn't travelled widely, he was a product of his age—yet his pages are alive with a sympathetic curiosity. Some of his stories, of course, are only hearsay but that doesn't alter his *tone*.

It has been suggested that the people of Patagonia couldn't have been giants and that Pigafetta was just making this up. But as he went ashore and met up with them, even recording some of their words (such as Capae = bread and Oli = water; though if the Tehuelche were like their neighbours they probably had dozens of words for water—running water, still water, rain water, spring water, melt water, clear water, muddy water—each with its own precise term), he could not help but notice their height. We know that there are pituitary and genetic giants, we know radiation can cause an increase in growth, we know that they had none of the diseases which stunted European children ... in this century Hakon Mielche could still write of their southern neighbours “the Ona Indians whom people have known and measured in our times, have been strong and well built, with an average height exceeding that of the white races. It is quite usual to come across Ona Indians some inches over six feet in height”.

Pigafetta writes sympathetically of the people of the Ladrones (now the Marianas) “These people live in liberty and according to their will, for they have no lord or superior; they go quite naked, and some of them wear beards, and have their hair down to the waist. They wear small hats, after the fashion of the Albanians ... ”

In Timor he says “all were naked like those of the neighbouring islands, and wear in their ears small gold rings with tufts of silk hanging from them; on their arms they wear many rings of gold and copper, which often cover them up to the elbow, The men are naked like the women, and wear attached to their necks round plates of gold, and on their heads reed combs ornamented with gold rings.”

Much more interesting than dismissing them as “naked savages”; Pigafetta's people are people, genuinely interesting in their own right and in their own myriad ways.

But between the 16th and 19th centuries many things intervened which required savages.

Colonialism needed savages on whom civilization would fall as dew from heaven—

Darwinism needed savages as ‘the missing link’—

Industrialization needed savages who would not understand the value of their iron-ore hills and would not have heard of unions or Child Labour Acts—

Evangelism needed savages to whom the Word would come and who could be presented on magic-lantern slides in a way that the angry poor of Manchester or Dublin could not—

Nor did it change until well into the 20th century. In the 1950s the American

government could be talking unselfconsciously of West New Guinea (West Papua/Papua Barat) as “a few thousand square miles of cannibal land” and President Kennedy—“those Papuans of yours are 700,000 and living in the Stone Age.”

Noni Sharp in *The Morning Star in Papua Barat* writes: “The Biak-Numfor people had for centuries used and worked iron; they were familiar with the processes of pre-industrial artisan skills.”

And here grew up a fascinating movement of what we might call spiritual and cultural renewal; the Great Korero Movement which developed the Morning Star flag—“Sampari-Kumeséri, the Star of Korero, lay upon a red background on the left hand side; the right hand side is composed of blue and white horizontal stripes. Blue, white, red signify hope, peace and courage. In later times the hope for, and confidence in, the possibility of the realisation of the Korerois of all Papua Barat became a source of courage to resist annihilation.” In the 1930s this movement, sometimes dismissed merely as a cargo cult was led by a remarkable woman called Angganitha bin Damai. Bin Damai means woman of peace but “Bin Damai also expresses a philosophy of non-violence: ‘Do not shed blood, for blood is a bar to renewal’—” The Dutch burned down Angganitha’s house and those in her village of Insumbabi and imprisoned her.

The reader is left with the disconcerting thought that the Dutch and the Americans might have learnt much of value from the people they handed over so casually to Indonesian colonialism in 1963. A young Italian lad of the early 16th century would have seen it.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 4th: Rainer Maria Rilke  
Thomas Carlyle  
Katharine Susannah Prichard  
Jane Aiken Hodge  
December 5th: Christina Rossetti  
Flora Thompson  
Joan Didion  
Sheridan Morley

\* \* \* \* \*

Frances Thomas writes: “Christina is still seen as a marginal poet, while ‘Rossetti’ is mentioned as though he were the only poet of that name. Christina’s works are in danger of being shunted away into ‘Womens’ Studies’; while this is sympathetic, it might become yet another way of ignoring her.’

Perhaps. But I thought I would have ‘Sing no sad songs for me’ put on a plaque for when I die—so that will help.

And I recently came upon her poem ‘A Crown of Windflowers’ in a children’s anthology. This was unexpected—yet it captures the eternal desire of children to find a way to fly.

Twist me a crown of windflowers  
That I may fly away  
To hear the singers at their song,  
And players at their play.

Put on your crown of windflowers;  
But whither would you go?  
Beyond the surging of the sea  
And the storms that blow.

—But it is an impossible dream—  
Alas! your crown of windflowers

Can never make you fly;  
I twist them in a crown today,  
And tonight they die.

Thomas says of Christina's poems—"These juxtapositions are characteristic of Christina's poetry; dearth versus plentitude, starvation versus content, bitter cold versus glowing warmth, chilly white versus red. It is partly this that gives her lines the peculiar poignant bitter-sweet flavour—"

And there is that pervading melancholy. Thomas explains it away—"We tend to think that all devastation in a woman's life is caused by men, so that here Christina is recording an unhappy love affair. In a society where the power base was jealously occupied by men this may very often have been the case, but there are other possibilities." She plumps for Christina's religious rigidities and the difficulties they caused a woman of volatile temperament. Possibly. But I often think of the memoirs by the honorary British Consul in Punta Arenas (Chile) who said he had personally known 20 suicides there—and he blamed the weather. There is a pervading greyness about Christina's life; while her compatriots were going to Italy she rarely stirred from the family's narrow dark rather forbidding London house surrounded on all sides by similarly forbidding grey-fronted houses. Is it any wonder that she turns so often in her poems to the warmth of flowers and fruit, of trees and hedges ...

\* \* \* \* \*

December 6th: Evelyn Underhill  
Sylvia Townsend Warner  
Jim Kjelgaard  
Stephen Edgar  
Richard Barham

December 7th: Willa Cather  
Joanna Kraus  
Jack Gray  
Joyce Cary  
Noam Chomsky  
Susan Isaacs  
C. R. Nicole

December 8th: Padraic Colum  
G. A. Henty  
B. Bjornson  
Jean Garrigue  
James Thurber

\* \* \* \* \*

I always remember the film of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* simply because it is the only film I ever squealed aloud in; that screech, or whatever it was, haunted me for years. Whenever someone invited me to a horror movie—I remember being invited to see *Horror on Snape Island* in Hong Kong and sitting there with my mouth clamped shut; my new-found acquaintances must have thought me very odd—this old fear would rise up. Recently I borrowed that old Danny Kaye film (based on Thurber's book) and although I didn't find it scary this time I enjoyed it; so often old films are embarrassing viewed after an interval of thirty or forty years.

