BETWEEN THE COVERS

COMPILED BY
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To the Memory of
TONY BAULD

With Special Thanks to
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INTRODUCTION

Another Writer's Calendar type book? Just one more? It is a bit like being tempted by chocolate cake or asparagus puffs. We-e-ll, just one more. Just a wee bit. Just a taste. And so here it is.

I justified it to myself using much the same argument I use when there's a little bit of something nice left on a plate. It doesn't seem worth putting away. Also I had a few little bits and pieces, ideas, things I thought I would like to follow up, still sitting around. Of course this is a specious argument. Give me a few months and I will have collected piles of new things to add to my leftovers. And although I sometimes feel I am wasting time, all those wonderful things I could be doing and am not, I am increasingly inclined to think that, like family history, 'writers' calendars' constantly press out the boundaries of my life and knowledge and imagination. I won't claim that they make me a better person, there is absolutely no evidence for that, but they make me a more 'satisfied' person and in a curious way I think that is valuable. The world is full of dissatisfied people, I don't mean dissatisfied with the political and social status of a suffering world, but dissatisfied with what they've got, they want a bigger share, something different, someone else's life (all those programs asking people who they would like to be) … but just give me a good book and enough light to read by and I 'wudn't call the quane me cousin'.

So I hope a little of my moment of content will fill these pages.

J. L. Herrera
Hobart 2007

I mentioned FIBS (the Falkland Islands Broadcasting Station) in my previous book; it has now changed its name to FIRS (the Falkland Islands Radio Service).

Recently I came upon a book called *Rediscovering Lafcadio Hearn* by Sukehiro Hirakawa; this contains a number of contributions by Japanese writers and gives a different perspective on his life. You might like to take a browse through it. (And see Appendix 1 for more.)

BETWEEN THE COVERS

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January 1: Maria Edgeworth
Robert Shaaban
Sir James Frazer
Sandor Petofi

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Hungarians have gained greatly from the richness and innovation of Petofi's work but poetry does not travel well so I found myself thinking vaguely on what else we non-Hungarians have gained from Hungary. I could point to things from medical advances to music but the other day I came upon this little snippet in Anthony's Bird's *Roads & Vehicles*, "By the middle of the eighteenth century the name 'coach' (the word and the vehicle are of Hungarian origin) signified a rigid-roofed closed vehicle with two *vis-à-vis* seats to hold four or six passengers, arranged with the body part suspended above the 'carriage' (the name given to what, in motor-car terms would be called the chassis) by leather braces acting, usually, with steel springs to insulate the passengers from the worst of the jolts."

Of much more use in the twenty-first century, though still occasionally execrated by purists, and used by hundreds of millions without a thought is another Hungarian invention: the biro.

Dian Dincin Buchman and Seli Groves in *What If* wrote, "People used to write with pens which had to be dipped over and over in ink or with fountain pens that they filled up with ink.

Sometimes the ink would spill — and sometimes the fountain pens would leak.

One day in Hungary, in 1938, a newspaperman named Biro visited a print shop. He noticed that when the papers came out of the press, the ink the printer used was dry, not wet or smudgy.

He thought to himself, "That would be a great ink to have inside a pen! *What if* I could make a pen that could carry a quick drying ink inside of it — the way a fountain pen carries regular ink inside of it?"

He worked out the first model, but the ink didn't come through the point. He had to make a completely different point. Instead of a long, thin one, he used a round ball that *spread* the ink over the paper like a paint roller spreads paint over a wall.

In 1940 when the Nazis invaded Hungary, Biro escaped to Argentina where in 1943 he patented his ingenious pen. Meanwhile, the English government had a problem with the pens used by the pilots of the Royal Air Force. The high altitudes at which the planes flew often caused these pens to leak. The pilots began using Biro's new pen with its quick drying ink and its ballpoint. No leaks! Soon the ballpoint Biro pen was used all over the world."

I can write with a pencil, a fountain pen, a stick in the dirt, a slate pencil, even possibly a chisel in stone … but for convenience … what better present than a biro and a box of refills? Even better an ink shop where I can not only get computer cartridges refilled but can take empty biros in and get them refilled … Alas! No one seems to be listening …

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January 2: Isaac Asimov
January 3: J. R. Tolkien
January 4: Michele Turner
Jacob Grimm
January 5: Umberto Eco
January 6: Kahlil Gibran
January 7: Robert Duncan
January 8: Wilkie Collins
Stephen Hawking
January 9: Lascelles Abercrombie

Karel Capek

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"There are, it is true, machines in existence which we have, perhaps rather prematurely, categorized as robots. But long before even this primitive vanguard became a practical proposition the idea of the robot was enjoying a lively existence in the human imagination. It seems to have been around even before it gained a name. Other inventions had to take concrete form before a name was found for them, and it took some time for the English speaking world to agree that the 'horseless carriage' should be a motor car or a 'flying machine' an airplane, yet when Karel Capek published his play RUR (for 'Rossum's Universal Robots') in 1923, the obscure word (it means no more than 'serf' or 'worker' in Capek's native Czech) was quickly and universally adopted. Capek's 'robots' were but the latest in a whole line of mechanical men, and all that the concept had hitherto lacked was a label.

"Sixty years later, while their real-life counterparts are only just undergoing their birth pangs, fictional robots have become as familiar a part of our imaginative lives as cowboys and Indians or cops and robbers; many a hero of contemporary space opera would be as lost without a robot companion as the Lone Ranger without Tonto or Holmes bereft of Watson. Moreover, from a very early stage the new genre of science or speculative fiction had seen that the robot had possibilities that most of its other technological paraphernalia lacked. Spaceships and time travel served to transfer old plots to new planets, but robots, along with those other novelties, alien beings from distant worlds, were jokers that could be dealt into the existing pack to produce a whole new game. The robot was not a prop, it was a character, and one which could be used to explore new metaphysical issues. Those exponents of sci-fi who aimed at simple entertainment were content to use the robot to play Watson to a human Holmes, but more serious writers saw that it had far greater potential in the role of Holmes himself — or, perhaps, Moriarty."

From *Reinventing Man* by Igor Aleksander and Piers Burnett. They go on to say:

"Many accounts credit rabbis with creating *golems* to serve in their households, a sort of magical race of gentlemen's gentlemen whose only drawback was that the power of speech was withheld from them. But a much more dramatic version of the legend is associated with Rabbi Loew of Prague who is alleged to have created a *golem* in order to protect the Jewish community in the city against one of the recurrent pogroms. In fact, later research has established that Loew was a sober theologian who would no more have meddled with *golems* than serve roast pork at a *bar-mitzvah* and the *golem* has moved further back into the realms of conjecture. But the *golem* attributed to Loew had two features that ensured its survival as a theme in fiction — it was superhumanly powerful (how else could it deter the gentiles?) and it was prone to get out of control and turn upon its creator. In one version of the story the creature ultimately runs amok and its career of destruction is only ended when the rabbi tricks it into kneeling before him and plucks the magic formula from its brow, thus reducing it to clay again."

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Jaroslav Seifert wrote a poem called 'Verses from an Old Tapestry':

Prague!
who has seen her but once
will at least hear her name
always ring in his heart.
She is herself a song woven into time
and we love her.
So let her ring!

My first happy dreams
glittered above her rooftops
like flying saucers
and vanished God knows where
when I was young.

Once I pressed my face
against the stone of an ancient wall
somewhere below the Castle forecourt
and in my ear, suddenly,
sounded a gloomy booming.
That was the roar of bygone centuries.
But the moist soft soil
of the White Mountain
was whispering gently in my ear.
Go forth, you'll be enchanted.
Sing out, they're waiting.
And don't lie.

I went and did not lie.
And to you, my loves,
Only a little.

This poem seems to contain that strange dichotomy of the 'bygone centuries' and the 'flying saucers', the city of Prague, the Czech nation as a whole, immersed in an ancient past whilst writing science fiction. Seifert though he wrote of socialism and changing social conditions is much more traditional in his outlook than the two writers who come first to mind to present twentieth century Czech literature: Franz Kafka and Karel Capek. And yet I think the strangeness, the disturbing undertones to their work, owes a lot to this dichotomy.

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While I was pondering on this juxtaposition of 'bygone centuries' and 'flying saucers' I thought there is another puzzling thing about Czech classics: that sense of labyrinthine irresolution. Places where power resides yet is incapable of concluding anything. The funny thing about this is that it is not confined to the grim or the mysterious. Jaroslav Hasek's famous comic novel *The Good Soldier Schweik* sees the hero travel between police cells and lunatic asylums, between the army ranks and the tenements of working class Prague, with unfailing good humour and the explanation that he gets into pickles because of being 'feeble minded' … but that curious maze-like structure of the plots is very much in evidence. I was tempted to think of it as picaresque but there is no final happiness waiting for the tired old hero at the end of his adventures. Was there something about early twentieth-century Prague which naturally inspired such a way of living life and writing books? And that sense that alongside the comedy travels something which has an undertone of dread and sorrow …

A handful of pieces from *The Good Soldier Schweik*:

… ' "The Emperor must be off his chump by now," announced Schweik. "He never was what you'd call brainy, but the war will about put the lid on it. Why, they have to feed him like a baby. A few days ago there was a chap in a pub telling us he's got two wet nurses."

He would probably have made more such profound remarks if at that point the conversation had not been interrupted by the return of Lieutenant Lukash.

He glared ferociously at Schweik, signed the documents and, having dismissed the messenger, beckoned Schweik to follow him into the next room. The lieutenant's eyes flashed fire. Sitting down on a chair, he gazed at Schweik and meditated on the beginning of the slaughter.

"First of all I'll land him a couple across the mouth," he reflected; "then I'll bang his nose in and pull his ears. After that, we'll see."

And he found himself confronted by the kindly and guileless eyes of Schweik, who interrupted the calm before the storm, as follows:

"Beg to report, sir, you've lost your cat. She ate up the boot polish and now she's gone and kicked the bucket. I threw her into the cellar—the next one, that is. You'll have a job to find another Persian cat like that. She was a nice little animal, that she was."

“What am I to do with him?” was the question which darted across the lieutenant’s mind. “Good God, what an utter imbecile he looks!”

And Schweik’s good-natured, guileless eyes beamed with a blend of tenderness and complacency at the thought that all was well, and nothing had happened, and even if anything had happened, all was well just the same.’

… ‘Preparations for the slaughter of human beings have always been made in the name of God or of some alleged higher being which mankind has, in its imaginativeness, devised and created.

When criminals are hanged, priests always officiate, annoying the malefactors by their presence.

The shambles of the Great War would have been incomplete without the blessings of the clergy. The chaplains of all armies prayed and celebrated mass for the victory of the side whose bread they ate. A priest was in attendance when mutineers were executed. A priest put in his appearance at the execution of Czech legionaries.

Throughout Europe, men went to the shambles like cattle, whither they were driven by butchers, who included not only emperors, kings and other potentates, but also priests of all denominations. Mass at the front was always said twice. When a contingent was moving up to the front line and then again before going over the top, before the bloodshed and slaughter.’

… ‘Officers’ orderlies are of very ancient origin. It would appear that Alexander the Great had his batman. I am surprised that nobody has yet written a history of batmen. It would probably contain an account of how Fernando, Duke of Almavir, during the siege of Toledo, ate his batman without salt. The duke himself has described the episode in his *Memoirs* and he adds that the flesh of his batman was tender, though rather stringy, and the taste of it was something between that of chicken and donkey.

Among the present generation of batmen there are few so self-sacrificing that they would let their masters eat them without salt. And there are cases where officers, engaged in a regular life-and-death struggle with the modern type of orderly, have to use all possible means to maintain their authority. Thus, in 1912, a captain was tried at Graz for kicking his batman to death. He was acquitted, however, because it was only the second time he had done such a thing.’

… ‘Schweik now inspected the landscape,

“It strikes me,” he said, “that we’ve taken the wrong road. Lieutenant Lukash explained it to us all right. We’ve got to go up and down, then to the left and to the right, then to the right again, then to the left, and we’re keeping straight on. I can see some crossroads in front of us, and if you ask me, I should say we ought to go to the left.”

When they reached the crossroads, Quartermaster-sergeant Vanek affirmed that they ought to go to the right.

“Well, anyhow, this is the way I’m going,” said Schweik; “it’s a more comfortable road than yours. I’m going along by the stream where the forget-me-nots grow, and if you want to traipse along in the broiling heat, you can. I stick to what Lieutenant Lukask told us. He said we couldn’t miss the way. So I’m going to take it easy across the fields and pick some flowers.”

“Don’t be a fool, Schweik,” said Quartermaster-sergeant Vanek. “You can see from the map that we’ve got to go to the right, like I said.”

“Maps are wrong sometimes,” replied Schwek, as he strolled downhill towards the stream. “If you won’t take my word for it, sergeant, and you’re so cocksure you’re right, why we’ll just have to part, and we’ll meet again when we get to Felstyn. Just look at your watch, and then we’ll know who gets there first. And if you get into any danger, just fire into the air, so as I’ll know where you are.”

‘Later in the afternoon Schweik reached a small pond where he came upon an escaped Russian prisoner who was bathing there. When he saw Schweik he took to his heels, stark naked.

Schweik rather wondered how the Russian uniform, which was lying under the willow trees, would suit him. So he took off his own uniform and dressed himself in the clothes belonging to the unfortunate naked prisoner, who had escaped from the convoy which was

quartered in the village on the other side of the forest. Schweik was anxious to have a good look at his reflection in the water, and so he lingered beside the brink of the pond for such a long time that he was discovered there by the field patrol who was looking for the Russian fugitive. They were Magyars, and in spite of Schweik's protests they took him off to the base at Chyruwa, where they put him among a gang of Russian prisoners who were being sent to repair the railway line leading to Przemysl.

Hear slept Josef Schweik of Prague, Company Orderly of the 11th Draft of the 91st Regiment who while looking for Billets was taken Prisoner near Felstyn by the Austrians by Misteak.'

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Cecil Parrott wrote a book about Hasek and his good soldier Schweik or Svejk. I felt he was right to point to the broader history of the country; where the ancient kingdom of Bohemia was, by 1900, a small squeezed-in part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Its people struggled to find ways forward. Hasek was attracted to the Anarchists but also explored other political ideas. Brought up Catholic he became strongly anti-clerical in his views. "The children soon discovered that religious ideas were to be found not in the catechism but in that part of their breeches which they sat on." He was chaotic, irresponsible, untidy. He was also an inveterate practical joker. While working on a magazine called *Animal World* he inserted an advertisement offering a couple of "thoroughbred werewolves" for sale. Amazingly the paper was inundated with offers. He had to put in a note to say they were now "out of stock"! Yet he also produced a large body of satirical short stories, articles, and essays. And in 1911 he woke up one morning and asked himself about the brilliant idea he had had just before going to bed. Alas, it had disappeared. But he had jotted down a note to himself. He looked for it. But his wife had thrown it out. He hunted through the garbage—and there it was. 'The Company Idiot,' he had scribbled down. And 'He had himself examined to prove that he was capable of serving as a regular soldier,' and then some more indecipherable jottings. In such domestic chaos Soldier Schweik was born and appeared in a number of stories before the outbreak of World War One. The ones before the war faced Austrian censorship and were more circumspect than the ones written in greater freedom afterwards.

Hasek was in the Austrian army in the war and later wrote of the horrors of its destruction. But satire, even in the midst of horror, was never far away. "Everywhere little heaps of human excrement of international extraction, belonging to all people of Austria, Germany and Russia. The excrement of soldiers of all nationalities and confessions lay side by side or heaped on top of one another without quarrelling among themselves."

I was not alone in seeing something at the heart of Kafka and Hasek which seemed to suggest a common root. Parrott wrote, "Karel Kosik in his penetrating essay 'Hasek and Kafka' has imagined that when Svejk was being led from the Hradcany garrison gaol down over the Charles Bridge he might have met Josef K. as he was being led up to his death in the Strahov quarry. He assumes that neither would have noticed the other — Josef K. would be absorbed in studying the physiognomy of his companions and Svejk would be chatting comradely with his guards. He believes that the two writers presented two separate visions of the world which in reality complement each other. Kafka taught that man must experience all types of alienation to be human. Hasek showed man as irreducible to an object and 'transcending reification'. For him his man was indestructible.

"Bernshtein suggests that the difference between Josef K. and Svejk lies in the fact that the former is surprised by everything and the latter by nothing. One certainly could not imagine Svejk a prey to Josef K.'s metaphysical torments, even if his sentiment, based on bitter experience of life, that 'No one anywhere has ever worried about a man being innocent', comes close to Kafka's."

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Sometimes pieces fall beautifully into place. At other times I find myself thinking 'what am I actually writing about? A person, a place, a time, an idea, a book?' This time I started out with

Karel Capek in mind … and instead it seemed to me that it was something about Prague that kept trying to steer me … somewhere, I wasn't sure where. So when I noticed a book called *The Spirit of Prague* by Ivan Klíma I wondered if some kind of subconscious influence was at work.

'My mother and father both came from Jewish families, but my mother's family had adopted the Jewish faith by choice. In the seventeenth century only two religions were permitted in Bohemia: the Jewish and the Roman Catholic. Many Protestant congregations advised their members to adopt Judaism rather than Catholicism, probably reckoning, wrongly, that the ban was temporary and that under the cloak of Judaism they could keep their original faith alive. The temporary state of affairs persisted for more than a century and a half, and over that time, the former Protestants became Jews. I remember that even though my grandfather was a Marxist and a free-thinker, he prayed every Friday evening in a language I couldn't understand. If my grandparents were free-thinkers, my parents rejected not only religion, but their Jewish identity as well. My father believed that technology knew no borders and that therefore he was at home anywhere in the world. My mother thought of herself as a Czech who was proud of her Evangelical ancestors (she even had me baptized, and right after the war I took an active part in the Evangelical youth movement.) I mention this because until the beginning of the war I never heard the word 'Jew', not even as an insult. I did not know the Jewish holidays, and the rituals that punctuated my life were no different from those observed by other children.'

(from 'A Rather Unconventional Childhood')

'In my second year, I decided that I would complete my studies with a thesis in Karel Capek, and I began the preliminary research. Capek had embodied the democratic spirit of the First Republic. He was a proponent of Anglo-American pragmatism, a personal friend of Masaryk, a long-time chairman of the Czech PEN club and a humanist in his writing. In everything he did, he opposed totalitarian ideologies and systems, which means he was one of the chief opponents of Nazism and fascism. This was precisely what confused the communist ideologists after 1948. First they banned Capek's works, then they granted clemency to the 'anti-fascist' part of him. My dissertation was called *Karel Capek's Struggle Against Fascism*, but it dealt with Capek's life, work and philosophy. Thanks to Capek I was able to spend time among the literary legacy of the First Republic. With harsh ideological indoctrination going on all around me, I was able to read magazines and newspapers in whose pages the great minds of the inter-war period spoke freely to me.'

(from 'How I Began')

'Many studies and essays have been written about the spirit of Prague. Books have come out with titles like *Magic Prague* or *Prague, the Mystical City*. The interesting thing is that these books were written by foreigners. The finest and best informed book about Prague I have ever read was written by an Italian, A.M. Ripellino; others have been written by Prague Germans or Jews who, for the most part, had to emigrate from Czechoslovakia to escape the Nazis. Their portraits of Prague, it would seem, have dominated the imaginations of many visitors to my native city. It is the portrait of a mysterious and exciting city that has inspired people's creativity by its ambience, by the remarkable and stimulating blend of three cultures that lived side by side for decades, even centuries: the Czech, German and Jewish cultures. '*Ich bin international*,' punned the German-speaking Prague native Johannes Urzidil. To him, the milieu of Prague had a fairy-tale beauty precisely because you could live here 'beyond nationality', because conflicts of nationality cancelled each other out and gave birth to a kind of immaterial, indefinable, mysterious world, a space that could be considered neither Czech, nor German, nor Jewish, nor even Austrian. Urzidil, like many of his contemporaries, drew his picture of Prague and its streets teeming with strolling city-dwellers, but he also depicted a Prague of picturesque empty lanes, nightclubs, open-air stages, theatres and cabarets, tiny shops, small cafes and, above all, beer halls and taverns, student societies and literary salons, and of course brothels and the colourful metropolitan underworld. Of course, this portrait was dominated by the experience of his generation, but also by the remarkable number of great spirits who lived here at the turn of the century. Think only of the composers Dvorak and Smetana, the writers Hasek, Kafka, Rilke, Werfel, Urzidil, Brod, and the politician Masaryk. The Czech and German theatres were

enlivened by a generation of great actors and singers; Albert Einstein lectured at the German University; and the Czech Charles University, after a long, arid period, could pride itself on a great many scholars with worldwide reputations in their field. Such an agglomeration of brilliant creative spirits cannot, of course, be explained by external circumstances, for such circumstances contribute only to a place in which brilliance can express itself.'

(from 'The Spirit of Prague')

'Once again I return to Karel Capek, who half a century ago, overwhelmed by the collective collapse of the intellectuals, and intellectuality, tried to define the mission of culture in our time: 'To know something, at least, about experiences, the knowledge and values humanity has already created—and not to lose ground, not to slip beneath that level. Yes, let's say it outright: education is, in this sense, conservation … Culture represents, first of all, the coherence of all human activity so far; it must not lose that … To defend that is just as serious a struggle as to take new positions by storm and conquer them. The human spirit would be a bad soldier if it only felt qualified to march in the vanguard … without being able to defend what it already conquered.' '

(from 'Our Tradition and the Limits of Growth')

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January 10: Lord Acton
Arnold Zable
January 11: Alan Paton
January 12: Edmund Burke
Charles Perrault
January 13: Horatio Alger
Amanda Cross
January 14: Hugh Lofting
January 15: Thomas Crofton Croker
January 16: Laura Riding
January 17: Douglas Hyde
Anton Chekhov
January 18: Peter Mark Roget

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It is curious to note that had Roget not written his thesaurus he would still have lived a long, interesting, and worthwhile life. Born in Soho, the son of a Swiss pastor, he was a gifted child and although his father died when he was young his mother Catherine Romilly sent him to Edinburgh University where he graduated in 1798 after doing his thesis on *De chemicae affinitatis legibus* (on the laws of chemical affinity). He went to work as a scientific researcher for Jeremy Bentham who was working on a 'Frigidarium' to keep food cool. He then went as a tutor, along with Lovell Edgeworth, Maria's brother, taking several boys on the Grand Tour. He was detained in France because of Napoleon's decree that all British men over eighteen be held as prisoners-of-war. Roget pleaded his Swiss nationality and managed to get his little party to safety via Germany and Switzerland. He was appointed Physician to the Public Infirmary in Manchester at the age of twenty-six and helped to found a medical school there. He returned to London to a busy life of medical research and teaching. He was physician to the Spanish embassy. He was interested in mechanics and invented various things including a type of slide-rule which helped him become a Fellow of the Royal Society, and he was a keen chess player, writing chess problems for the *Illustrated London News*. He married in 1824 and had two children.

He could have rested on his laurels. The world was a better place for his medical work, I feel sure. But in his seventies he began to put together the 'word book' which had been in his mind for many years. The first edition came out in 1852 and rejoiced in the title *Thesaurus of English words and phrases, classified and arranged so as to facilitate the expression of ideas and assist in literary composition*. Despite this it found an immediate market and by the time he died in 1869 it had already run through twenty-eight editions. In 1950 his grandson Samuel Romilly Roget sold the copyright to Longman, Green. Like Agatha Christie's grandson who was given the

copyright to her play 'The Mouse-Trap' it must have been a very nice 'nest egg' to inherit. And I suppose Samuel's teachers expected him to have 'a way with words'.

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Malcolm Thomas wrote in Stephen Allott's short biography *Lindley Murray: Quaker Grammarian*, "Lindley Murray is not a household name; but he once was. His *Grammar* and *English Reader* were reprinted and used on both sides of the Atlantic (and beyond), and not only by Quakers. In this respect he is comparable to John Gough, the Dublin Quaker schoolmaster, whose *Practical Grammar* was superseded by Murray's though Gough's *Practical Arithmetic* still remained a standard work for many years. Perhaps no textbook writer is a hero to the pupils of his day, and Stephen Allott notes John Dalton's reservations on the *Grammar*, shared by John Bright when he remembered his days at Ackworth School. Anne Ogden Boyce in the 1880s looked back at the 'children who, 50 years ago, toiled over the large and small print of his octavo *Grammar* [and] found it a somewhat weary pilgrimage through which the examples in Prosody looked like the Delectable Mountains at the end of the journey.' But she also reminds us that when 'we take up his "Reader", and imagine little Friends making acquaintance with "Damon and Pythias", with "Cicero against Verres", and "Adherbal against Jugurtha", and with the poetry and prose of Goldsmith and Addison, we need not wonder at the honour in which Lindley Murray was held by young and old'."

John Gough's *A Practical Grammar of the English Tongue* contained five parts: Orthography, Analogy, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody (and his *Practical Arithmetick* contained four parts: Whole Numbers, Weights and Measures; Fractions, Vulgar and Decimal; Mercantile Arithmetick; and Extractions, Progressions, Logarithms, etc) but Murray left Analogy out of his book which he introduces thus, 'English Grammar is the art of speaking and writing the English language with propriety.' By the time it was replaced in about 1877 it had gone through 112 abridged editions and 58 full-length editions in Britain and many more in America.

It is curious that Gough was an Irishman and Murray was an American. I found myself wondering whether it was people who saw the English language as an import, and therefore not very robust, who felt drawn to explain its rules and regulations to the children of the next generations. And, given the firmness with which grammar was taught, allowing no casual interpretations and back-sliding and failure to hand in homework, it is interesting to know that Murray ran away from home as a boy to escape his father's severity—and he later became a lawyer despite his father wishing him to go into business. I wonder if he ever urged teachers to use his grammar with kindness and tolerance rather than a rigid severity?

He was a mildly evangelical Quaker. His politics were conservative but he urged people to vote for William Wilberforce in 1806; "whose labours have done so much towards abolishing the iniquitous trade in human beings … and whose continued exertions would greatly contribute to a happy termination of the wrongs and sorrows of Africa." Wilberforce defeated Lascelles and Lord Milton who had reportedly spent £120,000 on his campaign. Murray was deeply supportive of children's education (and his wife Hannah was a founding influence for The Mount School for girls in York in 1784; it appears to be the teachers at that school who pressed him to prepare a grammar). He was a close friend of the Tuke family who struggled to change people's attitude to the mentally ill and to change the way they were treated.

In an interesting letter of 1824 Samuel Tuke wrote to Lindley Murray from Paris: 'We went first to the Salpêtriè. Dr. Esquirol, who is, perhaps, more devoted to the study of insanity than any other physician in Europe, was out of town; but his assistant, a Dr. Mitvié, showed me their private establishment for thirty patients, who pay from 400 to 500 francs a month; and accompanied me through every part of the salpêtrière which is devoted to the insane.

The Salpêtriére is remarkable for its cleanliness, the absence of unnecessary restraint, and the general appearance of comfort, or at least satisfaction, which is indicated by the manner of the patients. They have certainly fewer melancholics than we have in our establishments, and the French character is strongly marked under the influence of the disease. On the whole, I am disposed to think that there are very few establishments in England for the cure of the insane, which afford so good an asylum, or so great a probability of recovery.

The Bicêtre, to which I gained a very ready admission, and many kind attentions from the physician, Dr. Pariset, is in a very different state; and, with the exception of the ward for convalescents, is disgraceful to the French Government. Nor is the Hôpital de Charenton at all better. There are in these three places upwards of 2,000 lunatics, of whom, happily, the greater number are in the Salpêtriére. At Charenton, the patients pay from 800 to 1,300 francs per annum for their support, whilst at the two other establishments nothing is paid. No iron manacles appear to be in use in the Paris asylums.

They might certainly take some useful lessons from *us*; but I think there is also a good deal to be learnt from *them*. And, if I mistake not, the medical treatment of the subject is much more likely to receive illustration from *them* than from *us*. It is remarkable, however, that notwithstanding the zeal with which the science of medicine is pursued by the French, and the excellence of their schools, they are said not to rank so high as practical physicians. The mortality in the Paris is much greater than in the English for the same complaints, and it is also much greater in the city at large than in London."

His son remembered going to take tea with the Murrays; "He did not get up for he could not walk. His wife sat by him in a little black bonnet; a sweet gentle-looking little woman she was." The children "sat very still" and had tea, not out of a silver pot as Murray felt the only acceptable silver was for spoons as "he thought Christian people ought not to use costly things and spend a great deal of money to make themselves grand or even very comfortable; he thought they ought to spend it on those who are poor and need help." I am not sure how grand silver teaspoons might now be seen; but I know they were preferred when I was young as they were easy to clean and did not give a metallic taste to food or drink. He also says the cups in those days were made without handles though they came with saucers. I would imagine that anyone in the Tuke family would notice such things because, despite their long and intimate connection with better treatment for the mentally ill, none of them were doctors. All the family dealt in tea.

Murray came to live in Yorkshire, exchanging New York for old York, in the hope that the cooler summers would be better for his health. And there, as a semi-invalid, he began on his grammar.

He wrote, "I was often solicited to compose and publish a Grammar of the English language, for the use of some teachers, who were not perfectly satisfied with any of the existing grammars. I declined, for a considerable time, complying with this request, from a consciousness of my inability to do the subject that justice, which would be expected in a new publication of this nature. But being much pressed to undertake the work, I, at length turned my attention seriously to it. I conceived that a grammar containing a careful selection of the most useful matter, and an adaptation of it to the understanding, and the gradual progress of learners, with a special regard to the propriety and purity of all the examples and illustrations; would be some improvement on the English grammars which had fallen under my notice. With this impression, I ventured to produce the first edition of a work on this subject. It appeared in the spring of the year 1795." He continued to refine his book, edition by edition, to add exercises, not least for children who had left school but wanted to continue their "grammatical studies". He also developed a Spelling Book and two French grammars.

(I was surprised to learn that the "first English grammars for schools did not appear till 1734"; this was Loughton's *Practical Grammar of the English Tongue*. All the previous grammars were geared to both the learning of Latin and the imposing of Latin grammar on English usage.)

Allott writes. "It is hard to judge how far Murray influenced the writing and speaking of English. He opposed the dropping of the final g in words like singing, which had been defended as easier on the ear, and a reaction against the practice began in the 1820s, he opposed the dropping of the initial h, and the ending of sentences with weak words like prepositions, and his preferences have become commonplaces of good practice. He was certainly widely accepted, and sometimes resented, as the arbiter of correctness and good style. Indeed it was remarked with some irony that it was an American from New York who 'taught England her grammar'."

It would be an interesting experiment to rear up a class of students on his grammar and see how they responded and what kind of prose they would end up writing. But I suspect that both teachers and parents, not to mention prospective employers, would throw up their hands in dismay at the idea of a group of children coming forth casually speaking of the etymology of everyday words or taking their elders to task for their poor syntax or urging greater propriety of language use on their bosses … though the elders and bosses might be all the better …

* * * * *

The other day I was at a function where someone started complaining about the semi-literate job application letters he receives. That seemed to tap a deep well and suddenly other people were beefing about 'kids these days' and their lack of spelling, grammar, and punctuation. I didn't really feel called to add anything. My view is fairly embracing of children's failures and foibles. After all, it took me more than forty years to discover that I was spelling words like hierarchy and equinoctial incorrectly …

And my own memories of having to learn grammar, spelling, and punctuation, are all pretty grim. I can dimly remember one awful moment of wetting my pants in a spelling test I was so afraid of the teacher's sarcasm and abuse …

Being able to write good English prose wasn't presented as an excitement, a wonderful life skill, a door that opened exciting stories … No, you learned the rules or you got into trouble.

Behind all such conversations I think two unacknowledged issues lurk. On the one hand our children are growing up in a society which has prided itself on speaking a colourful lazy often incomprehensible thing called Strine (and laughing at visitors who can't 'comprende' and bringing out books of various utility and erudition on the subject of Strine). On the other hand behind every criticism lurks an unspoken 'why should these young pikers get away with grammar and spelling which would have seen their parents and grandparents suffer a sharp rap over the knuckles, if nothing worse?' Anyone over thirty still secretly harbours the belief that good grammar is something you have to SUFFER to acquire—and that people who make a point of speaking clearly in good grammatical sentences are being vaguely 'un-Australian' …

Yet English grammar, at least in its basics, should not be seen as a stumbling block. Nor should it be seen as something set in stone. Words, constructions, usages, meaning and function, all exist in a state of flux. Grammarians are never in full agreement. Heavy tomes have been written on the subject of the split infinitive. But the basics do come in handy …

The refinements and rarified levels can come later. Here is a simple lesson for six-year-olds:

Here, kids, are some LETTERS.

A H A M O

T E T S

E N

T E T C

H T

What a lot of T's in there! Though they say the most used letter in the English language is E. Never mind. Let's dive in and draw out 3 letters and make a WORD.

CAT

There he is, all nice and white and fluffy and purring and waiting for us to do something with him.

So let's put him in a SENTENCE.

THE CAT SAT ON THE MAT.

Look at him there! Doesn't he look pleased with himself! I can remember, as a child, we learned to draw cats by putting three letters on top of each other and adding some haunches. As in:

M

O

Q I'll now push them together a bit and make his ears a bit smaller and stick some whiskers each side of that O … And a name, he probably needs a name. I expect Tom will do.

But there's an odd thing about that sentence. It isn't just thrown down any-old-how, like pick-up sticks, it has a special order.

We could say CAT THE ON SAT MAT THE or ON SAT THE MAT THE CAT and you could probably puzzle it out. But some simple rules help as much in writing and reading as they do in soccer or playing chess.

So let's see what we've got there. We have a SUBJECT. The cat. He's waiting to do something. So we add in a PREDICATE. Sat on the mat. And we can then break it down a little further. The subject is made up of a definite article 'THE' which is a handy word to spread around, you can never have too many, specially while you're trying to decide whether you will sit a cat, a dog, or a guinea pig on the mat. There are also two other handy little indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' which I could use. A CAT. But this sounds less definite. It might be any old cat that's just come in off the street and decided to have a quick sit-down. But as we're thinking about Tom we'll make him sound more definite. If I was going to write something more unusual, such as the echidna sat on the mat, I could write AN ECHIDNA because it starts with one of the 5 vowel sounds—A E I O U—rather than one of those common consonants like C or M. But echidnas are a bit dangerous on the mat if you don't look where you're stepping. Both echidnas and cats are called nouns because they name small animals. A noun is a useful thing to put in as your subject. All kinds of things are nouns, people, places, animals, things, parts of the day, in fact parts of this, that, and almost everything. But we will stick with CAT as our noun.

Now the cat has to do something. So we start our predicate with a verb or a doing word. This is a fairly lazy cat so he is just sitting there. He could do other things. He could sleep or purr or hiss or growl or eat or, if he's not yet house-trained, he could make a mess. In which case our sentence would now be: The cat made a mess. Which is a nice simple sentence. And the result of what he did we call the OBJECT. A mess. And again it is made up of an indefinite article and a noun.

But let's go back to our first selection. Our cat sits ON a mat. There's a handy word in there, ON, which is a preposition. It links things. Prepositions are amazingly useful little words. On, at, by, in, through, over, under, to, from, and many more. We could say: The cat sat BY the mat. Perhaps his owner didn't like him leaving cat hairs stuck all over the mat and chased him off with a broom every time he tried to sit there. Perhaps he was a very shy and timid cat and we could say: The cat sat UNDER the mat.

So there we have a simple sentence. Just two more things you might have noticed. It begins with a capital letter T. Sentences usually do. As do names of places and people and cats. His name Tom would be written with a capital letter. And the sentence ends with a little dot called a FULL STOP. Simple sentences are the building-blocks of PARAGRAPHS which usually contain anywhere from three to twenty sentences. And PARAGRAPHS make up a PAGE in your book and perhaps ten pages might make a CHAPTER although writers these days sometimes don't bother with chapters and just keep going till they get to THE END.

But what if we want to jazz up our simple sentence a bit?

We could add a describing word, called an adjective, to our NOUN:

The LAZY cat sat on the mat.

Or we could say: The cat sat on the DIRTY mat.

Or we could add a describing word, called an adverb, to our VERB:

The cat sat LAZILY on the mat.

Or we could say: The cat sat SLEEPILY on the mat.

We could also add in an owner for the cat:

MY cat sat on the mat.

My, your, our, his, hers, are all PRONOUNS. Sometimes they stand in for a noun, sometimes they tell us who owns the noun. I could refer to myself and to my cat Tom and just say:

WE sat on the mat.

I could even add some more information in a CLAUSE.

My cat, whose name is Tom, sat on the mat. You know it is a clause because it has those little wiggly things like tadpoles at the beginning and at the end. These are called COMMAS.

There are of course other little odds and ends you can play around with.

A question perhaps. WHY is that cat on the mat? Questions usually start with HOW, WHY, WHEN, WHERE, WHAT, WHO, or WHICH and end with a QUESTION MARK like this: ?

If Tom has been missing for a few days and you come in and are amazed to find him sitting there you could make an EXCLAMATION: There is Tom on the mat! You know someone is surprised or excited if you see an EXCLAMATION MARK: ! Sometimes people are so surprised that they put in several of them !!!!!

But what if it is a strange cat sitting there? A cat you have never seen before?

You could say something like: "I've never seen that cat before! Where did he come from?"

And your small sister, who has a very kind heart, can say to you:

"It is a poor old stray cat that nobody wants." As soon as you see those marks at the beginning: " and at the end: " you know someone is saying or thinking something.

When people talk to each other we call it DIALOGUE. Most readers like dialogue and if you are reading a story aloud you can always try out some funny voices.

So I hope you have enjoyed your introduction to that terrifying thing called GRAMMAR. Now, the best thing to do is to go out and read lots of books. Little books that fit in a pocket, medium-size books to read while waiting for the bus, magazines and comics to read when you go to the toilet to get a bit of peace, any size books to have in your bedroom, happy books to read when you're feeling a bit down, exciting books to read when life is a tad ho-hum …

And when all else fails there are advertisements almost everywhere including the back of the cereal packet at breakfast …

* * * * *

Speaking of advertisements …

I defy anyone to unearth a six-year-old, unless they were severely brain-damaged at birth, who doesn't read words like Coca-Cola, MacDonalds, Hotel, Kelloggs, Bus Stop, Ampol, Cheese, etc, without so much as a hesitation. The environmental degradation, the undermining of grammar and spelling, the noise, the ubiquitousness, the sheer awfulness of most advertisements, not to mention the ethics of advertising products which will ultimately damage your health and well-being—all these problems and more have been laid at the door of the advertising industry. But the industry could re-position itself in the literacy debate: Love us! We teach your children to read!

Max Harris wrote in *The Australian Way with Words*, "Have you ever subjected yourself to the horrors of *Hansard*? Either State or Federal copies, it matters not. There's no real reason why you should, unless you are an intellectual masochist.

But when you read in cold print what you occasionally are forced to hear politicians say during the broadcasting of Parliament, you'll never again endorse the adage, 'a country gets the politicians it deserves'. Rubbish! No country deserves the politicians Australia gets.

There are two factors that arise when you pick up and read any random copy of *Hansard*.

First, there's the literacy factor. The inarticulacy, the stumblebum ungrammatical, incoherent language of those who have risen and been chosen to determine our social, economic and cultural destinies. The garbage thinking. The *non-sequiturs*. The droning infantilism of the general command of simple language. This traumatises readers for starters. And you have to remember that *Hansard*-speak has been sanitised for your convenience. Although *Hansard* reporters are obliged to disclaim all editing of parliamentary speech, it is an open secret that they edit the gobbledegook of political debate into elementary primary school English.

Secondly, there's the intellectual factor. When the pre-selected candidates are put up on the hustings, they have been wound up to parrot away with clockwork language which fools some of the people some of the time. But when they rise to speak in Parliament, they are on their own. The shriveled intellect, the Mickey Mouse concerns, and the plain mindlessness of what is supposed to be informed and rational debate of issues which concern the lives of us all, can make your flesh crawl.

Politicians work hard. They do their best. They play out the role of being professional idealists and good blokes. But a *Hansard* reading coerces us into asking nasty questions.

Do politics exercise a natural attraction for people of bloated egos attached to inferior brains? Is this the nature of political show-biz?"

It may just be that I have overlooked someone—but I cannot think of a politician who whiled away his retirement years writing about words, grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Never mind. But are politicians the right people to determine how, when, where, why, and what our children are taught?

* * * * *

Roget was more interested in people's vocabularies and their understanding of meaning than in their grammar or spelling. I was thinking about this the other day when I came upon a book called *Roget's Thesaurus of the Bible* by A. Colin Day. Instead of the various Concordance's, most famously perhaps Cruden's, which pick up word usage in the Bible, this book looked at passages of like meanings. I think students would find this of more use. But the thing that struck me is that while a variety of names are linked to dictionaries, from the days of Dr Johnson and Noah Webster, and to grammars and spelling books, the idea of comparing meaning is, perhaps forever, linked to Roget. No one else has been able to displace him from that central position. This is fame indeed. Whether it is good for the language to see someone as having 'the last word' is another matter. But I am inclined to think that it is not Roget's actual collections of like words and similar meanings that people are referring to but rather that they are using Roget simply as shorthand for thesaurus. After all, the fact that words change meaning over time is undeniable. Only the other day I came upon the curious little scrap of knowledge that in late Elizabethan times a 'punk' was not a young man with an arresting hairdo but a prostitute. We sometimes try to hold back the tide. Only the other day a friend was telling me that one of her favourite books and favourite names for a book was Cornelia Otis Skinner's *When We Were Young and Gay*. I hope that other meaning for gay and its connection to lovely words like gaiety is never lost.

The word thesaurus always makes me think of crocodiles. But as you might have guessed it comes from the Greek *thesauros* through the Latin *thesaurus* meaning something hoarded and is thus also the root of more familiar words like treasure …

* * * * *

January 19: Edgar Allan Poe
January 20: Robert Olen Butler
Ernesto Cardinal
January 21: Kevin Smith
January 22: Francis Bacon
Lord Byron
Sir Robert Cotton
January 23: Derek Walcott
January 24: Edith Wharton
Joice NanKivell Loch
January 25: Robert Burns
January 26: Philip José Farmer
January 27: Lewis Carroll
January 28: Colette
January 29: Thomas Paine
Romain Rolland
January 30: Barbara Tuchman
John Henry Hopkins (snr)
January 31: Bernard Barton
February 1: Muriel Spark
February 2: James Joyce
February 3: Walter Bagehot

Horace Greeley
February 4: Betty Friedan
February 5: Dwight L. Moody
February 6: Christopher Marlowe
February 7: Sir Thomas More
Sir James Murray
Thomas Killigrew

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Gaston Leval in *Collectives in the Spanish Revolution* collected up details of thousands of groups formed in Spain in the 1930s; they were collectives, syndicates, committees, cooperatives, mutual aid groupings of every hue, stalinist, socialist, anarchist, libertarian, and sometimes just like-minded people joining in informal arrangements; some took over abandoned estates, some joined existing small businesses, some created factories and marketing cooperatives … there was even a 'chocolate cooperative' … He writes, "The ideals pursued by the Spanish anarchist-communists are the same as those followed and propagated by the greatest minds from Plato and perhaps some of the Stoics, right up to our own times. The Spanish revolution achieved what the early Christians were asking, what in the XIVth Century the Jacquerie in France and the English peasants led by John Ball struggled for, and those in Germany whom Thomas Münzer was to lead two centuries later, as well as the English Levellers led by Everard and Winstanley, the Moraves brothers, disciples of Jean Huss. That which Thomas More foresaw in his *Utopia*, and Francis Bacon, and Campanella in *La Citta del Sole* and the priest Jean Meslier in his famous *Testament* (too often ignored) and Morelli in his *Naufrage des Iles Flottantes*, and Mably who like Morelli inspired the noblest minds in the American Revolution, and the *enragés* of the French Revolution of whom Jacques Roux, the "red priest" was one. And the army of thinkers and reformers of the XIXth Century and of the first thirty years of the present. It is, in world history, the first attempt to apply the dream of all that was best in mankind. It succeeded in achieving, in many cases completely, the finest ideal conceived by the human mind and this will be its permanent glory."

But there is a huge gulf between More's Utopia and the 'making the best of what they had' of peasants and artisans in Spain. More's book was essentially a despairing of existing human institutions to meet human needs, a kind of clean slate on which he could etch his ideas; the Spanish experience was in a way a vote of confidence in the ability of ordinary people to create good things out of bad.

*

Richard Marius in his biography of Thomas More says of his history of Richard III: "More's delineation of Richard's character shows a striking consistency, and it seems dubious that he manufactured this coherence out of whole cloth. Richard's loathing of sexual sins is remarkable, and although More stresses this point of his character merely to show that Richard is a hypocrite, the force and constancy of Richard's animadversions against sexual offences is striking."

As that evergreen question of whether Richard III killed, or had killed, his two nephews is having a renewed run and the idea that the descendants of Richard's brother, George, Duke of Clarence, are the rightful heirs of the British throne, is also being trailed, I thought I would look at the readily available literature myself and see if anything stands out as particularly plausible or well-reasoned.

At the heart of the various claims is the question of illegitimacy.

1. That Edward IV was illegitimate. It is not clear who first floated the claim that Edward's mother Cecily Neville was carrying on with someone else while her husband, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, was away fighting. I have found it attributed to her son George, her son Richard, Cecily herself, the King of France, general French propaganda, and documents supposedly supporting it found in Rouen. But, regardless of its genesis, it doesn't add up. Cecily and Richard were reportedly a happy couple. She went everywhere with him, despite discomfort and danger, including France and Ireland. Her children were: Anne, born 1439, Henry born 1441 (died as a baby), Edward born 1442, Edmund born 1443, Elizabeth born 1444, Margaret born

1446, William born 1447, John born 1448, George born 1449, Thomas born 1450, Richard born 1452, Ursula born 1455. A woman producing a baby a year was more likely to long for a rest from babies rather than another man in her bed! And Richard although he wasn't based in Rouen was only a short ride away as he prepared his troops to confront the French. A young couple who did not yet have a surviving male heir would have made every effort to get together; whether this meant Richard coming back regularly to Rouen or the two of them meeting at a half-way point or Cecily at times lodging in a village near the English army camp … Moreover, it was legally incorrect. All the children born to a married couple were automatically legitimate. Jokes were made about cuckoos creeping into the nest at the tail end of a family. But few women would risk their position, even their life, by committing adultery before they had produced an heir.

And what about the claim that Edward looked nothing like his parents? Edward was very tall and his portraits all show him with mid-brown hair (not flaxen or blonde as some accounts claim). Cecily Neville's father was Ralph Neville, first Earl of Westmoreland, and his skeleton was measured when his tomb was later refurbished. He was found to be a "very tall man with a diseased leg" (DNB). Both Richard and Cecily were great grandchildren of Edward III who was described as being well-built with blonde hair; Edward's mother, Isabella of France, was described as having beautiful blonde hair and her father Philip "the Fair", King of France, got his nickname from his colouring not his behaviour. Edward III's grandfather Edward I was described as "A long, lean man of six feet two inches, nicknamed 'Longshanks'," (J. H. Plumb and Huw Wheldon). So there were enough tall people and enough fair people in Edward IV's pedigree for there to be nothing surprising about his height and colouring. (And George, Duke of Clarence, was reportedly very similar to Edward in size and colouring.)

2. That the children of Edward IV were illegitimate. This is based on the claim that as soon as Edward IV died in 1483 a Bishop Stillington suddenly came forth with a document purporting to show that Edward had committed bigamy when he married Lady Elizabeth Grey (Woodville) because he had already signed a precontract to marry Lady Eleanor Butler. This was an appallingly cruel thing to do to any widow; the minute her husband is dead, and therefore unable to rebut the charges or protect his wife and children, to claim that she was party to a crime, that all her ten children were bastards, to make her the butt of gossip, scandal, and humiliation, and to deny her access to the alleged documents—let alone any means of legal redress. I am naturally suspicious of any document which is suddenly produced so opportunely. Bishop Stillington is always presented as both honest and harmless. Yet he had been called to Rome to answer accusations in 1475 which suggests he may not have been as honest and harmless as all that. There are two supposed reasons why he had kept the explosive document secret for two decades: 1. that he was afraid of Edward IV's wrath; but this doesn't hold water because it wasn't up to the bishop to charge the king with bigamy, he simply had to hand it to his superiors in the church to have it tested under canon law or, if he didn't trust the church to handle it properly, he could simply have passed it to the Lord Chief Justice. And 2. that Edward married secretly so he didn't know until it was too late. This makes it sound as though Edward and Elizabeth popped down to the registry office! But in their time people married in church or at home. In Elizabeth's case she would most probably have chosen to marry from her father's home in Northamptonshire. So her parents, siblings, her two children from her first marriage and possibly some of her Grey in-laws, also the Woodville tenants and staff, the local clergy, and quite likely local villagers and surrounding gentry would have been there (or if not there then they would have had to be blind and deaf not to learn what was planned). And on Edward's side he would hardly have posted off to the midlands without even a groom, nor would he have wanted to turn up at his marriage in stained and muddy clothes. He would have taken his personal staff and possibly several courtiers. For instance, his esquire of the body (valet) had been Sir John Norreys. As he got older he became Edward's Master of the Wardrobe and his son Sir William Norreys became one of Edward's Knights of the Body. There is a good chance that both men would have accompanied their master to his wedding. William was married to a sister of the 13th Earl of Oxford, so there is a good chance that Oxford was also aware of the marriage. Then there

were all the functionaries needed to keep things running at the London end in the weeks Edward was away. 'Secret' sounds dramatic but I don't think it is totally accurate …

The situation becomes even more puzzling when the claims made about Lady Eleanor Butler, Elizabeth Lucy, and the supposed son of one of them, Arthur Lisle, are looked at. The precontract was said to have been signed two years after Edward became king and three years before he married Elizabeth Woodville. So where was Eleanor all this time and why did the marriage not proceed? Even more puzzling was her name. She was said to be a daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury who was a Talbot. So why was she a Butler? I looked up the Shrewsburys in Vicary Gibbs' *The Complete Peerage* and there was certainly an Elizabeth Butler (daughter of the 4th Earl of Ormonde) and she married John Talbot and they had a son John Talbot, born in 1448, who became the next Earl and married Katherine Neville, niece of Richard Neville known to history as 'Warwick the King-Maker'. (This John was grandson of Margaret Beauchamp; related to Warwick's wife.) So Eleanor to be a suitable age to marry Edward IV had to be a sister to this John. In fact I found that John Talbot's first wife was Maud Neville, daughter of Thomas, brother to Ralph Neville, and his second wife was Margaret Beauchamp who died in 1467; so it was John, son of John and Maud, who married Elizabeth Butler as her second husband. But it was son John from the second marriage to Margaret Beauchamp who was created Baron Lisle in 1444 and bumped up to Viscount in 1451, and he appeared to have two sisters, Eleanor (so I wondered if she was the one who had married Thomas Boteler (Butler), son of Ralph, Lord Sudeley), and Elizabeth who married Lord Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. Ralph Boteler was created baron in 1441 and died in 1473. *Burke's Dormant and Extinct Peerages* says he had no children and that he was the first and last Baron Sudeley whereas *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage* says Thomas was the son of the first and last Baron. Whichever way it was, (and if Ralph had a son Thomas then he wouldn't have inherited the title as his father outlived him) Ralph's two sisters, Elizabeth and Joane, inherited the estate. (Ralph's first wife was Elizabeth Hende, his second wife was Alice Deincourt; Alice was born about 1404 and her first husband was William Lovel; "Alice, Lady D'Eyncourt, afterwards *m.* Ralph, Lord Boteler of Sudeley who *d.* 13th Edward IV, and by him had one son, who *d.* an infant, and she died 15th Edward IV", ie. 1475, which suggests that the betrothal may have happened when Thomas and Eleanor were children. It also means that Alice's sons, John Lovel and Thomas Butler, were half-brothers; John Lovel was the father of Francis Lovel who was a keen supporter of Richard III. But the *Complete Peerage* suggests Alice married Ralph when she was too old to bear children.) This only thickens the mystery. If Eleanor was Thomas Boteler's widow she would have inherited her husband's estates in preference to her father-in-law's sisters, not only to provide for her widowhood but also in the possibility she was pregnant with Thomas's heir. So I wondered if the precontract (if there ever was one) was between Thomas Boteler and Eleanor Talbot? If Thomas died as a child there might only have been a betrothal, not a marriage, anyway. She could have used his name once the precontract was signed but unless the precontract specified it or he had made a will she could not expect to inherit anything from him before they were actually married.

But while I was looking at the Shrewsbury pedigree in Burke's *Peerage & Baronetage* I realised it not only differed from the earlier versions but it contained something quite extraordinary: it had Eleanor down as a sister not only to a John Talbot but also to Richard Talbot who became Archbishop of Dublin in 1417 and died in 1449. In other words Eleanor is a generation *before* Edward IV and she is *sister* rather than daughter of the 1st Earl of Shrewsbury. To become archbishop in 1417 Richard must've been born before 1400. She is effectively two generations earlier than the John I thought most likely to be her brother; and therefore that John's greataunt. So even if Eleanor was 20 years or more younger (and there is nothing to suggest she was) than her brother she would still have been at least 20 years older than Edward IV! It was at this moment I began to feel uneasy; not about Eleanor who had probably lived a blameless life but about those historians who treated the story of the precontract as genuine. I went back and went carefully through everything again in case it was my mistake. Eleanor's father is said to have been born in about 1361 and died in 1396 and her mother died in 1413 but her second

husband, after Eleanor's father died, was Thomas Neville—brother of Ralph and uncle to Edward IV's mother. If this is correct, and within a year this way or that it probably is, *Eleanor could not have been less than 46 years older than Edward!* It was her brother John who married firstly Maud Neville and secondly Margaret Beauchamp …

(There is an alternative. Charles Ross in his biography of Richard III says that Eleanor was Ralph Butler's *daughter*, not daughter-in-law. This would not solve anything. She would still have been considerably older than Edward IV. And there is no sign of Ralph having any child except Thomas—and Thomas is problematic. But, curiously, Ralph's father was also a Thomas Butler. Was there ever a plan for him to marry Eleanor perhaps as his second wife? It seems unlikely as he was a provincial knight and the Talbots were rising fast. That other Eleanor, daughter of John Talbot and Elizabeth Butler, perhaps should not be forgotten—but her name was never Eleanor Butler. And there is a good chance that Thomas Butler was dead before she was born.)

Even if there are ways round these problems (and mistakes and confusions were common enough) the mind boggles at the idea that none of these people knew that the widow or the betrothed of Thomas (and it is unclear exactly when, where, and how he died; but as Ralph outlived both his son Thomas and his son's wife Eleanor it helps explain their shadowy existence) *was supposed to have been betrothed to Edward IV for 3 years.*

And the plot thickens. Warwick, we are told, was away in France trying to arrange a marriage to a French princess when Edward married Elizabeth Woodville. But it simply doesn't make sense that no one had told Warwick at any time in the previous three years that a relative of his niece was engaged to marry the king! I suspect he was in France doing diplomatic deals … not arranging a marriage to another Valois princess; not least because the Valois line was notorious for the insanity which cropped up generation after generation (not helped by their habit of marrying close cousins), perhaps finally and tragically in Henry VI …

Jasper Ridley says, "By the canon law, a precontract prevented the parties from contracting another marriage unless the precontract was invalidated or a dispensation was obtained, although the precontract did not in itself constitute a marriage until it was consummated by sexual intercourse."

It becomes even more murky. If Eleanor had been married she could not enter into an agreement to marry someone else unless her husband was very definitely dead or the marriage had been annulled; she would also need to have allowed a decent period of mourning if she didn't want nasty allegations to rise; a king was a prize worth poisoning a mere lord for in many people's estimation. And the problem of Eleanor doesn't end there. We are told she became a nun. A widow or a single woman could become a nun. But a woman who was married or contracted to marry could not take the veil. In that world she was expected to bring property with her as her 'dowry' and a woman was effectively her husband's possession. To become a nun she would need to show that both her property and her body were hers to dispose of as she wished. If she did become a nun then any contract had been dissolved or had never existed. And if her husband's aunts inherited then clearly she had not been able to will her husband's Sudeley estates to a religious order … Sudeley Castle, Ralph's refurbished home in Gloucestershire, surrendered to Edward IV in 1469; Burke's *Extinct Peerage* says of it, "He (Ralph) was afterwards, however, attached and brought prisoner to London; when it is stated, that as he was departing from his seat, he cast a lingering look upon Sudeley Castle, and exclaimed, "*Sudeley Castle, thou art the traytor, not I*." This castle he is said to have built up out of the spoils he had obtained in the wars in France. Leland tells us, "The Lord Sudeley that builded the castle was a famous man of war in King Henry's the fifth and sixth dayes, and was an admiral (as I have heard) on sea; whereupon it was supposed and spoken that it was partly builded ex spoiliis Gallorum; and some speake of a towre in it called Portmare's Towre, that it should be made of a ransom of his." From its present remains, it would seem that Fuller does not exaggerate when in his quaint phraseology he declares, "It was of subjects' castles the most handsome habitation, and of subjects' habitations the strongest castle." These relics, however, would rather indicate its having been a superb crenellated mansion than a baronial fortress."

So what about that other candidate Thomas More brings forward? Elizabeth Lucy. Was she any more likely to have had a precontract? Horace Walpole says she was the daughter of 'one Wyat of Southampton'. This doesn't sound a very likely background. And if there was a son for Eleanor née Talbot with the title of Lisle then it is very hard to see how he could have taken the name away from the Talbot family. There were other Wyatt, Lucy, and Lisle families of that era; some of modest prominence. But did she in fact belong to any of them? I found an Elizabeth Lucy, said to be a daughter of William and Eleanor Lucy of Newington, whose age would be suitable. She had three husbands: 1. Robert Corbet, 2. the Earl of Worcester (John Tiptoft, a supporter of Edward IV; and the information on him suggests that Elizabeth's mother, Eleanor Lucy, was William's *sister* rather than his wife; this seems correct and may explain why this Elizabeth has been overlooked—because her maiden name was actually Hopton not Lucy, but she and her children inherited half of the Lucy estates) and 3. William Stanley, brother to the first Stanley Earl of Derby. William is the man who conveniently came late into the battle at Bosworth Fields on the side of Henry VII and placed Richard's crown on Henry's head. If she had a son to Edward IV between or during any of these marriages then it is hard to see how he could be a Lisle although she was well placed to meet Edward at court.

Mary Clive suggests Elizabeth Wayte as the mother of Arthur Plantagenet who, much later, became Arthur Lisle. I looked him up in *The Complete Peerage* which has the last Viscount Lisle as the grandson of Margaret Beauchamp; the title then went in to abeyance and it was the grandson's aunt Elizabeth who married firstly Edmund Dudley, a minister under Henry VII, and then Arthur Plantagenet (in 1511), illegitimate son of Edward IV; "His mother's name is unknown; by some said to be the "Lady Elizabeth Lucy," by others the notorious Jane Shore, and by others one Elizabeth Waite, he himself being at first known as Arthur Waite. He was present, as "Mr. Arthur," at the funeral of Henry VII, being one of the squires of the body, but otherwise he appears to have been unnoticed till the succession of (his nephew) Henry VIII." He was knighted in 1513 and the title of Viscount Lisle of Kingston Lisle was given to him in 1523. "The Wayte family was seated at Lee Marks and Segenworth in Titchfield, Hants, from the 14th century. In 1538/9 John Wayte leased the manors to his kinsman, Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle." Titchfield is south-east of Southampton, near Gosport, but it later became the home of the Earl of Southampton. So that might explain how Horace Walpole conjured up 'one Wyat of Southampton'.

I am inclined to think that Richard III knew enough about Eleanor to make his claim sound feasible (and to make the suddenly 'discovered' documents look realistic)—while at the same time everyone who might have challenged it was conveniently dead. Edward IV, Eleanor, Eleanor's husband, her parents, her brothers, her husband's parents. In fact the only people with intimate knowledge of the life and death of Thomas Boteler were two very elderly ladies. Even if they were still alive, and this seems unlikely as Ralph is described as well into middle age when he was created Baron in 1441, they were hardly going to challenge the king!

That Richard was worried about a challenge seems likely. He took the document to parliament which had no jurisdiction and no expertise in marriage matters—rather than to the church where canon lawyers dealt every day with marriages, precontracts, annulments, questions of consanguinuity, legitimation, dispensation, bigamy, divorce and all the rest. It is notable that Richard never let the expert gaze of a canon lawyer near his document. (There is also an irony in that Richard himself had not sought the required dispensation before he married Anne Neville who was his first cousin once removed …)

Neither of these claims about illegitimacy struck me as plausible. There *are* two players in the drama who were undeniably illegitimate: 1. Cecily Neville's mother Joan Beaufort was the illegitimate daughter of Edward III's third surviving son John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford. She was illegitimate because Katherine was not married to John (or anyone else) when their four children were born. Pope Benedict XIII legitimated all four in 1397. It is claimed that he put a proviso on the act: that none of these children could inherit the throne. This is feasible as John

had legitimate children from his marriages to Blanche of Lancaster and Constance of Castile and he was close enough to the English throne for this to be an issue.

And 2. Isabel of Castile, grandmother of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, husband of Cecily Neville and father of Edward IV, George Duke of Clarence, and Richard III; because Isabel was the daughter of Pedro 'the Cruel' of Castile and his mistress, Maria Garcias de Padilla. Somewhat ironically, Pedro claimed, after Maria's death, that they had been secretly married and therefore Isabel was legitimate; but Isabel appears to have been born to Maria while Pedro's wife, whom he was accused of poisoning, was still alive. Although neither woman was an important player in the drama they are both reminders that legitimate, legitimized, and illegitimate children all combined to make up the 'great' families of the Middle Ages.

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Just as there are varying claims as to what Edward looked like so there are various claims about Elizabeth Woodville. I found her described as 'gilt', 'blonde', 'golden', 'flaxen', 'the Ice Maiden' and so on. Her portraits suggest dark or possibly red hair but no more than that though she does appear to have brown eyes. But the claim she was 'cold' may have come from her portraits which all show her as stiff and expressionless. These are all Tudor 'copies' of lost originals. But I think 'copy' should be interpreted loosely. I think they are Tudor portraits of how they believed the mother-in-law of Henry VII and the grandmother of Henry VIII *should* look. I am no expert but the headgear, at the very least, appears all wrong. I know historians always claim that Edward married Elizabeth because she was beautiful. But I am increasingly unsure of this. Elizabeth was 27 when she married Edward. Most royal brides were fifteen or so. Edward was surrounded by beautiful fresh-faced youthful beauties. Why did he go for a woman older than him and well past her youth? I do not believe in that epithet 'cold' either. While I was pondering on this I noticed something extraordinary. Of Elizabeth's twelve children, from her two marriages, only one died as an infant! (This was Margaret who died at 6 months old.) In a world where parents regularly lost children this suggests that Elizabeth was a very good mother and chose those who would care for her children, midwives, wet nurses, maids, governesses, wisely and carefully. When Cecily Neville complained about her son's choice of bride Edward didn't say that Elizabeth was beautiful, charming, or intelligent; he spoke of her *as a mother*. I think this is an important aspect. In a world where women, including perhaps Edward's mother, often seemed cool and detached towards their children, it suggests that Elizabeth's warmth and passion as a mother endeared her to Edward. Unlike other queens who were effectively sidelined once they had produced an heir (George IV and Caroline of Brunswick come to mind) Edward obviously maintained a close relationship with his wife and his occasional mistresses were never allowed to become 'players' in his life, unlike the mistresses of Charles II and other kings.

The descriptions of all the Woodvilles could not be more unattractive. Vitriol and vituperation drip from the pens of historians. 'Greedy', 'grasping', 'cruel', 'arrogant', 'ruthless', 'ambitious', 'cold', 'scheming', 'upstart widow', 'base-born' … they are made to sound utterly repellant. Almost the only historian to have a good word for them is Mary Clive in *This Sun of York*. She writes that Elizabeth Woodville was "small, dark, neat, quiet and foreign-looking — her mother was half-French and half-Italian. The Woodville family — men, women and children — clung together devotedly, and Edward evidently found the whole group charming; their French accents, which some people found so irritating, reminded him of happy days in the nursery". (He spent his early childhood in Rouen.) And she goes on "Allegations that they were grasping and pushing seem to be totally without foundation." So was she completely off in la-la-land and hadn't done her research? The book does not seem to support such an assumption.

It certainly seems more likely than not that Elizabeth's mother, Jacquetta de St Pol, was dark. But what about her father, Richard Woodville? I haven't found a description of him but I noticed one interesting thing. He was descended from a Lyons and I have come on the suggestion that in the Middle Ages the name could 'conceal' converted or assimilated Jews. This seems unlikely in this case but even if it was merely rumoured that the Woodvilles had Jewish blood or if they looked dark in a predominantly fair community (despite Edward I expelling the Jews, in the previous two hundred years there had been a number of marriages … and the Jews were still

being used as bogey-men in conversation, jokes, and books in the 15th century) this might help explain some of the extraordinary animus directed at them.

So what of the claims made about them?

1. For a start 'base-born' is problematical. Jacquetta de St Pol was the daughter of Pierre of Luxemburg, and sister to Louis of Luxemburg, Constable of France, whose family descended from Charlemagne, taking in along the way luminaries such as the saintly Pierre of Luxemburg, beatified by the Pope in 1527, and connections to the crowns of Austria, Hungary, Scotland, even Byzantium. In the words of C. S. L. Davies she was "a member of one of the great European royal families". Jacquetta's mother was a daughter of the Duke of Andria and granddaughter of the Duke of Bar. Jacquetta was a distant relative of Henry VI's wife Margaret of Anjou and descended from the Capetian kings of France; her sister was to become great-grandmother of Henri IV of France (he who signed the Edict of Nantes); and like most other players in this drama she was a descendant of Edward III through his daughter Isabelle. Richard Woodville's family were respectable provincial knights but he had been created Lord Rivers in 1448 in the same way that most other great families in the kingdom had begun their rise: by courage on the battlefield.

2. Elizabeth was said to have 'tricked' Edward IV into marriage, firstly by 'waylaying' him (which isn't realistic; Edward was the most eligible bachelor in the kingdom; every ambitious mama was 'waylaying' him and he had his pick of beautiful titled women) and secondly, by playing hard to get and refusing to become his mistress. But this is to misread the whole family. Elizabeth when she met him was a respectable widow of twenty-seven with two young sons. Her in-laws, the Greys of Ruthyn, were a powerful family in their own right and would not have taken kindly to Elizabeth bringing scandal to her sons or to their family. Adultery could be punished by the pillory, by acts of public penance, even by loss of property and worse. There is no hint of scandal in the Woodville family before they met Edward IV. (There is the claim that Richard Woodville married Jacquetta 'secretly' but as an Englishman required church permission to marry a foreigner the 'secrecy' is debatable and it didn't constitute a scandal.) But more than that it would be harder to find a more truly loyal Lancastrian family in the kingdom. Elizabeth's husband, Sir John Grey, had been killed fighting for the Lancastrians at St Albans. Her grandfather had been Esquire of the Body to Henry V and her father had been appointed Constable of Calais by Henry V. Jacquetta had been married to Henry V's brother, John Duke of Bedford, the man about whom Georgette Heyer wrote her last novel *My Lord John* and who has gone down in history as the man who captured Joan of Arc and helped send her to the stake. So Jacquetta was aunt to Henry VI and although her children were not first cousins by blood to him they were his 'courtesy' cousins. And Elizabeth had been for a time a lady-in-waiting to Henry VI's queen. For the Woodville family to change course so drastically because Edward IV wanted to marry their daughter ran the risk of them being publicly branded as turncoats, disloyal, even traitors; and if Edward lost his throne the Woodvilles would then be far more vulnerable than the great landed magnates. That Edward always offered marriage there can be no doubt. Even so it cannot have been an easy decision for Elizabeth no matter how much love he professed. Her behaviour at court so often described as 'cold' or 'haughty' strikes me as the behaviour of someone who can never relax or let down her guard; someone who is surrounded by enemies and always watching every word and gesture and afraid to be her natural spontaneous self. This is understandable. Many people saw her as the Lancastrian spy at the centre of the Yorkist court. Many believed she had bewitched the king by spells and sorcery. Added to that were all the natural jealousies and intrigues which filled every English court and the many people who resented the Woodvilles as not being 'one of us'. And in a country where both the French and the Italians were looked upon with deep suspicion (anti-Italian riots were quite common in London where the Italians had taken on the discarded Jewish mantle) here was a woman who spoke both French and Italian. I'm not surprised that her demeanour was marked by silence and withdrawal—along with a very human desire to remind the great ladies around her that she, not they, was Queen.

3. Elizabeth's brother John was said to have 'forced' the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk into marriage. This doesn't ring true. A widow could choose whether to remarry or not. Old documents often refer to widows as being 'at their own dispose' or having 'licence to marry where they will'. A mere earl could not pressure a Dowager Duchess, the only person who could put pressure on her was the king. But why would John want to marry a woman too old to have children? Presumably he wanted an heir. And the title and estates had already passed to the current duke so the benefits would have been minor. When I looked at the Dowager I noticed she was Katherine Neville, Cecily Neville's sister. So would John have really wanted to marry his sister's mother-in-law's sister? Still, this was Katherine's fourth marriage so she may not have been totally opposed to the idea of remarriage. (She had already been married to a Mowbray, a Strangeways, and a Beaumont.) While I was mulling on this I thought Edward appears to have shared the medieval sense of humour, bawdy, juvenile, and rather cruel. And the Dowager Duchess was one of the *grande dames* of the kingdom; the problem was she had to bow to the Dowager Duchess of Bedford who took precedence and this was Jacquetta. By all reports when she came to England Jacquetta was very young, very beautiful, cultured and cosmopolitan, she spoke French as her first language and Italian as her second, she had married beneath her, and so she created a constant problem of precedence for all the aristocratic women at court; the result seems to have been constant snubs, slights, criticisms, and generally offensive and chilly behaviour on behalf of some of the *grande dames*. I suspect Edward was sending a clear message to such women: they would respect and bow to his wife and his mother-in-law.

4. Histories constantly refer to the 'hordes' and 'masses' of Woodvilles coming to court and generally encroaching on everybody. Of course new titles have always been treated as parvenus and pushers-in in every age. But who were these hordes? Richard Woodville (who had one brother who had no children and at least one sister Joan who married and lived in France though several of her children returned to England) and his eldest son John (who had no children) were executed by Warwick the King-Maker in 1469 without trial. Jacquetta died in 1472. It is not absolutely certain how many of the Woodville children survived; nor were any of them, except Elizabeth, prolific parents. Richard III executed without trial both Anthony, who had no children (though he is said to have had an illegitimate daughter), and one of Elizabeth's two sons from her first marriage, Richard Grey, who also had no children. Elizabeth's brother Richard had no children, nor did her brother Lionel, nor her brother Edward. By my calculation that leaves several Woodville daughters, none of whom had large families (Joan and Cecily appear to have had no children, their sister Jacquetta who married Lord Strange had one child) and all of whom were subject to their husband's positions and loyalties; and Elizabeth's son from her first marriage who would have identified himself as a Grey rather than a Woodville and who had three children. Edward and Elizabeth had ten children of whom seven survived into adulthood (or five if you remove the 'Princes in the Tower'); Catherine being the last to die in 1527, but as Elizabeth spent virtually all her married life pregnant or recovering from childbirth she can hardly have spent large amounts of time seeking to play a role at court. We can stretch a point and add in a few more distant relatives occasionally coming to London but it is hardly 'hordes'! And the Woodvilles pale into insignificance when compared with the huge Neville connection. Ralph Neville had twenty-four children of which twenty survived and all of whom he married advantageously. Perhaps that is the problem. The Nevilles and the Percys were the two powerful northern families but their power came from land not from royal blood or titles. The Nevilles claimed to descend from the ancient Irish king, Niall of the Nine Hostages, and from a brother to Scotland's Duncan I … but these weren't links which would cut any ice with the Anglo-Norman nobility in London. Ralph changed all that by marrying the legitimated daughter of John of Gaunt, Joan Beaufort. Suddenly the Nevilles were shooting upwards. But I wonder if they wanted anyone to look too closely at their own sudden rise and intermarriage into all the oldest Anglo-Norman families? And what better way to divert attention than to constantly point the finger at another family which was also rising but which did not have the same sort of powerful land base or connections? Cecily Neville was said to have been angry at Edward for his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville. But was this because of who she was—or who she *wasn't*? Edward had

neither used his position to take the Neville family to greater heights—nor had he done anything to further the intricate web of alliances the Neville family had woven. By 1465 the Woodvilles begin to look like one of the few families in England without Neville connections—no matter how remote or obscure. At first I was simply going to rush past this point but then it seemed to me that it is a key to something important. So I took a minute to look at the alliances Ralph Neville had so cleverly woven. Because, in little more than a generation, a remote northern dynasty had effectively captured the English court. His children married into (or were granted the titles of) the families of the Earls of Kent, the Earls of Salisbury, the Earls of Northumberland, Baron Ferrers of Wem, Baron Abergevanny, Baron Latimer, Baron Fauconberg, the Lords Dacre, Scrope, Despenser, and Mauley, Sir Gilbert Lancaster, Sir Gilbert Umfraville … and the cream on their cake: three dukes, Norfolk, Buckingham, and York.

5. Elizabeth is said to have persuaded Edward to grant her first son from her first marriage, Lord Thomas Grey, the title of Marquess of Dorset. But before he was his mother's son he was his father's son in the medieval world. And Edward, I think, was building bridges with one of the most powerful families in the Welsh Borders, the Greys. They were related to the Mortimers, the Stranges, the Ferrers, the Hastings, Herberts, and Stanleys. They were Lancastrians but before they gave their support to Henry IV, the first Lancastrian king who had usurped the throne from Richard II, son of Edward III's first son, they had been close friends with Edward Mortimer, grandson of Edward III's second son Lionel; he arguably had a better claim to the throne than Henry IV, son of Edward III's third son, John of Gaunt. But Edward was captured and imprisoned by Henry IV and died of the plague. So, like the other great families of the Midlands and the Welsh Borders, who were the natural supporters of the Mortimer claim, they saw no choice but to switch their support to Henry's kingship.

6. The Woodvilles were said to have grabbed everything they could get hold of. This supposedly included the Duke of Clarence's estates when Edward had him drowned in the famous 'butt of malmsey' for treason. But when estates were taken under an Act of Attainder many legal processes had to be undertaken. In this case there was Clarence's wife and children to be considered as well as any property they held in their own right. (Clarence's wife was heir to Warwick the Kingmaker, who in turn had married the Warwick heiress, and his father in turn had married the Salisbury heiress.) Then there was the massive stock-take which had to be done before estates were bestowed elsewhere. For a family with a few acres and some cows this didn't take long but it would have taken years to stock-take Clarence's estates, for the Crown to take its share, and finally for the estates to be parceled out. This was the king's responsibility. Then there is the emotive word 'treasure'. Elizabeth is said to have taken wagons of gold and silver into sanctuary when Richard made his grab for power. But would she really have taken gold and silver, making her the focus of every beggar and thief in London, or would she have taken useful things like linen, beds, clothes, basins, wardrobes, not to mention maids and governesses? And everyone else in the Woodville family is also supposed to have run off with everything from the Mint to the Crown Jewels! King John lost his Crown jewels in a quicksand when he was carting them around the countryside with him in 1216 but by the late fifteenth century such things tended to stay put under lock and key. The image of the Woodvilles lumbering up to the Tower with dozens of horses-and-carts is hard to picture … and where would they have planned to take them? To set out through the brigand-infested unruly countryside was a quick route to poverty, theft, and disaster. Equally importantly none of these claims are backed up by hard evidence. And there is a self-righteous tone in a lot of the accounts—as though historians were implying that the Woodvilles were doing something no one else was doing. Yet when it comes to theft, pillage, double-dealing, and ambition on a grand scale the Woodvilles look like street urchins. It was their *lack of power* which made them useful scapegoats …

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Are there are any clues here both to what happened to Elizabeth's two sons, the 'Princes in the Tower', and why Henry Tudor claimed the throne and beat Richard at Bosworth?

The thing that struck me in all this was first the dynastic relationships which have been overlooked. Whatever Edward IV's faults were I think he understood the art of compromise and

reconciliation. It didn't make him any the less ruthless but basically he saw no reason to fight wars if there were ways around them. He cut a deal with the King of France to be paid for not going to war again in France; something which strikes me as very sensible. On the one hand it is extremely doubtful if he could have won a war there anyway. France was slowly and in piecemeal fashion absorbing the small duchies and principalities which the English in the past had played off against each other and used for a basic kind of victualling (usually known as pillage); the feudal serfdom which had left people powerless each time an English army came blundering through, killing and looting and burning, was giving way to a patchwork of small peasant proprietors, there was a rising and better-educated middle-class in the towns who could see more value in trading than fighting, and in the wake of Joan of Arc there was a new mood of confident nationalism beginning to take hold in France. On the other hand payments from France allowed Edward to be a little less demanding when it came to taxing his subjects; it is hard to know how much damage the thirty years of intermittent blood-letting and destruction we call the Wars of the Roses caused (the death toll is thought to be around 40,000) but some parts of the country had descended into serious poverty and lawlessness; anything which allowed people the chance to rebuild was welcome.

Why did people support Henry Tudor? Book after book stressed his remote claim to the throne. But he won his throne in battle. His pedigree was of as little importance as the pedigree of William the Conqueror. So why did people support him at all? It could be argued that his value was precisely that he *wasn't* closely connected to either side. His mother was first cousin once removed to Cecily Neville. His grandmother was the widow of Henry V. Did the powerful magnates believe he would be their puppet on the throne? Was he seen as a way of removing the threat of Welsh rebellions? Was there something about Henry himself which convinced people? None of these ideas seems particularly compelling. But if powerful people knew for certain that Richard had had the rightful heir, Edward V, son of Edward IV and Elizabeth, murdered (or even that he and his brother had died from plague, accident, childhood illnesses) then they were left with the choice of Edward's oldest daughter becoming queen (and medieval men were not keen on women rulers; they had not yet recognised the strength of women like Isabella of Castile, Jadwiga of Poland, Catherine of Medici, Margaret of Austria, and Elizabeth I) or seeking elsewhere for a male candidate.

Histories mention Richard III as making overtures to the powerful northern lords, the Percys, but nowhere could I find it mentioned that he had built bridges with the families who were the most deeply frustrated Lancastrians, the powerful families of the Midlands, the Stanleys, the Stranges, the Greys, the Staffords, the Mortimers, the Hastings, and so on. In fact, looked at dispassionately, he seems to have done everything possible to put them further offside! The books constantly referred to a 'Woodville faction' but this is misleading. The Woodvilles didn't have that sort of power, except in so far as they were a focus for a long history of frustration, and it conveniently overlooks the fact that these powerful families had constantly been expected to fall into line every time the crown changed course. There was no suggestion of genuinely listening to any sense of grievance they might have. Edward seems to have understood this. Richard either didn't understand it or believed he was sufficiently powerful to ignore it.

(In this sense I am inclined to think Richard's efforts to bastardise Edward IV's children were either a delaying tactic while he decided whether to lunge for the throne or a 'testing of the waters' to see what level of resistance he might face. But before opinion polls, freedom of speech, parliamentary elections, a media etc, there was no reliable way to test a king's acceptance … except on the battlefield … because people still found it wise to cheer for kings they hated …)

When he took to the field at Bosworth he certainly had by far the larger army, better horsed, better trained, and better supplied. In theory it should have been a walkover regardless of what the Stanley family (so often criticised for coming late into the battle on Henry Tudor's side) did because, although medieval troop numbers are notoriously rubbery, Richard probably had at least five thousand more soldiers. Richard Marius says of Henry Tudor's victory, "His bodyguard did its duty, and Richard died, swarmed over by efficient swordsmen who had the good sense to leave chivalry shut up in books."

Henry may not have been a particularly attractive character, either as man or as king, but he ushered in what most of the population longed for. Twenty years of relative peace and prosperity.

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And what of the princes? The one simple piece of evidence which points to their death in Richard's reign is that once they went into the Tower in 1483 they were never reliably seen again. There are vague reports of them seen at a window, seen playing in a garden, having clothes made. None of these are convincing. There were dozens of children (of staff, courtiers, craftsmen, foreign visitors, and even as prisoners) living in the Tower. It was to Richard's benefit to show the Princes and put rumours to rest but he never did so. By the time he took to the battlefield in 1485 the Princes had effectively been missing for two years.

Might they have escaped? I would like to think so. And I came upon the information that Elizabeth Woodville's grandfather had for a time been Constable of the Tower (as had her brother's father-in-law Lord Scales and, later, her son Thomas Grey) so if anyone in the family had heard stories of escapes and secret ways out they might have been tempted to follow suit. It is not certain but definitely possible that Richard had the youths removed from the Tower precisely because he knew this history. In which case none of the skeletons found in the Tower could be the boys. (And I am dubious of claims that children found there over the succeeding centuries might be the Princes; if they had taken after their very tall father they were probably already the size of most fifteenth century adults.) And, far from being cold, Elizabeth Woodville was passionately fond of and protective of her children. If anyone could have saved one or both of them I think it would have been her. I doubt if anything, whether it was smiling at Richard, pretending to be pleased with his behaviour, friendly actions and attitudes and words which stuck in her throat, would have been too much sacrifice if she believed it could save her sons. So if she did succeed in getting them away where would she send them? The only truly safe plan would be to get them out of England to her St Pol relatives in France.

And if Richard was responsible for their deaths—then all those, at court and in parliament, who pressured her to release her sons from sanctuary into Richard's 'care' must carry some of the blame.

While I was looking at the Norreys family I noticed something interesting. One of Sir William Norreys' sisters was Anne who married John Tyrrell (or Tirrell); the man who supposedly confessed to the murder of the princes was James Tyrell, a minor court functionary of the same status as the Norreys. So was James related to John? There is a possibility that he was. He certainly would not have taken upon himself to execute the Princes without clear instructions from Richard. But Anne's nephew was Edward Norreys who married a sister of Francis Lovell, the rather wild and quixotic man who died from trying to put the pretender Lambert Simnel on the throne in the time of Henry VII. Did the Lovells, Tyrells, and Norreys know something … or was this, more likely, wishful thinking on their part? (Henry VIII would later behead Sir Henry Norreys, Edward's son, ostensibly for adultery with Anne Boleyn but even the most suspicious of husbands must've known this was absurd; so was the king paying back a different score?)

And would Elizabeth herself have wanted her son to inherit? I'm not sure. Her marriage to Edward IV had embroiled her family, to whom she was undoubtedly attached, in unmitigated disaster. It had led to the beheading of her father, two of her brothers, one of her sons, and the probable murder of two more, she had seen her husband die from an awful combination of overwork, overindulgence, stress and strain, when he was only forty-one … and throughout her years as Queen she had been constantly subjected to slurs, slights, snubs, criticism, and a general atmosphere of hostility.

Perhaps not.

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"Between 1455 and 1487 armies of Englishmen fought against each other on at least seventeen occasions and the crown changed hands five times. This civil warfare has been known as 'The Wars of the Roses' since the expression was, apparently, first coined by Sir Walter Scott in 1829. There is no historical foundation for this title. Scott was presumably inspired by Shakespeare. In his *King Henry VI, Part I*, the two principal adversaries, the dukes of York and

Somerset, pluck roses and adopt them as badges in token of their mutual hatred: York's white rose then symbolises the claim of his house to be the true heirs to the English crown, while Somerset's red rose is the emblem of loyalty to the reigning house of Lancaster. This dramatic scene, unfortunately, was a complete invention of Shakespeare's part. There is no report of such an encounter between York and Somerset in the annals of their own time or even in the histories of the Tudor period. Nor is there any evidence that the forces of Lancaster and York marched into battle decorated with these emblems. The white rose was undoubtedly one of the emblems of the York family, but the favourite device of the duke of York was a fetterlock, while his son Edward IV adopted the badge of the rising sun. The red rose was likewise one of several traditional Lancastrian badges, but Henry VI made no use of it and it came to the fore only with Henry VII. But historically justified or not, it is convenient to have a term to identify a unique period in our history. 'Wars of the Roses' is certainly not the only modern name for past events to have achieved currency."

(R. L. Storey in *The Reign of Henry VII*.)

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So what of Thomas More's book *History of King Richard III*?

None of the descriptions of his book really prepared me for something which is basically a rollicking adventure story. It has real people in it but none of the things which would underpin it as history, such as documents, known statements, detailed interviews. More puts long conversations into people's mouths. He gives them emotions. He makes claims which have no evidence to back them up. Basically he was telling a story as he had heard it.