But it all reminds me of that vexed question. Should you read films turned into books, see books turned into films?

Many films are disappointing, not because of the change in the plot—that may be inevitable if the original plot hinged upon a person's *thoughts*—but because a character you loved has had their nationality, their looks, even their style changed beyond recognition. I have always disliked the series of *All Creatures Great and Small* because

a very young, very likeable Scotsman has been turned into a balding cool Englishman.

\* \* \* \* \*

What about Thurber himself? I realised I knew nothing about him except that he liked to create rather terrible old women. Of himself he said: ‘James Thurber was born in Columbus, Ohio, where so many awful things happened to him, on 8 December 1894. He was unable to keep anything on his stomach until he was seven years old, but grew to 6 feet 1½ inches tall and to weigh a hundred and fifty-four lb. fully dressed for winter. He began to write when he was ten years old and to draw when he was fourteen. Quick to arouse, he is very hard to quiet and people often just go away. At Buckeye Lake, Ohio, in 1923, he won a canary bird throwing baseballs at dolls. He has never been taken at fan-tan. He uses the Thurber over-bidding convention and even the most skilled partners have no chance with him. He never listens when anybody else is talking, preferring to keep his mind a blank until they get through, so he can talk. His favourite book is *The Great Gatsby*. His favourite author is Henry James. He wears excellent clothes very badly and can never find his hat. He is Sagittarius with the moon in Aries and gets along fine with persons born between the 20th and the 24th of August.’

And what of his writing? The dozens of animal fables that he wrote for the *New Yorker* are still lots of fun. For instance, in ‘The Wolf Who Went Places’ a preppy young wolf buys a Blitzen Bearcat, “a combination motorcar and airplane” in which he hopes to circumnavigate the world in 80 minutes. In fact it “took him only 78.5 minutes from the time he knocked down the Washington Monument on his takeoff to the time he landed where it had stood” and his prowess attracts a wild young, equally speed-crazy “wolfess”. Together, they come to their expected end and the moral of the story? *Where most of us end up there is no knowing, but the hellbent get where they are going.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Guy Endore wrote a novel rather than a biography about Alexandre Dumas, calling it *King of Paris*. It makes most writers seem a little pallid, a little lesser-than-life, by contrast—though I’m glad I didn’t have Dumas as a father or a husband—

—‘And the publishers continued to publish him because Dumas always had the good sense to borrow so heavily from them that they were forced to keep pushing his works so as to balance their accounts.’

—‘Dumas simply didn’t write letters. “I often sit down to write a letter,” he used to explain, “but I always end up by selling it as an article or a story. After all, I’m too well paid for whatever I may write to fold it up and mail it off to a single reader when I can just as well have ten thousand readers and some cash into the bargain.” ’

—When he discovered that his printer knew how to punctuate—‘From that day on, despite the hundreds of thousands of manuscript pages he wrote, Dumas was never guilty of a single punctuation mark, neither comma nor period, neither question mark nor dash.’

—And he has Dumas say “Didn’t I do the same with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? Sure I took a few liberties with Homer. But Homer himself would thank me for making him once more popular and readable. Imagine people reading Homer again as a serial with their daily paper!

“Ah, no! You can’t do that! Out of their towers swarmed the scholars, crying, Blasphemy! Heresy! Leze-majesty! And they frightened the poor editors until the serialization of Homer was stopped, and the scholars wrapped him up again like a mummy and took him back into the tower. But the people! The people! What do they get out of all this scholarly protection of the classics? Nothing! And do you remember? All the dry-as-dusts saying, Next thing—you know what?—that terrible Dumas will be selling the Bible for a serial. And why not? Do you know of any better story than that of Moses rescuing the Jews from Pharaoh? Do you know a better story than the Passion of

our Lord? Of course I shall make it into a serial some day! And it will be one of my best, too!”

Guy Endore, a little confusingly, also wrote a horror novel called *The Werewolf of Paris* which sparked a movie *The Werewolf of London* which helped usher in a spate of Werewolf movies such as *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* and *I was a Teenage Werewolf* before being re-done, though with many changes and moved to Spain this time, as *The Curse of the Werewolf*. After that werewolves seemed to go into decline—or perhaps they were overtaken by movies such as *The Exorcist* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*. But terrifying as werewolves might be as a plot device I wasn’t convinced that anyone had ever actually *believed* in them. This little piece in Basil Copper’s book about them in fact and fiction shocked me deeply.

“It has been estimated that in France alone between the early sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, well over thirty thousand people perished in a holocaust of revenge, when neighbour denounced neighbour to the authorities as a lycanthrope.

An even more horrible aspect of this black time was the widely held belief in Germany, France and Eastern Europe, that the werewolf could change his skin by literally turning it inside out. So that when he appeared as a man he wore his human skin outwards. But when he transformed himself into a werewolf he reversed his covering and wore the furry side uppermost. Incredible as it may seem, many people were literally cut to pieces by their accusers, who attempted to reverse their skins to reveal the fur beneath.”

\* \* \* \* \*

L. M. Montgomery discusses death in *Anne’s House of Dreams*—

“Isn’t ‘obituary’ an awful ugly word? ... There’s only one uglier word that I know of, and that’s *relict*. Lord, Anne, dearie, I may be an old maid, but there’s this comfort in it—I’ll never be any man’s ‘relict.’”

“It *is* an ugly word,” said Anne, laughing. “Avonlea graveyard was full of old tombstones ‘sacred to the memory of So-and-so, *relict* of the late So-and-so.’” It always made me think of something worn-out and moth-eaten. Why is it that so many of the words connected with death are so disagreeable? I do wish that the custom of calling a dead body ‘the remains’ could be abolished.” ...

Paul Barber in *Vampires, Burial and Death: Folklore and Reality* writes, “And here we must digress for a moment to consider terminology: *casket* and *coffin* both derive from the French and refer to a container in which a corpse is buried. If you were to use the word *coffin* in a modern funeral home, however, you would be corrected: the proper word is *casket*. It is difficult to get people in the industry to define the difference between the two words, and *Webster’s* (Unabridged, 2nd ed.) refers to a casket simply as “a coffin, especially a costly one.” I suspect that an inexorable linguistic change is taking place: in time, words of this sort lose their dignity, a commodity of great importance in the burial industry. *Casket* will presumably undergo this process as well, eventually, and we will have to beg another word from the French.”

As we’re not taking anything from the French at the moment we might prefer a Warlpiri word or, given the importance of funerals in Ireland, some Gaelic terminology. And isn’t ‘corpse’ a horrible word?

\* \* \* \* \*

December 9th: John Milton  
Joel Chandler Harris  
December 10th: Emily Dickinson  
Rumer Godden  
Melvil Dewey  
Nelly Sachs

“She is one of the oddest and most intriguing personalities in literary history” Ted Hughes writes of Emily Dickinson. But is “odd” the right description?

The mid to late nineteenth century was a kind of hot-house period, almost schizoid in its intensity for those women blessed with income and skills, genius even. What, I find myself thinking, was the fate of women like Beatrix Potter if they could not similarly find an outlet for rare and imperative skills.

Women were physically constrained and hampered by tight-fitting boned corsets; it was hard to sit down because of the bustles attached over their bottoms, their steps were made mincing by yards of heavy material dragging round their ankles ...

They were constrained by the need for chaperones when they went out, when men came to visit; a moment of real solitude became, for many women, the Holy Grail. The hobbies they could take up, the work they could do, the entertainments they could go to were limited ...

They were mentally, morally and spiritually strait-jacketed by the beliefs of their fathers, their clergy, their relatives ...

Dorothy Sayers has Miss Climpson in *Strong Poison* say: “I am *grateful* to have lived to see such changes, because whatever old-fashioned people may say about the greater *decorum* and *modesty* of women in Queen Victoria’s time, those who can remember the old conditions know how *difficult* and *humiliating* they were!”

This kind of intense italicized thinking sometimes spilled over into what the medical profession was so quick to label hysteria ... but which Emily Dickinson undoubtedly understood more clearly—

If the stillness is Volcanic  
In the human face  
When upon a pain Titanic  
Features keep their place—

As she brought it forth in dashes, capitals, “awful Tempest”—“Hour of Lead”—“boiling Wheel” and “delirious Hem” I think she understood with intense clarity that intertwined fear and excitement which comes with the quickening to a mystic experience of the immensity of God; she knew how pretty well-turned Wordsworthian pictures could never capture the maelstrom of inner experience. Ukranian poet Vasyl Stus wrote: “Dear God, immaculate rage I beg of you.” I think this is what Emily Dickinson *had*; whether she *wanted* it is another matter.

Women were expected to be pure in thought and deed and by this purity to be a restraining and calming influence on their menfolk.

It *is* a beautiful promise—“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”—but I am sure she understood that purity was not an absence of desire nor that *seeing* God was something to be casually and mundanely contemplated ... She remains an intriguing fascinating challenging writer—but odd only if we see in the way of the mystic something to be avoided in favour of so-called ‘normal’ life ...

Unusual too was the career of another writer born into the prudish, prudent, prurient Victorian age: that of George Borrow. While other schoolboys were cramming Latin and Greek for regurgitation in examinations he was acquiring a working knowledge of Irish, Welsh and Romany, following those with Hebrew and Armenian.

Nevertheless, the beginning of his writing career was straight-forward enough. He applied to a publisher in London who was willing to take him on but “I expect you, sir, to compile six volumes of Newgate lives and trials, each volume to contain by no manner of means less than one thousand pages; the remuneration which you will receive when the work is completed will be fifty pounds, which is likewise intended to

cover any expenses you may incur in procuring books, papers, and manuscripts necessary for the compilation—”; in between, he was expected to work as the general office dogsbody.

\* \* \* \* \*

George Borrow is best remembered for his *Borrow's Bible in Spain*. My copy once belonged to the Balmain Parochial Lending Library—so what has been its history in the hundred years since it left those shelves—and was not returned? In the front it says unequivocally ‘Members keeping a volume beyond the time allowed, will be fined 3 pence per week’. At 3d per week for 100 years it has become a very valuable—if very tattered—book but perhaps, like its author, it was possessed of a restless wandering spirit.

\* \* \* \* \*

I once heard a librarian say despairingly, “People who wouldn’t *dream* of taking threepence from you, see nothing wrong with taking and keeping books worth much more—”

\* \* \* \* \*

George Borrow seems an odd choice to spread protestantism in Spain—though he worked conscientiously—because he was always more interested in the people on the fringes of society; vagrants, tramps, shepherds, and of course gypsies. And he found them a-plenty in his Spain—“It was at this town of Badajoz, the capital of Estremadura, that I first fell in with those singular people, the Zincali, Gitános, or Spanish gypsies ... It was here that I first preached the gospel to the gypsy people, and commenced that translation of the New Testament in the Spanish gypsy tongue, a portion of which I subsequently printed at Madrid.” As later commentators have suggested that however quick an ear Borrow may have had, spelling other languages correctly wasn’t his strong point, I wonder what actually went into his Spanish gypsy bible?

Just before the Spanish Civil War Australian writer, Nina Murdoch (who founded the ABC children’s club ‘The Argonauts’), travelled in Spain. She too writes of the Spanish gypsies.

“Some of them are really plain, being flat-nosed and thick-lipped. Not all of them are dark-haired. But every one has dazzling white teeth, And there springs from the least charming such an abundance of vitality that the air is wicked with it. You catch the eye of one of them, and when she laughs towards you you laugh back with the knowledge of there being between you a delicious secret—the oldest, richest secret in the world: that life is sweet!

At cave doorways sit old, dark, hawk-eyed women with wrinkled yellow faces and white hair. But they do not wear the black frock nor even the black shawl of the elderly. They are still *gitanas* for all that their hair is no longer dark. Wear black? Ah, no! Crimson and orange are still for them, and gold ear-rings dangling!”

And Irish writer, Walter Starkie, also wrote of the Spanish gypsies—

“Last spring (1947) when I was wandering aimlessly about the outskirts of Barcelona, I came across a camp of Gypsy Coppersmiths. They belonged to the tribe of Cristo-jordi, many of whose members I had met in my travels through Spain and Africa in former years. These coppersmiths had wandered from country to country during the six years of war and their passports, which they proudly showed me, had been guaranteed by the International Red Cross. The chief of the tribe narrated his adventures in the drawling voice of chante-fable: they were mainly accounts of frenzied flights from police and Gestapo, and agonizing quests for food. As a primitive Gypsy, he thought of the World as a spacious garden full of fine, fat hedgehogs; “The Lord will provide” was his motto, for He feedeth the Gypsies as He doth the birds of the air; but all this harmony is destroyed by War. War is the product of the “Beng” or devil and his quadruple team of apocalyptic horsemen; a series of cataclysms that descends upon the

World, leaving it as parched as the desert. "It's hard on us Romanichals," said he, "seeing that we give a wide berth to all and sundry; we don't meddle with folks, nor do we take part in their quarrels for our ways don't cross." His one obsession was the number of bridges that had been destroyed. Being a Gypsy he looked upon a bridge as a quasi-sacred symbol, the link between one country and another. Bridges must be propitiated, because of the rooted belief that a living woman was always walled up in a bridge by Manoli, the magic builder, in order that it might defy all the devils of destruction. "Bridges are our refuge," said he, "and we always camped beneath 'em, but now there's not one standing and there'll be no intercourse between brother and brother from one end of Europe to the other."