There has been considerable discussion as to whether he got the story from Archbishop Morton. There was no love lost between Richard III and Morton. But this idea isn't very realistic. More went to live in Morton's household when he was twelve to work as a page. He was there, along with other boys, for two years. Henry VII had been on the throne for five years and appeared increasingly secure. It is hard to imagine that Morton spoke constantly about the brief reign of Richard III. After all, this was a man who had lived through six kings. And Morton was a man of many parts. He is credited with being one of the moving forces to bring the study of Greek into English life; a study which would lay the ground for humanism, reformation, and renaissance in English life. Now churchmen, lawyers, and scholars could read both the Bible and the Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, in their original tongue … and in the process some of the Latin books and manuscripts circulating, supposedly based on Greek originals, were found to be fraudulent. He was also interested in the many aspects of religious and secular life …

It seems far more likely that More drew much of his material from his father John More who had been a rising and ambitious young barrister during Richard's reign. It also seems almost certain that More himself would have seen Richard in person. His father would have taken him as a child (he was seven-years-old when Richard died) to watch the King ride past. London then had about forty thousand people. And seeing the king is the kind of thing that would have remained for ever in a child's mind. John More didn't die till 1530.

To his father's reminiscences he added his own flavourings. On the one hand he brought his powerful lawyer's mind to the mixture. But he brought something else. Superstition. Historians since have explained Richard's character in various ways but More implies that he was born evil. The allegory of a baby born feet first and already possessing teeth would not have been lost on medieval readers. The Plantagenet dynasty had always been in folklore the 'devil's spawn' based on an old legend, which went like this: an ancient Count of Anjou brought home a beautiful bride who was everything desirable, lovely in person, a good wife, a good mother, but there was something odd about her. As soon as the priest raised the Host during Mass she would turn and slip out. Her husband instructed four of his knights to stand on the ends of her cloak (people stood in church in those days). The priest raised the Host, the wife turned to leave church, but this time she could not move. With a terrible shriek, and still holding two of her children by the hand, she rose into the air and flew out a window and was never seen again. The remaining two children survived and one became ancestor of the Plantagenet dynasty. More was saying that

Richard's death, the last Plantagenet king, also saw the end of the dynasty of the devil's children. People would have seen the symbolism in it. It was not only laying a dynasty to rest; it was effectively the end of an age. It didn't mean that More liked Henry VII. He very clearly didn't. He wrote at Henry's death, "This day is the end of our slavery, the fount of our liberty, the end of sadness, the beginning of joy". But he *was* ringing down the curtain on the past.

It is hard to be didactic about More's history because we don't know when he began it, nor whether he intended to publish it or simply circulate it in manuscript copies. Some writers suggest he began it before he wrote *Utopia* and put it aside to write a story which appealed more. Some suggest that he planned it as his follow-up book to *Utopia* and either didn't go on with it because *Utopia* did not immediately find a popular readership or because of the press of his many other commitments as he rose in the court of Henry VIII or because some of the people he mentioned were still alive or because he had found that some of his material was wrong. These suggestions are not particularly compelling. He often did not complete things but the evidence suggests he found the time to complete the things he believed in. He would've known when he began writing which of his characters were still alive … and the only one he mentions is Jane Shore who is unlikely to have objected to the book. He wrote two versions of his history, one in English and one in Latin (which differs slightly), so this suggests a fair degree of interest.

But the book is unlike anything else he wrote in that all his other writings and translations were in the nature of debates, arguments, controversies, explorations of differing opinions, dialogues. He wrote as a lawyer exploring both sides of a case might write.

Peter Ackroyd says of him, "He did not write, or wish to write, 'literature' in any sense we now care to think of it. He wrote polemics, refutations, confutations and dialogues in which the case is 'put' and challenged in true deliberative fashion; there have been essays written on the prevalence of rhetorical punctuation in More's prose compositions, but that is only one aspect of a style largely derived from rhetorical figures and devices. When we come to look at his open-air dialogues, of which *Utopia* is the most celebrated example, we should remember that his conduct of debate was exactly that which the schoolboys of St Anthony's practised — something to be argued outdoors and in the public domain. There was no such thing as private truth."

His history of Richard is straightforward story, a form he probably did not find very congenial, and by choosing this form he was almost certainly influenced by what was undoubtedly the most popular 'history' of his time, *Le Morte D'Arthur*. He may have felt he was doing for 'modern' history what Malory had done for 'ancient'.

So why didn't he finish his book about Richard?

I came upon this comment in Dorothy Sayers' novel *Have His Carcase* in which a character says of Shakespeare's Richard III, 'Too slimy at the beginning and too tough at the end. It ain't nature. Not but what the play always acts well. Plenty of pep in it, that's why. Keeps moving. But he's made Richard two men in one, that's what I complain of. One of 'em's a wormy, plotting sort of fellow and the other's a bold, bustling sort of chap who chops people's heads off and flies into tempers. It don't seem to fit, somehow, eh?'

I think this is the key to More's problem with his book. He was a Londoner, born and bred. He probably learnt as a young man the rudiments of archery and he was a reasonable horseman. But he had never been in battle. And all his readers, soaked in the endless battle scenes of *Le Morte D'Arthu*r and other popular stories of that ilk, would be critical if the scenes leading up to Richard's death were not at least as good as Sir Thomas Malory's depictions. He could write the London scenes from the perspective of a lawyer and courtier. He was making heavy weather over how to present the battlefield scenes.

And is he reliable when it comes to suggesting that Richard had a deformed shoulder? Richard was born in Ireland in late autumn so it *is* possible he suffered from a mild case of rickets. This is a curious question because Erasmus says that More himself had uneven shoulders. He says this was not a deformity but rather that More walked in a slightly lop-sided way which suggested one shoulder was higher than the other. His certainty that there was no deformity suggests either that More had demonstrated this to him or that he had seen More undressed. This is almost the mirror image of the short scene where Richard is asked to prove he isn't deformed.

I can understand Shakespeare using a physical deformity on stage; it would be much easier to show than a mental or sexual aberration. And obviously Richard, who spent a lot of time charging round on horseback waving a sword, could not have been seriously physically disabled (though wearing armour caused haemorrhoids, kidney stones, and other nasty complaints) … and More's older readers, such as John More himself, would have clear memories of Richard's physique … So I think there is something else at work here.

While I was pondering I realised that Richard was only a child of eight when his father died. Richard, Duke of York, was an able and brave though not an innovative or even very clever commander. I am sure his son was brought up to admire his father's courage and abilities though it seems more likely Richard would have turned to his nineteen-year-old brother if he wanted a role model. It has been suggested that Richard was always jealous of Edward and Edward treated him unkindly but I don't find either suggestion compelling. There was too large a gap in their ages for the normal sibling quarrels to be an issue.

But I think Cecily *would* have told him stories of the man who had loomed so large in her own childhood, both physically and socially, her father Ralph Neville. Cecily, as last child and said to be beautiful, was probably admired and petted. And she had every reason to admire the father who had arranged for her the most glittering marriage possible. But if the boy Richard was regaled with stories of his extraordinary grandfather what might he have drawn from those stories? On the one hand he had failed dismally to walk in his grandfather's footsteps. Ralph sired twenty-four legitimate children (and probably a number of illegitimate ones). Richard had one rather sickly son who predeceased him (and several illegitimate children who may or may not have been his). Ralph had moved his family to positions of power and influence, not by war, but by consummate diplomatic skills. Richard, every time he compared himself with his grandfather, must have felt deeply inferior.

His life suggests the playing out of a deeply felt need to be a worthy successor of his father and his grandfather. In both he failed. He believed that rubbing out the Woodville family would be sufficient to enhance his power and security by diplomatic means. He believed that he was a sufficiently able commander to convince and triumph on the battlefield.

A deformed shoulder was one way of suggesting that Richard was not the man his brother Edward IV, his father, Duke Richard, or his grandfather, Earl Ralph, was.

But I think something else is the bedrock of Thomas More's story. It has to do with More himself. By all accounts he was a deeply troubled and divided man. He was drawn towards the ascetic life of a monk but knew he couldn't accept celibacy. For most of his life he punished himself for his perceived failings of the flesh by wearing a hair shirt and whipping himself.

Marius said of him "He was a Renaissance man, acquainted with a wide variety of knowledge, but he believed that a few great ideas gave meaning to life. They happened to be thoroughly medieval ideas, and when they were threatened, he could and did descend into deceit, hatred, and murderous rage—as most of us can and do when the very ground of our being is threatened and when we are not sure of ourselves. He could be a devoted and generous friend; he could also be an ugly and implacable enemy."

More was an intense, almost hyperactive person, idealistic, yet also pragmatic, distinctly misogynistic and yet accepting of female education and fond of his children; he hated sloth and believed that every minute of life should be used in some way, particularly in ways that brought success, advancement, an increase in knowledge or wealth. He was vain and yet could parade his humility.

When More used Richard as a vehicle to explore power and ambition he was probably exploring his own split self and his own confused and frequently contradictory impulses. Richard lived on the cusp of childhood memory. He wasn't a sufficiently clear memory to intrude on More's story. Through him More could explore the ideas, laws, attitudes, failures, impulses, that he struggled with in his own public and private life.

It has been suggested that More wrote his history to please the Tudors. This seems unlikely. When More wrote his history Henry VIII was at the peak of his power and popularity. He had no need to fear a king who had been dead more than thirty years. But More *was* capable of fudging

facts to suit the Catholic church. He demonstrated this in his later book on the Hunne case. Richard Hunne was a London merchant who was found dead, hanging in the cells at St Paul's. It was said to be suicide but all the evidence taken by the coroner's jury pointed to murder. More may have believed the church to be trustworthy in its evidence but as a lawyer he cannot have been blind to all the clues which pointed to murder.

Still, More *was* capable of writing to please the Tudors; his *Response to Luther*, written at the behest of Henry VIII, makes his portrait of Richard III look mild and gentle. With the King's backing he could descend to the most appallingly abusive and disgusting libels. But I think More was writing his history of Richard III for himself, not for any patron, nor to claim any place in history.

It is his devotion to Catholicism which was a key fact of his life and which finally brought him to the scaffold when he refused to swear allegiance to Henry VIII as head of the new English church.

But none of this would have led me to see More's history as presenting Richard as a prude. True, Richard has Jane Shore paraded half-naked through the streets of London for harlotry, and Richard called his document on treason a 'Proclamation for the Reform of Morals' (!), but I think it is more that the spirit of Thomas More pervades his 'history' of Richard as it pervades all his writing. And More was both a faithful husband and a man mortified by his own sensual nature.

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I have a theory that our bodies to a considerable extent are what we eat and our minds are what we read; not in its specific details perhaps but in its tone and its view of the world. This is a hard thing to pin down in the modern world but in the medieval world people owned few books and the ones they did read made a major impact on their views.

Edward IV encouraged the English printer William Caxton to return from the Netherlands and set up as a printer in London. Caxton and his partner (who had the delightful name of Wynken de Worde) set up shop and brought out at least a hundred books in London. They weren't the only printers there, nor perhaps were they particularly innovative, but they were hard-working journeymen printers who did a lot to put books into the hands of people beyond the aristocracy and the university-educated. So I thought I would look briefly at three books which became more readily available and therefore influential in this period.

Barbara Tuchman wrote in *A Distant Mirror* of St Thomas Aquinas. "If the lay view of medieval woman was a scold and a shrew, it may be because scolding was her only recourse against subjection to man, a condition codified, like everything else, by Thomas Aquinas. For the good order of the human family, he argued, some have to be governed by others "wiser than themselves"; therefore, woman, who was more frail as regards "both vigor of soul and strength of body," was "by nature subject to man, in whom reason predominates." The father, he ruled, should be more loved than the mother and be owed a greater obligation because his share in conception was "active," whereas the mother's was merely "passive and material."

The belief then was that men contributed tiny miniature 'people', too small to be seen, and that women contributed the warm safe womb in which these tiny things could grow, much as seeds in warm moist ground begin to grow. The problems for women were twofold; if children turned up looking like them or their relatives then they could be accused of adultery because children were naturally expected to look like their fathers; and if they produced girls when their husbands expected boys they were accused of doing things to alter the sex of the new baby—which could include anything from witchcraft to adultery to failing to eat the 'right' food …

Thomas was a Dominican monk who died in Italy in 1274 as he was bringing his huge work *Summa theologica* to its completion. Inspired by the recently re-discovered works of Aristotle it was his attempt to unify everything, harmonise everything, under the rule of the church. It was enormously influential. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval History* says of him, "What made noteworthy the contribution of Thomas Aquinas to the scholastic assimilation of Aristotle was less his acceptance of so much in Aristotle than his capacity to interpret apparently recalcitrant texts there in a way that made them concordant with Christian belief."

The most popular romance was the French chivalric romance, *Roman de la Rose*, or the Romance of the Rose. It was a huge thing with two authors working on it over a fifty year period, extolling male actions and attitudes, and like most such creations it offered up a woman as sex object and prize at the end.

But I thought, rather than dwell on the extreme misogyny of the medieval world (although it should never be forgotten as it influenced every aspect of public and private life), I would include this by Barbara Tuchman: "Women's status in the 14th century had one explicit female exponent in Christine de Pisan, the only medieval woman, as far as is known, to have earned a living by her pen. Born in 1364, she was the daughter of Thomas of Pisano, a physician-astrologer with a doctor's degree from the University of Bologna who was summoned to Paris in 1365 by the new King, Charles V, and remained in his service. Christine was schooled by her father in Latin, philosophy, and various branches of science not usual in a woman's education. At fifteen, she married Etienne Castel of Picardy, one of the royal secretaries. Ten years later, she was left alone with three children when her husband, "in the flower of his youth," and her father died within a few years of each other. Without resources or relatives, she turned to writing to earn the patronage that must henceforth be her livelihood. She began with poetry, recalling in ballades and rondeaux her happiness as a wife and mourning her sorrows as a widow. Though the forms were conventional, the tone was personal

No one knows the labor my poor heart endures
To dissimulate my grief when I find no pity.
The less sympathy in friendship, the more cause for tears.
So I make no plaint of my piteous mourning,
But laugh when I would rather weep,
And without rhyme or rhythm make my songs
To conceal my heart.

The plaintive note (or perhaps more sympathy than Christine pretended) loosened the purses of nobles and princes—whose status was reflected in patronage of the arts—and enabled Christine to undertake studies for a flow of didactic prose works, many of them adapted or translated from other authors, as was the common practice of the time. No subject deterred her: she wrote a large volume on the art of war based on the Roman classic *De re militari* by Vegetius; a mythological romance; a treatise on the education of women; and a life of Charles V which remains an important and original work. Her own voice and interest are strongest when she writes about her own sex, as in *La Cité des dames* on the lives of famous women in history. Though translated from Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, Christine makes it her own in the prologue, where she sits weeping and ashamed, wondering why men "are so unanimous in attributing wickedness to women" and why "we should be worse than men since we were also created by God." In a dazzling vision, three crowned female figures, Justice, Faith, and Charity, appear to tell her that these views of the philosophers are not articles of faith "but the mists of error and self-deception." They name the women of history who have excelled—Ceres, donor of agriculture; Arachne, originator of spinning and weaving; and various heroines of Homeric legend, the Old Testament, and Christian martyrology.

In a passionate outcry at the close of the century in her *Epistle to the God of Love*, Christine again asks why women, formerly so esteemed and honoured in France, are now attacked and insulted not only by the ignorant and base but also by nobles and clergy. The *Epistle* is a direct rejoinder to the malicious satire of women in Jean de Meung's continuation of the *Roman de la Rose*, the most popular book of the age. A professional writer with a master's degree in Arts from the University of Paris, Jean de Meung was the Jonathon Swift of his time, a satirist of the artificial conventions in religion, philosophy, and especially chivalry and its central theme of courtly love. Nature and natural feeling are his heroes, False Seeming (hypocrisy) and Forced Abstinence (obligatory chastity) his villains, whom he personifies as mendicant friars. Like the clerics who blamed women for men's desires, or like the policeman who arrests the prostitute but

not the customer, Jean de Meung, as a male, blamed women for humanity's departure from the ideal. Because courtly love was a false glorification of women, he made women personify its falsity and hypocrisy. Scheming, painted, mercenary, wanton, Meung's version of woman was simply the male fantasy of courtly love in reverse. As Christine pointed out, it was men who wrote the books.

Her presence was to provoke a vociferous debate between antagonists and defenders of Jean de Meung in one of the great intellectual controversies at the turn of the century. Meanwhile her melancholy flute still sounded in poetry.

It is a month today
Since my lover went away.
My heart remains gloomy and silent;
It is a month today.
"Farewell," he said, "I am leaving."
Since then he speaks to me no more.
It is a month today.

As shown by the sumptuous bindings of surviving copies, her works were in large demand by wealthy nobles. At the age of 54 she retired to a convent in grief for the condition of France. She lived for another eleven years to write a poem in praise of the figure who, to posterity, stands out above all others of her time—another woman, Joan of Arc."

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William Caxton wrote in his preface to *Le Morte D'Arthur*: "After that I had accomplished and finished divers histories, as well of contemplation as of other historical and worldly acts of great conquerors and princes, and also certain books of examples and doctrine, many noble and divers gentlemen of this realm of England camen and demanded me, many and ofttimes, wherefore that I have not do made and imprint the noble history of the Sangrail, and of the most renowned Christian king, first and chief of the three best Christian and worthy, King Arthur, which ought most to be remembered among us English men tofore all other Christian kings."

Caxton says there were nine men of universal worth in history: Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Joshua, David, Judas Maccabaeus, King Arthur, Charlemagne, and Godfrey of Bouillon. But as he was planning to do a book on Godfrey, ruthless leader of the First Crusade and brother to Baldwin I, first Christian king of Jerusalem, Edward IV prevailed on him to do a book on King Arthur instead. Caxton himself seems to have had doubts about the existence of Arthur but he agreed to publish the book credited to Sir Thomas Malory which was already circulating as eight books in manuscript form and which was based on earlier French versions, which in their turn were probably based on English legends. Malory is a shady person who is thought to have been a knight who was imprisoned for rape.

Elizabeth Hallam in the *Plantagenet Encyclopedia* says, "Sir Thomas Malory. d. 1471. English author; almost certainly Thomas Malory of Newbold Revell in Warwickshire. Knighted in 1442, he was a member of the parliament of 1445. In 1449 he and his men tried and failed to kill Humphrey Stafford, 1st duke of Buckingham; in 1450 he twice committed rape and extortion and in 1451 he terrorized the monks of Combe Abbey in Warwickshire. From 1451 he spent most of his life in prison, where he wrote his prose romance of King Arthur, Morte d'Arthur, published by Caxton in 1485. His work, supposedly based on French romances, is noted for the simple beauty of its prose and its narrative drive; it became the standard source for later versions of the legend."

But this view is not universally accepted. It also presents problems. It has Malory dying 14 years before his book was printed. So where was the book in the meantime and who else worked on it? It begs the question as to why a man with such a heinous criminal record was merely given a prison cell well-provided with sufficient comfort to translate, write, or adapt a major literary work—rather than losing his head. Would a Warwickshire knight have sufficient education? Given his lack of known background this is a hard question to answer. He would have needed to

be fluent in both French and Latin and to be highly literate in English. A bit of soldier's French picked up campaigning, a bit of church Latin; neither would be sufficient for the sustained effort of translating, collating, and anglicising the various French versions from which his book is said to derive. The name Malory could come from the Old French for 'unfortunate' or 'unlucky' while *mal* was French for bad. It may just be coincidence but I wonder if 'Sir Thomas Malory' was actually a pseudonym for someone else? Even possibly Caxton himself—as he is known to have done some detailed editing of the work and he may have felt that a titled author would sell more books …

Whatever Caxton thought of Malory or of Arthur he rightly saw it as a story which would find a ready audience. Malory's Arthur is redrawn as a Norman figure, with all the Norman trappings of jousts and armour and tournaments and bishops and even Saracens to hover in the wings. He only plays lip service to the magic and mystery of Merlin.

And when all eight books were published in 1485 they immediately became immensely popular. It seems certain that Edward IV had read the books in manuscript form so it is quite likely that Richard III had also.

How did they influence people? The curious thing is that the books, despite their colour and action and pathos and magic and romance, are about death. Death is the most glorious thing a king can hope for. And it is through death that a king's name lives on. I cannot really see this influencing Edward IV who, whatever his faults, enjoyed life. But I wonder if this death imperative influenced Richard? To die gloriously was better than to live on as yet another king struggling with taxes and uneasy French diplomacy and an ambivalent populace …

I think Richard could have avoided Bosworth. But there is the sense that he almost leapt at the opportunity to go north and fight.

And regardless of who else it influenced I feel sure Shakespeare had read Malory.

He has Catesby say: Rescue, my Lord of Norfolk, rescue, rescue!

The king enacts more wonders than a man,
Daring an opposite to every danger:
His horse is slain, and all on foot he fights,
Seeking for Richmond in the throat of death
Rescue, fair lord, or else the day is lost!

Then Richard III comes in and says: A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!

If he really did call for another horse I am sure it was in far more earthy terms! But I think Shakespeare's symbolism would have been understood by his readers. In Malory's book scenes such as this abound:

'When King Lot saw King Nentres on foot, he ran unto Melot de la Roche, and smote him down, horse and man, and gave King Nentres the horse, and horsed him again. Also, the King of the Hundred Knights saw King Idres on foot, then he ran unto Gwinas de Bloi, and smote him down, horse and man, and gave King Idres the horse, and horsed him again; and King Lot smote down Clariance de la Forest Savage, and gave the horse unto Duke Eustace. And so when they had horsed the kings again they drew them all eleven kings together, and said they would be revenged of the damage that they had taken that day.

'The meanwhile came in Sir Ector with an eager countenance, and found Ulfius and Brastias on foot, in great peril of death, that were foul defiled under horse feet. Then King Arthur as a lion ran unto King Credelment of North Wales, and smote him through the left side, that the horse and the king fell down; and then he took the horse by the rein, and led him unto Ulfius, and said, 'Have this horse, mine old friend, for great need hast thou of horse.' '

In the end the only person willing to find Richard a horse is an unimportant functionary …

Perhaps Dorothy Sayers was right. There are two Richards in Shakespeare. There is the More 'Richard' who schemed and plotted. And there is the Malory 'Richard' who hastened to his death in scenes of desperate slaughter but with the hope of posthumous memory.

*

"If there were but a snug secretaryship vacant there — and these things in Demerara are very snug — how I would invoke the goddess of patronage; how I would nibble round the

officials of the colonial Office; how I would stir up my friends' friends to write little notes to their friends! For Demerara is the Elysium of the tropics — the West Indian happy valley of Rasselas — the one true and actual Utopia of the Caribbean Seas — Transatlantic Eden."

(Anthony Trollope in *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* in 1860 extolling the virtues of the small British colony which is now part of Guyana.)

"When we see these intelligent insects dwelling together in orderly communities of many thousands of individuals, their social instincts developed to a high degree of perfection, making their marches with the regularity of disciplined troops, showing ingenuity in the crossing of difficult places, assisting each in danger, defending their nests at the risk of their own lives, communicating information rapidly to a great distance, making a regular division of work, the whole community taking charge of rearing of the young, and all imbued with the stronger sense of industry, each individual labouring not for itself alone but for all its fellows — we may imagine that Sir Thomas More's description of Utopia might have been applied with greater justice to such a community than to any human society."

(Thomas Belt in *A Naturalist in Nicaragua* 1874. He was talking about ants.)

But the concept of Utopia as both an ideal place of sharing and community, even a touch of the lotus-eater thrown in, *and* a totally rigid and totalitarian place, marked by a dreadful sameness, continue to inform our language in the twenty-first century. And the way people read the book itself seems to range between the extremes of an innovative, far-seeing vision for the organisation of nations to support the wellbeing of all people or as a place of mindless labouring with little joy and less opportunity for change and individual betterment.

Utopia, like much of More's work, is a dialogue ostensibly between More and the man who is knowledgeable about the land of Utopia, Raphael Hythlodaeus (translated as Nonsenso), who describes the people and customs and structures and belief in detail.

But the fascination of it is all the things which can be read into it. It has been read as a critique of Tudor rule, as a vision of what England might be, as anti-Catholic and more rarely as pro-Catholic in the sense of early Catholicism, as a fascination for the new lands and places that were being brought to people's attention (and More particularly draws on the travels of Amerigo Vespucci) so that many people, quite understandably, read Utopia as yet another strange new society entered on to the constantly expanding world-view; it has been called a misogynist tract; it has been described as crypto-Communism, and a radical re-thinking of many accepted dogmas such as a celibate priesthood and a more sensible attitude to divorce. The fascination for modern readers might rather be that it presents a society with a very practical attitude to the environment. Utopians are enjoined to live a simple, un-wasteful life. Greed is discouraged and conspicuous consumption is definitely not an ideal.

To what degree did it present More's blueprint for a more equitable and fairer future? I think to a considerable extent. He was well-placed to see the failings of monarchy, government, and church. And to what degree did it, wittingly or not, present More as a person? Again I think the answer must be: a lot. In it can be found More's ambivalence between a wish for an austere and deeply Christian life yet always tempted by the perks of power; his wish for women to have more opportunities and yet his own wish for them to remain subservient to men; a belief that power must have checks and balances and be transparent and yet his doubts as to whether such an ideal is practical; his own pity for the very poor but an acceptance that society as currently configured had effectively condemned them to future poverty; and perhaps in the simplicity and cleanliness of Utopia a secret jibe at the filth and smells of his London.

All this and more …

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February 8: Kate Chopin
John Grisham
February 9: J. M. Coetzee
February 10: Alexander Comfort
William Congreve (chr)
Charles Lamb

February 11: Sidney Sheldon
February 12: Judy Blume
Alan Dugan
February 13: Eleanor Farjeon
February 14: Frank Harris
February 15: Jeremy Bentham
February 16: Van Wyck Brooks
Francis Galton
February 17: Chaim Potok
February 18: Jean Auel
Len Deighton
February 19: Carson McCullers
Daniel Solander
February 20: Richard Matheson
February 21: W. H. Auden
Erma Bombeck
February 22: James Russell Lowell
February 23: W. E. B. Du Bois
February 24: Wilhelm Grimm
February 25: Anthony Burgess
Mary Chase
February 26: Victor Hugo
February 27: Lawrence Durrell
February 28: Wilfred Grenfell
William Kingston
Dee Brown
February 29: For overlooked writers everywhere

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"I was born on leap year day in 1960; in off years we celebrated my birth on March 1. On March 1, 1981, as soon as my parents had finished a loud and out-of-tune duet of "Happy Birthday" (while, a thousand miles away, Silber winced and re-seated his earplugs), I blew out twenty-one candles and presented a twenty-eight-page single-spaced essay to my father, expecting him to read it on the spot, and praise it to the stars, and publish it in *Heritage*: that was all I wanted for my birthday. I don't recall what I did get that year; all I know is that my dad took *a week* just to glance at my piece, and even then he got no further than page four. Maybe he'd already read too many unsolicited manuscripts that week. Or maybe it was too much trouble to pretend an interest in my work. His own career was going well enough that he had no need for vicarious success, and it must've been embarrassing to hear his own opinions — which already sounded archaic in his mouth — coming from someone my age."

(*SIMON SILBER: the works for solo piano* by Christopher Miller)

While I was reading this novel it occurred to me that while there is no shortage of books *about* music, musicians, composers … novels, autobiographies, biographies, documentaries and histories of individual pieces; and there is no shortage of books written *by* composers and musicians … yet no book can truly capture a piece of music.

Imagine being born deaf and someone gives you a book written lyrically and profoundly about Beethoven's ninth symphony, someone else takes you to a concert hall to watch the orchestra playing, and all the while you are closely lip-reading and taking in their body language, the response of the audience, even the sense of vibration through your body … but nothing can tell you what that music sounded like. Descriptions such as the 'thunderclap' of the kettle-drums or the 'soaring' voices or the 'glorious intertwining' of violins and oboes may make you envious that you can't hear, it may make the writing come alive, it may suggest a sense of grandeur such as you feel looking at mountains or a storm or a great gothic cathedral … but there are no words which can tell you how that music sounds.

While I was pondering on the question of how difficult it is to convey in words what a sound sounds like I was reading a little book on Tasmanian Birds and I thought 'it isn't just music'.

Olive Whistler (Pachycephala olivacea): a loud call which may be interpreted 'I'll wet you'

Grey Shrike-Thrush (Colluricinala harmonica): its chief calls have been interpreted 'jo-wit-ee' and 'Duke Wellington'

Striated Pardalote (Pardalotus striatus): a high-pitched and loud call which may be interpreted as 'pick-it-up'

Pick up any bird book and you will find the author wrestling with the same problem. Human words can be reduced to letters—or we have chosen human letters to represent human sounds. But the whole process ceases to work very effectively when we try to reduce non-human language to human words.

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One day I was reading that, as well as being used to rid the world of inherited diseases, one of the most common ideas being posited for gene therapy, new humans, supermen, lab-planned people, was that it would be possible to produce musical prodigies. Why would anyone want to create musical prodigies—even if it were possible? I always feel vaguely uncomfortable when I see tiny tots coming out to the piano, hardly able to reach the pedals, and strutting their virtuouso brilliance. I think this is because the idea of any kind of prodigy seems to go against the natural development and growing maturity of children. It short-circuits the process. There are brilliant children, in academia, in sport, in the arts, in all aspects of life, and I think they should have the sense of nurturing any child has a right to … but I don't believe they should be brought out to shame other children, nor to be a form of performing monkey, nor to make money for their parents, nor even to underpin the promotion of certain sperm banks …

And what makes a musical prodigy?

A good ear is very useful. Good coordination and flexible fingers help. A quick eye and a good memory help. But looked at calmly—what do music prodigies invariably have? A musical background in which they have been steeped since birth. And a prodigious talent for work. Sometimes, as with Beethoven and Mozart, the work was helped along by fathers with long rods and fierce tempers. Perhaps there are prodigies who don't fit this mould—but I can't think of any.

There are the curious cases of children who have appeared to be able to play music with no teaching—and for which the explanations have ranged from reincarnation to spirit possession to hypnosis to some kind of inner ear attuned to music no one else can hear. The most fascinating such cases I can think of are the ones that Oliver Sacks mentions in his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. These are people who, usually because of a stroke or seizure, begin to hear music playing and re-playing in their heads. It can be a bar, a song, a hymn, even medleys of songs like a radio left on. The strangeness goes further. Even deaf people can find everyday life unliveable because of the thunder of music in their heads and may need medication. But it isn't necessarily a disaster. He tells the story of 'Mrs O'C', an elderly and rather deaf lady living in a nursing home, who woke up one night hearing the sound of Irish songs. She was rather worried when all other explanations were removed and she had to accept that the songs were solely in her head. But as the noise dimmed a little she came to love the presence of the songs. She had left Ireland as a small orphan child and had always felt that there was something missing at the heart of her life. Now she said, "It was like being given back a forgotten bit of my childhood again." Over time the music gradually faded and disappeared again, leaving her with the happy memory. Why, out of the huge amounts of noise our minds store away over a long lifetime, just one or a handful of pieces should suddenly begin to replay endlessly is a puzzle.

But no one is suggesting that gene therapy will create more of such savants or of such inexplicable connections.

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Every musician who has worked with a librettist has had to struggle (and vice versa) with the intricacies of language and music and sound. W. S. Gilbert's very productive but sometimes fraught relationship with Arthur Sullivan comes to mind. But recently I came upon the interesting

story of Beethoven's long relationship with the poet and folklorist George Thomson. Joseph Kerman and Alan Tyson in their biography mention Beethoven's publishers in Germany, Austria, and France. "In the English market one firm predominated: that of Muzio Clementi (1810—23), who secured the English rights to a large number of works by direct dealings with Beethoven, and brought them out at the same time as the Viennese, Leipzig or Paris editions. Since these English editions were produced independently of the continental ones, each is potentially important for establishing an authentic text. George Thomson of Edinburgh also deserves a word or two. A civil servant and musical amateur who devoted much of his life to collecting national (and particularly Scottish) folksongs, he had already published several volumes of melodies with accompaniments by Pleyel, Kozeluch and Hayden before he approached Beethoven in 1803 with the request that he should write six sonatas introducing Scottish melodies. Although nothing came of this suggestion or other similar ones, Beethoven did in the end undertake to write piano trio accompaniments to a great quantity of Scottish, Welsh and Irish melodies submitted by Thomson. The work was carried out between 1810 and 1818, a period that included some otherwise barren years. About 1818 Beethoven also wrote for Thomson some simple variations for flute and piano on national melodies."

George Thomson spent sixty years as chief clerk to the Board of Trustees for the Encouragement of Art and Manufacture in Scotland. I imagine his 'other career' of collecting folk songs, music, and stories, which he published in six volumes as *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, gave him much more pleasure than his clerking. Carlyle described him in his old age as "a clean-brushed common-place old gentleman, in a scratch wig". But he also has another curious, and perhaps rather sad, claim to fame: his granddaughter Catherine married Charles Dickens.

Nancy Marshall says in the *Companion to the Burns Supper*, "In later life Burns' artistic talents were devoted almost exclusively to Scottish song, saving many lyrics and melodies, which would otherwise have been lost for ever. From 1788 until 1792 he wrote, rearranged and compiled songs for James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, later performing the same task from 1792 until his death in 1796 for George Thomson's *Select Scottish Airs*. The debt we owe to him for this service is immeasurable, considering his other responsibilities, his poor health and the fact that the work was totally unpaid." It is a fascinating continuum: Burns > Thomson > Beethoven …

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March 1: Lytton Strachey
March 2: John Irving
March 3: F. W. Boreham
Annie Keary
William Charles Macready

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Angus MacVicar wrote in *Rocks in My Scotch* of "F.W. Boreham, the Australian minister, whose books, countless in number, were best-sellers in the years following the First World War." Despite this, I had never heard of F. W. Boreham; I wasn't sure if this merely said something about my reading habits or whether it was more to do with the way posterity has treated him. So who was he? In the curious way such things come to me I was looking through an old folder the other day and I had photographed some pages from H. M. Green's *Australian Literature* about Guy Boothby—and who should come next on his alphabetical list but Frank William Boreham! So this morning I hunted in books of Australian biography and finally found him.

He was born in England in 1871 and became a clerk at the local brickworks where he lost his right foot in an accident. He was raised an Anglican but went as a young man to Spurgeon's College in London and became a Baptist student-minister. In 1894 he was 'called' to minister in Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand. He eventually became president of the Baptist Union there. He brought out two youthful books *Won to Glory* (1891) and *The Whisper of God and other sermons* (1902). Then he was 'called' to the Baptist Tabernacle in Hobart in 1906.

As well as obviously theological and temperance articles he had begun writing more widely for newspapers and in Hobart his biographical writings became well-known. He brought out his first biography *George Augustus Selwyn* in 1911 (Selwyn was the famous 'missionary bishop' who came to New Zealand in 1842 and worked hard to promote tolerance and understanding between Maoris and whites) and he "wrote a biographical series for the Hobart *Mercury*, which in 40 years covered 2000 persons; in 1912-59 he contributed 2500 editorials to the *Mercury* and the Melbourne *Age*. Boreham's 80 publications, including religious works, homiletic essays and novels, sold over one million copies." (ADB). The Broadbanks Dispensary in Bengal in India was funded by his writing and he is remembered by the F. W. Boreham Baptist Hospital in Canberra. He reached out friendly hands and homilies beyond the Baptists to preach in Methodist, Congregational, and Presbyterian congregations, a Canadian University conferred a doctorate of divinity on him in 1928, and he received the OBE in 1954. And a Hobart Baptist told me he is remembered as a shining light here. So why did I need a Scottish writer to tell me of his existence when Hobart should be proud to remember him?

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I remember hearing it said that Martin Luther King did not write his great speeches and sermons and homilies. He may not have. But I think to imply that he stole or plagiarised them from other people is to misunderstand the world in which pastors, ministers, and priests (not to mention rabbis, imans and all religious leaders) move. It is a world in which the writings of the past are the necessary foundation for everything. A preacher who drew his subject matter from a James Bond thriller rather than the Bible would soon have mutterings in his congregation. Not only is this the necessary bedrock but it was (and still is) accepted practice for ministers to buy books of sermons. There was a thriving trade in such books in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Undoubtedly some men simply used the printed sermons as is while others adapted them to local needs and yet others simply saw them as a source of ideas …

I think the key point is that a minister (of whatever flavour) was not a writer; nor was he expected to be. His business was to minister to his flock. To provide inspiration and leadership, to bring the Bible or other sacred writings to his people, to chastise wrong behaviour, to baptise, marry, bury, to pray for repentance, for safety, for health, even for rain, to visit those in need … and if he happened to be able to write his own sermons that was a bonus.

But what of such books today? Do ministers now go to the Internet? Have they become an old-fashioned and largely superceded way of preparing sermons? While I was pondering on this esoteric question I happened to come upon some boxes of books at the All Saints' market—and there were books and books of sermons! I got one, called *Homilies for Sundays of the Year* by Gonzague Motte, just out of curiosity. Their author was a French Catholic but the book was published in Chicago. The idea of homilies being described as:

"Interviewer: "Homily" is the rather erudite term we use for "sermon." Now today we are aware that sermons are not held in great esteem by many of the faithful. What is the problem with sermons today?

Author: There is indeed a problem, and it is important both for those who listen to sermons and those who have the task of preparing them. Sermons do have a bad reputation, and people's discontent with them is a significant sign. It shows that people are looking for something that they are not getting. People dread sermons more than ever before. And yet, at the same time, they yearn to hear God's word more than ever before.

Interviewer: Priests and preachers have been giving sermons for centuries, and people have been listening to them for centuries. Is there something more to be said about the Scriptures really? How is one to find something fresh and new to say today?

Author: There is always something new and unexpected to say about God's word, for several reasons. First of all, there are reasons having to do with human knowledge and scholarship. Man's knowledge of God's word, insofar as it is studied as an ancient text, is making steady progress. Thanks to the panoply of scholarly disciplines which we subsume under the term "exegesis," we can now better understand what the text itself is saying. With the help of historical, geographical, linguistic, and literary findings, exegesis is giving us a better

understanding of what is really expressed in the texts. So the homily can be new and fresh in this sense because we have a different view of the Biblical text.

Then there is also a liturgical reason. Here we begin to touch upon the mystery of the Church. For some years now, we have been reading three Scriptural passages every Sunday at Mass. When we have heard an excerpt fom the Old Testament and an Epistle, we come to the reading of the Gospel with an outlook that has been shaped by the preceding readings. The Gospel now appears to be a new and fresh message, reminding us of things we have heard elsewhere.

Finally, we get to the real reason why the homily can offer something fresh and new. The word of God is not a philosophy book or an intellectual work. It is not the account of a history that is written down once and for all. It is a living word and, as such, it has a life of its own. It develops by mysterious laws of its own, it operates in a secret way that we cannot observe. God's word today is not what it was yesterday or what it will be tomorrow. Thus, to the extent that the homily expresses the work of creation being accomplished by God's word at a given moment, it is always relevant to the moment and it must be reformulated constantly."

And what of the homilies? I had my usual problems with the idea of Mary as being the 'Mother of God', of the presentation of the perfect family as being mother, father, and one child—even though Catholics following suit would have been severely chastised—and the idea of perpetual virginity being equated with purity; something which sets a standard or benchmark for motherhood that no mother can reach.

And I suspect the Big Business that is Christmas would have its own problems with the statement, "Christmas promises us the tragic happening of a profound perturbation caused by the presence of God's holy one in our midst." Profound perturbations! Dear me, that won't help the cash registers! And 'tragic happening'?

But there is a more fundamental thread running through the homilies; that God 'intervenes' in human history. I think this is a misconception.

The homilies are mostly conventional, traditional, readable, middle-of-the-road, perhaps not surprising given that it had first to pass the religious censor to say it was 'free of doctrinal error', but I am left with my question: are such books still an essential part of the library of priests and pastors?

We have come to accept that behind the speeches we hear delivered every day and in all kinds of fora lurks an anonymous person. Occasionally a speechwriter comes out from behind and seeks plaudits. Don Watson comes to mind. But many of the producers of inspirational material, like F. W. Boreham, were well known in their day and popular with readers, more in the way that the New Age inspirational writers of today, such as Paolo Coelho, sell well.

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"Houghton stimulated a peculiar traffic which persists down to the present day—in second-hand sermons. He advertised books, reading and recommending them gratuitously. At some point he had to chide booksellers for putting new titles on old books." (*The Shocking History of Advertising* by E. S. Turner.) John Houghton was a London apothecary, a general dealer, a bookseller, but most importantly in his broadsheet *A Collection for the Improvement of Husbandry and Trade* in 1682 he was a pioneer of advertising. He not only advertised books of sermons but everything from funerals to match-making. But as I was pondering on this I heard Amanda Lohrey talking on the issue of 'marketing Jesus' and I found myself wondering if religions and religious objects *should* be advertised?

All kinds of things from new versions of the *Bible* to CDs of religious songs to devotional items to objects from archeological sites to church notices to tours to religious places are advertised. But should they be? And if so should they adhere to a higher standard than the advertising of ice creams or cars?

An article in the *New York Evening Post* in 1909 drew upon an aspect of advertising that perhaps makes it attractive to religion. Its optimism.

"The hypothetical and somewhat overworked visitor from Mars who should pick up a copy of one of our magazines could not help being struck at the difference in spirit between the literary

and advertising sections. If he concludes that the earth is inhabited by two races of men, a race of stumbling, bungling, unhappy failures and pessimists, and a race of vigorous, successful, radiant optimists, we can scarcely blame him. In the literary pages the world is the worst of all possible worlds; in the advertising supplement it is the best of all conceivable worlds. In the magazine proper everything goes askew. The railroads cheat us and kill us. The food manufacturers poison us. The liquor dealers destroy our moral fibre. The army is depleted. The navy has its armour belt in the wrong place. Workmen go about without work. Lack of sanitation kills its thousands. Automobiles do their share – the list is endless, but what a reconstructed world of heart's desire begins with the first-page advertisement. Here no breakfast food fails to build up a man's brain and muscle. No phono records fail to amuse. No roof paint cracks under the cold or melts under the sun. No razor cuts the face or leaves it sore. Illness and death are banished by patent medicines and hygienic shoes. Worry flies before the model fountain pen. Employers shower wealth upon efficient employees. Insurance companies pay what they promise. Trains always get to Chicago on time. Babies never cry; whether it's soap or cereal, or camera or talcum, babies always laugh in the advertising supplement. A happy world indeed, my masters!"

And the idea of advertising is so ubiquitous that we hardly turn a hair when we read something like: "After 9-11, the Bush administration appointed Charlotte Beers as Under-secretary for Public Diplomacy. Beers, who capped her career by heading two of the world's advertising behemoths, Ogilvy & Mather and J. Walter Thomson, became famous for 'branding' products like American Express. 'Well, guess what?', Secretary of State Colin Powell told senators on the Foreign Relations Committee. 'She got me to buy Uncle Ben's rice and so there is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something.' The 'something' that Beers is selling is 'an elegant brand' called 'the US' and the President and Secretary of State are the 'symbols of the brand'. Beers told Business Week: [T]he whole idea of building a brand is to create a relationship between the product and its user. … We're going to have to communicate the intangible assets of the United States – things like our belief system and our values.' (Sardar and Davies in *Why Do People Hate America?*)

I don't mind if companies advertise a new product. I don't mind if someone opening a new business lets potential clients know—but marketing America smacks of desperation and doubt.

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And what of F. W. Boreham's books? I had been under the impression that they were directed at ministers and churchgoers but I think he saw them as reaching a much wider and more secular public. When I enquired at the library they did not have a single one available for loan. But they did have some in their Tasmaniana Collection if I wanted to go up there and sit and read. Which is what I have been doing today. I know I put it off because I thought they would be heavy going—and instead the books were a delightful surprise. The Tasmaniana Collection has at least fifty, though some are editions of the same title … and he had a flair for titles; *Whisper of God, Arrows of Desire, A late lark singing, Boulevards of paradise, Ships of pearl, A witch's brewing, When the swans fly high, A tuft of comet's hair, Rubble and roseleaves and things of that kind, The home of the echoes, Mushrooms on the moor, The footmen and the horses* … I finally chose out three and sat down to read. He had a lively, rich, very readable style, compassionate, tolerant, steeped in a view of life where everything was a source of inspiration.

His *The Gospel of Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a meditation on the book, the character, the institution (of which he says "How can you advertise for sale a man who dwells among the eternities?"); of Uncle Tom he writes: "Uncle Tom was no critic, no scholar, no expert, no theologian. He knew nothing of the science of biblical analysis. He was not skilled to examine the sacred volume as the mechanic examines the telescope. But he gloried in looking *through* it, as the mariner looks through the glass. By means of it, he peered reverently into the very heart of God, into the wonders of free grace and dying love, into the radiant realm of redemption and forgiveness, into the awful mysteries of the Resurrection and the Ascension. And the visions that he thus beheld kept a song in his heart, a smile on his face, and a word of witness on his tongue, even in his darkest and dreariest days."

The essays in *Mountains in the Mist: Some Australian Reveries* often show a love of nature; such as what we might learn from other creatures in 'The Minor Minor Prophets': "Did no prophet rise up in those days to warn the Emperor that his invasion of Russia would be attended by so enormous and appalling a catastrophe? There *were* prophets to warn him! God never lets any man, much less half a million men, rush to his dreadful doom without sending some prophet to warn and deliver him. He sent Minor Minor Prophets. Listen! Frank Buckland, the great naturalist, who knew the Minor Minor Prophets thoroughly, says, 'If the Emperor Napoleon, when on the road to Moscow, had condescended to observe the flights of storks and cranes passing over his fated battalions, subsequent events in the politics of Europe might have been very different. These storks and cranes knew of the coming on of a great and terrible winter; the birds hastened south, but Napoleon and his huge army pressed on northwards.' " He also turns to people not usually thought of as either religious or wise such as George Burns, founder of the Cunard Line, and his dog Carlo in 'Praying for Carlo' in which Burns presents his business philosophy: 'I believe implicitly in the power of prayer; but I also believe in doing work well and in subordinating profit, and speed, and public opinion to safety, comfort, and efficiency.' We, for whatever reasons, have come to associate efficiency with speed and profit. It is probably no wonder that huge crashes reverberate in our ears. And in a little booklet called *The Merry Man of Mosgiel* he tells the delightful story of a man known as Dick Sunshine in his first NZ parish; Dick is a grocer who gives it up because of TB and decides to become a travelling evangelist and temperance advocate, believing the open air will aid his health. He has never made a speech before but his first attempt goes over well. Then an elderly gentleman asks him a question he cannot answer. He stands there in blank terror. But he has just been reading Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the story of the two 'Punch and Judy' men pops into his head. He says, "Codlin's your friend, not Short."

Everyone is puzzled. What profound wisdom might there be in this enigmatic statement? The meeting breaks up and people disperse still trying to decide whether to admit to their own bewilderment or pretend that they saw in it some deep and apposite wisdom. But Dick's career is launched and his frail life is prolonged.

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March 4: Sir Thomas Malory (d)
George Thomson
March 5: Charles Fuller
March 6: Elizabeth Barrett Browning
March 7: Bret Easton Ellis
March 8: Kenneth Grahame
March 9: William Cobbett
March 10: Fanny Trollope

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Jean Webster has her heroine say in *Daddy-Long-Legs*, "You see, I'm settled at Lock Willow permanently. I have decided to stay until I've written 114 novels like Anthony Trollop's mother. Then I shall have completed my life work and can retire and travel."

Mrs Trollope, though, used her travels to collect the material to create her books. In fact her first and most famous book *Domestic Manners of the Americans* depended on her visit to America in 1831. The astonishing thing about her work, and although that massive total included many 3-in-one or three-decker novels, is that she didn't start writing until she was forty-eight years old!

Victoria Glendinning says of her, "She had instant success, and never looked back, producing between 1832 and 1856 no less than forty books, comprising 115 volumes. Those who have read or (like myself) written about Anthony Trollope's life, know very well how forceful and gifted his mother was. We have been impressed by her indomitable courage and resourcefulness, and felt sympathy for her in her difficult marriage, in her long widowhood, and in the dreadful loss from tuberculosis of four of her six children."

Teresa Ransom in her biography of Fanny Trollope paints a picture of a lively good-natured loving but also shrewd observant tough-minded and remarkably forward-thinking woman. She saw many of her books, particularly her travel books, as a way to make money. But she also looked closely at some of the evils of her day and used her books to draw them to public attention, such as *The Life and Adventures of Jonathon Jefferson Whitlaw: or Scenes on the Mississippi* (slavery) and *The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy* (child labour), but she also wrote comedies without a deep message, such as her series on Mrs Barnaby, an ambitious, scheming, vulgar, but amusing widow. And she was quite capable of writing books that were regarded as 'unfeminine' in their tone, subject, or language, such as her very popular *The Vicar of Wrexhill* (clerical misconduct) on which William Thackeray, "who wrote a review of the book for *Fraser's Magazine*, was scandalized, and condemned the book as, 'a display of licentiousness, overt and covert, such as no woman conceived before,' He advised her. 'Oh! … that ladies would make puddings and mend stockings! That they would not meddle with religion, except to pray to God, to live quietly among their families, and move lovingly among their neighbours!' "

Fanny might well have been content to 'live quietly' but, like countless women, the need to care for a family and make money because of the loss or failure of the family's breadwinner thrust her into a world in which she had not been trained or educated for any profession. Far from criticising her I think William Thackeray should have doffed his hat to her! And Fanny who made friends wherever she lived could have shown Thackeray a thing or two about living 'lovingly' …

It is true that she probably lost potential friends and supporters in America by her blunt criticism of their manners: 'The total want of all the usual courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands are seized and devoured; the strange uncouth phrases and pronunciation; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter their mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife, soon forced us to feel that we were not surrounded by the generals, colonels, and majors of the old world; and that the dinner-hour was to be anything rather than an hour of enjoyment.' But it didn't do her any harm in England. Nor did people seem to mind her calling a spade a spade when it came to criticising the Americans, not least because it gave chapter and verse to an existing English prejudice.

So why has Fanny been forgotten when her son's novels regularly get re-printed? She was a major influence on his decision to write and she helped him find publishers for his first books. It is not hard to find recent paperback editions of many of his novels. But I must admit I find them both dense and rather bland. So I would like to suggest that a publisher or two might like to take a detour and bring back some of Fanny's books instead.

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March 11: Torquato Tasso
Douglas Adams
March 12: John Aubrey

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One day I was browsing in a paperback about Stonehenge and I came upon this mention, "John Aubrey is now remembered (if at all) for his collection of rambling biographies called *Brief Lives* but a more solid fame could be claimed for him: he was the first archeologist, or proto-archeologist, of England. Camden and others had written of antique sites, but they had drawn their information from records, and usually confined their observations to secondhand description. Even Inigo Jones approached Stonehenge more as an architect than an antiquary. Aubrey went to the site and poked around and measured." He believed Stonehenge to have been a druid temple.

Hard upon this little snippet I noticed David Tylden-Wright had written a biography of Aubrey. He paints a picture of a gregarious ever-curious observant man, interested in just about everything, with a talent for making friends and getting his financial affairs in a disastrous mess. Aubrey is remembered for his books of antiquarian and archeological interest, *North Wiltshire*

Collections (which he had difficulty finishing because his creditors in North Wiltshire had the bailiffs after him), *Natural History*, and *Monumenta Britannica*, but *Brief Lives* is the only one that continues to be readily available.

His work of surveying and recording ancient sites and ruins was valuable; not least because it helped to arouse interest in the past and make it harder for people to cart away and reuse ancient stones. Although his mapping of Stonehenge is the most referred to he actually started out with his 'ground-breaking' work on Avebury as a young man. "I was from my Childhood affected with the view of things rare, which is the beginning of Philosophy." It would take two more centuries before archeology took its place in the sun as a separate and rigorous discipline.

Tylden-Wright says of his early work: "Periodically Avebury, in the centuries that followed, relapsed into relative obscurity. Periodically, interest was rekindled — by the visits of Dr William Stukeley, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and by Sir Richard Hoare, at the beginning of the nineteenth — both of them led to it by Aubrey's account in *Monumenta Britannica*. But it never sank back into the destructive darkness, under cover of which the farmers could break and take what they wanted for their buildings. That Avebury is such as we see it today must in some measure then be due to the astonishing chain of events set in motion when Aubrey riding with his friends into Avebury on that early January day in 1649 'was so wonderfully surprised at the sight of those vast stones' that he later broke away from the hunt to examine them; and which culminated with the royal visit some fourteen years later which set the seal on Avebury's importance. Had Aubrey not come that way then, what further destruction and depletion might not have taken place? Had anyone else other than Aubrey happened upon them at that time would they have realized the importance of their find? It is an astonishing thought that these then virtually unknown stones should now be listed among the ten most important archeological remains in the world, their fame promising to excel that of Stonehenge 'as a Cathedral does a Parish church'. Both their state of preservation and their fame must surely owe much to the fact that, more than three centuries ago, Aubrey was interested enough and important enough, to bring them to the royal, and so the public, eye."

Even so, no ancient monument is ever totally secure. Nor is it simply the Taliban blowing up ancient Buddhist statues. The British East India Company seriously considered dismantling the Taj Mahal in the nineteenth century to reuse its marble. The Air Ministry in Britain seriously considered levelling Stonehenge in the twentieth century because it said it was a danger to low-flying aircraft … Aboriginal rock art faces a range of threats …

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Brief Lives does say a lot about Aubrey's own personality and his wide net of friends. It is too reliant on hearsay and opinion to be reliable as short biographical sketches and certainly by later standards, but his whimsical style and curious choices of information still make the pieces very readable. Richard Barber says of it, 'John Aubrey's *Brief Lives* is one of the strangest books—if indeed this collection of notes, excerpts, gossip and dry facts can be called a book—to have achieved literary fame.' It struck me as helpful that he often gave detailed physical descriptions of people in that pre-photographic age. But I am not sure what image would be called to mind by some of his descriptions.

'He was of middling stature, great goggly eyes, not of a sweet aspect' (John Birkenhead)

'He was of the tallest, but a little incurvetting at his shoulders, not very robust. His hair was but thin and flaxen, with a moist curl' (John Denham)

'He was of a middling stature, pretty strong set, roundish faced, cherry-cheeked, hazel eye, brown hair' (Andrew Marvell)

'He is of little stature, perfect; black hair, of a delicate moist curl; dark eye, but of great vivacity of spirit' (Nicholas Mercator)

'He was a spare man. He was scarce so tall as I am—question, how many feet I am high: answer, of middle stature. He had light brown hair. His complexion exceeding fair—he was so fair that they called him *the lady of Christ's College*. Oval face. His eye a dark gray' (John Milton)

‘He had a most remarkable aspect, an exceeding high forehead, long faced, and sour eye-lidded, a kind of pig-eye’ (Walter Raleigh)

Of Shakespeare he wrote, ‘Mr William Shakespeare was born at Stratford upon Avon in the county of Warwick. His father was a butcher, and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours, that when he was a boy he exercised his father’s trade, but when he killed a calf he would do it in a high style, and make a speech. There was at that time another butcher’s son in this town that was held not at all inferior to him for a natural wit, his acquaintance and contemporary, but died young.

This William being inclined naturally to poetry and acting, came to London, I guess, about 18; and was an actor at one of the playhouses. And did act exceedingly well (now B. Jonson was never a good actor, but an excellent instructor).

He began early to make essays at dramatic poetry, which at that time was very low; and his plays took well.

He was a handsome, well-shaped man: very good company, and of a very ready and pleasant smooth wit.

The humour of the constable in *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, he happened to take at Grendon in Bucks—I think it was midsummer night that he happened to lie there—which is the road from London to Stratford, and there was living that constable about 1642, when I first came to Oxford: Mr. Josias Howe is of that parish, and knew him. Ben Jonson and he did gather humours of men daily wherever they came. One time as he was at the tavern at Stratford on Avon, one Combes, an old rich usurer, was to be buried, he makes there this extemporary epitaph,

Ten in the hundred the Devil allows,
But Combes will have twelve, he swears and vows:
If any one asks who lies in the tomb.
‘Hoh!’ quoth the Devil, ‘’Tis my John o Combe.’

He was wont to go to his native country once a year. I think I have been told that he left £2 or 300 per annum there and thereabouts to a sister.

I have heard Sir William Davenant and Mr Thomas Shadwell (who is accounted the best writer of comedies we have now) say that he had a most prodigious wit, and did admire his natural parts beyond all other dramatical writers. He was wont to say (B. Jonson’s *Underwoods*) that he ‘never blotted out a line in his life’; said Ben Jonson, ‘I wish he had blotted out a thousand.’

His comedies will remain wit as long as the English tongue is understood, for that he handles the ways of men. Now our present writers reflect so much upon particular persons and coxcombities, that twenty years hence they will not be understood.

Though, as Ben Jonson says of him, that he had but a little Latin and less Greek, he understood Latin pretty well, for he had been in his younger years a schoolmaster in the country—from Mr Beeston.’

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March 13: Kofi Awoonor
March 14: Maxim Gorki
March 15: Ben Okri
March 16: Madame de La Fayette
March 17: William Gibson
March 18: Wilfrid Owen
March 19: William Allingham
March 20: David Malouf
March 21: Thomas Shapcott
Ved Mehta

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While I was reading Shapcott's *The Birthday Gift* with its gentle nostalgia ('little lunch', the fierce Queensland sun, Monday washing day, the see-saw in the back yard) it suddenly occurred to me that all Australian novels follow the same line; the stasis, happy or sad, dull or dramatic, and then the movement outwards. It doesn't matter whether it is the country kid coming to town, the young Aussie going overseas, the convict arriving, the drifter moving on, the migrant arriving, the swaggie trudging, the soldier enlisting … *The Birthday Gift* belongs with novels like David Malouf's *Johnno* or Jessica Anderson's *Tirra Lirra* but it also belongs just as comfortably in that great amorphous mass which is 'Australian literature' …

It is something so natural that we hardly notice it, yet it suggests a profoundly restless uneasy discontented populace. It is not unique to Australia and yet there is a difference. American novels are equally restless but they also contain the sense of constantly seeking betterment. The apparent lack of direction of writers like Jack Kerouac is rare. European novels are about the loss of innocence and the corruption of youths from the provinces. Chinese novels see the hero fleeing from the countryside to escape hunger and warlords.

But Australian novels rarely have this kind of goal-centred movement. People just 'hit the road' … It is strange, perhaps, that the most aimless road novel of all, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, is American rather than Australian …

I find aimlessness fascinating. I always found, when reading American writing magazines, how gaol-orientated they were. There were articles on how to organise your writing life for the next *ten years*. They were firmly focused on where you were going, how you intended to get there, and how you would deal with success. Yet, when I look around me, I see a lot of people who aren't going anywhere in particular. While the Australian media and the mass of magazines put an increasing focus on people who *are* going somewhere; growing wealthier, getting more successful, moving to a bigger home, gaining that promotion, Australian novels continue to fall somewhere between the world that is aimless and the world that is focused. It is as though we are afraid of the extremes. I am not sure what this says about Australians …

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It is true that occasionally a writer mentions those who are stuck in one place. In the 1930s Thomas Wood wrote in *Cobbers*, "A couple of sad-eyed women waited on us. We were going on to a town which would give us ice and fruit, new interests, new friends. They had to live here in an iron box, serving hot meat to strangers who'd stopped for a meal when the train came through, and were gone. And farther out were other women, just as pallid as these, to whom, in their loneliness, a railway would seem civilization. In Toowoomba, comfortable, prosperous Toowoomba, Essex Evans's birthplace, I had read his poems, and thought his 'Women of the West' sentimental. I began to question my judgement. It is a man's life, indeed, here. For women it must be hell."

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'The old-fashioned house was all but obscured by a remarkable tangle of growth. Vines and roses and nasturtiums fought the tiny weathered gate as I pushed it open and hesitatingly searched for a path and a door. The place reminded me of Miss Hare's Xanadu in Patrick White's latest novel *Riders in the Chariot*. His ascetic countenance appeared suddenly, its body hidden by the disheveled garden.

"Here you are," said his dreamy, haunting voice.

"Yes!" I said breathless with excitement. "Here I am!"

He was even taller and a bit younger than I remembered, and I was even more in awe of him.

…

I haltingly tried to voice some of my vague apprehensions about the hostile presence of the Australian bush. Patrick looked down at me, his eyes the same opalescent augers that first dismayed me, and spoke in his peculiar, faintly acrid voice. "But didn't you know? Australia doesn't like people."

…

The stubborn mental picture reappeared in messy picnickers swarming like flies over a colossus sprawled in half-sleep, too bored and old to swat.

To *me* there was pathos and effrontery in the extraordinary efforts expended on much of that worn-down land. The land, the land, the "man on the land." They said it in pubs, in political harangues, in newspapers and in magazines. I'd begun to think that one lived *in* America, *in* Europe, or *in* Afghanistan, but *on* Australia.'

Anne Baxter in *Intermission.*

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George Essex Evans has long since lost favour because of his patriotic and bombastic poems; though his most famous poem 'Women of the West' continues to turn up in anthologies. It includes the verses:

In the slab-built, zinc-roofed homestead of some lately-settled run,
In the tent beside the bankment of a railway just begun,
In the huts on new selections, in the camps of man's unrest,
On the frontiers of the Nation, live the Women of the West.

The red sun robs their beauty, and, in weariness and pain,
The slow years steal the nameless grace that never comes again;
And there are hours men cannot soothe, and words men cannot say—
The nearest woman's face may be a hundred miles away.

The wide bush holds the secrets of their longing and desires,
When the white stars in reverence light their holy altar-fires,
And silence, like the touch of God, sinks deep into the breast
Perchance He hears and understands the Women of the West.

But his women too are part of what he saw as the great adventure of Nation-building.

Well have we held our fathers' creed. No call has passed us by.
We faced and fought the wilderness, we sent our sons to die.
And we have hearts to do and dare, and yet, o'er all the rest,
The hearts that made the Nation were the Women of the West.

But I am not sure that he should be blamed. Or forgotten. The patriotic poems themselves are mostly forgettable but they served a useful purpose in an unsophisticated world where the idea of federation needed to be sold as a genuine and beneficial change to the way people saw themselves and their little place in the world. Many writers took time out from their ballads and bush verses to write a patriotic poem or two. Thomas Spencer is remembered for his humorous ballads but he also 'did his duty' and wrote his 'God Defend the Commonwealth':

Guard our new Britannia and maintain the old one's glory,
Weld the bond of kinship that encircles all the earth;
Grant that on each page that we may add to Britain's story,
Glory may be added to the land that gave us birth.
God defend the Commonwealth,
Bless our new Australian nation,
Grant our people peace and health,
God preserve our Federation.

Such poems have had their day. But I think they were seen as worthwhile when first written and published and Richard Jordan and Peter Pierce in their 19th century anthology, *The Poets' Discovery*, devote a whole chapter to Federation poems. I'm just glad that day is now gone. I would like to think that we can move on from all 'in your face' patriotism and mythmaking and jingoism and flag-waving … not least because the terrifying thing is that such attitudes always seems to require, sooner or later, a war to nurture and reinvigorate them …

But while I was pondering on the writers and writing of patriotic poems I came upon Colin Walker's little book about William McGonagall, a Scottish poet of the nineteenth century

described as the 'Bard of the Lead Balloon' or in Simon Winchester's words, 'the Scot whose standard set that by which all poetic dreadfulness is measured'. Though Iain Crichton Smith in 'The White Air of March' is much kinder: 'Why should you suffer the anonymous/ theses and poor parodies of those/ whose competence is just as small as yours —/ when they unlike you don't even love verse!' McGonagall, a weaver, describes his own sudden change when he was already fifty-two. "It was in the year of 1877, and in the month of June, when trees and flowers were in full bloom. Well, it being the holiday week in Dundee, I was sitting in my back room in Paton's Lane, Dundee, lamenting to myself because I couldn't get to the Highlands on holiday to see the beautiful scenery, when all of a sudden my body got inflamed, and instantly I was seized with a strong desire to write poetry, so strong, in fact, that in imagination I thought I heard a voice crying in my ears—

"WRITE! WRITE!"

I wondered what could be the matter with me, and I began to walk backwards and forwards in a great fit of excitement, saying to myself—"I know nothing about poetry." But still the voice kept ringing in my ears,—"Write, write," until at last, being overcome with a desire to write poetry, I found paper, pen, and ink, and in a state of frenzy, sat me down to think what would be my first subject for a poem."

McGonagall is an ideal test case in one respect; all his poems display the attitudes the late Victorians brought to their age, their sense of self and particularly the heroic self, and the idea of the patriotic poem. If McGonagall had become a journalist his passion for including dates and facts would not have jarred. If he had become a travel writer his interest in people, places, new inventions, disasters, and death, could have been incorporated. But all these Victorian interests lumped together in his poems are excruciating. He was an outsider needing to prove he was more patriotic than the local patriots. Born in Scotland of Irish parents he never quite fitted into the local communities. There is a touch of the sycophant in many of his poems, as well as in his life. And as an enthusiastic amateur actor he added in a delight in the archaic and the declamatory. When all these things came together in a bombastic heroic whole such as in his poems to praise Queen Victoria …

All hail to the Empress of India,
  Great Britain's Queen—
Long may she live in health, happy and serene—
  That came from London, far away,
To review the Scottish Volunteers in grand array:
  Most magnificent to be seen,
Near by Salisbury Crags and its pastures green,
Which will long be remembered by our gracious Queen—

And by the Volunteers, that came from far away,
Because it rain'd most of the day.
And with the rain their clothes were wet all through,
On the 25th day of August, at the Royal Review.
And to the Volunteers it was no lark,
Because they were ankle deep in mud in the Queen's Park,
Which proved to the Queen they were loyal and true,
To ensure such hardship at the Royal Review. … etc …

('The Royal Review' 1881)

it isn't hard to see why the patriotic poem has had its day. Yet, McGonagall himself is curiously touching in his optimism, his sense that things will get better, that his poems will find a ready audience, that he will make money and fame from his sheets. Instead he died in poverty in Edinburgh on the 29th September 1902 and was buried in Greyfriars Kirkyard.

* * * * *

Is the restlessness so evident in Australian life a sense, felt but not understood, that "Australia doesn't like people"? We hack away angrily at the fabric of the land, demanding that it

provide us with a living, yet unable to give it any sense of cherishment because we know it will never truly reciprocate. And we're not into 'cherishment' anyway.

When we say 'I love Australia' we rarely define what we mean; I am inclined to think because we know we don't love, not really, only the little bits and pieces of it which we feel have treated us kindly. Nor, when we speak of betraying our country, do we mean the removal of non-renewable resources, the extermination of species, or the poisoning of land and water. When we talk of 'moving Australia forward' we mean we want to cut and slice the land further to put down yet more roads, buildings, and marinas. But we know that the movement is ours; a secret all-pervading unexamined restlessness …

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March 22: Rosie Scott
March 23: Joseph Quincy Adams
March 24: Olive Schreiner
Richard Wurmbrand

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Richard Wurmbrand was a Christian pastor who was imprisoned in the Rumania of Nicolae Ceausescu. He is one among many who have written prison diaries, memoirs, and stories, from the fiction of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, to Nelson Mandela's autobiography, to the novels of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, to the book I am reading at the moment, Nien Cheng's *Life and Death in Shanghai*, in which Nien Cheng spent six years mainly in solitary during the Cultural Revolution in China because she was deemed a British spy.

But Wurmbrand called his reminiscences *My Correspondence with Jesus* and provides this little story which has always stayed in my mind. It is about what isolation, apprehension, fear, and a lack of contact with nature can do to people.

'It was next to impossible to obtain even a bit of paper or a pencil. I had none during my fourteen years in jail.

'Notwithstanding, some of us wrote. We smeared soap on the sole of a shoe and wrote on it with a piece of wood. I possess 350 Romanian poems written like this that I learned by heart and later transcribed. Other prisoners learned from one another such things as foreign languages, mathematics and chemistry by writing their lessons like this. If caught doing so, they were harshly punished.

'In her book *The Pastor's Wife* my wife (who was also in jail) tells the story of an imprisoned teenager who would write passionate letters to a boy she imagined to exist. Then she would write a letter as if from him reciprocating her love. The exchange of love letters became more and more burning. She would weep on receiving his letter, which she had written, and would cherish and kiss it. Once, he wrote that he had found another girl, whereupon she wept bitterly. Then she entreated her imaginary but more-than-real lover to come back to her. His 'no' was definite, and the poor girl lost her mind.'

But on a happier note I came upon the information that Georgette Heyer kept only one fan letter. 'It was from a woman who had kept herself and her cell-mates sane through twelve years in a Romanian prison by telling the story of *Friday's Child* over and over again.'

I think there are three kinds of prison stories, though much overlap; the story about the human body under solitary confinement and threat, the awfulness of totalitarian regimes and their use of solitary confinement to break people, and the third and perhaps strangest kind of story: the way people thrown back on their own resources in appalling situations find reserves of strength, inspiration, hope, faith, and courage. It is almost as though they are saying we need evil so that the human spirit might triumph. Perhaps we do. But it isn't a very comforting thought.

There is no shortage of famous books written in prison, perhaps the best known being John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, but there is a strong Western bias to such stories. We do not have the prison memoirs of people in the jails of Burundi or Chad. We do not know if people in Kazakhstan deal with long periods of solitary confinement in the same way. There is not a tradition of 'prison literature' in the South Seas and Melanesia.

Yet of all human experiences the only thing that seems worse than solitary is the knowledge that you are soon going to be taken out from prison and tortured or killed in a very terrible way, impaled, stoned, disembowelled, burned at the stake …

How do we deal with long periods in our own company? Thousands of prisons take young men off the streets and leave them to their own devices for more than 20 hours a day. Do they genuinely believe this is good for them, that the youngsters will reflect on their life and realise they've gone down the wrong road? Or is it more to do with lack of staff? Or is there a fundamental lack of imagination in the whole concept of what a prison cell does to people?

People, especially those who never waver in the knowledge of their innocence, sometimes come out of prison stronger and wiser than when they went in. But I am inclined to think that prison authorities can take no pride in this fact. It is usually because the seeds of faith and strength and courage were already strongly there.

It is natural to look for profound motives behind every imprisonment but one of the most pervasive in our society is surely boredom. We don't teach our children how to deal with boredom—probably because we don't know how to deal with it ourselves. Our only response is to provide 'things to do', everything from 'home entertainment systems' to a feast of sporting events to shops full of games and toys. But all these are directed at the symptoms. You express boredom. Someone pops up with a way to make you less bored. But none of this asks the big questions about why the life form with the most rich and powerful mind and imagination and ability to learn should also be the most bored …

And if boredom often sends people to prison it is nothing to the boredom *in* prison.

There is no shortage of prison poetry …

Here is the last verse of 'Pretoria Central Refrain' which Helen Joseph quotes in *If this Be Treason*:

One day they will say, 'The emergency's over!
  You may pack and return to your husband or lover!
Your children are waiting, so why don't you flit?'
  We won't even hear them — we'll sit and we'll knit …
The prison doors open and Spengler has gone
  But the women detainees sit on and sit on.
And three decades later, they'll dig thr' the grit,
  And there they will find us, while we sit and knit,
While we sit and we read, or we read and we sit
  And we knit and we knit and we knit and we knit!

But one curious thing that imprisonment (and also things like shipwreck or being caught by a cave-in) can give people is a sudden deep awareness of the tiny things around them and their beauty and significance. I think it is a pity that media pressure now causes such memoirs as the Beaconsfield Two to be rushed into print before they have had the opportunity to truly muse over ever aspect of the experience and develop the life-changing wisdom that may be embedded in it.

Nelson Mandela was 'fortunate' to be able to spend most of his long imprisonment in the company of his comrades but he spent the first part of his time in solitary confinement. He wrote in *Long Walk to Freedom*, 'For the next few weeks, I was completely and utterly isolated. I did not see the face or hear the voice of another prisoner. I was locked up for twenty-three hours a day, with thirty minutes of exercise in the morning and again in the afternoon. I had never been in isolation before, and every hour seemed like a year. There was no natural light in my cell; a single bulb burned overhead twenty-four hours a day. I did not have a wristwatch and I often thought it was the middle of the night when it was only late afternoon. I had nothing to read, nothing to write on or with, no one to talk to. The mind begins to turn in on itself, and one desperately wants something outside oneself on which to fix one's attention. I have known men who took half-a-dozen lashes in preference to being locked up alone. After a time in solitary, I relished the company even of the insects in my cell, and found myself on the verge of initiating conversations with a cockroach.'

Nien Cheng wrote of prison in Mao's China: 'One day, in the early afternoon, when my eyes were too tired to distinguish the printed words, I lifted them from the book to gaze at the window. A small spider crawled into view, climbing up one of the rust-eroded bars of the window. The little creature was no bigger than a good-sized pea; I would not have seen it if the wooden frame nailed to the wall outside to cover the lower half of the window hadn't been painted black. I watched it crawl slowly but steadily to the top of the iron bar, quite a long walk for such a tiny thing, I thought. When it reached the top, suddenly it swung out and descended on a thin, silken thread spun from one end of its body. With a leap and swing, it secured the end of the thread to another bar. The small spider then crawled back along the silken thread to where it had started and swung out in another direction on a similar thread. I watched the tiny creature at work with increasing fascination. It seemed to know exactly what to do and where to take the next thread. There was no hesitation, no mistake, and no haste. It knew its job and was carrying it out with confidence. When the frame was made, the spider proceeded to weave a web that was intricately beautiful and absolutely perfect, with all the strands of thread evenly spaced. When the web was completed, the spider went to its centre and settled there.

'I had just watched an architectural feat by an extremely skilled artist and my mind was full of questions. Who had taught the spider how to make a web? Could it really have acquired the skill through evolution, or did God create the spider and endow it with the ability to make a web so that it could catch food and perpetuate its species? How big was the brain of such a tiny creature? Did it act simply by instinct or had it somehow learned to store the knowledge of web-making? Perhaps one day I would ask an entomologist. For the moment, I knew I had just witnessed something that was extraordinarily beautiful and uplifting. Whether God had made the spider or not, I thanked Him for what I had just seen. A miracle of life had been shown to me. It helped me to see that God was in control. Mao Tze-tung and his Revolutionaries seemed much less menacing. I felt a renewal of hope and confidence.

'My cell faced south-west. For a brief moment, the rays of the setting sun turned the newly made web into a glittering disc of rainbow colours before it shifted further west and sank below the horizon. I did not dare to go up to the window in case I should frighten the spider away. I remained where I was, watching it. Soon I discovered it was not merely sitting there waiting for its prey but was forever vigilant. Whenever a corner of the web was ruffled or torn by the breeze, the spider was there in an instant to repair the damage. And as days passed, the spider renewed the web from time to time; sometimes a part of it was remade, sometimes the whole web was remade.

'I became very attached to the little creature after watching its activities and gaining an understanding of its habits. First thing in the morning, throughout the day and last thing at night, I would look at it and feel reassured when I saw that it was still there. The tiny spider became my companion. My spirits lightened. The depressing feeling of complete isolation was broken by having another living thing near me, even though it was so tiny and incapable of response.'

* * * * *

March 25: Anne Brontë
March 26: Erica Jong
March 27: Kenneth Slessor
March 28: Mario Vargas Llosa
March 29: Ernst Jünger
March 30: Anna Sewell
March 31: Edward FitzGerald
Andrew Lang
Andrew Marvell

* * * * *

Fernando Pessoa wrote in *The Book of Disquiet* about Omar Khayyam: "Omar had a personality; I, for better or for worse, do not. I am one thing one moment and something completely different the next; what I am one day I forget the next. Someone like Omar, who is who he is, lives in only one world, the external world; someone like me, who is not who he is, not

only lives in the external, objective world but in successive, diverse, internal worlds that are subjective. My philosophy, even though it longs to be the same as Omar's, cannot be the same. The result is that even though I really do not want them, I have in me the very philosophies I criticize, as if they were souls. Omar would reject them all because they were alien to him. I cannot reject them because they are who I am."

I am not sure if we can say anything so definite about the great Persian poet, mathematician and astronomer of the eleventh century—but to be 'one thing one moment and something completely different the next' is a curiously apt description of Iran.

Pessoa is remembered for his creation of 'heteronyms', other personas or masks under which he wrote many of his poems; while I was musing on what in his personality or background might have prompted the creations of these 'split personalities' I was reading another book from that era, Kurt Tucholsky's attractive little story *Castle Gripsholm* … and he developed what he called his five 'homunculi' because, 'it was useful to have a fivefold existence — because who in Germany will credit a political writer with humour? A satirist with seriousness? A whimsical fellow with knowledge of the penal code or a chronicler of cities with comic verse?'

I had always thought of Tucholsky as an *extremely* serious writer; the man who wrote:

I saw the world
In fire enfurled —
The women bent with sorrows,
The reaper cut
And they were struck
With a hundred thousand horrors,
And for what did they scream and die?
Haho! For a filthy lie!
The corpses — the corpses —
They lie in the earth,
We women — we women —
Now what are we worth!

You can't get more serious than that. So I was pleased to discover that he could write in a more playful vein. I hope he found such moments healing.

Legion are the writers who write mysteries under one name and something under another name—which probably says quite a lot about the way societies like to label and pigeon-hole people. But I think there is more to the creation of masks. It may be in a writer's background. It may be the result of abuse, such as the Multiple Personality Syndrome. But it may tell us more about the era, the epoch, the time, the history that writers lived through in their formative years.

* * * * *

'Although they had been introduced briefly in Cambridge, Tennyson and FitzGerald were no more than nodding acquaintances before meeting again at Mirehouse. FitzGerald was the cultured eccentric son of a rich family. He loved music as immoderately as Frederick Tennyson, with whom he kept up a correspondence on the subject, and his only financial extravagance was the constant purchase of bad pictures that he was always mistaking for masterpieces. Neither he nor his friends suspected that the poetry he wrote had the promise for the future of anything like his great version of the *Rubiáyát*. His face was lumpily formed, and he shambled along in clothes that always looked second-hand, but behind his shy and unpromising exterior was a sweet and loving nature, fierce only in his loyalty to his friends. His meeting at Mirehouse with Tennyson was the beginning of a lifelong friendship, more devoted on FitzGerald's part than on Tennyson's but necessary to them both. Until his death FitzGerald was to worry recurrently over whether Tennyson still counted him as a friend, but one random gleam of warmth from Tennyson would dissolve all his fears until the next time he felt he had been snubbed or neglected.

'Fitz', as he was invariably known, had been at school with Spedding, who was a distant relative, and he had a charming courtesy with his elders, so that Spedding's parents did not worry about his physical inertia or his vegetarianism as forms of eccentricity dangerous to James. In reaction to the grandeur of his own family, he hated ostentation or any kind of snobbishness, and

the manifestation of either would draw his gentle reproof. Once in later years when he and Tennyson had listened to a common acquaintance talking of his titled friends, Fitz picked up a candle to go to bed, then turned at the door and said to Tennyson, 'I knew a Lord once, but he's dead.' When they were both old men and FitzGerald had been hurt by Tennyson's neglect, the worst he could think of to say of him was that he lived in too grand a manner. Spedding called Fitz 'the Prince of Quietists', and said that 'Half the self-sacrifice, the self-denial, the moral resolution, which he exercises to keep himself easy, would amply furnish forth a martyr or a missionary. His tranquility is like a pirated copy of the peace of God.' '

(Robert Bernard Martin in his biography of Tennyson.)

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'The word 'mummy', according to Abd' el-Latif, the Arab physician who was writing in the 12th century, was derived from the Persian term *mumia* which meant pitch or bitumen. In Persia this substance flowed from the mountain tops and, mixed with the waters that carried it down, coagulated like mineral pitch; the resultant liquid was purported to have medicinal properties and indeed may have had some real benefit as an antiseptic. The Mummy Mountain became famed for this healing substance, and even the Queen of England received a gift of *mumia* from the King of Persia in 1809.' (*Discovering Ancient Egypt* by Rosalie David)

Heather Pringle in *The Mummy Congress* chronicles the sale of ground-up Egyptian mummies as a medical panacea through the Middle Ages and, later, as even a source of brown paint. But in her interviews with art conservator, Sally Woodcock, who had studied this bizarre trade in the UK, "She learned, to her surprise, that the Egyptian mummy trade was born almost by accident, from a scholarly muddle over the translation of a few old Arabic medical books. The ill-fated texts concerned bitumen, an old catch-all term for asphalt and other similar natural hydrocarbons. Medieval Arab physicians, as it turned out, were very fond of bitumen. They employed it as salve for cuts, bruises, and bone fractures. But they achieved their best results from a specific type of bitumen, a black rock-asphalt that seeped from a mountain in the Darábjerd region of Persia. This substance was known locally as *mumiya*.

"All this was clear enough; the trouble arose when European writers began translating these passages from Arabic. They were baffled by the word *mumiya* and some had ended up taking a stab in the dark at its meaning. Gerard of Cremona, a celebrated twelfth-century translator and a man of considerable erudition, had read classical accounts that described the use of bitumen in Egyptian embalming. So he assumed that *mumiya* referred to "the substance found in the land where bodies are buried with aloes by which the liquid of the dead, mixed with the aloes, is transformed and it is similar to marine pitch." Unfortunately, no one thought to question this definition, competent Arabic translators being rather few and far between at the time. So the idea that *mumiya* came from the embalmed Egyptian dead stuck in Western minds. Apothecaries in London, Paris, and Venice began clamoring for the new wonder drug, mumia or mummy, and people began referring to the ancient bodies themselves as mummies."

As John Webster has Gasparo say in *The White Devil*: Your followers

Have swallowed you, like mummia, and being sick
With such unnatural and horrid physic,
Vomit you up i' th' kennel.

The irony of this is that the Middle Ages might have been healthier if people had been treated with tar and bitumen instead of ground up dead bodies. But it also seems to say something about the way that the West has overlooked and misunderstood and written with considerable ambivalence about the ancient nation which gave the world mumiya; there is even something like a split personality in the Western response. When writers are referring to the Persians versus the Greeks or as people who created beautiful gardens and poetry and attar of roses the name Persia is used; when they are dealing with a remote Islamic nation which had largely dropped from Western consciousness till about 1950 it became Iran. Yet both names go back into remote antiquity.

After the mummies were preserved they were intricately wrapped and then they had a mask placed on them. The masks are always stylised and elaborate. But more than that, and no matter what pain or terror brought death, they are always serene.

Serenity. It is hard to use this word as a tag for modern Iran yet there is something wonderfully serene in the writings of the nation's famous early poets, prophets, and philosophers.

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I thought the reference library would have a good offering of Persian literature but no. Only two books peeped out from the shelves and shelves devoted to France, Russia, and ancient Rome. *Persian Sufi Poetry* (J. T. P. De Bruijn) and *The Essential Rumi* (Coleman Barks). Still, two books are better than none, so I took them both down.

De Bruijn says Sufi is thought to mean 'to wear a woollen cloak'. It is a tradition which was inspired by the Christian anchorites in the desert. And it provided a mystical and metaphysical strand of poetry alongside the more mannered court poetry and the lively but less profound tales and verses of ordinary people. Alexander the Great came blundering through, Islam came marching in, then the Mongols descended. All killed people and destroyed buildings and livelihoods but only Islam imposed a new religion and religious language which needed to be digested and incorporated.

In all traditions the ruba'i (plural ruba'iyat) or quatrain was the most popular verse form although many others, such as the ghazal or ode, existed. It is the quatrain which is best known in the west. "In Persia itself, 'Umar was not much regarded as a poet until his worldwide fame began to spread from Victorian England through the amazing success of Edward FitzGerald's adaptation of 'Umar's quatrains in his poem 'The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám'. It was first published in 1859, reprinted many times and translated into all the major languages of the world.

"During his lifetime, 'Umar-i Khayyám (1048-1131) was a celebrated scholar, not only in philosophy and the sciences but also in theology. The only writings attributable with certainty to him are in Arabic on the subjects of mathematics, astronomy and metaphysics. All that we know about 'Umar's life points to a more or less normal existence as a distinguished medieval scholar, who found patrons among the rulers and other influential men of his days. The earliest reference to him as a poet occurs in 'Imad ad-Din Isfahai's *Kharidat al-qasr*, an anthology of Arabic poetry, and some other Arabic writers of the late twelfth century who cite a few short poems of his. That Khayyám, like any other cultured person, would have written Arabic poetry occasionally, is not unusual, and it is even quite possible that at times he may have improvised some Persian quatrains."

The physician and metaphysicist Abu 'Ali ibn-I Sina (Avicenna) not only wrote his famous medical treatise, a book called *Metaphysics*, but also wrote some poetry. There is a long list of medieval poets in Persia, Sana'i, Sa'di, Hafiz, Rumi, Fighani, Firdausi, and more. But the problems, both of correct attribution and of determining what was new and what was a reworking of material already circulating in various forms, are possibly beyond resolution. For instance, Musharrif ad-Din Sa'di wrote a poem about the tragic love affair between moth and flame:

The lover, I am; it befits me to burn;
but what is the reason for your weeping and burning?
The candle replied: 'Oh my ill-fated lover,
a honey-sweet friend went away from me.
Someone like Shirin has deserted me;
there is fire on my head, as it was on Farhad's.'
The candle continued, while a painful flood
each moment gushed down on his yellow cheeks:
'Pretender, this love is not your game,
as you have no patience, no strength to stand.
Untouched you shrink from a single flame,
whereas I stand still until I am consumed.
If the fire of love has scorched your wings,
look at me: it burned me from head to foot.'