But the gypsies of Eastern Europe were not allowed to stand aside from other people's quarrels.

I had always thought that the quiet dignity with which Jewish prisoners went to their deaths was what I would aspire to if—God forbid—I should ever be in a similarly terrible situation. Years later, though, I read in *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, by Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon, of the Gypsy prisoners who—far from being dignified—wept and wailed, begged and pleaded, threw themselves at the feet of their guards, grabbed hold of their legs and wouldn't let go ... and confronted with this nerve-racking display of emotion the SS guards and kapos tended to leave them till last. (Alexander Ramati in *And the Violins Stopped Playing*, goes a step further: "the SS men and their kapo henchmen went from barrack to barrack rounding up the Gypsies, not expecting any opposition. But there was furious resistance ... those who threw themselves on the Nazis with knives, razors, sticks or their own bare hands, were selling their lives dearly.")

Dignified or not the Gypsies were saying, like the old women in Spain, that life is sweet and if it was to be taken from them then their captors must take into themselves something of their victims' grief and despair.

\* \* \* \* \*

Speaking of libraries—I came upon an old advertisement for Mudie's Select Library, for May 1856. (Fresh copies are added whenever a delay occurs; and an ample supply is provided of all the principal New Works as they appear. Single subscription one guinea per annum. Literary Institutions and Book Societies supplied on Liberal Terms etc etc.)

And what were they offering?

*John Halifax, Gentleman; Madame Pfeiffer's Second Voyage; Vaughan's Hours with the Mystics; Burton's El-Medinah and Meccah; Butler's Ancient Philosophy; Memoirs of Mrs Fitzherbert; Eastern Hospitals and English Nurses and Prescott's Philip the Second.*

I have the Prescott series; my great-grandmother gave them to my grandmother who possibly sat down by the light of a kerosene lamp after a long day upon a small Queensland dairy farm to indulge in Philip II's machinations (Prescott, discussing Philip's portrait, says 'Yet there is something in the sinister look of the eye which is far from winning our confidence')—but the question which intrigues me is how my great-grandmother came to have them. Was she particularly interested in history—or Spain—or Mary Tudor—or Spanish America—or had she, in turn, been given them by her father? He has gone down to posterity, such as it might be, with his own book *Greek Geometry from Thales to Euclid*; perhaps he, too, relaxed after a long day of students and theorems with the machinations of Philip II?

Every so often State Governments close down a library or two to save money. I'm not sure that it does. A literate and informed society seems a good investment to me. American writer, John Jakes, pointed out that even in the Great Depression no American library closed—but now they close with monotonous regularity.

Certainly mobile libraries fill part of the gap. But it's not the answer. Libraries are more than a collection of books for borrowing. They are places of research, places of meeting, holiday activities for children, photo-copying facilities, they are simply nice places to be on rainy days ...

My mother once mentioned that many country telephone systems were planned, funded, built and maintained by country people themselves. It was that or nothing. Of course governments *should* fund libraries—but when they can't or won't ... I am always impressed by what small communities working together can achieve.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 11th: Alexander Solzhenitsyn  
Alain Arias-Misson  
Naguib Mahfouz

December 12th: John Osborne  
M. R. Anand  
Louis Nowra  
Yves Antoine  
Chingiz Aitmayov

December 13th: Laurens van der Post  
Marc Connelly  
Howard Brenton  
Ross Macdonald  
Heinrich Heine

December 14th: Rosemary Sutcliffe  
Michael Cook

December 15th: Edna O'Brien  
Sneja Gunew

December 16th: Noel Coward  
Jane Austen  
Margaret Mead  
Arthur C. Clarke  
Sylvia Burack  
George Santayana

\* \* \* \* \*

By the law of averages many writers must die in the middle of a book. It creates a problem. Should the work be published as is—for example, J. G. Farrell's book about India *The Hill Station*? Should it be published with the author's notes—such as P. G. Wodehouse's *Sunset at Blandings*? Should it be finished by someone else—as has happened with Dickens' *Edwin Drood* and Jane Austen's *Sanditon*? Or should it be kept as a manuscript—available to scholars and biographers but not available to the general reader?

It is rather similar to the question which arises when someone announces that a 'forgotten' Hemingway story has been found, a Coleridge poem, a Shakespearian sonnet; that Emily Dickinson hid hundreds of poems in letters to her friends. Should we hasten to publish?

In those that had been shared with someone else already it is hard to see why not. They were deemed worthy of sharing. But for the others—oh yes, I know human curiosity is a powerful reason to publish—I feel that if the writer had not sought publication in his or her lifetime then it seems a courtesy to keep it unpublished. The reason it was unpublished seems very likely to be its author's dissatisfaction with it.

I read *Sanditon* by Jane Austen and A Lady. It satisfied my curiosity but it didn't satisfy my belief in the care and *rightness* Austen brought to her finished work. I had the vaguely uncomfortable feeling that I would've liked *Sanditon* better if I had been

satisfied with the knowledge that Jane Austen had been working on a ‘seaside novel’ when she died—and left it to my imagination to make of that what it willed.

\* \* \* \* \*

December 17th: Erskine Caldwell  
Christianna Brand  
John Greenleaf Whittier  
Alison Uttley  
Angelika Fremd  
Mustapha Matura  
Hans Juergensen  
Penelope Fitzgerald

December 18th: Christopher Fry  
G. B. Lancaster  
Abe Burrows  
Michael Moorcock  
H. H. ‘Saki’ Munro

December 19th: Howard Sackler  
Margaret Barbalet  
Horatius Bonar  
Miguel Piñero  
Jean Genet

December 20th: Zoë Fairbairns  
Tuure Vierros  
Joseph Brennan  
Nicholas Courtney  
John Burnett  
Andrei Codrescu  
Carol Farley

December 21st: Frank Moorhouse  
Nat Gould  
Heinrich Böll  
Anthony Powell  
Peter Tinniswood  
Peter Bibby

\* \* \* \* \*

Hardly a month goes by but I hear someone moaning that Australia has produced no Dick Francis, no Conan Doyle, no Agatha Christie, and that our shops are, in consequence, jammed with imports rather than home grown mysteries and thrillers. This seems to have fostered the idea that Australian writers by and large, whatever their other strengths, just can’t (or won’t) produce best-selling fiction in these genres.