But this was obviously a popular theme as other poets such as Jelaluddin Rumi also turned to it in 'Judge a Moth by the Beauty of its Candle' and other pieces. Was it a mystical theme on which students were encouraged by their masters to write? Was it a part of the Zoroastrian books of maxims and proverbs which continued to be popular into the Islamic era? Did it have hidden themes and allegories which could be read as comfort in times of tragedy and oppression? Mirrors too, seem to have had a deep symbolic significance.

The sense of shared and reworked themes and images doesn't take away from the beauty and richness of the material. The writings of the Sufi sage and poet Jelaluddin Rumi (1207 – 1273) are both prolific and immensely attractive. He was born in Balkh, now in Afghanistan, and became an acolyte of a Sufi sage and in turn attracted his own students when he settled in Konya. I thought I would like to include a couple of his poems but it was hard to decide and limit myself among this 'embarrassment of riches'. Not least because he ranged far and wide.

God has put into the form of hashish a power
to deliver the taster from self-consciousness.
(from 'The Many Wines')

An invisible bird flies over,
but casts a quick shadow.

What is the body? That shadow of a shadow
of your love, that somehow contains
the entire universe.
(from 'Where Are We?')

I could have spent hours choosing out lines and images that appealed to me but I think the piece I liked best was one which might be called a 'wisdom' poem or a meditation on the inner and outer form, but which also contains a delightful sense of the absurd. It begins:

A certain young man was asking around.
"I need to find a wise person. I have a problem."

A bystander said, "There's no one with intelligence
in our town except that man over there
playing with the children,
the one riding the stick-horse.

He has keen feelings and insights and vast dignity
like the night sky, but he conceals it
in the madness of children's play."
(from 'The Sheikh Who Played with Children')

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The Fitzgerald translations of Khayyam have been criticised so I turned to the version done by W. H. Whinfield in the 1880s, partly based on the work of Persian scholar Mrs Cadell. He says 'Fitz-Gerald was a born poet, and the great liberties he took with Omar have been amply justified by the result.' Though I had never heard of Jessie Cadell she proved to be an interesting 'player' in this story. A Scot, she found herself as an army wife in India with time to spare and wrote a novel *Ida Craven*. She also "made herself mistress of Persian, and upon her return to England after the death of her husband devoted herself especially to the study of Omar Khayyam, the astronomer-poet of Persia. Without seeking to compete with Mr. Fitzgerald's splendid paraphrase in its own line, Mrs. Cadell contemplated a complete edition and a more accurate translation. She visited numerous public libraries in quest of manuscripts and embodied a portion of her researches in an article in 'Fraser's Magazine' for May 1879, on which Bodenstadt, when publishing his own German translation, bestowed the highest praise, without any idea that he was criticising the production of a female writer." (DNB) Jessie Cadell died before her project was completed.

Whinfield suggests that it is necessary to have a little background in the main currents of intellectual life in Omar's time to really appreciate his poetry. He defines these currents as 1) *Shari'at* or sacred law, something which many sophisticated Persians found hard to swallow; 'for a moment it seemed possible that the dogmatism of Arabian theology might be tempered by an infusion of Persian rationalism' but after splits and dissent, dogmatism won out. 2) *Hikmat* or philosophy. 'Wonder has been expressed at the suddenness with which the unlettered Moslems, men of one book and of one idea, assimilated the stores of Greek learning. But the marvel disappears when the circumstances are taken into consideration. It was only when Persian influence had obtained ascendancy in the new court at Baghdad that this change began. By the aid of Syrian and Jewish translators, Aristotle's Physics, Logic, and Metaphysics, with the *Isagogue* of Porphyry and the glosses of Alexandrian commentators, the *Almajiste* of Ptolemy, the medical works of Hypocrates and Galen, and the geometry of Euclid, &c., were laid open to the investigation of Moslem enquirers.' Over and over again I have heard commentators puzzle over the huge gap between the 'golden age' of Islamic scholarship and the rigid simplistic nature of much that passes for Islamic scholarship six hundred years later. But it is this co-fertilisation of the ideas of those two profoundly cultured though ancient enemies, Persia and Greece, which lie at the heart of the golden age. It is the rigid dogmatism funded and encouraged by Saudi Arabia which is currently in the ascendant. Perhaps if President Bush would cease trying to push Iran into this camp and instead pay homage to the glories of Iran's civilisation and influence he might achieve more. 3) *Ma'rifat* or mysticism. This was the attempt to live by the spirit rather than the letter; a religion of the inner life in which they sought closer communion with the divine. In this it seems to show some Buddhist influence. Unlike an afterlife in heaven or hell Sufis believed they would be absorbed into this sense of Oneness at the heart of everything. Although there is debate over whether Omar Khayyam should be classed as a Sufi poet he was obviously influenced by such ideas.

In synagogue and cloister, mosque and school,
Hell's terrors and heaven's lures men's bosoms rule,
  But they who master Allah's mysteries,
Sow not this empty chaff their hearts to fool.

The fourth influence is the place of poetry in his life and times; something which was lively and popular throughout society, from the simple folk poetry of the countryside to the courtly love lyrics of the khalifs and their world.

But one of the things I had not formerly taken into account is the degree to which Omar appears to thumb his nose at both the Koran and its literal interpretation. He, like other Iranian scholars and sophisticated intellectuals of his time, looked down on its language and requirements and usage as simplistic, a kind of 'dumbing-down' so as to be accessible to the illiterate and the stupid. He obviously had difficulty believing in a creator who busied himself with tedious minutiae but gave no insight into the wonders of creation. He returns to this in many ways.

When Allah mixed my clay, He knew full well
My future acts, and could each one foretell;
  Without His fiat nothing can I do;
Is it then just to punish me in hell?
    And—
Ye, who are wont to drink on common days,
Need not on Friday quit your drinking ways;
  Adopt my creed, and count all days the same,
Be worshippers of God, and not of days.
    And he comes back to his doubts again and again—
Allah hath promised wine in Paradise,
Why then is wine on earth declared a vice?

He also raises the similar question of why it is all right for men to enjoy themselves with women (houris) in Paradise to whom they are not married—yet adultery on earth is a heinous crime and horribly punished.

This, I think, is just as much a problem with all religions. Did God really spend time telling people what to do with animal entrails and blood? Any religion which pulls out a few simplistic rules and rams them down people's throats on the grounds they are 'the word of God' invites rebellion. Yet the simple can also be profound and beautiful. 'Be still and know that I am God' is a worthy meditation in any time and place. I think that, fundamentally, a religion, a set of religious writings must be 'larger' than me. They must inspire, challenge, deepen my wisdom and understanding, help me to grow spiritually. If they are petty or trivial, if they suggest that all that is needed is to keep to the rules, if they encourage complacency and smugness … then they are not truly religious …

Omar's poems are meditations on life and beauty and serenity, on death and sin, on wine and friendship, on ethics and happiness and sorrow. At times he seems to have drunk deeply of the philosophy contained in the Books of Job and Ecclesiastes. It isn't possible to be didactic about his own personality and beliefs, not least because we don't know for certain how much of the work is his and how much was added in by students, acolytes, friends, or later poets expanding on his themes. But my own impression was that he, as mathematician and astronomer, took a view of the world that placed human lives in perspective and arched them over with a universe that was both amazing but also ultimately benign.

They say, when the last trump shall sound its knell,
Our Friend will sternly judge, and down to hell.
Can aught but good from perfect goodness come?
Compose your trembling hearts, 't will all be well.

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April 1: Edgar Wallace
April 2: Edward de Vere
Hans Christian Andersen
Sir John Squire
April 3: Edward Everett Hale
Reginald Hill
April 4: Maya Angelou
April 5: Richard Eberhart
April 6: John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo
John Pierpont
April 7: Donald Bathelme
William Wordsworth
April 8: Ursula Curtiss
April 9: Charles Baudelaire
April 10: William Hazlitt
Joseph Pulitzer

* * * * *

"Nellie Bly was a young reporter, working for *The World*, Joseph Pulitzer's scandal-loving newspaper. Some editor had a brainstorm to expose the hideous condition of the patients in Blackwells insane asylum, and Nellie Bly volunteered for the job. Undercover, you'd call it. She actually went to the district attorney for advice, and for the promise that they would begin a grand jury investigation if she found abuses.

"So Bly checked into a women's boardinghouse, claiming to be a Cuban immigrant called Nellie Moreno. Within days of her arrival, feigning insanity and babbling in an incomprehensible tongue, she was escorted to the police station and then to court. First stop was Bellevue, where doctors ruled out the delirium of belladonna, the deadly nightshade poisoning of so many nineteenth-century mysteries, and actually declared her to be insane. On to Blackwells."

"Committed to the asylum?"

"Spent ten days there, documenting everything from the filthy ferry that brought her over, to the vicious prison attendants from the penitentiary who choked and beat their patients, to the baths that consisted of buckets of ice water being thrown on her head, to the descriptions of the

perfectly sane women who were just sent away because they couldn't be understood. 'Inside the Madhouse' made a pretty compelling story in the *World*, and then your office exposed the whole operation."

(From *The Deadhouse* by Linda Fairstein)

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The *Britannica Book of the Year* said simply: 'Under the terms of the will of Joseph Pulitzer, publisher of the *New York World*, the Pulitzer prizes in journalism, letters and music were established in 1917. The graduate school of journalism of Columbia University administers the prizes and annually announces the winners.'

I probably wouldn't have felt a need to know anything more about the prizes or the man behind them—except that I ran into a friend with a book under his arm which turned out to be a biography of Pulitzer. Was it interesting, I asked. Definitely worth reading, he said. So this week I have been reading Denis Brian's biography.

Pulitzer *is* a fascinating character. He was born in Hungary in 1847. His parents, Philip and Louise Pulitzer, were Jewish. Joseph always said his mother was Catholic and as he was sixteen when he left home he must've known whether or not she attended church—which suggests her family had converted at some stage. He was recruited to go to America to fight in the Civil War. His early years in the States were an extraordinary list of disasters; everything he tried failed and left him worse off. But then a scam, a man recruiting labour who took his hopeful recruits and abandoned them, brought about an unexpected reversal in Pulitzer's fortunes. A reporter from the German language St Louis newspaper, the *Westliche Post*, heard what had happened and asked Pulitzer to write up the story for the newspaper. From there it was a slow but steady upwards journey. He studied law, he found he was a good journalist, he eventually acquired the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, and he married Kate Davis, a distant cousin of Jefferson Davis.

It was in St Louis that he discovered what would sell papers: his inimitable combination of white-knight jousting with powerful figures, muckraking exposés, "murder, mayhem and mystery" and a clear position in support of the people down the bottom of the heap. There he said, "We are ruled by the alliance of whisky and gambling; and the corruption bred by these noxious influences permeates our whole local government and our local politics. … The pollution of bribery has silenced a servile press, has corrupted an obsequious police, has defiled the very judgment seat of justice itself. The congenial alliance between the gambling hall and brothel, the convenient service of the pander and the capper [a decoy], the coercion of the spy and the blackmailer—these have been the influences which have ruled St. Louis." In 1883 he acquired his flagship, the New York paper the *World*, and he soon raised circulation by using the stream of exposés which had proved a winner in St Louis. There he had carried a gun because of the constant threats to his life. New York was less a physical threat but again he made his watchword "Accuracy! Accuracy! Accuracy!" to protect his paper in the many libel cases it faced. He rarely lost such a case.

But in his constant battle with Randolph Hearst's newspaper empire he wasn't averse to using the same recipe of exaggerated sex and violence to sell papers and during the Spanish-American War in Cuba he descended to the same level of wild jingoism which was selling Hearst's papers.

I had mixed feelings about Pulitzer at times. His driven hyperactive nature made him hard to live with and hard to work for. But his foresight and courage outweighed his difficult personality. He spent the last third of his life almost blind yet he continued his crusades. I find that amazing. He could afford all the secretaries and help he needed but it doesn't alter my sense of admiration for his work and commitment. He was an equal opportunity employer. He founded Columbia's School of Journalism. He exposed countless abuses and corruptions in public life. In general, he was extremely generous to the people in his life. But perhaps his greatest contribution to society was his belief that the press *can* play a positive role in making society more honest, open, and equitable.

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One of Pulitzer's crusades involved the Statue of Liberty. Brian writes, "What Pulitzer took very seriously was the recent gift to America from French workingmen and workingwomen. They had contributed $250,000 for a magnificent statue of a woman symbolizing liberty, and representing the enduring friendship between the two peoples. But the 225-ton statue lay languishing in France, because Congress refused to pay $100,000 to construct a pedestal for it." Pulitzer set to work to get the money. "On August 11 Pulitzer told his readers that he had the money for the Statue of Liberty's pedestal. With the exception of his own contribution, $1,000 from a Pierre Lorillard, and $250 from Secretary of the Navy William C. Whitney, the rest had come from 120,000 workingmen, workingwomen, and children, while the wealthy, he wrote, "looked on with an apathy that amounted to contempt. Yet in the opulent city of New York more than enough money is wasted every day in licentiousness, folly and shame to build this Pedestal."

I had heard various people quote part of the verse on the statue,

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost, to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!'

but only fairly recently I learnt that it was written by an American poet Emma Lazarus. She was an interesting woman. She was born into a well-off Sephardic Jewish family in New York, privately educated, helped to bring out her first book of poems when she was only sixteen, but talented and versatile, then more poems, a novel, a drama, and translations. She wasn't religious or even very interested in Jewish life and culture. But then she had her own road-to-Damascus experience caused by the persecution of Russian Jews. She began to identify and speak out on behalf of Jews facing poverty and oppression. In 1881 she brought out *Poems and Ballads of Heinrich Heine* (a well-received translation of his work), then *Songs of a Semite* in 1882 about 14th century Jewish life. But it was the sonnet she wrote 'to' the Statue of Liberty, 'The New Colossus', very much a talking-point for anyone in New York, which made her famous and which was chosen to go on the pedestal.

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'When, in January 1880, a small paper, the *Bulletin*, appeared in Sydney few people could have thought the event one of importance. It was a crude production of eight pages, badly illustrated, and lacking in any kind of authority. Its style was lively but uncertain, its direction vague. Two of its pages were occupied with an account of the hanging of the Wantabadgery bushrangers, prefaced by an interview with the hangman: the rest of it had the feeling of something hastily improvised. There was little hint of political purpose, or even of basic idea in it. Yet the public found an unexpectedness and piquancy in its tone: it provided a change from the dullness and formality of current journalism: the first issue was bought up eagerly. But many such papers have had a good reception. Probably the *Bulletin* would have died after a short burst of promising activity, like the rest of them, if of its two founders—John Haynes and J.F. Archibald—one had not been an editor of genius. Archibald, in spite of some haziness about form, really had an idea of what he wanted to create. He was not particularly interested in politics: his mind did not work along political lines: but he was filled with patriotic fervour. It was his dream to found a national newspaper. He had a passion to make his fellow Australians aware of their country, aware of its varied life and varied character: he was eager to see the imitative habit of mind that was stultifying social life in the towns supplanted by the tough, sardonic independence that he felt was the spirit of the inland.'

(*National Portraits* by Vance Palmer)

The Bulletin did become a national institution, for a time, but it was a paper designed to 'connect' people across the far-flung countryside and tell their stories, not a paper to right wrongs and crusade against corruption.

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Frank Clune began his best-selling *Wild Colonial Boys*: 'In the merry month of May, Anno Domini 1921, my peregrinations in search of a crust brought me as a commercial traveller to the

one-pub township of Binalong, near the old sheep-town of Yass, on the Murrumbidgee watershed in southern New South Wales. A returned soldier of World War I, with a Turk's bullet in my leg, I was trying a lot of things once or twice, in a demobilized Digger's battle to get started again in civilian life. For me the Murrumbidgee was no new demesne, as I had cleared out from my parents' home in Woolloomooloo, Sydney, when I was twelve years of age and sought sanctuary as a truant at farms and sheep stations on the lower reaches of that picturesque stream. A lot of water had flowed down the 'Bidgee since then, but at peaceful Binalong time seemed to be standing still. On the pub veranda, I listened to the yarns of a venerable old-timer.

"Boy and man," he wheezed, "I've lived in this district for seventy-five years. I can remember when there were no fences across this country, and when no trees were ring-barked. Many's the time I've mustered mickies in the Abercrombie Ranges—that means rounding up wild cattle, you know—and droved 'em up hill and down gully, through creek and over plain, by night and by day. You can't lose me anywhere in the bushrangers' country!"

"Bushrangers?" I queried.

The old-timer's eyes glittered. "Yes, all this district was the bushrangers' country—from Goulburn to Gundagai, from Biggs to Bathurst, along the Lachlan and the 'Bidgee rivers."

"Did you know any of the bushrangers?"

"Know them? Well, I ought to know them—I was a bush telegraph for them! They could always get a feed or a change of horse at our place up in the hills, and many a time my father sent me galloping through the bush with a message that the traps were coming."

"Traps?" I echoed. "What were they?"

"Mounted troopers," grunted the ancient, in syllables of scorn.

"Who were these bushrangers?" I persisted.

My lack of knowledge sooled the sage on to explain.

"Well, the first was Frank Gardiner, nicknamed Darkie, the Prince of Highwaymen and King of the Road. Next after him came bold Ben Hall, a real I-ammer, a real ding-donger! Ben was the best of the bunch. With him were Johnny Gilbert, Johnny O'Meally, Johnny Vane and Johnny Dunn—wild colonial Johnnies, all of them, native-born Australians. Game for anything, stick on a horse like part of it, knew every inch of the bush and every trick of the track, never forgot a friend or forgave an enemy! Outlaws they were by proclamation, but heroes to thousands because they were game against any odds."

"The law got them in the end?" I mused.

"Yes!" Grandpa spat out. "The law got them, by the dirty work of pimps and informers! But the real ding-dongers were never taken alive." His bent figure shook defiantly and he spoke with fire. "They died with their boots on, swapping hot shots in hot blood."

The old-timer pointed along a road winding through timbered ridges into Binalong. "One of the gang," he said, "young Johnny Gilbert, lies buried in the police paddock over there. He was shot dead in a gun fight with the police, down by the creek. It happened exactly sixty years ago this month."

For hours I listened intently as the grey-bearded bushwhacker filled my ears with the dramatic doings of the Wild Colonial Boys of the days when his beard was black.

Before leaving Binalong I squeezed through the wires of the police paddock fence, to bushranger Johnny Gilbert's grassy grave among the gum trees on the hill-slope.

A quatrain of Banjo Paterson's surged through my mind:

There's never a stone at the sleeper's head,
There's never a fence beside,
But the smallest child on the Watershed
Can tell you how Gilbert died.

Thus I became interested in the saga of the Wild Colonial Boys. The old-timer of Binalong has gone where all old-timers go; and today, in 1948, only nonagenarians can personally

remember the desperate doings of the early 1860s. All others who tell tales of the bushrangers are speaking only from local legend.'

Many nations have a famous outlaw or rebel or two tucked away; Scotland has Rob Roy, England has Robin Hood, Spain has El Cid, the USA has Jesse James, Bonnie and Clyde and many more … But as I was reading Frank Clune's book I began to feel that there is something unhealthy about Australia's choices. None of the characters in the dramas are inspiring, sympathetic, funny, wise, none of them are really there for anyone else. I can feel sympathy and pity for people who weren't handed a particularly good hand of cards (Ben Hall was transported for stealing a handkerchief worth ninepence; though it was his son who took to bushranging) … But I want to do more than feel sorry for people or make excuses for them.

The early bushrangers were just that: people who ranged the bush as a means of survival. The crimes came later. They fall into two broad areas: the people who wanted easy wealth who usually began by duffing cattle, sheep, or horses and moved on to holding up stage-coaches, lonely farms and pubs or individual travellers; and the people who wanted some kind of revenge, either on an individual squatter, businessman, convict overseer, or trooper, or people who wanted in some way to wreak indiscriminate revenge on the system.

It is a curious that such a large brutal overwhelming system inspired so little in this last category. Though there were some exciting and courageous escapes the few small convict insurrections usually fizzled out almost before they began; their leaders either being hanged, sent to Norfolk Island or Tasmania, or escaping into the bush. Yet had there been a concerted push among the convicts, who far outnumbered free settlers and officials, the country's history might have been very different. Better? Possibly not. But most definitely we would have learnt different names and dates in our school books.

It helps to explain why the founders of *The Bulletin* were hazy on what direction a national paper might take. The convict system had ended but the bushrangers were still a part of rural life—their obvious target, the squatters. City crime was driven by poverty or drunkenness. But the political, economic, and social systems were seen as relatively benign. *The Bulletin* spent more time poking fun at the Aborigines than in exposing corruption in high places. And it saw its readership as wanting something different from Pulitzer's crusading journalism …

Perhaps this helps explain why America got Superman and Australia got Ginger Meggs.

* * * * *

When John Steinbeck wrote *Travels with Charley* he presented his poodle in a very attractive light.

'Charley likes to get up early, and he likes me to get up early too. And why shouldn't he? Right after his breakfast he goes back to sleep. Over the years he has developed a number of innocent-appearing ways to get me up. He can shake himself and his collar loud enough to wake the dead. If that doesn't work he gets a sneezing fit. But perhaps his most irritating method is to sit quietly beside the bed and stare into my face with a sweet and forgiving look on his face; I come out of deep sleep with the feeling of being looked at. But I have learned to keep my eyes tight shut. If I even blink he sneezes and stretches, and that night's sleep is over for me. Often the war of wills goes on for quite a time, I squinching my eyes shut and he forgiving me, but he nearly always wins. He liked traveling so much he wanted to get started early, and early for Charley is the first tempering of darkness with the dawn.'

He also named his camper-truck for Don Quixote's horse. Even so it isn't an animal story. Charley is a companion on the journey and an ice-breaker for conversations. But the book ranges in a variety of areas. Steinbeck tells us how he invented a method for washing his clothes. "I had a large plastic garbage bucket with cover and bail. Since the normal movement of the truck tipped it over, I tethered it by a length of strong elastic rope of cotton-covered rubber to the clothes pole in my little closet, where it could jiggle to its heart's content without spilling. After a day of this, I opened it to dispose of the stuff at a roadside garbage can and found the most thoroughly mixed and kneaded garbage I have ever seen. I suppose all great inventions spring from some such experience. The next morning, I washed the plastic bucket, put in two shirts, underwear, and socks, added hot water and detergent, and hung it by its rubber rope to the clothes pole, where it

jiggled and danced crazily all day. That night I rinsed the clothes in a stream, and you've never seen clothes so clean."

It only remained to hang them to dry and put the next lot of clothes in the bucket.

He provides a pleasant sidelight on roadside signs. "The New England states use a terse form of instruction, a tight-lipped, laconic style sheet, wasting no words and few letters. New York State shouts at you the whole time. Do this. Do that. Squeeze left. Squeeze right. Every few feet an imperious command. In Ohio the signs are more benign. They offer friendly advice, and are more like suggestions. Some states use a turgid style which can get you lost with the greatest ease. There are states which tell you what you may expect to find in the way of road conditions ahead, while others let you find out for yourself. Nearly all have abandoned the adverb for the adjective. Drive Slow. Drive Safe."

He criticises 'historical markers', he discourses on mobile homes, human rights, deer, and the weather. But the overwhelming sense the book gives is of a restless world. A brief world. A world in which people say 'hello' and 'goodbye' in almost the same breath. A world in which the fade-in, the sound-bite, the quick grab, the slick superficial presentation, was already becoming part of the way people ingested everything, from their food, their love life, their ideas of interior decoration, travel, listening to music, to the way they sorted out the complexities of the world around them.

In Pulitzer's world people naturally turned to newspapers to understand what was happening. Now they are more likely to turn to the television set or the internet, with wireless and newspapers fighting a rearguard action. Does it matter how people get their news and information? Possibly not. Given that, however it comes, it has been pre-digested, steam-cooked, rendered down, spiced-up, de-boned, and vacuum-sealed with a misleading label put on the back to provide pleasant euphemisms rather than blunt truths …

Except that I think we process information differently depending on whether we see it, hear it, or read it … For instance, television only gives us unemployment percentages and some little arrows. It never gives the number of unemployed or tells us how those percentages were worked out. The true impact on the lives of the hundreds of thousands of unemployed people are reduced to a bland percentage and so inspire little understanding or sympathy. We still have to turn to newspapers … and even then we have to get out our magnifying glasses …

* * * * *

And what of brave young Nellie Bly?

Brian writes, "Early in September (1887) a distraught young woman named Elizabeth Cochrane, desperate for work after someone had stolen her purse containing her life savings of a hundred dollars, confronted Cockerill in his office. The vivacious twenty-three-year-old explained how as a reporter on the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, using the pen name Nellie Bly, she wrote about her personal experiences—her life in Mexico, what it was like to work in a factory; and how, at fourteen, during her mother's divorce trial, she had testified against her drunken stepfather. This was not her first attempt to work for Pulitzer. Previously, having heard that he was sponsoring a balloon flight from St. Louis, she had written to him repeatedly, offering to join the flight crew and report her experiences, but never received a reply. Now she handed Cockerill a list of other story ideas. Sympathizing with her plight, he gave her twenty-five dollars to tide her over and promised to consider her proposals.

Her timing was perfect. Pulitzer had been wondering how to investigate a tipoff that mental asylum nurses on nearby Blackwell's Island (renamed Welfare Island in 1921 and Roosevelt Island in 1973) mistreated their helpless patients. Among Bly's suggestions passed on to him was for her to feign insanity, get hospitalized, and then report her experiences as a patient. A great idea, said Pulitzer. It would test her reporting prowess and, if she pulled it off, might shame public officials into reforming the place. Realizing that once inside as a certified lunatic Bly might have trouble getting out, Pulitzer promised to rescue her after a certain time."

She succeeded impressively. "After her undercover triumph at the women's lunatic asylum, her second success, published on April 1, was to expose an Albany lobbyist, Edward Phelps, for bribing politicians."

"A muckraker before President Teddy Roosevelt popularized the term, Bly's exposés were becoming remarkably effective in fulfilling Pulitzer's goal to reform the system: her firsthand account of the disgusting way male guards treated women in city prisons caused the appointment of women matrons to guard female inmates. She also visited free dispensaries pretending to be ill to check on the medical care of the poor and, acting as a decoy, exposed a bar-tender who spent his leisure time driving a horse and carriage through city parks, picking up women new to the city to seduce and turn into prostitutes. Her report, revealing how he bribed police with beer to let him get away with it, ended his outdoor career.

"Encouraged from afar by Pulitzer, one week she unmasked a famous mind reader as a phony and the next dramatized in vivid, emotional language the misery of starving slumdwellers."

But her most famous exploit probably wasn't any of her essays into the seamier side of life. Jules Verne's fictional Phileas Fogg got round the world in Eighty Days. Could the *World's* very real Nellie Bly do it in less? Her journey is at least as exciting as the imaginary one. And she arrived back in the States, according to the *World*, in the remarkable time of "72 days, 6 hrs, 11 mins, 14 secs" with "The Whole Country Aglow with Intense Enthusiasm" …

Nellie Bly married a much older man and retired briefly from journalism. But her marriage wasn't a great success—but then I suppose not many men could compete with the level of excitement and challenge she was used to. She came out of 'retirement' and returned to the *World*.

Apart from her own impressive career she had a major impact—on other women who found the confidence to seek careers as reporters—and on other newspapers which found the confidence to hire them.

* * * * *

April 11: Cyril Pearl
April 12: Scott Turow
April 13: Seamus Heaney
Samuel Beckett
April 14: Michael Roads
April 15: Benjamin Jowett
Jeffrey Archer
April 16: Kingsley Amis
April 17: Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen)
John Ford (bap)
April 18: John Foxe
Thomas Middleton (bap)
Clarence Darrow

* * * * *

"The Louisiana statute and comparable laws in other states grew out of the long-standing efforts of Christian fundamentalists to reassert the scientific vitality of the Biblical narrative of creation against its Darwinist rival. The great landmark in this Bible-science conflict was the famous *Scopes* case, the "monkey trial" of the 1920s, which most Americans know in the legendary version portrayed in the play and movie *Inherit the Wind*. The legend tells of religious fanatics who invade a school classroom to persecute an inoffensive science teacher, and of a heroic defense lawyer who symbolizes reason itself in its endless battle against superstition.

"As with many legendary incidents the historical record is more complex. The Tennessee legislature had passed as a symbolic measure a statute prohibiting the teaching of evolution, which the governor signed only with the explicit understanding that the ban would not be enforced. Opponents of the law (and some people who just wanted to put Dayton, Tennessee, on the map) engineered a test case. A former substitute teacher named Scopes, who wasn't sure whether he had ever actually *taught* evolution, volunteered to be the defendant.

"The case became a media circus because of the colorful attorneys involved. William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic presidential candidate and secretary of state under

President Woodrow Wilson, led the prosecution. Bryan was a Bible believer but not an uncompromising literalist, in that he thought that the "days" of Genesis referred not to 24-hour periods but to historical ages of indefinite duration. He opposed Darwinism largely because he thought that its acceptance had encouraged the ethic of ruthless competition that underlay such evils as German militarism and robber baron capitalism.

"The Scopes defense team was led by the famous criminal lawyer and agnostic lecturer Clarence Darrow. Darrow maneuvered Bryan into taking the stand as an expert witness on the Bible and humiliated him in a devastating cross-examination. Having achieved his main purpose, Darrow admitted that his client had violated the statute and invited the jury to convict. The trial thus ended in a conviction and a nominal fine of $100. On appeal, the Tennessee supreme court threw out the fine on a technicality but held the statute constitutional. From a legal standpoint the outcome was inconclusive, but as presented to the world by the sarcastic journalist H.L. Mencken, and later by Broadway and Hollywood, the "monkey trial" was a public relations triumph for Darwinism.

"The scientific establishment was not exactly covering itself with glory at the time, however. Although he did not appear at the trial, the principal spokesman for evolution during the 1920s was Henry Fairfield Osborn, Director of the American Museum of Natural History. Osborn relied heavily upon the notorious Piltdown Man fossil, now known to be a fraud, and he was delighted to confirm the discovery of a supposedly pre-human fossil tooth by the paleontologist Harold Cooke in Bryan's home state of Nebraska. Thereafter Osborn prominently featured "Nebraska Man" (scientific designation: *Hesperopithecus haroldcookii*) in his antifundamentalist newspaper articles and radio broadcasts, until the tooth was discovered to be from a peccary, a kind of pig. If Osborn had been cross-examined by a lawyer as clever as Clarence Darrow, and satirized by a columnist as ruthless as H.L. Mencken, he would have looked as silly as Bryan."

Phillip E. Johnson in *Darwin on Trial*.

Alfred Garfield Hays, one of the defence team alongside Darrow, later wrote *Let Freedom Ring* in which he said: "The sensational character of the undertaking which would make Dayton world-famous was not an unwelcome feature. No time was to be lost. Other communities, once they caught the idea, would compete for the attraction of a trial involving science, the Bible and Tennessee." And Dayton was much less famous than its namesake in Ohio …

But one of the points that Darrow made in his defence of Scopes remains relevant anywhere where religious texts play a role in education. He pointed out that if teachers had to make sure their teachings were always in accord with the Bible then they would require a) an encyclopedic knowledge of the Bible, b) clear official guidance on which versions of events were to be accepted as correct, and c) clear official guidelines on the right interpretation of ambiguous or obscure passages.

* * * * *

Clarence Darrow ended his career with a famous case in Hawaii which allowed an American naval officer to walk free after killing the Japanese-Hawaiian man Joseph Kahahawai he had kidnapped, beaten till he supposedly confessed to raping the officer's wife, then murdered.

I love court-room dramas. But many of them depend on the 'good guys' having the better lawyer, the more conscientious lawyer, the lawyer better versed in precedent, the lawyer who is willing to put everything, career, reputation, even life on the line, as he digs deeper. (And such dramas overlook the fact that organised crime can afford the best legal talent on offer.) It is true that poor lawyers fail to save the innocent at times. But I am inclined to think that good lawyers can be more dangerous than bad lawyers; they are more likely to get the innocent convicted when prosecuting, they are more likely to get monsters off when defending … Yet this is not the lawyers' fault; it is a problem intrinsic to the adversarial system. Justice Douglas, introducing a collection of Darrow's speeches and articles, says, "Some say that Darrow in his later years became bitter and conservative. But in his prime he certainly was a fearless liberal, representing many lost causes. Darrow represented both the poor and the rich. There was no class line among his clientele. But he never, I think, represented the strong against the weak, the mighty against the

masses. When those lines were drawn, he was always on the side of the underdog fighting for equal protection, due process, and a fair trial."

This is slightly misleading in that the cases Darrow took on tended to be highly-publicised cases—which meant that other people, journalists, family, unions, supporters, had worked hard to get them into the public eye. Darrow wasn't the sort of lawyer who deals day in day out with a stream of uneducated, unemployed, inarticulate no-hopers. But this could be said of any high-profile lawyer. He worked hard to end capital punishment; something which still disfigures the American system. He did sterling work on behalf of exploited miners and other blue-collar workers. He pointed out racial bias in the way the system worked.

But I felt a slight unease, reading some of his material and the effect it had on court rooms, with jurors and even judges reduced to tears. Douglas says, "The institution through which Darrow achieved his great distinction was the jury. Darrow knew that juries are more to be trusted than judges when it comes to the protection of the *life* and *liberty* of the citizen." Lawyers move on to their next case. But every juror spends the rest of his or her life with that one case seared into the memory. In that strange hot-house atmosphere where you are removed from ordinary feet-on-the-ground everyday life and locked up with eleven strangers it is easier to be swayed by emotion. But it is not the emotion you felt at the time that stays with you. It is whether you believe you understood and weighed the facts correctly and came to the right conclusion. The court room is the one place where emotion should *not* be the deciding factor. To live the rest of your life with the knowledge you were influenced by the passion of a great orator rather than that you made a calm careful judgement which reflected the truth of the case as its facts were presented would be an intolerable burden.

James Morton in *Gangland: The Lawyers* presents a more specific problem relating to Darrow and juries: "Even the greatest lawyers can find themselves in professional difficulties. Clarence Darrow was one of them. The little localised difficulty which left him fighting for his professional life came relatively late in his career when he travelled to California in 1911 to defend the McNamara brothers, James and John. Heavily involved in the labour union movement, both had been charged with the bombing on 30 September 1910 of the Times Building in Ink Alley, Los Angeles. In the subsequent explosion twenty people died; four as they missed a safety-net into which they tried to jump from the burning building.

"Darrow's record as a defence lawyer stands with the greatest. He too was heavily involved with the labour movement. He had defended, amongst others, anarchists charged with the 1886 Haymarket Riot in Chicago and Eugene V. Debs, head of the American Railway Union, charged with contempt of court in 1894. At the turn of the century he defended miners in the Pennsylvania coal strike of 1902. Five years later he successfully defended William 'Big Bill' Haywood, head of the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies), who in 1907 had been charged with the assassination of the former governor of Idaho.

"Darrow did not really wish to appear in the McNamara trial. At the time he was a sick man and was tiring of the rigours of court work. However, partly through his fee and partly through a suggestion that if he declined the brief he would be regarded as a traitor to the labour movement, he was pressed into service. The money put at his disposal by the Unions was the equivalent of $3 million today, with his fee being the equivalent of $500,000. He was also to be allowed to select his co-counsel and to set the trial strategy. It soon became clear to Darrow that the case was hopeless; the evidence against the brothers was overwhelming.

"One great difference between American and British trials is that in the United States there is pre-trial examination of the jury as to their beliefs, so that jurors potentially most antagonistic to prosecution or defence may be eliminated. Some prefer to phrase it the other way and say it is so that the jurors potentially most favourable to the prosecution or defence may be selected. To this end, if the money is available in an important trial, inquiry agents are used to research the background of potential jurors.

"On 6 October 1911 Darrow's principal investigator, Bert Franklin, approached a juror named Bain and, finding he was in financial straits, offered him $4,000 to acquit the McNamaras. The next month, it was increasingly apparent to Darrow that there was no defence likely to save

James McNamara, who had actually planted the bomb, from the gallows. Darrow was about to strike a plea bargain when Franklin approached a second man. Unfortunately this time he picked quite the wrong man in Lockwood, who was himself a former deputy sheriff and a friend of the District Attorney. Lockwood reported matters and it was arranged that he should receive his bribe at 9 a.m. on 28 November at the corner of Los Angeles Street and Third. Unfortunately not only were the police watching but Darrow was in the area. Franklin was arrested.

"As for the trial of the McNamaras, Darrow encountered difficulties. James was by no means unhappy to face the gallows and so become a martyr to the Union cause. Eventually on 1 December 1911 Darrow persuaded the brothers of their perilous situation and, to what was described as pandemonium in court, he announced they would be changing their pleas to guilty. Four days later James received life imprisonment and John was sentenced to 15 years.

"Darrow's actions are a good example of a lawyer doing what he can for a client rather than for the cause. However, now he was no longer a hero to the working class but regarded as their betrayer. On 29 January 1912 Franklin, who by this time had pleaded guilty to attempted bribery, gave evidence to a Grand Jury implicating Darrow. That afternoon Darrow was arrested on a charge of jury tampering."

Darrow was in fine form when the jury tampering case came up, moving the judge and jury to tears. He was acquitted. But he was less successful when it came to the charge of bribing Bain. With the jury deadlocked with eight of the twelve jurors wanting to convict Darrow a plea bargain was struck and the District Attorney agreed to drop the case. "Darrow, for his part, promised never to practise law in California again. It was not the great man's finest hour."

* * * * *

If only there was an absolutely fail-safe way to determine the truth!

Lie detectors, truth serums, and hypnosis have all been claimed as fail-safes by their supporters but none of them are; people who believe absolutely that they are in the right or have convinced themselves that they were right to do the wrong thing can come through with flying colours; the techniques are dubious with people with serious mental illness, people who are epileptics, people who are addicted to substances, people who come from vastly different faith and belief traditions … And to assume that the sub-conscious cannot tell lies seems to me as dubious as assuming the conscious cannot. Hypnosis too has come under fire for its misuse in child abuse cases because hypnotists can just as easily implant suggestions as determine what is already there. And where it is used without checks and balances it can in itself become a form of abuse.

Hypnosis and lie detectors have also come under fire where they have been used in so-called 'alien abduction' cases—where people have unexplained gaps in their lives, hours, even days, where they have no memory of where they were or what they were doing. Because a lot of such cases are claimed by Americans they are easily dismissed as the whacko fringe—though in fact they appear to be worldwide in distribution. It is just that there is a well-developed network of UFO and other researchers in the USA for people to contact. If something odd happens to someone in Upper Volta or Outer Mongolia with whom might they share it?

The problem with dismissing all such reported cases is that they need to fall with 100% certainty into the categories of hoax, honest mistake (or dishonest mistake), delusion or hallucination, manmade explanation (eg. a new military prototype) or natural explanation (such as St Elmo's Fire or an unusually active aurora in the night sky) … if you are left with even one case which absolutely refuses to fit any such category you have a problem.

I am temperamentally inclined towards natural explanations for most things; not least because I regard the universe as a place of such extraordinary wonder, power, beauty, amazement, and logic, that I believe it can do just about anything. But some of the problems in almost anything are firstly semantic. What do we mean when we use words like alien, abduction, creation, evolution, design, or any one of dozens of other loaded words? This is an important question, not least because the choice for our children is now being posited as the Science of Evolution and the Intelligent Creation model. If we aren't even certain what we mean by

evolution should we be teaching our children anything about the possible origins of life or human beings?

Margaret Drabble wrote an attractive novel, *The Peppered Moth*, in which the moth '*Biston betularia*, the Manchester moth, aka the peppered moth' is an allegory for the human families of the Yorkshire coal towns. 'Seb does not seem to have grasped the evolutionary point about the Manchester moth. He seems to think it grew visibly darker during the nineteenth century, as the soot of the industrial revolutions poured from the chimneys and furnaces of Manchester and Preston and Liverpool and Leeds, as filth silted the canals and blackened the vegetation.

'Of course it didn't grow darker,' protests Faro, rising to the bait. After all, this is a subject about which she really does know something. 'It's just that the darker ones survived amidst the muck and the paler ones shone out like beacons and got eaten by pigeons. It's a classic illustration of the survival of the fittest.'

But in fact this is not about evolution at all; it is about ratios in an existing population. All-white cats are frequently and fluffily ensconced in comfortable armchairs; they are rare in feral populations. But this too is about ratios. It tells us nothing about how or why or when or where moths or cats evolved. Or why populations developed a range of colours. Or even if cats did evolve rather than springing fully formed from a Frankenstein experiment in an Egyptian temple! We need to be clear about whether we are discussing the development of a new species or simply variations within an existing species.

I find all the fury and invective expended on the Evolution versus Creation problem rather pointless. Why shouldn't we simply tell our children that no theory of the Origin of Life or the Origin of Humans can currently be *proved*? We may have been created by God (bearing in mind no human intelligence has ever adequately defined what we mean by God, let alone whether we might all mean the same thing), we may have been created by micro-changes or macro-changes of existing organisms, the Earth may have been 'salted' by floating bacteria or other simple organisms, or by a comet carrying life forms, or by Francis Crick's 'directed pan-spermia', we may have been changed by strange alien beings making a 'pit stop' … The honest answer is we don't yet know. Our children accept that we can't land people on Venus and so much that we present about Venus is still 'best guess' extrapolated from the various bits of information we have so far collected. Children don't fall in a disorganised heap when presented with a working hypothesis—or dozens of working hypotheses. But I think it could equally be argued that children should not be being taught *any* theories at all in biology classes. It is a bit like teaching literary theory to students before they can read and write. Instead of wondering where and how and when biology began—why not give students a thorough grounding in biological life as it *is* in all its internal and interactive complexities? Then children have a good basis from which to look more objectively at theories, of any persuasion, down the track.

I can understand the fears that giving Intelligent Design airplay will give joy to die-hard Creationists and Biblical literalists and fundamentalists—but the opposing camp, summed up in Nobel laureate Jacques Monod's words, "Chance alone is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, at the very root of the stupendous edifice of evolution: this central concept of modern biology is no longer one among other conceivable hypotheses. It is today the *sole* conceivable hypothesis, the only one that squares with observed and tested fact. And nothing warrants the supposition — or the hope — that on this score our position is likely ever to be revised", seems to me equally problematic in that it replaces one rigidity with another—and in both cases it would seem to me that we are failing to give space for children to exercise their own sense of wonder and curiosity. That is part of the reason why things such as the Entanglement Theory are so fascinating: because they suggest there are dimensions we haven't yet even guessed at … and perhaps too because they urge powerful scientific and religious figures to be more humble …

The whole question of what is Life, what is Intelligence, how do we define such terms, what do we mean by them, is at the heart of Mark Ward's book *Virtual Organisms*. Researchers trying to develop Artificial Life (Alife) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) first had to define what they meant. They wandered down the 'essence of life' road, the idea of some form of life force

which leaves us at death. They went down the trail of reproduction. A life form is something which can reproduce itself. But they rejected this because undoubtedly there are living forms which cannot reproduce themselves. They finally came to a vague consensus that life is life because it contains a blueprint from which it can constantly repair itself. The new cells each body constantly forms have to fit with the existing ones—or something very strange and ultimately non-viable would soon result. This idea of a blueprint for life is a fascinating thing but it has raised more problems than it has solved. Even the simplest one-cell organism has a profoundly complex structure. And unicellular organisms don't share the same structure. They show wide inner variation. But they do all share two attributes: they can repair themselves to some degree and they can reproduce themselves by some form of splitting.

In fact Mark Ward's journey through the world of the uni-cell is a fascinating and problematical journey in itself. He writes: "Prokaryotes are much more promiscuous than larger animals who can only swap genes within rather than between species. Prokaryotes merrily swap information all the time, a state of affairs that has led some to suggest that these simple unicellular creatures should not be considered as different species. All the different types of bacteria can share genetic information. Sometimes this information makes its way into the organism's main DNA strand and gets passed on to its offspring, sometimes it just hangs around inside the microbe performing a useful task. This ability to pass around information means they are in effect one species that is, to all intents and purposes, immortal. For everything else sex is about death. Probably the only thing that can match prokaryotes for fecundity and ease of exchange is computer software. While not all software is written in the same language the ways in which different programs can be made to work together is increasing rapidly. Some think that most software will eventually be made up of short lengths of code that can work with each other. This similarity between microbes and software is sobering when you consider what prokaryotes have done to the planet and how long they have been living. It's an insight some Alife researchers are keenly pushing.

"The simple prokaryotes had the world to themselves for nearly two billion years. If you were taking that car journey through history make sure you have great conversationalists as driving companions. For the first two days there would be nothing to see. The only thing you might come across would be mats of mainly cyanobacteria, the blue-green algae. These microbial mats trap silt and mud, with new layers growing on top of the old until gradually the banded rocks called stromatolites are formed. Today these are the oldest of life's relics.

"The view does not get much more interesting even when the eukaryotes arrive. Unlike the simpler prokaryotes, these organisms possess a nucleus and several other internal structures that either store energy or help keep the cell functioning. They probably arose as symbiotic relationships developed between simpler organisms. They may have emerged first in microbial mats when one bug accidentally enclosed a fellow and found life easier as a result. Lynn Margulis, a professor at the University of Amherst in Massachusetts, has collected a powerful body of evidence to support the thesis that the earliest eukaryotes were symbiotic collections of prokaryotic cells.

"Eukaryotic, or nucleated, cells are very different from their simpler ancestors. They are up to a thousand times larger and their genetic material is contained within a discrete capsule called a nucleus. The rest of the cell body encloses the energy converting and producing structures needed to keep the cell alive.

"These cells first appeared around 1.4 billion years ago. They may not have added much to the view but in other respects they exerted a profound influence. By the time they do make their appearance it would be possible to roll the windows down, as the atmosphere was beginning to contain significant amounts of oxygen.

"Humans may worry about the pollution we cause but this is nothing compared to the havoc wrought by the cyanobacteria that were at this time pumping out oxygen. In effect they poisoned the atmosphere for themselves.

"Carbon dioxide used to make up over 95 per cent of the atmosphere but now it counts for only 0.03 per cent. Gradually over the last few billion years the amount of carbon dioxide in the

atmosphere has been depleted as photosynthesizing organisms have converted it into carbohydrates. Photosynthesis also involves breaking water down into hydrogen and oxygen. To many bacteria oxygen is a virulent poison and as the gas became ubiquitous it probably killed off huge numbers of them. Just as any serious environmental threat does it also spurred evolution and the appearance of eukaryotes. Many of the structures found within these cells use oxygen and appeared for the first time during the oxygen holocaust of two billion years ago. The gradual reduction in the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has driven evolution in many different ways.

"For the next 900 million years the prokaryotes and the eukaryotes shared the planet until the first recognizable multicellular organisms appeared. The symbiotic trend established by eukaryotes enclosing other structures is a key trend. For multicellular organisms are in reality highly symbiotic creations. All the cells in a dog contain the same genetic material but each cell type only makes use of a certain part of that instruction book. There is an unwritten agreement to work together even though cells do different jobs. In contrast prokaryotic cells have to do everything themselves.

"Since the appearance of multicellular creatures life has literally exploded. The boom in multicellular animals that took place 570 million years ago is known as the Cambrian explosion. The emerging creatures had no competition for the available environmental niches they preferred, they were the first to settle into the new home. Everything was up for grabs.

"How exactly multicellular organisms arose is as big a mystery as the origins of life itself. While it is known that multicellular organisms share genes that dictate body plans and divisions into front, middle and back, no one is sure how these genes arose, nor how exactly they do their job."

Marshall T. Savage wrote in *The Millennial Project*, "The blue-green algas are perhaps the most remarkable forms of life on the planet, being both the simplest and the most successful. The blue-green alga is such a primitive life form that its cell doesn't even have a nucleus; its genetic material simply floats freely within its body. These primitive plants have existed, essentially unchanged, for practically the entire history of Life on Earth. Fossils of blue-green algae, nearly identical to their modern descendants, have been found in rock formations of Western Australia, dating to 3.5 billion years. The blue-green algae had already lived out 94% of their present history when the dinosaurs were just beginning.

"During their long history, blue-green algae have adapted to virtually every ecological niche where there is light and moisture. These astonishing plants can be found in hot springs, where the water temperature exceeds 160 degrees F.; in brine lakes, where the salinity is so great that no other life can exist; in perpetually frozen Antarctic lakes, under ice 18 feet thick; even inside lichens, where they live in symbiotic harmony with their fungal hosts. Even in the harshest reaches of the Sahara desert, 48 varieties of algae have been discovered living under a single rock, subsisting on nothing but the morning dew.

"Algae's vitality and antiquity are surpassed only by their abundance and importance. Just as the 'Earth' is covered mostly by water, so too is 'Life' mostly made of algae. Algae form not only the base of the pyramid of Life, but comprise the bulk of the pyramid as well. Seventy percent of the world's biomass is algae. Together with the other algas, the blue-greens account for as much as 90% of the photosynthetic activity on earth. The algae are both the main source of oxygen in the atmosphere, and the primary regulators of carbon dioxide. In large measure, the algas, the blue-greens in particular, are the very cause of Life on Earth. Without them, Gaia would be a lifeless hell-hole not much different than Venus."

The puzzling, and fascinating, thing about this is that we are given to understand there is a kind of evolutionary imperative, a constant development from the single cell to the multicell, from the simple to the complex to the differentiated, in essence an inbuilt drive to change and develop under the pressure of changing temperatures and environments. But is there an equally strong imperative towards a kind of stasis, an ability to resist the pressure to evolve? Should we have, as well as a Theory of Evolution, a Theory of Non-Evolution? Because the unchanging is as intriguing as the changing …

And the simplest cell still contains complex DNA information—which suggests DNA predates the first cell, which developed to cover and protect it. This intrigues me. Instead of the old question: Who made God? or Who made Matter? we should be asking Who made DNA? It is a blueprint for life—but is it alive? My first assumption would be to say, yes, but then I found myself wondering: if DNA predates the cell which surrounds and protects it, then in what form did it 'live' before it developed a protective covering? Can DNA float in space or form from water or gas or rock? Does it continue to exist in some sort of free state, not linked to any particular life form?

At the moment hopes for a breakthrough in how (and whether) we evolved from some form of single cell creature are being focused on what is currently seen as 'waste' or redundant DNA … DNA which appears to have no current purpose but which may have been useful at some past period … I would like to say watch this space but even this idea may be superceded, either by a newer idea or by the rush to clone everything. The feeble cries of churchpeople and (some) medical ethicists aren't going to prevail. In fact I will go out on a limb and say that cloned people will be a certainty within twenty years. Yet no one knows how the unicellular beings acquired their template if I might call it that, something which seems so simple yet was so complex, so effective, so safely kept, so capable of infinite reproduction, so linked to energy sources, so capable of … in fact, so absolutely mind-blowing!

"We teach our children through the literature of nursery books that animals live pleasantly in spacious farmyards and fields, while we feed them animal food produced callously in factories." (From *The Animals' Report* by Richard North.) The two troubling aspects in every part of our relationship with animals seem to be that human beings are both hypocritical, as North suggests, and callous. Behind every picture of frolicking lambs are pictures we would prefer not to show. Behind every Dolly the Sheep are deformed debilitated pain-ridden creatures which have never consented to the horrors we subject them to … usually on the grounds that *their* suffering is minimal or that it will reduce *our* suffering …

Should we clone people? I don't believe we should. I don't believe we should clone anything. Beyond the questions of cruelty and of ethics is a deeper reason. We don't understand the blueprints of life, we don't understand evolution, we don't understand creation, we don't understand the complex interplay of biology and chemistry and physics and so on, and we don't understand what we mean by 'life force'.

Gena Corea in *The Baby Machine* said she "stopped Richard Seed in the hall. Somehow our conversation got on to the genetic manipulation of embryos. With eggs being fertilized in a dish and with embryos being flushed out of women, the embryo has now become available for manipulation. I asked Seed if gene manipulation will be used for therapeutic purposes — that is, to correct genetic 'defects'. 'That's the way it will start,' he replied. 'It will start therapeutically.' He went on to say that gene manipulation would later be used to control human evolution. This, he added, was not an original idea with him; it was a common philosophical observation. Before hurrying off to his next meeting, he said to me:

> There is a very dramatic change now [in the ability to control evolution] which is not fully appreciated by the population at large.

"I was not surprised at his casual mention of men's plans to direct human evolution. He had discussed it somewhat during an interview with him in his office in Chicago in 1980. Seed had told me then that he had thought a good deal about eugenics, a programme that calls for improving the human race by increasing the propagation of the 'fit' rather than the 'unfit'. He had said that people feared reproductive technology would be used for eugenics; that, in fact it could be, but that that was very positive:

> Just generally trying to improve the human race is a good thing … We have already been practicing eugenics in a small way by selecting mates we consider superior and by using amniocentesis and aborting

defective fetuses … Technology is going to provide tools to do it in a progressively larger and larger way and that's probably what will happen.

"This, he reiterated, was positive and in no way the 'horror story' some made it out to be.

"The idea of redirecting human evolution was not original with Richard Seed. I had been reading the literature of reproductive technology for more than four years and had come across that idea repeatedly: in the work of the French biologist Rene Dubois, for example, and Dr. Robert Sinsheimer, as well as the late Hermann J. Muller, and Dr. Clifford Grobstein. One clear example is of the ethicist Dr. Joseph Fletcher, who wrote in 1974 that in the past few years, men had indeed begun 'to take charge of their own evolution'. He looked favourably on this control over human reproduction:

> Control is human and rational; submission, the opposite of control, is subhuman … To be responsible, to take control and reject low quality life, only seems cruel or callous to the morally superficial.

"We know all about 'low quality life'. We know who those in power defined as low quality life when the eugenics movement was in full swing: the disabled; the dark-skinned; the unemployed; in Germany in 1930 — the Jew. Today in the Indian cities where businesses which detect and abort female fetuses thrive, we know that female life is low quality life."

I don't suppose love gets much of a look in in most laboratories (though they would be the better for it) but I had thought that most scientists were deep believers in the idea that it is chance mutations which confer an evolutionary benefit and which therefore are essential to the Theory of Evolution. But if scientists see almost everything outside a very narrow definition of normal as a defect and therefore to be expunged …

* * * * *

Nick Pope in *The Uninvited* looks at the explanations which have been put forward as possible motivations for alien contact. These include:

1. That we may be seen by aliens in the same way that we see animals: as creatures there for our benefit, use, profit, and as ideal subjects for laboratory experiments.
2. That we are being tested; we are the laboratory specimens and the aliens want to know 'how we tick', whether we are intelligent, what our range of emotions and abilities are, what kind of blueprint we contain.
3. That we are merely in the way, that we are on the way to somewhere else. Pope likens this to moths caught by speeding cars. The moths cannot understand the purpose of cars or journeys. If we believe in intelligent life, in some form, elsewhere in the universe, this becomes a realistic scenario.
4. To gain genetic material. This can be seen in various ways. As the collection in the same way that scientists want to collect the DNA of all human tribes and groups. As material to experiment with, to understand the nature of the earth (or even perhaps to try and unravel an evolutionary history) or to 'develop' in some way. Or as material to develop hybrids or an alien beachhead—this is the idea that John Wyndham used in *The Midwich Cuckoos*; it is also the thinking behind multinational attempts to get genetically-modified products into new areas; once they're in there is no way back to a GM-free status. This makes a lot more sense than the Hollywood idea of fleets of invading spaceships.
5. As sightings and reports have only become commonplace in the last half-century—ie. in the period when humanity moved towards making space travel a possibility—there are two resulting scenarios: they are trying to find ways to save us from ourselves or they are trying to find ways to save themselves from the human export of war or disease into space.
6. They are not aliens. They are us. They are what we will become and have gained the ability to travel backwards in time. In a future where all human beings are cloned and in which they have lost the ability to reproduce naturally with all the emotions surrounding that

experience, they have come back to see a world in which every human is a unique being with all that that implies for personality, selfhood, relationships, and society.

I am not sure that I find any of these explanations compelling either to explain the present claims or future possibilities. But they are all interesting and thought-provoking.

* * * * *

"With such slim research on the safety of GM food and such enormous risks, why are respected institutes, scientific panels, research journals, even government officials lining up to defend it as proven safe? And why are they so quick to condemn evidence that might be used to protect the public? … a key to understanding … is to follow the money.

"With less research money available from public sources, more and more scientists in the U.S. and Europe are dependent on corporate sponsors, and hence, corporate acceptance of their research *and* results. Among Britain's top research universities, for example, dependence on private funds often amounts to 80 to 90 percent of the total research budget. But reliance on corporate sponsorship can carry a hidden price."

A poll of 500 scientists working in either government or recently privatized research institutes in the UK revealed that 30 percent had been asked to change their research conclusions by their sponsoring customer. According to the report, published in the UK's *Times Higher Education Supplement* in September 2000, "The figure included 17 percent who had been asked to change their conclusions to suit the customer's preferred outcome, 10 percent who said they had been asked to do so [in order] to obtain further contracts and three percent who claimed they had been asked to make changes to discourage publication."

"If 30 percent admitted to having been asked to change their results, one wonders how many others, having succumbed to their customers' requests, were too embarrassed to answer truthfully.

"The article, entitled "Scientists Asked to Fix Results for Backer," said scientists complained that "Contracting out and the commercialization of scientific research are threatening standards of impartiality."

"Dr. Richard Smith, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, says that the "competing interests" that sponsor research have "quite a profound influence on the conclusions." He warns, "We deceive ourselves if we think science is wholly impartial."

In the U.S. corporate donations rose from $850 million in 1985 to $4.25 billion in less than ten years. According to the *Atlantic Monthly*, "increasingly the money comes with strings attached … In higher education today corporations not only sponsor a growing amount of research—they frequently dictate the terms under which it is conducted."

"Consider the case of the University of California at Berkeley. In November 1998, the biotech company Novartis gave $25 million to the Department of Plant and Microbial Biology for research. In exchange, Novartis gets the first rights to negotiate licenses for about one third of the discoveries made by the department. This includes discoveries funded by Novartis as well as those funded by federal and state sources. Novartis can also delay the publication of research by up to four months, providing time for patent applications and for allowing the company to utilize the proprietary information. In addition, Novartis gets representation on two of the five seats of the committee that determines how the department's research money is spent.

"When informed of this deal, many in the faculty were outraged. More than half believed it would have a "negative" or "Strongly negative" effect on academic freedom, about half thought it would get in the way of "public good research," and 60 percent thought it would inhibit the free exchange of ideas between scientists.

"Worse than the problems of enforced secrecy and delay," says the *Atlantic Monthly* article, "is the possibility that behind closed doors some corporate sponsors are manipulating manuscripts before publication to serve their commercial interests … A study of major research centers in the field of engineering found that 35 percent would allow corporate sponsors to delete information from papers prior to publication."

In addition, many professors own stock in the company that sponsors their research, or sit on their boards, or hold a corporate endowed position, or simply rely on the corporation for

continued research money. Even universities are investing in companies that fund or benefit from university research. "In a study of 800 scientific papers published in a range of academic journals, Sheldon Krimsky, a professor of public policy at Tufts University and a leading authority on conflicts of interest, found that slightly more than a *third* of the authors had a significant financial interest in their reports." None of these papers, however, disclosed the information. Mildred Cho, a senior research scholar at Stanford's Center for Biomedical Ethics, says, "When you have so many scientists on boards of companies or doing sponsored research, you start to wonder, How are these studies being designed? What kinds of research questions are being raised? What kinds aren't being raised?"

"Research in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that studies of cancer drugs funded by non-profit groups were eight times more likely to reach unfavorable conclusions as the studies funded by the pharmaceutical companies. Or consider the case of the genetically modified artificial sweetener aspartame: About 165 peer-reviewed studies were conducted on it by 1995. They were divided almost evenly between those that found no problem and those that raised questions about the sweetener's safety. Of these studies that found no problem, 100 percent were paid for by the manufacturer of the sweetener. All of the studies paid for by the non-industry and non-government sources raised questions."

(*Seeds of Deception* by Jeffrey M. Smith)

In a case such as the sweetener the bias might seem obvious. But the scientific establishment has no clear-cut way of distancing itself from the bias that money brings with it. Even such august bodies as the Royal Society in Britain are likely to come down on the side that has the money.

One day when I was looking for a book on botanist Robert Brown I happened to notice there were a number of books on GM foods and agriculture; as it was something I thought it behooved me to know more about, I borrowed a bundle and spent a week ploughing through them.

So what do we mean when we use words like 'good' and 'precision' in science? What do words like 'peer review' and 'adequate tests' and 'independence' mean in the scientific world? Even words like 'facts' and 'proof' are rubbery. At every level the debate on genetic modification is beset by this lack of clarity. Confusions reign even before the process begins. Companies claim they will end world hunger—yet there are indications that GM crops often yield less. Companies are patenting GM seeds on the grounds these are completely new—yet they insist to government regulators these foods are essentially the same as existing foods and therefore do not need to be tested. Companies claim that GM crops will use less pesticide and herbicide—yet they have successfully lobbied in the United States to get allowable levels of residues raised simply because GM crops are actually designed to be sprayed more heavily.

And take the process itself. We are urged to see it as a scientific miracle in terms of its precision and its benefits. But first of all genes rarely exist solely to carry one trait. The 'new' genes are blasted into the genome by means of metal, gas, or air. They may damage the existing genes in the cell and it is not clear where they will settle once they are in there, or how they will react. The cell tries to balance up its genetic structure by moving genes—which can further damage or affect its own complement of genes, genes can carry unwanted fragments with them, they can get contaminated, they can have peculiar and dangerous side-effects … and this is long before anything gets planted, sprayed, pollinated, harvested, carried …

No one knows what happens when GM pollen is carried on the wind, when it gets into the soil and may exchange genes with soil bacteria, when it gets into waterways, when it may cross with other varieties (either wild varieties or other GM brands) … No one knows what happens to bacteria genes when they are eaten by humans or animals … they may be making whoopee in your unsuspecting bowel … And the whole process of testing is fraught with an attitude of slapdash science (for instance testing products on adults rather than children; even though we know that things like thalilomide were harmless to women but left their babies without arms or legs), ad hoc responses, secrecy, intimidation, false advertising, deliberate mixing of GM products with non-GM, pressure on farmers, a failure to inform the public …

Good science?

And what does all this have to do with evolutionary theory, you might ask? I asked myself that question. And the most obvious response is = quite a lot. A science department is a science department. The biologists working on a new variety of cotton are not housed in splendour while the biologists working on evolution are reduced to a tent behind the gardener's shed.

But I think it deals more with attitude. Marc Lappé and Britt Bailey wrote in *Against the Grain*, "Genetic engineering also raises major scientific issues of possible genome destabilization and ecological disruption … It is also possible to argue the creation of transgenic crops is intrinsically immoral because it violates the evolutionary integrity of the organism. Questioning the exotic origin of a gene in transgenic plant species is valid because plants have rarely, if ever, acquired genes across genera lines in the past. The profaning of the natural order by transgenesis is a widespread and pervasive sentiment in some religious circles."

Effectively scientists can not only change evolution but they can end it. The contamination of bio-diversity ultimately denies future generations any options but the ones science is now setting out. Does it matter that the rich 'pool' of maize species in Mexico is increasingly contaminated (and in another ten years may be totally contaminated) by non-species genes? Does it matter that people, plants, and animals no longer 'own' their own genes? Does it matter that scientists feel most comfortable with mono-systems which bring fewer variables with them?

*

Much has been written about the Irish Potato Famine in the nineteenth century. But behind the anguish and the blame a simple fact has been overlooked. Europe grew only *two* species of potatoes (as a number of cultivars). When they both succumbed to potato blight there was no other variety for farmers to use. Farms in the Andean potato-growing areas were equally small, farmers lived at subsistence level, their staple crop was equally important—BUT they had dozens, even hundreds, of varieties to turn to, all with varying degrees of resistance to potato blight.

When I came to Tasmania I liked it that people were knowledgeable and interested in growing and eating a wide range of potatoes. James McAuley even wrote a poem on this interest. But it is more than taking an interest in what we eat, wear, dose ourselves with, grow as ornaments, or turn into furniture …

At the heart of all debates about science are the value systems of the scientists themselves. People teaching 'intelligent design' are very clear in what they believe and why they believe it. We can't subject their beliefs to proof in the laboratory. God is not, so far, amenable to being minced up and put in a test tube with a catalysing agent. But neither is evolution. So far. Neither of these theories are science. Both are philosophies.

But there is one key difference. Evolutionists rarely tell us where they are coming from, what their motivation for study and research is. Is it money? Is it a belief that the world is a random series of events—and evolution is the way in which this chaos inevitably organises itself? Is it curiosity? Is it the humble belief that the world will ultimately reveal all its secrets to those who research with an open mind? Is it fame or the chance to be published in prestigious journals? Is it that evolution, of all the options, appears the most reasonable? I don't mind where scientists are coming from. But I think that, just as I would like to see all scientists disclose the source of their funding, I would also like to know what their values and motivations are. We, the public, expect it of politicians. Yet we treat scientists with kid gloves.

The question I think I would like to ask all who have the power to change our future is: do you believe the universe exists solely for the benefit of humans?

*

Why do people believe in alien visitations? I think the answer is simple. As Lappé and Bailey say, "Do we have the wisdom "to play God"? Or put into more contemporary language, do we have the foresight and intelligence to substitute human selection for natural selection?" In a world where the ideas, beliefs, and wishes of ordinary people are so often ridden roughshod over, and treated with contempt by those who hold our well-being and safety and the richness and diversity of our earth in their power, I feel sure it becomes wonderfully comforting to believe,

even to feel you *know*, that there are beings out there far more clever and far more advanced and far more powerful and with a far more profound sense of understanding and wisdom than anyone here on earth …

* * * * *

Clarence Darrow is remembered for his court cases but he also entered into several famous debates, he wrote articles, he wrote his autobiography, he turned to fiction and wrote a novel *An Eye for an Eye*. As well as the legal interest of his cases he also brought a strong knowledge of literature into his court material, even quoting Omar Khayyam and other poets. I couldn't track down his fiction but I thought a small taste of his article on John Brown, hero of song and legend—

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave,
But his soul is marching on" … etc

—might give an idea of his style.

"John Brown was born in Conneticut in 1800. His parents were farmers, and like all who really work, were poor. His natural instincts were never warped or smothered or numbed by learning. His mind was so strong, his sense of justice so keen, and his sympathies so deep, that he might have been able even to withstand an education. He believed in Destiny and in God. He was narrow, fanatical, and self-willed, like all men who deeply impress the generation in which they live. Had he been broad and profound, he would have asked himself the question, "What is the use?" and the answer would have brought an easier life and a peaceful death. He was a man of one idea, which is all that the brain of any man of action can ever hold. He was not a philosopher, and therefore believed he had a mission in the world, and that he must early get at his Master's work, and never rest by day or night, lest that work should not be done. He was of the type of Cromwell, of Calvin, of Mahomet; not a good type for the peace of the world, but a type that here and there, down through the ages, has been needful to kindle a flame that should burn the decaying institutions and ancient wrongs in the fierce crucible of a world's awakening wrath."

And when the attack failed …

"But soon the mad frenzy of the mob began to die away. A few brave souls stood unmoved in the fury of the storm. While Brown still lived, the calm, sane voice of Emerson called his country-men to view Brown's deeds in the light of the motives that fired his soul; he told the world that soon the day would come when his deeds with their motives would place John Brown among the martyrs and the heroes of the earth. Theodore Parker did not lose his head in the mad unseemly haste to save his neck, and brave old Wendell Phillips fearlessly hurled his maledictions in the teeth of the maddened and exultant foe. But when the scaffold bore its fruit, and the dead hero's heart was cold, the pulse of humanity once more began to beat; the timid, the coward, the time server, the helpless and the weak looked on the brave, cold clay, and from a million throats a cry for vengeance was lifted to the stars. Men cried from the hustings to wake a sleeping world, newspapers condemned the act; ministers who still were Christians appealed from the judgment of the court to the judgment of their God; church bells with sad tones tolled out the tidings of Brown's passing soul, and men and angels wept above his bier. And still the tide rolled on, until in less than two short years the land resounded with the call to arms, and millions of men were hurrying to the field of strife to complete the work John Brown began."

* * * * *

Clarence Darrow bestrode American legal life for five decades.

Theon Wright wrote of his last case in 1931 in *Rape in Paradise*:

"The old man came down to the Islands believing his personal presence and his known tolerance and understanding of human suffering would help smooth over any racial problems that might exist. When he left the islands two months later the racial issues were more deeply graven than ever.

There were many who blamed Clarence Darrow for the outcome of the Massie-Fortescue trial, which in itself was a paradox. He had always hated injustice and arrogance; he had nearly always aligned himself with the downtrodden people of his day, the unprotected victims of a hostile society. Yet in Honolulu he found himself ranged on the other side, fighting for those

things he despised: arrogance and ruthlessness of economic overlords, the failure of man-made justice to protect the weak and disenfranchised. Why?

It is necessary for the writer at this point to indulge in some personal recollections. Clarence Darrow was well known to my family for three generations. His sister and my grandmother, Adelle Williams, were among the first half dozen coeds at Allegheny College in Western Pennsylvania. As a young man Darrow had spent summers at my grandfather's farm near Meadville. It was natural that he should visit my father while he was in Honolulu; and on several occasions I was present in the evenings when he came to my father's home.

On one of these occasions, after the trial was over and before he left for the mainland, he unburdened himself of some thoughts about the "race problem" in Hawaii. He seemed puzzled and troubled; and it was at this time that he made the comment about his hope of "healing racial wounds" in the Islands.

He had previously expressed to newspaper reporters covering the trial his frustration of being unable to understand the intricate mentality of the "Oriental." But the stolid reticence of the Hawaiian was even more puzzling.

"What is it about these people I do not understand?" he asked.

"You met all the issues," my father said, "except one—the only one that really had to be met. That was the racial issue."

He spoke of the background of Hawaii … the growing disenchantment of the Hawaiian people with the small clique of *kamaoina haoles* (white Americans) that had gained control of the Islands; the political ferment and discontent; and finally the refusal of the *haole* elite to accept the decision of their own laws and courts, in the case of the Ala Moana defendants. The Hawaiians and other "racial groups" in Honolulu, including the Portuguese, who were regarded as "white" but not *haole*, were not bitter against Darrow, or even against the Massie-Fortescue group, or the Navy. What they resented was a concept of justice that would throw five boys of mixed Hawaiian and other racial origins into prison, as hoodlums and gangsters—even though there had been no real proof of their guilt; and at the same time it would allow four mainland *haoles* to go free, after they admitted killing Joseph Kahahawai.

It was as simple as that."

* * * * *

April 19: José Echegaray
April 20: Julie Zilko
April 21: Charlotte Brontë
April 22: Henry Fielding
Ellen Glasgow
April 23: William Shakespeare

* * * * *

Karl Shapiro wrote a poem he called 'The Second-Best Bed'.

'In the name of the almighty God, amen,
I, William Shakespeare, take my pen
And do bequeath in perfect health
To Christ my soul and to my kin my wealth
When I am dead.
And to Anne, good dame,
I bequeath my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

To Judith a hundred fifty pounds I give,
The same if three more years she live,
And the broad-edge silver bowl. To Joan
My hose and clothes and all the suits I own
Both blue and red.
And to Anne, good dame,

I bequeath my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

Ten pounds to beggars for their drink and board,
To Mr. Thomas Cole my sword,
To Richard Burbage, Arndell Nash,
Heminge and Hamlet one pound six in cash,
And to her I wed
Who is Anne, good dame,
I bequeath my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

To Joan also my Stratford house I will,
For sisters shall not go with nil
And to her sons five pounds apiece
To be paid within a year of my decease.
And as I have said
To Anne, good dame,
I bequeath my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

Last, to my daughter, born Susanna Hall,
My barns and stables, lands and all,
Tenements, orchards, jewels, and wares,
And these forever for herself and heirs,
Till all are dead;
But to Anne, good dame,
I bequeath my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

Good wife, bad fortune is to blame
That I bequeath, when I am dead,
To you my honor and my name,
A table, a chair, and the second-best bed.

* * * * *

The curious thing in this is not the supposed puzzle about 'the second-best bed'; Anne already had all the beds she needed, in fact there is a good chance that their best bed was hers anyway … but that Shakespeare *didn't* bequeath his name. Certainly she became, in life, Anne Shakespeare. But to posterity she is remembered as Anne Hathaway. It suggests she was a strong decisive capable woman. It might even suggest that far from William deserting her and the children to try his luck on the London stage, she sent him with her blessing. 'I can look after the children and business here for you, you are too clever not to at least give it all a try there.' Because, regardless of how many lovers scholars try to impute to Shakespeare, we know of only *one* for absolute certain. Anne Hathaway. Will came back to her regularly through the years. He came back to her for good in his later years.

* * * * *

"It has been wished to make these Tales easy reading for very young children. To the utmost of their ability the writers have constantly kept this in mind; but the subjects of most of them made this a very difficult task. It was no easy matter to give the histories of men and women in terms familiar to the apprehension of a very young mind. For young ladies too, it has been the intention chiefly to write; because boys being generally permitted the use of their fathers' libraries at a much earlier age than girls are, they frequently have the best scenes of Shakespeare by heart, before their sisters are permitted to look into this manly book; and, therefore, instead of

recommending these Tales to the perusal of young gentlemen who can read them so much better in the originals, their kind assistance is rather requested in explaining to their sisters such parts as are hardest for them to understand: and when they have helped them to get over the difficulties, then perhaps they will read to them (carefully selecting what is proper for a young sister's ear) some passage which has pleased them in one of these stories, in the very words of the scene from which it is taken; and it is hoped they will find that the beautiful extracts, the select passages they may choose to give their sisters, in this way will be much better relished and understood from their having some notion of the general story from one of these imperfect abridgments—which if they be fortunately so done as to prove delightful to any of the young readers, it is hoped that no worse effect will result than to make them wish themselves a little older, that they may be allowed to read the Plays at full length—" so wrote Charles and Mary Lamb introducing their *Tales From Shakespeare*. It is strange that Thomas Bowdler has been excoriated for expurgating Shakespeare while the Lambs have been praised for précising Shakespeare—because both exercises contain the same 'danger': that the young reader will feel there is now no need to bother with long contorted plots and old-fashioned language in the full-length Plays. And I wonder how Victorian school-boys explained 'lie with him' to their little sisters?

Their *Tales* owe much to the style of both the Bible and popular fairytales:

"Sebastian and his sister Viola, a young gentleman and lady of Messaline, were twins, and (which was accounted a great wonder) from their birth they so much resembled each other, that, but for the difference in their dress, they could not be known apart." (Twelfth Night)

"Pericles, prince of Tyre, became a voluntary exile from his dominions, to avert the dreadful calamities which Antiochus, the wicked emperor of Greece, threatened to bring upon his subjects and city of Tyre, in revenge for a discovery which the prince had made of a shocking deed which the emperor had done in secret; as commonly it proves dangerous to pry into the hidden crimes of great ones." (Pericles)

"There was a law in the city of Athens which gave to its citizens the power of compelling their daughters to marry whomsoever they pleased; for upon a daughter's refusing to marry the man her father had chosen to be her husband, the father was empowered by this law to cause her to be put to death." (A Midsummer Night's Dream)

"During the time that France was divided into provinces (or dukedoms as they were called) there reigned in one of these provinces an usurper, who had deposed and banished his elder brother, the lawful duke. (As You Like It)

"During the time of Augustus Caesar, Emperor of Rome, there reigned in England (which was then called Britain) a king whose name was Cymbeline." (Cymbeline)

The strong prose and unvarnished plot-lines were seized upon by generations of school children, lost in the maze of the 'real thing', with a great sense of relief.

But one thing struck me as I was reading through them. There are all the theatrical conventions, mistaken identities, girls disguised as boys, simple people who are really of 'noble blood', impediments to true love. But I was intrigued by how often Shakespeare sends his characters out into a forest. Sometimes they are lost, sometimes they are banished, sometimes they are seeking solitude … It isn't something I associate with other playwrights of Shakespeare's era, Marlowe, Kyd, Webster, etc, though I may simply not have read widely enough. But I think it could be because Shakespeare was already a grown man when he arrived in London and he in essence brought the forests and woodlands of his Warwickshire childhood with him.

Often they are nameless but he calls the wilderness in 'As You Like It' the forest of Arden and places it in France. Although it is accepted as being the existing Forest of Ardennes I wondered if he was also paying tribute in this play to his mother Mary Arden. Much is written about his father, John Shakespeare, his wife, Anne Hathaway, about his possible mistress in London, about his daughters Judith and Susanna … but, somehow, his mother usually gets overlooked. Why is she of so little interest? We have some juvenilia from other famous playwrights and novelists and poets—but Shakespeare, the playwright, seems to leap from nowhere. Undoubtedly he had to write essays and perhaps verse while at grammar school and he

would have learned something of rhetoric and debate; he would have read the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, perhaps Chaucer and later English writers, as well as something from Latin and Greek authors. But we have no image of Shakespeare the child preparing little stories or early attempts at plays or poems to read to his family or show to his mother. I think it is this lack which has encouraged people to throw doubt on Shakespeare's authorship … but the fact that we don't have youthful attempts to write for a public doesn't mean there weren't any. And it must be noted in passing that we don't have juvenilia from most of his contemporaries either. The childish stories of Robert Greene or John Ford? Sorry. We don't even have Bacon juvenilia or the writings of the ten-year-old Edward de Vere …

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The Lambs, Charles and Mary, have been a blessing to countless schoolchildren struggling to grasp the plots of the plays. But I wonder how many school authorities and curriculum designers would have been so keen on the Lambs if they had looked closely at their lives? As Kathy Watson writes in *The Devil Kissed Her*: "On the afternoon of 22 September 1796, Mary Lamb killed her mother. She stabbed her at home, in the dining room, with the carving knife the family used at mealtimes, making this a homely crime as well as a violent one. Mary was thirty-one years old and, at the moment she raised the knife, quite mad. She had experienced mental illness before but, on that day, she had, in common parlance, lost her mind. She literally didn't know what she was doing. At that time, the Lamb household included herself, her paralysed mother, her dotty aunt, her father who was rapidly succumbing to senile dementia and her brother who had recently had a nervous breakdown." Watson suggests Mary suffered from bipolar disorder. Although she suffered similar episodes throughout her life this didn't quite seem to fit as her 'normal' times were times of great calmness and serenity rather than unnatural exhilaration. And the period leading up to the attack suggests something might have snapped even without mental illness in the family equation. Watson's description of the gathering storm is worthy of the best of mystery writing. "Some sort of disaster was probably inevitable. As the summer of 1796 drew to an end, Mary was living on a knife-edge. The long days spent hunched over fabric, cutting and stitching, measuring, pushing herself to finish her task, were unravelling her. She hunched over her sewing until her back ached, worked her needle until her fingers became numb and peered at fabric until her eyes were blurred with tiredness. The precision required in sewing hid the rush of over-wrought energy and nervous excitement building in her mind.

"The demands of her parents, both ill in their different ways, were endless. She was physically drained and mentally wound up. From morning to night, she worked and worried, her daily life encompassing the worst of both worlds — she was lonely, isolated in her burden of work and care — but never left alone to recoup her spirits. All her resources — time, energy, money, skills — were pressed into a struggle to keep the feeble Lamb family afloat. No part of her life was truly her own, there was no minute of her day that was not already claimed in the service of someone else. Even at night, there was no privacy; she shared the bed of an elderly invalid. Insomnia is now recognised as a warning signal in manic-depressive illness and it was impossible that Mary could sleep properly in these circumstances. With sleep deprivation, that peculiarly disorientating and distressing mental state, problems are magnified tenfold and rational thought flies out of the window. That year, September was as hot as June — 78 degrees Fahrenheit — and working with fabric in that heat would have been miserable and oppressive. And September was traditionally a bad month for dressmakers. So added to the normal family worries over money, there was a seasonal dip in income."

Rather than being sent to prison or an asylum she was placed in the 'care' of her brother. This seems to have been a legal responsibility he took on—though it does not mean she no longer did housework or sewing. Together and separately they wrote for children, Charles also wrote books and essays, but their most famous production was their *Tales from Shakespeare*. I had always assumed this was mainly Charles' work and that Mary in her fragile mental state merely did some reading and encouraging in the background. But no. Charles did the outlines of the six tragedies, Mary wrote the preface and did the outlines of the fourteen comedies and history plays

they chose for the book. She found that her mental health was much better in her times of greatest creativity. Even so, Charles was listed as sole author.

Charles eventually became an alcoholic. Mary continued to suffer times of mental instability. I found myself feeling rather sorry for both of them. But Charles did have one consolation. He was a lion among the lively literary lions of his time, such as William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, the energetic discussions in taverns and coffee houses and clubs and the drawing-rooms of various luminaries and patrons. Mary was always constrained by her illness and by the narrower definition of a woman's place …

* * * * *

In one respect I can understand the query that will perhaps hang over Shakespeare forever. There is something ordinary, practical, down-to-earth about him which people seem to resent. They want him to be in some way romantic; to be a dying Keats or a blind Milton or a racketty Byron or an eloping Browning. But have you ever tried to write thirty-seven full-length plays with a goose quill? It is hard journeyman work. And don't let anyone try to convince you that those who wrote a few exquisite lines, one hand resting on a noble alabaster brow, presenting the work of composition in precious terms as the muse and the chosen, ever churned out thirty-seven full-length plays.

Shakespeare attended his local Grammar School rather than university; the assumption in so many theories being it was 'just' a Grammar School. But the grammar school was something very new and exciting in Elizabethan times. It attracted intelligent and educated young men to develop the new textbooks required, such as the need for Latin and Greek grammars suitable for boys, and to develop the idea of teaching, rather than tutoring. Whenever I have come upon mention of the setting up of these new schools it is always presented in a very positive light. For people in the provinces remote from London it must have seemed like opening a window on the world of scholarship and I am sure for many boys, and their parents, it did just that; encouraging a sense of confidence and a desire to seek wider horizons.

But those possibilities were never going to be handed out on a plate. They had to be worked for. University-educated playwrights like Marlowe and Lyly were not so driven by this need to make every opportunity count. Lyly, 8 plays, and Marlowe, 6 plays, did not need to be prolific. I watched a documentary which suggested Christopher Marlowe was not stabbed in a tavern brawl in 1593 but that he was smuggled out of England and returned later to reinvent himself as Shakespeare. An interesting theory but we are not talking about a man who saw his writing and his acting simply as 'work'; Marlowe was the son of 'a Canterbury shoemaker' so he had no assured place in society but once he had his university training various professions were open to him, including the law, and unlike other journeymen-writers he didn't turn to writing pamphlets, doing secretarial work, or acting. There is a whiff of the dilettante about the fact that he only worked on things that were apparently important to him and which could advance his career; no hack-work, no apocrypha, and no apparent worries over making ends meet. Perhaps as has been suggested Marlowe received a retainer from the state to do some espionage but nothing in his ten years of writing before his death suggests a writer used to writing fast or writing for hire. Did he really get to work on his (supposed) return and write a further 37 plays? I doubt it. I come back to my initial point. Shakespeare made opportunities for himself in a world which never owed him a living because he was willing to *work*. Whether it was a play to be re-written or adapted, whether it was something for an intimate evening in a lord's house or a big sprawling thing for the open-air theatre, William simply sat down and got to work. It would be more appropriate to compare his career to someone like Thomas Dekker. We don't know exactly where, when, or to whom he was born, nor where he spent his childhood, or whether he married. Yet Dekker was a mainstay for the Lord Admiral's Men theatre company and is credited with working on 50 plays for them; some were his own, some were collaborations, some were re-writes of older plays and stories. Whatever the theatre needed he worked on. When the theatre didn't need him he wrote pamphlets for sale.

It might be argued that we don't worry about all the mysteries that surround Dekker because he didn't have Shakespeare's talent. But that isn't completely the case. James E. Ruoff in

Renaissance Drama says of his pamphlet *The Gull's Horn-Book*, 'a brilliant satire describing a typical day in the life of a London gull, or fop. Of especial interest is the chapter "How a Gull Should Conduct Himself in the Popular Playhouse," a wildly funny invective that throws considerable light on the incredibly informal and intimate theatrical conditions at public playhouses like the Globe or the Swan, where a gallant like Dekker's could sit on the stage and twit the players and playwright, and quite possibly be pulled down and beaten by the audience.'

Dekker was followed by Thomas Heywood, even more prolific and very much the mainstay of the troupe, but we know equally little of his life, only that he was buried on the 16th August 1641. Two of the plays of John Webster are still quite often performed, 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi', yet we don't know when Webster was born nor, surprisingly, do we know when or where he died. So much for contemporary fame. And the 'father' of the Elizabethan theatre, Thomas Kyd, is another 'dark horse'. We know he was baptised in 1558 but we know nothing of his schooling or early career. The surprising thing about Shakespeare is not how little we know about him—but how much.

How playwrights developed depended on the material they had to work on, the inspiration they received from the troupe they worked with, their own ambition to create plays that succeeded dramatically and appealed to audiences, as well as the natural ability they brought to the craft.

But 'Who Wrote Shakespeare?' books are an industry in themselves, like self-help and diet books, and the other day I was reading another of them. This one suggested Elizabeth I as the secret author. It depends on some of the usual reasons. But I must admit I am getting quite fed-up with this idea that if you weren't born and bred in Sydney, New York, or London, and didn't attend a prestigious university, then it is unlikely you will be able to rub two words together. All the evidence suggests otherwise. And writing for the theatre, more than novels or poetry, is an interactive shared pursuit. Again and again I have come upon advice to beginning playwrights along the lines 'if you are precious about your work don't write for the theatre'. The best playwrights are those who were intimately involved with the theatre. Goethe's plays are to me not very convincing; not least because I can't imagine them playing very dramatically. But then Goethe was deeply involved in other things. As were most of the candidates to be Shakespeare.

The writer, George Elliott Sweet, also takes Shakespeare to task for inconsistency in the spelling of his name. Last year I came upon an ancestor called Ann Dugdill. In her small Yorkshire village her family, through the 1600s and 1700s wrote their name as Dougdayll, Doudgdayll, Dugdell, Dugedayll, Dugdaile, and many other variations; only in the 19th century did they appear to have settled definitely on Dugdale. Even common names like John appear in infinite variations: Jo., Jho., Jon, Jhon, Johes, Johnes, Johannis, Johannus, Johann, and more. Consistent spelling is a modern preoccupation.

But I found myself wondering about his statement that 'The statisticians tell us that the vocabulary of the average university graduate is about three to four thousand words; of some of the most eminent men in literary history less than ten thousand words; Shake-speare employed approximately fifteen thousand different words in composing his works.' I think the Elizabethans did have good vocabularies. Conversation was a vigorous healthy art. But what is an average graduate? A student of English Lit? A maths student? One doing vet science or engineering? How was this determined? What is average for the non-student? And exactly which words were included or excluded? No one ever gives the nuts-and-bolts on these questions.

So I thought I would do a little experiment of my own. I would take three of my books, just plain ones without foreign adventures, technical details, or great length. I would choose a book of poems and stories, *The Chalk Man*, a book of short stories, *Safe as Houses*, and a book of three mystery novellas, *Out to Grass*. I wouldn't count any of the names of people, places, streets, brands, etc. I would think I am ordinary enough as a housewife and hack writer, and provincial enough as a non-university-educated person who grew up on a small dairy farm on the Darling Downs. And as Shakespeare was English I thought I would take a provincial non-university-educated English writer and try that out for size. So I took Caroline Leakey (Oliné Keese) and her famous nineteenth-century novel *The Broad Arrow* as another check on vocabularies.

Counting words is not a gripping pastime (see Appendix Two for the details) but what I realised as I went along is that the more sources you check the larger the vocabulary grows—regardless of the talent of the writer. You cannot compare one university thesis with six Marlowe plays with thirty-seven Shakespeare plays. The only fair comparison would be one thesis, one Marlowe play, one Shakespeare play … or thirty-seven of each …

Sweet also suggests that taking Elizabeth as author explains the identity of the 'Dark Lady'; she is Lettice Knollys who grabbed the man Elizabeth fancied, Robert Dudley. This seems unlikely. Elizabeth could have had him if she really wanted him. What I think she was punishing was their secret marriage. If she didn't come down hard on one piece of deceit and dissimulation and hiding things from her—who might next be tempted to keep knowledge from the Queen?

Many women have been suggested including Henry Carey's mistress, Emilia Lanier, who appears to have been a capable intelligent and, indeed, a radical woman. She ran a school after her husband died and also wrote a long poem called 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeodrum' (1611) which was seen as an early feminist poem. In it she writes,

'When spightfull men with torments did opprese
Th'afflicted body of this innocent Dove,
Poor wome seeing how much they did transgresse …
They labour still these tyrant's hearts to move.'

Henry was Elizabeth's nephew and his troupe, The Chamberlain's Men, probably included Shakespeare at some period. Did Shakespeare try for a bit of hanky-panky with Emilia and get knocked back? It is always possible. The same could be said of any woman who knocked him back. But while I was thinking on this I realised there was an actual dark lady in the picture. Physically dark. She was one of Elizabeth's women, Lady Margaret Norreys, daughter-in-law of the Henry Norreys who had gone to the chopping block under Henry VIII rather than do Henry's bidding and admit to adultery with Anne Boleyne. Elizabeth referred to Margaret as 'my crow' because she reportedly had both black hair and a dark complexion. It is hard to imagine Shakespeare wanting Margaret, not least because she would have been considerably older and married, although he may not have seen this as an issue. But from the little evidence available I get the impression Margaret was very protective of Elizabeth. And she and her husband Henry, like Elizabeth, understood what it meant to lose a parent to the axe. It seems to have created a bond between them.

Did the brash young man, increasingly confident in the London *milieu*, go to the top in seeking patronage—and was it Margaret who was given the task of 'closing the door in his face'? It has always been assumed the Dark Lady was a lover—but is that necessarily so? Might she, more simply, be someone who failed to help him on his ambitious way or seemed to actively obstruct him? Whatever Margaret's faults and virtues she seems to have been someone Elizabeth trusted. But that may not have endeared her to a young playwright with his way to make …

And the image of 'Dark Lady' may be symbolic. Frances Yates in *The Occult Philosophy of the Elizabethan Age* draws attention to one of the famous pictures of the 15th century, Durer's 'Melancholy', with its image of a pensive woman with dark hair and a dark complexion. Many moods and ideas can be read into that image. What has come to be described as the 'black dog' of depression may have been, to Shakespeare, a 'dark lady'. Or it may have contained within it his own sense of a forbidden fascination with cabbalistic and occult ideas …

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Shakespeare's wife, father, patrons, colleagues, and to a lesser extent his children have been written about. But his mother is a curious omission. He lived at home until he married Anne Hathaway. So it might be assumed that she had a considerable influence on him. He had seven siblings of whom two brothers (who both came to London) and a sister Joan survived childhood but this doesn't suggest a large enough family for him to have gone unnoticed by a busy and preoccupied mother.

Mary Arden was one of the eight daughters of Robert Arden who owned property near Stratford one of which he rented to Shakespeare's grandfather Richard and which he gave as part of her dowry when she married Richard's son John; a nice parcel of sixty acres and a

farmhouse—which John Shakespeare later lost, in the 1590s, through financial speculations, mortgages, and other problems. Mary, at only sixteen, was the executor of her father's will. Although it is quite likely that she was illiterate (or perhaps it would be more correct to say she was uneducated; she probably could read and write a little) it suggests a young woman with a clear head and a good knowledge of her father's varied land-holdings. I wonder how she felt when her husband lost all the land she had brought to the marriage? More importantly, the choice of Mary rather than a male relative suggests that Robert Arden had a high opinion of the intelligence of women and of his daughter in particular. Did he ever hire a tutor or a governess at any time? There probably would not have been a school open to girls in Mary's childhood. Did he provide some teaching himself in the long winter evenings?

Robert Arden believed himself to descend from a family which had lived near the Forest of Arden from before the Conquest in 1066. He traced himself back to Thorkell of Arden, of whom Thomas Hinde wrote in *The Domesday Book*, "The holdings of Thorkell of Warwick, and of Robert Beaumont, Count of Meulan, comprised three-quarters of the non-ecclesiastical property. Thorkell, son of Alwin, the sheriff under Edward the Confessor, was one of the only two Englishmen in the county (Warwickshire) still holding a baronial estate from the king after the Conquest; his descendants perpetuate the name of Arden today."

Edward Marston in *The Foxes of Warwick* gives a novelist's perception of him, "Thorkell himself looked like a human embodiment of Jack Frost, his cloak flapping open to reveal the old man's lean, sinewy, angular body, his mane of white hair falling to his shoulders from beneath his cap and his long beard tapering to a point. Ice-cold eyes glistened in the haggard face. His bare hands had a skeletal appearance.

"Norman soldiers usually had little respect for Saxons but their visitor was an exception. Thorkell was one of only two thegns in the entire realm who retained their estates intact after the Conquest. Most had been forcibly dispossessed. Along with Robert Beaumont, Count of Meulan and brother of Henry, Thorkell was the wealthiest overlord in the county and, while he paid the Normans the compliment of learning their language, he did not sacrifice one jot of his pride or his identity. Thorkell of Warwick was a glorious reminder of the time when the Saxons held sway over England."

Although it is not proven that Robert Arden was a descendant of Thorkell he certainly believed it (and it is definitely possible), which makes it certain his daughter Mary also believed it and passed it on, with all its embellishments and accretions and sense of an ancient and noble family, to her son. What impact would it have had on the development, confidence, and imagination of a young boy? A lot, I would think.

By Shakespeare's time the once extensive Forest nearby had disappeared but it probably still existed in the memories of local people as something large and rich and mysterious and full of strange hermits, runaway lovers, outlaws, and a myriad other possibilities and superstitions.

But I was intrigued to find that a play, 'Arden of Feversham', is among the Shakespearian apocrypha. I had never even thought of Shakespeare as having apocrypha but in fact this almost encompasses a scholarly industry in itself. Around fifty plays make up this curious collection. To me, the idea of fifty plays waiting round for attribution, like unclaimed luggage on a carousel, is extraordinary in itself and I think it says something about the nature of the theatre in the late 1500s and early 1600s. The modern ideas of copyright, plagiarism, retaining early drafts, in other words guarding your literary efforts like a tigress with her cubs, just didn't matter very much to people in those days. Registering their plays at Stationer's Hall provided a small degree of protection but it wasn't the same as copyright. And once the Folios were published there was no compelling reason to keep earlier drafts. Why would William take a lot of grubby little bits of paper home to Stratford? I wouldn't. And I really wonder why so many people assume that his failure to do so is profoundly significant.

'Arden of Feversham' is dated 1592 and is based on a 1551 murder where Susan Arden and her lover murdered her husband Thomas Arden; it is said to have begun 'the vogue for "documentary" domestic tragedy'. The grand, the majestic, the historic, rather than the domestic and the local, seems always to have appealed more to Shakespeare. It is Thomas Kyd who is the

frontrunner as likely author of the play. In fact he is frontrunner for a number of the Shakespearian apocrypha. Given his fame in his time and his position as 'elder statesman' to the younger generation of playwrights it might be asked why none of his likely plays contain his name. Even 'The Spanish Tragedy' was only definitely ascribed to him nearly two centuries after his death. At first glance there is a curious kind of humility and lack of ego in the theatre world of that period. Yet I'm not sure that it meant Shakespeare or Marlowe had no ego and no pride in their work or their success. I think it provides a sense in which people, perhaps wisely, lived for the moment. There were no newspapers to pay theatre critics. Plays only ran for one or two weeks. There was no benefit to their children in their plays. If they made money in the theatre they invested it in land or livestock or a tavern. And where they literally wrote plays at the behest of theatre entrepreneurs they were 'hacks for hire'. There was no point in getting precious about a particular play …

So what does the Shakespearian apocrypha include? Charles Boyce in *Shakespeare A to Z* says, "Numerous plays have been attributed to Shakespeare at various times, but it is generally thought that they were written by others and are thus outside the canon; these comprise the Shakespeare apocrypha. While nearly 50 works, in whole or in part, have been assigned to Shakespeare at some time, only 12 have ever been seriously enough proposed to be included in the apocrypha. Six of these were first attributed to the playwright in the Third Folio. They are: LOCRINE; THE LONDON PRODIGAL; THE PURITAN; SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE; THOMAS, LORD CROMWELL, and A YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY. The other six are: ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM; THE BIRTH OF MERLIN; EDWARD III; FAIR EM; THE MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON, and MUCEDOROS. In addition the authorship of *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* remains in sufficient dispute that these two plays, though commonly included in the canon, are sometimes placed among the apocrypha, as is SIR THOMAS MORE, which contains only a few pages by Shakespeare."

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April 24: Louisa Stuart Costello
Jaroslav Hasek
April 25: Walter de la Mare
April 26: Artemus Ward
April 27: Edward Gibbon
April 28: Terry Prachett
Harper Lee
April 29: Jill Paton Walsh
April 30: John Lubbock Avery
Paul Jennings

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One day I was given a Paul Jennings to put on a stall so I took the time out to read it myself. As I was doing so my son came by and I said, 'You used to like Paul Jennings. What was it about him that you liked?' He thought a moment and said, 'His humour. The stories were fun. And I liked it that he wrote short stories. Most children's writers don't.' Then he said, 'But after a while they started to seem a bit the same.' This is both a pro and con. Young children *like* the sense of 'more of the same' but then a time comes when variety starts to seem like the promised land.

Paul Jennings also wrote a book called *The Reading Bug* to encourage more kids to read, and more parents to encourage reading. Of course writers of children's books have a vested interest in children reading more books. But I think there is tremendous value in children developing both reading skills and a love of books very young. I liked the image of Mark Latham encouraging reading together. If families really did come together in that nice comfortable way we might not 'need' terror laws. (I also agreed with him on the value of buying people out of the timber industry; it seemed a far more decent way than the current business of grim attrition in which people usually leave because of bankruptcy.) But I do have two small quibbles.

There is a strong temptation once children can read for busy parents to say, 'Go and read your book. I'm busy.' If books are seen as an alternative to parental attention then books can lose their delight. And I don't think young children should be doing a lot of reading. Those first few years of life are full of energy and enthusiasm and excitement for life. Never again will children be quite so good at running and jumping and playing and climbing and shouting and singing and dancing. A. S. Neill compared schools unfavourably to army regiments. "Soldiers at least move around a lot, but a child sits on his bottom most of the time at an age when the whole human instinct is to move." To encourage them to use those precious years in living in imaginary worlds, in experiencing life at second hand, when it is waiting to be lived in to the full, seen, heard, tasted, touched, climbed on, somersaulted through, worries me. Lydia Pender caught it well in her poem 'Boy':

Shout! Shout, just for the joy of it!
Shout! You're a boy, and the morning is new!
Whistle your dog up, and run for the fun of it!
  Laughter's for you!

Shout! Shout, just for the heart in you,
Racing your collie-dog under the sky!
Yours is the world, and the morning's a part of you
  Galloping by!

We can go on reading in our armchairs in the nursing home—but we can't go out and turn cartwheels.

* * * * *

Ruth Park, in her autobiography *The Fence Around the Cuckoo*, wrote of her time on the children's section in the *Auckland Star*, "In the two pages dedicated to the younger children we ran puzzles, stories, competitions, which brought in thousands of entries, and of course their own contributions. The latter taught me what children like to read; often it resembles in no way what adults think they enjoy." I am sorry she didn't elaborate. But I suspect that many of the stories children sent in were about animals. Her *Muddle-Headed Wombat* was a hit with children, not least, I also suspect, because it removed adults from the stories …

*

New Zealand also produced the delightful poems of a six-year-old child, Laura Ranger. In *Laura's Poems* …

God
The clouds are God's thought balloons
sailing by.
He thinks about what we're doing.
He knows I am writing a poem now.

My House
The fence is crippled and broken.
Mum's garden is a real mess
of rosemary and wallflowers,
and spiky purple pencils of lavender.

Where Do Burglars Live?
When they've been caught
burglars live in jail.
They eat bread
that's gone stale.
After a while they get
lonely and turn pale.

We respond to the innocent artlessness of such poems. Yet they are a child writing in an adult way for an adult audience. How did the same child see the world before she had words and constructions and punctuation and a sense of organising her thoughts in an adult-prescribed way? There is no simple entrance into the mind of the pre-language child.

Dr David Lewis wrote in *The Secret Language of Your Child*, "Infant conversations are rather like the ideal Victorian child. They can be seen but not heard. The "words" which make up the language's considerable vocabulary are directed not at the ears but at the eyes. They are soundless signals created by means of a wide repertoire of body movements. When these signals are correctly formed into phrases and sentences, they have no need for accompanying speech to convey their meaning. Vivid dialogues can be constructed using only a smoothly flowing sequence of visual signals." He goes on to say, "As with words, their meanings can vary according to the emphasis placed on them and the sequences in which they are used. If body talk is to be effective, every movement must be properly performed and the whole message as carefully choreographed as a ballet. When this is done the signals provide a system of communication and self-expression which is as satisfactory and flexible as any spoken language.

"It is true that toddlers cannot use these signals to discuss last night's television programmes, grumble over the weather, or gossip about a neighbour. But only an adult would regard such limitations as significant.

"All the toddlers social needs can be met by using silent speech.

"With it, the very young child is able to make new friends, organise games and win the co-operation of other toddlers when a team effort is needed. In the nursery it enables a pecking order to be established and maintained. The dominant child can exert leadership over the group and the anxious child can appease aggressors without a word being necessary. The signals warn other infants that a child is angry, or miserable, frustrated or fed up. They can be used to show affection, repay a kindness, return an insult or protest at an injustice. The only time the language seems to fail is when the child uses it to talk to an adult. Then there is a good chance of a breakdown in communication and the child runs the risk of being either misunderstood or ignored completely.

"For the strange thing about silent speech is that while its signals are usually crystal clear to other infants, they frequently make little or no impression on grown-ups. Adults often appear unable to get the message, however clearly an infant sends it out."

But this is the fascinating 'language' that comes between the baby and the child with language. What of that baby? Marie Winn wrote in *The Plug-In Drug*, "It is hard to conceive of what goes on in a child's mind before he learns to speak or understand words. Our own perception of thinking is so bound up with the notion of some sort of inner language that the nature of nonverbal thought is almost "unthinkable." And yet there is experimental evidence to prove its existence. Researchers have demonstrated that infants as young as three months of age can differentiate between pictures of a regular human face and a discrepant image, one, say, with three eyes. Something akin to thinking must be going on as the infant compares the picture of the "wrong" face with his internalized experience of regular human faces. A "thought" of a regular, two-eyed human face must exist in the child's mind, an image unaccompanied by words (since the child is months away from language acquisition), and yet activated somehow by the discrepant image. This is how the child learns. Until the advent of language, he will continue to absorb experience by means of a nonverbal form of thought."

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One of the most delightful yet strange pieces of children's writing is the diary of a little girl, fostered by a family in an Oregon lumber camp in the early 1900s. Born Francoise D'Orleans she became Opal Whiteley. One of her foster-sisters, in a fit of pique, tore up Opal's 'diary' which she had written on old envelopes, paper bags, scrounged scraps of paper. But she kept the tiny pieces and many years later pieced them together again and the diary was published in 1920 in the United States.

Her foster family argued that she was claiming to be someone she wasn't and that she was simply their daughter, not a French orphan. Perhaps the praise and publicity had something to do

with their claim. Because the writing is always slightly un-English in intonation, it occasionally uses French words, it always calls her foster mother "the mama" not "my mama", and it seems doubtful if a little girl brought up by a homespun uneducated American family would call a horse Savanarola or a woodrat Thomas Chatterton Jupiter Zeus or a pig Peter Paul Rubens. This might be explained away if the diary really was a hoax written later. But most telling for me was that behind the delight in nature, the tenderness, the curiosity, the little domestic details, the diary is steeped in a sense of loneliness and grieving.

Opal's parents remain a mystery too. How did a little French orphan end up with an American family? At first this seems the greatest mystery of all. But then I realised Seattle was a major port in the 19th century, ships came regularly from the Orient, from French Indo-China, from the Philippines. Did she arrive as a small child on one such ship and authorities needed a foster family after the death of her mother or father or both? She wrote her diary when she was five and six. But she had clearly been exposed to educated people, erudite, and steeped in European history and culture. It is thought that her father might have been the French geographer Henri D'Orleans who travelled in Central Asia and died in Saigon in 1901. If her mother then came to America with her small daughter, perhaps dying on board ship or soon after her arrival, it might fit the known facts of Opal's life.

But perhaps none of that matters. What is certain is that the diary gives a compelling insight into the way a child writes when it isn't writing for adult approval or acceptance.

Even so, it cannot give us an insight into the mind of a child before it has language. And the very fact of gaining language begins to order our thoughts in a particular way. Because language does not come to us in random words. It is placed upon children both as cause and effect and as sentences which begin and end in a particular and organised way. And once language is acquired so too is that way of ordering our minds. We cannot return to the mind of a small baby or toddler. Even if we are regressed through hypnosis or a particularly vivid and early sense of memory we automatically order those memories according to the constraints and advantages of language.

It can be imagined that a small pre-language child thinks and sees and orders its thoughts in terms of sensations and feelings, as well as a kind of acceptance of the world as it continually is seen, heard, smelled, and felt. In this, perhaps, the small child is very close to the way that a young animal orders its sense of the world.

It has been claimed that thoughts are impossible without language but I cannot accept that. Anyone who has simply sat and watched a pre-language child considering things, watching, touching, sees a child thinking …

Opal writes:

The waters of the brook lap and lap.
They come in little ripples over grey stones.
They are rippling a song.
It is a goodbye song to Lars Porsena.
He is the crow that is no more.

It was only yesterday.
I was making a go across the cornfield.
Lars Porsena was going on ahead.
His movements did look queer
with his tail feathers not growed out yet.
Brave Horatius did follow after me.
The crow came back to see if we were coming.
I was watching him with joy feels in my heart.
Brave Horatius did give a queer bark
and he pulled the corner of my apron.
I looked looks about.

The chore boy was in the corner

of the cornfield with a gun.
Maybe he did not see Lars Porsena there.
I ran a quick run to stop him.
I hollered hollers at him.
When I was come to where he was
I did tell him he must not shoot that old gun.
A ball in it might go as far as Lars Porsena.

He just laughed a laugh.
He said that Lars Porsena
was nothing but a crow.
And then he pointed that gun
right at my own dear Lars Porsena.
The noise was a big awful cal lamb of tea.
I had feels I was killed dead
when I saw him fall.

I ran a quick run.
I found he was making little flutterings.
When I did pick him up
he was wet with much blood.
I felt the shivers of his pains.
I wrapped my apron around him
so he would not have cold feels.
There was much blood on it
as we did go along.

The raindrops were coming down
in a slow, sad way.
The sky was crying tears
for the hurts of Lars Porsena.
And I was too.

I had not knows what to do.
I did cuddle him up close in my arms
and I washed off some of the blood,
but more and more came
And sleepy feels were upon him.
I did sing "Sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus."

Now I hear the mama say
"I wonder where Opal is."
She has forgets.
'I'm still under the bed
where she put me quite some time ago.
She did not have likings
for my putting Lars Porsena on my bed.

We both had sleeps together.
Only now he does not have wakeups
and stiffness is upon him.
I did have queer feels in my throat
and pain feels all up and down me.

I so did want him alive again to go explores.

And on a happier note …

After the chickens I did go
to feed the folks in the nursery.
The caterpillars do eat so much.
They do get hungry feels
inside them most often.
When I did have them well fed
I did make tries to get them
into their christening robes
so they can be christened
before they do grow more old
and before they do grow too big
to wear their christening robes.

It is a book that never fails to move me with its strangeness, its tenderness, its beauty …

* * * * *

That famous Greek pastoral of perhaps the second century, Daphnis and Chloe, says, "In this sweet country, the field and farm of Mytilene, a goatherd dwelling, by name Lamo, found one of his goats suckling an infant-boy, by such a chance, it seems, as this: There was a lawn, and in it a dell, and in the nethermost part of the dell a place all lined with wandering ivy, the ground furred over with a finer sort of grass, and on that the infant lay. The goat coming often hither, disappeared very much, neglecting still her own kid to attend the wretched child. Lamo observes her frequent outs and discursations, and pitying that the kid should be so forsaken, follows her even at high noon. And anon he sees the goat bestriding the child carefully, lest she should chance to hurt it with her hooves, and the infant drawing milk as from the breast of a kind mother. And wondering at it, as well he might, he comes nearer and finds it a man-child, a lusty boy and beautiful, and wrapped in richer clothes then you should find upon a foundling."

Another book I have read several times is Charles McLean's *The Wolf Children*. It too moves me and raises questions beyond the recital of known facts. In 1920 two young girls were found in a wolf's den in Bengal after the she-wolf had been killed. They were taken to an orphanage in Midnapore run by the Reverend and Mrs Singh. No one has ever found out their real identities and as they were both girls there is a possibility that they had been abandoned and left to die. McLean's recital raises many questions: the girls refused to eat cooked meat and always preferred raw including carrion (which raises questions about assumptions over the change to eating cooked meat because of the more palatable flavour whereas it is more likely to have been done to aid elderly people chew tough meat); it took the surviving girl nearly three years to be able to stand and walk (clearly the change in human uprightness was not something achieved overnight as some accounts of human development seem to suggest); the children had no expressions and did not acquire them for years (which suggests we have expressions because we see expressions all the time, not because they are an automatic human response); the children saw with great ability in the dark (which suggests that ability lies latent in all of us); and the children appeared to be able to empathise and communicate with other animal species, including dogs and chickens, more easily than they did with other children (which raises questions about whether inter-animal communications occur with greater ease than animal-human communications; also that bonding of human with human is a learnt activity not a natural one); there are deeper questions such as whether a sense of sympathy and altruism which we might interpret as goodness is innate. Certainly the two girls had a deep sense of closeness but the only other person they were ever able to express such an affection for was Mrs Singh. And beyond questions of what makes a human human is the knowledge that despite the assumptions and understandings painfully arrived at by the people who tried to reintegrate them into everyday

human life—we can never enter the minds of those two children. What it meant to live as wolves is forever closed to us …

* * * * *

May 1: Joseph Addison
Marie Corelli
May 2: Alan Marshall
May 3: May Laffan Hartley
Niccolo Machiavelli

* * * * *

When I set out on the family history trail I suppose I hoped vaguely that I might unearth a connection to a famous writer. I wasn't fussy. Anyone well-known would do. What I didn't know was that I would unearth connections to several writers I had never heard of—but who have brought considerable pleasure and interest into my life.

My great grandmother was Caroline Martin and a first cousin of hers was Walter Noel Hartley who married May Laffan in 1882. He was a chemist and wrote and lectured in both London and Dublin on such things as the properties of air and the spectrum of metals, including his books *Air and its Relations to Life*; *Water, Air, and Disinfectants*; and *Quantitative Analysis* which I must admit I haven't tried to track down. *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* (Blain, Clements and Grundy) says of May, "Her most highly regarded work, *Flitters, Tatters, and the Counsellor*, 1879, realistic tales of the day-to-day survival of Dublin 'street' children, ran through three Irish editions before publication in England. The 1881 Tauchnitz edition has three extra stories, including 'The Game Hen', showing women's vindictive and supportive treatment of one another in a very poor community." And John Sutherland in *Victorian Fiction* writes, "May Hartley's most successful novel was the early *Hogan MP* (1876); a story set in contemporary Dublin attacking the self-imposed shackles of the Catholic community. The hero is a venial Home Rule MP, manipulated by unscrupulous peers and financiers. According to the Spectator (which assumed the author to be a man), 'we have seldom read through a modern novel which left a worse taste behind it than this'." She regarded *Hogan MP* as a Faustian novel owing more to European trends than to other Irish women writers of her era. James Calahan lists it as a regional Irish novel though also "urban". She also did some translations from French but it was her critical writings on Catholic education and her supportive stories of mixed marriages which brought her fierce denunciation from the Catholic church. She was a Catholic but married an Anglican. Her marriage does not seem to have been particularly happy but I have not been able to disentangle the strands which appear to have caused her to have a nervous breakdown. (I have since discovered that her husband preferred to holiday with his friend and fellow scientist John Young Buchanan—so there may have been undercurrents that could not be spoken of.) And this stress cannot have been helped when her only son, a captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, was killed at Gallipoli in 1915. Brigitte Anton says of her, "The death notice in the Irish Times … did not mention her literary achievements, and there was no obituary. It seems that the life and work of this powerful social critic of Irish Catholic life had already been forgotten, and some ninety years later her works continued to be neglected by writers on Irish literature."

But I think I can understand a little. Sometimes the stories you need to write are not necessarily the ones you will have the strength and confidence to defend when a bigoted world falls on you in fury and denunciation. I hope someone will decide to reprint some of her work.

* * * * *

I sent away to get the marriage certificate for my great-grandmother's brother's marriage. His name was William Lockwood Martin and he married Mary Edith Ollivant in Clifton in England in 1884. My curiosity was 'why Clifton?' When the copy came it didn't resolve the question about Clifton but it gave the other people signing the register as Joseph Earle Ollivant and Edmund Alfred Ollivant. Relatives obviously but just where did they fit in? I found they were Mary Edith's first cousins—and interestingly Edmund, who was an army officer, had a son Alfred Ollivant who was a member of the Fabian Society and quite a prolific author. I had not

heard of him but I tracked him down in *Edwardian Fiction* by Kemp, Mitchell and Trotter and found that he had written an immensely popular animal story called *Owd Bob*. "Much his best-known work is his first, *Owd Bob, the Grey Dog of Kenmuir* (1898), a powerful and tragic tale of sheepdog trials in Cumbria, which soon was regarded, as animal stories are apt to be, as a children's book. But Ollivant also published thirteen other volumes of fiction, mostly for adults, and sometimes concerned with social problems. In *The Framing of John Blunt* (1911), a hard-bitten socialist journalist sent to investigate a cruel aristocratic spinster, Lady Rachel Carmelite, of Scar Hall, Cumberland, finds her the ideal landowner (he himself turns out to be of more than respectable origins). *The Royal Road: Being the Story of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Edward Hankey of London* (1912), dedicated to Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), contains extensive criticisms of the system of poor relief. Hankey, who operates a splitting machine at a leather factory, is guided onto the straight and narrow by a slum doctor and his sister (notable for her sturdy figure, her pince-nez and 'short workmanlike skirt'). He marries happily, and has a child. Then he contracts tuberculosis, and is forced to leave the factory. A lodger steals the money he has put by, and the authorities prove totally unsympathetic. He and his wife attempt to drown themselves, but are prevented by the doctor, who cannot however cure the tuberculosis."

(I am not surprised that he allowed his John Blunt to be proven 'respectable'; his mother was a daughter of conservative classics professor and prolific writer on classic and theological subjects, John James Blunt.)

The library tracked *Owd Bob* down for me in its stack, the only one of his books they could find, and this week I have been enjoying it.

Perhaps it has a little too much dialect for modern readers but it is not hard to see where stories like *The Wind in the Willows* and *Tarka the Otter* found part of their inspiration. And yet, just as it isn't a children's story, it also isn't an animal story really. James Moore, a dour unemotional but decent Dalesman owns Owd Bob, "—such was Owd Bob o' Kenmuir—owd, young though he was, by reason of that sprinkling shower of snow upon the dome of his head" and Adam M'Adam, an irascible Scottish shepherd, with a giant-size chip on his shoulder and a grudge against the world, owns a strange fierce dog he calls Red Wull. The story is the unbearable tension between the two men, their attitude to the world, and the very different ways in which they are regarded by the locals. It is the tension of the settled and respected against the interloper, the outsider, in both dog and man.

"In the North everyone who has heard of the Muir Pike—and who is there has not?—has heard of the Grey Dogs of Kenmuir; everyone who has heard of the Shepherds' Trophy knows their fame. In that country of good dogs and jealous masters the pride of place has long been held, unchallenged." At the back of the Moore family Bible is listed the pedigrees of the Grey Dogs of Kenmuir. Whereas M'Adam, the "little Scotsman with the sere, sardonic face" rescues his dog when he finds him as a puppy beside an itinerant who has succumbed to cold and hunger in the hills. He never loses a chance to criticise and abuse the people around him and finds the local adulation of Owd Bob absurd. Worse, he is abusive to his son David, perhaps because he is a painful reminder of his dead wife Flora, and David makes it much worse by spending every free moment in the more welcoming household of the Moores and defying and disobeying his bitter-tongued father. He is ashamed of his disliked and alien parent and his father, by imposing his wishes usually at the business end of a stick, rather than by sensible explanation, adds to what Ollivant calls "the huge sad host of Lost Opportunities".

Owd Bob is the paragon of all dog virtues. Red Wull is a lawless creature always ready to attack any and everything, including other local dogs. The tension between their owners is played out against the intense competition for the Shepherds' Trophy, the knowledge that a dog has turned secret sheep killer, and the fear that the two dogs will finally set upon each other. The tension is exacerbated by David's love for Moore's daughter Margaret and the almost embarrassing partisanship of the local Dales' folk. In its sense of brooding apprehension it owes more to James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* than to any previous animal story.

The book came out in 1898. The 1949 edition I've just been reading is the 25th reprinting.

But the book has been forgotten in the rush of more obviously 'animal' stories. John Sutherland said of it, "The work pioneered a whole genre of anthropomorphic dog tales but is principally memorable for its exact description of dales' dialect and mores." This is slightly misleading in that Owd Bob doesn't speak. We don't know what he is thinking. The world is not seen through his eyes. If Owd Bob, as a hero, has a successor I think it is in the hard-working, patient, and loyal sheepdogs of James Herriot's stories …

*

One of my great-great-grandmothers was Catherine Cecilia Jephson. Her family produced several modest writers. Her father was the Rev. John Jephson who accompanied Sir Walter Scott in 1825 on his visit to Maria Edgeworth and preached to Scott and the local congregation on a text from Corinthians "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" though I don't think it was directed at Scott who was a modest man. (Honora Edgeworth wrote to John's daughter Henrietta to say that Scott had "something of the look of a very well kept Newfoundland dog" about him.) John's uncle, Robert Jephson, had been a minor poet and playwright, a friend of Johnson and Boswell (who described him as "a lively little fellow and the best mimic in the world") as well as of theatre people like Sarah Siddons and Edward Kemble.

Among Catherine Cecilia's siblings were Richard, whose son Richard Mounteney Jephson wrote *Our Life in Japan* (with Edward Elmhirst) and a string of modestly popular novels with a military flavour such as the *Girl he left behind him* and *He would be a Soldier*, and John who also became a clergyman and wrote minor books like *Narrative of a Walking Tour in Brittany* and *Sheakespeare: His Birthplace, Home and Grave*. John's son Arthur (A.J.M.) Jephson became known for his part in Henry Morton Stanley's ill-fated attempt to rescue the Emin Pasha—and out of this expedition came his *Emin Pasha and the rebellion at the Equator* (1890), a book of African folk tales, and after his death his *Diary of the Emin Pasha Relief Expedition*.

Roger Jones in his book *The Rescue of Emin Pasha* says that, "The expedition that took shape during that hectic month (January 1887) differed in several important respects from Stanley's previous ventures. The basic personnel would consist, as before, of Wangwana porters—six hundred in number—recruited in Zanzibar. But an important difference lay in Stanley's enlistment of a number of assistants—gentlemen volunteers, the Elizabethans would have called them—to serve under him as "officers". Initially seven were chosen from the hundreds who applied to take part in the expedition.

"Four were soldiers or ex-soldiers: Major Edmund Barttelot (7th Fusiliers), Captain R.H. Nelson (Methuen's Horse), Lt. W.G. Stairs (Royal Engineers), and Mr William Bonny (late Sergeant, Army Medical Department). A fifth, John Rose Troup, had worked under Stanley for the Congo Free State. The remaining two, Mounteney Jephson and James Jameson, obtained their places principally, it would seem, by virtue of their being willing to subscribe £1,000 apiece to the Emin Relief Fund. All except Jephson had previous experience of the tropics either as soldiers or travellers." The person who provided Jephson with the necessary funds Charlotte de Noailles is various described as a 'cousin' and a 'family friend'.

And so the stage was set for disaster. But what should and could have been a straightforward matter of re-supplying the Pasha as the governor of the territory of Equatoria, now part of southern Sudan, was made immensely complex by the totally opposed personalities and aims of Stanley and the Pasha and by Stanley's attempt to serve three masters; "Throughout these discussions Stanley had to reconcile, or appear to reconcile, the conflicting aims of his three employers—the Khedive, King Leopold, and Mackinnon's Association. The Khedive, on behalf of the British Government, wanted the file on Equatoria closed; Leopold wanted a foothold on the headwaters of the Nile; Mackinnon wanted a commercial base in East Africa within reach of the sea." Far from relieving the Pasha Stanley wanted to send him packing so that the way would be clear for King Leopold's Belgian Congo to spread northwards. But the Emin Pasha, born in 1840 as Eduard Karl Oskar Theodor Schnitzer in Oppeln in Prussian Silesia, had lived an adventurous life with a strong scientific bent before coming to govern Equatoria; "To leave Equatoria was to admit himself beaten, to abandon his life's work half finished, and to give up his Province to the chaos from which he had tried so long and so hard to preserve it. It was also to exchange a

position of power and authority for the likelihood of an obscure retirement as the pensioner of an ungrateful government. Worse still, perhaps, it would mean an end to his scientific labours and to the reputation his researches had begun to earn him in the museums, learned societies and universities of Europe."

But it was Stanley's personality and Stanley's ideas which prevailed. Much has been written about his egotism, his boastfulness, his duplicity, and his ruthlessness alongside his personal courage. This expedition displayed all his worst characteristics. For instance, "In fact someone *had* seen the Ruwenzori before, and for Stanley to claim this important discovery as his own was both dishonourable and disingenuous. The honour of the discovery—the most significant geographical result of the entire Expedition—belongs jointly to Parke and Jephson. They had glimpsed the same mountain on April 20 when on their way to the Lake with the boat. Parke's entry for this day reads:

On the march we distinctly saw *snow* on the top of a huge mountain situated to the south-west of our position. As this was a curious and unexpected sight, we halted the caravan to have a good view. Some of the Zanzibaris tried to persuade us that the white covering which decorated this mountain was *salt*; but Jephson and myself were satisfied that it was snow.

"They later reported their discovery to Stanley. According to Parke, "He was a good deal interested," though Jephson says that Stanley "had laughed at me and pooh poohed the idea". Stanley's account does, indeed, refer to the report he had had from Jephson and Parke, but in a way that somehow contrives to suggest either that his officers were mistaken or that they had seen a different mountain. Such petty meanness accords ill with the stature of a man whose geographical discoveries had brought him sufficient fame and honour to satisfy ten normal men. He had no need to add to his triumphs by stealing from his subordinates."

Stanley caused many needless deaths, of both Africans and Europeans, the Pasha removed against his will returned to the interior under the aegis of a German expedition and was murdered on the orders of Arab trader and slaver Said bin Abed, and the only real 'winners' were the British Government which was able to increase its share in the 'Scramble for Africa' and the Germans who gained a foothold south of Equatoria.

And what of Equatoria today? Jones writes, "The struggle of the South Sudanese peoples against oppression and exploitation by invaders from the North has now been going on for something like 130 years. Since the arrival of the first Khartoum traders in or around the year 1840, the tribes of Equatoria and Bahr-el-Ghazal have seen, and suffered under, a continuous succession of alien intruders: Danagla slave-hunters, Egyptian governors (Baker, Gordon, Emin), Mahdi-ist jihadiya, Manyuema ivory-hunters, Belgian colonial troops and British administrators. All these people—whatever their motives—have made their contribution, greater or larger, towards destroying the complex and delicately-balanced social and economic way of life of the native inhabitants. And yet, though domination by outsiders—whether benevolent or purely predatory—has lasted more than a century and a quarter, the tribes have consistently attempted (and still are attempting) to maintain their integrity and independence."

* * * * *

May 4: Thomas Huxley
Robin Cook
May 5: Karl Marx
May 6: Rabindranath Tagore
May 7: Robert Browning
Archibald MacLeish
May 8: Peter Benchley
May 9: Sir James Barrie
May 10: James Gordon Bennett
May 11: Stanley Elkin
May 12: Edward Lear

May 13: Daphne du Maurier
Bruce Chatwin
May 14: Sir Thomas Hall Caine
Robert Owen
May 15: Xavier Herbert
Edwin Muir
May 16: H. E. Bates
May 17: Doris Zagdanski
May 18: Omar Khayyam
May 19: Lorraine Hansberry
May 20: Margery Allingham
May 21: Janet Dailey
May 22: Eva Gore-Booth
May 23: Elias Ashmole
May 24: Mary Grant Bruce
May 25: Robert Ludlum
Raymond Carver
May 26: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu
May 27: Rachel Carson
Julia Ward Howe
John Cheever
Harlan Ellison
May 28: Patrick White
Maeve Binchy
May 29: Frederick Faust (Max Brand)
May 30: Julian Symons
May 31: Alexander Cruden
Judith Wright
Helen Waddell
June 1: John Drinkwater
June 2: Thomas Hardy
June 3: Margaret Gatty
June 4: Terry Smith
June 5: Margaret Drabble
Ken Follett
June 6: Will James
June 7: R. D. Blackmore
Gwendolyn Brooks
June 8: William Dampier
Sara Paretsky
June 9: E. M. Delafield
June 10: Maurice Sendak
Margit Kaffka
June 11: Michael Meyer
June 12: Sir Oliver Lodge
June 13: Fernando Pessoa
W. B. Yeats

* * * * *

Fernando Pessoa wrote, "Son, we cannot love. Love is the most carnal of illusions. Listen to me now: To love is to possess. And what does a lover possess when he loves? A body? In order to possess it, we would have to make its matter our own; eat it, incorporate it into ourselves… And even that impossibility would only be temporary because our own body passes on and metamorphoses, because we do not possess our body (we merely possess our sensation of

it), and because, once we have possessed that beloved body, it would become *ours*, and cease to be another's. And love, therefore, once the other being disappeared, would also disappear.

Do we possess the soul? Listen to me in silence. We do not possess it. Not even our own soul is ours. In any case, how would we go about possessing a soul? Between soul and soul is the abyss of their being souls.

What do we possess? What do we possess? What causes us to love? Beauty? And do we possess it by loving? What does the most ferocious and dominating possession of a body really have of it? Neither the body nor the soul, not even beauty. The possession of a beautiful body does not include beauty, it includes the cellular, fatty flesh; a kiss does not touch beauty on the mouth but on the moist flesh of the lips that can be seen to be/slimy/. Even intercourse is only a contact, a rubbing, close contact but not a *real* penetration of one body by another… What do we possess? What do we possess?

Our sensations — at least? Isn't love, at least, a means by which we possess each other, ourselves, in our sensations? Isn't it, at least, a manner of dreaming each other clearly, and more gloriously in that case; the dream of existing? And at least when the sensation disappears, the memory of it remains with us forever, and thus we really do possess…

Let's dispel this illusion too. We don't even possess our sensation. Don't say a word. Memory, after all, is the sensation of the past… And all sensation is an illusion…

"Listen to me, always listen to me. Listen to me and stop looking toward the window open onto the plain on the other side of the river or the sunset (…), or that train whistle cutting through the vague distance (…) Listen to me in silence…"

We do not possess our sensations… We do not possess each other in them.

(A tipped-over urn, the sunset pours an oil of (…) over us in which the hours, rose petals, float gently)"

*

Is this why human beings are the great killers in the natural world? Because only we are plagued by the desire to possess … and in death we have denied the other the chance, the hope, the belief, that at least they can possess their self; and we who have killed now possess that other as fully as it can ever be possessed. For the sake of possessing a place, a land bounded by borders, but we can never possess the earth, we can only map it, claim it, buy it, sell it, move it, poison it, but we can never hope to truly *possess* it, even though we grow from it and sink back into it …

'The Persians were the great gardeners of antiquity'; the word paradise comes from the Persian, *apiri-daeza*, meaning an orchard surrounded by a wall. On the simplest level we possess our gardens, whilst knowing they always exist beyond our grasp. I get annoyed when the landlord crushes down my bluebells as he hacks a branch off a tree … 'oh my poor poor bluebells' I moan … yet I know it all exists in itself somewhere beyond me. Is it any wonder that we dream of finding paradise, that we hold it out as the ultimate hope; because we know it offers freedom at last from the life-threatening desire to possess …

* * * * *

V. S. Naipaul wrote of his visit to Iran in *Among the Believers* and it leaves a sense of a confused almost schizophrenic place. 'The mountains to the north of Tehran showed in the morning light, faded in the daytime haze, and at sunset became a faint amethyst outline. The lights came on; here and there neon signs did their little jigs. The traffic roared. But through all the hectic-seeming day the cranes on the unfinished buildings had never moved.

Technology was evil. E.F. Schumacher of *Small is Beautiful* had said so: *The Message of Peace* quoted him a lot, lashing the West with its own words. But technology surrounded us in Tehran, and some of it had been so Islamized or put to such good Islamic use that its foreign origin seemed of no account.

The hotel taxi-driver could be helped through the evening traffic jams by the Koranic readings on his car radio; and when we got back to the hotel there would be mullahs on television. Certain modern goods and tools — cars, radios, television — were necessary; their possession was part of a proper Islamic pride. But these things were considered neutral; they were

not associated with any particular faith or civilization; they were thought of as the stock of some great universal bazaar.

Money alone bought these things. And money, in Iran, had become the true gift of God, the reward for virtue. Whether Tehran worked or not, seventy million dollars went every day to the country's external accounts, to be drawn off as required: foreign currencies, secured by foreign laws and institutions, to keep the Islamic revolution going.

But some people were scratchy. They could be scratchy in empty restaurants where they didn't have the food their old-time menus offered. They needed customers, but they couldn't help hating those who came. They were scratchy at my hotel, for an additional reason. After the revolution the owners had left the country. The hotel had been taken over by a revolutionary *komiteh*, and it was important for everyone downstairs to display pride. (It was different upstairs. The chambermaid told me by signs one morning that I wasn't to use the hotel laundry; she would wash my clothes. She did. When I came back in the afternoon I saw my damp clothes displayed in the corridor, hung out to dry on the door-knobs of unoccupied rooms.)

Nicholas, a young British journalist, came to see me one evening and — starting from cold — began absolutely to quarrel with the man at the desk about the hotel taxi charges. The quarrel developed fast in the empty lobby.

Nicholas, tall and thin and with a little beard, was jumpy from overwork: the long hours he kept as a foreign correspondent, the 'disinformation' he said he had constantly to sift through, the sheer number of words he had to send back every day. He had also begun to be irritated by the events he was reporting.

The man at the desk was big and paunchy, with a sallow skin and curly black hair. He wore a suit and radiated pride. His pride, and Nicholas's rage made him lose his head. He went back to the manners and language of old times.

He said, 'If you don't like the hotel, you can leave.'

Nicholas, with the formality of high temper, said, 'It is my good fortune *not* to be staying at the hotel.'

I took the car at the stated price, to calm them both down.

Nicholas leaned on the desk, but looked away. The man at the desk began to write out the taxi requisition slip. In spite of his appearance, he was a man from the countryside. He had spent a fair amount of money to send his mother on the pilgrimage to Mecca; he was anxious about money and the future, and worried about the education of his children. During the boom an American university education had seemed possible for the boy, but now he had to think of other ways.

Nicholas was closed to pity. He remembered the boom, too, when hotels had no rooms, and he and many others had slept on camp-beds in the ball-room of a grand hotel and paid five dollars a night.

He said, 'For seven months no one in this country has done a stroke of work. Where else can you do that and live?'

The revolution continued. The election results showed — although there were charges of rigging — that the people had done as Khomeini had told them, and voted in mullahs and ayatollahs to the constitution-framing Assembly of Experts. A man was executed for having a two-month affair with a married woman. The Revolutionary Committee for Guild Affairs warned women hairdressers (mainly Armenian) to stop 'wasting their youth' and cutting the hair of men. And some frightened carpet-washers began to advertise an 'Islamic carpet-wash' — the carpet to be rinsed three times in water.

Five billion dollars' worth of American F-14 jets were written off, their missile system too 'difficult and uneconomical'. And other big pre-revolutionary projects were cancelled, in addition to the two West German nuclear power plants on which a billion dollars were owed. The six-lane highway to the southern port of Bandar Abbas was taken away from an American consortium and given to an Iranian contractor: 'In the first stage of the work two lanes will be constructed.' There were reports of sabotage: the Israelis had been sabotaging the 'normal operations' of the Arya

National Shipping Line. The Kurds in the north-west were in rebellion; the Arabs in the south-west were restive.

The speeches never stopped. The Minister of Labour and Social Welfare made one and got his picture in the papers: the mosque, he said, was not only a place of worship but also 'a base for launching anti-colonialistic movements in a display of unity, thought and action'. Unity: it was the theme of a big Friday Sabbath feature in the *Tehran Times*. 'Why has Islam the potential for revolution?'

Unity, union, the backs bowed in prayers that were like drills, the faith of one the faith of all, the faith of all flowing into the faith of one and becoming divine, personality and helplessness abolished: union, surrender, facelessness, heaven.

'How did you like the Hilton?' one of the hotel desk clerks asked me. He was less buttoned up than the others: he dealt in a small way in silver coins and was on the point of selling me two.

'It was empty.'

'All the hotels are empty. It will change in two months. There is no government now. In two months we will have a government. At least that's what we say.'

He was a devout man, like the others in the hotel. No sermon on television was too long for him.

They spoke, in Iran, of the oneness of faith and deed. That oneness had overcome the Shah and his armed forces. That oneness was all that was still needed. But they were fooling themselves. What, after the centuries of despotism, they really believed was that the state was something apart, something that looked after itself and was ever restored. And even while with their faith they were still pulling it all down — hotel, city, state — they were waiting for it to start up again, to be as it was before.

I decided then to go to the holy city of Qom; and that was when I met Behzad. He led me through the traffic and said, 'You must always give your hand to me.' I liked the words; they answered my need. Without the language, and in the midst of these Iranian contradictions, I needed now to be led by an Iranian hand.

Then Behzad translated the legend in the revolutionary poster — 'Twelfth Imam, we are waiting for you' — and I was taken to another level of wonder.'

Behzad was a Communist. The Twelfth Imam lived in the ninth century.

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'Although Iran is now an Islamic republic with an overwhelming Muslim population, there is variety in religion too. The largest group is made up of Shi'ite Muslims of the Twelver sect, so-named because they believe in the twelve imams who ruled successively after the prophet Mohammad's death until the twelfth one disappeared—or went into "occultation." Twelver Shi'ites now await the return of the Mahdi, or twelfth imam—an idea not unlike expectations in other major faiths.

'But Iran is also home to mainstream Sunni Muslims as well as other smaller Muslim sects. And there are enough Iranian Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians to have their own special seats in Parliament. Most big Iranian cities have at least one church, synagogue and fire temple. The one faith shunned politically and persecuted exclusively on religious grounds is that of the three million Baha'is, whose break from Shi'ite Islam in the nineteenth century is still viewed as heresy.' (*The Last Great Revolution* by Robin Wright.)

I had been under the impression that Iran, home of Zoroastrianism, had turned on its awkward child and consumed it; leaving the main community of believers to exist in India. So I was relieved, if that is a suitable word, to know there are still enough to warrant a representative in parliament.

In fact Parsee means Persian; and the Indian Zoroastrian community of this name were Persian immigrants and refugees from Islam who entered India in about the 10th century and formed a small faith community within the large Hindu world.

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‘By “Hassassin” I assume Dan Brown means what is more commonly known as the “Assassins.” And I believe that he may have garbled the Arabic, because I’ve seen it transliterated as “Hasasheen.”

‘The Order of Assassins was a part of Shia Islam that developed in northern Iran, in the eleventh century. It was a branch of Islam that is now known as the Ismaili—the group that’s led by the Aga Khan. They are wholly peaceful.

‘But in their initial period, they had control of a fairly good-sized slice of what’s now northern Iran. And they devised, for purposes of proselytizing, a form of terrorism that involved infiltrating individuals into areas that were controlled by their religious enemy. These individuals would then become servants of prominent political or religious leaders considered obstacles to their preaching and serve with great devotion.

‘At some point—sometimes years after they took the position, and seemingly out of nowhere—they would assassinate their master. Always with a dagger, and always in a public place. The name Hashasheen arose because there were some people who believed that only a person under the influence of hashish could possibly behave in this manner, turning on someone that they had served with such devotion.

‘There is a whole series of legends about the Assassins. The most common one is that before they left their home territory on their mission they were given hashish, and then taken into a beautiful garden, filled with comely maidens. When they awoke later they were told, You have visited paradise, and after you have completed your mission—which, of course, was in effect a suicide mission—you will have this paradise for eternity. There seems to be absolutely no basis for the hashish story, or the simulation-of-paradise story. The stories filtered west to the Holy Land, where they were picked up by the Crusaders.

‘The group from which the Assassins came was defeated militarily. Even though the purpose of the assassinations was supposedly to remove opponents of their preaching, it had the effect of increasing political and military opposition, and they were crushed. So there hasn’t been an Order of Assassins for many centuries.’ (Michael Barkun in *Secrets of Angels & Demons*)

Marco Polo is also said to have spread the hearsay on the Assassins and their use of hashish and a simulated paradise. The sect was founded by Hasan-i Sabbah (c. 1055 – 1124) and a later leader was known as Aladdin. The complex influences and traditions which aligned the sect with the Sufis, with the Crusaders, with the stories of the Arabian Nights, with Islamic schisms, with the modern-day wealth of the Aga Khans, with the ancient destructions wrought by Mongols in Persia, with the lingering influences of the Nestorian Christians, and in the more remote mountain areas with the ancient faith of Zoroaster … all this and more makes for a mysteriously potent mix. I’m not surprised that people who enjoy reading and writing about conspiracies have dipped into this pool …

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Elaine Pagels wrote a book about the influence of the Adam and Eve story on the Christian attitude to sex, calling it *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*. In it she writes, “Gnostic Christians, on the other hand, castigated the orthodox for making the mistake of reading the Scriptures—and especially Genesis—literally, and thereby missing its “deeper meaning,” Read literally, they said, the story of creation made no sense. Are we to believe that Adam and Eve actually heard God’s footsteps rustling in the Garden of Eden, as the text suggests, when it says that Adam and Eve hid themselves, for “they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8) or did God lie when he warned Adam and Eve, “You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledges of good and evil, for on the day you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17), though they went on to live for hundreds of years? To whom was God speaking when he said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image” (Genesis 1:26)? And why did God try to keep from Adam and Eve the knowledge that he admits could make them “like one of us” (Genesis 3:22)? Certain Gnostic Christians suggested that such absurdities show that the story was never meant to be taken literally but should be understood as spiritual allegory—not so much *history with a moral* as *myth with meaning*. These Gnostics took each line of the Scriptures as an enigma, a riddle pointing to deeper meaning. Read this way, the text becomes a shimmering surface of

symbols, inviting the spiritually adventurous to explore its hidden depths, to draw upon their own inner experience—what artists call the creative imagination—to interpret the story."

We do now tend to see it as myth with meaning—but the irony is that it was almost certainly founded on history with a moral. The Bible sets Eden in a very specific place. "A stream flowed in Eden and watered the garden; beyond Eden it divided into four rivers. The first river is the Pishon; it flows round the country of Havilah. (Pure gold is found there and also rare perfume and precious stones.) The second river is the Gihon; it flows round the country of Cush. The third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria, and the fourth river is the Euphrates."

In other words the delta country in modern Iraq, Iran, and the head of the Persian Gulf—but in ancient times this was home to the extraordinary civilisation of Sumeria. Because we don't know for sure when Genesis was written down, or by whom, we don't know if it pre- or post-dates the Jewish exile in Babylon—so we cannot know for sure whether it is a pre-exile story based on handed-down stories of the rise and fall of the Sumerians or whether it is a post-exile story in which Babylonian and Persian elements have been incorporated into an older Sumerian story. But, read like this, fragments of Sumerian history and culture and loss permeate the Bible's early stories. Their king who was plucked as a child from a basket in the reeds, their use of ribs in myths, their choice of an unblemished animal for sacrifice, the importance of donkeys in their society, their apparently wise and down-to-earth law code, their famous flood story in the Gilgamesh epic, their love of poetry, a habit of falling in love with women seen bathing …

They could write:

Oh, Sumer, great land, of the lands of the universe,
Filled with steadfast light, dispensing from sunrise to sunset
the divine laws to all the people,
Your divine laws are exalted laws, unreachable,
Your heart is profound, unfathomable,
The true learning which you bring … like heaven is untouchable …
Your lord is an honored lord; with An, the king, he sits on
the heavenly dais,
Your king is the great mountain, the father Enlil …
May your steadfast temples lift hand to heaven …

But Sumeria was threatened on all sides; by the rising empires in Persia and Egypt and Babylon … but more insidiously from the enemy within. A prosperity and a culture based on the intensive irrigation of land which had previously been inundated by the sea and over which a fertile band of silt had been laid down by the yearly floodings of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers was intensely vulnerable to salination. There were certainly wars and disasters but I think the fertility of the land died slowly without an obvious 'hand of destruction'. Eden ceased to be Eden and became small tribes of wandering herders, fishermen, and traders. The moral people drew, understandably, was that the Sumerians had displeased God. The moral we can draw is a vastly different one. If we ask too much of our earth it will fail us … and we will go wandering like the ancient Sumerians in search of a new home and haven.

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It could be said that people possess revolutions—until they are hijacked, get out of control, or die dismally. But do people possess their religions? Do people possess their nations? Do people possess their history? If they do then it would make all these things democratic, even perhaps anarchical. But I don't think they do. So what do people possess? I think most people would point to the things they have bought. All else is mist and shadows.

This seemed a relevant question to be asking while I pondered on Iran. In the ancient world no one doubted that Iran (Persia) existed and that what it had and did and said and thought truly mattered.

Recently I have been reading Herodotus' *The Histories*. This makes fascinating reading.

Herodotus was born in Halicarnassus in what is now Turkey between 490 and 480 BC. Aubrey de Selincourt says of him, "English poetry made its first appearance already fully-formed in Chaucer; but the miracle of Chaucer is less than the miracle of Herodotus, for the English poet

was heir to the long tradition of European poetry, but Herodotus the prose-writer had no predecessors. His History was a new thing. He was the first Greek, the first European, to use prose as the medium of a work of art. His mastery of the new medium is one measure of his genius."

But he brings something else that was new to his work. By our standards he seems credulous and superstitious. And yet he tries hard to winnow the truth of people's lives and tribal histories from the mass of legend and story. He often says that something is only hearsay, that the story has been passed on, that there are several versions, that he doubts the truth of a claim. The stories that existed and grew with each generation already had a long and important existence—the Bible forms the best known and perhaps most coherent narrative of such an existence—and met a different agenda. They were magical and mystical rather than analytical and closely examined. They existed as the fount of each people's spiritual and communal and tribal identity. Deciding which version was most likely to be true wasn't what they were about. Each people as they grew sufficiently populous and distinctive sought to mark themselves out. They all drew from the common 'wellspring' of ideas and beliefs and myths and traditions. Sometimes these can be singled out; the Sumerian tradition of their king found in a basket of reeds finds its echoes in the story of Moses; the drawn up lists of laws by which people were to live existed in simple or complex forms in every kingdom; the ways in which dreams were seen as foretelling the future; the significance of fire and sun and water and mountain-tops, of certain animals; the attitude to astrology; the echoes in proverbs and sayings …

But Herodotus essentially tried to step outside the usual reason for putting together oral histories and beliefs and traditional wisdom. He wanted to tell why and how people came to live where they lived, how they lived their daily lives, why they believed the things they believed, how their ruling dynasties came about. He was more concerned with politics and trade and diplomacy and everyday life than with the spiritual dimensions.

He ranges far and wide—Egyptians, Libyans, Parthians, Medes, Scythians, and other peoples—but he never lets his readers forget that the only nation which really mattered in his lifetime was Persia. It is like a huge, sophisticated, wealthy, powerful, yet also mysterious Eastern presence which hovered over the lives and thoughts of every Greek, whether in Athens or living in the far-flung Greek colonies.

He ends his *Histories* with, "This Artayctes who suffered death by crucifixion had an ancestor named Artembares; and he it was who made the Persians a proposal, which they readily accepted and passed on to Cyrus. 'Since,' they said, 'after God himself, you, Cyrus, by your conquest of Astyages, have given Persia pre-eminence in the world, let us leave this small and barren country of ours and take possession of a better. There are plenty to choose from — some near, some further off; if we take one of them, we shall be admired more than ever. It is the natural thing for a sovereign people to do; and when will there be a better opportunity than now, when we are masters of the whole of Asia and its many nations?'

"Cyrus did not think much of this suggestion; he replied that they might act upon it if they pleased, but added the warning that, if they did so, they must prepare themselves to rule no longer, but to be ruled by others. 'Soft countries,' he said, 'breed soft men. It is not the property of any one soil to produce fine fruits and good soldiers too.' The Persians had to admit that this was true and that Cyrus was wiser than they; so they left him, and chose rather to live in a rugged land and rule than to cultivate rich plains and be slaves."

Cyrus (born about 590 BC, died about 529 BC) gets a brief mention in the Bible as the king who provided the exiled Jews with the means to return home when he conquered Babylon in 539 BC. The Book of Ezra says that Cyrus told the Israelites to return home and rebuild their temple, that he gave them back the bowls and cups King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had looted from their temple, that their 'neighbours' gave them silver utensils, gold, supplies, pack animals, other valuables and offerings for the Temple, and that Cyrus made a proclamation: "This is the command of Cyrus, Emperor of Persia. The Lord, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler over the whole world and has given me the responsibility of building a temple for him in Jerusalem in Judah. May God be with all of you who are his people. You are to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the

Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is worshipped in Jerusalem. If any of his people in exile need help to return, their neighbours are to give them this help. They are to provide them with silver and gold, supplies and pack animals, as well as offerings to present in the Temple of God in Jerusalem." Ezra says 42,360 exiles returned. The more I look at these few paragraphs the more extraordinary I find them. Babylon was further from Jerusalem than Egypt from Canaan; yet this long march is dismissed in a couple of paragraphs. Cyrus was a believer in Zoroastrianism yet he is the moving force behind the rebuilding and rededication of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. But Cyrus is definitely named. He is a genuine person in the narrative. Whereas the 'Pharaoh' or 'Pharaohs' are never given names. Even minor kings throughout the early stories have names. So why are the Egyptians nameless? Is this because Egypt acted as an identify-forming myth while Cyrus forms part of an attempt at narrative history?

And this gives no hint as to how important Cyrus really was, nor of him as a person. Herodotus gives him one of those miraculous background stories. "The Assyrians had been masters of upper Asia over a period of five hundred and twenty years, when the Medes set the example of revolt from their authority." The man who helped them break away was Deioces who became king of the Medes and ruled for 53 years. He had a son Phraortes who attacked and subjugated Persia and ruled for 22 years. His son was Astyages who ruled for 35 years. But his dreams about his daughter Mandane, that she would have a son who would usurp his throne, caused him to marry her off to a minor Persian official, Cambyses, and when her son Cyrus was born Astyages had a court officer take him away to kill him. But this man could not bring himself to kill the king's grandson and instead he gave him to a herdsman and told him to expose him in the wild mountains. The man's wife Cyno had just given birth to a baby which had died; so she and her husband replaced him with Cyrus and brought him up as their son. But when Cyrus and some other children were playing a game of pretending to be kings Cyrus acted so much like a king that questions were asked about the boy. The story eventually came out that the court official had given the baby to a herdsman. Astyages got his revenge; he had the man's own son killed and served up at dinner. The king however forgives the herdsman and his wife and because her name translated as 'Bitch' it was used to spread the story that the child had been reared by wild dogs in the mountains. This does not prevent the prophecy coming true. Cyrus is sent to the home of his father Cambyses where he persuades the Persians to revolt against Median control. The aging Astyages is brought to his grandson's palace, where Cyrus is now king of Persia, and dies there.

Was there any foundation to the story? Or does it belong in the long tradition of the 'Romulus and Remus' type of story? Given the deep belief in dreams, prophecies, and divinations, the answer must be: Perhaps.

Herodotus writes, "No race is so ready to adopt foreign ways as the Persian; for instance, they wear the Median costume because they think it handsomer than their own, and their soldiers wear the Egyptian corselet. Pleasures, too, of all sorts they were quick to indulge in when they get to know about them — a notable instance is pederasty, which they learned from the Greeks. Every man has a number of wives, and a much greater number of mistresses. After Prowess in fighting, the chief proof of manliness is to be the father of a large family of boys."

He says the boys are trained in three things: "to ride, to use the bow, and to speak the truth." … "They consider telling lies more disgraceful than anything else, and, next to that, owing money. There are many reasons for their horror of debt, but the chief is their conviction that a man who owes money is bound to tell lies."

These are things he says he knows from personal experience but their burial customs are in the realm of hearsay: "a male Persian is never buried until the body has been torn by a bird or a dog. I know for certain that the Magi have this custom, for they are quite open about it. The Persians in general, however, cover a body with wax and then bury it. The Magi are a peculiar caste, quite different from the Egyptian priest as indeed from any other sort of person. The Egyptian priests make it an article of religion to kill no living creature, except for sacrifice, but the Magi, not only kill any thing, except dogs and men, with their own hands but make a special point of doing so" …

None of this was any comfort to Cyrus. He made the mistake of underestimating Tomyris, queen of the Massagetae, a nomadic people akin to the Scythians living to the north of Persia. She said to him, "Rule your own people, and try to bear the sight of me ruling mine. But of course you will refuse my advice, as the last thing you wish for is to live in peace." Cyrus ignored this sensible advice and died at the hands of her Massagetae warriors. He had ruled Persia for twenty-nine years. And the Persians built a fine tomb for him at Pasargadae which is said to still exist though there is a strong likelihood Cyrus himself is not in it …

Puzzling as is the Bible's cursory description of the ending of the Babylonian exile and the return home of the exiles—so too is the apparent ignorance or disinterest of Herodotus in the history and customs of Palestine. He gives time and space to small and now-forgotten tribes but has no tales to tell of Jerusalem or its people.

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Tom Holland in *Persian Fire* goes further and says of Herodotus, "Committed to transcribing only living informants or eyewitness accounts, Herodotus toured the world — the first anthropologist, the first investigative reporter, the first foreign correspondent. The fruit of his tireless curiosity was not merely a narrative, but a sweeping analysis of an entire age: capacious, various, tolerant. Herodotus himself described what he had engaged in as 'enquiries' — 'historia'. 'And I set them down here,' he declared, in the first sentence of the first work of history ever written, 'so that the memory of the past may be preserved by recording the extraordinary deeds of Greek and foreigner alike — and above all, to show how it was that they came to go to war.' But Holland is mainly writing about the clash between the large Persian empire and the much smaller Greek states and the powerful influence this has had on world history.

He says of the Persian Empire that 'although certainly founded amid 'the tearing down of walls, the tumult of cavalry charges, and the overthrow of cities', had also, as it expanded, developed a subtler response to the challenges of dominion. By guaranteeing peace and order to the dutifully submissive, and by giving a masterly demonstration of how best to divide and rule, a succession of Persian kings had won for themselves and their people the largest empire ever seen. Indeed, it was their epochal achievement to demonstrate to future ages the very possibility of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, world-spanning state. As such, the influence of their example on the grand sweep of history would be infinitely more long term than the aberrant and fleeting experiment that was the democracy of Athens. The political model established by the Persian kings would inspire empire after empire, even into the Muslim era: the caliphs, would-be rulers of the world, were precisely echoing, albeit in piously Islamic idiom, the pretensions of Xerxes. Indeed, in a sense, the political model established by the ancient monarchy of Persia was one that would persist in the Middle East until 1922, and the deposition of the last ruling caliph, the Turkish Sultan.'

He goes on to say, 'Had the Athenians lost the Battle of Marathon, and suffered the obliteration of their city, for instance, then there would have been no Plato — and without Plato, and the colossal shadow he cast on all subsequent theologies, it is unlikely that there would have been an Islam to inspire bin Laden. Conversely, when President Bush speaks of 'an axis of evil', his vision of a world divided between rival forces of light and darkness is one that derives ultimately from Zoroaster, the ancient prophet of Iran. Although the defeat of Xerxes was certainly decisive in giving to the Greeks and therefore to all Europeans, a sense of their own distinctiveness, the impact of Persia and Greece upon history cannot entirely be confined within rigid notions of East and West. Monotheism and the notion of the universal state, democracy and totalitarianism: all can trace their origins back to the period of the Persian Wars. Justifiably it has been described as the axis of world history.'

The Persian empire becomes more extraordinary when you look at its youth. Cyrus > Cambyses > Bardiya > Darius > Xerxes. And the empire itself was more like a sea anemone; expanding outwards, drawing inwards, expanding again in a flow of tiny filaments that reached into remote tribal territories as well as large cities and small states.

But when Alexander the Great marched into Asia in the spring of 334 BC he had thirty-five thousand troops; he also had in his eye the declining empire of Darius III, on the throne for two insecure years. Alexander was undoubtedly a brilliant strategist but he also had a lot of luck. Could he have swept through the Persian Empire, destroying Persepolis, and laying waste populations, if he had come a century earlier? Probably not.

So what might be seen as Alexander's legacy across Asia Minor? He has been credited with bringing religious tolerance. He helped spread Greek ideas, architecture, arts, culture. But whether this was a benefit or not depends on your perspective. The claim that the 'grey-eyed' people of central Asia and western China are the descendants of Alexander's troops doesn't add up. Apart from the fact that very few Greeks, then or now, have grey eyes—it flies in the face of the normal inheritance of genes. The Greeks brought no women with them. Alexander encouraged his soldiers to take local wives but as his empire disintegrated many of his men abandoned their wives and fled westward. As brown eyes are dominant every time any children left behind married and intermarried any Greek influence was further diluted. Any Greek genetic inheritance would have been swamped in only a few generations. The fascinating grey-eyed people of western China may differ very obviously from their Chinese neighbours but their inheritance, I suspect, is uniquely their own, not as a forgotten offshoot of Greek military adventures.

And Alexander was ultimately a victim of his Persian success. Frank Lipsius in his biography of Alexander writes, "In Persia the king was an entity distinct even from his possessions, creating an anomalous situation in which the title of king could be — and was after Alexander's death — inherited independently of any territories to which it might have originally referred. Only in this society could the cult of Alexander's divinity thrive." But a king, an emperor, a conqueror, who has no loyalty firmly rooted in peoples and communities ultimately has nothing but a legend to pass on. Hardly was Alexander dead and buried than his legacy was disappearing. But an awful lot of people had died to create the legend.

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As I was pondering on Herodotus and the *Bible*, both fascinating subjects, it occurred to me that Persian power was underpinned by two things (apart from brute force!): an excellent bureaucracy with careful lists and records, posting stations, fast communications, and well-trained scribes—and an all-inclusive treasury of myth, folk-lore, magic, and inspiring beliefs including the acceptance of monotheism. Both these things are well to the fore in the Bible but they are also seasoned with the clear narrative and interest in peoples that marks out Herodotus's life and work. It might be argued that the genius of the *Bible* is to take these three things and draw them into a (fairly) coherent whole and then draw clear moral and ethical lessons from them.

But it is possible, even necessary, to take this strand of history much further. Generation after generation is presented with first century Palestine and the great hovering empire of Rome over it and against this backdrop everything is understood and explained; from Jesus to the Jewish Revolt and a lot in between. But the other vital player is virtually invisible. Iran.

Warwick Ball in *Rome in the East* writes, 'Following the Iranian occupation of Judaea in 40 BC, an anti-Roman member of the Hasmonaean family, Antigonus, was installed on the throne. Herod was forced to flee, at first to the court of Maliku (Malchus) II at Petra and then to Cleopatra's court in Egypt. Both eastern monarchs had little time for the dispossessed Idumaean wanderer, so he went to Rome later the same year where he renewed friendship with Mark Antony. The Romans were still smarting under the loss of Palestine to Iran. In siding with the Iranians the Hasmonaeans had forfeited all Roman support for even nominal recognition. This was Herod's great chance: Antony saw in Herod a leader who might win Palestine back for him. The senate proclaimed him King of the Jews (in a ceremony in the Temple of Jupiter!) and awarded him a splendid coronation in Rome.

Armed with a new title — and a Roman army to give it teeth — Herod was sent out in 39 BC to regain his kingdom. It took two years' of hard fighting simply to get from Galilee to Jerusalem, as the Hasmonaeans still enjoyed widespread support. After a tough four-month siege,

he finally captured the city in 37 BC. Herod then proceeded to liquidate all members of the Hasmonaean family and its supporters, as well as make the usual obligatory war against the Arabs across the Jordan. But his revenge on the Hasmonaeans did not last long, for the Battle of Actium in 31 BC removed his Roman benefactor, Mark Antony. Hastily, Herod set sail for Rhodes to submit to the new Roman strong man, Octavian, who confirmed his appointment as King of Judaea under Roman protection. Octavian also enlarged Herod's kingdom as recognition for services rendered to the Roman state. Thus, a plebeian, born half Idumaean half Nabataean, proclaimed king in a republican ceremony in a pagan temple, armed with a Roman army, became King of the Jews.'

Herod was a tyrant, he was also a builder on a grand scale, not least for his massive rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, but perhaps even more importantly he was a Westernising influence in a society which remained distinctly Eastern. Ball writes, 'Palestine was vitally important to Rome's security. Threats from 'pirates', real or perceived, was one of them — and after Rome controlled the entire Mediterranean littoral trouble from pirates virtually ceased. But more important was Iran, which posed a real threat. Although Palestine did not share common borders with Iran, in some ways it figured higher in the 'Iranian question' than Syria or Armenia, which do. For Palestine shared a common people: the Jews. The largest population of Jews outside Judaea itself was in Iran. These were descendants of the Jews who had been exiled by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC but who had chosen not to return, even after Judaea was restored to them by Cyrus the Great in 538. Indeed, during the Jewish Revolt the Jews were hoping for substantial support from their compatriots there. Given the traditional sympathy between Jews and Iranians following Cyrus' restoration of the Temple (a bond doubtless reinforced by mutual monotheism), a threat from Judaea was perceived by Rome as a potential threat from Iran itself. Furthermore, Josephus writes that 'there is not a region in the world without its Jewish colony', particularly in the vital — and often volatile — second and third cities of the Roman Empire, Alexandria and Antioch. The reason why Rome had to put down any Jewish revolt so thoroughly, therefore, was not incipient anit-Semitism, nor intolerance of their strange religion, nor even that they posed any real threat. It was because the large numbers of Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean represented a perceived 'fifth column' in the heart of the Roman Empire — as well as potential oriental hordes at the gate of the empire. Never mind that such threats were not real, it was the *perceived* threat that mattered to the Romans rather than any reality, rather as modern great powers might overreact to threats that are more imagined than real, such as Communism or Islamic fundamentalism.'

Iranian Jews were probably the major donors to the Temple coffers in Jerusalem. Rome was a beneficiary of this Eastern largesse. Intriguingly, 'There might even have been more Jews in the Persian Empire than in Judaea. It is certainly probable that eastern Jewry as a whole probably dates from Nebuchadnezzar's diaspora rather than Titus'. Judaism took root in many countries of the Iranian world very early on: the Afghans, for example, 'traditionally see themselves as descended from the tribes of Israel' and 'extensive Jewish remains dating from the tenth century have been found in central Afghanistan' …

But how might this religious, cultural, social, even ethnic complexity have played out in people's lives?

It probably isn't possible to make clear claims on this subject. But there are quite clear-cut influences that can be discerned in developing religious beliefs. 'Zorostrianism was the world's first credal religion, reason enough for it to be fundamental to the development of any later monotheism. Its founder, Zoroaster, may have lived 1700-1500BC, although he may have lived somewhat later in Bactria. Suffice to say it was substantially earlier than Christianity. But mere primogeniture does not alone make it essential to an understanding of Christianity; Zoroasterianism contained many more elements that found their way into Christianity. It was the first religion with a concept of a hopeful hereafter offering a day of judgement, salvation, resurrection and paradise, rather than some vague, amorphous netherworld such as existed in Greek or Judaic traditions. The dualism which dominates Zoroastrian belief — the conflict between the forces of light and darkness — is echoed in Christianity by its emphasis on good

versus evil, as well as heaven and hell, God and Satan. This dualistic belief has been suggested as an explanation for the eastern orientation of the early churches: east, being the source of light, symbolised good, as opposed to the west, the source of darkness symbolising evil.

'More than that is the Zoroastrian notion of deity representing the abstract concept of purity and goodness of the universal single god, of god the creator. The idea that 'God is good' has become so much an accepted part of Christian faith that it is merely taken for granted, but it must be remembered that the idea was quite revolutionary in the western world in antiquity: the pagan gods — the gods of the Greeks and Romans — were good, bad, indifferent, in fact reflected the full range of human behaviour, the only difference from humankind being their immortality. They were rarely, if ever, good! Even the god of the Old Testament was to a large extent a severe, vengeful god; the Christian god owes more to Zoroastrianism than to Judaism.

'The Zoroastrian conflict between good and evil was not indefinite, for it was believed that a redeemer — the *saoshyant* — would ultimately appear and overthrow the forces of darkness forever, ushering in a new era of rule by the forces of light that would last for eternity. This *saoshyant*, moreover, was to be born of a virgin from the prophet Zoroaster's lineage. The implications for the development of Christianity are obvious, although the idea of a redeemer or saviour was common to a number of other ancient eastern religions, both pagan and monotheist. The Christian reverence for a sacred book springs mainly from Judaism with its reverence for the Torah, but it might equally stem from the Zoroastrian reverence for the sacred *Avesta*. Of far greater implications for Christianity was the position of the hereditary priesthood, or Magi, in the Zoroastrian religion. The institution of the Magi is one of the most fundamental in Iranian tradition. Its exact origins are hazy: it probably antedates Zoroaster, going back to early Iranian origins in Central Asia. When Indo-Iranian tribes migrated to India in the second millennium BC the idea of an hereditary high-priesthood was taken with them and became the Brahmans, the Indo-Iranian overlay on Indian Hinduism. The institution of the Magi followed Iranian migrations to the Iranian plateau too, becoming a specific religious caste of the Medes. It was grafted on to Zoroastrianism and has remained an integral part of Iranian society to this day: many important Iranian dynasties, such as the Sasanians, the Barmakids, the Samanids and the Safavids, began as hereditary priestly families (Zoroastrian, Buddhist or Sufi), and today, Iran is the only country in the Islamic world which has a structured priestly hierarchy (the mullahs and ayatollahs). The institution of a priesthood had no counterpart in the West. The Judaic institution of the Pharisees only occurred, it must be stressed, *after* Judaism came into contact with — and under the influence of — Zoroastrianism during the Babylonian exile. Pagan Rome had many priests, of course. But their function was strictly limited to the temples they were attached to; there was never any structured hierarchy, no concept of administering to a flock or of overseeing the religion, in both spiritual and administrative terms, such as became familiar under the Church. The Magi of Zoroastrian Iran was the only institution of a structured priesthood in the ancient world. The idea entered Christian mythology with the visit of the Three Magi to the infant Christ — symbolically, the old monotheistic religion giving its blessing to the new one being born in Bethlehem.'

* * * * *

As a child I found the Bible a rather overwhelming and worrying thing, I think many people felt the same, and it seems natural that Sunday Schools delved in briefly and drew out specific stories. These stories were presented as morality rather than story—which resulted in many anxious moments for children. Take Adam and Eve. Country children if they saw a snake were expected to call an adult who would dispatch it. The idea of a talking snake and resulting disobedience didn't make a lot of sense to me. Or take Noah and the Ark. We were told that the whole world got drowned because it was wicked. But this apparently included small children and babies. What could they have done that was so terribly wicked? I used to think of those small children being washed away and drowned willy-nilly. Or take the people in the desert making and worshipping a golden calf. Living on a dairy farm I accepted that calves were vitally important. But how and when did these sad hungry people find time to pan for enough gold, to smelt and

mould it? Surely something large enough to be worshipped would have taken many years to make?

But the real problem, I think now, was that only a very limited part of the Bible was separated out. We were given no sense of the whole. I found this description helpful:

'Traditionally the Hebrew Bible has been divided into three main parts.' These parts are:

'The *Torah*—also known as the Five Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch ("five books" in Greek)—includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These narrate the story of the people of Israel from the creation of the world, through the period of the flood and the patriarchs, to the Exodus from Egypt, the wanderings in the desert, and the giving of the Law at Sinai. The Torah concludes with Moses' farewell to the people of Israel.

The next division, the *Prophets*, is divided into two main groups of scriptures. The Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings—tell the story of the people of Israel from their crossing of the river Jordan and conquest of Canaan, through the rise and fall of the Israelite kingdoms, to their defeat and exile at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Latter Prophets include the oracles, social teachings, bitter condemnations, and messianic expectations of a diverse group of inspired individuals spanning a period of about three hundred and fifty years, from the mid-eighth century BCE to the end of the fifth century BCE.

Finally, the *Writings* are a collection of homilies, poems, prayers, proverbs, and psalms that represent the most memorable and powerful expressions of the devotion of the ordinary Israelite at times of joy, crisis, worship, and personal reflection. In most cases, they are extremely difficult to link to any specific historical events or authors. They are the products of a continuous process of composition that stretched over hundreds of years. Although the earliest material in this collection (in Psalms and Lamentations) may have been assembled in late monarchic times or soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, most of the Writings were apparently composed much later, from the fifth to the second century BCE—in the Persian and Hellenistic periods.'

(from *The Bible Unearthed* by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman)

They suggest that the early writings were begun to create a sense of identity in Judea, after the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, but that they were developed and expanded in the post-exile period. I had been tempted to see this return from exile essential to the bringing of the ideas of Zoroaster to Jerusalem. But of course that isn't so. Zoroastrianism's ideas had probably percolated throughout the region long before the rise of Judea …

But one thing did strike me. God 'speaks' to the writers of the various Books in various ways, through angels, through dreams, through voices, but often in an unspecified way. But there is that intriguing image of God speaking from a burning bush. God tells Moses he is standing on 'holy ground' and that he must now lead the Israelites home from their exile in Egypt. It is effectively a 'one off' so what importance might we read into it? I have come upon many attempts to see Akhenaton and his worship of the sun as the beginning of monotheism but it could equally be argued that Zoroaster provided a simple and far more influential belief in which a sole deity, invisible and beyond representation, could be worshipped and listened to through the medium of fire. And perhaps, too, it was meant to be read as the story of one exile, one homecoming, but two aspects of it: the practical narrative and the symbolic presentation of a new beginning.

* * * * *

I started out with a question. Do people own their revolutions? I think it can be said that the Ayatollahs' Revolution belongs to the Iranian people or at least its men; what they do with it is also their decision. But what of that revolution which happened three millennia ago? It diffused throughout the ancient world, knowing no boundaries, and it remains a profoundly important influence in the way we see our world. Yet it is also an invisible influence. When I went looking for some basic material I found a black hole. It is not hard to find book after book on druidism or Sufism. But Zoroaster? Or more correctly—Zarathushtra?

There are of course brief mentions in dictionaries and encyclopaedias and collections and but there was no agreement on who the prophet was or when he lived, dates varying from 550 BC

to much further back than 1000 BC, Mary Boyle in *Zoroastrians* suggesting 1200 BC and the most recent book available, Peter Clark's *Zoroastrianism* suggesting 1400, and also varying in the sense of him as a man to whom a profound revelation was made and a man able to bring together in a new and exciting form a range of long-existing beliefs among the nomadic peoples in western Iran, Afghanistan, northern India, and central Asia. But his central figure of one god, imageless, uncreated, the source of all good, (though making lesser beings as emanations) is invariably accepted, as is the primacy of fire and the existence of a priethood, the magi, as well as a general acceptance that he saw matter as good and evil not as a dualistic force but as a kind of parasitic aspect. Good and evil were an *ethical* dualism not a physical one. Added to that was a vision of heaven and hell, but in hell the punishment was designed to fit the crime and punishment was never eternal. He believed in an 'end to history'. He promoted the value of work. He sought an end to animal sacrifices. He saw women in egalitarian terms. And perhaps more beautifully was the image of a religion which saw life as something to be enjoyed, not 'a vale of tears'.

He is claimed to have married three times and had three sons and three daughters (which suggests a symbolic importance for three) and he began preaching at the age of thirty. He praised marriage and saw it as a partnership. It was a male religion but not to the extent of the misogyny later religions achieved; perhaps because ancient nomadic peoples hadn't yet achieved the 'civilised' ideal of expendable or inferior groups and classes. The best known aspect of it is, of course, the priestly structure, the Magi, which existed long before Zoroaster himself. I have just been reading Adrian Gilbert's *Magi* and Richard Trexler's *The Journey of the Magi* in the hope of insights into the Biblical presentation. Gilbert suggests they were probably from the small kingdom of Commagone on the western edge of the Persian empire and north-east of Palestine near Edessa where the royal cult was a form of Zoroastrianism and where beliefs in the prophecy that Zoroaster would have a posthumous 'son' were retained. Trexler sees the story as symbolic and looks at the way one symbolic story can spawn thousands of interpretations down the centuries.

Gilbert also takes the 'star of Bethlehem' as a real event: the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces on 29 July 7 BC. But as the story was written at least fifty years later I think we have to take into account both the importance of hindsight and the profound part that star-gazing played in that world. The modern split between the science of astronomy and the superstition of astrology is meaningless back two thousand years ago. The people who devoted their lives to studying the movements and patterns of the heavens were the same people who read meanings, portents, and prophecies into those movements. Everything from people's moods and health to their good fortune and their intelligence, to the harvest and the fecundity of their animals, to the hour of their birth and death, was influenced by the heavenly patterns. Earthly life mirrored heavenly life in profoundly important ways. Whoever wrote the story of the arrival of the 'wise men', whether Matthew or someone else, understood that Jesus had to be 'embedded' in this halo of heavenly blessing and portent. His life and death, to have enduring meaning, had to be 'written in the stars'.