Yet this was far from the truth a century ago. Late nineteenth century Australia produced at least three writers who took on the best that Europe and America could offer and frequently outsold them.

Guy Boothby was born in Adelaide and began his career as the mayor’s secretary. His first works were a comic opera called *Sylvia* and a book of travel stories *On the Wallaby*. Then, in 1894, he packed up himself, his wife, and his manuscripts and headed for England where his famous character, the hypnotic Dr Nikola, quickly brought him success. To his repertoire he added the ‘gentleman crook’ Simon Carne (though I can’t help thinking that ‘gentleman crook’ is a contradiction) in a book called *A Prince of Swindlers* which drew on his knowledge of the Turf. Carne pre-dated other characters of this ilk such as Hornung’s Raffles and Leblanc’s Arsène Lupin. So popular did Boothby become in his short career (he died in 1905) that Rudyard Kipling

said of him “Mr Guy Boothby has come to great honours now. His name is large upon the hoardings, his books sell like hot cakes.”

Nat Gould was born in England but came to Australia as a young man and became the Brisbane *Telegraph's* racing writer. His first novel came out in 1890 and he continued to produce racing mysteries steadily for the next fifty years. At his death he had written 150 of them, 26 still waiting with his publisher. By our standards his mysteries are often fairly transparent but he is credited with creating the first racecourse detective, Valentine Martyn. The secret of his success according to *Longman's Magazine* was “a candid simplicity of style, and a direct and unaffected appeal to the primitive emotions and our love for that noble animal the horse.”

After his return to England at the turn of the century he retained his popular formula but simply switched from the Australian to the English Turf for his background. *The Times* called him “the most successful writer of best-sellers” and claimed that any newspaper running one of his stories could be assured of an increase in circulation of “100,000 copies a day”.

When he died his books had already sold more than thirty million copies.

Fergus Hume was born in England and came to Melbourne via New Zealand. In Melbourne he wrote and self-published *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* which Peter Haining has called “without doubt the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century”. (It quickly became popular enough in Australia for someone to parody it in *The Mystery of a Wheel-Barrow!*) Hume took it to England and unwisely, though perhaps understandably, sold the copyright for £50. Put out as ‘railway fiction’ it had soon sold 350,000 copies. He went on to write another 140 novels but none ever quite achieved that level of popularity—though having ‘The Author of The Mystery of a Hansom Cab’ emblazoned on each cover must have helped. Though a hardback edition was brought out by Currey O’Neill in 1982 it has been left to a New York publisher (Dove) to bring his best-seller back to the world.

Three remarkably successful novelists, all with best-sellers to their credit—so why do their names merely bring a shrug and an apologetic “No, I’m afraid I’ve never heard of any of them”?

Banjo Paterson, believing he could do better than “the tale-spinner Nat Gould, whose melodramatic novels of sporting life had won over millions of readers”, brought out his own melodrama of the sporting life *Done for the Double*, using the pseudonym Knott Gold. But instead of making quick money for him his readers laughed at *Done for the Double* and went on buying Nat Gould—and that probably explains the reasons for Gould’s success: he genuinely liked the kind of books he wrote, understood his readers and gave them what they wanted without being patronising, obscure or facetious.

But readers have changed over the years. Today, the stories of those three novelists often seem improbable, transparent, melodramatic or over-simple. Still, the changing tastes of readers are not really excuse enough for consigning to oblivion three writers who helped make Australian fiction popular, set at bay any suggestion of a cultural cringe, and proved that overseas readers and publishers were quite prepared to buy Australian stories which contained no hint of the bush, squatters, convicts, drovers or bushrangers. Despite the fact that many overseas readers would’ve had difficulty pinning Melbourne on a map they snapped up Hume’s first novel when his English publisher billed it as ‘A Sensational Melbourne Novel’.

So isn’t it about time we took those three writers out of that musty old cab at the back of the museum and gave them three hearty cheers?

\* \* \* \* \*

Nat Gould will never become the patron saint of feminists—

“After considerable experience I have found that once a woman takes to gambling, it absorbs her whole thoughts, and gambling leads to other things, such as

champagne and its attendant consequences”

—but I can’t help thinking that the 1890s must have produced a number of remarkably successful female punters!

\* \* \* \* \*

I may be biased but I think that racing has more than its fair share of ‘characters’; of course, this isn’t open to scientific proof—what after all *is* a ‘character’?—but two which appeal to me are the Hon. Dorothy Paget and Louis the Possum.

The Hon. Dorothy was undoubtedly a lesbian, she was also eccentric, overweight, wealthy, possessed of a variety of phobias, tiresome, wasteful— yet also unexpectedly likeable. She was difficult to work for, her judgement was poor, she was a pain in the neck to her succession of trainers and jockeys, but Quintin Gilbey calls her *Queen of the Turf* and points out that “she won seven Cheltenham Gold Cups, a record which may stand for all time, and both the Grand National and the Derby, a feat only once previously accomplished, and that by a man who a year later became King of England. She landed some gigantic bets, which were ever fresh in her mind, while the even bigger ones she lost were forgotten within a few minutes of her secretary, Miss Williams, despatching cheques to her bookmakers.”

(Ah, and I wonder if she indulged in champagne?)

Maurice Cavanough and Meurig Davies on the other hand give the strange story of the Chinese market gardener who, so far as we know, never lost a bet. Jimmy Ah Poon had a market garden in the Sydney suburb of Canterbury around the turn of the century.

For reasons which must always remain a mystery he became enamoured of a horse called Poseidon. He couldn’t say Poseidon so he always asked, What price, ‘Possumum’? (whilst pointing to the bookie’s board no doubt) and, in the way such things go, he became known as Possumum, then as Louis the Possum. He started out with a bank of £50 from his market gardening endeavours; a few months later he had developed this to £5,000 and was able to give up his cabbages and silver beet. When Poseidon won he had money on him; the times when Poseidon lost he could be seen sitting serenely in the stands, not having risked a penny. All told he is believed to have won £35,000 on the one horse in two years.

Poseidon retired. Jimmy Ah Poon disappeared, never to be seen on an Australian racecourse again. Everyone believed he had returned to China to live out his old age in peace and modest luxury.

Although, as these were far from peaceful years in China, it might have been more restful among the cabbages in Canterbury.