But as no final pronouncement can be made on the magi and the time of Jesus' birth I thought this piece about death might be of more interest. "Zoroastrianism, the indigenous religion of Persia prior to the introduction of Islam, is yet another echo of mankind's early dualistic perspective. The Supreme Being, Ahura Mazda, was thought to have created two equal but opposite twin spirits who together ruled the world, Spenta Mainyu and Angra Mainyu. In much the same way, the soul of man was thought to have been designed with this same binary nature; the two parts of the soul were called the *urvan* and the *daena*, and just like the two primordial offspring of the original Creator, these two souls were thought of as twins.

"Thought to exist before birth, the *urvan* survived death unharmed. It was conscious, active, and verbal, and was free to make its own independent choices and decisions. Meanwhile, the *daena* was, like Egypt's *ka*, also conceived of as the person's own image or self. Paralleling both the Egyptian *ka* and the Chinese *po*, Persia's *daena* was also thought to grow and develop over the course of one's life, being created or molded by the thoughts, words, and deeds of its *urvan*,

becoming a mirror image of the person's earthly life. The *daena* contained the person's conscience, as well as a perfect memory of the person's life experience.

"After wandering alone for three days after death, the *urvan* would again encounter its *daena*, in the form of a beautiful maiden at a place called *Chinvat peretu*, the "Bridge of the Separator" which led to the Zoroastrian heaven. But the *urvan* could only cross this bridge if its *daena* did not convict it of unrighteousness. This encounter between the *urvan* and *daena* was critical; the nature of the afterdeath "conversation" of these two halves of the soul, when the *urvan* would find itself confronted by the full memory record carried within the *daena*, would determine the entire afterlife experience of the individual. Immortality required the successful reconciliation of the *urvan* and *daena* after death; if the *urvan* had been good and honest in life, it would pass through this judgment safely to live in heavenly bliss with its *daena*, but if not, it would fall into a gray, shadowy netherworld."

(from *The Lost Secret of Death* by Peter Novak; in this can be found the symbolism that is so vital an aspect of Jesus' death and resurrection; not least the promise that a life lived in faith, hope, love, and charity will bring perfect wholeness, an end to the dual self, as its resolution.)

Peter Clark writes, "Zoroastrianism, which can rightly claim to be the oldest of the world's prophetic and revealed religions, has, in common with many younger traditions, evolved over a lengthy period of time. Due to Zoroastrianism's ancient beginnings there are problems with assigning even an approximate date to its emergence, although a figure of roughly 1400 BCE is reckoned by a large number of scholars to be most likely. Since Zoroastrianism began within a pre-literate culture there is a lack of recorded information about its earliest times. All that we know with any certainty about Zarathushtra, the priest-prophet who gave his name to this ancient faith, is that which we can deduce from his *Gathas*. These are seventeen short hymns whose brevity belies their philosophical and theological profundity, and which express what was probably the lifetime's preaching and teaching of their author. We can also use these hymns to build up a picture not only of the world into which the prophet was born, but also of how he thought that world should be transformed in accordance with his own unique vision of God. The *Gathas* introduce us to a number of revolutionary features which are clearly their author's innovations, rich in insight and often startling in originality. Furthermore, to say that Zarathushstra heralded the beginning of Western civilization is no wild claim, since his powerful message resonated long after his life not only within the religious culture to which he gave new life but, as his descendants expanded their political power a thousand years after, also in the movement that would eventually dominate the west — the Judeo-Christian tradition — where it still continues to be heard, perhaps faintly, even today."

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I came away from my brief foray with the feeling that the kind of 'split soul' feeling that Iran gives out might have more to do with the forced conversion to Islam and the predominant loss of its own profound contribution to religious history than to Western attempts to admire ancient Persia and scarify modern Iran.

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June 14: Jerzy Kosinski
June 15: Thomas Randolph (bap)
June 16: Joyce Carol Oates
June 17: Kerry Greenwood
June 18: Robyn Archer
June 19: C. H. Spurgeon

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As a child I always felt sorry for the character in the L.M. Montgomery books called Moody Spurgeon MacPherson; it seemed an awful name to give a boy. His mother has marked him out to become a minister. So off he has to go to college for an education. "Poor Moody Spurgeon fell on hard luck at the very beginning of his college career. Half a dozen ruthless Sophs, who were among his fellow-boarders, swooped down upon him one night and shaved half of his head. In this guise the luckless Moody Spurgeon had to go about until his hair grew again.

He told Anne bitterly that there were times when he had his doubts as to whether he was really called to be a minister."

It was only much later that I realised he had been given, deliberately or not, the names of three well-known evangelists, Dwight M. Moody, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, and Aimee Semple McPherson.

I know that most literary novelists tend to look down on that kind of hellfire evangelism, except to poke fun at it, or to make the villain-of-the-piece a member of some revivalist sect … and yet revivalism is just as serious a subject as any other; perhaps more so. Every religious movement, every political movement, every economy, every artistic or literary or craft or musical experience tends to have its highs and lows. Sometimes the lows mark the end. Sometimes they are a temporary experience. Sometimes the highs go to an extreme of emotion, of ecstasy, of insanity. But they are a worthwhile subject for discussion, for the author, for the psychologist …

I think calm careful writers find any kind of outpouring of emotion a little disconcerting; whether it is screaming at a soccer match or violently protesting about free trade and globalisation or hallelujahing in a monster crusade. We, we like to think, are not that kind of elemental easily-swayed person. After all, there is only a matter of degree between people screaming at a horse to run faster and people screaming adulation at a Nazi rally … isn't there?

But the opposite question is equally pertinent. Why cannot human ideas, human policies, human organisations reach a 'steady state' and not need these dramatic highs and lows? It is hard to pick up a newspaper or turn on a radio or TV and not hear the word 'growth'. The economy is growing, the population is growing, the popularity of something is growing, the national waistline is growing … Sometimes of course things are not growing and an element of panic starts to lurk. But we wouldn't worry about downturns if we weren't brainwashed to believe that constant growth is not only natural but desirable. But why is it? An organism that can't stop growing turns into a monster. A child which did not reach such a steady state, a plant, an animal, a mosquito which refused to stop growing would terrify us. So why does a constantly growing economy, a constantly growing religion, a constantly growing audience not terrify us?

When a new revival movement starts up, such as the publicity surrounding the 'Toronto Blessing', some people welcome it as renewal, other people fear it as something which will get out of control or lead people astray … and unspoken in there is the fear that unbridled emotion will lead to unbridled action. What is terrorism really but the evidence of such a link? Millions of people who will never witness or suffer a terrorist act fall prey to that fear of inevitable growth …

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'Gordon laid down the pen which he had been twiddling nervously in his fingers. "Yes," he said. "Look at Mr. Spurgeon. He was little more than a boy when he was preaching to thousands. Charles Haddon Spurgeon. John Hamer Shawcross." He mused over the names. "Eh?" There was an affectionate challenge in his voice. John did not take it up.

"Well," said Gordon, "We can't all be Spurgeons, but we can all bring such gifts as we have to the Master. I was a poor babbler when I began to preach. You'll do better than that. Perhaps I shan't be here much longer, and I'd like to know that you'd made a beginning." '

(from *Fame is the Spur* by Howard Spring.)

I picked up a little book of Spurgeon's homilies in an op-shop one day, called *John Ploughman's Talk*. It was hard, though, to find in them the inspiration that drew huge crowds to hear Spurgeon preach.

"It is of no more use to give advice to the idle than to pour water into a sieve; and as to improving them, one might as well try to fatten a greyhound."

… "They sneer at the ranters; but there is not a ranter, but would be ashamed to stand up and read somebody else's sermon as if it were his own."

('The Idle')

"Fault-finding is dreadfully catching: one dog will set a whole kennel howling."

('Religious Grumblers')

"It is doleful living where the wife, instead of reverencing her husband, is always wrangling and railing at him. It must be a good thing when such women are hoarse, and it is a pity that they have not as many blisters on their tongues as they have teeth in their jaws."

('Home')

"It is astonishing how many old sayings there are against wives, you may find nineteen to the dozen of them. Men years ago showed the rough side of their tongues whenever they spoke of their wives."

('A Good Word for Wives')

"Good thoughts are blessed guests, and should be heartily welcomed, well fed, and much sought after. Like rose leaves, they give out a sweet smell if laid up in the jar of memory."

('Thoughts about Thought')

I imagine that this idea of 'home-spun wisdom' went down well in some quarters in the nineteenth century. I mainly found it rather patronising and dull. But as with all people remembered as speakers rather than writers the question is always: was it their style of delivery, their voice, their mannerisms, something about their personality, which drew an audience—rather than the actual content of their speeches and sermons?

* * * * *

"One of Abbott's contemporaries, the Reverend Dwight Moody, who became the most famous evangelist of the late nineteenth century, was one of those rare parents who do not discipline their children as they themselves have been disciplined. Although he had been whipped as a boy, he did not choose to inflict similar pains on his own children. As his son William noted:

> To these whippings Mr. Moody always referred with great approval, but with delightful inconsistency never adopted the same measures in the government of his own family. In his home grace was the ruling principle and not law, and the sorest punishment of a child was the sense that the father's loving heart had been grieved by waywardness or folly.

Dwight Moody's son, Paul, later confirmed this observation in his autobiography. One of Paul Moody's most vivid memories was of an incident that occurred when he "was quite young." He was playing in the kitchen with a friend who had stopped by after his normal bedtime hour. His father observed this, and then returned shortly and commanded him to go to bed. Paul Moody recalled:

> This time I retreated immediately and in tears, for it was an almost unheard-of thing that he should speak with such directness or give an order unaccompanied by a smile. But I had barely gotten into my little bed before he was kneeling beside it in tears and seeking my forgiveness for having spoken so harshly. He never, he said, intended to speak crossly to one of his children.

Paul Moody's childhood experience remained embedded in his consciousness years later, and he acknowledged the impact that this encounter with his father had upon his religious life thereafter:

> Half a century must have passed since then and while it is not the earliest of my recollections I think it is the most vivid, and I can still see that room in the twilight and that large bearded figure with the great shoulders bowed above me, and hear the broken voice and the tenderness in it. I like best to think of him that way. Before then and after I saw him holding the attention of thousands of people, but asking the forgiveness of his unconsciously disobedient little boy for having spoken harshly seemed to me then and seems now a finer and a greater thing, and to it I owe more than I owe to any of his sermons. For to this I am indebted for an understanding of the meaning of the Fatherhood of God, and a belief in the love of God had its beginnings that night in my childish mind.

In the Moody family, the pattern of corporal punishments, undoubtedly passed from generation to generation on his mother's side, was broken with the children who wrote with such affection and loyalty about their eminent evangelist father, whose ministry reached vast numbers

of people on both sides of the Atlantic. Dwight Moody's experiences with pain and punishment were not transmitted to the generation to come. The Moody family, however, was an exception to the general rule, which has shaped American family life, that we do to our children what was done to ourselves."

From *Spare the Rod* by Philip Greven.

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Wilfred Grenfell wrote in his autobiography *The Story of a Labrador Doctor*, 'What I now believe that D. L. Moody did for me was just to show that under all the shams and externals of religion was a vital call in the world for things I could do. … He helped me to see myself as God sees the "unprofitable servant," and to be ashamed. He started me working for all I was worth, and made religion real fun—a new field brimming with opportunities." As well as working in remote areas of Newfoundland and Labrador he was also a stalwart of the Mission to Seamen movement.

Do you remember when E. Annie Proulx brought out *The Shipping News* and suddenly Newfoundland was on the radar screen? I found her book a bit of a disappointment—perhaps because I expected it to give me more of a 'feel' for Newfoundland. Apart from the annual seal-hunt, graphically told in books like *Red Ice*, Newfoundland (and Labrador) rarely features in the news now. But the referendum held to decide on its status back in 1948 was a time of immense drama. Grenfell, writing of his arrival there in the 1890s, said, "The east coast of Labrador belongs to Newfoundland, and is not part of the territory of Canada, although the ill-defined boundary between the two possessions has given rise to many misunderstandings. Newfoundland is an autonomous government, having its own Governor sent out from England, Prime Minister, and Houses of Parliament in the city of St. John's. Instead of being a province of Canada, as is often supposed, and an arrangement which some of us firmly believe would result in the ultimate good of the Newfoundlanders, it stands in the same relationship to England as does the great Dominion herself. Labrador is owned by Newfoundland, so that legally the Labradormen are Newfoundlanders, though they have no representation in the Newfoundland Government."

Wayne Johnston in his attractive memoir *Baltimore's Mansion* wrote, "The rest of the island beyond the Avalon lay in outer darkness, beyond the uncrossable mist, unknown except in the lore of scorn, the place of the fearsomely dense people known as the baymen, who in the distant past had inflicted upon us a "grievous wound." It would be years before I understood the nature of that wound: on July 22, 1948, in a referendum ordered by Britain, in which the choices were independence or confederation with Canada, Newfoundlanders voted by the barest of margins for confederation. On the Avalon, the vote was two to one for independence, and outside the Avalon two to one for Canada. "Forgive them Lord, they know not what they did," my father said." "

Joan Clark in *Latitudes of Melt* has the referendum as a dividing factor in a family; those who sought independence as a way of keeping a sturdily unique way of life and those who saw joining Canada as the way to greater prosperity: "He had voted — Yes for Confederation. For years he had been watching people along the shore dribble away, abandoning houses built by their father and grandfathers … In Tom's view Newfoundland needed Canada's help, and fast."

Farley Mowat wrote in *A Whale for the Killing*, "In 1948 Newfoundland was still nominally a self-governing Dominion in the British empire, but in 1949, goaded and harried by a messianic little man named Joseph Smallwood (some called him satanic), Newfoundland was stampeded into joining Canada. Smallwood won the decisive vote by the slimmest of margins as islanders of all classes fought desperately for the retention of their independence, impoverished as it was. For these dissenters, independence was of greater worth than flash prosperity. Smallwood, on the other hand, regarded independence as an insufferable barrier to progress. Most Newfoundlanders, he once contemptuously said, did not know what was good for them and would have to be hauled, kicking and screaming into the 20th century. He was just the man to do the hauling … This meant that all the islands' mineral, forest and human resources were to be made available, virtually as gifts, to any foreign industrial entrepreneurs who would agree to exploit them. Smallwood demanded that Newfoundland turn its back on the ocean which had nurtured the

islanders through so many centuries. … The independent people, and the egalitarian way of life, could not survive the tides of change as more and more people came to Burgeo from more and more "closed-out" outports. There was not nearly enough wage work to go around. The new men could not fish successfully for themselves because the local grounds were foreign to them and were by now seriously overcrowded and overfished as well. Consequently, scores of men, both young and old, were forced to leave their families behind and seek work, not only outside Burgeo, but outside Newfoundland where the grandiose industrial schemes of Premier Smallwood had come to nothing." …

The sad thing is that, although the change of status seems to have been clearly and fairly the wish of the majority of the people of Newfoundland (if you discount the pressure of propaganda), the people of Labrador seem to have been short-changed all down the line; without representation when Newfoundland 'possessed' them and used as an air force training ground against their wishes when Canada 'acquired' them. A kind of eternal poor relation.

Certainly the referendum about ceasing to be an English dominion and becoming a province of Canada was fairer than the referendum carried out in West Papua where the choices were ostensibly independence or annexation by Indonesia … and in which 1,205 men were rounded up, some at gun-point, and ordered to vote for Indonesia. Not a single West Papuan woman got to vote or even voice an opinion. President Suharto set the tone for the referendum when he said in 1969: 'There *will* be an act of self-determination, of free choice, in West Irian but if they vote against Indonesia or betray or harm the Indonesian people, this would be treason … '

It is a curious question. Fairness. It isn't an integral part of the world's great religious traditions. Where in the Bible, the Torah, the Koran, or any of the religious traditions of Asia and elsewhere is there a clear commitment to FAIRNESS?

Looked at closely, the traditions, far from raising this as an ideal, do their best to persuade their believers to accept that life and society are fundamentally unfair and that they should simply accept the cards they have been dealt. Up to a point, being encouraged to accept things and simply get on with life makes sense—rather than endlessly railing at the unfairness of things—but it has also been immensely damaging, particularly to women and girls. Every restriction, every lack of opportunity, every legal impediment, every moment of suffering, has been explained away as 'God's will'. The remarkable thing about it is the sense of faith and hope women and children down through the centuries have retained and imparted and shared.

So where did the concept of fairness come from, if not from religion? After all, the secular aspects of life down through the ages haven't been marked out by fairness either.

I tried the word in the OED and was interested to see that the idea of being fair, and equitable, of trying to treat people equally, does not have a long and proud tradition behind it. Certainly Geoffrey Chaucer wrote, "To drawen folk to heven, with fairnesse, By good example" but it was much more widely used to refer to beauty, colouring, gentleness, courtesy, even the weather, than our modern concept of fairness. Nor was it something embedded in religious tradition but rather it owed more to the development of the legal system, the development of equity courts, and the struggle to have people treated equally before the law … and even there it continues to make heavy weather of fairness …

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Aimee Semple McPherson was born in Ontario in Canada in 1890 and was only seventeen when she began preaching. In 1908 she went briefly to China with her first husband who was a missionary. But it was her success when she arrived in Los Angeles which made her a household name. The Angelus Temple there cost one and a half million dollars to build. It was the heart of her empire in which she was simply known as Sister Aimee. I have come across various reports suggesting she had a monstrous ego, that she effectively 'gobbled up' any men in her life, that she was constantly involved in litigation; in other words she was the archetypal American evangelical monster.

But I came away from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, from Daniel Mark Epstein's biography, and from a short piece in *God's Generals* by Roberts Liardon, with the image of an exciting dynamic woman deeply concerned with salvation, healing, crossing racial barriers, and

social needs. Certainly she did become embroiled in controversy because she took people away from mainstream male-run churches, because she was naïve in business matters, because she was often too preoccupied to give much attention to choosing her staff carefully, and after being widowed she divorced her second husband. (Which may explain why other evangelists prefer to sneak their extra-marital affairs in the back door rather than admit that their marriage is a failure.) In a sense she set the tone for later evangelists by continually looking at ways she could reach more people. This involved setting up a radio station and a Bible school, editing a magazine, writing books and pamphlets and founding 200 other missions across the country. But unlike many evangelists who see themselves as the worthy recipients of their followers' giving she seems to have had a simple belief that she was merely the conduit for money to reach the poor and needy and she saw her church as being socially as well as religiously active in the community. Her son took over her work after her death and it remains a major aspect of Pentecostal outreach.

And among her books were *This Is That, In the Service of the King, Give Me My Own God,* and her autobiography *The Story of My Life*. I was intrigued by the title *Give Me My Own God*. Did this mean she had radically changed interpretations of the Bible? Did it mean she had blunted the patriarchal nature of Christianity? Did it mean that she had constant visions and revelations which undermined her traditional beliefs? The book proved to be part of her ongoing combination of autobiography and ministry—and in which she records her meeting with Mahatma Gandhi.

But as I pondered on her I realised the animus she faced probably owed a lot, not to her personal flaws and foibles, but to the simple fact that she was a woman succeeding very publicly in what had always been a male province. If thousands of people flocked to hear her every week who then could say with authority 'Women Can't Preach'?

* * * * *

"Following the Melbourne meetings, we embarked on a series of brief stops in Tasmania and New Zealand. In Hobart, the capital of Tasmania, an electrical failure cut off the floodlights and plunged the platform and much of the arena into a faint dimness. The crowd could barely see the platform, and I could sense them growing restless. When I got up to preach, I tried talking to them about the delicious Tasmanian apples that I had been enjoying. Still the restlessness continued. At that point, a small boy walked up the steps of the platform, paused to ask Bev a question, then stepped forward and presented me with a fine, big apple. His openness delighted the crowd, and from that moment on I had their undivided attention." So wrote Billy Graham of his 1959 tour of Tasmania in his autobiography *Just As I Am*.

I found the book tedious at times as it dwelt on what things cost or showed him with a parade of politicians. The book has some small howlers, such as "An itinerant evangelist to Stone Age animists in Irian Jaya (northern West Irian) sold all the pigs that were his means of livelihood in order to raise money to attend the (1983) conference". I was horrified by the idea of holding a crusade in a bullfight arena. Would those same Christians agree to a crusade in an abattoir? And although he was rabidly anti-Communist I liked his sense of enthusiasm and dedication and his willingness to go to places like North Korea with a reasonably open mind.

He expresses something of the dilemma which many evangelical Christians gloss over when he notes the gap between his belief that revival is about repentance and faith whereas bodies like the World Council of Churches talk of social and political justice. But it is only partly a gap. The WCC severely blotted its copybook when it avoided, year after year, speaking out on East Timor for fear of offending Indonesia. Their social justice is always tempered by pragmatism. Evangelism at its best cares for people's bodies as well as their souls. At its worst it is a cash cow for unscrupulous men and women. Somewhere in the middle it is well-meaning people, well-fed, nicely-dressed, who jet in to poor countries and give people a moment's forgetfulness, like a Roman circus, of the miseries that abound in their daily lives. And somewhere too, and rarely, it is something capable of opening doors on new perspectives and ways of understanding life …

Why do people go along to Crusades and Revival meetings? What impact does it have on their lives? And perhaps most curiously why have so few writers wished to delve into the

phenomenon, except occasionally to poke mild fun? More than 100,000 people turned up to hear Billy Graham in Melbourne. How do all those people remember the experience? Did it change their lives? How do they feel when they look back from forty years on?

* * * * *

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, 'revival is a season of glorious disorder' and 'This is the heart of revival: to be in the presence of God.'

Other people have written in similar terms: 'This is revival: when the Spirit of God brings us into His presence.' (*Fire in the Islands!* Alison Griffiths writing on the Solomon Islands.) I have come upon glimpses of revival and change in Ireland, in Canada, in South America, wherever an inspired speaker has come with a message. I think that is one of the keys to revival, perhaps even the most important key, because I am yet to find a place where such renewal 'took off' under the aegis of a stumbling confused barely-audible speaker. When we speak of 'spell-binding' oratory we are expressing something important about the nature of evangelism.

Almost anyone can improve their speaking skills. I am willing to attest to that. Organisations like Toastmasters and Rostrum clubs and debating societies can help. So can amateur theatricals or a good and nurturing class teacher. And if you can't get to meetings there are some good books out there. One I like is *Never Be Nervous Again* by Dorothy Sarnoff.

She tells this delightful story: "I was in the theater for many years and until I was in *The King and I*, I went on stage every night with terrible stage fright. My heart would pound; I'd say to myself, Why am I here? But one night while I stood in the wings with Yul Brynner, waiting to go on, I discovered the beginning of my physical control of nervousness. Yul Brynner stood there in the wings pushing a wall in a lunging position as though he'd like to knock it down, grunting as he did it. I said, "Yul, what do you do that for?" He said, "It helps me control my nervousness."

So I tried it, without the grunt, and sure enough, I never got stage fright again. Not only that, but the contraction of pushing the wall seemed to give me a whole new kind of physical energy. From then on, whenever I was waiting in the wings to do concerts, operas, nightclubs or television, I use this exercise of pushing a wall and — no nervousness.

When I became a public speaker, I couldn't very well go to the program chairman and say, "Excuse me, I feel a little shaky. I have to go push a wall." So I asked myself just what I was doing when I was pushing the wall. What could I do while I was waiting to go on that nobody would see and would give me the same control?

I discovered that what you do when you push a wall is contract the rectis abdominis muscles. These are the muscles that lie below the ribs where they begin to splay. This is the vital triangle. Contracting these muscles can have miraculous results.

To understand how these muscles work, try this. Sit down in a straight-backed chair. Carry your rib-cage high, but not so high you're in a ramrod-straight military position. Incline slightly forward. Now put your hands together out in front of you, your elbows akimbo, your fingertips pointing upward, and push so that you feel an isometric opposing force in the heels of your palms, and under your arms.

Say SSSSSSSS, like a hiss. As you're exhaling the S, contract those muscles in the vital triangle as though you were rowing a boat against a current, pulling the oars back and up. Now the vital triangle should feel like you're tightening a corset. Relax the muscles at the end of your exhalation, then inhale gently.

Contracting those muscles prevents the production of noradrenaline or epinephrine, the fear-producing chemicals in your system. While you're waiting to go on, sit with your vital triangle contracting, your lips slightly parted, releasing your breath over your lower teeth on a silent SSSSS. You can do it anywhere without anyone noticing. And nothing, absolutely nothing will be able to make you nervous!"

And yet Spurgeon's own life was changed by a stumbling preacher. A fierce snowstorm in mid-nineteenth-century London meant he couldn't get to his usual place of worship so he went into a little Primitive Methodist Chapel; their minister had not been able to get there and a member of the congregation came forward reluctantly. Using the day's text of 'Look unto Me and

be ye saved, all the ends of the earth' he started in: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, "Look." Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your fingers; it is just "look." Well, a man needn't go to college to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, "Look unto Me." Ay! Many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, "Look unto Me." Some of ye say, "We must wait for the Spirit's workin'." You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, "Look unto Me." ' It is a reminder that as well as the speaker and the message there needs to be a listener who is seeking …

Most evangelists are prolific writers as well. Billy Graham is not unusual in having written more than twenty books. But we rarely think of famous preachers as writers. I think that is understandable. Although I was not impressed by *John Ploughman's Talks* I was interested in the image of C. H. Spurgeon as the most popular preacher in Britain in his day; possibly the most popular nineteenth century preacher anywhere. From a Dutch Protestant background, the eldest of seventeen children, it was as a Baptist preacher that he made his mark, giving his first sermon at the age of sixteen and by the time he was in his early twenties he was preaching to six thousand people and more every week. The Metropolitan Tabernacle Hall in London was built to accommodate his congregation and still wasn't big enough. Clearly he, as a speaker, was able to make his words come alive. The DNB says he had 'a clear and sympathetic voice'. J. C Carlile in his biography of Spurgeon says, 'One of the most famous dramatic critics of the day, Sheridan Knowles, described him as "absolutely perfect in his oratory." Knowles declared that had he been on the stage, Spurgeon easily would have filled the largest theater.' He was also said to speak with humour and fervour. But curiously it was his youth which initially drew many people. One of those who heard him speak was Scot William McGonagall in 'Descriptive Jottings of London':

Then there's Mr Spurgeon, a great preacher, which
no one dare gainsay,
I went to hear him preach on the Sabbath-day,
And he made my heart feel light and gay,
When I heard him preach and pray.

And the Tabernacle was crowded from ceiling to floor,
And many were standing outside the door;
He is an eloquent preacher I honestly declare,
And I was struck with admiration as on him I did stare.
But he ends with the odd statement:
Mr Spurgeon was the only man I heard
speaking proper English I do declare.

Spurgeon founded a magazine called *Sword and Trowel*. But his largest number of writings were his sermons, more than two thousand of them, which were collected up and sold as books and found readers in many remote places around the world, including Tasmania; and when his son Thomas Spurgeon visited Hobart in 1878 thousands turned out to hear him deliver several of his father's best known sermons.

He said of his way of preparing his sermons: 'I frequently sit hour after hour praying and waiting for a subject, and this is the main part of my study; much hard labor have I spent in manipulating topics, ruminating upon points of doctrine, making skeletons out of verses and then burying every bone of them in the catacombs of oblivion, sailing on and on over leagues of broken water till I see the red lights and make sail direct to the desired haven.

'Unstudied thoughts coming from the mind without previous research, without the subjects in hand having been investigated at all, must be of a very inferior quality, even from the most superior men, and as none of us would have the effrontery to glorify ourselves as men of genius or wonders of erudition, I fear that our unpremeditated thoughts upon most subjects would not be remarkably worthy of attention.

‘Our sermons should be our mental lifeblood—the outflow of our intellectual and spiritual vigor; or, to change the figure, they should be diamonds well cut and well set, precious intrinsically and bearing the marks of labor. God forbid that we should offer to the Lord that which costs us nothing.’

Interestingly, Carlile also includes the ideas of some other famous nineteenth century preachers on preparing sermons.

‘I am like a man who has an apple tree in his garden and knows that some of the apples are ripe. He reaches up and feels expectantly among the many hanging on the boughs, till at last one drops readily into his hand and he crunches it with joy. So, when I am getting ready for Sunday morning, I feel through my mind to find a thought that has been slowly ripening through experience. It falls naturally toward me, and I bite into it with relish.’

(Ward Beecher)

‘For myself I can only say that I always have my theme for the following Sunday chosen by Tuesday morning, and I work steadfastly Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday mornings on the development of the theme but I always write in order to clarify and define my thoughts, then I draw off an outline of what I have written and speak from the outline I have made.’

(Dr Fosdick)

‘In making a sermon I first of all fix my mind on a suitable theme and then try to find a text that fits it. Sometimes the process is reversed and a great verse from scripture leaps into my mind like a tiger from a thicket. I then assemble all the literature I can muster which has bearing upon the matter and con it over. I afterwards write out the sermon in my own hand.’

(Dr Parkes Cadman)

His wife Susannah brought out his letters, diaries, and notes as a four-volume autobiography after his death. But I got the impression that as well as his youth, people came hoping for hellfire and damnation, for the controversies he entered into with other more libertarian preachers, (though he was outspoken on issues such as slavery, causing an American boycott of his writings by saying ‘Slavery is the foulest blot that ever stained a national escutcheon’, and he had a great empathy with animals) and for his belief that Biblical scholarship, both archeological and textual, was being used to water down the moral messages of the *Bible*. It is an interesting question still. Which matters most in a speech? The content or the delivery? A writer depends on the content. But a great orator can make a page of pedantic writing into something more than its words and its meaning.

Was Jesus just such a ‘spell-binding’ preacher? Did those who wrote down his words struggle to capture the essence of what had inspired and changed them? And did they find that, valuable though their attempts for posterity were, they could never recapture the inimitable glory of his spoken words with all the passion and sincerity and sense of wonder and hope they carried? And is this why he terrified the Roman governors? Was he put to death not because of his message or who he claimed to be but because his speaking had created ‘a season of glorious disorder’?

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June 20: Anna Laetitia Barbauld
June 21: Ian McEwan
Christopher Wray
June 22: Julian Huxley
June 23: Richard Bach
June 24: Queen Victoria
June 25: George Orwell
June 26: Colin Wilson
June 27: Lucille Clifton
June 28: Luigi Pirandello
June 29: Agnes Williams
June 30: Czeslaw Milosz

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Robyn Mathison sent me this attractive little poem; I had not previously heard of the author nor, I realised, did I know anything at all about Polish poets or Polish poetic traditions.

After every war
someone has to tidy up.
Things won't pick
themselves up, after all.

Someone has to shove
the rubble to the roadsides
so the carts loaded with corpses
can get by.

Someone has to trudge
through sludge and ashes,
the sofa springs,
the shards of glass,
the bloody rags.

Someone has to lug the post
to prop the wall,
someone has to glaze the window,
set the door in its frame.

No sound bites, no photo opportunities,
and it takes years.
All the cameras have gone
to other wars.

The bridges need to be rebuilt,
the railroad stations, too.
Shirtsleeves will be rolled
to shreds.

Someone, broom in hand,
still remembers how it was.
Someone else listens, nodding,
his unshattered head.
But others are bound to be bustling nearby
who'll find all that
a little boring.

From time to time someone still must
dig up a rusted argument
from underneath a bush
and haul it off to the dump.

Those who knew
what this was all about
must make way for those
who know little.
And less than that.
And at last nothing less than nothing.

Someone has to lie there
in the grass that covers up
the causes and effects
with a cornstalk in his teeth,
gawking at clouds.

'The End and the Beginning' by Wislawa Szymborska from *View With a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems*. I must admit I had never heard of Szymborska but I was curious enough to go to the most recent *Writers' Directory* and find a life, a writing record, even a home address: Ul. Krolewska 82/89, 30 – 079 Cracow, Poland. A faraway and unknown poet suddenly seemed touchingly real and 'near' …

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In fact the two aspects of Polish writing which came immediately to mind had little to do with poetry. The stories of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the language created by Ludovic Zamenhof which became known as Esperanto. And yet they are both natural outcomes of a tragic modern history.

Recently I was reading *Master Race* by Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman about the Nazi kidnapping of blonde blue-eyed Polish children. They point out, as others have done, 'It is an irony that scarcely any of the Nazi leaders would have passed their own racial tests: Hitler was no blond beauty, Goebbels was deformed, Goring overweight, Bormann bandy-legged, and Hess probably mad.' But I think this is one key to their obsession. If they had felt confident that they met their own ideal they might not have been so driven to create a nation in which everyone met the same criteria. There is a very large dollop of inferiority and failure at work.

They suggest that at least 200,000 Polish children were kidnapped during WW2. "Usually, and quite naturally, there was fierce resistance from the adoptive parents when it was suggested the children should go — as in the case of Alojzy Twardecki and his German parents. Sometimes the children would be moved out of the family house and hidden in another town so that the authorities could not trace them. Yet even when children were returned, their reunion with their natural parents at the railway station was often a shock and a disappointment to both sides. Some children were unable to recognise mothers whose physical appearance had been altered by the ravages of war. Sometimes, unless the mothers spoke German, they had no common language in which to talk. This was, after all, precisely what the Nazis had intended.

"Yet if it was Himmler and his accomplices who had masterminded this calculated deconstruction of family ties, the victorious Allies, ironically enough, helped ensure that the Nazi aims were partially achieved. Just as the Germans placed their national ambitions above any concern for human suffering, so did the Americans, the British and the French let the prosecution of the Cold War come before the interests of bereft Polish families. Unwittingly, following Himmler's precept about not presenting your potential enemies with the gift of future leaders, they placed a low priority on sending Polish children back to the East. As so often in the past, the Poles were assigned the role of victims.

"Because of all the obstacles in the way of repatriation, fewer than 40,000 Polish children went back from Germany and former German territories after the war — about a fifth of the estimated total of those taken." And how many might have enriched Polish literature?

The death of a man is like the fall of a mighty nation
That had valiant armies, captains and prophets,
And wealthy ports and ships over all the seas,
But now it will not relieve any besieged city,
It will not enter into any alliance,
Because its cities are empty, its population dispersed,
Its land once bringing harvest is overgrown with thistles,
Its mission forgotten, its language lost,
The dialect of a village high upon inaccessible mountains. ('The Fall')

Budberg: a familiar name in my childhood.
They were prominent in our region,
This Russian family, descendants of German Balts.
I read none of his works, too specialized.
And Chen, I have heard, was an exquisite poet,
Which I must take on faith, for he wrote in Chinese. (from 'The Magic Mountain')

The purpose of poetry is to remind us
how difficult it is to remain just one person,
for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors,
and invisible guests come in and out at will. (from 'Ars Poetica')

from *Bells in Winter* by Czeslaw Milosz

The interesting thing about Milosz's poetry is the twin obsessions of language and landscape and the way they constantly intertwine. When I read his account of his own life and background in *Native Realm* it suddenly seemed to all fall into place. Like other writers who see themselves as 'outsiders' in a place, in a language, it takes on additional aspects, things that probably go unnoticed by its everyday speakers, by the people who have looked out on the same landscape every day of their lives.

I liked his reflections. You might too.

Speaking of the trade in amber he wrote, 'This was the only sign of habitation that came from the wooded region on the Baltic until the end of the Middle Ages, when the forest dwellers became a scandal for Christianity. As long as all minds were preoccupied with the spread of the True Faith, and the main theme of chivalric songs and legends was the struggle with the infidel, it is no wonder that those provinces, which the light of the Gospel had never penetrated, stirred up fears and reminded men of their unfulfilled duty. Europe, too, had her redskins, who served notice of their presence in constant armed attacks, appearing unexpectedly and just as suddenly withdrawing to their inaccessible retreats. To the neighbouring Slavs, their language was incomprehensible; the level of their technical knowledge, if measured by their armaments, was inferior to that of their adversaries. Their bows, spears, and leather-covered shields had to stand up against suits of armor and the lance, but their swiftness of maneuver made up for this shortcoming. It was during this epoch that the generic name for these tribes first made its appearance: "Litwa," or Lithuanians. To what extent they could be called barbarians or savages it is hard to determine, owing to the inadequacies of written sources and the biased judgments of the Christians. They had a rather complicated religious organization supported by a hierarchy of priests. Gradually, as they extended the boundaries of their possessions, they organized themselves into a state. In the year 1226, the Polish prince of Mazovia, as a defense measure against the Lithuanian raids, called in the Teutonic Order of the Knights of the Cross and allowed them to settle in the territory later known as East Prussia. From that moment, the Lithuanians' main enemies were knights from various Western countries, who looked something like tanks and who wore over their armor white capes emblazoned with a black cross.

'All that happened a long time ago, but Europe has retained the memory of her struggle with the last pagans of the Western world in her collective consciousness—true, the memory is hazy, but it is conspicuous enough in certain modern Catholic catechisms. For example, in Christenfibel, the work of Pieper and Raskop, two German theologians, we read: "But during this second period, new peoples entered the Church's orbit: beginning with the thirteenth century, Teutonic Knights conducted battles and skirmishes on the frontiers of the West in the name of the Church and the Empire. They subdued the Prussians, battled with the Lithuanians, penetrated to Latvia and Estonia, and pushed on as far as Peipus Lake.

'How much the accident of our birthplace can separate us from the set of opinions held elsewhere may be worth noting here. Even the most primeval tragedies of a people endure because they are given permanence by proverbs, folk songs, whatever is handed down by word of mouth, and later they become the stuff of a nation's literature. The image of an exterior darkness,

of peripheries, where only zealous missionaries ventured, was so firmly rooted in the minds of the two German theologians that they thought it fitting to set it forth along with the truths of the Faith. But in my childhood I was shown a completely different picture. The epic of the Christian mission was, in effect, an epic of murder, violence, and banditry, and for a long time the black cross remained the symbol of an evil worse than the plague. All my sympathies, therefore, went out to the "noble savages" who defended their freedom and knew why they defended it: because wherever the Teutonic Knights were victorious, there they built their castles and transformed the local population into a herd of slaves toiling for the profit of the Order.

'The books that recounted the heroism of these pagans and described places with familiar-sounding names fell into the hands of my companions and myself at an age when our initial reactions were being formed and they must have left a deep psychic imprint. The consequence of such reading was surely an instinctive loathing for violence disguised as ideology and a skeptical attitude toward the apologetics of all "civilizers." '

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David Crystal wrote in *Language Death*, 'An anecdote reported by the Dauenhauers deserves repeating: Jewish writer Isaac Singer was once asked in an interview why he wrote in Yiddish, as it was a dying language. 'So I like ghost stories', Singer replied. 'Also, I believe in the resurrection. What will all those Jews have to read when they come back to life if I don't write in Yiddish?' ' A friend lent me a book of stories by Isaac Bashevis Singer years ago. As I was handing it back I said I hadn't particularly liked them. She said she too had found them disappointing. But then she said 'I wonder if it was the translation?' Since then I have wondered about that too. In fact I have wondered about it in regard to all translations. Did the translator capture both the straightforward aspects of the plot and story—and the more subtle nuances? There is really no way to tell unless you can go to the original.

Poland was also the home of that brave attempt to circumvent this recurring problem and create an international language: Esperanto.

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July 1: Dorothea Mackellar

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Dorothea Mackellar is remembered by generations of schoolchildren for her immortal lines 'I love a sunburnt country,/ a land of sweeping plains', although as we get hotter and hotter we may have more difficulty with her verses. They may end up banned from schoolbooks because they are a reminder of the folly of older generations.

But the other day I came upon her poem called 'On a Tasmanian Road' which is a lovely change of pace and climate.

Though curfew now has sounded for the butterflies and bees,
All the fires of autumn are burning in the trees.
Grey and cold as steel the sky, yet to left and right
Stand walls of polished hawthorn burning bright, burning bright.

Sunset: balsam colours in a brittle crystal sky;
Through the dusk the owls hunt past, hooting as they fly
Small and cold and lonely like forgotten bells;
Streaming down the wind come all the tangled orchard smells:
Woodsmoke, earth and apple-sweet: now the stars burn white—
Hurry home to blazing logs this frosty night!
And just the thing to enjoy on a July evening.

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July 2: Herman Hesse
July 3: Franz Kafka
July 4: Stephen Collins Foster
July 5: George Borrow
July 6: Catherine Fanshawe

July 7: Robert Heinlein
July 8: Charlotte Perkins Gilman
July 9: June Jordan
Dean R. Koontz
July 10: Aphra Behn (chr)
Edmund Clerihew Bentley
July 11: Robert Greene (bap)
July 12: Pierre Berton
Petrarch
July 13: Fanny Burney
Isaac Babel
July 14: Owen Wister
Gertrude Bell
Ingmar Bergen
Isaac Bashevis Singer

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I came upon the suggestion somewhere that the 'Father of the Western' was a writer called Owen Wister. I knew nothing about him but I looked him up in Kunitz & Haycraft's *Twentieth Century Authors* which has the enigmatic statement, 'Writers of cowboy novels and editors of "Western" pulp-magazines have more reason to be grateful to him than, perhaps, they altogether realize.'

Jane Candia Coleman introduces her book of stories *Moving On*, which I quite enjoyed, with the claim that she wanted to explore some of the sense of ethnicity (and women's contributions) to the Western genre. But she also says, "Those who survived and triumphed in the West had strength, courage, hope. It is their stories that need to be told, not tales of weaklings or failures, cry babies or revisionist anti-heroes. Then, as now, the American Wild West stands as a symbol of possibilities."

When I first read this I thought it is curious that the image of the Australian Outback is so different. But the more I pondered on it the more it came to me that the American Wild West, for all its colour and larger-than-life quality which has spawned millions of stories, films, radio shows, articles and news items, was marked by a curiously negative feature: a profound death-wish.

Jane Tompkins in *West of Everything* wrote: "To go west, as far west as you can go, west of everything, is to die. Death is everywhere in this genre. Not just in the shoot-outs, or in the scores of bodies that pile up toward the narrative's close but, even more compellingly, in the desert landscape with which the bodies of the gunned-down eventually merge. The classical Western landscape is a tableau of towering rock and stretching sand where nothing lives. Its aura of death, both parodied and insisted on in place names like Deadwood and Tombstone, is one of the genre's most essential features, more seductive than the saloon girls' breasts, more necessary than six-guns."

There are many differences between the two experiences.

The Australian Outback wasn't explored by larger-than-life heroes; it was explored by ordinary people with very ordinary desires and ambitions and with all the gamut of human attitudes and emotions. Nor has anyone seriously suggested otherwise. It is also a place in which women, though few in numbers, played out normal roles. They weren't good-time gals in saloons, nor were they in need of help from brave men when their cattle disappeared, nor did they peer out from 'prairie schooners' with their broods of flaxen-headed children. They were ordinary women trying to bring up ordinary children in a strange land and having the usual round of successes and failures. I like it that we've always managed to keep our feet relatively close to the ground.

And there is another curious difference. We see the Outback, the farms, the little country towns that were springing up, as like as not through the eyes and rhythms of the many who turned to verse. Newspapers often made space for poetry, much of it of very modest worth, but a way for

people to get their ideas and experiences and anecdotes and humour into print. The US had its famous poets of this era—Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and more—but they rarely took the West as their subject. Whereas it is hard to think of an Australian poet who didn't take country life, horses, cattle, loneliness, drought, remoteness, as subject matter.

But Coleman's book is a reminder that there are two 'Wild Wests': the real frontier where non-indigenous people steadily pushed out over Indian land with all the turmoil and tragedy and guilt and justification and violence and anger that involved; and the imagined Wild West of book and film which grew as the real West diminished in people's minds.

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"It has happened in other countries that what was once looked upon condescendingly as being unworthy of art became, almost overnight, the body and soul of the highest art. It happened in Germany and in Russia early in the last century. I believe it will happen in our own country when western legends and myths, western folklore, become the basis of a sophisticated art. There is no lack of snobbism among eastern intellectuals toward western materials. Some academic writers and critics, who enjoy western films, deride the notion that in the more serious realm of the novel the same materials can be used to good and true effect. The frontier may be closed, finished; no doubt it is—the geographical one. But there are other frontiers—the frontier of a cultural *tone*, for example. These are important also. They contain elements which the geographical frontier created or inspired. The frontier has gone underground, and if this is a calamity to the adventurer it is not necessarily so to the artist, in particular the writer. There is a free-swinging sense of things in the West which has long been missing in the East. The ghost of Europe hovers over the East." So wrote Charles Neider introducing *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*.

Probably the two best-known writers of the real West, 'as it happened', were Bret Harte and Mark Twain. They poured out magazine stories about life in the small dusty towns and mining camps and were immensely popular in their day. But when it came to reinventing the West they were seen as unsuitable models. There were too many *women* in their stories … and not nearly enough *guns* …

Harte's stories have faded with time, perhaps because his determination to have a twist in each tail makes them seem a little artificial. And his stories not only have too many women and not enough guns, they also challenge the simple white-red conflict of the West.

In 'An Episode of Fiddletown' Harte wrote, "On the road to Sacramento he was twice playfully thrown from the top of the stagecoach by an intelligent but deeply intoxicated Caucasian, whose moral nature was shocked at riding with one addicted to opium-smoking. At Hangtown he was beaten by a passing stranger—purely an act of Christian supererogation. At Dutch Flat he was robbed by well-known hands from unknown motives. At Sacramento he was arrested on suspicion of being something or other, and discharged with a severe reprimand—possibly for not being it, and so delaying the course of justice. At San Francisco he was freely stoned by children of the public schools; but by carefully avoiding these monuments of enlightened progress, he at last reached, in comparative safety, the Chinese quarters, where his abuse was confined to the police and limited by the strong arm of the law."

Not only was the real West ethnically diverse, it was also deeply racist.

"He had never seen a steamboat in his life. Born and reared in one of the Western Territories, far from a navigable river, he had only known the "dugout" or canoe as a means of conveyance across the scant streams whose fordable waters made even those scarcely a necessity. The long, narrow, hooded wagon, drawn by swaying oxen, known familiarly as a "prairie schooner," in which he journeyed across the plains to California in '53, did not help his conception by that nautical figure. And when at last he dropped upon the land of promise through one of the Southern mountain passes he halted all unconsciously upon the low banks of a great yellow river amidst a tangled brake of strange, reed-like grasses that were unknown to him. The river, broadening as it debouched through many channels into a lordly bay, seemed to him the ultima thule of his journeyings. Unyoking his oxen on the edge of the luxuriant meadows which

blended with scarcely any line of demarcation into the great stream itself, he found the prospect "good" according to his lights and prairial experiences, and converting his halted wagon into a temporary cabin, he resolved to rest here and "settle." " ('In the Tules')

Far from galloping behind great glossy pounding horses, with Indians whooping in their rear, most wagons plodded along behind oxen, mules, donkeys, or broken-down old horses. Someone said to me that more people died of starvation because of the death of their animals or the breakdown of their wagons than the entire number killed in Indian attacks.

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The man who probably did the most to establish the genre of the Western novel was a man called Frederick Faust who was born in Seattle. He wrote under many names including Max Brand and Owen Baxter. He wrote in many genres, including poetry and film scripts (including the Dr Kildare series), but he is still easiest to find in the shelves of Western novels. Yet he is curiously unlike the image of the Western writer. Everything I found about him stressed his enjoyment of the poetry he wrote and some pointed to a dreamlike aspect to his work. Worse still he went to live and write in Italy and was killed there while acting as a war correspondent during WW2. And yet that aspect of 'Dreaming the West' which at first glance seems so alien to a down-to-earth, tough-guy, non-literary genre, is its vital underpinning. If the West was no longer to be based on the wry homespun yarns of everyday life such as Mark Twain, Bret Harte, and countless other short story writers did for the era's newspapers and periodicals—then writers essentially had to *dream* a new and different era.

Myriam Miedzian wrote in *Boys Will Be Boys*: 'In a New York *Time's Magazine* article, author William Manchester, who fought in Asia in World War II, tells us that when his rifle company was polled on why they had joined the Marines, a majority cited a war fantasy with John Wayne called *To The Shores of Tripoli*.

'Manchester recalls, "after my evacuation from Okinawa, I had the enormous pleasure of seeing Wayne humiliated in person at Aiea Heights Naval Hospital in Hawaii … Each evening, Navy corpsmen would carry litters down to the hospital theater so the men could watch a movie. One night they had a surprise for us. Before the film the curtains parted and out stepped John Wayne, wearing a cowboy outfit — 10-gallon hat, bandanna, checkered shirt, two pistols, chaps, boots and spurs. He grinned his aw-shucks grin, passed a hand over his face and said, 'Hi ya, guys!' He was greeted by a stony silence. Then somebody booed. Suddenly every one was booing.

"This man was a symbol of the fake machismo we had come to hate, and we weren't going to listen to him. He tried and tried to make himself heard, but we drowned him out, and eventually he quit and left."

The Wild West of countless books, films, and TV serials is fake through and through. But its creation, which I had initially thought of as a kind of nostalgia for something which never really existed but which meets the same purpose as all the people who sigh for 'the good old days', was both a political and a social creation.

Jane Tompkins says that this West "functions as a symbol of freedom, and of the opportunity for conquest. It seems to offer escape from the conditions of life in modern industrial society: from a mechanized existence, economic dead ends, social entanglements, unhappy personal relations, political injustice. The desire to change places also signals a powerful need for self-transformation. The desert light and the desert space, the creak of saddle leather and the sun beating down, the horses' energy and force—these things promise a translation of the self into something pure and more authentic, more intense, more real.

"The hero of Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), says in a moment of rare self-revelation: "Often when I have camped here, it has made me want to become the ground, become the water, become the trees, mix with the whole thing. Not know myself from it. Never unmix again." (280). In Westerns the obsession with landscape is finally metaphysical. The craving for material reality, keen and insistent as it is, turns into a hunger even more insatiable. "My pa used to say," says a character from Louis L'Amour's *Galloway* (1970), "that when corruption is visited upon the cities of men, the mountains and the deserts await him. The cities are for money but the high-

up hills are purely for the soul." The same is true of the Western. Thriving on physical sensation, wedded to violence, dominated by the need for domination, and imprisoned by its own heroic code, the Western appeals finally beyond all these to whatever it is the high-up hills betoken."

It is a world not made for just anybody to enter. You have to be a white male, English-speaking, fit, in good health, tall enough to be accepted by the police … Everyone else is just there as window-dressing. The tradition is not only racist and sexist but it grew up in direct antipathy to all that the Eastern United States meant: it has no time for culture or education, and little for deep thought, interesting chat and conversation; it is diametrically opposed to city life and all that comes with it including a range of comforts and possessions; and to go one step further it is anti-Christian. The gun has replaced the cross. Jesus is that wimp who died on the cross instead of pulling out his hardware and mowing down everyone from Pontius Pilate to the Jewish elders. Religion is for women and children in Sunday Schools and Bible readings—and weak men. It has nothing to do with men pitting their strength against nature. Religion is about looking at yourself and the world you live in, examining yourself, being honest about your sins and failings, working to make the world a more compassionate and loving place … the West is about dying in a blaze of blood and glory. Ultimately it is about copping out.

Laurie Powers wrote of the pulp Westerns her grandfather Paul churned out: "Over the twenty-five year period from 1920 to 1945, at least 162 different Western magazines hit the news-stands at one point or another. At one point in 1940, there were thirty-six pulp Western magazines for sale. Much of this popularity can be attributed to the fact that the Great Depression was considered the Golden Age for the Western. Americans could not get over their love affair with the Wild West, despite the fact that the frontier was declared "closed" in 1890. Millions of people still packed up and moved West, hoping to find the life that the West always seemed to promise. Those that didn't move went to the picture show, paid 24c, and watched reel after reel of "B" Westerns—many of which were spin-offs from pulp Western stories—that starred a cavalcade of cowboy stars. And millions more paid 10c for 114 pages of a pulp magazine with no ambiguity in the stories and where the good guy always won.

"Once readers read a pulp magazine, they passed it around to other friends. Each issue was, as Sonny's creator wrote, "literally read to pieces." Reader after reader escaped into a world where, at least for a few hours, they could live on a big ranch rather than the stifling apartment in the city. They could look out over a cliff at magnificent landscapes, breathe the clean air, tame that wild bronco, and eat a five-course breakfast. They could derive satisfaction from storylines that meted out appropriate judgment to characters that could always be counted on to have the same characteristics. Bankers were greedy and corrupt, town officials were not to be trusted, lawmen were inept, and those who reeked of bad breeding were murderous and amoral. A common theme in the pulp Western is the downfall of the greedy rancher who bilks poor farmers out of their land—but they always receive their due in the end. Reading a pulp Western story allowed the reader to pretend, at least temporarily, that society's problems could be solved with a swing of a saloon door."

But as I was musing on this I thought perhaps it could go one step further. As fascism rose in Europe and found a pleasant echo in the USA it homed in on this idea of reclaiming something pure, untrammelled, brave, heroic, of creating men of steel. Everyone else was expendable. In a sense the Nazis were attempting to live imaginary lives in an imaginary Wild West. Not having the real thing to blunt this kind of rage at modern civilised life they turned to domination and war. But the Americans had a vigorous and vital imagined West to turn to every week at the cinema and the bookshop and on the wireless. It was almost as though American men didn't need to seek real violence in real space and genuine landscapes—because they had cheap, easy, and constant access to the fake version.

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At the other end of the spectrum from the literary style of Faust were the simple ungrammatical anecdotes and homespun cowboy lore of Will James. He was born Joseph Dufault in Quebec in 1892 and while other boys ran away from home to go to sea or to war he seems to have been so captivated by the idea of the 'west' that he ran away to become a cowboy.

I have just been reading his *All in the Day's Riding* which I found quite interesting.

Some time ago I was looking for an ancestor called John Beauchamp on the internet. A great many connections came up but they were nearly all for a western artist of that name. I was reminded of this when I came upon Will James's work because he was probably the quintessential western artist. He illustrated his books and magazine articles with pictures which are very much the stereotypical western cowboy, bucking bronco, and mountainous background.

James writes, "I'm thinking I've sure bit off a big chunk to chew on when I took it onto myself to tell some of the cowboy of to day because these cowboys of today, even tho they're the same as them of fifty years ago, are scattered over a powerful big territory, a bigger territory than the old time cowboy ever knowed.

"To day you'll find the cowboy in Hollywood and doing work there with horse and rope that none other but a cowboy can do. The cowboy has been in Europe, and there to contest with others of his kind on bucking or rope horse for the prizes that were offered for the winner. He can be seen in such places as New York or Chicago and riding his bucking horse there the same as he does on the range, only he's riding in an arena and in front of a crowded grand-stand. Last October the world's best riders, which comes only from the western part of the United States, when it comes to bronc riders, was gathered at New York for another big annual rodeo there.

"But that ain't where you'll see all the cowboy of to day, not by a long shot. The good old range that once was stirred and tracked by big buffalo herds and ponies' hoofs has kept many spaces which are still sure enough wide and open. In them few spaces which scatters here and there along both sides of the Rockies and from Canada to Mexico you'll find the cowboy of today still doing pretty well the same work his old man has done.

"It's true of course that there's no more Indians that needs fighting, and that the longhorn cattle which was trailed from Texas to the Northern ranges has been replaced by the white-faced Hereford, and even the long trails themselves are all cut up by strands of barb wire, but to the west of them trails is still a lot of open territory left … "

Although generations of children played 'Cowboys and Indians' it was the US Army which fought the indigenous people across the west, not the cowboys. But James's main focus is on cowboy lore, such as the following snippet, and anecdotes about horses, cattle, and more rarely people. I suspect James was drawn to the life simply because he loved horses.

"At the head of his bed is the war bag, a flour sack or some such like, which takes the place of a pillow. To make it soft or give it size, there's accumulated in there many things which is part of a cowboy's needs—tobacco sacks and cigarette papers, strips of buckskin and latigo leather to mend things with, some odd spurs, a marlinspike, and wrapped up with care might be the picture of some girl, a few frazzle-edged letters, and maybe some touchy poetry which has been tore out of old magazines. The cowboy might lay a coat over the war bag to make it extra soft, and if a spur rowel or something digs him in the ear, all he has to do is turn the bag over and pound it some. It's pretty well like finding the soft side of a boulder, but anyway, that's the cowboy's pillow, and he's glad to lay his head on it when night comes."

I like the idea of cowboys reading poetry but now I know why they are always portrayed as so ratty, so quick to get into fights—they never got a decent night's sleep!

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"In the old West (something I know about only from the movies, which are to history as comic books are to literature) the worst crime you could commit was the stealing of a horse. A horse was a man's livelihood, his transportation, his love-object, his life.

Thus, when a Westerner wanted to berate someone (without using blasphemy or obscenity, which the movies used to frown upon) he would use a gradually intensifying series of beratements something like this: 'You low-down, ornery, varmint of a sheep-herdin' hoss-thief.'

Horse-thief was the worst you could call a man. The definite impression I got was that if you called a person a 'hoss-thief', it didn't even do any good to smile.

Calling names didn't stop horse-theft, however.

On a more practical note, I gathered from the movies that frequently, when a person was found astride someone else's beloved horse, he was strung up on the spot, without waiting for such effete details as a trial.

That didn't stop horse-theft, either.

In fact, nothing stopped crime, generally, in all the history of the world. The Lord himself, in the ten commandments, said in plain Hebrew: 'Thou shalt not kill!', 'Thou shalt not steal!' and so on, yet in the thirty-five centuries since Moses brought those tablets down into the Israelite camp, that has not helped.

We have had ferocious punishments, and that has not helped; and increasingly sophisticated police forces, and all the power of advancing technology, and that has not helped, either.

What can help? Well, in the case of a particular crime, like horse-theft, there are two possible hopes. Make sure that everyone already has all the horses he can possibly want, or fix it so that horses are relatively worthless.

No one but a few idealists think that everyone can be supplied with horses (or, in a more general sense, that social justice can be attained), but how about the second alternative?

You see, automobiles were invented, and horses stopped being so gol-darned, dad-rotted (whoops, I'm talking western) necessary. I suppose there are still people who will steal a horse just to be mean and ornery, but it is no longer the problem it used to be."

(*Computer Crimes and Capers*, introduced by Isaac Asimov)

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I was browsing in Robin May's *Facts and Figures of the Wild West*, looking for information on one slice of history which always intrigued me, the history of the Pony Express, ever since I was young and used to enjoy Rex Dixon's Pocomoto books such as *Pocomoto—Pony Express Rider* and *Pocomoto—Tenderfoot*. Pocomoto is a young orphan boy who goes to live with relatives and meets a Pony Express rider Laredo. From the books I gained the impression that the Pony Express was a major means of communication throughout those turbulent years. So I was astonished to learn that the Pony Express, so embedded in Western mythology, only ran for eighteen months.

It began in 1860 and ran from St Joseph, Missouri, to Sacramento, California. The advertisement said: 'Wanted — young, skinny, wiry fellows not over eighteen. Must be expert riders, willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.' As well as the fictional Pocomoto real characters such as William Cody ("Buffalo Bill") rode the route at the age of fourteen. These young lads were expected to average 14 kilometres an hour on their ponies. And it was true that several were killed along the way.

The Pony Express "ended in October 1861 after only eighteen glorious months. The reason was simple: the trans-continental telegraph line had just been completed. Poor Russell, Majors and Waddell were ruined as the service had been wildly expensive to run, though 34,753 items of mail had been carried by their valiant — and world-famous — young riders."

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The 'Wild West' is now taken as the period from approximately the end of the American Civil War to 1900. Its geographical location is approximately west of the Mississippi through to California. But writing about it has now split into about four very different strands, though there is still a market for the traditional Western and publishers looking for manuscripts to fill that market.

The *Encyclopedia of Frontier and Western Fiction* by Jon Tuska and Vicki Piekarski trawls widely in its choice of entries; including writers who are not usually identified as writers of Westerns such as James Fenimore Cooper, Ridgwell Cullum, Howard Fast, Brian Garfield, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Ken Kesey, D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Anne Porter, Theodore Roosevelt and Jessamyn West. They also include such interesting sidelights as General Custer's wife, Elizabeth, who wrote three books, *Boots and Saddles* (1885), *Tenting on the Plains* (1887), and *Following the Guidon* (1890), but she was more concerned with keeping her husband's reputation bright and pure than in giving an insight into the life she found as an army wife in the Wild West.

Alongside the traditional Western there is the historical strand which takes in books such as Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (where 300 Lakota Indians were massacred in 1890), Mari Sandoz's *These Were the Sioux* and some of Peter Mathiesson's work (though it must be said these are all white writers) as well as biographies of particular characters. I recently came upon a biography of Wyatt Earp in a book exchange. There is the continued reprinting of the novels, short stories, articles, and poems written and published before 1900; and Mark Twain's large output still makes a lot of the running. And there is the modern cowboy novel. Larry McMurtry and Tom Robbins immediately spring to mind. But I think this strand could also expand to include some of the work of John Steinbeck and earlier writers who used western places and work and cattle but don't fit the designation of 'Western fiction'.

The Western does not have a high reputation either as story or as writing—and having now read around fifty offerings I would endorse that view. Bennett Cerf wrote in *Try and Stop Me*, 'An advanced student of literature unearthed from *Spicy Western Stories* a gem that read: "She was silent a long time. He could smell the perfume wafted upward from between her proud breasts, placed so cleverly on the lobes of her ears." *The New Yorker* snapped it up, of course, and added the perfect comment: "Novel, but we wouldn't like it as a steady thing." ' And spicy?

Although I haven't come on anything to match that I rarely came upon writing to excite me. Bill Pronzini, introducing Western writer Frank Bonham, wrote, 'The conventional cowboy hero has been written about to voluminous excess; endless minute variations on the same themes—range wars, rustling, cattle drives, the itinerant cowhand whose life is fraught with personal peril—make for dull reading after a while, and are in part responsible for the general critical view of the traditional western as cliché-ridden and substandard.'

Bonham himself wrote, tongue in cheek, 'Actually, I knew my Ratty words and phrases by heart, and the wand was unnecessary, for I could write without flinching, "a bullet tore into his slab-muscled thigh." All his heroes, early-day Mr. Americas, had slab-muscled thighs. Once a magazine made a typo and it came out "slab-muscled thing."

'Hell of a place to get shot, pardner.'

(Ratty refers to Ed Oliver Ratt, a prominent Western writer and editor, who encouraged a particular style of melodramatic and clichéd prose.)

An occasional good plot, sometimes a delight in horses, an occasional snippet of western lore, now and then a vibrant sense of the landscape—but my enjoyment was almost always tempered by the relentless violence, obvious plots, and cardboard characters.

And what of those frontier words? Many of them come from the Spanish language. Canyon. Mesa. Hombre. Arroyo. Sombrero. Corral. Chaparral. Rodeo. Chaps (from chaparejos). And so on. But I was intrigued to learn that 'posse' comes from the Latin 'posse comitatus' meaning 'the force of the county'. And 'sheriff' comes from the Old English designation 'scirgerefa'; scir = shire and gerefa = reive …

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Peter Mathiesson in *Indian Country* provides an important reminder that at the heart of the West, in both fact and fiction, was the conflict over land.

"In the late forties, the long Hopi resistance to encroachment by the Americans became organised. In 1947, Chief Sackmasa of the Coyote Clan decided to reveal to the leaders in his kiva certain teachings and prophecies that he had been instructed to keep secret "until a gourd of ashes fell from the sky," boiling water, burning the land, and leaving ashes where nothing would grow for years to come; this gourd of ashes would be a sign to the Hopi to declare their prophecy and message to the world before it was too late. Then another man stood up and said he had been told to speak "when the Coyote spoke." Other leaders of other clans had similar instructions, and all of them agreed with Sackmasa that "the gourd of ashes" could only be the terrible atomic bombs that the white man had dropped two years before at Alamogordo, New Mexico, three hundred miles away, and later at Hiroshima and Nagasaki." They put together a letter for President Truman in 1948 which read in part:

"Today we are being asked to file out land claims in the Land Claims Commission in Washington, D.C. We, as hereditary Chieftains of the Hopi Tribe, can not and will not file any

claims. … We will not ask a white man, who came to us recently, for a piece of land that is already ours.

"Neither will we lease any part of our land for oil development at this time. This land is not for leasing or for sale. This is our sacred soil." …

Other tribes and clans found themselves in a similar struggle but always on the banks of a canyon in which the other side saw the land through totally different eyes. The Western mythology could do nothing to bridge that gap. Despite an occasionally lyrical description of the landscape it was still about land as a commercial entity, what it could be made to produce, what it was worth per acre.

Mathiesson went on, "(In addition to mines and tailings piles, the Church Rock Navajo are also threatened by what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has called the worst contamination in the history of the nuclear industry; not long after the antinuclear demonstration at Mount Taylor, on July 16, 1979, the dam at a United Nuclear Corporation tailings mill pond gave way near Church Rock, releasing ninety-five million gallons of radioactive water into the Rio Puerco, that once-great, now-dead tributary of the Rio Grande. Although the pond had been overfilled, and the dam itself was known to be cracked and fissured, this event got almost no publicity, unlike the spectacular episode at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, which reminded the world that a nuclear disaster was "inevitable." In northwestern New Mexico, events have been unspectacular, insidious, and slow, and so far, most of its victims have been Indians—conditions which apparently permit the authorities to ignore a nuclear tragedy that has already occurred.)"

"It is estimated that about seventy-five percent of known uranium reserves in the United States are currently controlled by the seven major oil corporations (Kerr-McGee and Gulf control more than half, mostly through leases on Indian lands)—hence the huge power of the uranium lobby to prevail over human welfare and common sense, not to speak of the law of the land. Most or all of the companies exploiting the Grants Mineral Belt are here illegally, since they have rarely or never bothered to prepare the environmental impact statements that are required by the National Environmental Policy Act, far less submit to public hearings and obtain approval from the government agencies involved.

"In regard to Indians, the U.S. government has customarily suspended its own laws wherever these got in the way of commercial expedience, and never more so than in collusion with the great energy consortiums that are looting the Southwest (and the Great Plains) under the red-white-and-blue banner of "energy independence" for America. In 1977, for example, in approving an Exxon lease for uranium prospecting on four hundred thousand acres of Navajo land, the Secretary of the Interior waived thirteen regulations of his own department, including the lease area limit of 2,560 acres."

And so it goes on. An old tale retold. As Aimée and David Thurlo put it in *Plant Them Deep*, 'At the second site, farther north and in the foothills, Rose showed Sadie land that had been ravaged by uranium mining. Few things grew here, though the mines had closed many years ago. Settling ponds that had once been filled with contaminated water had been left uncovered like open sores. "Children still swim in those during the rainy season, and livestock drink the runoff where it collects," Rose said. "The land here is cursed. Our people believe that knowing the name of your enemy gives you power over him, so we named the uranium dust *Yeetso*, yellow monster. Once it was freed and allowed to roam our land, all *Yeetso* has done is cause us pain." '

So should the modern Western incorporate this sense of degradation and contamination, alongside traditional themes of race, conflict, heroism, and greed?

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Controversy and dismay erupted in the US when writers like Bruce Johansen (author of *Debating Democracy: Native American Legacy of Freedom* 1998) suggested that the American Constitution owed as much to the Iroquois Federation as to any European model. This makes a lot of sense. Hollywood needed Indians only as warriors. What it determinedly overlooked was the way in which many tribes had developed workable democratic institutions, diplomatic relations, and sophisticated tribal federations. The early 'settlers' on the eastern seaboard could not help but become aware of this tradition. They also could not help noticing that the Indians

they met were frequently highly intelligent, self-sufficient, and had rich and complex languages … which pioneering Europeans rarely tried to learn beyond a few simple trading words.

'The Cherokee Nation once ruled 135,000 square miles of North America, including parts of what are now eight states. Unlike the Plains Indians, so popular with producers of Western movies, the Cherokee lived in log cabins, wore turbans, and adopted the European style of dress. With Sequoyah's alphabet, their language became transcribable in the 1820s.

'In 1838, in one of the more infamous betrayals in modern history, the Cherokee were forced from their homes and driven 1,200 miles west to Oklahoma on a death march christened the Trail of Tears. The survivors came to be known as the Western Band Cherokee. The Eastern band is composed of the descendants of those who hid out and remained in the Smoky Mountains.

'As I drove past signs for the Oconaluftee Indian Village, the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, and the outdoor drama *Unto These Hills*, I experienced my usual anger at the arrogance and cruelty of manifest destiny. Though geared toward the dollar, these contemporary enterprises were also attempts at heritage preservation, and demonstrated the tenacity of another people screwed over by my noble pioneer ancestors.' (from Kathy Reichs' *Fatal Voyage*)

There is, of course, the consolation that those noble pioneer ancestors were never wimps.

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One thing I used to notice when I ran a market stall was that I would quite often be asked if I had any Westerns. The request would invariably come from an elderly man.

Of course women were in both places, the Outback and the Wild West, as wives and mothers and daughters, occasionally as farmers or hotel owners or shopkeepers in their own right, as prostitutes and employees, and, in the case of female Aborigines and Native Americans, usually as victims, yet the Wild West was reinvented as 'bloke's business' … and I think this is an important reason why women though they may enjoy Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Neilson, Spencer, Gordon, Steele Rudd and many other Australian writers of the period are rarely major readers of Westerns.

But the Wild West wasn't entirely 'bloke's business'. I came upon this piece of information in May's book: "Who was the most remarkable stagecoach driver? … Probably the most remarkable was 'one-eyed' Charlie Parkhurst, 'the greatest whip in the West'. One day Charlie was held up by a robber called 'Sugar-Foot' and decided it was high time to become expert with a six-gun, and when the two met again, 'Sugar-Foot' lost. When tough, baccy-chomping Charlie Parkhurst died in 1879 an odd fact emerged."

Charlie Parkhurst was a woman.

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A publisher of Frederick Faust alias Western writers, Max Brand, George Owen Baxter, David Manning and others, wrote "much that happens in a Western story by Frederick Faust depends upon an interplay between dream and reality. There will come a time, probably well into the next century, when a reëvaluation will become necessary of those who contributed most to the eternal relevance of the Western story in this century. In this reëvaluation unquestionably Zane Grey and Frederick Faust will be elevated while popular icons of this century such as Owen Wister, judged solely in terms of their actual artistic contributions to the wealth and treasure of world literature, may find their reputations diminished. In such a reëvaluation Faust, in common with Jack London, may be seen as a purveyor of visceral fiction of great emotional power and profound impact that does not recede with time."

Owen Wister's reputation now rests principally on his novel *The Virginian.* Wister's grandmother was Fanny Kemble, the English actress who married a southern slave-holder Pierce Butler, and was very unhappy. She wrote *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838 – 1839* after she had left him and returned to London. Her daughter Sarah married an American doctor Owen Jones Wister. She was a cultured intelligent woman, a friend of Henry James, but also a woman with little outlet for her talents. She pressed her son Owen to do the things she couldn't. His aim was to be a concert pianist and he played for Liszt who believed he had the necessary talent. But his father stepped in, refusing to pay for piano lessons in Europe and

insisting he go into business back home. He acquiesced but it brought on various nervous troubles. He married a distant cousin. But in the middle of his own unhappiness and resentment at life someone suggested he go west for his health.

The result was *The Virginian*.

I would have to say that although I was curious to read the book I didn't particularly like it.

So why was the book so popular when it first came out?

Theodore Roosevelt had already brought out his 4-volume-history *The Making of the West*, as well as personal accounts of his attempts to 'tame the wilderness' and 'expand the frontier' and shoot large bears. But these were about the grand myths, the heroic actions, the vision of a place to be conquered. I think Wister because he made the West sound everyday, accessible, domestic, mildly misogynistic, set in attractive landscapes, just different in its small details, also helped people to believe that they too could live there safely, if only in the imagination. They didn't have to be armed and ferocious to find a niche there … He wrote of his intentions for the book, 'What is become of the horseman, the cow-puncher, the last romantic figure upon our soil? For he was romantic. Whatever he did, he did with his might. The bread that he earned was earned hard, the wages that he squandered were squandered hard, — "blown in." as he expressed it, or "blowed in," to be perfectly accurate. Well, he will be here among us always, invisible, waiting his chance to live and play as he would like. His wild kind has been among us always, since the beginning: a young man with his temptations, a hero without wings.'

He did not trouble his readers with the moral dilemmas of Indian land; he reinforced people's attitudes to the rightness of the death penalty. And in the end, as his Virginian ceases to be simple cowboy and becomes settled and wealthy, he provided a Western version of the American Dream. He did what Americans expect of their Fathers …

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July 15: Clement Clarke Moore
Clive Cussler
July 16: Dorothy Cottrell
Christopher Koch
Anita Brookner
July 17: Christina Stead
July 18: Margaret Laurence
Vidkun Quisling
Robert Hooke

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Chinua Achebe wrote in 'An 'If' of History':

… Had Hitler won,
Vidkun Quisling would have kept
his job as Prime Minister
of Norway, simply by
Hitler winning.

Cause and effect might not have been that straightforward but it fitted neatly into my image of Quisling, the man who added his name to the language for 'traitor'. But I came across a mention of Quisling's earlier history in *The Unwanted* by Michael R. Marrus. "During the years 1922-23, Nansen's agents were working feverishly in the Ukraine, establishing centers for the homeless and starving, apparently feeding between twelve million and fifteen million people. Nansen's brilliant protégé, Vidkun Quisling, practically ruled large areas of the Ukraine in 1922 and later advocated recognition of the Soviet government when he returned to Oslo the following year." This image is that of a hard-working, brave, idealistic and compassionate man. So my question was: what happened to turn one Quisling into the other? Was it simply the greater rigidity and conservatism that comes with age? Did something happen to disillusion him? Was it a severe case of 'compassion fatigue'? Or did he believe that by seeming to link Norway to Nazism he might actually protect his country? I might never have got round to trying to answer my questions except that I noticed Hans Fredrik Dahl had written a biography of Quisling.

I found myself often feeling a sympathy for Quisling particularly in his early years. The son of a pastor, who wrote the name as Qvisling in its long journey via Quislinus from the Danish placename Kuislemark in Jutland, he had an interesting and quite happy childhood. His father wrote a three volume work *The Souls of Angels* and then *The Christian Teaching on the Devil* which led to him being described as "Norway's foremost authority on the Devil". But far from being either fore-runners of New Age ideas or studies in the occult these were conventional studies on Biblical references. He joined the army, one of his brothers Jorgen chose to become a doctor and wrote *Sexual Studies* in 1921 (which was seen as daring and controversial for its time; "Since male sexual desire is more concentrated in the phallus, and female desire radiates in many diffuse directions out from the uterus, the male is more easily aroused by the female body. The male body is nowhere near as exciting for the female as the female body is for the male." …) and later *Philosophy: The Anthropomorphic System*. The desire to come up with a universal system which would incorporate and explain everything seems to have been a family foible. Vidkun later spent years working on his system which he called Universism.

His only sister Esther died and he was later to say that his humanitarian work was inspired by her. He was sent as military attaché to the Norwegian legation in Petrograd in 1918 and saw the Russian revolution at first hand. He learnt Russian and was later said to have an "encyclopaedic knowledge of Russia". His knowledge and experience led to him being recruited by Norwegian explorer and humanitarian Fridtjof Nansen. "He shared Nansen's view of a humanitarian duty which transcended politics"; though he later came to believe that Nansen's view of the world was naïve. He was painfully shy, rather clumsy, intelligent, hardworking, modest and deeply Christian and described as being "wonderful with children". But his value to Nansen was partly his army training. In the chaotic situation in the Ukraine in 1922 no one appeared to know how many people were at risk of starvation, when and where … nor where the supplies of food were going. Quisling put together a clear and detailed report which went to the League of Nations, 'Famine Situation in Ukraine'. "The famine, Quisling stated, had been brought about by a combination of civil war, government requisitioning, failed agricultural policies, the Allied blockade and the severe and enduring drought of the summer of 1921, which had reduced the crops to a fraction of the normal yield." One of the underlying problems he faced had no easy resolution. There was no shortage of food outside the Ukraine but European governments, still hoping the Bolsheviks would fail, had no wish to prop them up—and the new rulers in Moscow through a combination of ineptitude and using food as a political weapon could not be trusted to distribute food to those most in need.

"Altogether, it is possible that around a million Ukrainian lives were saved; of these, two hundred thousand under Quisling's administration, the rest mainly by the much more efficient and wealthy American Relief Administration of Herbert Hoover, who preferred to give less to many more of the victims than did the Nansen system."

While in the Ukraine Quisling apparently married twice; this curious situation has never been explained, not least because no paperwork for either 'wife', Asja or Maria, has ever been found. It seems possible that he saw his work of saving lives in a more personal way than merely humanitarian relief. Asja later migrated to the USA, Maria remained with him till the day in 1945 when he was shot by a firing squad for treason and murder.

He went to France as things improved in the Ukraine but later became involved with the attempt to help Armenian refugees from Turkey to settle in the small Soviet Republic of Armenia. He did most of his years of work without pay but in the end he failed to get Russian support or permission for the program. It is hard to say how deeply disillusioned he became because of the realisation that the Communists had no interest in humanitarian work—his attitude towards the new regime in Moscow had always been critical and yet with some ambivalence towards aspects of communism.

He worked for a Norwegian company in Russia and was accused of illegal trading in roubles; yet no support for this claim has ever been found. He returned to Norway and wrote a number of well-regarded essays including 'The Recognition of Russia' which led to the Norwegian government formally recognising the Bolsheviks as a fait accompli, 'Political

Thoughts on Fridtjof Nansen's Death', 'The Language Struggle in the Ukraine', 'Russia and Peace' and a book *Russia and Ourselves*.

Then he turned to politics in the chaotic Depression years. People at first regarded his interest in Russia with deep suspicion, believing him to want to import communism, but as he, always serious and conservative by nature, moved further to the right he found himself, after a nasty incident when he was stabbed and bashed in his office, being accused of inventing the attack so as to discredit the Left. His brand of national socialism owed most in these years to his anti-Bolshevik beliefs and his rather rigid interpretation of Christianity. But, first Italy then Germany began to woo him. It was a slow process. Fascism found stony ground in Norway and he never seems to have understood that what Hitler was offering was not a form of friendship and brotherhood—with Germany as big brother and Norway less important but retaining its independence in "free, federal forms". Goebbels desribed him as "a typical reddish Germanic blond, a little tired, a little absent-minded". By the time he became disillusioned and humiliated by the knowledge that Hitler was using him it was far too late. And if his relations with Hitler demonstrate anything it is that people with poor self-esteem are at great risk when stronger-minded people come wooing. It might be said in his favour that he never sought to deny what he'd been and done unlike other figures who reinvented themselves as resistance heroes as the tide of war turned. And unlike other fascists he was not personally greedy, clinging to the idea that after the war he would like to live quietly as a country pastor.

But he did take on board Hitler's racial theories. On one hand he strongly identified Jews with Bolshevism and Trotskyism. On the other hand he believed he had been defrauded when it came to selling his art collection and that most of the dealers were Jews. He was undoubtedly defrauded but the background of the various dealers was less clearcut. And although he appears to have been kept in the dark about the deportation of more than 700 Jews from Norway he had made it far easier for Reichskommisar Terboven and his henchmen by legislating to distinguish and separate out Norwegians of Jewish origin.

While in prison he wrote his ideas down in *Universistic Aphorisms*. Then on an evening in October 1945 he "sat down to write his last message to Maria, thanking her for her loyalty and love" then, in the early hours of next morning, he was taken out, insisting he did not want to be blindfolded because he "wanted to look death in the face". His request was ignored and the man whose surname "became a byword for traitor in nearly every language" was shot dead.

Would Norway have suffered more or less without him in those traumatic war years?

There is no simple answer to that question.

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July 19: Ernest Buckler
A. J. Cronin
July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith
July 21: Hart Crane and …

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I had the idea of occasionally going to something, a sport, a place, an exhibition, a shop, completely outside my normal routine but as it was Winter I thought I would do something much simpler, till Spring. I would go into the library and I would choose one book from the fiction shelves with my eyes closed and one book from the For Sale trolley, again choosing blind. That way I wouldn't drift towards authors and sections I already tend to patronise. I thought I would do it in Glenorchy where they know me sufficiently well not to be perturbed by the sight of a woman acting oddly. So this is the way it has been turning out:

21 July (2005): 1. *A Guide for the Perplexed* by Jonathon Levi. (I wonder if my sub-conscious knows something I don't?) 2. *Kill Claudio* by P. M. Hubbard.

29 July: 1. *Galatea 2.2* by Richard Powers. 2. *Bulbs, Corms, and Such* by Millicent E. Selsam.

18 August: 1. *Meadowland* by Thomas Holt. 2. *The Uninvited* by Nick Pope.

9 September: 1. *The Defector* by Evelyn Anthony. 2. *Furnace* by Muriel Gray.

23 September: 1. *The Lady in the Car with Glasses and a Gun* by Sébastien Japrisot. 2. *A Secret History* by Mary Gentle.

7 October: 1. *Seek My Face* by John Updike. 2. *Damage* by Josephine Hart.
2 December: 1. *Hunger* by Lan Samantha Chang. 2. *Heart to Heart* by Miriam Hodgson.
29 December: 1. *Postscripts* by Claire Rayner. 2. *Someone's Mother is Missing* by Harry Mazer.
24 February: 1. *The Bride* by Margaret Irwin. 2. *Marriages* by Amy Witting.
10 March: 1. *Saints of big Harbour* by Lynn Coady. 2. *Monsieur de Brillancourt* by Clare Harkness.
6 July: I thought I would round off my year of Mystery Reading with two more books. The Glenorchy Library was closed for a while after a fire in the reference section and they didn't have their Sale trolley out again. So I chose my two books from the shelves: 1. *Plant Them Deep* by Aimée and David Thurlo. 2. *A Perfect Peace* by Amos Oz.

Would I have picked any of these books off the shelves in the normal way of things? Possibly not. Yet, to varying degrees, I enjoyed them all.

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The leaflet for the *Books Alive* program recently came my way. The awful truth is that I found its whole presentation and scope and selections DULL. It isn't that some of the books being promoted aren't excellent books. It is that that isn't the way to promote books and reading. If people take down a mentioned book and don't enjoy it, the whole idea is stillborn. They may grit their teeth and say 'well, I'll give another book a try.' But I don't think it's a question of promoting particular books as a way to get people to read—or to read more. There are far more basic questions to be answered. Do people feel comfortable with their level of literacy? Do they find libraries and bookshops welcoming places? Are they getting the help they ask for? Are they being urged to buy books which are too expensive, too big, too detailed, too literary, too technical, for what they need? (This is probably a question which should be given top billing. Recently I was urged, as librarian at the Quaker Meeting House library, to buy a new history from the UK. After discussing it with various people I went ahead and ordered it despite blanching at the price of £43. A library probably does need to hold the major books that come out. But I couldn't help noticing that the Quaker 'books' which fly off the shelves are things such as the Pendle Hill pamphlets from the US; small things of 20 to 30 pages but dealing with topical issues. They can be read in one sitting, they can be fitted in to a handbag, they can be read in bed or while travelling …)

And, as someone said, there *is* something patronising about a government-funded program to get us to read. If someone recommends a book I am certainly willing to give it a try. But the basic assumption of people in high towers that I as part of the hoi-polloi mightn't be reading enough and therefore should be urged to read more is off-putting. It is probably why government-funded campaigns to get us to eat more vegetables don't get very far … that underlying sense of 'we know what is best for you' …

And since starting my Mystery Book Tour I can say: who needs a stranger to steer them towards something to read when a whole wonderful world of small surprises is there for the taking?

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'What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumble puppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions". In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.'

Amusing Ourselves to Death by Neil Postman.

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I suppose the Books Alive program is a kind of guide for the perplexed; like those sheets libraries do: if you enjoyed Georgette Heyer try these authors, etc. But the original *Guide for the Perplexed* was the book written by the famous Jewish scholar Moses Maimonides.

Frederick II wrote one lasting book *De arte venandi cum avibus* (The Art of Hunting with Birds) on falconry, which he based on Aristotle's *De animalibus*; like most medieval courts his attracted poets and scholars, though his image as an enlightened and tolerant ruler, with his court as a 'great centre of learning' does not really stand up very well to close scrutiny; and his life ended in a long drawn out battle, shades of the struggle between Henry II and Thomas a' Becket, with Pope Innocent IV but made much more complicated by his dual hats as King of Sicily and Holy Roman Emperor. Both men, though, died of natural causes.

David Abulafia says of his milieu, "Of all the translations made in southern Italy in Frederick's reign, the most important was surely that of a work originally written in Arabic but then put into Hebrew, whence it reached the court of Sicily and the scholars of Naples. Moses ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides, or Rambam, sought in the *Guide for the Perplexed* to reconcile the world-view of Aristotle with the dictates of Jewish religious teaching. His most fervent modern admirers tend to ignore this work in favour of his more orthodox works that had no such impact outside Judaism; he is thus a cult figure both for the orthodox and for the anti-fundamentalist wings of modern Judaism. But the *Guide* had among its early readers the scion of a south Italian noble famly, well-liked at court, Thomas Aquinas, and he too, like Maimonides and Averroës, was to attempt the reconciliation of Aristotelianism with his faith. Michael Scot may have had a hand in the translation from Hebrew, but in fact his Hebrew, though he knew some, seems rather faulty, at least in surviving manuscripts. As with the translations from Arabic, this must have been team-work, with Jew, Christian and where appropriate Muslim sitting together and communicating in the vernacular romance they had in common. Certainly, Frederick's court was not packed with Jewish scholars. Frederick brought Jews to his kingdom of Sicily to help cultivate the soil, but expressed reserve about allowing in too many or permitting them greater religious freedom than canon law assigned them. Scholars were to some extent above these rules, but Frederick was no enthusiastic philo-Semite; he shares the attitudes of his more educated contemporaries, and no more. Set against the saintly, hysterical Jew-baiter Louis IX of France he easily appears a man of sense and moderation, but similar views to his could be found even in papal circles, and influenced his own outlook. Not to deny that occasional Jewish scholars were presented at court: the ibn Tibbons and Judah ha-Cohen certainly knew Frederick personally, and were on good terms with Michael Scot. At the very highest rung of the intellectual ladder there were scholars of all three religions who were willing to confront together problems they shared, in science or even religion, such as the proof of God's existence or the eternity of matter. Although the court of Frederick provided some opportunities for this work, that of Castile was a more effective pestle in which ideas could be ground together; it really did contain representatives of the three religions and enjoyed readier access to the texts of Arabic learning, many themselves first written in Spain."

I found the book described as a guide 'for', 'to', and 'of' the Perplexed. Just another little perplexity! But *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy* says of it, "From his own testimony in a letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the translator from Judeo-Arabic into Hebrew of his major philosophical work, *Dalalat al-Ha'irin* (Guide of the Perplexed), we know that, in addition to Aristotle, whom he held in the highest esteem, Maimonides was influenced by philosophers in the Islamic world, especially al-Farabi.

"Maimonides' prominence as a spiritual authority is evidenced by his extensive *Responsa* to legal, religious, and philosophical questions sent to him by Jewish communities in both Islamic and Christian lands and by the *Mishneh Torah*, a work written in Hebrew in which he sought to present a clear systematic exposition of the Oral Law in order to make it fully accessible to all Jews. His prominence as a physician is attested by his medical writings and by his appointment as court physician to al-Fadil, Salah al-Din's vizier.

"The *Dalalat al-Ha'irin* has as its explicit aim the resolution of perplexity at the apparent tension between philosophy and revelation, a perplexity felt most acutely by those educated in both the Torah and philosophy. It is to this audience that the *Guide* is addressed. Maimonides diagnoses the source of his readers' perplexity as, on one hand, a strong intellectual desire, leading to an inordinate haste in the pursuit of knowledge, and, on the other hand, improper instruction in divine matters', that is, "improper interpretation of the Bible in relation to philosophy"; which makes the controversies which surrounded him understandable.

He was born about 1138 "in Córdoba in Muslim Spain, whence his family was forced to flee in 1148, after the Almohads conquered Andalusia." He settled in Cairo where he wrote his famous book. He died in 1204.

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July 22: Emma Lazarus
Dr Spooner
July 23: Coventry Patmore
July 24: John Newton
François Vidocq
July 25: Elias Canetti

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"Basil Taylor, who had been one of my sub-editors on *Cherwell*, had become a talks producer at the BBC, and early in 1945 he suggested that I should review books for them. The prospect terrified me; I was plagued by a nervous sniff and cough when I tried to speak in public (though not when acting); once I had returned to Oxford to address a literary club and had made an embarrassing hash of it. But he persuaded me that I could, something for which I have always been grateful; apart from all else. I could never otherwise have accepted the lectureship in Sweden which was to shape my life. My first talk dealt with recent novels by Maugham and Joyce Cary and one by an unknown Bulgarian writing in German, Elias Canetti's *Auto-de-Fé*. This last had been sceptically received in Britain, but it greatly excited me, and I extolled it at the expense of the other two. This earned me an invitation to tea with Canetti in Hampstead. A squat, shock-haired man, he seemed childishly grateful, and played me a record of animal and bird noises recorded in the jungle which we both thought remarkable. He remained largely unrecognized in Britain; thirty years later, when I was elected to the Royal Society of Literature, I was astonished to find that he was not even a Fellow, and nominated him unsuccessfully to be a Companion, an honour they grant to supposedly outstanding writers. The following year he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature."

(Michael Meyer in *Not Prince Hamlet*)

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I must admit I was surprised to discover Elias Canetti was born in Bulgaria; I had always, though without thinking about it very deeply, assumed he was Italian. But as my view of Bulgaria was of a place which bristled with large wrestlers and weight-lifters and, in a more historical vein, was the place on behalf of whose people Gladstone fulminated, this wasn't surprising.

So I was also surprised to read this in Jeffery Deaver's book *The Blue Nowhere*. "Bulgaria probably has more hackers per capita than any other country. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of Central European Communism the Bulgarian government tried to turn the country into the Silicon Valley of the former Soviet Bloc and imported thousands of codeslingers and chip-jocks. To their dismay, however, IBM, Apple, Microsoft and other U.S. companies swept through the world markets. Foreign tech companies failed in droves and the young geeks were left with nothing to do except hang out in coffee shops and hack. Bulgaria produces more computer viruses annually than any other country in the world."

It seemed a timely moment to read *A Concise History of Bulgaria* by R. J. Crampton. The thing which intrigued me most was the 19th century renaissance in Bulgarian culture and political life. It grew out of the focus on education and the development of the vernacular. It seems incredible that at the beginning of the 19th century there were no schools at all in Bulgaria, only some teaching in monasteries. In 1834 a lay school was set up "on the Bell-Lancaster system in

which older children taught the younger ones." By 1840 there were thirteen schools. By 1850 every sizable community had a school and by 1878 "there were an estimated 2,000 schools in Bulgaria. Almost all of them were financed by local guilds or by the village council or its urban equivalent." The problems were equally great when it came to teaching materials. The first grammar book being produced in 1824. But there was no standard Bulgarian; grammar, spelling, and usage varied and final decisions on standardisation were not made until the 1870s. "In addition to schools the spread of literacy and education was aided by the *chitalishta*. The English translation of this word is usually 'Reading Room' but cumbersome English 'Community Centres' come nearer to capturing the essence of this particularly Balkan institution. The *chitalishta* provided books and newspapers as well as places in which to read them, but they were also used to stage plays, to conduct meetings, and to present lectures. In many of them adults were taught the rudiments of reading and writing and in later years they were convenient venues for secret conspiratorial gatherings." With the growth of literacy came Bibles in the vernacular, printing presses, poetry and novels, literary societies … in other words a vibrant written culture. And eventually Bulgaria's Nobel Laureate for Literature, Elias Canetti.

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I had read Canetti's *Crowds and Silences* but I noticed the library had his *A Torch in My Ear*; the only trouble with that, I soon discovered, was that it was the *second* volume of his autobiography; although there was only a three year gap between the volumes the library told me the first one was 'too old' for them to stock. But in the serendipitous way things happen I was down in the Hobart Bookshop looking for a book a friend in Ghana had asked for—and there was his first volume *The Tongue Set Free*. The second volume is set in Frankfurt and Vienna but I soon realised that two of the aspects that inform his later life, his memories of the vibrancy of his early years in Bulgaria and his immense affection, sometimes tempered by exasperation, for his mother, are also the cornerstones of his childhood.

He writes: "Ruschuk, on the lower Danube, where I came into the world, was a marvelous city for a child, and if I say that Ruschuk is in Bulgaria, then I am giving an inadequate picture of it. For people of the most varied backgrounds lived there, on any one day you could hear seven or eight languages. Aside from the Bulgarians who often came from the countryside, there were many Turks, who lived in their own neighborhood, and next to it was the neighborhood of the Sephardim, the Spanish Jews—our neighborhood. There were Greeks, Albanians, Armenians, Gypsies. From the opposite side of the Danube came Rumanians; my wetnurse, whom I no longer remember was Rumanian. There were also Russians here and there. …

"Ruschuk was an old port on the Danube, which made it fairly significant. As a port, it had attracted people from all over, and the Danube was a constant topic of discussion. There were stories about the extraordinary years when the Danube froze over; about sleigh rides all the way across the ice to Rumania; about starving wolves at the heels of the sleigh horses.

"Wolves were the first wild animals I heard about. In the fairy tales that the Bulgarian peasant girls told me, there were werewolves, and one night my father terrorized me with a wolf mask on his face.

"It would be hard to give a full picture of the colorful time of those early years in Ruschuk, the passions and the terrors. Anything I subsequently experienced had already happened in Ruschuk. There, the rest of the world was known as "Europe," and if someone sailed up the Danube to Vienna, people said he was going to Europe. Europe began where the Turkish Empire had once ended. Most of the Sephardim were still Turkish subjects. Life had always been good for them under the Turks, better than for the Christian Slavs in the Balkans. But since many Sephardim were well-to-do merchants, the new Bulgarian regime maintained good relations with them, and King Ferdinand, who ruled for a long time, was said to be a friend of the Jews."

He provides an interesting insight into the Sephardim community. "The loyalties of the Sephardim were fairly complicated. They were pious Jews, for whom the life of their religious community was rather important. But they considered themselves a special brand of Jews, and that was because of their Spanish background. Through the centuries since their expulsion from Spain, the Spanish they spoke with one another had changed little. A few Turkish words had been

absorbed, but they were recognizable as Turkish, and there were nearly always Spanish words for them. The first children's songs I heard were Spanish. I heard old Spanish *romances*; but the thing that was most powerful, and irresistible for a child, was a Spanish attitude. With naïve arrogance, the Sephardim looked down on other Jews; a word always charged with scorn was *Todesco*, meaning a German or Ashkenazi Jew. It would have been been unthinkable to marry a *Todesco*, a Jewish woman of that background, and among the many families that I heard about or knew as a child in Ruschuk, I cannot recall a single case of such a mixed marriage."

Around him were the Gypsies with their colour and movement but also accused of stealing children; the Bulgarian girls who did much of the everyday housework and laundry; the Turks who kept their womenfolk behind barred windows; and his friend who chopped the wood, the 'sad Armenian', who "sang songs, which I couldn't understand, but which tore my heart. When I asked my mother why he was so sad, she just said bad people had wanted to kill all the Armenians in Istanbul, and he had lost his entire family."

His mother is a fascinating thread through his writing. "Although the literatures of the civilized languages she knew became the true substance of her life, she never felt any contradiction between this passionate universality and the haughty family pride that she never stopped nourishing." Highly intellectual, interested in every aspect of culture, warm and passionate, but also snobbish and sometimes difficult, she suffered from the limitations imposed on women in her era, but she also had the ability and the money to indulge many of her passions. His closeness to his mother means that his autobiographical writings are as much her biography as his life story.

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And in case I hadn't got my fill of Canetti I came upon his book with the curious title *The Conscience of Words*. Colour, life, emotion, meaning—all these things I had given to words but conscience? I couldn't resist finding out what he had in mind. It turned out to be a book of essays—and more about wordsmiths than words. But he did include a personal little chapter on his attitude to notes, memo books and diaries. He wrote, "There cannot be enough ruses and cautionary measures for keeping a genuine diary a secret. Locks cannot be trusted. Codes are better. I myself employ an altered stenography that would take weeks of drudgery to decipher. Thus I can write down whatever I like, never hurting or damaging another person, and when I am finally old and wise, I can decide whether to make it disappear entirely or confide it to some secret place, where it would be found only by chance, in some harmless future."

I wonder what, if anything, was found when Canetti died …

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So what of Gladstone's outburst? Gary Jonathon Bass wrote in *Stay the Hand of Vengeance*: "The Ottoman Empire's subjugation of Bulgaria had won it Gladstone's lasting enmity. In his famous broadside, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, published in September 1876, Gladstone had written:

[W]e now know in detail that there have been perpetrated under the immediate authority of a Government [Turkey] to which all the time we have been giving the strongest moral, and for part of the time even material support, crimes and outrages, so vast in scale as to exceed all modern example, and so unutterably vile as well as fierce in character, that it passes the power of heart to conceive, and of tongue and pen adequately to describe them. These are the Bulgarian horrors; and the question is, What can and should be done, either to punish, or to brand, or to prevent?

"Gladstone's fury was enough to doom Disraeli's tilt towards the Ottoman Empire, which the Tories saw as a way of checking Russia. There was no equivalent popular moralism in any other European country. At the very end of his career, Gladstone devoted his final foray in public life to denouncing the Ottomans again, this time rallying not to the side of the Bulgarians but that of the Armenians."

In 1876 the Bulgarians rose against Turkish oppression and suffered wholesale and horrifying masscres as a result. Stowers Johnson in *Gay Bulgaria* writes: 'The *Daily News* brought the horrible story of these atrocities to England, but it did not suit Disraeli to

acknowledge belief of anything against our allies the Turks. These murders were "inventions" and "imaginary atrocities". Walter Baring, accompanied by Russian and American representatives, was sent out from the British Embassy at Constantinople on official inquiry. He went late, after a great tide of British indignation, but even then to our government's dismay the evidence was everywhere and the *Daily News* made this visit of Baring a climax. The terrible article by MacGahan could not be gainsaid for all our Embassy's Turkish leanings. No wonder Turgenev wrote his poem, "Croquet at Windsor", to attack Queen Victoria and Disraeli's Government. This is what readers in England read in the *Daily News* on August 7th, 1876, from J.A. MacGahan:

> I have just seen the town of Batak, with Mr. Schuyler. Mr. Baring was there yesterday. Here is what I saw. On approaching the town on a hill there were some dogs. They ran away, and we found on this spot a number of skulls scattered about, and one ghastly heap of skeletons with clothing. I counted from the saddle a hundred skulls, picked and licked clean; all women and children. We entered the town. On every side were skulls and skeletons charred among the ruins, or lying entire where they fell in their clothing. There were skeletons of girls and women with long brown hair hanging to the skulls. We approached the church. There these remains were more frequent, until the ground was literally covered with skeletons, skulls, and putrefying bodies in clothing. Between the church and the school there were heaps. The stench was fearful. We entered the churchyard. The sight was more dreadful. The whole churchyard for three feet deep was festering with dead bodies partly covered – hands, legs, arms, and heads projected in ghastly confusion. I saw many little hands, heads and feet of children of three years of age, and girls, with heads covered with beautiful hair. The church was still worse. The floor was covered with rotting bodies quite uncovered. I never imagined anything so fearful. There were 3,000 bodies in the churchyard and church. We were obliged to hold tobacco to our noses. In the school, a fine building, 200 women and children had been burnt alive. … Many who had escaped had returned recently, weeping and moaning over their ruined homes. Their sorrowful wailing could be heard half a mile off. Some were digging out the skeletons of loved ones. A woman was sitting moaning over three small skulls with hairs clinging to them, which she had in her lap.
>
> And what of the shocking excuse? That the Bulgarians were savages!
>
> For us, for our national honour, for my own pride as I stood looking on the glass cases in that museum with my Bulgarian friends beside me, we did have Gladstone, there was Her Majesty's Opposition to arouse the conscience of the nation to break association with Turkey's brutality.'

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Even so, Canetti's second volume of autobiography has an interesting little hint which seems to point to the genesis, or a part of it, of his most famous book *Crowds and Power*. His cousin, Bernhard Arditti, "had converted to Zionism while very young, discovering his oratorical powers, which he put in the service of the cause." Perhaps the strangest thing about this cousin's fiery campaign is — "He spoke Ladino to them and scourged them for their arrogance, which was based on this language. I was amazed to discover that it was possible to use this language, which I regarded as a stunted language for children and the kitchen; it was possible to speak about universal matters, to fill people with such passion that they earnestly considered dropping everything, leaving a country in which they had been settled for generations, a country which took them seriously and respected them, in which they were certainly well off — in order to move to an unknown land that had been promised them thousands of years ago, but didn't even belong to them at this point." And not long afterwards hundreds of Jewish-Bulgarians, inspired by Arditti's Zionism, pack up for Palestine and leave behind what had been quite comfortable and happy lives in Bulgaria. There is an irony in this in that Bulgaria's Jewish community, of all the Eastern European communities, suffered least in World War Two.

But Canetti himself says the genesis of the book lay in witnessing workers' demonstrations in Frankfurt in 1922 …

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July 26: Aldous Huxley
July 27: Hilaire Belloc
July 28: Beatrix Potter
Henry Glapthorne
July 29: Benito Mussolini
Booth Tarkington

* * * * *

"This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force." Dorothy Parker on Benito Mussolin's novel *Claudia Particella*, a 'grand romance' from the time of Cardinal Emanuel.

I had no image of Mussolini as a writer but in fact he had a long history as such; articles, letters, propaganda, poetry, history, he founded two magazines, *Utopia* and *Gerarchia*, and a newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, he wrote in the period before he cynically embraced the Catholic Church a biography of the Czech martyr Jan Hus burnt to death by the Catholic Church for 'heresy', *Giovanni Huss il veredico*; he wrote his autobiography, he launched forth into a novel and several plays. His writing is described as 'vigorous', his style 'bombastic'. And all his work was a means of promoting his ideology of the time, first socialism, later fascism. It might be a useful way to track his changing view of the world but I can't honestly say that I really want to hunt any of it down.

And I am not surprised that Dorothy Parker was unenamoured of his 1910 novel *Claudia Particelli o l'amante del cardinale* as *The Oxford Companion to Italian Literature* dismisses it as a 'bodice-ripper'. The thought of a bombastic, machismic, chauvinistic 'bodice-ripper' is, to put it mildly, daunting.

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'In 1935 when Mussolini marched into Abyssinia one of the songs the dance bands were playing was 'Roll along, covered wagon'. Juvenile sentiment was heavily on the side of the ill-armed tribesmen, and almost until the end their faith was strong that in some way or another right would prevail against bombers, and mechanized infantry, and dum-dum bullets:

Roll along, Mussolini, roll along,
You won't be in Abyssinia long,
You'll be sitting on the plain
With a bullet in your brain,
Roll along, Mussolini, roll along.'

Peter and Iona Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*.

Are children still passionately on the side of right? Were children ever passionately on the side of right? Is there an innate ability in children to identify with the downtrodden, the battler, the vulnerable, the sufferer of injustice? And is this quality snuffed out by the emphasis on realpolitick, the art of the possible, the constant trading-off and compromising and determining 'national interest' and 'best possible outcomes' and political and economic wheeling and dealing which marks out adult life? Are children born with a natural affinity to St Francis of Assisi—and parents and society work hard to turn them, instead, into miniature Machiavellis?

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Anyone who writes about political figures sooner or later seems to refer to Nicholas Machiavelli. He turns up in all kinds of contexts.

John Hollander and Frank Kermode writing of Edward Hyde: "He was not a man of blood and totally declined Machiavel's method, which prescribes, upon any alteration of a government, as a thing absolutely necessary, to cut off all the heads of those, and extirpate their families, who are friends to the old one." And "Any and all harsh Realpolitik could be blamed, in Elizabethan England and thereafter, on a stock figure of Italianate evil, called Machiavel, having much to do with the major political thought of the Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli (1469 – 1527)". In other words there was the real Machiavelli and there was the figure of Machiavel which personified evil, the devil, the comptroller of hell. It is this second aspect that Thomas Nashe uses in *Pierce Penniless*: "Envy, awake, for thou must appear before Nicolao Malevolo, great muster-master of

hell. Mark you this sly mate, how smoothly he looks? The poets were ill advised, that feigned him to be a lean, gag-toothed beldam, with hollow eyes, pale cheeks, and snaky hair; for he is not only a man, but a jolly, lusty, old gentleman, that will wink, and laugh, and jest drily, as if he were the honestest of a thousand; and I warrant you shall not hear a foul word come from him in a year. I will not contradict it, but the dog may worry a sheep in the dark and thrust his neck into the collar of clemency and pity when he hath done; as who should say, 'God forgive him, he was asleep in the shambles, when the innocent was done to death.' But openly, Envy sets a civil, fatherly countenance upon it, and hath not so much as a drop of blood in his face to attaint him of murder."

I noticed *The Bulletin* recently referred to a speech by Peter Costello as Machiavellian …

Both political figures and political manouevres are referred to as Machiavellian. But what of the real Machiavelli? He cannot really be removed from the life and attitudes and ambivalences of Renaissance Florence. Its own princes and people could not decide how to respond to his most-famous book *The Prince*. Was it a book of advice, an allegory, a cloaked way of deriding Pope and Church, a tract to promote atheism, a promotion of militarism, a way to improve Machiavelli's public standing—all this and more. Curiously though no one seems to have read it in the modern way: as a straightforward promotion of pragmatism and realpolitick. And modern tyrants have taken his view that it is better to be feared than loved to heart; something which none of his contemporaries seems to have lifted from it.

So when people use the term 'Machiavellian' should we see it as meaning tough, cynical, sinister, clear-headed, hardline and hardnosed—or should we read into it the deeper sense of ambivalence and hedging, of frustrated ambition and constant exhortation that his contemporaries found in him? Did Peter Costello's speech express cynicism or frustrated ambition? Maurizio Viroli wrote of Machiavelli's personality in *Niccolò's Smile*; that he was "mischievous; irreverent; gifted with an exceedingly subtle intelligence; unconcerned about questions of soul, afterlife, or sin; fascinated by practical affairs and great men." Except that no 'great men' of the moment spring to mind as having "an exceedingly subtle intelligence" I suppose it could be said that Machiavelli's personality, like his famous book, has a modern flavour.

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One day I let my hair down in the Moonah Book Exchange and bought a book called *The City of Light*, said to be the travels to China in the thirteenth century by an Italian Jewish merchant called Jacob D'Ancona. The doubts about its provenance reflect the doubts thrown up about Marco Polo's famous travels. But the more I read into the past the more I realise that both journeys are very likely to have happened; if not exactly as described (hyperbole was as popular then as it is now) then very close. People did cover huge distances—and thought nothing about it. We are the ones who have come to think of the ancients as confined to the one small village or town.

David Selbourne, translator of the manuscript, points out: 'Thirteenth-century China was not known only to missionary friars, the Polos, and Muslim traders from the Levant. I have already referred to the Spanish rabbi, Benjamin of Tudela, who preceded Jacob d'Ancona to the Orient by one hundred years, leaving a diary of his journey, written in Hebrew, which was apparently completed in Castile in 1173, and first published in Constantinople in 1543. It is assumed that, like Jacob, he travelled as a merchant, reaching 'Khuzistan' — identified variously in south-western Iran, on the Indian Ocean, or on the frontiers of China — in a journey which seems to have taken thirteen years. Later, in the fifteenth century, there were the Italian Jews Elijah of Ferrara, a Talmudist and traveller, and at the end of the century Meshullam of Volterra, both of them rabbi-merchants.

'The list of non-Jewish Italians who knew the Orient in mediaeval times, and wrote of it, is of course much longer. Plano Carpini was in Karakorum in about 1246. The Venetian Marco Polo set out for China in 1271, the year following Jacob d'Ancona's departure, reaching the Mongol (or 'Tartar') court of Kublai Khan at Shangdu — the fabled Xanadu — in mid-1275, two years after Jacob's safe return to Italy; in 1292, after serving the Mongol conquerors of Sung

China as an administrator and envoy, he embarked upon his return journey to Italy from the Zaitun that Jacob knew.

'The Franciscan Giovanni di Monte Corvino (1247—1328) sailed from Hormuz to Zaitun in 1291, later being appointed archbishop of Khanbalik (Beijing) by Pope Clement V; the already mentioned friar of Friuli, Odorigo, or Odoric, was in China from 1324 to 1327 and visited Zaitun also; while another renowned Italian friar who left a record of his travels, Giovanni di Marignolli, visited China in the 1340s.'

Non-Italians 'who left accounts of their journeys include the Japanese monk Jojun (1011-81); Rubruquis, who reached the Karakoram mountains in 1253; the Armenian Hetoum (or Hayton); who was in China in 1307; and the German knight, William of Boldensele, who was in the Orient in 1336.'

The omissions for which Marco Polo has been 'taken to task': not mentioning the Great Wall of China, tea, or the bound feet of Chinese women, seem to me a beat-up. Jacob also doesn't mention the Great Wall. Why should a medieval Italian traveller, surrounded by castles, fortresses, city walls, and huge stone ruins, at every turn, find a simple wall of interest? It is debatable whether we would find the wall so interesting if it were not for the fact that you can see it from space. Jacob does mention what is probably tea in passing, "a beverage made of small leaves of a bush which is much prized among them but which is bitter to taste" but it clearly didn't interest him, and women's feet, "some compress their feet, even to the breaking of bones, so that they should remain small, for they consider it to be more elegant and more beautiful, while others paint their faces and necks white, and others eat little so that they may be always slender" but if you blinked you would miss these couple of sentences in a large book. They obviously made no impact on him. Perhaps because he was a man, perhaps as a merchant he could see no value in a rather insipid drink for which there was no demand in spice-mad Europe. He refers to drunkenness but he never tells us what people were getting drunk on. Still, it was more likely to be rice wine than tea!

The interest in Jacob's account is that he was a Jewish rather than a Christian merchant. And he went both ways by sea; leaving from Ancona in Italy and eventually reaching the port in southern China he calls Zaitan but which was probably Quanzhou. His book is interesting for his views on places he passes through, such as Basra now in southern Iraq where he mentions the wealth of the Jewish community and the goodwill between Muslims and Jews but he also says "in the summer there is a heat so great as is unknown in any other part of the world, a heat without measure", and the various ports in India and Ceylon.

I found his habit of perving then condemning unpleasant, if not unusual, and the long debates he appears to conduct at regular intervals in China seem unlikely and were probably what he would like to have said if he not been restricted by the needs of business, translation, and goodwill. He is sensible, observant, knowledgeable, pious, and undoubtedly canny. But the real interest in the book, I think, is for the light it throws on the attitudes, ways of seeing the world, the background, and the business of a medieval Jewish merchant. I found no difficulty in believing that Jacob existed, that he took such a journey, and that in his old age he wrote down an account of it for his descendants; not least so that they might be encouraged in business and nurtured in a deeply pious and learned outlook on the world.

Thinking of long journeys and doubts over what happened to merchants and visitors to far lands reminded me of the contentious claim I found in Paul Doherty's book *Isabella and the strange death of Edward II*. His claim is very simple. Edward did not die a horrible death in 1327 in Berkeley Castle near the Welsh border. Rather a dead body was substituted, the coffin was closed, and Edward was secretly whisked out of England and ended up in Lombardy in northern Italy. My first thought was 'tell me another' but as soon as I read that the main source for the information was a Manuel di Fieschi, an Italian priest who had several wealthy benefices in England, including as Canon of Salisbury Cathedral, (and later became Bishop of Vercelli), I put aside my scepticism and began to look at the idea more closely.

The story as regularly told doesn't make sense. People in the surrounding villages were said to have been able to hear poor Edward screaming as someone thrust a hot poker up his backside.

This in a fortified castle on a mound away from other habitations with feet thick stone walls and for someone who, far from standing beside a narrow window, would have been bent over with his face thrust into the floor, a chair, or a mattress. No. Nor does the story that this method of death was chosen so the king's face would not be marked make sense. Because Edward was hurried into a coffin, not shown to the public, not sent off to London, but embalmed by a local woman, and buried without fanfare. Far from showing the king's unblemished face, the conspirators apparently went all out to make sure no one saw the dead king.

But it is the Fieschi connection which intrigues. Edward was said to have been smuggled out of England via the south coast. The major landowners there were the Earls of Devon, who had married into the Fieschi family; Vicary Gibbs says it was Beatrice di Fieschi, sister of Pope Innocent IV; Burke's gives it as the daughter of Beatrice's niece Beatrice, marrying the seventh earl. Beatrice, the sister of Pope Innocent IV, previously Sinibaldo Fieschi, was a daughter of Ugo Fieschi, Count of Lavagna. Their brother Tedisio had sons Niccolo and Ottobone who became Pope Adrian V, and a daughter, the second Beatrice, who married Tomasso II, duke of Savoy. Another relative was Innocent IV's nephew Frederick; "In 1253 the pope wished to provide for his nephew, Frederick di Lavagna, and Grosseteste (Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln) was ordered by the papal commissioners to induct him into a canonry at Lincoln." Although Grosseteste was an eminent philosopher in his time he was mainly remembered for his disobedience to Innocent's request. However in the middle of this quarrel Grosseteste died. (I see there is now some debate over whether the philosopher and the bishop were the same person or whether there were two Roberts in the same family; either way Frederick was not made welcome.)

And there is another intriguing connection to the family. The aunt of one of Edward II's favourites, Hugh de Spenser, was married to the Earl of Devon at the time of Edward's escape. This wealthy land-owning family, holding large slices of Devon and Cornwall, was ideally placed to sneak the fugitive king safely out of England to their ancestral homeland and family connections in France …

Of course it did not end up doing Roger Mortimer, who had supplanted Edward II in Isabella's bed, much good. He was hung, drawn and quartered at the instigation of Edward's son, the youthful Edward III. Roger had fought in France, Italy, England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. He had escaped from the supposedly impregnable Tower of London. Doherty writes, "On 1 August 1323, the garrison of the Tower celebrated the feast of Peter Ad Vincula — St Peter-in-Chains — after whom the Tower chapel was named. At the banquet the guards were drugged and Mortimer, with further help from two wealthy London merchants, John de Gisors and Richard de Betton, escaped from the Tower by a rope ladder. He lowered himself down, swam the Thames and reached the pre-arranged meeting place, where a group of horsemen took him to Portchester from where he crossed to France." Escapes *were* possible. And in a world where people's loyalties were not to abstract things like 'country', 'justice', or 'the Crown' but to other people, it was rarely difficult to find people who might be persuaded, bribed, encouraged, or intimidated into helping.

The letter Manuel di Fieschi sent to Edward III in 1340 is a complex mixture of red herrings and information that wasn't publicly available. Was it a blackmail letter? And if so who was he wanting to support? Himself? Edward II? Even distant relatives in England? Manuel is much younger than the unwanted Frederick … but in the annals of the Fieschi family the rejection of one of their own by English churchmen may have rankled. Sneaking 'God's anointed' out from under the noses of his gaolers might have appealed.

And one other thing intrigued me. Men continued to leave England's shores regularly on Crusade in the time of Edward II. In the bustle and confusion of embarkation from various ports who would take particular notice of one more man going aboard. It would not raise an eyebrow. In those times how many ordinary sailors would even have seen the king—let alone made the leap that this silent taciturn figure was their deposed monarch?

It probably can't be proved that Edward II lived his life out in scholarly reclusion in Italy. But it is not completely impossible.

‘Machiavellian’, as a term for the sinister and the manipulative, had to wait until Niccolò Machiaveli came along. But the term certainly fits a considerable number of popes. While I was browsing through John Kelly’s *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* for the details of the di Fieschi popes I had more than enough reminders of this aspect of the papacy. Yet they would undoubtedly, both popes and antipopes, intriguers, adulterers, and occasionally murderers, have all presented their deeds as being for the good of the Church, not for individual or personal ambition. In that they were true forerunners and disciples of Machiavelli.

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Myriam Miedzian alerted me to Cesare Lombroso’s wider interests in criminology: “Cesare Lombroso, one of the founders of the field, attributed women’s lower crime rates to their passivity, lack of male vigor, and lower position on the evolutionary ladder which led to them being less differentiated biologically and therefore less vulnerable to the “atavism” which he thought made some men natural criminals. This theory testifies to the depth of commitment to women’s defeativeness. It is no small fact to turn a lower level of criminality into a symptom of evolutionary inferiority!” And given the way that criminals have frequently been assumed to be closer to the ‘brute creation’ than less criminally-inclined men this is a direct contradiction in terms.

Katherine Ramsland in *The Science of Cold Case Files* writes, “Like many other forensic sciences, anthropology crossed into the legal arena in the nineteenth century, developing the field of criminal anthropology, or the proof of criminality via body measurements. In fact modern criminology stems from Italian psychiatrist Ceasare Lombroso, who proposed that some types of people are closer to primitive ancestors than others. He utilized the work of anthropologist Pierre-Paul Broca to create this “new science,” which relied on facial measurements and anomalies of the skull, face, and body to determine who was or was not a criminal type. He believed there was a “born criminal” who was irresistibly compelled toward a life of crime; that this criminal was an atavistic being—a throwback to earlier hedonistic races; and that certain physical traits signaled those who belonged to this distinct species. Others could become criminals through weak natures or “vicious training.” The born criminal had peculiar sensory responses, a diminished sensibility to pain, no sense of right and wrong, and no remorse.”

Lombroso’s famous work on ‘head-bumps’ was certainly not new; earlier doctors had studied what was called craniology, but he codified his ideas into his famous treatise, *The Delinquent Man*. Although it had a considerable impact (and was still being referred to in the crime fiction of the early twentieth century) it was deeply flawed, not least because his research was done in prisons. He wasn’t out there testing the ‘head-bumps’ of popes and prime ministers, nor even of ordinary law-abiding peasants. He was predisposed to find ways in which potential criminals could be identified and ‘headed off at the pass’. This lack of any kind of ‘control’ population outside prison undermined any claim his studies had to being scientific.

Yet, in a curious way, head-bumps have found some other areas of usefulness. (And a small group of geneticists continue to search for ‘criminal genes’.) The shape of a skull found and needing to be identified can be assisted by a knowledge of proportions and measurements. Head injuries can be the precursor to changes in behaviour and personality and may show up on simple examination. And the increased use of facial reconstruction requires an in-depth knowledge of heads. But Lombroso ran into a cul-de-sac because he worked hard to make his data fit his theory —rather than coming at his study of heads with an open mind.

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If I were to say to you ‘the Brothers Grimm’ or ‘Hans Christian Andersen’ or Lewis Carroll or Frank Baum I am sure you would immediately come back with the name of one their famous tales. But the other day it occurred to me that I didn’t even know the name of the author of *Pinocchio*, let alone anything about how or when the book came to be written.

So this has been one of those curious little time-out moments in my life.

The man who wrote *Pinocchio* was Carlo Collodi.

This was actually his pseudonym when he began writing children’s stories. His real name was Carlo Lorenzini and he was born in Florence in 1826. He tried the seminary first. Then, with

all the drama and talk of revolution in the air, he became a journalist and published *Il Lampione*, a magazine of political satire. With Italian unification he could relax and turn to writing for children. He brought out *Giannettino* in 1876, *Minuzzolo* in 1878, then the first chapter of *Pinocchio* appeared in 1880 with that famous beginning:

'There was once upon a time …

"A King!" my little readers will instantly exclaim.

No, children you are wrong. There was once upon a time a piece of wood.'

Like many stories of its time it was written first as a magazine serial. But it was immediately popular and has remained popular ever since.

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July 30: Emily Brontë
July 31: Primo Levi
August 1: Richard Henry Dana
M. R. James
August 2: Bei Dao
August 3: P. D. James
August 4: Henry Savery

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I came upon this little bit about a companion of Henry Savery, a man called Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, who was transported for murder, in a book of articles called *Poison* collected by Richard Glyn Jones. "It was again the Italians who inspired Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. He quit the army complaining that the colours of the uniforms were too harsh, and attempted to pursue a career in art and letters. He might have succeeded, too, for his paintings were admired by Blake and his prose was praised by Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey, whom he got to know and whose company he craved. The problem was that the artistic collections and the little gatherings cost money, which an annuity of £200 could not support, and his artistic endeavours — successful as they were — did not add appreciably to this total. He therefore asked the four trustees who controlled his money whether he could realize the capital from which this annual interest accrued and, in the face of their flat refusal, decided to employ his artistic talents on a likeness of their signatures. The Bank of England coughed up without demur, and a criminal career was launched.

"The £2259 helped things along for a while, but those tedious creditors were soon threatening to interrupt the little *soirées* once more. Forgery would not work a second time (in this context, anyway), but there was an uncle with a fine house and a very decent income — and, alas, excellent health. During his study of classical Italian literature, Wainewright had come across a pamphlet on poisons, and the glamour of the whole business had fascinated him; a sensitive soul such as his would have recoiled from the idea of violence, but a subtle poison in uncle's wine? It was easily done, and Wainewright was soon installed in Linden House with his wife and child. The extravagant living continued and, while some of the creditors were paid off, others soon appeared, as did Wainewright's mother-in-law plus two daughters by a second marriage, who moved in to share the Wainewrights' good fortune.

"There were rumours that he now began to use his artistic influence to pass off spurious engravings as genuine, but this was chickenfeed: much more substantial funds were needed if the dilettante life was to continue, so Wainewright hatched a plot to insure the lives of all these in-laws, in particular sister-in-law Helen. There was a cunning touch in that Helen's life was insured in sister Madeleine's name, from whom Wainewright knew he would be able to extract money; the arrangements were completed over the Christmas week of 1830, and Helen ceased to exist shortly afterwards. When her mother began asking questions about Helen's death, she was poisoned too. But when Madeleine tried to claim the £18,000 insurance there were problems, and creditors were presenting even more pressing problems, and so finally Wainewright was obliged to abandon his literary life and flee to the continent, where he hid for several years. He eventually returned to England in disguise and hoped that he would avoid capture, but by now he was universally known as Wainewright the Poisoner and his arrest followed rapidly. In Newgate he

became something of a celebrity (when taxed with the murder of pretty young Helen, he pointed out that 'she had very thick ankles'), but he was sentenced to transportation, and died lonely and neglected in Tasmania.

"His writings are no longer read, and Wainewright's only real contribution to the literature for which he strived so hard was to inspire a splendid essay from that other wit, Oscar Wilde."

Peter Ackroyd wrote in his biography of poet, artist, and visionary, William Blake, "Many years later, Blake himself signally failed to predict a similar destiny for a much closer acquaintance: Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, whose strange life as an art critic and a poisoner provided Dickens and Wilde with suggestive plots, knew Blake well enough to extol the virtues of his unpublished *Jerusalem*. His career as a writer and murderer might have intrigued Blake, who declared that the 'enjoyments of Genius' were to be found 'among the fires of hell', but on no occasion does Wainewright seem to have been forewarned by Blake about his fate."

It amazes me that his fate was only transportation, not the gallows. But since that was written he has inspired a book by the English Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, aptly titled *Wainewright the Poisoner*. Posterity, at least, seems determined to remember him.

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In the current history debate, instead of Eat More Greens or Do More Exercise we now have Learn More Australian History, I notice that no one is suggesting we learn more about the fifty thousand years of Aboriginal history, it is only a matter of learning more of the history of the last two hundred European-dominated years. Nor is anyone grappling with the issue of what within that narrow range constitutes suitable history for children. Cook and Philip, of course, but beyond that? Nor is the real question being asked. Why is Australian history taught as something akin to spinach. You need a bit for your health—but you can't really expect to like it. And when children are turned off a subject in school there's a good chance they will never want to return to it.

I have just been reading *Historians in Trouble* by Jon Wiener dealing with a range of problems in the history world in the USA, plagiarism, misconduct, fraud, misrepresentation and error, so that Australian shenanigans seem small beer by comparison; debate over the correct transcription of a footnote, debate over personalities, debate over statistics … or the absence thereof. Yet the thought came to me: would young students get more from history if they saw that their elders don't necessarily agree and are not averse to occasionally destroying reputations or throwing knives, that history is not a matter of settled facts and squeaky-clean heroes, but is a part of the flawed business of trying to draw truths from ill-written documents, etc …

And yet those two hundred years abound in interesting characters. Not the Kelly Gang, not Captain Bligh, not John MacArthur, they've all had whatever juice they ever had long since squeezed out. But what about people like Wainewright? We were given to understand that the convicts were a sort of amorphous mass mainly sent here for stealing loaves of bread or handkerchiefs. Not very good people but worth a vague sense of pity. But they were characters in their own right. The governors sent out were often as debatably corrupt. The soldiers had seen service in a variety of remote and interesting places and some were as dangerous as the felons they guarded. The free arrivals came for many and varied reasons—from romance and evangelism to money-making and avoiding scandal.

As a child, I got a brief serve of explorers, all of them brave but curiously uninteresting, a bit like peas from a dull pod, along with a brief mention of William Cox, William Charles Wentworth, a couple of later governors, and a passing mention of John Dunmore Lang presented as a kindly Scottish clergyman who helped 'new arrivals' settle in, a sort of one-man Good Neighbour Council …

But what if children were served up the real John Dunmore Lang?

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Cyril Pearl in *Brilliant Dan Deniehy* says of Lang, "At this time Deniehy was closely associated with Dr Lang. In 1850 Lang had established 'The Australian League', dedicated to the establishment of a federal Australian republic, with the title of 'The United Provinces of Australia'. David Blair was its first secretary. At the beginning of 1854, when Hawkesley was

acting as temporary secretary, Lang offered the job to Robert Wisdom. In declining, Wisdom wrote that 'it would be necessary for the post to be filled by a person not only possessing indomitable zeal and energy but also endowed with more than ordinary oratorical powers.' He recommended Mr Deniehy: 'Possessing uncommon elocutionary powers he would be better fitted to address public meetings than anyone with whom I am acquainted.'

"Deniehy did not become secretary, but actively supported the League, lecturing on republicanism at its headquarters in Lang's Australian College in Jamison Street.

"Lang himself remains an enigma. To many, like Deas Thomson, he was a 'noisy liar'. 'a blackguard', a 'red republican', and a 'foul-mouthed slanderer'. To others, he was 'a distinguished Australian patriot' and a 'valiant and intrepid leader of reform'. Unquestionably, he was the most enthusiastically acclaimed and most violently denounced man of his time in Australia. His career, from when he arrived in Sydney in May 1823 to establish the Presbyterian Church till his death on 8 August 1878, was punctuated by innumerable personal and political squabbles, law-suits and controversies. He was twice imprisoned for libel, several times imprisoned for debt, and once horse-whipped in a Sydney street. He was an ardent Australian nationalist, and a man of great energy and courage, but little tolerance or magnanimity, as Deniehy was to discover."

Deniehy referred to a 'bunyip aristocracy' and Lang referred to the 'would-be Earl of Wingy Carribbee, and the Viscount Curraduchidgee' but Lang was neither a promoter of the English class system nor a man of the people. He arrived in Sydney from Scotland in 1823 to be the colony's first Presbyterian minister. But he never confined himself to his religious duties. For the next fifty years he was one of the best-known people in the young colony. Quarrelsome, difficult, intelligent, interested in virtually every aspect of public life, with a finger in nearly every pie, he was against transportation, for good education for everyone, for suffrage, for a republic, for honest politics and free settlement. He founded the Australian College, he founded a newspaper *The Colonist*, he went into politics, he was jailed for four months for libel (though public subscription paid his £100 fine). He upset almost everyone some of the time, including the Presbyterian church, though they made him Moderator of the NSW church in 1872. But he also inspired friendship and loyalty.

And he was a capable writer and poet, bringing out his *Improved Metrical Translation of the Psalms*, and several books of verse both religious and sharp-tongued secular pieces. This is one of his earliest pieces:

'Twas said of Greece two thousand years ago,
  That every stone i' the land had got a name.
Of New South Wales too, men will soon say so too;
  But every stone there seems to get the same.
'Macquarie' for a name is all *the go*:
  The old Scotch Governor was fond of fame,
Macquarie Street, Place, Port, Fort, Town, Lake, River:
'Lachlan Macquarie, Esquire, Governor', for ever!

Choice work for British Peers! Baser alliance
  Than Austria's with her band of despot kings!
For he who setteth virtue at defiance
  And holds her dread commands as paltriest things,
Whate'er his rank, learning, or wit, or science,
  Or high pretence of love for freedom, brings
A tyrant worse than Slavery in his train
And binds men with a more ignoble chain.

On Freedom's altar ere I place strange fire
  Be my arm withered from its shoulder-blade!
Yea! Were I lord of Great Apollo's lyre,

I'd sooner rend its chords than e'er degrade
Its sweet seraphic music to inspire
One vicious thought! When built on vice, far maid,
Thy temple's base is quicksand; on the rock
Of virtue reared, it braves the whirlwind's shock.

This 1824 piece ('Colonial Nomenclature') is mild compared to some of the vitriol that dripped from his pen. But his secular writings were also valuable as a contribution to Australian history—such as *An Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales* and *Transportation and Colonization*—but he has been overlooked as the visionary and prophetic voice of nineteenth century Australia, writing *Freedom and Independence for the Golden Lands of Australia* as early as 1852, possibly because modern republicans want their views to come free of any 'taint' of religion.

* * * * *

In books people always seem to be reading 'significant books', classics, best sellers, Shakespeare, Jung, etc, but the thing I like about real life is that people constantly surprise you or give you delightful little moments.

This morning I was sitting in the little park in front of the Glenorchy Council Chambers waiting for the bank to open and reading *Ralph Rashleigh* when two elderly gentlemen came and sat down beside me. Beards, beanies, a bit tatty, people I would picture reading the racing pages. One of them asked me what I was reading and I showed him and asked him what he liked reading. He said, "I always liked Erskine Caldwell. You know *God's Little Acre* and such? Good books."

Another day I was chatting with my neighbour who was telling me about a dog a friend of his had got from the Dog's Home and he described it as "just like 'Greyfriars Bobby'." I loved that description and I could immediately picture the dog.

And another day I overheard two sixtyish women waiting to go into the library talking about their reading; one had been reading a book apparently called *Deadly Deviates*, the other, more mildly, said she remembered the books by Canadian writer Mazo de la Roche which she had read with pleasure as a child.

People are always full of surprises. But convict literature, despite Laurie Hergenhan's choice of *Unnatural Lives* as the title for his book on con. lit., is curiously 'as expected'. Probably the two best known novels written by convicts are James Tucker's *Ralph Rashleigh* and Henry Savery's *Quintus Servinton*. And they both suffered from the widespread belief in the publishing world that they were autobiographies, and therefore of less literary and imaginative quality, rather than novels. Certainly Savery doesn't help matters by saying of his novel: "Although it appears under this shape, — or, as some may perhaps call it, novel, — it is no fiction, or the work of imagination, either in its characters or incidents. Not by this, however, is it pretended to be said that all the occurrences it details, happened precisely in their order of narration, nor that it is the mere recital of the events of a man's life — but it is a biography, true in its general features, and in its portraiture of individuals; and all the documents, letters and other papers contained in its pages are transcripts, or nearly so, of originals, copied from the manuscript, which came into the author's hands in the manner described in the introductory chapter."

* * * * *

The language used by both Tucker and Savery is lively and very readable—and yet it seems conventional and rather colourless compared to the newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and speeches of the day. Cyril Pearl collected up and republished the work of Charles Adam Corbyn who had reported in mid-nineteenth-century Sydney for *Bell's Life in Sydney* and the *Empire*. Pearl says of him: "Charles Adam Corbyn, who reported for both papers, like most of his contemporaries, went about his job with tremendous gusto, gloriously uninhibited by laws of libel or contempt, or the irritating limitations of good taste. What journalist today could describe a presiding magistrate as "Mr. Vinegar-cruet," or begin a report with a sentence such as "Mr. Ninivian Stewart is a long-nosed, lank-jawed hypocritical-looking shoemaker," or "Mrs.

Elizabeth Hilton is a tall powerful woman, whose face outvies in colours those of a round of beef" or say that a citizen has a head "like a prize cabbage," or a face "like an oatmeal cake," or eyes "like two burnt holes in a blanket"? By comparison with the Dickensian vividness of this prose, present-day reporters dip their pens in milk and water.

"In 1854, Corbyn published a collection of his reports from the *Empire*, and *Bell's Life* in Sydney. He dedicated it to George Robert Nichols, a solicitor with a big police-court practice. Nichols, whose home and office were at 172 Castlereagh Street, was the solicitor of the City Commissioners, and a Member of the Legislative Council. One of his legislative achievements was to stop goats and dogs being harnessed to heavily-laden wagons. He was the son of Isaac Nichols, a convict who became Sydney's first postmaster."

It is true that I have never heard a clergyman talking of "flatigious immorality" or a politician described as a "precocious biped", at least not recently, so Corbyn's reports seem to leap off the page:

"A good-looking little spit-fire, with a baby in her arms, named Mary Lewis, was charged by a man named Butler, of a Titus Oates cast of countenance." Or: "A hopping disciple, named Addison Wiliam Blakey, with a head like a prize cabbage, and one good leg and a swinger, was introduced to the Mayor for neglecting to supply the natural wants of Ann, his wife, and a couple of young Blakeys. Who, fortunately, seem to take more after the mamma than their daddy. Mrs. Blakey said, that about five weeks ago, her "model 'usband" gave her the magnificent sum of 6d., saying (for Addison W. Blakey is a cove what has seen better days) "here miladi is maintenance for bub and grub for a fortnight." On Saturday last, Addison W.B. inserted his cauliflower noddle, and gave his missis eighteen pence."

But I think he would run foul not only of libel laws but also racial villification if he now wrote: "Thomas Williams, a very black blackamoor, lately cook, slut, and butler at Hile's public-house in York-street, was charged—" or "Donald M'Kenzie, an ogre-like Negro, of the dirtiest black colour imaginable, was charged—"

It is not that we have ceased berating and villifying and generally criticising people; it is just that we have dropped the colour and kept the abuse.

* * * * *

The other thing about 19th century accounts is my curiosity: what did people sound like? The claims that people sounded like modern Cockneys may have some truth in it but only a smidgin … Many convicts and settlers were Irish, not to mention a good smattering of Scots, Welsh, Cornish, and others. Could one particular group have imposed something of itself so pervasively? Or did it have more to do with climate, lifestyle, dust, flies, and isolation, as others claim?

'The broad Australian accent is not a lovesome thing, I grant you. At its worst, it is reminiscent of a dehydrated crow uttering its last statement on life from the bough of a dead tree in the middle of a claypan at the peak of a seven-year drought … Proper Australian is spoken while moving the lips as little as possible – making life hell for deaf lipreaders, but keeping the flies out of the mouth. Indeed, it has been said, quite seriously, that our flies are the cause of our mode of speech.

'The noise which comes out should be gratingly flinty and half should be through the nose. Inflection should be minimal, as should facial expression. No hand gestures, of course – hands should be in the pockets.'

Buzz Kennedy in 1978, quoted in *Australian Slanguage* by Bill Hornadge.

But Wainewright would, no doubt, have spoken very 'nicely'—which may have helped him beat the gallows and live reasonably comfortably in Tasmania.

Hornadge also quotes W. T. Goodge's 1897 poem 'The Great Australian Slanguage':

Tis the everyday Australian
  Has a language of his own,
Has a language, or a slanguage,
  Which can simply stand alone.
And a 'dickin pitch to kid us'

Is a synonym for ‘lie’,
And to ‘nark it’ means to stop it,
And to ‘nit it’ means to fly!
And a bosom friend’s a ‘cobber’,
And a horse a ‘prad’ or ‘moke’,
While a casual acquaintance
Is a ‘joker’ or a ‘bloke’,
And his ladylove’s his ‘donah’,
Or his ‘clinah’ or his ‘tart’,
Or his ‘little bit o’ muslin’,
As it used to be his ‘bart’,
And his naming of the coinage
Is a mystery to some,
With his ‘quid’ and ‘half-a-caser’,
And his ‘deener’ and his ‘scrum’,
And a ‘tin-back’ is a party
Who’s remarkable for luck,
And his food is called his ‘tucker’,
Or his ‘panem’ or his ‘chuck’.
A policeman is a ‘johnny’
Or a ‘copman’ or a ‘trap’,
And a thing obtained on credit
Is invariably ‘strap’.
A conviction’s known as ‘trouble’,
And a gaol is called a ‘jug’,
And a sharper is a ‘spieler’
And a simpleton’s a ‘tug’.
If he hits a man in fighting
That is what he calls a ‘plug’,
If he borrows money from you
He will say he ‘bit your lug’.
And to ‘shake it’ is to steal it,
And to ‘strike it’ is to beg;
And a jest is ‘poking borak’,
And a jester ‘pulls your leg’.
Things are ‘cronk’ when they go wrongly
In the language of the ‘push’,
But when things go as he wants ’em
He declares it is ‘all cush’.
When he’s bright he’s got a ‘napper’,
And he’s ‘ratty’ when he’s daft,
And when looking for employment
He is ‘out o’ blooming graft’.
And his clothes he calls his ‘clobber’
Or his ‘togs’, but what of that
When a ‘castor’ or a ‘kady’
Is the name he gives his hat!
And our undiluted English
Is a fad to which we cling,
But the great Australian slanguage
Is a truly awful thing!

But while I was mulling on accents, slang, and language in general I began to think we’ve got it quite wrong. I had a Cockney friend, Tony, who was out here on a

working holiday in 1970 and I sometimes had difficulty understanding him; more to the point he sounded nothing like an Australian. But I realised that, looking back on that, no one had ever asked the key question: was there a definable Cockney accent in 1788? I am inclined to think the answer should be 'not really'. London then was still a conglomeration of linked villages. The push from enclosure, from the industrial revolution, from the arrival of refugees, Huguenots, Jews, and others, had begun both to crowd and to change London. But the process was still in its infancy. There were no radios, no televisions, no cinemas—the blanketing effect wasn't there. Basically people inherited their parents' accents, with small changes occurring if they left home young.

Then—hundreds of people got bundled up together and sent off to the other side of the world. Convicts, warders, seamen, settlers, soldiers, administrators. Not only were they crowded together in a land which had no familiar named aspects but more importantly the convicts, who made up the vast majority of early arrivals, had no moments of grace. They could not ask overseers to repeat their instructions because they didn't understand a Lancashire accent. But neither could they build important public buildings if there was constant misunderstanding. They had few opportunities for long conversations in which they might familiarise themselves with regional dialects and colloquialisms. And too much talk could be dangerous anyway. At every level of the new life there was a need for a kind of shared verbal shorthand. One of the most obvious aspects of Australian is its minimalist nature. People shortened words, dropped endings, combined words, never bothered with long-winded explanations. By the time transportation ended, this sense of the language as something to express the least in the simplest shortest way possible had thoroughly permeated the society.

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On board the ship which brought Henry Savery to Australia was another larger-than-life character, the Reverend John Dunmore Lang, and in company with Lang and Savery was a third remarkable character, Isabella Mary Kelly. I would never have heard of her if I had not come across *The Trials of Isabella Mary Kelly: Her legend and the Truth* by Maurie Garland. She was Irish, Catholic, and travelling alone when she arrived in Australia with some money to invest in land. John Ramsland, introducing the book, says of her:

'Undoubtedly Isabella Mary Kelly was an unusual woman for her time as a property owner and a cattle baroness, but she was also an intelligent and capable one. Maurie Garland's incisive narrative, based on significant sources that have not previously been addressed by historians will unfold her real story for the first time for the discerning reader. He gives us a fresh chance to see how she lived, thought and acted in the context of a difficult pioneering environment. The layers have been skillfully scraped away to reveal a fresh and lively portrait of both her life and her times. The frontier-settler world and its rugged landscape of the Upper Manning has been accurately evoked, together with the rigid divisions on the sectarian and gender lines that clearly existed very strongly. Maurie Garland has recognised that to reach the truth in colonial history, the rose-coloured glasses have to be thrown off for an unflinching gaze at Australia's pioneering past through the prism of the life of a solitary but passionate, able and determined woman.'

The terrifying thing about Garland's story is the way that person after person, even respected writers and historians, simply regurgitated the nonsense about her; as late as 1996 *The Daily Telegraph* could describe her as "Gun-toting sadist forced convicts to join her harem"! There is a further irony in the fact that the man who did his best to wreck her life, Charles Skerrett, and who saw her wrongfully imprisoned for perjury was a genuinely 'crooked stick'. He had been transported to Hobart for robbery—and despite being a married man he had continued misbehaving. But he was a consummate con-man and managed to con almost everyone into believing his stories. When he reached NSW he claimed to have been a magistrate for nine years and to have made money on the Victorian goldfields. NO ONE ever checked his credentials and even the Chief Justice of NSW accepted him at his own valuation and pardoned him, despite his certain involvement in cattle-stealing and forgery.

There were other women on the land; Ann Dugdale and Caroline Newcomb in Victoria come to mind. They received a degree of support and respect. This may have been because they

were Protestants or because they lived in Victoria or because they had each other's friendship and help. Isabella Mary Kelly did not invite friendship, she seems almost to have had a deep and abiding aloofness from men, even a distaste, but she did find a champion in Dunmore Lang and several other men who tried to get her compensation for losses caused by wrongful imprisonment. But I took away from the book a profound sense of unease both for the way that the idea of 'mateship' is now being used to muffle the cruelties and misogyny of our past and for the way in which slander and lies can continue so far beyond the grave … still being served up as 'history' …

It probably isn't necessary to peel away layers from the Rev. John Dunmore Lang.

But Henry Savery, though the facts of his life are known, is a curiously 'ungraspable' character. When he sat down to write his famous novel *Quintus Servinton* he does not seem to have been motivated by a desire to set the record straight and present himself in a better light. In fact I came away from his book with the feeling that his main motive was nostalgia. He had lost something which he hadn't known to be precious to him and his view of the world until it was too late and it was irreparably gone.

He wrote, in his curiously vague and dreamy way, of his fellow passenger: 'Whilst so amusing himself one day, after the voyage had been resumed, a Presbyterian divine of the Scotch kirk, who was a passenger on board the vessel, came up to him and said, "I should na have expected that the sufferings of a fellow creature, could have afforded ony pleasure to sic a young man as yersel. It is na in vara gude keeping, I'm thinking, with one who has sa mich to be thankfu' for upon his ain account."

"I feel the force of your reproof, sir; and am sorry you had occasion to offer it. It was the remarks of the sailors which made me laugh; not, I assure you, sir, any delight in witnessing a fellow creature's pain."

"I dinna doubt it, young man: I think na less of ye. I dare say you've been brought up vara deferently fra the maist part of the misguided puir creatures who are now aboard with us. You'll excuse the question, but has ony regard been paid by yer frien's, to yer religious instruction?"

Quintus was glad to find the conversation take this turn — as, thanks to his mother in his childhood, to his good preceptors in his youth, and subsequently, to his connexion by marriage, he was tolerably versed upon all points bearing upon different religious faiths — knew the distinctions between the doctrines of Calvin and Luther — between those of Socinus and Arius — was acquainted with the various texts, whereon each grounded his respective opinions — was well read in every thing relating to the reformation — to the difference between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy, and understood the tenets of the numerous sects of Dissenters. The Scotchman, on his part, was equally pleased to have touched a string, from which, to his ear, so musical a chord as Quintus's answer vibrated' ….

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August 5: Alexander Kinglake

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When *The Times* in London sent Irish journalist William Howard Russell to cover the Crimean War they catapulted him into history as the world's first war correspondent. As Trevor Royle wrote in *Crimea*: "One other British institution was also making preparations for the coming conflict and in so doing would change the reporting of modern warfare. Early in February Delane summoned to his office in Printing House Square William Howard Russell, a stocky and forceful Irishman who had made his name as a journalist by covering Irish politics. Although Delane had several military officers under contract to provide him with news, it was not a satisfactory arrangement and he had already been advised by his manager, Mowbray Morris, that *The Times* would disappoint its readership 'when we offer nothing better than reports from other journals, however authentic.' To make good that deficit he decided that when the army left, William Howard Russell would accompany them. At first the Irishman was unwilling to follow what might still be a fool's errand but Delane convinced him that the war would be over in no time and that he would be back in London by late summer. With Russell suitably convinced, arrangements were made immediately to accompany the Guards Brigade when they left for

Malta, en route to 'the seat of war'. As it turned out he did not return until two years later and he came back as much of a household name as any of the war's military commanders."

The unfortunate thing about this is that it has created the sense that he was the *only* person reporting the war. Royle writes, 'The credit for revealing the horrific conditions at Scutari is usually given to William Howard Russell but, in fact, the writer in this issue of the paper was Thomas Chenery, an Etonian barrister, who acted as the local correspondent for *The Times* in Constantinople.' Even more curious was the presence of a young woman, Fanny Duberly; 'Although the old cavalry barracks looked comfortable from the outside the appearance was deceptive. Inside, the British soldiers and their families were forced to endure unimaginable squalor. 'The dilapidation! the dirt! the rats! the fleas!' wrote an enraged Fanny Duberly, the young wife of the paymaster of the 8th Hussars, whose letters and diaries provide one of the most colourful accounts of the campaign. In the town itself she discovered that things were even worse: 'horribly filthy beggars [were] hovering everywhere … refuse of every description … ' '

She published her lively and often eye-witness account as *Journal Kept during the Crimean War* in London in 1855. And she did not shy away from recounting the horrors; 'I was riding out in the evening when the stragglers came in; and a piteous sight it was — men on foot, driving and goading on their wretched, wretched horses, three or four of which could hardly stir. There seems to have been much unnecessary suffering, a cruel parade, more pain inflicted than good derived; but I suppose these sad sights are merely casualties of war, and we must bear them with what courage and fortitude we may.'

Alexander Kinglake's connection to the war is different. He certainly viewed some of the fighting at first hand but his fame rests on his writing of the definitive history of the war in English, his *Invasion of the Crimea* in 8 volumes. He was the C. E. W. Bean of his time.

At university he became friends with Thackeray and Tennyson. In 1835 he toured to Constantinople and other places in the Levant and wrote of his travels. Although he set up as a lawyer it always had to take second place to his passion for travelling and writing.

His history has been criticised because he, because of his friendship with Lord Raglan, was seen to be partisan, because he was an amateur in military matters, because he was rather anti-French, and because he clogged his history with too much detail on small incidents. The first criticism is certainly true but knowing his position allowances can be made. He made up for his amateur status by massive research and interviewing some of the men involved. Pettifogging detail might have annoyed Victorian readers who wanted the great sweep of 'heroic' action but it has been a boon to later researchers.

So did Tennyson draw on Kinglake's view of the war, the jingoistic newspaper reports, or some private source of his own?

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While I was reading Cyril Pearl's *Brilliant Dan Deniehy* I realised I had always seen the Crimean War as something 'out there', I had never wondered how people in Australia might have reacted to it.

So I found his insights very interesting. "When Parkes, who despite his former radicalism supported the war, rebuked Harpur for opposing it, Harpur asked how a war, 'undertaken to uphold one despotism against another', was 'calculated to advance the true liberties of Europe, or benefit her suffering and down-trodden nationalities?'

"War fever was particularly virulent in Sydney. The *Sydney Morning Herald* called for a public meeting to discuss defence. Sydney-siders talked of asking protection from the French at Tahiti. The Governor-General, Sir Charles FitzRoy, proclaimed a 'public day of Solemn Fast, Humiliation and Prayer … in order to obtain pardon of our sins, and in the most devout and solemn manner send up our prayers for imploring His blessing and assistance on Her Majesty's arms … '

London's *Punch* magazine poked fun at the apparent panic downunder. 'We shall be glad to hear of any progress that may be made in this notable project for protecting several thousand of miles of seashore against the one apocryphal ship now rumoured to be pursuing some apocryphal voyage, for some very apocryphal purpose, in some apocryphal part of the Pacific.'

For a people who pride themselves on a calm laconic approach to life I sometimes think we do panic and over-the-top responses rather well.

"When a patriotic meeting was held at Malcolm's Circus, Sydney, in May 1854, Deniehy contributed a sardonic account of it to the *People's Advocate*." In this he said: 'Look at the material of the joke: War between allied England and France with the Czar of Russia, on a question about the Greek Church, and a meeting of a certain numbers of persons at Sydney on the shores of Port Jackson in the Australian continent, sixteen thousand miles off, to express *their* loyalty—' In fact loyalty seems to be the key word in the response of most public figures and meetings; which is curious because as Deniehy points out their loyalty had never been in doubt.

"In the rapturous and rhetorical chorus there was only one dissenting voice—that of Dr Lang: 'The influences of the presiding Genii of the Circus, Clown and Pantaloon, seemed to have turned the head of every man present except the stern, sensible, matter-of-fact, down-right and up-straight intellect of the grand old Presbyterian patriot,' said Deniehy.

'All he said might be fused into two words, *cui bono*? What's the good of all this, or rather, who will all this do good to? And the only answer the sensible gravelling question got … seems to have been, according to the newspaper reports, 'great confusion', 'immense uproar'. 'cheers and hisses'.

"In Sydney attempts were made to form a volunteer corps. A reader of the *People's Advocate* spoke for many immigrants when he wrote: The bulk of us think that there is very little worth our fighting for. The bulk of the young men live in lodgings—we have no homes. Our earnings are barely sufficient to keep us alive and not sufficient to keep us out of debt—we have no property. The families from which we have detached ourselves are in the Mother country; we have no defenceless parents, sisters or sweethearts, to animate our arms or heal our wounds. Without houses, property or friends, and with good legs to carry us beyond the Blue Mountains, at the approach of an enemy, why should we enroll ourselves as soldiers, unless we like that kind of fun for its own sake? … The feeling is—let the possessors of property fight for themselves … Let the Landlords and other scheming exactors pay for fighting men, or buy the foe off."

When the government wanted to raise a Goulburn Yeomanry Cavalry Corps which would start drilling as soon as 'thirty gentlemen were enrolled' Deniehy questioned their definition of gentleman. 'It has been defined as one 'who keeps a gig', but I know a storekeeper who keeps a gig, to say nothing of the publican and even justices of the peace.' His image of a 'gentleman' is not inspiring. But I couldn't help laughing when he says, 'In conclusion, I can only say that if that 'Roosian' Ketchikoff does land, I only hope he may try travelling upon the Goulburn road. I have a notion that he would undoubtedly regret such a step' …

"As the war in the Crimea blundered on, Sydney's martial fervour increased, and in February 1855 a public meeting was held in the Royal Victoria Theatre to raise money for a Patriotic Fund. The report of the proceedings occupied eleven columns of small type in Parkes' *Empire*." The new Governor Sir William Denison: 'The servants throughout the country both male and female would, I am certain, respond to the call of Mercy,' he said, 'I hope to find the domestic female servants active co-operators with them; the times are peculiarly favourable to them. They are as well paid as other members of the community, while at the same time their outlay is considerably reduced as bonnets are now selling from 5/- to 10/-.'

Henry Parkes declaimed:

There was a cause of battle for the Right:
  Australia's capital had gathered then
Its beauty and its Chivalry, and bright,
  Our flag waved over fair women and brave men

And "Archdeacon McEnroe said he hoped no invidious distinction would be made with regard to the widows and orphans of Roman Catholic soldiers. He was sure that their blood would not be the least copious on the fields of Alma and Inkerman. More cheering greeted the announcement that David Jones and Co. had contributed £100 to the fund, and its employees, £63.9.0. The compositors of the Empire gave £50, and Mr Darvall, £50. Mr Andrew Torning, lessee of the Royal Victoria Theatre, who also ran a Sydney fire-brigade, offered the profits of his

theatre for one night. Mr Daniel Cooper, one of Sydney's wealthy merchants, headed the list with £1,000, and a promise of £500 a year while the war continued.

"The meeting, which had lasted three hours, ended with three cheers for Lord Raglan and General Canrobert, the subscribers, and the committee, and a volley of groans for the Emperor Nicholas. The *Empire* described it as 'a noble demonstration of enlightened patriotism'.

"The defence of Sydney became a burning question, and on which every Tom, Dick and Harry pontificated. At a meeting held in the Exchange Rooms in August, Captain Robert Towns, the distinguished blackbirder, and Mr W.R. Piddington, the Sydney bookseller, recommended the construction of a barrier across the Harbour, composed of the hulls of vessels connected by chains, which could be sunk in a few minutes on a gun signal. It was explained that the surprise of meeting such an obstacle would cause panic on board the first vessel, and 'if followed quickly by other vessels, they would be in such a mess coming, tumbling on top of each other as would prove their certain destruction.' Dr Berncastle thought that Sydney should be defended by a foreign legion of 2,000 men, commanded by British officers, and paid for by a poll tax of 10*s*.0*d*. for every male, 5*s*.0*d*. for every female, and 2*s*.6*d*. for every child, in the colony."

Training with broadsword, fencing and bayonet was offered. The NSW Attorney-General suggested taxing the people of NSW £100,000 a year, something which Deniehy denounced: 'If this Colony were an integral part of the British Empire, or had Great Britain been forced into the war by the aggression of a foreign power upon any of her territories, there might be some pretence for such a scheme … The case, however, is now widely different, and if the Britsh Empire, in the plenitude of its might, volunteers its support to defend a Mohammedan ally from the aggression of a Northern Autocrat, there is no reason why we, a remote dependency in a state in *transitu*, should be compelled to bear a share of the expense of that war' …

Sales of rifles, revolvers, swords, shot, even poignards went up.

But *Bell's Life in Sydney* printed the irreverent 'Tim Donohue's War Shout':

Hooraw, me boys! who fears to lisht,
Onless he's tould the r'ason
Or won't spit bouldly in his fisht
While fightin' is in s'ason?
Sure none but rale bosthoons will care
Whether they tackle Rooshey's Bear,
Or challinge Albin's buntin'.

Our camp we'll pitch on Razorback,
An' fortyfy each angle,
To give the Cossicks slatherawhack,
When they attack Menangle!

Would the Peace Movement be more effective if it rallied satire, irreverence, and derision to its side more often?

* * * * *

The Great Bullion Robbery, now sometimes called the First Great Train Robbery, was inspired by the Crimean War. On the 15 May 1855 a train travelling from London Bridge to Folkestone to meet the cross-channel ferry was carrying £12,000 in gold coins and ingots, in a new cleverly-designed and supposedly impregnable safe made by John Chubb, destined as pay for the unfortunate men fighting in the Crimean War. But along its short journey the supposedly impregnable safe was opened and everything removed and "lead shot in neatly tied packets" was substituted. The crime was committed so cleverly that no one knew when or where it had been carried out and the British and French firms involved traded very acrimonious accusations.

The cast of the gang responsible included the Jekyll-and-Hyde character, James Townsend Saward, a successful London barrister by day and a successful forger and thief by night, who sold on the melted down coins; Edward Agar, a professional thief and expert safebreaker, but also a successful financial investor, who in a sustained demonstration of skill, clever improvisation, and cool nerve made the keys to open the safe (and Donald Thomas' account of his machinations in

The Victorian Underworld is worth reading for this alone); William Pierce, an ex-ticket printer for the railway; James Burgess, a railway guard; William Tester who had been stationmaster at Margate and was now a high official at London Bridge station; and a couple of minor players.

On the other side was Samuel Smiles, secretary of the South-Eastern Railway Company, former radical journalist, later author of such books of Victorian values as *Self-Help* (1859), *Character* (1871) *Thrift* (1875) and *Duty* (1887), a man who believed absolutely in his company and the precautions taken.

And there was an extra player in the wings. As James Morton wrote: "The First Great Train Robbery was one of the most successful crimes of that century, or indeed any other. Had the players devoted the same care to their personal relationships, probably there would never have been a prosecution."

Edward Agar had a young woman, Fanny Poland Kay, in his life. Fanny had his child. But he had fallen for another young woman, Emily Campbell, who was a prostitute in the employ of an unsavoury character called William Humphries—who wasn't about to let his young employee fly the coop. He set one of his toughs on to frame Agar for robbery and Agar was charged and sentenced to transportation to NSW. Fanny Kay was angry at being superceded and worried at being left without sustenance for her young child. Agar told her he had made arrangements with William Pierce for her to receive regular payments. But Pierce, not content with his share of the robbery, had pocketed the money he was supposed to give to Fanny. She didn't know the details of the heist but she knew enough to make her dangerous. She told what she knew—and it was enough to bring the whole conspiracy crashing down. Only Saward was able to avoid prosecution—only to be caught in an unrelated forgery case two years later.

But nobody seems to have recorded how the soldiers in the Crimea, hungry, cold, dirty, weary and unpaid, felt about the Great Train Robbery …

* * * * *

The most famous poem of the Crimean War was Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Military historians now say it could not have happened in the way it has been traditionally portrayed. But Tennyson's readers didn't want the details. They wanted blood and glory—and they got that in buckets.

I

Half a league, half a league,
  Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.

II

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
  Some one had blunder'd:
Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
  Rode the six hundred.

III

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
  Volley'd and thunder'd:

Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
  Rode the six hundred.

IV

Flash'd all their sabers bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
  All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
  Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
  Not the six hundred.

V

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
  Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
  Left of six hundred.

VI

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
  All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
  Noble six hundred!

* * * * *

August 6: Rolf Boldrewood
Piers Anthony
August 7: Dornford Yates

* * * * *

"Some revival of interest in road-steamers became manifest in the late 1850s, the bias being now towards slow-moving engines for drawing heavy loads or for agricultural work (though there were a few 'light' steam pleasure carriages), and the Locomotives and Highways Act of 1861 was actually framed to encourage their use by protecting them against excessive tolls. This was followed in 1865 by the notorious 'Red Flag' Act (28 & 29 Vic., c. 83) which imposed speed limits of 4 m.p.h. in open country and 2 m.p.h. in towns and required all 'road locomotives' to be attended by at least three persons, one of whom was to walk sixty yards ahead of the engine carrying a red flag by day and a red lantern by night. Various other restrictions, such as those governing the use of water from public supplies, were also enacted.

"This Act has always been reviled by motor enthusiasts and historians as a prime example of short-sighted governmental interference stifling invention and enterprise, but … the Act was

not wholly unreasonable in the circumstances of the time. It is, however, fair to say that the next Highways and Locomotives Act, of 1878, which amended and amplified the regulations, was unnecessarily restrictive.

"Typical of the pettifogging nature of this Act was the clause which reduced the distance by which the 'Red Flag Man' had to precede a road engine from sixty yards to twenty. Also it was left to the discretion of local authorities as to whether he should carry a flag or not. This was generally interpreted as though the flag was still mandatory, and some of the first private motorists were summonsed for not having a banner borne before them. Henry Hewetson, the English agent for Benz cars, took advantage of the fact that neither the 1865 nor the 1878 Acts specified the size of the flag and infuriated the police by having his young son carry before him an inch of red ribbon tied to a pencil."

(from *Roads & Vehicles* by Anthony Bird)

* * * * *

23rd June, 1907

Dear Berry,

I've arranged for a car, with a chauffeur, for us to try. Hired the two for one month. If the vehicle suits us, we order a similar car. If it doesn't, we don't.

We shall, of course, be unpopular. Sir Anthony will denounce our decision and will declare that we are letting the neighbourhood down. But he'll have a car himself in two years' time. You'll see. Speed has a convenience which nobody can deny: and cars don't have to be cared for, as horses have. Of course they are going to kill the romance of the road, rather as gunpowder killed the romance of the battlefield. But that is the price of progress.

Well, there we are. I feel at once ashamed and excited. It is going to be a remarkable experience—taking familiar roads at forty-five miles an hour.

Expect me, then, on Monday, complete with car. I shall hope to arrive for lunch, but we may be delayed.

Yours ever,

Jonah.

(From *The Berry Scene* by Dornford Yates.)

* * * * *

'The car in the courtyard garage was a red car, built in 1914, and no one, not even Uncle Ralph, was allowed to drive it. My father's father had bought it in Austria as a collector's piece. It was the car in which the Grand Duke had been shot, in Sarajevo; and it was said to have killed over twenty people since. Each subsequent owner had crashed and died in it after only a few months. It had even pretended to break down once: its owner had arranged to be towed to the nearest town, and as they set off the engine sprang to power. It rushed into the towing vehicle in front, and crushed the impotent driver to death on the steering wheel. My father's father had been proud of this acquisition. It was shipped to England, as there wasn't a soul in Europe who would drive it by then for love or money. Uncle Ralph often stood for hours in the gloom of the garage and gazed at it longingly. He would willingly have sacrificed his life for the experience. But he was forbidden. After these feasts of contemplation, he went up to the gunroom over the garage and wandered about in the remains of my father's father's uninteresting museum. The adders pickled in bottles, and the black bear with an unconvincing red tongue, did nothing to distract Uncle Ralph from thoughts of the death car below.'

(From *Wild Nights* by Emma Tennant.)

*

'Once people have got a moty car, blessed if they can stay still anywheres.'

(From 'Philomel Cottage' by Agatha Christie.)

*

There are few books which don't mention driving or cars; and yet, although there are books or films about cars, such as Walt Disney's 'Herbie' or Val Biro's 'Gumdrop', there are surprisingly few books about cars despite their number and ubiquitousness. There are manuals for

every type of car. There are books of vintage and veteran cars. There are books of a rather dull sociological nature about the impact of cars on town-planning and family pursuits.

And yet, given that cars have had such an enormous impact on the way we see the world, on the configuration of the Middle East, on our attitudes to the non-renewable, there is a curious lack of books on the psychology of cars and the intricate ways they influence virtually every life on the planet. It is almost as though I have been looking for interesting things about fence posts. Useful objects. Things that exist in their billions. But no one writes books about them.

I have just been reading *Against the Machine* by Nicols Fox in which she says, 'For the past two hundred years, technology has been creeping up on us slowly, seductively, incrementally, until it now dominates our thinking, our expectations, and our actions in ways that could not have been anticipated and of which we are scarcely aware. It has, in a manner not consciously or carefully considered, reshaped and reordered the world around us to its own measure. Over those two centuries, the relationship between human and tool has shifted dramatically. The extent to which we now attempt to adapt our lives to the requirements of the machine is unacknowledged. We adjust automatically, willingly, bravely …' and 'We have created dependency where none existed, forgetting that we survived and thrived as a species for hundreds of thousands of years without the internal combustion engine or the cell phone.'

I can understand why we don't want to look too closely. Years ago I heard someone say that from the fuel we put in our cars 95% moves the car and 5% takes the driver from place to place. This equation has always remained to bother me with its gross inefficiency and absurdity. 95% of every litre of petrol is a lot to waste for convenience, comfort, and a sense of freedom.

Ivan Klima looked at this in 1975: 'Even when I was a boy, I remember reading in magazines that within two centuries, all the coal we have on earth would be burned up, or that in 150 years we would have exhausted the last deposit of silver, or that the reserves of crude oil would hardly last us to the end of the next century. It used to seem strange to me that such details never frightened or upset anyone. People went on shovelling coal into their furnaces, and they would drive tons of steel, burning gallons of petrol, merely to convey their few kilograms from place to place.' ('The end of Civilization')

And Stanley Robert mentioned it in last week's *Mercury*: 'If we step back and consider cars for a moment, they end up making little sense as a mode of transport. Liquid fuel is a valuable and limited resource, yet we obtain less than 1 per cent of its energy when we use it in a car.

'We lose 87 per cent of its energy due to inefficiencies of the combustion engine, the drivetrain and in sitting idle. That leaves only 13 per cent of the energy of the fuel to move the car.

'If we assume the average car weighs 1500 kg and the average person weighs 80 kg, that means we're using 5 per cent of 13 per cent—a mere 0.65 per cent—to move that person. To put it another way, for every litre of fuel put into the car about 6.5ml—a bit more than 1 teaspoonful—is used to move the person.' ('Science Watch')

And when I consider that I can go out and walk ten kilometres on a tomato sandwich and a cup of tea, neither of which seems likely to run out in the near future, the inefficiency on which the world's transport systems are built is mind-boggling.

Of course you might like to point out that I don't travel very fast on my tomato sandwich and cup of tea. This is true. But traffic in many major city centres now travels more slowly than a horse-and-buggy. If congestion gets any worse it will soon travel more slowly than me and my tomato sandwich …

* * * * *

I am not terribly interested in cars. And yet I love browsing through books on the cars of eighty years ago. I've just been reading Pedr Davis's *Veteran and Vintage Cars* and there are three aspects of old cars and early motoring that might be worth focussing on.

1. Their flexible energy sources. Davis writes, "Though the world's auto industry once built more steamers than petrol or electric cars, a steamer in full flight is a rare sight." In the days when petrol stations were a rarity (and later in war-time) cars were developed to run

on a variety of fuels, kerosene, petrol, firewood, mill waste, coal gas, occasionally electricity, and other readily available substances.

2. Their flexible construction. A number of the early Australian cars were literally home-made. For instance, in the early 1900s, Albert Ohlmeyer, "was a member of a group of Barossa Valley motoring enthusiasts who assembled each Sunday morning with their motorcycles or home-made cars." The claim by old timers that early cars could be fixed with some fencing wire or baling twine wasn't all that far off the mark. People bought those parts of the vehicle they couldn't make themselves. My father when he bought us a Ford Popular simply bought the chassis, engine and four wheels. He built the rest on himself from wood and tarpaulin mainly. People did wonders with wood, canvas and leather. And if something was damaged it wasn't hard to replace. Our cars go faster, they are more comfortable, and they contain many extras. But we have also paid a price in loss of convenience and simplicity.
3. It is easy to overlook the fact that Australia was at the front in early construction and innovation. Among innovators was Harley Tarrant in Victoria, and Frederick York Wolseley and Herbert Austin who built their first car in Australia in 1885 as a 'break' from manufacturing mechanical clippers for shearing sheep and eventually took their business to Britain. And then there is the 'Australian Six' made in Sydney from 1919 to 1930 by Frederick Hugh Gordon. It was a beautiful little car but could not compete with the massive influx of cheap Fords. To these might be added a range of hybrids using imported parts or ideas and local input.

I couldn't help feeling that we traded a degree of self-reliance, innovation, variety, and flexibility, for speed, comfort, and conformity.

* * * * *

"Belonging is always mutual. This is true even in the case of things that belong to us. We tend to think of our relationship to belongings as a one-sided propietorship. This colors our love for things. It gives it the wrong color. Rightly understood, love for things, too, is a "yes" to belonging—to a mutual belonging, whether or not we are aware of this. You may think your car belongs to you merely in the sense of being your property, serving your needs. But the car knows better. She won't serve your needs for long, unless you serve her needs in turn and have her serviced. It's mutual: "I'll take you there, if you keep my oil level up." If you really love your car, you'll be sensitive to her needs. You will intuitively understand that the two of you belong together. Love takes that mutual belonging seriously. Love cares, even for things."

Gratefulness, the heart of prayer, by David Steindl-Rast.

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August 8: Marjorie Rawlings
August 9: John Dryden
Philip Larkin
P. L. Travers
Peter Wright
August 10: Jorge Amado
August 11: Enid Blyton
August 12: Robert Southey
August 13: Roy Heath
August 14: John Galsworthy
August 15: Napoleon Bonaparte

* * * * *

Napoleon rampaged through Europe leaving a trail of burnt villages and wrecked farmland, looted churches, homes, and treasuries, war crimes, misery, chaos, and theft. An estimated four to five million people died in Napoleon's wars, and "His consumption of horsepower was unprecedented and horrifying. In the pursuit of speed by his armies, hundreds of thousands of these creatures died in their traces, driven beyond endurance. Millions of them died during his wars, and the struggle to replace them became one of his most formidable supply problems." But

people continue to point to Napoleon's 'reform' of the penal code as a worthwhile result of his rule. In fact it wasn't an unmitigated good. Paul Johnson in his biography of Napoleon writes: "Bonaparte's other strong suit was his reputation as a law-maker, which allowed him to claim to be the Justinian of the modern world. The ancien régime had retained feudal and regional anomalies despite all the centralizing and modernizing efforts of Richelieu, Mazarin, Colbert, and the reforming liberals during the last days of Louis XV and throughout the reign of Louis XVI. The Revolution took up the cause, enacting nearly 15,000 statutes, then making half a dozen attempts to embody them in a homogenous code. Bonaparte, having absolute authority and a habit of taking rapid decisions, pushed the project forward. Despite his panegyricists, he attended in person only thirty-six out of the eighty-seven sessions of the Council of State needed to complete the draft code by the end of 1801. Its 2,281 articles were finally published in March 1804, when it was named the Code Civil and, from 1807 to 1814, the Code Napoléon. It abolished what remained of the feudal system and established, in theory anyway, the principle of equality before the law. It was imposed in those parts of Europe where the French writ ran, or rather where the French army occupied the barracks. The more rational and popular parts of it became permanent. Though it had a huge impact on large parts of Europe, and it still has, Bonaparte did not create it. On the other hand it could not have come into being without him. Much of its apparent novelty was not new — after all, the English Parliament had abolished the feudal system in the early 1640s. Insofar as Bonaparte's opinions were reflected in it, the code was conservative, or rather paternalist. It reversed the progress in women's rights that had been made under the Revolution (Bonaparte loathed women's interfering in politics, and his view of their role was close to the *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* notion of Hitler). It enabled the French state to reimpose slavery in the West Indies, at a time when Britain had just abolished the slave trade by law. It contained many open or hidden pitfalls for libertarians and weighted the balance heavily in favour of public authority as opposed to the individual. It led to the dark French saying about power: 'Only *le Pouvoir* can correct the abuses of *le Pouvoir*.' But, with all its faults, it was his monument.'

Yet something genuinely radical did happen in the French world of law and order during and just after the time of Napoleon. A man named François Vidocq. Angus Hall in *The Crime Busters*: "Vidocq believed in the infallibility of setting thieves to catch thieves, and wrote: "During the twenty years I spent at the head of the Surete I hardly employed any but ex-convicts, often even escaped prisoners. I preferred to choose men whose bad records had given them a certain celebrity. I often gave these men the most delicate missions. They had considerable sums to deliver to the police or prison officers. They took part in operations in which they could easily have laid hands on large amounts. But not one of them, not a single one, betrayed my trust."

Strictly speaking, Vidocq was not a thief, but he used many thieves in his work. He had gone to prison for beating up another man who fancied Vidocq's young lady. Sent to prison he escaped and was recaptured. This happened again and again. Eventually he was sent to the galleys for eight years as an 'habitual escapee'. Again he escaped, came to Paris, and set up as a second-hand clothes dealer. But many people in the underworld recognised him as a fugitive and blackmailed him. Finally, knowing there was no end to this extortion, he went to the police and offered them a deal: if they would amnesty him he would provide information. Surprisingly they said yes and gave him a free hand to set up a CID department. In his first year, 1809, he is credited with putting more than eight hundred men behind bars. He employed twenty ex-convicts as his detectives and sometimes had them sent to prison on bogus charges and later had them carted out, hidden in coffins. He paid meticulous attention to detail, he kept careful records, he had a phenomenal memory, he was a master of disguise, not least because of his attention to detail; in one case he chafed his ankles severely and doused himself with lice so as to appear as a recently unshackled prisoner. He set up the world's first private detective agency. But he also promoted a deep sense of humanity; saying to a man taunting two murderers going to the scaffold, "This is no way to act toward men who are about to die," and silencing him.