\* \* \* \* \*

- December 22nd: Henry Treece  
David Martin
- December 23rd: Robert Barclay  
Marie Bjelke-Petersen  
Ken Methold
- December 24th: Matthew Arnold  
Noel Streatfield  
Mary Higgins Clark  
Juan Ramón Jiménez  
James Hadley Chase  
Keith Dewhurst
- December 25th: Rebecca West  
Dorothy Wordsworth  
Ross Fitzgerald  
Noel Langley

Fritz Lieber  
Samura Al Mana  
Titus Maumela

\* \* \* \* \*

Fame can be a burden; it can sit heavily on a modest and unassuming writer. It can also sit heavily on a writer's writing.

I first came to Rebecca West via *Return of the Soldier* and *The Judge*; both of which have moments of such lightness and sparkle. I felt Rebecca West was working out some private spleen with the character of Cyril, poor man, but she doesn't put a word wrong in the first book.

Later I tried *Cousin Rosamund*. What had happened in the meantime? It is tedious, repetitive, and parts of it sit like a beginner's try at pastry. Would she have cut and edited much of this dough if she had lived to complete it? Or had she, with age and fame been drawn into believing her early writing was lightweight and now her every word must be weighted down with significance? Or was it simply me—and I am averse to weighty significant words?

Somewhere in between I read the collected letters that H. G. Wells had sent her during their love affair. As H. G. Wells had a perfectly good wife sitting at home I couldn't help thinking of a neighbour saying of someone who'd gone off with someone else—to live 'in a harmony obviously world-forgetting, though not likely to be by the world forgot' leaving chaos and children behind—"They both deserve a good spanking"; now, I don't want to sound like the world's biggest wowser but my sympathies are with Mrs Wells ... And was West also influenced by re-reading the letters and decided, whether or not a couple was suited, there *would* be weddings and fidelity?

She also wrote a book about the trial of William Joyce, better known as Lord Haw-Haw—"He was like an ugly version of Scott Fitzgerald, but more nervous". Joyce went on trial for broadcasting propaganda for Germany during World War II; as the trial progressed the charge was reduced: he had committed treason between the day Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939 and the day he became a German citizen in 1940. But it was still seen as treason and he was hanged; the irony of the case is that Joyce, because of a mix-up over his birth and papers almost certainly was an American citizen during this period and America was not at war with Germany. His family had emigrated to the USA from Ireland before moving to England after Joyce's birth.

Rebecca West likened his behaviour to that of another complex Irishman, Sir Roger Casement.

Casement was born in Ireland and joined the British diplomatic service, working as a British Consul first in Mozambique, then Angola, then the Congo Free State. He was so horrified by the behaviour of the Belgian traders towards the African rubber collectors that he finally put together a long and detailed report which led to a furore in Britain and to the formation of the Congo Reform Campaign which garnered support in the UK, the USA, and at home in Belgium.

(Joseph Conrad upon meeting him in the Congo recorded: Made the acquaintance of Mr. Roger Casement, which I should consider as a great pleasure under any circumstance and now it becomes a positive piece of luck.

Thinks, speaks well, most intelligent and very sympathetic.)

In Casement's time the Congo was run as the private business empire of King Leopold II and one of his principal agents was Henry Stanley of Livingstone fame, of whom *Punch* magazine said his motto should be 'Eminent Travellers Rescued While You Wait' and he has been described as "brave, ambitious, resourceful, ruthless and energetic with a touching faith in the magic powers of the Maxim gun, especially in

areas where nobody else possessed one". But Leopold was too much even for Stanley to swallow; he described his "enormous voracity to swallow a million of square miles with a gullet that will not take a herring". Under pressure from outraged public opinion the Congo ceased to be a private fiefdom and became an official Belgian colony.

Hoskyns and Whiteman write: "Labourers who failed to deliver the goods had their hands cut off. Chain gangs and floggings were authorized by law. The establishment of Catholic missions and the abolition of the Arab slave trade did little to redeem these evils and in 1908, mainly as a result of pressure at home and abroad, Leopold was obliged to relinquish control of the Congo to the Belgian parliament.

Although much of the oppressive legislation remained the Belgian administration which ruled the Congo from 1908-1960 was vastly more enlightened." Even so, in 1958 "the Congo had had elections only to a tiny number of town councils, the facilities for secondary education were derisory and there was no Congolese in the administration with a rank above chief clerk and none in the army above an N.C.O. The Congolese graduates could be counted on the fingers of one hand and there was no Congolese doctor, lawyer or engineer."

Casement, though, had moved on to be a British Consul in Brazil then was asked to visit the headwaters of the Amazon in the Peruvian highlands to report on the exploitation by white traders of the Putumayo rubber tappers, work which earned him a knighthood.

It would be strange indeed if Casement had not been concerned for the plight of Ireland when he had risked his diplomatic career by speaking out for other people, and homosexual diplomats were even more at risk. His attempts to help the Easter Rising in Ireland ended in failure and he was hanged in Pentonville Prison in 1916. It is still suggested that his homosexual diaries were forgeries (they were used to justify his death sentence) and that his homosexuality was as much on trial as his 'treasonable' activities in Ireland. He was a cautious man, a quintessential diplomat throughout his career, and it seems hard to believe that he would have committed everything to paper and then left it where it could easily be found.

I later came on a different view of the diaries in *The Defectors* by Col. Vernon Hinchley. He says, 'There is, in fact, not the slightest doubt that the various volumes were written up by Casement, day by day over a period of more than a decade, in his own handwriting.' There is no person's handwriting which cannot be forged but he goes on, 'But I am going to ask a question which seems to have been overlooked by previous writers on this case: admitting that Casement wrote down descriptions of a great number of homosexual encounters, is there any shadow of proof that any such incidents actually occurred? And the answer is a definite negative.' He notes that none of the people who knew Casement well had ever regarded him as homosexual. Yet the diaries suggest that even when he was sharing a small cabin with other officials he was still managing to fit in up to five sexual encounters with young boys per day and right under their official noses. Because the British Government released only excerpts at the time of his trial, and those carefully chosen to show him in the worst light possible, no one asked whether it was really possible for this to be a true record. Hinchley goes on, 'In my opinion the Black Diaries were not a record of facts at all. I believe that day after day, month after month, Casement wrote down notes on imaginary homosexual encounters merely as a perfectly harmless way of getting some poison out of his system. It was his great misfortune, firstly, that the diaries were found at all, and, secondly, that they happened to offer useful and timely propaganda to an unscrupulous Government.' Casement was poorly defended. It might also be said that he seemed to accept with resignation that poor defence. I cannot help wondering if once his rich fantasy life by which he had sublimated his own desires had been blazoned across the media and in open court and used to drag his whole distinguished reputation through the

mud he didn't very much care what happened to him any more.

It might also be suggested that having seen Belgian colonists and administrators in action he had less sympathy with Belgium in the first world war than most people—and the war was ostensibly being fought to free Belgium from German colonialism.

In 1965 his body was exhumed and brought home to Ireland. (A strange story has his ghost 'appearing' to a Miss McClane, an owner of the former Casement home, Invermore House, in about 1980.) Not that the Republic of Ireland is always sympathetic to those caught up in the complexities and grey areas of loyalty. It requires 'A formal declaration of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State' for the aspiring citizen. But Casement's belief in the rightness of his cause still carries a deep and moving conviction:

'Self-government is our right, a thing born in us at birth, a thing no more to be doled out to us or withheld from us by another people than the right to life itself—the right to feel the sun or smell the flowers or love our kind. It is only from the convict these things are withheld, for crime committed and proven—and Ireland, that has wronged no man, that has injured no land, that has sought no dominion over others—Ireland is being treated today among the nations of the world as if she were a convicted criminal.

... Where all your rights have become an accumulated wrong, where men must beg with bated breath for leave to subsist in their own land, to think their own thoughts, to sing their own songs, to garner the fruits of their own labours, and, even while they beg, to see things inexorably withdrawn from them—then, surely, it is a braver, a saner and a truer thing to be a rebel in act and deed against such circumstances than tamely to accept them as the natural lot of men.'

\* \* \* \* \*

Rebecca West faithfully reports the trial but the question of why is never resolved; nor, intriguingly, does she compare the case of Joyce's colleague, Mildred Gillars *alias* 'Axis Sally'. Yet I think, unwittingly, she gives the clue when she suggests that Joyce's wife would be happiest returning to the south bank of the Thames, where she belonged—West associates the north bank with money and opportunities. She sees Joyce as a misfit, a mediocrity and a malcontent but that could be said of many of us and doesn't precisely explain anything.

Many people in England expressed admiration for Hitler for various reasons:

Dorothy Sayers puts it—

"Wot this country wants," said Padgett, "is a 'Itler."

"That's right," said the foreman. "Keep the girls at 'ome."

And Len Deighton—

'When the Wehrmacht was straining its eyes to peer through the Channel mist, the order went out to form a British Puppet Government. German diplomatic circles were asked to contact likely sympathizers, using the individual approach as far as possible. So it was that earnest, charming, personal letters reached earnest, charming people who might be prepared to be a Member of Parliament in the Nazi-backed National Socialist government that was to have its seat in the Channel Islands until London was made ready.'

What would have happened if Hitler had been content with the Ruhr, Austria and Czechoslovakia? Would Britain have heaved a sigh of relief and got on with business as usual? People in high British places did not necessarily approve of Hitler's methods (though they did not mind force being used against coal miners) but they often approved of what appeared to be his success in creating greater order and efficiency ...

William Joyce broke with Sir Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists and class undoubtedly played a part; he appears to have believed passionately in the need for a society where a man would not be put down because of his class, his school, his

background; where he would not be barred from clubs or a commission in the army because of his accent or because he didn't have the right connections. And he wasn't alone in believing that Hitler was trying to create a classless society. But Rebecca West took her own degree of privilege for granted—think of how casually those terms roll out in books of that era: 'don't ape your betters', 'know your station', 'inferiors', 'such a common little boy', 'lesser orders', 'lower classes'—and either didn't see this underlying aspect of Joyce's dissent or didn't want to grasp this difficult nettle.

And it's hard not to entertain the suspicion that Joyce was hanged not because he had been more influential than people in high places but because he had carried his belief to its logical conclusion rather than use the more 'earnest' and 'charming' ways of the more privileged ...

In her introduction to a collection of Mary Grant Bruce's stories and articles, *The Peculiar Honeymoon and other Writings by Mary Grant Bruce*, Prue McKay says—

'The question of allegiance is as old as settlement. Until World War II, the majority of immigrants were British. Some continued to regard Britain as Home and passed on their ties, renewed in strength, to the following generations. Others, having left a life of grinding poverty and a rigid class system felt no affection or duty towards the country they had left, but rather a fierce pride in the country they were helping to build.'

The famous fight between Churchill and Curtin epitomises this dilemma of what 'my country' means. Churchill wanted to retain the Australian troops in North Africa to tie down the German troops and keep them well away from Britain; Curtin wanted the troops home to protect Australia from the growing fears of a Japanese push into South-East Asia. Curtin won.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning took up the sense that patriotism as an ideal is cold comfort—

And many a plighted maid and wife  
And mother, who can say since then  
"My country,"—cannot say through life  
"My son," "my spouse," "my flower of men,"  
And not weep dumb again.

I have often noticed that the people who most fiercely promote 'my country' as a patriotic ideal rather than as a living breathing beautiful sensitive vulnerable sense of *belonging* tend to be childless or with grown and departed children, perhaps rather lonely people ... and ideals, unless they are rooted in an enduring kindness towards people and places, can be hard taskmasters rather than a warming leaven ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Hobart cooking identity, Elizabeth Godfrey, worked for a short while as a telephonist with the BUF, then as secretary for Lady Moseley; leaving when the movement grew violent.

In her memoirs she writes: "We worked long hours, but that was never the end of it, for in addition we were expected to go to the more important meetings. Many were the dreary evenings I have listened to the late William Joyce (better known later as Lord Haw-Haw) holding forth in some dusty hall in outer London. For that matter, should the need arise we were expected to be able to hold forth ourselves, though I am thankful to say it seldom did."

He doesn't sound like a man who could persuade anybody to do anything.

\* \* \* \* \*

And with cooking on my mind ... Margaret E. Guthrie writes in her article 'So You'd like to Write a Cookbook': "Time was if you were a good cook people would say, "You should open a restaurant." Or, "I'll bet you could make a good living catering." Now if you're a good cook, people say, "You ought to write a cookbook."

What has changed? The cookbook market. In a recent article, Craig Claiborne said that when he first published *The New York Times Cookbook* in 1961, perhaps only twenty cookbooks a year were published. He now estimates that well over a hundred are published annually, and I think that's a conservative figure." She goes on to say that "Astronomer Carl Sagan has said that if a serum is not found soon, by the year 2,000 all the land mass of the planet will be twelve feet deep in cookbooks!"