The Encyclopedia of World Crime says of him: "Vidocq spent his later years writing several books, one dealing with the history of the criminal class, another about the rehabilitation

of criminals and two huge novels based upon his detective experiences. His oft-quoted *Memoirs* suffered at the hands of many translators and Vidocq was critical of those who cavalierly misrepresented his exploits and statements. Balzac, who was Vidocq's lifelong friend, depicted the detective as the character Vautrin in his *Comédie Humaine*. Vidocq died at the age of seventy-seven, hailed as "an honest man" who was truly the first great detective in the world, one whose pioneer exploits were more factual than fictional, which made this remarkable person all the more legendary, all the more heroic."

Katherine Ramsland describes him as the "brilliant French police spy during the eighteenth century who mingled so well with the criminal element that no one suspected he was responsible for a spate of arrests. Once they caught on, he continued his work in disguise; his skills derived, in part, from having been a criminal himself. In 1811, he became the founder and first chief of the Sureté, an elite undercover unit that rapidly gained international fame. Vidocq is considered the father of modern criminal investigation. Among his accomplishments was the introduction into police procedure of many of the basic methods of criminalistics, including document examination, casting of footprint impressions, and firearms analysis."

He was also helped by Mathieu Joseph Bonaventure Orfila bringing out his ground-breaking *Treatise of General Toxicology* in Paris in 1813. But the thing that amazed me was that his success depended heavily on his stable of ex-convicts. Yet in hundreds of cases not one of them ever betrayed his trust in them. Perhaps even more amazing is the fact that many of the people who went to prison or the guillotine because of him genuinely respected this man they called 'the Wolf'.

R. F. Stewart in ... *And always a Detective* described Fergus Hume's Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Dove, "Dove is but the "local Dogberry' and plays a Seegrave role; the main detective is Drage, the "Vidocq of London"." Vidocq doesn't get as many mentions in whodunits as Lombroso or the fictional Gaborou but I found myself wondering what aspect of Vidocq did the new breed of detective story writers feel they were drawing upon. His success? His use of like to catch like? His understanding of the attitudes and ways of the people he sought? His memory? His clever disguises? Or his ability to put small scraps of information together into a workable whole?

* * * * *

Marie Antoinette is seen as the greedy luxury-loving feather-brained young woman who by her extravagance helped bring on the French Revolution. But is this fair? Thornton Hall wrote of her, "Wedded when but a child, full of the joy of youth, with laughter bubbling on her pretty lips and gaiety dancing in her eyes, to a dull-witted clown to whom her fresh young beauty made no appeal; surrounded by Court ladies jealous of her charms; feared for her foreign sympathies, and hated by a sullen, starving populace for her extravagance and her pursuit of pleasure, the Austrian Princess with all her young loveliness and the sweetness of her nature could please no one in the land of her exile. Her very amiability was offence; her unaffected simplicity a subject of scorn; and her love of pleasure a crime." (*Love Affairs of the Courts of Europe*) As the fifteenth child of the Empress Maria Teresa of Austria no one expected her to be useful in the advancement of Habsburg power so she was undereducated and overlooked. Sent to France as a fourteen-year-old bride for a prince apparently uninterested in love, sex, or companionship and left to try to make her own way in a largely hostile foreign court she simply fitted into French courtly ways as best she could. The implication that she should have understood French society, reformed the French court, and warned her husband what was in the wind is patently absurd. Marie Antoinette is unremarkable in the list of French queens—except for the fact that, in her last days, she displayed a level of courage, fortitude, honesty, and moral strength I found myself admiring.

With her husband executed, the fate of her children unknown, and her health failing, she was subjected to a show trial. In the words of Antonia Fraser, "At the very last, she was asked if she had anything further to say in her defence. 'Yesterday I did not know who the witnesses were to be,' answered Marie Antoinette. 'I was ignorant of what they would say. Well, no one has articulated anything positive against me. I finish by observing that I was only the wife of Louis XVI and I had to conform to his wishes.' These were her last words to the court. Marie

Antoinette, a woman in terrible health, had been in the courtroom something like sixteen hours, with only a few sips of bouillon to sustain her, having spent fifteen hours there the day before."

She was finally returned briefly to her cell after 4 a.m. on the 16 October 1793; seven hours later, her hands tightly bound behind her, she set out on the jolting ride through a bitterly cold Paris, jeered and derided and humiliated on her journey to the guillotine. But "Every account, every eyewitness, agreed on the unassailable composure with which Marie Antoinette went to her death."

* * * * *

August 16: Georgette Heyer
Thomas Heywood (bur)
August 17: Wilfrid Scawen Blunt
Ted Hughes

* * * * *

Ted Hughes wrote a poem he called 'Pibroch':

The sea cries with its meaningless voice
Treating alike its dead and its living,
Probably bored with the appearance of heaven
After so many millions of nights without sleep,
Without purpose, without self-deception.

Stone likewise. A pebble is imprisoned
Like nothing in the Universe.
Created for black sleep. Or growing
Conscious of the sun's red spot occasionally,
Then dreaming it is the foetus of God.

Over the stone rushes the wind
Able to mingle with nothing,
Like the hearing of the blind stone itself.
Or turns, as if the stone's mind came feeling
A fantasy of directions.

Drinking the sea and eating the rock
A tree struggles to make leaves—
An old woman fallen from space
Unprepared for these conditions.
She hangs on, because her mind's gone completely.

Minute after minute, aeon after aeon,
Nothing lets up or develops.
And this is neither a bad variant nor a tryout.
This is where the staring angels go through.
This is where all the stars bow down.

This doesn't really fit my image of the pibroch except for that undertone of chant. For example, here is a traditional verse:

'I can hear the pibroch sounding, sounding,
Deep over the mountain and glen
While light springing footsteps are trampling the heath,
'Tis the march of the Cameron men!
'Tis the march, 'Tis the march, 'Tis the march o' the Cameron men.'
(My mother was a Cameron.)

But the image here is of skirling mists and the sound of the pipes and swinging kilts …

The OED defines a pibroch as ‘the art of playing the bagpipes’; from the Gaelic *piobaireachd*, *piobair* = a piper, and *achd* = the act of playing. It goes on to say ‘In the Scotch Highlands, a series of variations for the bagpipes, founded on a theme called the *urlar*. They are generally of a martial character, but include dirges.’

(I was surprised to find the OED referring to the ‘Scotch’ Highlands.)

And this rather beautiful description comes in *Jock* by James Kennaway:

“To the unpractised ear a pibroch has no form and no melody, and to the accustomed ear it has little more. But it is a mood and a pibroch was something Jock felt almost physically; damp, penetrating and sad like a mist. It enveloped him and pulled at his heart. He was far too much the professional to be moved to tears, but the corporal played well and it took a moment before Jock fully recovered himself. The pibroch very often comes to a sudden end; it is a finish that makes it a fragment, and the more sad for that.

“Jock himself says—‘You have to be in the mood for the pibroch; it is a lament. It is a lament.’ He mopped his brow. ‘But it is something else as well. That’s the catch. It’s no just a grieving. There’s something angry about it too.’ ”

So it could be said that Hughes’ poem fits the definition though I find it rather pedantic and lacking in much sense of mood.

* * * * *

But the poem is important for a different and unrelated reason. While I was pondering on it the thought came to me: I never managed to tie myself down to a favourite book—but what about a favourite poem? On the one hand I have a great fondness for the stirring sort of poem, the emotionally-wrenching ballad particularly the Scottish ones with their underlying sense of lament, or the jolly gallop of a bush verse. But an actual favourite poem? I am very fond of Matthew Arnold’s ‘The Forsaken Merman’. I read a lot of poetry and I always have the feeling there are wonderful poems just waiting round the corner to be found. But I think, on balance, my favourite poem is James Elroy Flecker’s ‘The Old Ships’. It doesn’t matter how often I read those 31 lines (or what I read into them) each time I feel a renewed sense of discovery and of mystery.

The other day I heard an old lady I know recite part of John Squire’s poem ‘The Discovery’; when she came to the last line she couldn’t remember it. She said it was a poem which had always impressed her. We had it in our poetry book at primary school but I don’t remember any teacher ever drawing our attention to it. Perhaps because the last verse goes:

And he, in fear, this naked man alone,
His fallen hands forgetting all their shells,
His lips gone pale, knelt low behind a stone,
And stared, and saw, and did not understand,
Columbus’s doom-burdened caravels
Slant to the shore, and all their seamen land.

Now I can see why this wasn’t a poem for children. If Columbus, who we were given as a larger-than-life hero, had ‘doom-burdened caravels’ then where would it end? Cook’s ‘doom-burdened colliers’? Bass and Flinders in a ‘doom-burdened whale-boat’? Those brave explorers fanning out across Australia carrying ‘doom’?

Squire was a competent and interesting poet but this is his only poem to continue to turn up in collections.

Another poem I have always enjoyed is ‘The Jackdaw of Rheims’ by Richard Harris Barham. One time when I was agonising over what to do as my poetry-reading at Toastmasters (I had narrowed it down to about three poems, one of which was Browning’s ‘Pied Piper of Hamelin’ which I found I couldn’t fit into the time allowed) I finally settled on this poem. I had great fun reading it and I think people enjoyed listening. It has humour and pathos and pokes a mildly satirical finger at church wealth and pretension. So if you are ever stuck when asked ‘to bring a poem to read’ why not give it a whirl?

Richard Barham is also remembered for writing *The Ingoldsby Legends*. But when it comes to poetry it is his little jackdaw which is his only poem remembered and anthologised now. Yet in his time his skill as a comic poet was admired and his poems found a ready audience.

Another poem we had at school was ‘Beth Gellert’ by William Spencer. This always made me feel so terribly sad. I was glad when we moved on. Yet it is a classic in its modest way. So I was curious to come unexpectedly on a bit about its author. Dorothy Howell-Thomas in *Lord Melbourne’s Susan* wrote, “At the age of twenty, William Spencer, talented, witty, at home in this clever, happy, yet oddly amoral society, already sharing the bane of money troubles with his contemporaries, faced a life that was gradually to separate this undoubtedly engaging young man from all these cousins and friends and was to end in loneliness and sadness.” (He died, a shabby alcoholic, in Paris.)

“Spencer had been unusually fortunate in his education. He had loved Harrow and was stimulated to work there. Then before going to Oxford, where he did not take a degree, he spent six months under the tutorship of Dr Parr. This celebrated teacher used to take a few students into his vicarage for private tuition, where they had the run of his magnificent library. His method of teaching, one of discussion and conversation, with which today we are familiar, was well suited to Spencer’s mind. Dr Parr was a fine Latinist; later, even his critical friends realized that Spencer was a good classical scholar. Like a number of literary men of his time, he owed a good deal to this master.

“William Spencer’s family life during his childhood had not been equally happy. His father, Lord Charles Spencer, a younger son of the third Duke of Marlborough, and his mother were, by the time he was fifteen, on the brink of a separation. ‘I have this instant seen a most wretched being, Ld Charles Spencer’, Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire wrote to her mother, ‘… on his coming to town his family and relations have shown him that on his son’s [there was also an elder son, John Spencer] acct he must be parted; he will not hear of a divorce. I believe he is going to Chiswick with Wm Spencer, but do not write him a kind line.’

“The Grand Tour, when the time came, was thorough, and took Spencer to Germany and to many of that country’s courts; to Switzerland and Italy; and to France. He became outstandingly fluent, even in that age of linguists, in Italian, German and French, though later his translations from Italian were criticized as having a number of errors.

“Young Englishmen were made welcome at the French Court, and still attended even after the Revolution of 1789 had begun its rumblings. A little known characteristic of Louis XVI was his knowledge of English and his interest in contemporary English literature. Therefore a presentable young English poet, who also had a witty turn of phrase, son of an aristocratic family, would be doubly welcome, especially as so many of his relations were on terms of friendship with the King and Queen. So close did William Spencer get to the French royal family, that he was in the room at Versailles when Louis and Marie-Antoinette and the former Director General of Finances Necker were waiting for the Paris mob, at that moment approaching after marching from Paris. It was the evening of 5 October 1789, and Necker with his obstinate policies bore a heavy responsibility for the events of that year. William Spencer ‘heard the Queen of France herself say to M. Necker, “What are we going to do? Speak, say a word, it depends on you.” Necker sat in a corner, he was *bien poudré*, and held a great pocket handkerchief to his eyes. He spoke not a word. Years later, Spencer told this story to Necker’s daughter, Madame de Stael, by then as famous a writer as an opponent of Napoleon.”

“Spencer was becoming well known as a writer of society verse, translations and imitations of the romantic ‘Gothick’ ballads about ghostly night-riders and dying maidens that were much in vogue. His opera *Urania or the Illuminé*, which was played at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and for which his brother John Spencer composed the music, was openly a burlesque of German tales of doomed lovers. He hoped not to give offence by his reference to one of the few ‘slight shades of error’ in the German character. His translation of Gottfried Bürger’s ‘Leonore’, a ballad of spectres and open graves and phantom horses, soon became one of his best known works. The subject fascinated other poets too: Walter Scott’s imitation of the German ballad was among his earliest poetry.

“William’s feeling for shades of language and his sensitiveness to forms of expression different from his own (w)as most clearly shown in his ballad ‘Bethgelert’.” It was mistakenly thought to be a genuine Welsh folk poem and was set to a Welsh tune when it came out in 1800.

It was included in school anthologies through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “It is indeed a remarkable work in its evocativeness of a legend still told to tourists who visit Carnarvonshire.” But not everyone appreciated it. Princess Lievin, wife of the Russian Ambassador, said. “Oh, my dear, there’s that dreadful song. Just think that it is about a dog which goes on dying during thirteen verses, and I’ve heard it twice and that makes twenty-six.”

There are lots of ‘one-remembered-poem’ people. What else did Clement Clarke Moore write besides ‘A Visit from St Nicholas’ with its immortal beginning: ‘’Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house/Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse’? And more pertinently—what else did James Elroy Flecker write?

Flecker had a very short life and career, dying of tuberculosis when he was just over thirty, but although I found him described as a poseur he managed to write two plays, a novel, an Italian grammar book, and a handful of poetry books, the best known being ‘The Golden Road to Samarkand’ and ‘The Old Ships’. He was born in South London and went to Istanbul in 1910 and Beirut in 1911 in the consular service but he already showed signs of the disease which eventually killed him. He married a Greek woman called Hellé Skiardaressi and she seems to have understood his yearning, not to understand the Orient but to write of his imaginings about Eastern life and culture. Hellé put on his tombstone “O Lord, restore his vision to the dreamer”. I like that.

* * * * *

The other day I happened upon *Ariel’s Gift*, Erica Wagner’s overview of Ted Hughes’ last book of poetry *Birthday Letters* which he wove around his relationship with Sylvia Plath. I must admit I have problems with people who claim that Plath was a genius, or would have been but for the patriarchal damage done by Ted Hughes, and that Hughes was a genius, or would have been if he hadn’t had to cope with all the fall-out of his wife’s suicide.

Here were two highly intelligent highly educated people capable of making their own choices and writing their own material. Maybe it isn’t the best idea for two people striving in the same area to marry each other. But I’m sure it also had its compensations. And what they did in their marriage was surely their own business. But what I think *wasn’t* entirely their own business was the welfare of their children. I get cold shivers up my spine when I think of Ted Hughes casually letting his wife, knowing the fragility of her mental state, walk away with two small children. I get even colder shivers thinking of Sylvia Plath putting her head in a gas oven while her two small children were alone upstairs in their cots. What if no one had visited soon enough? What if someone had entered the flat unwittingly smoking a cigarette? And think of those two poor little mites, crying, hungry, frightened, dirty, no sign of their mother …

Seamus Heaney in ‘The Indefatigable Hooftaps’ wrote “There is nothing poetically flawed about Plath’s work. What may finally limit it is its dominant theme of self-discovery and self-definition, even though this concern must be understood as a valiantly unremitting campaign against the black hole of depression and suicide. I do not suggest that the self is not the proper arena of poetry. But I believe that the greatest work occurs when a certain self-forgetfulness is attained, or at least a fullness of self-possession denied to Sylvia Plath … ” I had the feeling that this could apply to both Plath and Hughes. Perhaps it is partly why they were drawn to each other in the first place … and perhaps it had in it seeds of despair which needed pulling up, not careful nurturing in poem after poem … Who can say when catharsis ceases to be catharsis and becomes something more dark and dangerous? And perhaps this is behind his lines:

Alone

Either of us might have met with a life.
Siamese-twinned, each of us festering
A unique soul-sepsis for the other.

Plath’s most frequently anthologised poem is undoubtedly ‘Daddy’; but what of Hughes’ work deserves especially to be remembered? I could not decide. Here and there I came upon a delightful line or phrase, a memorable image or idea, but Hughes, in quantity, starts to feel like wading through heavy clay. Perhaps ‘Rain’ or something slightly quirky like ‘A Pink Wool

Knitted Dress' resonated particularly. But I did not feel I could put my imprimatur on any one poem.

* * * * *

Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in *Kidnapped*: "But Robin only held out his hand as if to ask for silence and struck into the slow measure of a pibroch. It was a fine piece of music in itself, and nobly played; but it seems, besides, it was a piece peculiar to the Appin Stewarts and a chief favourite with Alan. The first notes were scarce out, before there came a change in his face; when the time quickened, he seemed to grow restless in his seat; and long before that piece was at an end, the last signs of his anger died from him, and he had no thought but for the music."

I think great poems are like that. Whether for a minute or a lifetime, they pick you up and carry you away with them.

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August 18: Carolina Nairne

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Paul Jennings, described as that "worldy-wise sophisticate of the London *Daily Telegraph*", wrote: "It always gives me quite a shock when I see typists typing and realize that they *aren't looking at the keys.* It seems incredible. I can remember the top row, qwertyuiop, because that is a kind of word; you can pronounce it. It would be quite a good onomatopoeic word for corkscrew, *qwe – rt* being the squeaky noise of the cork turning round and *yui* – OP being it coming out. But asdfghjkl, although fairly memorable, is too confusing, with 'a' and 's' so arbitrarily added to the alphabetical sequence. And as for zxcvbnm — I don't see how anybody could remember that.

Some time ago I asked one of these no-look typists how she did it. She said they began by typing that thing about the quick brown fox, slowly. Well, I tried it slowly and I got this remarkable poem:

th quoci
The quick briwn fox jiumoec the quock bobrow
the quock bo
the qi
the quicj brown hox ji ji jumoef over the lazu fod
the quoci
thr quo
the quick brown fox junpeffed over the lazu llazy fdodfdoh
dodof f dof doh doh dog.

I realized straight away that I have remarkable gifts as a typewriter medium. These ordinary typists, by a rigid mechanical discipline, have imposed their conscious will on the machine, making it write dreary orders for spangeing irons, and thursling rods, and copper and silk stone grummets. But the typewriter takes me straight into the collective unconscious of the West. Jung says somewhere that the nightmare, the fire-breathing horse that symbolized terror for pre-industrial man, is being replaced by locomotives or great black machines out of control. So, too, the typewriter replaces the planchette, the sybil, or the inspired idiot as the mouthpiece of these verbal race memories. We do not know yet what the *quock bobrow*, or even the *quock bo*, is. The typewriter throws up these disturbing concepts for our consideration and then goes off into a counter-melody in the scat-singing idiom (*ji ji jumoef*); then there is a return to this *quoc* motif, or archetype. The last line produces a splendid verb, *jumpeff* — so much stronger than mere 'jump'. It suggests the fox (or *hox*) sailing insolently over the *lazu fdodfdoh*, going '*pff*' contemptuously as it does so. Yet this marvellous extension and exploration of language is all done in the medium of a popular song, like Edith Sitwell's earlier verse. I should like to hear Danny Kaye sing that last line.

It is fairly clear, however, that the typewriter is trying to come through with some basic message about the *quoci*. A little patient work by a trained analyst would soon straighten it out. But it is not always so simple. The typewriter taps such a rich, teeming world that several

attempts often disclose no unity to the lay-man. Consider, for instance, these two versions of a well-known poem:

matu laf a lyttle lamv
id gleece was qgite as sbei
abd evertwhere that maty wabt
that lamh was stee to ho.

maty gas a lyyrrlr lavm pamb lanm
labm lamn lamh ba blast
utd forrcr aa waa whire as svie
abd everytgwee ygar maty webt
yhat la, j waa sure yo go

kank lamj nub b b b lamn lamb
575757575

How *European* this is! What lyrical variations are called up by the tender associations of 'little' — the charming Anglo-Saxon *lyttle*, the April, Chaucerian bird-song of *lyyrrlr*! Observe the Romanian *sbei*, the Germanic *stee to ho* (compare Siegfried, at the end of Act One, singing to Tolstoy's disgust, *Heiho, Heiho! Aha! Oho! Aha! Heiaho!* You could easily add, *stee to ho!*). And then we come right into our own dialects with *yo go*, which, of course, is pure Birmingham.

The curious line at the end looks at first like the sort of thing that comes through on a teleprinter when they are testing it. But when we look carefully we see that 575757575 is an expression of ecstasy at the appearance of the word 'lamb' which has suddenly come out right. We can appreciate the rational beauties of ordinary speech all the more after we have had these glimpses of the dark creative chaos from which it has emerged — the fascinating world of the gleece and the kank.

In this vast field which I have opened up there is great need for a proper, regularized, statistical method. There must be thousands of typewriter mediums like myself, and if our findings could be collated I am sure it would widen the whole field of modern psychology (there need be no conflict with existing science; you will notice the significant reference to *id* above). But the psychologists had better hurry up, while there still remain poople who xannot type.

('Psychotyping' from *The Jenguin Pennings* by Paul Jennings; pieces written mainly for the *Observer*.)

* * * * *

As a child I simply believed that Mother Goose was as imaginary as her Nursery Rhymes and John Rowe Townsend says categorically, "the only certainty is that there was no truth in the Bostonian claim that she was a Mistress Goose or Vergoose of Boston.". Now I am not so sure. The 'real' Mother Goose was said to be a woman called Elizabeth Foster who, in 1682, married a widower with ten children named Isaac Goose in Boston, Massachusetts. Elizabeth had six more children to add to the family. Two of the Goose children died, leaving Isaac and Elizabeth with fourteen little goslings to amuse and bring up. She is said to have been a wonderful storyteller and rhyme-maker … and the rhyme about the 'Old Woman who lived in a Shoe' is thought to be her wry look at her own situation. One of her daughters married a printer named Thomas Fleet and he is said to have gathered up all his mother-in-law's tales and rhymes and printed them as *Songs for the Nursery*. Eileen Hellicar says Mrs Goose died in 1757 and is in the Old Granary Burial Grounds in Boston. I hope her grave is marked with a frieze of nursery rhyme characters.

Of course many rhymes existed in various forms before then, and more have been created since. Sarah Martin created the form of Old Mother Hubbard we now recite to our children but the character existed long before then. Even Edmund Spenser has a Mother Hubbard figure in his work. And some are much more recent such as Jane Taylor's creation 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and that ever popular American rhyme 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' by Sarah Josepha Hale.

It is strange that Sarah Josepha Hale should now be remembered for that one simple rhyme, which came out in her *Poems for Our Children* in 1830, when she was pre-eminently a writer for and about women. Born Sarah Buell in 1788 "She received her early education largely from her mother to whose teaching she attributed her love for books and her faith in the capacity of women" though her older brother was willing to teach her some Latin and philosophy. She married a lawyer who died, leaving her with five young children to rear. I am always amazed when I read that a woman turned to writing as a way of making money; I always think of writing as an almost impossible way to make money. But in the days when few occupations were open to middle class women who had to provide for a family writing was seen as a genteel occupation. She published a book of poems, *The Genius of Oblivion*, in 1823, and in 1827 a novel, *Northwood, A Tale of New England*, which impressed the owner of the *Ladies' Magazine* in Boston and led to the offer of an editorship there. The magazine was bought out by Louis Godey who asked her to move to Philadelphia and take over his magazine Godey's *Lady's Book*. It gave her enormous power over women's lives as the magazine was the top-selling periodical for women in America for many years. She was conservative in her taste and ideas, a great believer in women as the moral force behind men, a firm supporter of good educational opportunities for women (and a strong influence on the founding of Vassar College), and she tried always to be 'a beacon-light of refined taste, pure morals, and practical wisdom'. I wonder which of those qualities nineteenth century women found most useful or inspiring?

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It doesn't surprise me that women created so many nursery rhymes; they were faced, day in, day out, by grizzling children, sick children, bored children, children who wanted rhymes to clap to and dance to and sing to …

But given the staying power of nursery rhymes and the way they cannot help but influence our children's lives (how many children have gone through life thinking of their toes as 'little piggies' or who invariably think of stars as 'twinkling' rather than shining, glowing, pulsing or any other similar description?) it seems sad that so many of their creators are so invisible. I am sure Mrs Goose and all her ilk didn't think of themselves as creating deathless verse … and yet rhymes do more than amuse children. They aid our sense of rhythm, they are a delightful way to encourage children's manual dexterity, and they help create a sense that words are things to be enjoyed and played with, rather than merely useful tools for imparting and exchanging information. When Mem Fox speaks so enthusiastically of the value of nursery rhymes in the development of children's love of language and reading she is saying something that I think is profoundly important.

She is talking more of rhyme and rhythm. The other thing I think children enjoy is making up words. Sometimes their words are simply mishearings or mispronouncings of words they have heard adults use. But at other times children, faced with things that appear to have no name, simply come up with their own. Sometimes these are things that adults are too polite to name; sometimes they are things that it has never occurred to adults to name; and sometimes they are things for which the adult name is too long, difficult, or unwieldy for a child to want to use.

Frank Muir and Patrick Campbell wrote *Call My Bluff* for adults but I think this kind of book, a little simplified, is also fun for children, to stimulate the imagination and suggest there are many fascinating and rarely used words out there. This is just one example from their book:

CROCKLING:

a. What a veritable feathered orchestra is provided by Dame Nature; a trilled symphony to gladden the ear of a country-dweller on a summer's morn. Over here, the cock-a-doodling-doing of a cockerel, up to its spurs in muck. Over there, the cuckooing of a cuckoo, happily fouling another bird's nest. But what is that sound called, you ask? That beautiful noise made by that batch of stork-like birds, cranes? 'Why, Lord bless 'ee, sir, that noise be called "crockling". 'Tis the crockling of cranes.'

b. A ‘crockling’ is an over-ripe, or under-ripe, or (if there is such a thing) sideways-ripe banana, or marrow, or avocado, or even homely spud. “Crockling” is the dealer’s term for any underprivileged fruit or vegetable which, because of the lack of charm of its appearance, is invariably packed away at the bottom of the basket or punnet.

c. A ‘Crockling’ is a ‘lovesome thing, God wot’. It is a small stone ornament, usually in the form of a bud nestling within a circle of leaves, and medieval stone-masons had the happy idea of placing them on the outside of Gothic pinnacles, or Gothic canopies, or on the apexes of Gothic arches. In a sentimental moment one might describe them as stone button-holes worn by churches.

I took their idea and made up some words and ideas to take to Toastmasters one evening for people to have fun creating a meaning for a word. These were my words and introductory suggestions. I was amazed and delighted with the creative use people made of my made-up words. So next time you are stuck in the car with three bored children and the only thing you can think of to amuse them is a game of ‘I Spy’ why not try a game of ‘Way-Out and Wacky Words’?

KEGGLE – This is a word I quite often see on supermarket ads but I’ve never actually dared ask anyone what it means in case they’ll think I’m very ignorant.
BUANCE – This has that sort of French sound like nuance but not being a French speaker I am all at sea. Perhaps there’s a bi-lingual person who can help me.
PONTIVINIMOUS – A very pretentious word but I’m sure quite useful in the hands—or the mouth—of someone who loves big words.
PRESSEP – This sounds like a cross between a press-up and a precept but the English language being the mongrel thing it is I may be way off the mark.
ARABAS – I’m not sure but this may be one of those words which describe what a ballet dancer is doing when her foot is higher than her head. Who knows?
STRIDLING – For a long time I used to come past schools in the lunch break and think ‘what a fine lot of young stridlings out playing’ but then I found I should be thinking of striplings. So the question is—what are stridlings?
WIDDIMERE – I was always tempted to see this as one of those words, like a pride of lions, that denoted a gathering of widows but someone said he thought it was a lovely lake in the Western Arthurs. Can anyone solve this problem?
PHANTAMERIC – This might have something to do with ghosts or it might even be a spice. But I have an uneasy feeling it was actually the name of a famous racehorse …
NUBALLY – When I was young and people talked about bally calves I used to think they were being nasty about little calves crying for their mothers. Then I found it just meant they had a white face. I don’t know if this might be a clue?
ANACORCUS – I had a vague idea this was a rare variety of rhododendron found in the Annapurna mountains but I couldn’t find it in my book of nice perennials to grow in the garden. So? Any thoughts?
DALMA – We used to have a game called Helma and I am tempted to think this might be its first cousin. On the other hand it might be what Dalmatian owners call their dogs when they’re in a hurry. Or even a lovely medieval city in the Balkans which isn’t half the place it once was.

And now … It’s goodnight from me.

(Oh, and crockling is actually a. I hope your cranes crockle suitably …)

* * * * *

Karen Knight wrote this for her collection of poems on Walt Whitman: ‘How the War felt from the piano stool’:

A sheet-music shop

was the place to be seen in.
Twenty thousand pianos
were sold each year.
All those women
writing the words
and the scores.
All those pianos selling for
three hundred dollars apiece.

Mrs S.G. Howe hummed out the
Battle Hymn of the Republic
while she was polishing her shoes.

Mrs E. Mitchell dedicated
her touching ballad
Burial at Camp
to Miss Maria Still
because she liked her name.

And Mrs Parkhurst
author of The Dying Drummer Boy
and *Art thou thinking of me in my Absence*
claims she was inspired by despair.

When Mrs Sawyer
no relation to Tom
heard *When this Cruel War is Over*
she wondered if it would ever
be sung by men.

I have always thought of 'Mrs S.G. Howe', Julia Ward Howe, in the same breath as Sarah Josefa Hale. And yet they, although they came from similar backgrounds, are remembered for very different reasons.

Julia has two, seemingly contradictory claims to fame: she wrote the stirring 'Battle Hymn of the Republic'—

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the
coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where
the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of
His terrible, swift sword:
His truth is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
His truth is marching on.

He has sounded forth the trumpet
that shall never call retreat;
He is sifting out the hearts of men
before His judgment-seat;
Be swift, my soul, to answer Him!
Be jubilant my feet!
Our God is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
Our God is marching on.

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was
born across the sea,
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures
you and me;
As He died to make men holy, let us
die to make men free,
While God is marching on.
Glory, glory, Hallelujah!
While God is marching on.

—and the anti-war 'Mother's Day Proclamation'.

Arise, then, women of this day!
Arise all women who have hearts,
whether your baptism be that of water or of fears!
Say firmly:

'We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies,
our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage,
for caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn
all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

We women of one country
will be too tender of those of another country
to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.
From the bosom of the devastated earth a voice goes up with
our own. It says 'Disarm! Disarm!
The sword of murder is not the balance of justice!'
nor violence indicate possession.
As men have often forsaken the plow and the anvil at the summons
of war,
let women now leave all that may be left of home
for a great and earnest day of counsel.
Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate
the dead.

Let them then solemnly take counsel with each other as to
the means whereby the great human family can live in peace,
each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,
but of God — .
In the name of womanhood and of humanity, I earnestly ask
that a general congress of women without limit
of nationality
may be appointed and held at some place deemed most convenient
and at the earliest period consistent with its objects,
to promote the alliance of the different nationalities,
the amicable settlement of international questions,
the great and general interests of peace — .
(1870)

How did Mother's Day, designed as a day of international solidarity among women and against war, turn into something twee where children 'buy something for Mum'? Perhaps Neil Postman is right to point to that process of sentimentalisation as being inevitable.

But Julia and her husband Samuel Gridley Howe were interested in many aspects of social and land reform, abolition, peace, suffrage and rights for women, all hopefully leading to a more equitable society. And, looked at closely, the 'Battle Hymn' is not *quite* as militaristic as its name suggests … perhaps because, strangely, she wrote it in a tent, at night, with no light to see by, in a soldiers' camp … and it was only in the light of next morning that she could puzzle out her scribbled lines …

* * * * *

And speaking of 'invisible' women who wrote rhymes, lullabies, songs, and verses—I recently came upon another interesting writer. Carolina Nairne. I had never heard of her—and yet she is credited with some of Scotland's most famous and still-sung pieces such as 'Charlie is my Darling', 'Will ye no' come back again', 'John Tod', 'The Laird o' Cockpen', 'Caller Herrin' and 'The Hundred Pipers'. Her family, the Oliphants, were firm Jacobites. She was deeply impressed by the verse of Robert Burns but saw herself as writing things that women would not find bawdy or rude. Because of this her work has been characterised as perpetuating a sentimental Scotland of tartans and pipes and 'the Prince o'er the Water'. But I am inclined to think it would be truer to say that her verses were so popular simply because they gave voice to something that was under severe threat at the time from English restrictions, English politics, and English economic policies. Like the ballads and poems of Burns each small piece was more than a set of verses; it enshrined both memory and a way of life. And provided rollick and rhyme and a hint of pathos. Such as in 'The Land o' the Leal' (leal = loyal) …

I'm wearin' awa', John,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, John,
I'm wearin' awa'
To the land o' the leal,
There's nae sorrow there, John,
There's neither cauld nor care, John,
The day is aye fair
In the land o' the leal. Etc.

But she wasn't recognised in her lifetime; not least because most of her pieces came out anonymously or under the pen name of Mrs Bogan of Bogan. It was said that "even her husband, Major William Murray Nairne, whom she married in 1806, was unaware of her achievement." But in 1846 her niece, also a talented poet, gathered up her pieces and published them as *Lays from Strathearn*.

So next time you find yourself cheerfully belting out a nursery thyme, folk song, or old ballad, take a moment to reflect. There are probably fascinating stories behind the words and the tunes.

* * * * *

August 19: James Gould Cozzens
August 20: Emily Brontë
August 21: John William Burgon
August 22: Dorothy Parker
E. Annie Proulx
Ray Bradbury
August 23: W. E. Henley
Nelson DeMille
Jessie Cadell
August 24: Sir Max Beerbohm
Robert Herrick (chr)
A. S. Byatt
August 25: Bret Harte
Thomas Dekker (bur)
August 26: Earl Derr Biggars
John Buchan

Jane Smiley
Guillaume Apollinaire
August 27: Ira Levin
August 28: Sir John Betjeman
Leo Tolstoy
Johann von Goethe

* * * * *

I always enjoyed the little story in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Ingleside* where Anne is asked to write the obituary of a local farmer; she writes four verses beginning with—

Make it where the winds may sweep
Through the pine boughs soft and deep,
And the murmur of the sea
Come across the orient lea,
And the falling raindrops sing
Gently to his slumbering.

Make it where the meadows wide
Greenly lie on every side,
Harvest fields he reaped and trod,
Westering slopes of clover sod,
Orchard lands where bloom and blow
Trees he planted long ago.

—but when it comes out in the paper someone has added another verse:

A wonderful husband, companion and aid,
One who was better the Lord never made,
A wonderful husband, tender and true,
One in a million, dear Anthony, was you.

It reminded me that obituaries these days are very prosy things. I couldn't recall seeing an obituary in verse. Some are a mere recital of the milestones in someone's life, others wax lyrical about their impact and influence—but verse? Still, perhaps it is just as well. The idea of the ode, the elegy, the epitaph to the deceased, has a long and honourable past … but it doesn't seem to lend itself to poetry's most beautiful moments. Is it the need to link it to the qualities of the departed? Is it that tradition of never speaking ill of the dead? Is it that its clichés and expectations invariably intrude?

Some fine poets *have* written elegies … here are a couple:

Thomas Hardy and his 'In Memoriam' for well-known doctor Frederick Treves buried in Dorchester Cemetery January 2 1924:

In the morning, when the world knew he was dead,
He lay amid the dust and hoar
Of ages; and to a spirit attending said:
'This chalky bed?—
I surely seem to have been here before?'

'O yes. You have been here, you knew the place,
Substanced as you, long ere your call;
And if you cared to do so, you might trace
In this grey space
Your being, and the being of men all.'

Thereto said he: 'Then why was I called away?
I knew no trouble of discontent:
Why did I not prolong my ancient story
Herein for aye?'

The spirit shook its head ‘None knows: you went.

‘And though, perhaps, Time did not sign to you
  The need to go, dream-vision sees
How Aesculapius’ phantom hither flew,
  With Galen’s, too,
And his of Cos-plague-proof Hippocrates,

‘And beckoned you forth, whose skill had read as theirs,
  Maybe, had Science changed to spell
In their day, modern modes to stem despairs
  That mankind bears! …
Enough. You have returned. And all is well.’

John Betjeman wrote a number of poems which could be seen as elegies for both people and things; but possibly his most memorable elegy is this piece, ‘I. M. Walter Ramsden ob. March 26, 1947 Pembroke College, Oxford’:

Dr. Ramsden cannot read *The Times* obituary to-day
  He’s dead.
Let monographs on silk worms by other people be
  Thrown away
  Unread
For he who best could understand and criticize them, he
  Lies clay
  In bed.

The body waits in Pembroke College where the ivy taps the panes
  All night;
That old head so full of knowledge, that good heart that kept the brains
  All right,
Those old cheeks that faintly flushed as the port suffused the veins,
  Drain’d white.

Crocus in the Fellows’ Garden, winter jasmine up the wall
  Gleam gold.
Shadows of Victorian chimneys on the sunny grassplot fall
  Long, cold.
Master, Bursar, Senior Tutor, these, his three survivors, all
  Feel old.

They remember, as the coffin to its final obsequations
  Leaves the gates,
Buzz of bees in window boxes on their summer ministrations,
  Kitchen din,
  Cups and plates,
And the getting of bump suppers for the long-dead generations
  Coming in,
  From Eights.

Serious business this. So I was curious to come upon a humorous epitaph from Scottish poet James Thompson. Most of Thompson’s work is fairly dense and doesn’t appeal particularly to the modern reader but this piece raises questions about the person he had in mind.

‘An Elegy upon James Therburn’

Now, Chatto, you're a dreary place,
Pale sorrow broods on ilka face;
Therburn has run his race,
And now, and now, ah me, alas!
The carl lies dead.

Having his paternoster said,
He took a dram and went to bed;
He fell asleep, and death was glad
That he had catch'd him;
For Therburn was e'en ill bested,
That none did watch him.

For had the carl but been aware,
That meagre death, who none does spare,
T'attempt sic things should ever dare,
As stop his pipe;
He might have come to flee or skare;
The greedy gipe. Etc … Poor James Therburn! Was he a crook and a rogue or more simply someone who had roused Thompson's ire at some time?

I have always tended to get James Thomson and Francis Thompson confused. Now I find myself thinking: 'James was a wordy Scot who wrote this less than complimentary epitaph and Francis was a wordy Anglo who wrote 'The Hound of Heaven'—which although it is a poem about faith and vocation could also be read as a story about Death—because Death is the one thing which will never say 'pass, friend' … and read like that the poem immediately becomes much grimmer, not the grim reaper but the hound of dying … which is a curious image because of the many stories of dogs immediately knowing when their owner has died … even if that death has taken place somewhere else, even on the other side of the world.' And to complicate things further there were two Scottish poets called James Thomson; a nineteenth century one whose most famous poem is 'The City of Dreadful Night' and this eighteenth century one whose most famous poem was probably 'Winter' …

* * * * *

'Interestingly, however, the term "suicide" was introduced into the English language in 1651 by Walter Charleton in order to make available a more neutral and less judgmental term for acts of self-killing which until then had been described as "destroying oneself," "murdering oneself," and "slaughtering oneself"—all phrases that convey firm disapproval. Charleton made his contribution to the English language with this sentence: "To vindicate one's self from extreme and otherwise inevitable calamity by *sui-cide* is not (certainly) a crime." This hyphenated word did not exist in the Latin but was an invention achieved by linking two Latin words, "sui" (self) and "cide" (kill). John Donne (1572 – 1631), a sympathizer with suicide on select occasions, introduced the term "self-homicide" in his *Bialtanatos* for the same reason—to provide us with a milder and more neutral word for the deed. However, it was Charleton's "suicide" and not Donne's "self-homicide" that ultimately carried the day, in time becoming the word commonly used in English to designate acts of self-killing. In contrast, in Germany "selbstmorde" (self murder) is still the everyday word for self-killing, "suizid" (suicide) being a word belonging to a technical, clinical vocabulary.'

Terminal Choices by Robert N. Wennberg

* * * *

'Death, in the library index, came after Dairy Farming and Dandruff. This struck Rosemary as being about right: nourishment, followed by physical decay, followed by its final symptoms. A neat rounding off. She picked up the newspaper and turned as usual to the classified departures.

She could, after all, catch up any time with the ephemera of the headlines; on the back pages were the eternal verities. People popping off like flies. She had to keep abreast.

"Peacefully in a nursing home, a month before his 90th birthday …"

"Peacefully in hospital, aged 80 …"

"Peacefully at home, aged 87 …"

So much peace. Peace comes as the end. Why, then, she wondered, was everyone so apprehensive?

"After much suffering …"

"Aged 69, after a painful illness, bravely borne …"

Not so good, those. Still, here was a "peacefully in her sleep, in her 84th year," that wasn't bad. And next to it, "suddenly, whilst playing bowls, aged 85." Even better, the best of the day's crop.

Sunlight on smooth green turf. "Your turn, old man." He grips the ball, takes a good swing back, heel in the spongy grass, releases the hold, gone. Perfect. Suddenly whilst playing bowls. No messing about with the long illness bravely borne, the nursing home, bedsores, spouted cups, tubes up your nose, starched helpers plumping up your pillows and checking the incontinence pads.

Most of the announcements were brief and factual, keeping it short. There was the occasional surprise, the odd venture into originality, but as a rule the basic vocabulary varied only slightly. It must be the undertakers: could there be a handbook? Funeral Parlour Esperanto, a manual of Suitable Phrases for the Occasion?

Bowler-hatted, black-coated, spines at a deferential slant, they hover like crows — "Now, madam: we have 'peacefully in a nursing home', how would that suit you? Or was it a case of 'suddenly at home'? Or there's 'after a short illness' … or 'after a *long* illness' as the case may be … Bravely borne, would you say? Good, good, we'll put that in then, shall we?"

She felt a twinge of satisfaction when occasionally a customer refused to fit into the Deathspeak pigeonhole:

"In Casablanca, following a stroke … "

There he sat, the old boy, replete with couscous, pins and needles running up his crossed legs, round-eyed at the belly dancer, leaping to his feet to join in — "Come on, mother, no harm, you're only young once!" Then, pouff! A thump in the chest like a hammer, a sense of being, what? Squeezed by a cosmic hand, shaken like a rat? And here he was ten days later, in the Deaths, rubbing shoulders with the Peacefully-in-their-sleep-at-home mob.'

(From *The Dying Art* by Lee Langley)

* * * * *

The most famous lines about death are probably Andrew Marvell's:

'The grave's a fine and private place,

But none, I think, do there embrace' but it is a curiously laconic statement about death and loss. Although elegies and epitaphs and obituaries owe as much to convention as to emotion I continue to believe poems about death should grip the heart … and Rudyard Kipling's 'Danny Deever' stands out, not least because it draws in the discomfort and pain of all the others concerned in his death …

'What's that so black agin the sun?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny fightin' 'ard for life," the Colour-Sergeant said.

"What's that that whimpers over'ead?" said Files-on-Parade.

"It's Danny's soul that's passin' now," the Colour-Sergeant said.

For they're done with Danny Deever, you can 'ear the quickstep play.
The Regiment's in column, an' they're marchin' us away;
Ho! The young recruits are shakin', an' they'll want their beer to-day;
After hangin' Danny Deever in the morning'!

* * * * *

I have always thought of Arnold Toynbee, in the rare times he is pressed upon my attention, as an historian. But the other day I came upon a book he had compiled called *Mankind's*

Response to Death. One of his contributors, A. Keith Mant, wrote: 'John Bruhier, a Paris physician of the 18th century, collected histories of persons alleged to have been buried alive. He gave 52 alleged examples of premature burial and 72 mistaken certifications of death, and recommended that burial should not take place until early putrefaction had occurred. A century later Fontenelle recorded 46 cases of either premature burial or errors of certification; while Carré asserted that there had been 46 cases of persons who had been certified dead and had recovered whilst awaiting inhumation. In the late half of the 16th century a Norman gentleman, M. Francois Civille, was alleged to have been three times dead, three times buried and three times disinterred and resuscitated. In England the case of Colonel Townsend was extensively quoted in textbooks of medical jurisprudence. Colonel Townsend voluntarily went into a state of suspended animation in the presence of Dr. Cheyne, another doctor and an apothecary. His respirations and heart apparently ceased and after half an hour, as they were leaving him for dead, he slowly recovered.

The famous Professor Louis, doyen of French medical jurisprudence, described a curious case of conception whilst apparently dead. A young monk stopped at a house where a young girl was laid out for burial and offered to spend the night in the room where the coffin was placed. He stripped the body during the night and had intercourse with it. The following morning, after he had left, the girl was resuscitated as she was about to be interred, and nine months later she gave birth to a child!

A leading article in the Lancet of 1866 reported a speech made by the Cardinal Archbishop Donnet of Bordeaux to the French Senate. In his speech the Cardinal described how as a young priest he had collapsed in the pulpit of a crowded church on a hot and sultry day. He was pronounced dead by a doctor and preparations were made for his funeral. Although he could see nothing he could hear what was being said. The Cardinal said that it was hearing a voice which he had known from infancy that produced the effort to get himself out of the trance. The next day he stood in the same pulpit. The Cardinal went on to say that he had himself saved several persons who had been considered dead and prepared for interment. One case he described was of a young girl who was about to be finally covered before burial. He did not feel certain that the girl was dead so he called out to her. The girl recovered and grew up to become the mother of a family.

There are several records of surgeons performing caesarean sections on women mistakenly considered to have died during labour. Before the days of anaesthesia, antisepsis and modern surgery, such an operation performed during life was invariably fatal, but the law of Numa Pompilius demanded a caesarean section on women who died undelivered. A number of premature operations are recorded and the eminent Parisian obstetrician and gynaecologist Peu, having carried out a caesarean section on a woman believed to be dead, vowed never to undertake such an operation again.

Mistakes in the pronouncement of death were not confined to the inexperienced doctors. Vesalius, the founder of modern anatomy and physician to both Charles V and Philip II of Spain, carried out an autopsy on a man who was supposed to be dead and whose heart was seen to be beating, together with other signs of life, when the thorax was opened. Vesalius was charged with homicide and impiety and taken before the Tribunal of the Inquisition, and his life was spared only by the intercession of the King of Spain.

There is no doubt that during the plagues and epidemics which swept Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, several persons were prematurely buried owing to the natural desire to dispose of infected bodies as soon as possible.

Hadwen cites numerous cases culled from the English, American and continental literature of dramatic recovery shortly before proposed interment, and horrifying examples leaving no doubt that persons were buried alive … "

Is this sufficient to send you scurrying off to add a codicil to your will? 'I am not to be cremated or buried until I have begun to turn black and to smell' …

But what is death is as problematical as what is life. Decades ago the law took the simple position that life began when a baby drew its first breath and ended when a person drew their last breath. A foetus is definitely alive but its life does not begin if it cannot make the perilous

passage from non-breathing in the womb to breathing outside of it. The body does not die with the cessation of breathing. All sorts of processes continue. Hair and nails continue to grow. Muscular activity can continue. Cells die at different rates. But the 'person' is dead.

People brought back from death sometimes report visions which I see are explained away by scientists as either hallucinations or dreams. They may be. But I seriously doubt it. Unless they can explain why people should have such similar dreams at the moment of dying. We don't have peas-in-the-pod dreams during our lifetime. Even people who share homes, families, or experiences don't report the same dream. Why should we all, or nearly all, then dream of a journey through a tunnel towards a light at death?

And there is a different problem that needs to be taken into account. People who have shown completely flat brainwave activity have been revived to go on with life. But people dreaming or hallucinating show brainwave activity. So do we dream or hallucinate before the brain shuts down or as we begin to revive? Or is this strange sense of journeying registered by something other than our brain?

Organs can be taken from a person showing no brain activity even though that person is still definitely alive—and brain activity has sometimes begun again after half-an-hour or more of stillness. There is a curiously ambivalent and hypocritical attitude to death in our society. We are constantly urged to hand over our organs, something which clearly will cause death, and yet any suggestion of *choosing* death is met by a chorus of disparagement and disingenuous talk of 'slippery slopes' …

*

Frank Delaney said of Betjeman: 'Few living poets are so firmly welded to the immediate social past of their environment — the great historical or classical themes have never attracted him. Betjeman's dramas have always been played out at pavement or privet hedge level, and the world to which he harked back, the past world of his parents and his roots, emerges like a photograph album from his poems.'

I don't think of him as a gloomy poet, nor a poet who writes about death and dying, yet he is profoundly a poet of loss; the little changes to places and habits and routines and the things which once seemed so settled and so sure, like the arrival of the morning milk on the doorstep.

* * * * *

August 29: John Locke
August 30: John Gunther
Mary Shelley
August 31: William Saroyan
September 1: Arthur Upfield
September 2: David Daiches
September 3: Lennie Lower

* * * * *

Bill Hornadge wrote in *The Australian Slanguage*, 'another twentieth-century writer who tapped the vein of basic Australian speech with enormous success was Lennie Lower, probably the most prolific humorous writer any English speaking country has ever produced. His output in the form of newspaper and magazine columns from the late 1920s to his death in 1947 was prodigious and he had an enormous following throughout Australia. Lower was not a great user of slang but his columns were always written in a simple colloquial form, understandable at the lowest levels.'

This is true. His columns depended on a humour that bordered on the absurd, a sense of topicality, a whiff of misogynism, and a light and lively touch for their appeal. Here is one from the collection of his newspaper pieces put together by Tom Thompson and titled *Here's Lower*:

Let's Become Purer

Purity is rapidly becoming fashionable, thanks to Mr Norman Lindsay.

People who previously objected to it are now viewing it tolerantly. In Michigan, they aim to ban anything that tends to make vice more attractive and virtue a back number. Films must

have no bedroom scenes, no scanty clothing scenes, no demonstrations of passionate love, and no scenes of bloodshed or violence.

We look forward to the times when there will be no bathrooms, or if there are, when they are hermetically sealed and are referred to, when it is impossible to refrain from mentioning them, as the 'B'.

Soap, in these happy times, on account of its close association with the naked flesh, will be referred to as 'S', and will be sold in packets labeled 'Dog Biscuits.' When retiring to the 'B.R.' (bedroom), the pure-minded man will not clothe himself scantily, but rather don an overcoat, and having locked the door, stand up in the wardrobe and go to sleep.

Demonstrations of passionate love will be confined to hand-shaking, and then only under proper supervision.

Violence and bloodshed will not be permitted except in surgeries and dental parlors.

As for women — women will not be permitted at all.

Or perhaps they might be kept in compounds, wearing long chaff-bag coverings and stove-pipe leggings.

Anything calculated to arouse the baser passions, such as a knife and fork, will be used only by people of repute. Square plates of course. We can never look on a round plate without blushing at its curves.

If any reader can think of any other improvements, we will be glad to put them into effect, or ban them, or burn and prohibit and disinfect them.

We get a sensual pleasure out of banning things, and pure minds are full of things to ban.

*

Bill Hornadge goes on, 'I once discussed with his mother the methods he used in writing his only novel *Here's Luck*, that great epic of Australian humour. At the time he was a columnist on the Sydney *Daily Guardian* and much of his work on the novel was done at the office in between his columns. Each night he would bring home the bits and pieces of chapters that he had put together and would read them out to his mother and sister for reaction, comment and suggestions. His mother, a rather formal, elegant lady who would have been described by former generations as being 'well brought up', told me that she strongly disapproved of what she termed 'vulgarisms' in the book, such as 'pub' and 'grog', and she strongly urged her son to make the book more 'respectable' (her term). Lower resisted and in this showed much better judgement than his mother as it was the colloquial down-to-earth style that gave it such force — and saleability. The fact that *Here's Luck* has only been out of print on rare occasions since it was first published in 1930 is a fair indication of its enduring qualities and how seriously Australians are wedded to their peculiar form of colloquial speech. Lower's mother was well advanced in age when I spoke with her and was still torn between great pride in her only son's great literary achievement and the secret wish that his fame could have rested on a work more in line with her own elitist upbringing. And this seems the eternal dilemma facing the educated Australian who has a constant love-hate relationship with an Australian English which he or she (sees) is a caricature of the real thing, yet which he or she feels compelled to use as one of the key factors in the assertion of national aspirations.'

But it wasn't only Mrs Lower who had problems with her son's language. Hornadge goes on to say, 'In *Copy It Sweet*, Jim Ramsay categorically states that the word QUEEN originated in Australia, but this is not correct as it is a very old English slang term for a prostitute. It may well be that Australians were the first to use it as a derogatory term for an effeminate type of male homosexual, but if so, it now has world-wide usage. Its most celebrated public use in Australlia occurred in 1940 in the noted clash between Noël Coward and Lennie Lower at a big Sydney reception for the visiting celebrity. Lower, who shared the usual Australian male aversion for homosexuals, was a very reluctant guest at the reception, having been dragooned into attending by his employer Frank Packer.

In due course Noël Coward was introduced to Lower and, in a rather condescending manner, the great man exclaimed, 'Ah, the King of the Australian humorists, one presumes!'

To which Lennie Lower, who had by then imbibed more liquor than was wise, retorted acidly: 'Ah, the great QUEEN of the English stage, one presumes!'

Pandemonium.

A very furious Frank Packer rushed up and demanded apologies and, when these weren't forthcoming he sacked Lower on the spot. Which was why Lennie Lower spent the remaining years of his working life until his death in 1947 at *Smith's Weekly*, whose management had always strongly espoused the myth of the big, bronzed Aussie male, and who were not at all concerned at the possibility of one of their writers offending visiting Pommie Poofs.'

* * * * *

I have heard Lower called the Father of Australian Humour. This way of talking about writers, and others, as being the Father, or more occasionally the Mother, is popular. But the other day I came upon a book *Edgar Huntly*; *or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker*, by James Brockden Brown which described him as the Father of the American Novel. I must admit I had never heard of him. So fatherhood seemingly had not bestowed lasting fame or recognition on him. A lawyer, a Quaker, a Philadelphian, a writer and friend of writers; Norman S Grabo said of him, "Between 1798 and 1800, four of those novels hurried through final preparation and through the press—*Wieland* (1798), *Ormond* (1799), Part I of *Arthur Mervyn* (1799), and *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). With Part II of *Arthur Mervyn* (1800), Brown was established as the first significant American novelist." Although I was not enamoured of *Edgar Huntly* I *could* see how it probably influenced writers such as Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

* * * * *

One day my friend Cheryl and I went on a second-hand bookshop 'crawl'. It was tremendous fun. And among the books I bought was a copy of Lower's *Here's Luck*. I must admit I had expected it to be in the tradition of the laconic and slangy bush yarn type of humour. So it came as a surprise to find that it probably owes more to English writers such as P. G. Wodehouse and Herbert Jenkins of 'Bindle' fame. It is more misogynistic than Wodehouse (though Wodehouse takes his swipes at his terrifying Aunt Agatha and sundry old nannies; "Aunt Dahlia's eye, while not in the same class as that of my Aunt Agatha, who is known to devour her young and conduct human sacrifices at the time of the full moon, has lots of authority") or, arguably, Jenkins (who has Bindle "a journeyman pantechnicon-man" without a job frequently at odds with the fierce Mrs Bindle; but it is easy to excuse their conflicts given that "Piece by piece the smaller of the Bindles' possessions had already passed through the portals over which swung the three brass balls of penury" and there is no relief in sight) but it is very much about family relationships in suburbia; hardly a whiff of the bush and the times when the hero Jack Gudgeon and his son Stanley go to the pub or to the races almost seem like insertions to prove the book is about Australian characters and institutions.

Cyril Pearl described it as 'Australia's funniest book' but I found much of its humour overly contrived and rather heavy-handed. It certainly has some amusing moments. Jack and Stanley pick up two women, 'Steak' who 'had red hair and blue eyes, and a wide mouth. Not a hard mouth, but a mouth that knew its way about' and 'Eggs' who was 'a beautiful chemist's blonde. Scientifically made up, low slung in the body, with the merest suggestion of an eyebrow on either side of an otherwise vacant forehead.' Jack's wife Agatha not surprisingly gets upset and leaves the family home, a Woollahra terrace house, to go home to her mother in Chatswood. The house gradually turns into a rubbish tip. 'Stanley, of course, would never think of trying to straighten things up a little, and as for myself, I do not regard it as a man's sphere to be pottering about tidying things. Man makes the mess; it is the woman's privilege to clean it up.' The trouble is—Steak and Eggs are already 'taken'. 'I was not afraid. I simply did not wish to see Slatter. He was not the sort of man I like to entertain and I hold it as a British subject's birthright that I should be allowed to choose my acquaintances and regulate my own visiting list. To put it in the social jargon, I was merely not at home to Slatter.' But Stanley remains a magnet for the girls. His father is astounded to discover he has had a big win at the races. ' "Split infinitives!" I gasped. An oath which I use only when absolutely astonished. A journalistic friend who subsequently and, of course, inevitably died of starvation and alcoholic poisoning, taught me it

and I use it rarely. I was more than astonished, I was dumbfounded. That the boy should be so secretive about his winnings amazed and pained me. I resolved to teach him poker at the earliest opportunity.' Light relief is provided by the visit of a 'country cousin' who has bought himself a complete city rig-out by coupon. 'His tight trousers showed two inches of thick woollen socks. A leather belt, like the surcingle of a horse, girded him, and two bony wrists, from which dangled a pair of outsize hands, stuck out from the short sleeves of his coat.' Agatha eventually returns home. Unfortunately Daisy (Steak) is still around. 'There was no fight. They just sat together and talked. That's the sort of woman Daisy was. Hard as nails, a woman of the world, and a good sport. She had tact. It is the tactful ones of the earth who keep it from flying apart.' Personally I thought it was Agatha who was the good sport—returning to find her home filthy, wrecked, and full of strangers and seemingly taking it all with no more than a resigned sigh. But none of the characters gripped me. I didn't really mind whether it ended happily or not.

I doubt if it would really come top of people's funniest book lists these days. Yet I can understand its immense popularity when it came out. All three writers were producing 'funny books' in the grim years of the Depression. For an hour or two they enabled readers to forget the world outside and take refuge in situations which gave them a chuckle or two and which were essentially kind and neighbourly. The losers may lose but they never lose beyond redemption. The sun will shine again tomorrow.

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September 4: Joan Aiken
François Chateaubriand
September 5: Sir Walter Raleigh
Arthur Koestler
September 6: Elizabeth Ferrars
September 7: C. J. Dennis
September 8: Siegfried Sassoon
September 9: Carl Sagan
September 10: Cyril Connolly
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)
Franz Werfel
September 11: D. H. Lawrence
September 12: H. L. Mencken
Sir William Dugdale

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On the 14 July 1683 the Ottoman Turks reached the city of Vienna and besieged it. Two months later, on the 12 September, the Turks began the long retreat back through the Balkans. The slaughter and misery were massive. But in amongst those long-forgotten soldiers was a name which is still known around the world.

It belonged to a horse. Known to the Turks as Azarax he is now remembered as The Byerley Turk. As one of the three founding sires of all modern thoroughbreds he lives on through every horse that races on any racecourse.

But as Jeremy James writes in *The Byerley Turk* the horse lived an extraordinary life; he was at some of the key battles of the seventeenth century, he changed hands in dramatic circumstances, he crossed Europe, he left his mark …

Foaled in the Turkish-ruled Balkans, probably in 1678, he was taken into the huge Turkish cavalry. The Turks came from the steppes of Asia. "On May 29th 1453 the holy Christian city of Constantinople is renamed. The name is taken from the Greek 'eis tin polin', meaning 'to the city'. Istanbul." In that huge vigour which can press a victorious people to expand and expand the Turks spread on into the Balkans, through Eastern Europe into Hungary, down the coasts of the Levant and into North Africa, down the Arabian peninsula and across Iraq into Iran … They reached the gates of Vienna and were turned back but Vienna remained the key to the takeover of Europe in the minds of their succeeding Sultans … and the 'Great Push' brought together a huge army that was expected to storm Vienna and sweep on … The Habsburg, Leopold I, was an

indecisive emperor and he would almost certainly have lost Vienna if it had not been for the Poles …

"Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland, Grand Duke of Lithuania, Russia, Prussia, Masovia, Samogitia, Livonia, Kiev, Volhynia, Podolia, Podlacjia, Smolensk, Severia and Chernigov, is married to the beautiful Maria Kazimiera de la Grange d'Arquien.

Maria Kazimiera de la Grange d'Arquien is French. As well as her native tongue she speaks Polish, Russian, German, English, Latin, Greek and even some Turkish. She is a down-to-earth Queen: learned, loyal and spirited.

One early June morning in 1683 she asks her warrior king husband two pertinent questions. Does not the security of Krakow depend upon the security of Vienna? Is it, she asks, not possible that if the Turks march on Vienna, and Vienna falls, that they would then march on Krakow?"

But Jan Sobieski was not the only Christian king who received an urgent plea for help from Leopold I. Men came from as far away as Ireland and Scandinavia and Iberia.

The Turks were defeated and retreated into Hungary. The Christian armies followed and besieged them in Buda. "When the Ottoman army is driven from the walls of 12th September 1683, it releases a wave of destruction upon the Ottoman Empire. Mohacs will be lost, Buda will be lost, Belgrade will be lost, the Balkans will be lost, Rumelia and Morea — the Peloponnese. Ottoman forces will be driven back to the very gates of their ancient Empire. Their horses will be lost, their Karamans and Germiyans, Anatolian, Ayvacik Midillan, Canik, Caukurova, Gemlik, Kapadokya, Katamonu, Rumeli and Uzunyayla — all lost, taken and assimilated into western horse blood, bringing height and speed to the horses of their enemies, losing advantage for the people who bred them."

Among the horses which retreated from Vienna to Buda was Azarax. And among the westerners who gained horses there when Buda fell were Jacob Richards, James Fitz-James, Edward Vaudrey, Frederick Fife, Lord Savile, Lily Christian and Lord Cutts. Vaudrey took Azarax, and his Turkish groom, back to England where the horse and his groom were acquired by Robert Byerley. But the horse's adventures were far from over; Byerley, a Protestant, took him to Ireland where he was at the Battle of the Boyne and the Siege of Limerick. Again he came through unscathed and came back to Yorkshire where he became a famous sire. "The Byerley Turk died in his stable on March 16th 1703. Byerley buried him not a stone's throw from where he died. On his grave, he planted a tree."

The Turkish groom disappeared from Yorkshire and made the long secret journey back to Istanbul where he "was said to have taken horse-breeding in the Ottoman Empire to new heights. He was killed in the second Siege of Belgrade in 1717 at the age of 57."

The fear of a Turkish occupation of Europe was over; though the Ottoman Empire survived till World War One destroyed its control over the Middle East and North Africa. It did not, of course, stop the Europeans fighting with each other—or dismembering Poland.

But the history of thoroughbred breeding was a story of peaceful change and spread, only disrupted by occasional skullduggery and honest mistakes. "In 1791, James Weatherby, nephew of the first James Weatherby, first Secretary of the Jockey Club, founded in the Star and Garter Coffee House in London, published the first General Stud-book. In this, he laid down the commonly-accepted principle that the lineage of all thoroughbred racehorses could be traced to three foundation sires: The Godolphin Barb in 1729, The Darley Arabian in 1706, and the Byerley Turk, in 1686."

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I had never thought of any of the Habsburgs as writers, apart from signing official documents and letters, but Andrew Wheatcroft in his history mentions Maximilian, ancestor of Leopold; "Consistent themes run through all his major works, those published and the others merely projected. In an age fascinated by the stars, he constructed what can only be considered a new cosmography. At the heart of the universe was the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. But next to them, both servant and intermediary with sinful mankind, was Maximilian, king and priest, and the house of Austria, chosen by God to carry the divine presence into the world. … The life and career of Maximilian, rather like the life of Christ, provided the necessary

lessons for human salvation. The first element was the life of Maximilian considered as allegory. He planned to recount his autobiography in three volumes. Only the first, *Theuerdank*, was published in his lifetime; the second, *Weisskunig*, languished in manuscript until it was published in the eighteenth century, and the third, entitled *Freydal*, remained unpublished until the 1880s. All were by him, dictated or written by himself; for the most part he would edit, and correct the scripts taken down orally by his secretaries."

Even though they were said to have an Arthurian flavour of romance, fantasy, and allegory, I think I will give them a miss. Even stranger perhaps was the history of Maximilian's namesake and descendant four hundred years later—the Maximilian who was imposed on Mexico as their Emperor. John Charles Chasteen wrote in *Born in Blood and Fire* of a time of liberal reform in Mexico, which would include selling off the Church's huge landholdings but would also break up communal lands held by indigenous farmers, and the consequent confused responses. "The Reform lasted for only a few years before a conservative general seized the presidency and dissolved congress in 1858. A full-scale civil war then erupted. Fleeing toward the liberal strongholds in the mestizo mining towns of the Mexican north, the reformers chose Benito Juárez to command their forces. They chose well, because even those who disliked Juárez respected his determination. The conservatives controlled most of the army, but the liberals now enjoyed widespread popular support. The Juárez government soon retook Mexico City, but the liberals' troubles were not over. The civil war had bankrupted the Mexican state, and Juárez suspended payment on foreign debt. France, Spain, and Britain retaliated by collectively occupying Veracruz. At first, this occupation seemed simply another episode of gunboat diplomacy. The French, however, had an ulterior motive.

"In desperation, defeated Mexican conservatives reached for their secret weapon: a monarch. Napoleon III of France wanted to expand French influence in Latin America. (In fact, the French invented the name "Latin America" during these years as a way of making their influence seem natural. Before the mid-1800s, people had talked of Mexico or Brazil or Argentina, and also of "America," but never of "Latin America." Because French, like Spanish and Portuguese, is directly descended from Latin, the term "Latin America" implied a cultural kinship with France.) Napoleon III obligingly supplied Mexican conservatives with a potential monarch obedient to French interests. The would-be emperor of Mexico, Maximilian, was a truly well-intentioned man from one of Europe's greatest royal dynasties, the Hapsburgs. Before accepting the plan Maximilian asked earnestly whether the Mexican people really wanted an emperor. Mexican conservatives assured him that they did.

"So French troops invaded central Mexico in 1862 and installed Maximilian as emperor two years later. Once again, Benito Juárez retreated northward to lead the resistance, and this time he found a powerful ally in the United States. French intervention was an obvious challenge to U.S. sway over Mexico. Napoleon III had attacked during the U.S. civil war, when there was little danger of interference from the United States. In 1865, however, that war ended, U.S. aid to Juárez increased, and Napoleon III decided to withdraw French forces from what had become an expensive mess. Maximilian stayed in Mexico, where he was captured and executed. His wife, the glamorous Empress Carlota, escaped. She managed to return to Europe but was insane for the rest of her life.

"Benito Juárez returned to Mexico City as president. Mexican conservatives had utterly disgraced themselves by inviting the French invasion; they would never again rule Mexico. Nor would Catholicism ever regain its former prominence in Mexican society.

"On the other hand, the triumph of liberalism had reinforced a nationalist mystique that had been growing in Mexico for decades. Loss of so much national territory to the United States fueled a nationalist spirit of resistance. In an attempt to satisfy the patriotic feelings of Mexicans, on his first Independence Day in Mexico Maximilian had made a public pilgrimage to the church where Father Miguel Hidalgo had begun the uprising of 1810. The emperor engaged in a bit of political theater by ringing the bell of Hidalgo's church and, on other occasions, wearing a serape and exhibiting his taste for Mexican food. When he faced the firing squad, among Maximilian's last words were "Viva Mexico!" But nationalism was a losing issue for the conservatives in the

1860s. Juárez, Zapotec in spite of the rice powder, was simply a more convincing nationalist symbol than Maximilian dressed as a mariachi."

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Crown Prince Rudolf hired a man called Emil Schindler to illustrate his book *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Words and Pictures* and was planning to take him on an eastern trip when he instead committed suicide. Schindler died of appendicitis soon afterwards. People still debate: would the First World War have happened if Rudolf had succeded his father? Instead the old man named his nephew Ferdinand … with fateful consequences.

But Emil Schindler also played a part in history. Posthumously he became father-in-law to three famous men: Gustav Mahler, Walter Gropius, and Franz Werfel. His daughter Alma was a difficult, colourful, tactless, larger-than-life character; vaguely reminiscent of Sylvia Plath in the way that she constantly sought men who could be looked up to as father-figures, yet were also men of genius who would give her glory to bask in and would enable her to believe that her own undisciplined talent had been in some way starved by the need to nurture theirs.

Werfel was to say that he wasn't sure whether "Alma was my greatest stroke of luck or my greatest misfortune". Susanne Keegan in her biography of Alma, *Bride of the Wind*, writes, "When reviewing the content of Werfel's literary output between 1922 and 1945 it is, indeed, tempting to lay at Alma's door the blame for his undoubted decline as a poet and his rise to fame as the author of a collection of worthy but mainly unsatisfactory novels and plays." His earnings and his fame as a novelist went up steadily and undoubtedly made it easier for him to leave Austria and enter the United States when the Nazis came storming in. And his novels were not negligible. Among them were *Juarez and Maximilian*, about the Habsburg who briefly reigned as Emperor of Mexico, *The Forty Days of Musa Degh*, which he based partly on French Ministry of War documents about the Turkish massacre of the Armenians, *The Song of Bernadette*, a Jewish view of Lourdes, and his play *Jacobowsky and the Colonel*.

But I notice that it is as a foremost Austrian poet he is still remembered and anthologised. Yet, having now browsed through books on him by Peter Stephan Jungk and Lothar Huber, I realise this close connection to Austria and poetry is a little misleading. He was born and grew up in Prague. He spent time in Austria, Italy and Germany. His work fits into the main strand of German Expressionism. He was a Central European intellectual in a tradition that brought him into contact with most of the giants, Max Brod, Franz Kafka, Arnold Schoenberg, Elias Canetti, Alban Berg, the Mann Family, Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Koestler and many more. He had a youthful success with his book *The Friend of the World* and managed to get plays, poems, and stories accepted regularly—although his father, a Jewish businessman in Prague, had hoped he would enter the family business. In that he was not unlike many who felt themselves torn between a Jewish merchant heritage and a European cultural heritage.

Yet I felt the book that was most important to him was his *The Forty Days of Musa Degh*. He met Armenian orphans in Damascus; the French Ambassador in Vienna Conte Clauzel helped him gain access to important French documents, and he had access to Armenian monks in Vienna. "Werfel began his research there in June 1930. He first read the comprehensive reports of the German pastor Johannes Lepsius, who had pleaded for the Armenian people with the highest Turkish authorities and had also tried to pressure the German government into threatening Turkey with abrogating their military alliance if the genocide was not stopped." The book was a success but was later banned by the Nazis in Germany and "Hollywood was interested, and MGM acquired the film rights although it was never made into a film due to Turkish intervention."

His play about Maximilian in Mexico was also both history and allegory. John Warren in Huber's book says of it, "*Juarez und Maximilian* … was written in 1924 as an attempt to reconcile 'den Konflikt zwischen Dram und Epos' … and to tell the story of the unfortunate Habsburg who, beguiled by promises which were never met and filled with a sense of his own personal destiny set out to bring an enlightened and visionary form of government to a Mexico, which already had an elected President but was torn with dissension. An attempt doomed to tragedy, both by force of historical circumstances and by the nature of Maximilian himself."

Benito Juarez is the respresentative of the anonymous masses to be moulded by the enlightened and idealistic young ruler to be imposed on the masses; a hero who cannot see that he is part of the problem and would rather stand, guiltless, above the mess. In that he might be a metaphor for many tragic misunderstandings and mistakes in more recent times.

And perhaps Austria doesn't deserve the poet it claimed as its own. Werfel died in America but now lies in a Vienna cemetery; "Armenian circles in the United States raised the money for the transfer of FW's bones, as the Austrian government could not see its way to pay for it."

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September 13: Sherwood Anderson
Roald Dahl
September 14: Mario Benedetti
September 15: Agatha Christie
Loren D. Estelman

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The other day I was reading Glenn Alterman's *Creating Your Own Monologue*. Just as desktop publishing has made it easier for me, and the hoi-polloi generally, to dump our stuff on anyone susceptible—so too does the monologue offer a route for the writer, actor, or director with very limited resources …

He writes, "Perhaps one of the most famous monologists of all time was Ruth Draper. Draper, an actress, performed many of her one-woman shows during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Her first show of "monos" as she called them, was performed in England in 1920. The two-hour-long evening was composed of an assortment of well-developed characters created totally from her imagination. From the very beginning, the critics raved about her work as a monologist. She spoke many languages and performed her monologues all over the world.

"Draper's characters ranged from the very poor to the extremely wealthy, and they had a true-to-life quality to them. Through her characters, she developed her monos into mini plays with a beginning, middle, and end. She never used a script but relied totally on her memory. Her characters were constantly changing and evolving. She was never content with her work and was always looking for new ways to express herself. She tried to work as simply as possible, without too much clutter. A prop as simple as a hat, or a handbag was all that was required. Add to that a chair and a table and she was ready to create magic, "Draper's magic" as it was called. She had a tremendous belief in the actor's ability to pretend. She felt that if she truly committed herself to her imagination in creating her characters, the audience would believe in them."

One of her first admirers and followers was Cornelia Otis Skinner who began as a monologist. But she gradually developed in her own direction and is now more likely to be remembered as a writer. A more recent admirer is Mary Louise Wilson who created a one-woman show round fashion personality Diana Vreeland. "When I was a child I was fascinated with Ruth Draper, so I thought about monologues but it didn't seem like something someone did in modern times. I hated the idea of a one-woman show. A one-person show just seemed like something that couldn't be done. You needed two characters for a play to happen. The only one-woman show that I ever saw that I liked was Pat Carroll's *Gertrude Stein*. I liked that show very much, was very impressed with it. It was an inspiration to me."

But probably the most beautiful description of Ruth Draper's work comes in Agatha Christie's 1933 novel *Lord Edgware Dies* where she has Hastings say, 'Carlotta Adams was an American girl with the most amazing talent for single-handed sketches unhampered by make-up or scenery. She seemed to speak every language with ease. Her sketch of an evening in a foreign hotel was really wonderful. In turn, American tourists, German tourists, middle-class English families, questionable ladies, impoverished Russian aristocrats and weary discreet waiters all flitted across the scene.

'Her sketches went from grave to gay and back again. Her dying Czecho-Slovakian woman in hospital brought a lump to the throat. A minute later we were rocking with laughter as a dentist plied his trade and chatted amiably with his victims.

'Her programme closed with what she announced as "Some Imitations."

‘Here again, she was amazingly clever. Without make-up of any kind, her features seemed to dissolve suddenly and re-form themselves into those of a famous politician, or a well-known actress, or a society beauty. In each character she gave a short typical speech. These speeches, by the way, were remarkably clever.’

Christie then positions Carlotta to become a character in a murder mystery.

As Charles Osborne says in *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*: “Agatha Christie revealed in her autobiography that the idea for *Lord Edgware Dies* had first come to her after she had been to a performance by the famous American entertainer, Ruth Draper. ‘I thought how clever she was and how good her impersonations were; the wonderful way she could transform herself from a nagging wife to a peasant girl kneeling in a cathedral.’ Carlotta Adams was clearly based on Ruth Draper, whom older playgoers in London will remember, for, although she first appeared in London in 1920 with her dramatic monologues at two performances at the Aeolian Hall in Bond Street (Carlotta Adams in *Lord Edgware Dies* ‘had given a couple of matinées which had been a wild success’ before doing a three weeks’ season the following year), Ruth Draper continued to visit London for the following thirty-six years, giving her final performance at the St James’s Theatre (now, alas, demolished) in July 1956, the year of her death. She possessed, to an extraordinary extent, the ability to alter her appearance with the minimum of help from props or costumes, merely by thinking herself into the character she wished to impersonate.”

But I felt that Christie herself, as she sat through an evening of monologues, had come away with the belief not that it was necessary to depend on stereotypes for her type of fiction but that if she too could reach through to the essence of a character readers would immediately respond to the simply-drawn characterisation in the belief that they, too, knew people ‘just like that’ …

Unexpectedly I came upon a scrap of a Ruth Draper monologue in *The Virago Book of Women Gardeners*, called ‘Showing the Garden’:

‘Come, Mrs Guffer, do come. I am longing for you to see the garden … Tea is not quite ready — and I’m so afraid you are going to run away the moment we’ve had our tea that I am determined you should have at least a *tiny* glimpse of the garden! I won’t take you far … Happily it’s very near … I always feel that I am most fortunate in having a part of my garden into which I can fairly *tumble* … Here we are already!

Oh, do you? … How very sweet of you!

As a matter of fact, you know I am rather sorry you should see the garden now, because alas! It is not looking its best … Oh, it doesn’t *compare* to what it was last year … We’ve had a very poor season, I think … Oh, it’s been very much too dry … I think everyone has suffered … ’

It doesn’t give any hint as to how Draper herself felt about gardens and gardening but I think Christie was more deeply influenced by Draper than I had realised. She came to use dialogue very effectively to hint at people’s social status, their confidence in their position (or otherwise), their relationships to friends and families and spouses. Yet she rarely spells it out in detail. Just a succession of little half sentences and broken-off phrases and the person comes to life …

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Agatha Christie has rarely been studied as a playwright. Yet, at one stage in the 1950s, she had three plays running successfully in London; something many better-known playwrights only dream about. Most of her plays are mysteries, some are adaptations from her books, and all of them are helped by the touch which makes her dialogue in her books very readable.

She never tried her hand at a monologue; in fact, few playwrights have. I think the problem is that a monologue needs a brilliant actor to succeed. A play can be ‘carried’ by a couple of good actors even if the supporting cast is mediocre. You can’t get away with a mediocre monologist.

It may be my limited knowledge of such things but I am inclined to think that some of the best monologists have been women; perhaps because this is one way round the problem that plays traditionally had their best parts written for men. Siobhan McKenna comes to mind. And,

more recently, Melinda Bobis. But other women have taken their One-Woman-Shows around the world.

An interesting one is Verity Laughton's *The Mourning After* in which Nancye Hayes played an older woman, Belle Doyle, who had done a radio show for many years called *Berenice Beleaguered* but had wanted to go on to a theatre part playing Ellen Kelly.

The play required its cast-of-one to sing, act, and do a number of voices. Not a simple ask.

The other day when I was in the Tip Shop I came across a book called *Ten Diminutive Dramas* by Maurice Baring. These aren't monologues nor are they One-Act-Plays. They might be regarded perhaps as Half-Act-Plays, as they are designed to take about 15 minutes to act. I do not know if a theatre would want to bother with such an offering when it probably makes better box office sense to go for a full-length-drama and a well-known playwright. But I found the pieces, in the words of Desmond McCarthy, 'amusing trifles'. The best one is probably where 'Macbeth' is being rehearsed at the Globe. The Stage Manager says to Shakespeare: 'We're thinking of transferring the scene to Macbeth. It wouldn't need much altering. Would you mind rewriting that scene, Mr. Shakespeare? It wouldn't want much alteration. You'd have to change that line about Arabia. Instead of this "little hand," you might say: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this horny hand." I'm not sure it isn't more effective.' Shakespeare says people might laugh. The man playing Macbeth says he can manage. Shakespeare says it is more likely that Lady Macbeth would sleep-walk. But Macbeth is keen to do it. Lady Macbeth then intervenes, 'I've got nothing to do in the last act. What's the use of my coming to rehearsal when there's nothing for me to rehearse.' She wins that point.

But 'Macbeth' isn't finished. He says: 'Before we do this scene there's a point I wish to settle. In Scene V, when Seyton tells me the Queen's dead, I say: "She should have died hereafter; there would have been a time for such a word"; and then the messenger enters. I should like a soliloquy here, about twenty or thirty lines, if possible in rhyme, in any case ending with a tag. I should like it to be about Lady Macbeth, Macbeth might have something touching to say about their happy domestic life, and the early days of their marriage. He might refer to their court-ship. I must have something to make Macbeth sympathetic, otherwise the public won't stand it. He might say his better-half had left him, and then he might refer to her beauty. The speech might begin;

O dearest chuck, it is unkind indeed
To leave me in the midst of my sore need.

Or something of the kind. In any case it ought to rhyme. Could I have that written at once, and then we could rehearse it?'

Shakespeare goes away and comes back with his famous lines:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Etc.

'Macbeth' is NOT happy with this contribution.

I had not previously read anything of Baring's (and when I tried the fiction shelves I came up empty-handed; well, not quite—I went away, as I tend to do, with something quite unrelated, in this case Sebastian Barry's *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty*); and yet he was quite prolific, writing poems, essays, plays, novels, an autobiography *The Puppet Show of Memory*, and becoming an important commentator on Russian literature, such as in his *Landmarks in Russian Literature* which came out in 1910, and George Orwell said of his work that it "must have been the means of introducing many people in this country to the great Russian novelists". He belonged to the banking family but made his way as a journalist including covering the Russo-Japanese War of 1904/5 and reporting later from Russia and the Balkans. He belongs in that Edwardian period which Agatha Christie looked back to with a never-quite-lost sense of

nostalgia. The tea out on the lawn. The women in long muslin gowns and parasols. The clutch of smartly-uniformed servants. The careless sense of empire and superiority. He wrote with a wry pen of the rich and famous, including his pieces on characters in history which he called *Unreliable History*. And he did a short play he called 'The Blue Harlequin'. Was this simply part of a general interest at that time in the figures of the Harlequin, Columbine, etc—or did Christie take her pleasure in later creating her figure of 'Harley Quin' from seeing a performance of this as a child?

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September 16: Alfred Noyes
September 17: Ken Kesey
September 18: Dr Johnson
James Shirley
September 19: William Golding
September 20: Stephen King
September 21: Leonard Cohen
September 22: Nita Temmerman
Dale Spender
September 23: Baroness Orczy
Jaroslav Seifert

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Hungary has many fascinating things no doubt, fascinating buildings, fine wines, gypsy orchestras, beautiful scenery … but the aspect which creates a kind of yearning to see Hungary is the great plain …

"She saw the great Hungarian plain unfold before her eyes. Something in her was touched by the solemn beauty of it. Its immense grassy expanses unbroken by mountains or trees, shimmering under the spring sun. The dark blue sky, cloudless, like an inverted blue bowl. Herds of grazing sheep, like patches of snow. No sound, save the soft thud of the horses' hoofs on the white dusty road, and now and then the distant tinkle of sheep's bells, or the eerie sound of a shepherd's flute, the tilinkó. At times these plains, called the "puszta," are the very essence of timeless calm. At times the puszta wakes up and resembles an ocean in a storm. Clouds, so low it seems you can reach up and touch them, gather above. Hot winds roar over the waving grass. Frightened herds stampede, bellowing and crying. But calm or stormy, it is magnificent."

(from *The Good Master* by Kate Seredy)

"It was now evening time and the sky was lit up in crimson. As far as my eye could reach I saw nothing but the immense sweep of corn-fields, faintly rippling in the breeze as though they were the waves of a yellow ocean. There is something primeval about those plains of Hungary in the setting sun, as though the humanity inhabiting them were still in the Biblical stage. I expected to see Ruth appear in the wake of the harvesters to glean the remaining sheaves. The sunset transformed the smiling fields into a great noble landscape with something cosmic about it, and my thoughts travelled far away to the parched uplands of Castile, between Medina de Campo and Salamanca, where there is naught to break the monotony but ghostly cypress-trees here and there. Above, in the sky, which seemed in this Hungarian sunset to be so far away, I could see pyramids, towers and castles battlemented. Why does a race perpetuate the scene of its beginning? I saw here upon the central plateau of Asia, beneath the pyramid-shaped clouds, the snowy mountains in the distance and the nomadic race sowing the corn that would feed the bronzed men and women before they set out in the following year for fresh plains. At this tranquil hour of the evening, when not a living being seemed to stir, an overpowering feeling of loneliness descends upon the solitary wanderer. Wandering in the mountains never induces loneliness, because they limit the flight of the human spirit, but in the plain that loses itself in the blue horizon there is infinity. In the mountains I hear church bells resounding in the valleys, and there is comfort in the distant sounds of village life; but in the never-ending plain, discouragement dogs the wanderer who longs to see hills in the distance, for they make him think of the spires and towers of cities. Probably this feeling of melancholy which I experienced was due to weeks of

wandering in the plains. For the people who dwell in plains are never merry. I have found that their folk-music is always sad, and though the Hungarian rhythms lash us up to the pitch of excitement, they are always in a minor key."