The good thing about cookbooks is that you can give them to just about anybody—Barbecue Cookbook—Ten Easy Ways to Avoid Junk Food—Pritikin Cookbook—Learn to Cook—Make Your Own Easter Eggs—Old Family Favourites—From Orchard to Larder—Mediterranean Cook Book—Bread Around the World—Use that Wok—Bush Tucker—Cooking in a Caravan—Eat Well for \$3-50 a Day—Best Christmas Puds—*ad infinitum*—

I do buy cookbooks for people—and get given them—but I must admit my favourite recipes are those which link me to friends and relatives—Mum's Lemon Syrup, Auntie Millie's Rockcakes, Mrs Crompton's Choc Slice, Betty's White Christmas, Maisie's Chocolate Apple Cake ... and who knows—maybe there are people with Jennie's Date Cake or Jennie's Piklets (*sic*) in their scrapbooks ...

I used to have a touching idea that people didn't steal from National Trust Houses. Alas. Runnymede, next door to me, has lost among other things, the silver candle snuffers and Ovid from the main bedroom, the hose-timers from the garden, the cash-box from the gift-shop, a charcoal iron and Mrs Beeton from the kitchen ...

My image of Mrs Beeton is of a red-cheeked substantial woman, greying hair, large apron, brisk and capable. I was astonished to find she was only 28 when she *died*—from puerperal fever after the birth of her fourth child—and only 21 when she brought out her famous *Book of Household Management*—

The *Dictionary of Gastronomy* says of her: Author of *The Book of Household Management* and probably still the best-known writer on food in the world today. Her name is a household one and her book, first published in 1861, has gone into countless editions.

When she embarked upon her *magnum opus* she wrote to her friend Mrs English for advice and received this reply. 'Cookery is a science that is only learned by Long Experience and years of Study which, of course, you have not had ... '

\* \* \* \* \*

But I think my favourite chef is the one who gives me shivers up the spine and who is well-known to Dr Who fans—Shockeye of the Quawncing Grig. Given the opportunity to visit Earth he "licked his lips. 'I have a craving to taste one of these human beasts, madam. The meat looks so white and roundly layered on the bone—a sure sign of a tasty animal' ... "

\* \* \* \* \*

December 26th: Henry Miller  
Dion Boucicault  
Donald Horne  
December 27th: Carl Zuckmayer  
Elizabeth Smart  
Antonio Cisneros  
December 28th: Leslie Rees  
Max Hastings  
Barbara Tufty  
William Root  
Janet Lunn  
Anthony Cohen  
December 29th: E. W. Hildick

Vera Brittain  
 Johanna Kaplan  
 Gerard Windsor  
 Peter Meinke  
 Dudley Pope  
 December 30th: Rudyard Kipling  
 Elyne Mitchell  
 Paul Bowles  
 Matthew Cohen  
 December 31st: Caradoc Evans  
 Holbrook Jackson  
 Ram Singh  
 Simon Wiesenthal  
 Mathilde Fibiger

\* \* \* \* \*

Caradoc Evans came to prominence with his book *My People. Stories of the Peasantry of West Wales*. Perhaps ‘prominence’ is too tame. He was treated as a pariah by his fellow Welsh. Gladys Mary Coles says “Caradoc’s own controversial work attracted much attention in the press. Something of a forerunner of Dylan Thomas, he expressed himself boldly and with energetic originality.”

He also, it would seem, thrived on controversy because she goes on to say of his first play *Taffy* that “This gripping, witty play by Caradoc Evans had a riotous first night, almost as stormy as that of Synge’s *Playboy*. Evans’ vehement criticism of the Welsh had roused their anger, an irate contingent disrupting the performance with a demonstration and loud singing of the Welsh National Anthem.”

Gwyn Jones’ introduction to *My People* says “His people are elementals, stripped to the very fork, and at one with the soil and the beasts. The mainsprings of their actions are greed, hypocrisy and lust.”

Yet, at the beginning of the collection it is hard to see how they brought down the wrath of the Welsh. But as I read on a vision of Welsh religion, Welsh success, Welsh ambition unfolds in his bare Old Testament style prose—and it is a vision without kindness, a vision that is brown at the core.

In ‘The Glory that is Sion’s’ Evans says “He was as irreligious as an irreligious Welshman can be” but the trouble really is that the most unpleasant people are frequently the most religious. There are characters who arouse pity—such as old Nanni—but none who precisely arouse liking and people want to be liked through their literature as much as through their beer or their beaches.

When he died he was called ‘the best-hated man in Wales’—yet his name, now, is most likely to provoke a polite “Who did you say?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Browsing through an anthology of Scottish poetry one day I began jotting down some of the fascinating words—

musardy = idle dreaming  
 kenspeckle = famous  
 whig-mig-morum = politics  
 fidging fain = excited  
 swenty ouris = rogues  
 gaberlunzie man = licensed beggar

It’s not that I plan to use them. I wouldn’t even know how to work a licensed beggar into a story. They just have so much fun and *character* in them.

Of course new words are coming into our lives all the time—feedback, copout, back-up, downsize, accessing, info-tech, cyber this and that—and they may be useful

words. But they're not, somehow, *attractive* words. I can't imagine myself using them for the fun of using them.

Choosing exactly the right language, Biblical, formal, literary, informal, colloquial, downright slangy and so on, is difficult—and a story can be spoiled by language which jars. But I doubt that our problems are as great as that of colonised people's—"he was inhibited by having to write in riksmaal, the formal language used for writing, which was based on Danish and was far removed from Norwegian conversational rhythms. Landsmaal, the language spoken by country people ... was not yet accepted as a written form, though Vinje was to do much during the next few years to champion its use. This gap between the spoken and written tongues was a handicap to Norwegian writers which few foreigners can appreciate—"

It is a problem for people whose 'home' language is a dialect, a variant, but who wish for a wider audience ... yet it also holds within it the seeds of a much richer and more memorable experience ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Those little black squiggles on paper—or vellum or parchment or silk—or a computer screen—we ask so much of them. To conjure up another world, to create taste and sight and sound, to move us with images of beauty, to repel us with horror, to make us laugh, to make us cry, to give us images in our mind's eye which may be what the writer intended and may be something totally different ... I was astonished to hear a friend say once that she dreamed in black and white; I had just assumed that everyone saw coloured images in the same way I did ... and recently I heard someone suggesting books came to them in sentences ... stories come to me in pictures, and trying to take out of those pictures the *essential* parts to be turned into words is so enormously difficult ... I wonder if that is why the finished result is so often unsatisfying: because those little black squiggles can only *suggest* rather than *convey* the richness and excitement of those mindly pictures, their sweep and grandeur, their *colour* ... and yet those twenty-six little squiggles do achieve remarkable things ...

\* \* \* \* \*

**The End**

Acknowledgements: Snippets from the Calendar have appeared in *The Famous Reporter*, *Recipes and Reminiscences*, and *The Australian Friend*.