(from *Raggle-Taggle* by Walter Starkie)

Yet the plains have been both benefit and tragedy.

At one stage I thought I would look at the effects of Roman Occupation on various places, not Britain or Palestine, both of which have been widely written about but places that sort of fall off the edge of the universe. I thought of Portgual where William Atkinson wrote, "No name on the Roman side in their twenty years of warfare admit comparison with that of Viriatus, the first great figure in the peninsular scroll of fame. Though born a mere Lusitanian shepherd, he was a born leader of men, and his daring sallies at the head of a small band in the mountains of Estremadura attracted others to his banner from far and wide. Surviving where most of his tribesmen perished, in a particularly ruthless massacre perpetrated by Galba under promise of peace, he became the recognized head of Lusitanians and Celtiberians and for eight years proved himself more than equal to the best armies Rome could put in the field. Honourable and chivalrous, he threw into relief equally the bad faith and the barbarity which repeatedly sullied the repute of a foe driven at last in 139 (B.C.), since it was no match for him in battle, to compass his assassination by bribery." Or this: "The campaigns of Viriatus had their contemporary counterpart in the defence of Numantia, the symbol of a no lesser greatness in defeat. Numantia, on the Douro near modern Soria, was a natural stronghold which for some fourteen years defied Rome and humbled its every effort at capture, until veterans and recruits alike came to dread the name and to rebel at such an assignment. In 134 it sent its greatest general, Scipio Aemilianus, with a force of 60,000 men to [surround] the town that even he did not feel strong enough to take by assault; its defenders numbered some 4,000. Building fortifications all around and denying it supplies, he was able after sixteen months to enter a shambles where the last survivors, having fired their homes, committed suicide rather than live to grace his triumph. The memory was to burn itself deep into the heroic consciousness of later ages. Cervantes made of it a moving play which in the War of Independence, nearly two thousand years after, inspired the defenders of Saragossa to comparable extremes of valour against Napoleon."

And I thought of Carthage …

And then I thought of the Roman attempts to drive north into Eastern Europe. Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries in *A History of Eastern Europe* write, "The territory of present-day Hungary entered documented history in 9 BC, when its predominantly Celtic inhabitants were subjugated by the Romans." It became the Roman province of Pannonia but it remained a place of tribute rather than extensive occupation. And the Romans were not left to enjoy its benefits in peace. Attila the Hun swept in from the Asian steppes in the fifth century, the Avars arrived in the seventh, an estimated 400,000 Magyars in the ninth. "In the dim and distant past the principal forebears of the Magyars may have originated as far east as Xinjiang or Inner Mongolia (in present-day China). Graves in a cemetery 50 km (thirty miles) east of Urumchi (the capital of Xinjiang) have been found to contain weapons and artefacts similar to those buried in Hungarian cemeteries dating from the ninth and tenth centuries." King Stephen (1000 – 1038) took Hungary back into the 'Roman camp'; the irony being this influence, Latin usage, Catholicism, Roman concepts of law and society, was to prove far more enduring than anything from the Roman occupation. The Celts, harried from pillar to post, gradually retreated and were absorbed into the rising nations of western Europe; a clear reminder that although Asia has suffered widely from European depradations—Europe has also suffered grievously under Asian depredations. And although Hungary's problems declined to factional infighting and the greed of its nobles its agonies were not yet over. "In 1241 the Mongols raced through the country, virtually burning Hungary to the ground and killing an estimated one-third of its two million people" (from a *Lonely Planet Guide to Hungary*); the only advantage to come out of this was to encourage the varying groups in Hungarian society to bury their differences and make common cause. Then they were allowed two centuries of relative peace and prosperity before the Ottoman Turks came charging into Eastern Europe …

* * * * *

The best Hungarian writer of the nineteenth century was Sandor Petofi but he was overshadowed in the English-speaking world by the lively adventures of Baroness Orczy, particularly her Scarlet Pimpernel books. *The Oxford History of Hungarian Literature* says of Petofi: 'When a Hungarian is asked who, in his opinion, is the greatest poet his country ever produced, he will most probably cite Sandor Petofi. Petofi is known and respected wherever Hungarian is spoken; his name is associated predominantly with poetry, and he enjoys a place like that mainly reserved for Shakespeare in English-speaking countries. His appearance on the literary scene was sudden and brief, yet he radically changed the dominant trends and created a new school. No one would write poetry again without feeling his impact.' He died in 1848 in the uprising in Hungary against Austrian power. Lorant Czigany goes on to say 'some modern Hungarian poets have found it difficult to escape. The heritage and message of Petofi seem to lie deeply imprinted on the national ego.'

* * * * *

You say a name, but it's not known to anyone.

Either because that man died or because
He was a celebrity on the banks of another river.

Chiaromonte
Miomandre
Petöfi
Mickiewicz

Young generations are not interested in what happened
Somewhere else, long ago.

(from 'the Accuser' by Czeslaw Milosz)

Perhaps they aren't. But Emmuska (Baroness) Orczy's Scarlet Pimpernel books have had a long life. No one would suggest that she is a giant of Hungarian literature, nor point to any Hungarian flavour in her books, but a hundred years ago she was essentially the 'face' of Hungarian writing and probably the only Hungarian author most people could name.

I found a Scarlet Pimpernel omnibus containing four novels (*The Scarlet Pimpernel, I Will Repay, Eldorado, Sir Percy Hits Back*) of her swashbuckling hero on a stall last year and bought it. But when I got it home I found that the first few pages were missing. I thought I would borrow a copy from the library, photocopy the missing pages, and glue them in. But to my surprise, when I looked in the shelves of the Glenorchy Library, I found no Scarlet Pimpernel but a book of hers I had never heard of called *Castles in the Air*. Why not, I thought, and borrowed it. But it is quite the opposite to romantic heroes and marvellous escapes. Its 'hero', Hector Ratichon, is a private agent in post-Napoleonic Paris, a kind of amoral and pathetic Vidocq. He doesn't mind what cases he takes or how he sets about solving them—and he almost always comes a cropper. His marvellous dreams of making a mint always turn into managing to squeeze out just enough to keep body and soul together. His dreams of a wealthy and important marriage always fail. But his high opinion of himself never falters.

But it *is* possible to feel some sympathy. Times are hard. "The war had ruined everyone. Twenty-two years! and hopeless humiliation and defeat at the end of it. The Emperor handed over to the English; a Bourbon sitting on the throne of France; crowds of foreign soldiers still lording it all over the country—until the country had paid its debts to her foreign invaders, and thousands of our men still straggling home through Germany and Belgium—the remnants of Napoleon's Grand Army—ex-prisoners of war, or scattered units who had found their weary way home at last, shoeless, coatless, half starved and perished from cold and privations, unfit for housework, for agriculture, or for industry, fit only to follow their fallen hero, as they had done through a quarter of a century, to victory and to death." And on a more domestic level: "Meat in Paris in the

autumn of 1816 was 24 francs the kilo, and milk 1 franc the quarter litre, not to mention eggs and butter, which were delicacies far beyond the reach of cultured, well-born people like myself."

It wasn't hard to see why Baroness Orczy was so popular in her day. Her books were lively, amusing, readable, and always managed to convey the faint and intriguing whiff of someone who has been privy to secrets of the famous and the powerful—even when they have fallen on hard times.

* * * * *

September 24: John Peel
F. Scott Fitzgerald
September 25: A. H. Sayce
September 26: Minette Walters
September 27: Louis Auchincloss
September 28: Ellis Peters
September 29: Colin Dexter
September 30: Truman Capote
Laura Esquivel
Jelaluddin Rumi
October 1: Henry St John Bolingbroke
October 2: Roy Campbell

* * * * *

Roy Campbell wrote a verse 'On Some South African Novelists':

You praise the firm restraint with which they write—
I'm with you there, of course:
They use the snaffle and the curb all right,
But where's the bloody horse?

* * * * *

They flutter like moths round a candle,
Stale similes, granted, what then?
I've got a stale subject to handle,
A very stale stump of a pen.

From 'Hippodromania' by Adam Lindsay Gordon.

*

A *sylva rerum*, Kate Jennings tells us in *cats, dogs and pitchforks*, is a 'forest of things, a seventeenth century term for a fascicle of loosely arranged notes, occasional poems, copies of letters, memorable quotations, et cetera.' I love this idea. *Sylva rerum* here I come …

*

Free Verse
First refuge of those
Who cannot tell
An iambic pentameter
From
A Pickford's pantechnicon
(V. E. Cox)

*

"It's also worth bearing in mind the difference between an epigram and an aphorism. The former is merely a witty play on words (if one can use 'merely' in such a fashion), while the latter contains a point or moral."

(Christopher Hitchins *Unacknowledged Legislation*)

*

All will be judged. Master of nuance and scruple,
Pray for me and for all writers, living or dead:
Because there are many whose works
Are in better taste than their lives, because there is no end

To the vanity of our calling, make intercession
For the treason of all clerks.

'At the Grave of Henry James' by W. H. Auden

*

Compton Mackenzie when he came to do a reprint of his novel *Sinister Street* wrote: 'The only alterations I have made in this new edition of *Sinister Street* are the excision of nearly two hundred superfluous 'verys', the adjustment of a few stops, the correction of a few misprints, and the use of 'ise' in words like 'civilise' derived fron Latin and of 'ize' in words like 'apologize' derived from Greek. In earlier editions I spelt even 'surprise' with a 'z'.'

I had never thought of differentiating endings on that basis. I much prefer the softer 'ise' as an ending but the auto-correct on my computer insists on turning everything into 'ize' whether I want it or not. I have gone along with it mostly, telling myself that 'z' is an unfortunate and overlooked letter and deserves a bit more airplay. But the problem often is that unless I am very firm and vigilant I get a novel with both endings used randomly. Now when I look at other people's choices of ending I find myself wondering what lies behind their decisions.

* * * * *

James McAuley wrote: 'Valediction: Roy Campbell'

He stood against the leveling stampede
And cracked the stockman's whip of his polemic;
He never left his friends or slurred his creed
In times when cowardice grew epidemic.

Action he loved, and honour, and the life
Of simple men before machines were master.
He gave a pure devotion to his wife,
And said his rosary amidst disaster.

Contemptuous of the babble of his time,
He loved the Muses with a noble passion,
Catching a golden splendour in his rhyme
When rhyme and splendour both were out of fashion.

Who now shall bring back from our wars a song,
Like Heracles returning with a trophy?
May Christ who calls the singer from the throng
Give stars and music to his heavenly strophe.

* * * * *

October 3: Gore Vidal
October 4: Damon Runyon
Edmund Malone

* * * * *

Michael O'Brien-Twohig wrote in *Diplomatic Courier*: "I had heard of the notorious Chicago hoodlum, of course, always associating him in my mind with an underworld character called Scarface who had appeared in a film I had seen years previously. I mentioned this to my companion and asked her if the gangster era had really been as black as film directors and writers had painted it. She proved to be as well informed on the subject as she had already shown herself to be on the past glories of Greece and Rome. The reality, she said, had been far worse than fiction could ever be. She told me, for example, that Al Capone had been making about a hundred million dollars a year out of a variety of rackets—boot-legging, gambling, prostitution and so on. I listened spell-bound to her fascinating stories of Al's enterprising contemporaries—"Schemer" Drucci, "Mops" Volpe, Nitti the Enforcer, "Machine Gun" McGurn. Not even Damon Runyon could have dreamed up such colourful names."

Still, Damon Runyon didn't do too badly when it came to thinking up names for his characters but giving people lively and colourful nicknames was an American habit long before he came on the scene. Even writers like Bret Harte did it …

* * * * *

"If Damon Runyon had been handed the script of the Fine Cotton fiasco he'd have rejected it as too improbable even for one of his humorous off-Broadway fables.

"Mind you, it had all the ingredients—schemers on the make, a cast of colourful characters, lazy, incompetent, ambitious and suspect racing officials, thousands of punters who just wanted to be on the winner, crooked cops, assorted dames, greedy swells as well as battling little guys trying to make a dollar from an audacious sting set to beat the system.

"But it had another side to it that would have surprised even Damon, a nasty side of viciousness, treachery and perfidy, involving bookies, corrupt politicians, naïve or bent newsmen, jealous racing rivals and a criminal mastermind to take advantage of it all and round it off with a fix.

"Many factors went into the fix; no one man was entirely responsible. The main villain, although cunning and ruthless, was no Gorman, no great brain. His moves could be tracked. But he had a lot of money to back his desires and buy his way through to pay the cops and other willing stooges; and he had a lot of corrupt people on side in the community willing to help.

"In the wake of Fine Cotton the entire racing world was stunned when officials warned off Bill and Robbie Waterhouse from all tracks, labeling those hereditary rulers of bookmaking as cheats and swindlers.

"Fine Cotton, the picnic performer, destroyed the Waterhouse gambling dynasty; its aftermath of malice and jealousy also ended the last active days of the gambling legend, Big Bill Waterhouse, a survivor in the jungle of chance for 50 years.

"Were they guilty? Did they deserve it?

"The story is really quite simple, although the public never learned the truth in spite of Jockey Club and police hearings in two States and various tribunal and court appearances.

"What makes Fine Cotton fascinating is how and why such an obviously clumsy, two-bit, outrageously ambitious affair of slap-dash amateurism would turn out to be so serious in the end for the most professional people in racing.

"I can tell you. But first the farce: Fine Cotton was really only suitable for laughs due to the hilarious way it was disorganized; the players themselves gave the scam an inherent touch of absurdity by treating it as a serious enterprise, although even before the race, they too saw the funny side."

Kevin Perkins gives an outline of the affair in *The Gambling Man* and it is almost mind-boggling in its absurdities. In 1984 John Gillespie was in Boggo Road jail in Brisbane for holding up a tote when he met Pat Haitana who introduced him to his brother Hayden, a small time horse trainer in NSW. Gillespie had nearly got away with a ring-in (a substituted horse) when he swapped Apparent Heir for Mannasong. The horse didn't win, the coup failed, the trainer Bill Steer was disqualified for life, but the mastermind continued on his merry way, including managing to sell a horse he didn't even own five times! He bought a horse called Captain Cadet with the aim of doing another ring-in—but prison intervened. The most extraordinary thing in this extraordinary saga was that he already had more than 350 convictions, mostly for false pretences, and yet nobody seemed to think it worthwhile to warn the public or keep an eye on him.

Hayden Haitana also had 20 convictions but they were all for drink-driving. It was Gillespie who sweet-talked 3 men with money, Robert North, John Dixon, and Tomaso Di Luzio, into his next scheme. Captain Cadet, in the meantime, had developed a bad leg so Gillespie bought a horse called Dashing Solitaire. He persuaded Adelaide director Andrew Coventry to buy him and Coffs Harbour trainer Wendy Smith to train him. Then he found a lookalike horse called Fine Cotton and bought him, but again he persuaded two other people to become the owners, Pauline Pearse and Mal McGregor-Lowndes, then he sent the horse to Haitana to train.

Gillespie told Haitana to take Fine Cotton to Queensland to race at Bundamba. Unprepared, Haitana had a job with a car that kept breaking down to get him there and the horse ran wearily. It didn't matter; he was meant to look hopeless. Then Gillespie told Wendy Smith Dashing Solitaire was to go off to Adelaide—but instead he put him in a float and sent him to Brisbane. But Dashing Solitaire then ran into a fence and could not run in the planned race. Gillespie hurriedly looked round and bought a horse called Bold Personality. But there was a very big problem. Bold Personality was bay not brown. Unfazed Gillespie decided to dye him. He then moved both horses to the stables of a Brisbane trotting trainer Ian McMahon.

But instead of dying him brown the horse had gone a peculiar gingery colour. So they hastily shampooed him back to bay and used paint to spray a couple of white socks on him—which came out grey! So they painted over the socks with brown paint. By now the poor horse must've smelled like a cross between a panel-beating workshop and a hairdressing salon.

Gillespie hired a very junior apprentice, Gus Philpott, and paid a very young strapper, Cherie O'Neill, to lead the horse into the mounting yard. Even though Bold Personality, now masquerading as Fine Cotton, was a NSW horse no one checked either his papers or his physical appearance. Betting opened on him at 33 to 1 but immediately came down to 7 to 2, a massive plunge, but still the stewards took no notice. Gillespie in company with a group of senior Queensland police watched the horse go out on to the track. (It remains a mystery just what the police knew of the scam.) Elsewhere Bold Personality's former owner was deliberately distracted from watching the race …

After all that, poor old Bold Personality only managed to beat Gold Harbour by a whisker. But as he came back to scale a noisy crowd suddenly appeared and began chanting 'Ring-in! Ring-in! Wrong horse! Wrong horse!' and telling the stewards to wake up. Who were these people? They melted back into the crowd and have never, at least officially, been named. As more and more people took up the refrain the stewards finally acted by calling up the racecourse vet.

Gillespie had hoped to be able to do a quick re-substitution and have the real Fine Cotton with his correct brands and correct coat in place. But things had moved so fast this plan failed—and presumably the vet, unless he was corrupt, could tell a just-raced horse from one which had spent the afternoon in a stall. Even so, and incredibly, Haitana said the horse's papers had been stolen and he was allowed to leave the course unmolested. It took a week for police to find him again.

The only people to be charged by police were Haitana, North, (I year each) and Gillespie (4 years). But this extraordinary bungling inept farce had seen a deluge of bets from all around Australia and even from PNG. Somebody, it was believed, must have been behind the whole thing to have organised such a nationwide betting plunge. The man who was cast in this role was bookmaker Robbie Waterhouse. But the problem with this is—would a bookmaker plan a ring-in like that? Would a bookmaker plan a ring-in at all? He couldn't refuse to take bets on the ring-in. He might be able to lay some off on to other fielders but this is always risky. He could plead a bilious attack on that day and stay home—but Waterhouse wasn't a little one-man-operation in Woop-Woop. There have been a number of notorious ring-in schemes on Australian racetracks but they have been the work of punters hoping 'to beat the bookies'. The criminal schemes in which bookmakers have been implicated are the other way around: they have been accused of trying to nobble the favourite so as not to have to pay out. Even so, would any hard-headed gambler, whether punter or bookie, have taken so many people into his confidence … and could any such gambler truly have planned such a comic opera … and hoped to get away with it?

But there is one aspect of the case which has never fully been unravelled. It was played out against the investigation into corruption in Queensland by Tony Fitzgerald QC which eventually brought down some powerful figures including the Police Commissioner. Fitzgerald called it "a boat which was being blown by the winds of greed through a sea of complacency".

The con was planned and carried out by a dyed-in-the-wool con man, John Gillespie, and it seems likely that he is the only man who can answer the many remaining mysteries—including, of course, the degree of prior knowledge Queensland police had. But with all the media sound

and fury a scapegoat had to be found. John Gillespie didn't have the background or the panache or the sophistication the public sought in their criminal mastermind. Just as the drugs figures brought to public attention (such as the Mr Asia Syndicate) always seem curiously nondescript and ordinary and even faintly pathetic so too did this con-man not stride the stage as a criminal colossus.

Inept stewards, embarrassed guardians of public money, needed to divert attention from themselves. Inept police, embarrassed guardians of law and order, also weren't averse to some diversionary tactics. It was only when the most powerful bookmaking family in Australian history had been brought crashing down was it suggested that justice had finally been done. But the whole exercise has a profound sense of not ringing true about it.

* * * * *

Damon Runyon knew lots about fall guys and every other kind of guy. But I would query that idea that he would have been surprised by its small-time hood-like viciousness, or its vaguely hinted-at connections to organised crime. The 1920s and 1930s in Prohibition and Depression America were extraordinarily vicious and violent. Runyon gives his stories, fact and fiction, a lighthearted spin but the violence is always there.

He often makes his gangsters sound humorous—"One evening along about seven o'clock I am sitting in Mindy's restaurant putting on the gefillte fish, which is a dish I am very fond of, when in comes three parties from Brooklyn wearing caps as follows: Harry the Horse, and Little Isadore and Spanish John. Now these parties are not such parties as I will care to have much truck with, because I often hear rumors about them that are very discreditable, even if the rumors are not true. In fact, I hear that many citizens of Brooklyn will be very glad indeed to see Harry the Horse, Little Isadore and Spanish John move away from there, as they are always doing something that is considered a knock to the community, such as robbing people, or maybe shooting or stabbing, and throwing pineapples, and carrying on generally." ('Butch Minds the Baby')—in fact his whole style, his casual throwaway lines, his habit of calling his characters 'guys' and 'dolls', and the many humorous names he bestows on his people like Milk Ear Willie, Last Card Louie, Meyer Marmalade, Hot Horse Herbie, and Frankie Ferocious, all combine to make his stories seem light-hearted and funny, merely hinting at an underlying sense of rambunctious criminality.

So it comes as a bit of a shock to realise just how deadly the 1920s and 1930s were in the United States. Max Harris wrote, "Damon Runyon made his name and fame by introducing a fantasy world of imaginary New Yorkers with wonderful names, a world rendered more enchanting because so few New Yorkers have ever enjoyed a colourful nickname, even in the Mafia." But I came upon a book called *Murder Inc.* by District Attorney Burton Turkus from 1952. He says, "It is the general belief that Prohibition produced the underworld gang. Actually, the criminal mob sprang from the wars between labour and management, just before and subsequent to World War I." … "For all the free-shooting, mad-dog wars of Prohibition's heyday, gang crime was but a suckling in swaddling clothes through the tempestuous twenties.

"Millions were made by mobsters in illicit alcohol. Public officials were corrupted. Small plug-uglies became mob big-shots through guns and the closed-eye attitude—if not outright connivance—of the Law. Those gangs and gangsters, however, dealt for the most part exclusively in alcohol.

"When Prohibition was doomed, it was a foregone conclusion that the ganglords were not going into anything so prosaic or peasant-like as earning an honest dollar. So, with repeal, they switched to big business, the magnitude of which they never ever dreamed—and which illicit alcohol never produced. Then organized gangsterism grew up. It is ironic, indeed, that by ending the trigger-happy dry era, the Law lent the helping hand which shoved the racketeers into far-flung labour-industrial extortion, into the tremendous narcotics trade, the unbelievable billions in gambling, and, eventually, into national organization."

Murder, Inc. was a hire-a-killer organization set up by the gang bosses. A man would go in wherever there was opposition to be rubbed out, do the killing, and disappear again. In Brooklyn alone the police had two hundred unsolved homicides on their books; not all the responsibility of

Murder, Inc. but enough to make them feared. “Had the full beam of publicity been turned on the ring as a national entity ten years ago, today’s drive on crime would have had a far more advanced start. Public clamour would have demanded widespread action far sooner.

“For make no mistake about this: the organization of Murder, Inc., the national Syndicate that was founded in 1934, was the same organization that has caused countrywide furore through 1950 and ’51.”

But the gangs never had any trouble recruiting new leg-soldiers. “Police were assigned to every intersection. Wherever one of these bums was loafing, he was made to move. Toughs were yanked ceremoniously off the corners at every opportunity, and charged with any “rap” on which we could bring them in. There might not be enough to convict all of them—these swaggering gangsters were slick. But they could no longer set and hatch. This played hob with the street-corner crap games that were the neighbourhood pastime; whether it would erase any marks from the map remained to be seen.

“It was, however, excellent preventive medicine. Kids were growing up on those streets. A hood, loudly flaunting his affluence-without-work, would park his shining new convertible in the neighbourhood parking lot, swagger down the neighbourhood main street with a laquered doll on his arm, saunter into the neighbourhood bar and begin tossing money around for drinks for the boys. This tends only to breed admiration in the local youth—admiration and envy. Easily influenced kids dream of the day they can achieve the same wonderful estate. Envy quickly advances to imitation.”

It is also a reminder that the many lively and colourful names in the world of organised crime hid a viciousness that has been overlooked or largely whitewashed out of existence. Or worse still, seen as romantic! Kid Twist Reles, Dukey Maffetore, Lupo the Wolf, Legs Diamond, Dutch Schultz, Spider Murtha, Lulu Rosenkrantz, Sholem Bernstein, Blue Jaw Magoon, Faustino Satriale, Dandy Jack Parisi and many more. Perhaps, too, Damon Runyon took more than lively monikers from the real world. This is a transcript of one of these hoods, Angelo (Julie) Catalano speaking: “When I see I am far enough, I stop. I’m looking to get out of that car. While I’m walking, to where Reles is waiting, there are yards. I drop the gloves in a yard.” … “I done the whole thing through fear. They had the cleaver in their hands and they had the ice pick. If I would refuse to drive that car, I would be dead with the guy in the same car.” Give this some polish and some humour and it might be Damon Runyon …

And James Morton wrote, “In addition to Murder, Inc. there was a smaller ring of killers known as the Larney Mob headed by the Ludkowitz brothers and including a Rose Pantiel.”

* * * * *

“Business is business, it has its ups and downs, and involves some risks. No one ever claimed it was a sure thing. But the risks are usually calculated risks, the up-cycles and down-cycles are both explicable in rational terms. The coal or fuel oil business is fine this year because we had a cold winter and people burned a lot of fuel. The melon business is dismal this summer because farmers grew more melons than people care to eat and melons are a glut on the market.

“The gambling business—and this describes Wall Street—is something else again. It is not rational, and the proof of it is the wild fluctuations of stock prices, not merely from day to day but from hour to hour. The rising and falling prices on the stock market ticker tape resembles nothing so much as the runs of good and bad luck, of sevens and elevens or deuces and treys at the dice table.

“If a share of stock is, as the New York Stock Exchange copywriters like to say, “Your Share in American Business,” why should its price change twenty times a day?

“Does the price of my dinner fluctuate from one evening to the next? Suppose that when I went to the Oak Room in the Plaza for cocktails, as I often do, the bartender were to say:

“Good evening, Mr. Darvas. Martinis are being quoted at 97 cents this evening, sir; Manhattans 78, bourbon 43, the bottom has fallen out of the sweet vermouth and it’s down to 3, but the dry is holding firm at 39; club sandwiches $5.26; pickles $1; and I don’t recommend the chicken salad until we see how the proxy fight in the kitchen is going to come out.”

"A ridiculous world, if it were so. I see a valuable property at 650 Park Avenue. I don't see real estate being quoted on a ticker tape; 650 Park Avenue going for $3,500,000 in the morning, three hours later selling for $3,530,000, two hours later down to $3,450,000, the next day only $2,900,000. I don't see the man who sold it at three o'clock one afternoon rushing in the following morning to buy it back for less than the price he received for it the day before.

"To suggest that such fluctuations of price in any commodity could serve the public interest is insane. But in gambling, naturally, it is another matter. Fluctuations in the value of numbers in a lottery is necessary to the entire existence of that kind of lottery, and one gets what one pays for —a gambler's chance to sell numbers; or in the case of Wall Street, symbols printed on paper IP—INTERNATIONAL PAPER, CN—NEW YORK CENTRAL, IBM—INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES, GM—GENERAL MOTORS, for more than one paid for them."

Using IBM as an example he shows "that the price of IBM between 1936 and 1960 ranged all the way from 37/8 per share to 400. In 1961 the low was 387; the high, an amazing 607! In 1962 its peak price was 587½ in January, down to 300 in June, up to 392½ by the end of December." While the company's earnings were, per share, 1961: 7.54, 1962: 8.72, 1963: 10.00 (est). "Each year was better than the previous year. Then why the insane price swing?"

"Even a moment of reflection will suggest that charts like that are illogical. Swings indicated on the price chart have no relationship to INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES as a business enterprise. The price roller coaster relates only to the fluctuations of the price of IBM in the Big Casino known as the New York Stock Exchange.

"A glance at my newspaper shows me that IBM pays an annual dividend of $4 per share. That is something less than 1 per cent at current share market prices, and I don't have to tell you that no one invests his money to earn 1 per cent.

"The plain truth is that people who buy IBM—at $300, or $600, or at any price—are simply betting that it will rise in price. The same applies to most speculative stocks and, as far as I am concerned, practically all common stocks are speculative stocks. They may go up, they may go down. Take a chance, and find out.

"If I seem to belabor the point about gambling and the stock market, it is not with bluenose intentions but to *underscore the essential realities of the situation!* My experience in the market has taught me that there is only one rational way to approach the business of buying and selling stocks for a profit; and that is, first of all, to understand very thoroughly what it is that I am buying and what it is that I hope to sell again.

The ABC's of Wall Street, as I have found it, are these:

A. When I buy stocks I am buying chips in a casino.
B. My object is to take advantage of the price fluctuations created by the speculation of my fellow gamblers in such a way as to get more for my chips than I have paid for them.
C. But since that is also the object of the other players, I must be very sure that I play my game well."

He, after close study, developed a simple system. A stock that was neither very high-priced nor El Cheapo would be watched carefully; when it showed, despite small fluctuations, that it was climbing he would buy in. At the same time he set an automatic sell order if the price fell below a set amount and this amount would be leveraged up as the stock rose. For example: Buy in at 37½, set the automatic sell at 36. When the stock reached 39 the sell would rise to 37½ and so on.

The book came out in 1964. So what has changed? That stock markets will always crash seems certain so long as they are driven by speculation; they are not about the viability of the individual company or even about its capitalization or current dividends but rather about whether speculators think they can make an eventual profit. But the slumps will probably never again be as great as that of 1929 simply because the huge superannuation and other kinds of mutual funds will buy in at bargain basement levels thus helping the market to start moving up again. Equally, the same problems—the power of rumours, 'insider trading', incorrect information, the influence

of political and diplomatic activities, will always affect the price of shares in ways that the small investor has no control over.

When I listen to politicians talking about the 'mums and dads' entering the stock market, it always seems faintly obscene to me, as though ordinary people are seen as a kind of sheep-like mass to be herded into the market when a government wants to privatise a government-owned entity … and yet these same small investors are given no education, information, or honest appraisal of what they are being urged to buy into … nor does anyone ever come out and say in complete honesty that the stock market is merely a more complex and sophisticated form of gambling …

To listen to politicians it might be thought investors are either mums and dads or super funds. Nothing in between. Like lotteries. In the words of Patrick Burgess in *Money to Burn*, "Every Pools, Lotto, Totto Lotto, State lottery, newspaper bingo winner, was a battler.

No journalist had ever written: 'A wealthy company director pigging it in a penthouse in Darling Point today won $5 000 000 in Lotto. He didn't know what to do with it.' "

'Battlers', 'Mums and Dads' … the words and images are touching, heart-warming, comforting … and very misleading, even dangerous.

Nick Leeson in *Rogue Trader* wrote about the three years in which he ran up such huge debts on the Singapore Futures Exchange that he brought Barings Bank crashing down around everyone's ears. It is a terrifying story because our world now floats on this kind of absurdity. We see those pictures of (mostly) young men frenetically busy in the world's stock markets and we never query whether this is actually a sensible way to do business. As Ben Mezrich wrote in *Ugly Americans*, "The cast of characters was right out of a Hollywood thriller. Geniuses culled almost exclusively from the Ivy League, driven by ambition, some with an almost total lack of both ethics and proportion. Funded by private investors and massive corporate banks, they were raiders and traders and speculators all rolled togher, true adrenaline junkies who lived at the end of life. These were kids running billion-dollar portfolios with little or no supervision, kids who traded information in the back rooms of high-class hostess bars and at VIP tables in nightclubs in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Bangkok."

When Barings came tumbling down in 1995 the UK *Daily Telegraph* wrote "Mr Leeson is neither a victim nor a hero, merely the latest in a long history of young men entrusted with responsibilities for which they proved unfit." The problem is—a system which is designed to work at such a pace requires the energy and the ambition of the young whilst requiring them to make split-second decisions about millions of dollars worth of other people's money; decisions which rightly should be made with a degree of collective wisdom and careful thought. Barings' problems began with a mistake, something which is made by traders every day. Things are bought instead of sold. Quantities get confused. In this case Leeson put the mistakes into a separate account and tried to trade back into profit. Instead the markets went down and ultimately took the bank with them.

I found myself thinking of the markets as a ship tossed around, the troughs, the giant waves, sometimes becalmed, sometimes with a furious storm behind it. But then that didn't seem a good metaphor. Because the sea has substance and what is traded increasingly hasn't. A century ago there was only a small gap between speculation and the land or the cases of apples or the new office building. Now billions of dollars change hands every year dealing in things which don't yet (and may never) exist, futures, options, derivatives … Leeson in his book speaks of the relief in actually exchanging ordinary bank notes for something equally real such as a meal—as compared to the unreality of the world in which he spent every day, with its flickering numbers on screens, its secret gestures between traders, its late night phone calls to markets around the world …

Yet the West floats, apparently unquestioningly, along on this massive sea of unreality. Perhaps because to question it is as dangerous as asking whether the emperor is wearing a glorious golden cloak … Naked emperors are not very easy on the eye. Naked gambling on our future is far more terrifying.

* * * * *

‘How can you buy or sell the sky — the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. We do not own the freshness of the air or the sparkle of the water. How can you buy them from us? … We know that the white man does not understand our way. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother but his enemy and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers’ graves, and his children’s birthright is forgotten.

There is no quiet place in the white man’s cities. No place to hear the leaves of spring or the rustle of insects’ wings. But perhaps because I am a savage and do not understand, the clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lovely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around a pond at night? The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind itself cleansed by a midday rain, or scented with a piñon pine. The air is precious to the red man. For all things share the same breath — the beasts, the trees, the man. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench …

When the last red man has vanished from the earth, and the memory is only a shadow of a cloud moving across the prairie, these shores and forests will still hold the spirits of my people, for they love this earth as the newborn loves its mother’s heartbeat … One thing we know — our God is the same. This earth is precious to Him. Even the white man cannot be exempt from the common destiny.’

Chief Sealth Duwamish in 1865; as quoted in Peter Matthiessen’s *Indian Country*.

Buy the land, the sky, the water? Buy and sell the rights to desecrate and pollute? Trade in unwanted fumes? Piece of cake to modern traders …

* * * * *

Damon Runyon did a lot to define the crime bosses and hoodlums of the thirties, even if he was more interested in the small time gangster than the big men. Modern images revolve between the man in the business suit and the one in the dark glasses … and it is sometimes hard to decide, when their clothes are off, which is which. But one of the strangest stories of a ‘robber baron’ I have come across is this story Richard McGregor tells in *Japan Swings*; ‘For the Japanese who know her, Nui Onoue is the Dark Lady of Osaka, but some like to call her the Bubble Woman, after the era of feverish land and share speculation in which she thrived, and which she came to symbolise. She cut a sad figure on the few occasions I sat in at Osaka District Court for hearings of the massive fraud charges against her. Looking like a distressed widow at her husband’s funeral, she sobbed quietly and lightly dabbed her eyes, occasionally stiffening to sternly shake her head in disagreement with the evidence against her. Onoue, who is in her late sixties, had much to be upset about. Before the bubble economy burst, she was—on paper at least—one of the 25 richest people in the world, which was no small achievement for the daughter of a local hoodlum in rural Japan who knew nothing about high finance. ‘When she bought warrants, she thought “warrants” was the name of a company’, one of the reporters covering her case told me. Onoue based her share purchases on tips she proclaimed came from ‘the gods’, and in the process became the biggest individual shareholder in several of Japan’s, and the world’s, largest companies. By the time her fortune unraveled, she’d left a trail of fraud leading right to the top of a number of Japan’s most august financial institutions.

…

‘Onoue’s first big break had come about 25 years before, when she became the mistress of the head of a large Osaka construction company. The businessman rewarded her with money to open two restaurants. One of these, Egawa, which opened in 1965, became the headquarters of her sharetrading empire. It was only by visiting the restaurant that you could appreciate how astounding Onoue’s story was. To find Egawa, you had to wind your way through the back streets of Osaka’s sleazy red-light district, past the peep shows and love hotels, and the ‘Pink Salons’ and ‘Soaplands’, various kinds of brothels cutely categorised by the services they offer. Unlit and empty when I visited it in late 1992, Egawa stood between a flashing neon sign, which offered ‘Women and All You Can Drink’, and a strip club. This seedy setting became a mecca for the members of Osaka’s financial community. Brokers from Japan’s big four securities

companies based themselves in her restaurant all day to manage her trades, and then settled in for the night, when the real action took place.'

It was at night that she claimed to get messages telling her how to invest. Her brokers did not believe her but neither did they argue the point. 'The sheer size of Onoue's transactions turned the small branch offices of securities firms in the red-light district into some of the most profitable in the country. It was the equivalent of moving the parts of the Sydney Stock exchange to a small betting shop in Kings Cross, or Wall Street in New York to 42nd Street's red-light district.

'The original source of the money which launched Onoue's career in the market remains a mystery; and a long-standing rumour that it came from a criminal syndicate has never been proven. She first raised a large amount of cash from what was to become her main source of credit, the most respectable pillar of Japanese capitalism, the Industrial bank of Japan (IBJ). She used this capital to invest in shares, which in turn provided her with more collateral to borrow money elsewhere, which she put back into the stockmarket as well. Everyone was happy—as long as share prices continued to rise. The bank was really being paid to lend Onoue her own money. And she got money to invest in a stockmarket which was then only moving in one direction, as well as gilt-edged collateral to boost her borrowings elsewhere. By the start of 1990, Onoue was worth Y1.13 trillion ($15 billion), and was the biggest single individual shareholder in IBJ itself, Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank (then the world's biggest bank) and a host of other blue-chip companies, including Toshiba, Sumitomo Bank and Fuji Heavy Industries. One local businessman ruefully noted that her fortune was about equal to the cost of building a massive new airport near Osaka, a project which had been the dream of the business community for half a century.

'But the start of 1990 was also when the bubble began to lose air. A desperate Onoue scrambled to cover her losses by heavying the president of a small credit union to issue her with fake deposit certificates. She used these to borrow more money to cover her loan repayments so she could stay afloat, but eventually the game was up. Onoue went bankrupt and was subsequently charged with fraud. How a woman with little education and no family connections or financial skills could become the glamour girl of some of Japan's most powerful and prestigious financiers is a question that has never been answered.'

*

"Until the police supergrasses told all, the most common theory on why good detectives turned bad involved 'the slippery slope'. This argument held that officers started their journey to taking bribes or stealing money by first of all bending the rules, so-called 'noble cause' corruption. Frustrated at seeing criminals who were 'well at it' walking free from court, officers would fit them up to gain convictions. After that, so the thinking went, it was easy to take the next step, into thieving or accepting bungs … (But) The first conclusion reached by analysis of the cases was the obvious one that corruption stems very largely from simple greed, a desire for more money."

Bent Coppers (*The Inside Story of Scotland Yard's Battle against Police Corruption*) by Grant McLagan.

Greed does explain a lot in our world. But it struck me as I was reading Leeson's story that one thing our society does not handle well is mistakes. It is a truism that everyone makes them. But that is not what we tell our children. From the moment they are old enough to be aware (and sometimes before then) we punish them for mistakes, their mistakes, our mistakes, society's mistakes …

By the time children leave school society has instilled in them the profound belief that the best thing to do with a mistake is—do your damnedest to hide it. From mistakes in school lessons to small deceits at home, from bad driving to adultery, from domestic violence to financial fraud … we have learnt our lessons well and we become extraordinarily inventive at finding ways to hide things which rarely began as anything more than a mistake, a moment of weakness, a misunderstanding or misapprehension, maybe a misdemeanour … years down the track lives have been wrecked.

So maybe we need to rethink how we relate to small children. ‘Didn’t I tell you not to take another lolly before tea!’ Smack. ‘Didn’t you hear me say you had to put your boots on?’ Yell. ‘How many times have I told you how to count to ten!’ Humiliation. Punishing mistakes in small children doesn’t make them strong and truthful. It encourages deceit and dissembling.

* * * * *

Various critics have looked at Runyon’s lively and distinctive style with an unsympathetic pen; from a biographical dictionary which described him as writing for the semi-literate to Kenneth Tynan’s portrait: ‘the late Damon Runyon, who is such a scribe as delights to give the English language a nice kick in the pants’. But Walter Winchell is lighthearted about the man himself: ‘For the benefit of future historians, Damon Runyon is a coffee fiend. From ten to fifteen cups at a sitting. His one weakness is snappy clothes, and there is a race horse bearing his tag, which, however, isn’t as fleet as the one christened for his lovely bride, Patrice. He actually makes wagers on the ring fighters he picks to win in his columns. (No wonder, he has so many sidelines. Probably to pay off!) He once observed: “If you have two friends—on Broadway—consider yourself a success!” From that manner of figuring—then Runyon is a millionaire. The outlaws on both coasts, who respect his opinions on sports, also respect his articles on crime. The lethal sock he packs in his pillars of pithy patter for the papers—has driven mobsters out of New York faster than an extra girl in Hollywood says “Yes.” ’

Damon Runyon made greed comic, light-hearted, lively, readable, fast-paced, and with just the necessary hint of romance and pathos. I find it hard to say whether we should admire the skill with which he turned a world of hoods and gangsters into butts of fun—or whether we should be seriously concerned that we have a society which finds the attempt to ‘get rich quick’ the ideal stuff of popular fiction … Perhaps both.

* * * * *

October 5: Vaclav Hável
October 6: Melvyn Bragg
October 7: Thomas Kenneally
John Marston (bap)
October 8: John Cowper Powys
October 9: Aimee Semple McPherson
October 10: Harold Pinter
James Clavell
Ken Saro-Wiwa
October 11: Elmore Leonard
François Mauriac
October 12: James McAuley
October 13: Iona Opie
October 14: Vernon Lee
Eugene Fodor
October 15: Howard Colvin
October 16: Oscar Wilde
Günter Grass
October 17: Les Murray
Nathan Field (bap)
October 18: James Truslow Adams
Dun Karm
October 19: Sir Thomas Browne
Adam Lindsay Gordon

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“We stay-at-homes know so little of the other side of the world. But we are not aloof — not uninterested. We recognise the fascination of it all. The glamour — yes, the glamour. Gordon’s poems bring it all before one, do they not? Such a true Australian! You must be very proud of him.”

"We are — but he wasn't an Australian," said Mr. Linton.

The lady sailed on, unheeding.

"Yes. The voice of the native-born. And your splendid soldiers, too! — "

(from *Captain Jim* by Mary Grant Bruce)

It may be only a coincidence that so many of the popular poets and balladeers of the nineteenth century in Australia were Scottish. Banjo Paterson, Will Ogilvie, Adam Lindsay Gordon, John Shaw Neilson, and a number of lesser lights. And it may only be coincidence that they had the massive figure of Sir Walter Scott striding across their internal landscape. And it may only be coincidence that they recast Australian bush life in a way that is curiously lively, dramatic, even jolly. It isn't that they never write sad poems of regret and lament. It isn't that they don't write poems of pale northern maidens, likened to alabaster and rosebuds and all the rest, though I have a strong suspicion that they loved their horses more than they loved their womenfolk. But there is an optimism about their work which perhaps it would not have had if they had not had the opportunity to migrate to Australia and leave behind the grim poverty of many parts of Scotland, the cold, the mists, the tiny crofts, the food … They brought two things with them. A deep and abiding knowledge of Scott's seminal works—and the knowledge that Australia would give them opportunities Scotland couldn't … or wouldn't …

Gordon is only a moderate fit into this niche. He was born in the Azores. His sense of being a 'well-born' Gordon (both his parents, possibly to his misfortune, being Gordons) led him to a certain snobbishness. He grew up and was educated in England. Unlike others he may have been worse off by coming to Australia. And unlike the optimism and cheerfulness of a Banjo Patterson he is rarely humorous and suffered severely from depression and melancholia, not helped by the many times he damaged his head in falls, the failure of his financial ideas, and the loss of his baby daughter. But he definitely saw himself as a Scot. And like his confreres he loved horses, racing, riding, jumping; he wrote sympathetically of small country towns and the uneducated people on the land, and he took a strong interest in the natural aspects of the countryside around him. He probably owed more to Byron and Browning but he was influenced enough by Scott and the 'Border Ballads' to make the ballad his favourite form.

But unlike the others he never grew into the mature poet. Because in April 1870 he took his rifle and went down to the beach at Brighton in Victoria and shot himself.

*

Despite the complexities of Gordon's character his friendship with Father Julian Tennison-Woods was uncomplicated and pleasant in their shared love of the classical writers and their efforts to come to terms with a country so different from their formative influences. The relationship of Tennison-Woods to another Scot, Mary MacKillop, was not only complicated but frequently stormy. This is perhaps not surprising. The two men found themselves in agreement on the things they deemed to matter. MacKillop found herself struggling in a male world and a male church to achieve things for women and girls, particularly a worthwhile education, a voice, a degree of respect.

It is a pertinent reminder that men as seen through women's eyes are very different to the figures seen through men's eyes. I often notice in biographies of famous 'men of letters' a tendency to present the real persona as the one striding the public stage and the unimportant one that viewed by wives and children. Yet I can't help thinking that we have it round the wrong way. The real person is the one who steps inside, closes the door, and drops the carefully maintained public image. And many of them do not appear very attractive when seen like this. Gordon comes through the test quite well. He married for love. He treated his wife Maggie Park well. He appreciated her character, her skills both as a housewife and a horsewoman, and his actions often appear to be motivated by a desire to provide her with a better life.

In this respect his death can be seen as part of an ongoing attempt to make life better for her; that his death would free her from his increasing depression and inability to cope and allow her to remarry—which she eventually did.

It is slightly ironic that Gordon's best-known lines, along with 'The Sick Stockrider', are:

Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
KINDNESS in another's trouble.
COURAGE in your own.

But looked at closely I think it is both a clear indication of why his problems grew too large for him and why he would have seen his death as part of that philosophy of stoicism and courage.

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October 20: Thomas Hughes
October 21: Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Carrie Fisher
October 22: Doris Lessing
October 23: Michael Crichton
Robert Bridges
October 24: Sarah Josepha Hale
October 25: Geoffrey Chaucer (d)
October 26: Andrew Motion
October 27: James Macpherson
Desiderius Erasmus
Sylvia Plath

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"Surely a tribe whose lot would seem the most disastrous, the most wretched, the most godforsaken … for they are afflicted not with five but with six hundred furies, always starving, … on the treadmill and the rack among the hordes of boys. They grow grey with labour, deaf with noise, haggard with filth. Yet they count themselves princes among men … So they terrorise their flesh with threats, cutting those wretched boys to pieces with cane and rod and whip and raging at their sweet will in all the ways they can think of … " (from *In Praise of Folly*)

I don't know if I would have liked Erasmus (1466 – 1536) if I had met him face to face. But there is an element of *kindness* in his writing, even when he was criticising other theologians and philosophers, which marks him out from both his predecessors and from his contemporaries. This was undoubtedly looking back to his memories of his schooldays in the Netherlands. But although it was as theologian, writer, and philosopher that he preferred to make his mark education in a curious way changed the course of his life. He was hired as tutor to the young William Blount, Lord Mountjoy, in Paris and asked to come with him to England. He would have visited at some stage almost certainly but the importance of this visit was partly in gaining John Colet as a friend.

Although his name in England is more closely entwined with that of Thomas More it was Colet to whom he was closest and most in tune. Colet became Dean of St Paul's in 1504 and when his father, who had been Lord Mayor of London, died and left him a rich man he put it towards building a St Paul's School. "Erasmus wrote textbooks for the school; he took a spontaneous interest in its pupils and it was for them that he composed his attractive *Sermon on the Boy Jesus*."

A. G. Dickens and Whitney Jones in their book *Erasmus the Reformer* provide a picture of a man who was calm, moderate, intellectual, and believed profoundly in Christianity as an inner structure on which outward behaviour is based. He was deeply pacific in his outlook, writing, "War is sweet to those who have not tried it" and "The Rhine may separate the French from the German, but not the Christian from the Christian" and, childless himself, he had a deep empathy for children. He criticised many things—from women to Jewish rituals—but it was abuses in the Catholic church, the resistance to providing the Bible in the vernacular, and the failure of the

church to truly care for its poor and uneducated rather than taking advantage of their gullibility, which most exercised him. He has been criticised for 'fence-sitting', for not taking sides in the great debates that marked the Reformation. But this is a misunderstanding. He endeavoured to reach and influence people by his writings, such as *Praise of Folly*, *Education of a Christian Prince* (he believed that if it wasn't possible to change primogeniture then it was necessary to educate that first-born to fit the position he had inherited), his translation of the New Testament, and various books of assorted wisdom which he referred to as colloguies, adages, paraphrases, and so on. And he always wrote as a moderate reforming Catholic. Would the world have been different if Erasmus' views of what the church, the religion, the church fathers, the life of Jesus, true faith really meant had prevailed? I was interested in their view: "In retrospect, the brief brilliance of the 'Erasmian phase' in Spanish history is instructive in our wider context of the relationship between Erasmus and religious reform. It is surprising only if one accepts the ploy of its contemporary adversaries in denigrating it by heretical and above all Lutheran association. The influence of Erasmus was an import which, although undoubtedly assisted by friends at court, achieved such notable success only because of indigenous movements of reform. Criticism of church abuses, a nurturing of biblical scholarship, and an appeal to the inner life of the Christian as opposed to doctrinal formalism, had preceded and in several ways anticipated it. It is thus supremely ironical that an alleged association with doctrinal aspects of the Lutheran Reformation which he himself rejected should have been used as the chief weapon to crush his supporters in a country where it seemed, at one time, as if Erasmianism would be established and would flourish upon undoubtedly Catholic soil. Some historians have conjectured that an Erasmian-led wave of spiritual fervour might have produced a Spain with a reformed, but non-Lutheran, church which could have led the cause of European *reform* as opposed to Counter-reformation. This may now appear fanciful, but would not have done so during the 1520s. In the event, the legacy ranged only between a certain spiritual empathy between Erasmus and the Spaniard whose name to some epitomises the Counter-Reformation, Ignatius Loyola, and a last flickering of Erasmian wit in that very different character, Cervantes."

But it was the image of Erasmus travelling to England in 1488 with the young William Blount which intrigued me. Three hundred years later, my gr-gr-gr-grandfather Thomas Martin, who was a builder in company with his son; "Their clientele appears to have been largely Catholic, for in 1828-31 Thomas Martin was employed by Michael Henry Blount to repair and restore the front of the Elizabethan Mapledurham House, Oxon, discreetly reinstating the mullioned windows and adding a Gothic porch and a pinnacled gable". I like to think of Erasmus and the young William standing at those windows looking out on to the garden … and was that why the family wanted the windows reinstated? The Blount family remained Catholic through thick and thin. But then they had seen through the eyes of Erasmus what the church at its best could be …

* * * * *

'West Denton is the first European school to use Virtual Reality, and is building on its large existing stock of computer experience and applications. Clarke (the principal) is an enthusiast. He believes VR is an ideal teaching technology as it fits school patterns perfectly. 'It can be used by large classes or small groups, students can keep projects in their own files, and it crosses disciplines and subjects,' he says. 'The software is robust enough to be used for anything we can throw at it. We can create libraries of worlds, and use them for the school as a whole.' Whether the money will be there for him to carry through his concept is another matter. In Britain, at least, education is well down the list of priorities, behind the armed forces, health, unemployment pay and sundry emergencies.

'This money shortfall, the need for both better cognitive and technical research, and making VR pupil-proof, all mean it will be some time before virtual worlds invade most classrooms. Nevertheless VR appears to be made for education. Because it is easy to use, entertaining and visually stimulating, it also offers more to children and adults with learning difficulties than any other technology. The University of Nottingham's department of Engineering and Operations Management has a VR consultancy unit which has been working in this area with Shepherd

School. Young people with learning difficulties are being offered a familiar VR learning environment in which they can manipulate symbols of everyday objects with virtual hands.

'Virtual Reality will provide a new, interesting educational environment – and once you capture the interest of students, the rest is relatively easy. VR appears to have the facility of keeping children quiet by absorbing their attention fully, and at the same time stimulating unexpected flights of imagination. It is the nearest we have yet come to general, classroom-based, learning by doing. Teachers who have tried it are enthusiastic, and those who have only read about it are intrigued. Even Russian educationalists are investigating its potential. In the long run, it is doubtful if it could be kept out of schools, even if that is what we wanted.

'Mandala is the Canadian VR ystem which uses video-cameras to include users in a virtual world. Users see themselves on a screen in this world – like a mirror, except that it is *not* a mirror image — and interact with the virtual objects in it. It has been used in the home, in clubs, public places and schools. In Ontario schools it has been described as a 'step into Sesame Street' for young children, and as 'a challenging, teaching video game' for older ones. While Mandala is used to teach dance, music and rhythm, it also has academic uses, such as language teaching, basic reading skills, business charting, and economic data presentation. Although it has been received well by students it has a drawback. Users must keep their eyes fixed on the screen in front of them, as they would for television or ordinary computers, only even more so to cope with interactivity. In time Mandala, which is now available in America, Germany, Britain and France, will be networked to form the basis of distance learning.' (West Denton is on the edge of Newcastle in the UK.)

Glimpses of Heaven, Visions of Hell: Virtual reality and its Implications by Barrie Sherman & Phil Judkins.

The modern world is not short of 'teacher-substitutes'; television and radio, the internet, virtual reality and its changing manifestations, videos, tapes … and, of course, books. But I notice that when education comes up, or the lack of it, many older people tend to talk of the 'university of life', of the things they have learnt outside of schools. My mother worried about too much reading, it might be bad for the eyes, it would make us round-shouldered, it might remove us from the joys of the world around us, it might make us discontented. I worried about my children watching too much television. It might contaminate their bodies with low-level radioactivity, it might contaminate their minds with rubbishy programs and advertisements, it might make them hanker for things that were not good for their stomachs or their ideas. Parents now worry about what their children might find on the Internet, what too much game playing will do to their fitness, whether they are being exposed to too much violence or political ideas they don't agree with …

I notice books which try to suggest the ways in which future machines will impact on our lives, mainly computers and robots, tend to believe that our descendants will enter with simplicity and a sense of normality into a world of virtual reality.

The word is misleading. I retain a soft spot for those monsters in early science fiction stories—such as the creatures in Doctor Who which were so obviously people dressed up or which looked as though they might fall over at any minute or lose a wing—precisely because they were *obvious*. But what happens when the lines cease to be obvious? As I was browsing through a book about making *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy in New Zealand I felt that the lines were already becoming invisible. Another ten years and children will have no sense of what is real and what is the computerised real. Instead of people taking Bishop Berkeley to task for suggesting all this is not real, the reality of the world and the reality of virtual reality, parents will struggle to explain to their children what is real and needs to be engaged with and what is not real and can simply be enjoyed. Does it matter? I think it does. And it surprises me that philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and educationists are not treating it as profoundly important.

It is not hard to find popular books which tell us we are becoming more anxious about things such as keeping up—Alain de Botton immediately springs to mind where his philosophy comes over more as a form of esoteric self-help, tempered by an interest in sociology and semantics—but I think the anxieties out in the great charted reaches of the world's suburbs are

more profound. My children will probably be alive in fifty years' time. What kind of world will they live in? Will they retreat to a world of virtual reality—because the real world has been wrecked? Will they want to live on, dependent on such ersatz joys?

What does this have to do with Erasmus? I think it is relevant because his view of the inner and outer worlds was of the profound synthesis of an ethical Christian self. Whether or not we define the synthesis of real and virtual worlds as Christian may not matter so long as they are founded on that sense that both 'right being' and 'right living' belong together.

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A book beloved of school curriculum-setters in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*; even in my time excerpts from it still turned up in school reading books. Such an excerpt made no impact on me. But much later I came upon the statement that the book was about Erasmus. So I tracked down a copy to see if this was really so. And the curious thing is that the book is about Erasmus's *parents*. It is a novel. But Reade clearly was inspired to write it because he saw them as star-crossed lovers in a turbulent time—and because he was intrigued by that idea that genius is such a random, fragile, fraught creation. Gerard Eliassoen was legally prevented by his parents from marrying Margaret Brandt and eventually became a Catholic priest. Margaret stayed home to care for her father …

Erasmus does not appear till page 388: "Holland rang with his death; and little dreamed that anything as famous was born in her territory that year. That judgment has been long reversed. Men gaze at the tailor's house, where the great birth of the fifteenth century took place. In what house the good Duke died "no one knows and no one cares," as the song says.

And why?

Dukes Philip the Good come and go, and leave mankind not a half-penny wiser, nor better, nor other, than they found it. But when, once in three hundred years, such a child is born to the world as Margaret's son, lo! a human torch lighted by fire from heaven; and "FIAT LUX" thunders from pole to pole."

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October 28: Angus MacVicar
Simon Brett
October 29: James Boswell
October 30: John Bunyan (chr)
October 31: Dick Francis
November 1: Edward Said
November 2: Odysseus Elytis
November 3: Conor Cruise O'Brien
Benvenuto Cellini
November 4: Walter Cronkite
November 5: James Elroy Flecker
November 6: Thomas Kyd
November 6: Lucy Aikin
Cibber Colley
November 7: Albert Camus
November 8: John Duns Scotus (d)
November 9: John Borg

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While I was browsing through Professor Borg's book on cacti I came upon the information that he was the major influence on plant collecting, developing botanical gardens, planting trees and collecting information on plants in Malta. But the thing that surprised me was the thought: I have never before read a Maltese writer. I've read novels and travel books which touch on Malta. I've read a bit about the ancient ruins on Malta. I've come upon war books which deal with the defence of Malta and all that it suffered. There are those enduring images in fiction: Dashiell Hammett's Maltese Falcon, Rudyard Kipling's Maltese Cat … but Maltese writers?

So this past week I've been looking for Maltese writers. I wasn't greedy. Even one would be exciting.

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John Borg wrote, among other books on plants, the seminal work *The Flora of the Maltese Islands*; he also brought to Malta plants from around the world. But the curious thing is that plants and the small stony islands, Gozo, Comino, Filfla, and Malta, which make up the nation we call Malta, do not seem natural bedfellows. Whereas giant stones do seem like a natural 'growth' …

I was thinking of this while reading Peter Marshall's *Europe's Lost Civilization*. He set out to sail from the Orkneys to Malta visting various impressive stone remnants along the way. He writes, "Malta, for megalith hunters is a veritable Mecca. There are twenty-three classified ruins built between 3600 and 2500 BC, and possibly a score more which may have been destroyed over the centuries." They include Ggantija with its flowing lines and massive 15 tonne blocks on Gozo and behind it the Xaghra Stone Circle which differs from other early stone circles in being part of a large necropolis. Then he visited the megalithic temple at Borg in-Nadur and the dolmens at Tal-Qadi. And "I could not have left Malta without visting its most mysterious ancient wonder: the underground labyrinth known as the Hypogeum at Hal Saflieni" under the capital city Valletta. As well there is the "colossal female statue almost three metres high" at the temples in Tarxien which has been cut or broken at the waist which is regarded as "the earliest colossal statue in the world". Nor is this the end of Malta's prehistoric marvels. There are the temples at Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, built more than five thousand years ago …

The puzzle is that Malta is neither thought to have been settled far enough back nor by a sufficient number of people to have achieved these marvels. The temples and stones demonstrate an interest in astronomy, the peaceful worship of the Great Goddess, as well as a sense of focus for the communities and a cemetery at the end. But it is unlikely that Malta ever had more than ten thousand people in prehistoric times. Nor are there sites where smaller temples clearly predated the islands' massive stone structures. It is as though a sophisticated society of masons and sculptors required no tentative beginnings in these small farming and fishing populations.

And how green and fertile were these islands then? Now they are dry with grass and prickly pear, carob trees and thistles, small farms, orchards of fig trees, and vineyards clinging to the limestone slopes.

* * * * *

Tobacco always seems an odd thing to have gained such importance. It doesn't stop pain, send people to sleep, give them beautiful visions. The most that people say of it is that it 'calms their nerves' or gives them something to do with their hands. In earlier days it was thought to kill germs by 'smoking' them out. Perhaps it did. But it left a lot of black gunk in their place. And people had as much ambivalence then as they do now …

Forsaken of all comforts but these two,
My faggott and my Pipe, I sitt and Muse
On all my crosses, and almost accuse
The heavens for dealing with me as they doe.
Then hope steps in and with a smyling brow
Sch chearfull expectations doth infuse
As makes me thinke ere long I cannot chuse
But be some Grandie, whatsoever I'm now;
But haveing spent my pype, I then perceive
That hopes and dreams are Couzens, both deceive.
Then make I this conclusion in my minde,
Its all one thing, both tends unto one Scope
To live upon Tobacco and on hope,
The ones but smoake, the other is but winde.

('Upone Tabacco' by Sir Robert Aytoun 1569 – 1638)

An anonymous contributor, in a parody of John Aubrey, wrote in *Cruikshank's Comic Almanac*: "Tobacco is a plant growing in China on inaccessible mountains, whence it is plucked by people in balloons made of fish-skin, and preserved in red leather bottles under-ground. Sir Walter Raleigh did use it first. Its vapour inhaled is an admirable narcotic; and one Master Aytoun, deprived of it, did, in its stead, smoke strips of *Blackwood's Magazine*, but this well nigh coste him his life."

The indigenous peoples who first tried the various varieties of nicotiana saw it as 'special occasion' herb. And most people did not become addicted until the twentieth century made it cheap enough, easy enough, and acceptable enough, to smoke every day.

Although it is sometimes referred to as 'Madam Nicotine', perhaps to rhyme with guillotine, nicotine has a male origin. The *Britannica* says of it, "Both the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum*) and the compound are named for Jean Nicot, a French ambassador to Portugal, who sent tobacco seeds to Paris in 1550."

* * * * *

"Furniture will be a largely obsolete concept. Take for example the dresser my mom bought me when I was a kid. I still have it, and by the standards of its era, it's an admirable household fixture. It is a massive construction of maple wood, expertly joined with cunningly cut pieces, fitted and glued with the strength of iron. It is set with massive brass fixtures, and looks today—discounting the dust—as new as the day it was purchased, a quarter century ago. So far, so good; a fine piece of furniture you might say. But let's look at it objectively, as a machine, as an object with a purpose. Here sit a hundred pounds of hardwood with a compressive strength of 1500 psi, jointed by an expert craftsman into a rigid box that would easily support a bull elephant. And what is the sole purpose of this massive crate, this monument to a dead tree?—it holds my socks.

"Not only is it blind engineering overkill of epic proportions, it is also an environmental disaster. The home to generations of squirrels, a sentinel post for falcons, an autumnal banner of golden glory, a living creature, was chopped down to enshrine some underwear. This, my friends, is no way to run a planet."

The Millennial Project by Marshall T. Savage.

There is a tendency to believe that the only people who worry about the loss of forests are those who wear torn jeans and dreadlocks and are willing to sit up in trees. This little poem comes from an elderly Tasmanian, Phoebe Wilson, who wrote *A Tasmanian View*:

'I wrote this poem the first time I travelled through Woodsdale to the East Coast, and saw the desolation of our lovely forest. I decided to go to the chip mill at Triabunna, and see what happened to our trees. I was turned back at the entrance by a man in a metal hat.' She called her poem 'Woodchipping'.

Hark, the crashing in the forest,
And the whining of the saw;
Machines and dozers do their damndest,
As they denude the forest floor.

Bereft of home, now birds and wildlife
Flee before the deaf'ning noise;
Orchids, heath and blue-love twining,
Wilt as men pursue their joys.

We are promised reafforestation,
Pellets dropping from the sky;
How can hardy little pellets
Sprout, when yonder land is dry?

The rain-belt will be non-existent.
No doubt we'll hear the farmer's plea;

Birds and other lovely creatures,
Have been forgotten in the spree.

Japan is clutching all before her.
This will make her very strong;
Her black ships roll along our Coastline –
Scouting as they steam along.

I was turned back at the chipping entrance
By a man in a metal hat;
He says we have SQUARE MILES of bushland,
And the usual this and that.

He can't convince ME we'll be not be sorry,
As man so pursues his greed;
What use the dry and barren country,
Or the little yellow seed?

I remember a local news story of an old Downs man dying at a hundred; the announcer said he cleared 'every tree from his land with his own hands'. My mother's response to this was: 'The wicked old man!' But now I find myself wondering: what did he do with all those trees? Firewood? Fenceposts? Small sheds? Or were they, things which had been growing for uncounted years, home to birds and koalas, caterpillars and lizards, simply pushed into a pile and burnt?

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I have sometimes come upon explorers saying how proud they were to have a little piece of flora or fauna named after them. I quite understand the feeling. And I am inclined to think that if I can't have a butterfly named after me I would happily settle for a new species of grass. Civilisation may think it runs on oil and guns—but in reality it runs on grass. So instead of *Trioda Fitgeraldii* or *Sporobolus Mitchelii* or *Poa Morrisii* or *Lepturus Stoddartii* or *Erichne Burkittii* … like Peter Wimsey saying, 'I shall be honoured to go down to posterity in the turn-up of Wilfrid's trouser' I would be delighted to see a miniscule mention of *P. Herreriansii* or *L. Jennienii* …

Joseph Banks has done quite well in the naming stakes. One day while I was browsing through Marcie Muir's *The Directory of Australian Children's Books* I noticed that Captain Cook, as a subject for children's books, was away out in front by a mile. No doubt they felt he had everything they needed. A rise, if not from rags then from modest beginnings, an interesting life, no troublesome wives and children needing to be brought in, a strong sense of command and discipline, and travel to interesting places. Yet, in a way, this is misleading. Britain had no shortage of strong-minded sea captains who could probably have sailed the *Endeavour* with equal efficiency.

It is Joseph Banks who is the one called the 'Father of Australia' in the sense that he constantly pressed the British Government to consider Australia rather than southern Africa as the site of their proposed 'thieves' colony'. And, not content, with getting Botany Bay to the front in that hard-fought race he followed every aspect of the infant colony with interest. On the one hand he urged the new arrivals to send him back specimens and information on every aspect of the natural world. On the other he pressed the government in London to give the small colony every possible support.

The Royal Society of Tasmania said of him, 'It may be said that without his powerful and sustained interest behind the scenes in Britain, the first twenty-five years of settlement in Australia would have been much harsher than they were. Without doubt, we owe a great debt to this man — a debt not now sufficiently recognised.

‘Banks is called “the Father of Australia”. There is a monument to him at Kurnell and the town of Bankstown is named after him. His name is commemorated in the plant genus *Banksia* and also in some other plant species; a seaweed, a sundew, a wild pepper and the Tenterfield woollybutt *Eucalyptus Banksia*. While these are fine and appropriate memorials to the man, most Australians do not realise how significant was the contribution of Banks (and through him, of the Royal Society of London) to our very existence as a nation.’

Although Banks was president of the Royal Society in London for a record 42 years (1778 – 1820) he only published one scientific paper ‘to suggest that the Barberry plant can serve as an alternative host to the wheat rust fungus’. Born with the proverbial silver spoon his style was autocratic and I found him described as ‘difficult’.

Kate Grenville in *Joan Makes History* says of him aboard the *Endeavour*, “and then there was the man of leisure, the dandy, the philanderer: the botanical gentleman.” “He was a small smooth man with a tight smile of some charm and tiny white teeth, and I could see that he thought himself irresistible to any creature in a skirt” … “I could see that the Captain felt no great love for this hummingbird of a man, with his quick eyes and brilliant waistcoat of silver brocade”.

And more seriously one of the editors of Cook’s *Journals*, Philip Edwards, said of him, “First among the supernumeraries, and in the eyes of many in England first in the entire expedition, was Joseph Banks, a rich man and a Fellow of the Royal Society although twenty-five years of age. He had shown his eagerness for the development of natural science at Oxford, and had been in Newfoundland and Labrador collecting plants and insects. He was responsible for bringing Daniel Carl Solander, Swedish pupil of Linnaeus. The assistant naturalist was another Swede, Herman Diedrich Spöring. The astronomer was Charles Green, formerly an assistant of Nevil Maskelyne, the Astronomer Royal. The two artists were Sydney Parkinson and Alexander Buchan, neither of whom survived the voyage.”

There is a curious ambivalence about Joseph Banks in both fact and fiction. Even serious works seem unsure whether to promote him as scientist, lobbyist, dilettante, botanist, man of leisure, a man who used his influence …

In actual fact he wasn’t the only botanist to travel with Cook. Dr Solander made his modest mark (and has plants named for him), as did Scottish botanist Robert Brown who eventually became the keeper of Banks’ massive private collection.

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‘Pythagoras, the Aztecs, Indians and Vikings all recorded the eating of seaweed. Hawaiins used to cultivate ‘limu’, seaweed gardens of over seventy species, until western eating habits corrupted their good taste. Now the knowledge is lost, and, too late, a renewed consciousness of their own history has set Hawaiians to revive the limu garden. In Britain, coastal dwelling people ate seaweed but only a few instances have been recorded for posterity: the Romans noted that the British in Wales ate water plant or laver, others used carragheen and dulse. As late as the 1800s young stalks of sugar wrack (*Laminaria saccharina*) were sold on the streets of Edinburgh.’

Seaweed: A User’s Guide by Sonia Surey-Gent and Gordon Morris.

I loved that image of the limu or seaweed garden. The trouble is: sewerage outlets got in the way …

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But back to this burning question of Maltese writers. The national bard of Malta, everything I consulted seemed to agree on, was a man with the wonderful name of Dun Karm. So I have been looking for more about him. He started out as a young man in the priesthood, teaching, but left and became Assistant Director of the National Library. He worked on the official English-Maltese dictionary, he wrote the lyrics to the national anthem *Innu Malti*. You can still see his house in Valletta. His real name was Carmelo Psaila. He began writing poems in Italian and then turned to writing in Maltese, when his first novel in the vernacular, *El-Habib* or *The Friend*, showed that people wanted material in Maltese (a language that combines Phoenician and Arabic with touches of Italian and Latin) eventually becoming a kind of Maltese Chaucer by giving

people back pride in their national language. His verse was said to combine religious and nature themes with "rhythmic musicality" and "visionary expressive power" …

Unfortunately he seems to be treated more like a tourist sight than a writer to be read …

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November 10: Karl Shapiro
Ivan Turgenev
November 11: Kathy Lette
Carlos Fuentes
November 12: Janette Turner Hospital
Bill Hornadge
November 13: R. L. Stevenson
November 14: Steele Rudd
November 15: J. G. Ballard
Gerhart Hauptmann
Sue Woolfe
November 16: Chinua Achebe
Colin Thiele
November 17: Auberon Waugh
November 18: Margaret Atwood
November 19: Mikhail Lomonosov
November 20: Thomas Chatterton
Don DeLillo
November 21: Marilyn French
November 22: George Eliot
Jon Cleary
November 23: Richard Hakluyt (d)
Jasper Mayne (bap)
November 24: Jacob Burckhardt
Carlo Collodi
Benedict or Baruch Spinoza
William F. Buckley
Philip Massinger (bap)

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'Sorry to keep you waiting, Jeeves,' I said. 'Hope you weren't bored?'
'Oh no, sir, thank you. I was quite happy with my Spinoza.'
"Eh?'
'The copy of Spinoza's Ethics which you kindly gave me some time ago.'
'Oh, ah, yes, I remember. Good stuff?'
'Extremely, sir.'
'I suppose it turns out in the end that the butler did it.'

(P.G. Wodehouse *Jeeves in the Offing*)

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'This great heritage of hope Jesus adopted; purged it of the narrow nationalism which exalted the Jew above the rest of mankind, and of the petty localism which made Zion the seat of universal sway and worship; but he retained and sublimed its notes of pardon, equity, kindness, peace, plenty, and health. … he was no teacher purely spiritual. He came to make man whole in body, mind, and thought. … He raised woman at a bound from her depressed estate; ignored the Rabbinical disparagement of women and the surprise of his own disciples when they found him talking with a woman; welcomed women into the inner circle of his associates; took with the twelve on social tour a party of women; and in this travelling fellowship made real the friendship which he introduced between men and women—quite apart from the exclusive union of wedlock. His commendation of Mary above Martha released woman from sole preoccupation with domestic duties and opened up to her free pursuit of the highest truths and spiritual fellowship

with the greatest souls. … He preferred the loving courtesan to the frigid Pharisee. Into the Kingdom of God, before the chief priests and elders, the harlots would be welcomed. His tremendous stress on the value of the little child is only now being appreciated by public authorities in their promotion of child-welfare, child-study, child-training, and in their belated efforts to reduce infant mortality.'

From *The Philosophy of Jesus* by Roberts and Horder—but is philosophy the right word? I found myself debating this from both the all-inclusive angle where everything, religion, feminism, child psychology, lifestyle, history, and so on, could be brought with some benefit under the title of philosophy … and the opposite angle where other disciplines, from sociology to psychiatry to your average lifestyle magazine have hived off aspects of living which were once seen as philosophy. Should there be boundaries between religion and philosophy? Are books about people's aspirations really philosophy? Is evolution a philosophy until every scientific question is answered? Should we speak of the philosophy of 'string theory' rather than the science or the physics of 'string theory'?

The philosophy that was pre-eminent in the medieval universities of Europe dealt with logic, with contradictions, with semantics and interpretations—it did not have much to do with the life and teachings of Jesus, his philosophy if you like, but it can be argued that it laid the ground for the development of science.

Except that science isn't necessarily about logic. Eminent scientists are quite willing to use emotive phrases and colourful clichés. It is not only poets who talk of 'nature red in tooth and claw' even though every scientist knows that the vast majority of species that make up 'nature' have neither teeth nor claws. The term 'survival of the fittest' is trotted out by both the layperson and the scientist even though most science programs turn round and stress that it is the very young and the very old that are most vulnerable when it comes to survival. (And it is not usually the 'fitness' of the young which saves them but the ferocity or courage of their mothers.) Fitness, let alone 'good' genes, isn't really the issue. And legion are the scientists who continue to point to the 'imperative' in nature to spread the individuals' genes most wildly—even though we know that most plants are entirely at the mercy of the weather (it doesn't matter how prolifically a plant has flowered if it is too windy for the bees to come out and pollinate or too still for the seeds to be carried away); that most birds pair bond for life and do not spread their genes beyond one or two eggs per year; and that all herd animals are restricted by availability of food, by the oestrus cycles of females, and by the size of the territory they can realistically retain.

But behind this is the more problematical question of the use of emotive language to gain a wider audience while claiming for science a neutral and objective stance.

Mary Midgeley in *Evolution as a Religion* takes science to task for its careless use of emotive words like 'lottery', 'win and lose', 'random', even words like 'specialization', 'complex' and 'chance' come with baggage. João Magueijo, writing of the creation of the universe, said "Why did we win the lottery so many times in a row?" Richard Dawkins titled a book *The Selfish Gene*. We know a gene cannot be either selfish or compassionate, neither greedy nor generous. But undoubtedly people picked up a book with that title who would not have picked up a book called *A Theory of Gene Evolution and Survival*. But by equating diversity with that emotive word 'success' it is easy to overlook the fact that the least diverse organisms, such as the algae, are also the most 'successful' in terms of numbers and ubiquity. I don't blame scientists at all for wooing buyers and readers with snappy titles. But by pitching a book at a wider audience scientists run the risk of undermining the crucial factors which differentiate science from philosophy, culture, literature … And Dawkins' book has a problem common to all books about living organisms which necessarily turn to specific behaviours and habits of specific species to 'prove' general points. In fact, as fast as a generalisation is made, a species can be found to raise questions or seriously undermine that ringing declaration …

Although Midgeley focuses on loaded words, 'good', 'bad', 'altruistic', 'harmless', 'lethal, 'survival', 'success', and others, which are so common in all writings on evolution, she takes the wider view that all the sciences which use language as their fundamental tool run the same risks. Whether it is biology or sociology, psychology or archeology—if its basic structure depends on

words then it has this inbuilt problem. No amount of graphs and pie-charts, no time-lines, no measurements, can free it of this association with variations in meanings and perceptions, nor of emotion. Even to talk of 'hard facts' is to set the mind ticking with a range of meanings, connotations, and memories. It is hard to see a way around this—except for the one that practitioners in all word-based areas would reject out of hand—to cease calling these areas of study and research 'sciences' and once again call them 'philosophies'.

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It may have been coincidence but last week I found myself reading of the Taliban in Afghanistan (in Ann Jones' *Kabul in Winter*) banning toothpaste because it is not mentioned in the Qur'an—and at the same time reading in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval History*, 'It is important to note that despite its expansionism and its insistence on absolute submission among believers to the new rule of faith embodied in the Qur'an, the conquering Muslim political elite was not intolerant of either the peoples or the cultures over which it established hegemony. In Syria, for example, late Antique philosophy, as exemplified in the Hellenized Jews of Alexandria, Origen, Porphyry, and even the more mystical Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, continued to be promoted among a learned stratum at the top of the dominated society. By the late ninth century this type of literate discourse had established a beachhead within Arabic intellectual circles. Al-Kindi, a sometime resident of the city of caliphs at Baghdad, is commonly venerated as the father of Arab philosophy, both for his own writings and for the work he encouraged in others. For the next two hundred years, the central period of monasticism in the West, it was preeminently in the Islamic world that the intellectual quest for wisdom persisted and advanced. Here we may pace a beginning of the third major phase in the history of medieval philosophy.

'Already, with al-Kindi, Muslim interest in Greek philosophy displayed a particular fascination with the works of Aristotle. In this it paralleled a direction Boethius had taken three centuries before, which undoubtedly facilitated the reception of Arabic thought in the West when Boethius's work itself was revived around the end of the eleventh century. But the rapidity with which the Islamic world developed a mastery of the whole Greek heritage and began to chart a path of its own is astounding. The great Persian polymath Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) produced the most impressive speculative synthesis since the early Neoplatonists. In its influence on critics and defenders alike, both in Islam and in the West, Ibn Sina's thought easily bears comparison with that of Kant or Hegel in modern times.

'In Spain, site of an emirate opposed to Baghdad since the mid-eighth century and then home of the caliphate of Córdoba from 929, a separate flowering of the same extraordinary culture began only slightly later. Here the dynamism of Jewish communities ensured that learned Jews would play a prominent role. The strongly Neoplatonizing *Fountain of Life*, written in Arabic by the eleventh-century Jewish poet Solomon Ibn Gabirol (Avicebron), was influential among Muslims and also, in Latin translation, in later Christian circles to the north. By the twelfth century the focus had narrowed even more sharply on Aristotle than before, and the interpretative sophistication applied to his works by Spanish intellectuals had taken a qualitative step beyond all earlier treatments. Moses Maimonides, a Jew born and educated in Cairo, pointed the way with his *Guide for the Perplexed*, written, like Gabirol's work, in Arabic. In Ibn Rushd (Averroes), a contemporary Córdovan physician and lawyer who ended his days in Marrakesh in 1198, Muslim scholarship produced a monumental series of commentaries on Aristotle's writings that provided a focus for some of the most important philosophical debates of the following centuries. Later Christian thinkers, for example, would find enunciated in Averroes the challenging ideal of a purely philosophical way of life superior to the way of religious faith.

'Taken in its entirety, the evolution of speculative thought in the Muslim world marked a considerable enrichment of the philosophical heritage of late Antiquity. And Arabic achievements in mathematics and natural philosophy, especially astronomy, laid the foundations for later medieval science in the West and ultimately set the stage for the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century.'

As I put aside Ann Jones' book I couldn't help thinking that Afghan women had been short-changed by all strands. The wisdom of the Muslim philosophers had not been used to make

their lives more liveable. The science derived had ended up in bombs and missiles to destroy their homes and livelihoods, and the 'simplifying' and 'purifying' aspects of strict Koranic teachings had denied them the few small pleasures that modern life has offered. In a society where hundreds, possibly thousands, of women each year attempt suicide by burning themselves alive, by swallowing insecticide, and other extraordinarily painful and terrible means, I couldn't help thinking that the most useful book would be a simple guide, not to the perplexed, but to the desperate telling them how to commit suicide painlessly. It seemed to enforce that common perception: what use is philosophy if it does not make human life more fulfilled, more profound, more beautiful?

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I came upon the suggestion that George Fox's wife Margaret Fell may have written to Spinoza in Amsterdam, asking him to translate several tracts. It is possible. She sent a couple of short tracts to Rabbi Manasseh ben-Israel in Amsterdam (the man Oliver Cromwell contacted with his invitation for Jews to consider emigrating to England) and Spinoza was in contact with Dutch Anabaptists and Collegiants who were in touch with Dutch and English Quakers. But her plate was pretty full with the needs of persecuted Quakers in Britain. And the suggestion that she was trying to convert him to Quakerism is a modern view. At that time Quakerism was as much a philosophy of God as it was a settled religion. Membership and formal rules were still in the future. But I think she would probably have couched her tracts in strongly Christian terms; something which Spinoza probably found dificult—as do modern Universalist Friends. Since then I've come upon the information another early Quaker, Anne Conway, may have been a friend and correspondent to Spinoza. Her *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* came out in Latin in 1690 and in English two years later. At first I thought it was his troubles, expelled from the Jewish Community in the Netherlands for 'heresy', which might have been the link. But I think it was rather that his philosophy, so profoundly rooted in God and all the implications that flow from that, and his time spent with Dutch mystics, found a sympathetic response in early Friends. Rufus M. Jones in *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th & 17th Centuries* writes of his particular friendship with one Collegiant, "Peter Balling was one of an interesting group of scholarly Collegiants who became very intimate friends of Baruch Spinoza, and who received from the Jewish philosopher a strong impulse toward mystical religion. Before they became acquainted with the young Spinoza, however, they had already received through Descartes a powerful intellectual awakening, and had discovered that consciousness itself, when fully sounded, has its own unescapable evidence of God. … Spinoza, though bringing to his philosophy elements which are foreign to Descartes, and though fusing his otherwise mathematical and logical system with the warmth and fervour of mystical experience that is wholly lacking in the French philosopher, carried Cartesianism to its logical culmination, and has given the world one of the most impressive presentations that ever has been given of the view that all things centre in God and are involved in His existence, that it belongs to the very nature of the human mind to know God, and that all peace and felicity come from "the love of an infinite and eternal object which feeds the soul with changeless and unmingled joy." He, too, had his conversion-awakening which took him above the love of earthly things, and through it he found an unvarying centre for his heart's devotion, which made his life, outwardly extremely humble, inwardly one of the noblest and most saintly in the history of philosophy."

When Albert Einstein was asked by a rabbi if he believed in God he replied: 'I believe in Spinoza's God who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, but not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and action of men.' But I am not sure that Spinoza's beliefs can be so neatly divided. T. S. Gregory introducing Spinoza's best-known work, *Ethics*, says, 'But to understand the *Ethics* it is necessary first to realize that Spinoza believed in God and loved God in unperturbed singleness of life, and that this book was written not as instruction or apology but as prayer.' I wondered at this description and it didn't seem, immediately, to fit the sense of someone trying to convince a world of his viewpoint and beliefs in neat and careful propositions, proofs, and corollaries.

But I think, if prayer is not seen as petition, plea, or even thanks, but as a profound sense of 'living in God' then the description fits. Because Spinoza says things like "Hence it follows that the human mind is a part of the infinite intellect of God" and "The greatest good of the mind is the knowledge of God, and the greatest virtue of the mind is to know God" …

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November 25: Poul Anderson
Lope de Vega
Franz Gruber
November 26: Charles Schulz
William Cowper
Mihaly Babits

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One day I was browsing in a writer's magazine and I came upon an article giving tips and outlets for the hymns you may have written. I must admit my first impulse was to think 'but people don't write hymns any more'—then common sense came to the party and I realised that people are still as busy as ever writing hymns and carols. Admittedly the process is more active in the evangelical churches and in ethnic congregations who want hymns and carols more suited to their way of looking at the world. But new words and music do enter the canon. And some of them are very attractive.

Sir John Betjeman wrote in his poem 'Olney Hymns':

Oh God the Olney Hymns abound
With words of Grace which Thou didst choose,
And wet the elm above the hedge
Reflected in the winding Ouse.

Pour in my soul unemptied floods
That stand beneath the slopes of clay,
Till deep beyond a deeper depth
This Olney day is any day.

The Olney Hymns, so far as I knew, were the production of William Cowper, sixty-seven of them written mainly in the 1770s and while he was living in the small English town of Olney. I came across this in Hazel Holt's novel *Death in Practice*: 'I wondered idly what it was that had agitated June Hardy and if it was something to do with her step-brother's death. It seemed suitable that the final hymn should be "God moves in a mysterious way", and, as we sang Cowper's fine words, I wondered if the final lines ("God is his own interruption / And he will make it plain") were a sign to me that I should stop fretting over the problem and leave well alone', and I thought 'how nice to think that people are still enjoying Cowper'. But when I went and actually looked at his production I realised that the 'Olney hymns' include both Cowper's creations and those of his partner in hymn-writing, the local curate in Olney, the Reverend John Newton, and between them they wrote over 300 hymns. But this one 'Light Shining Out of Darkness' (No XXV) is one of Cowper's and it begins like this:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm. ….

Cowper's hymns (and Newton's too) are mostly conventional and traditional in their words, style, and sentiments. But they are a large and attractive body of work so if you find yourself in an Anglican church there is a good chance one of them will be on the hymn list.

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Perhaps, like me, you've occasionally noticed the names which sit in lonely splendour above the best-known Christmas carols—and perhaps, like me, you've never given them much thought. But quite recently I found myself asking who were they, how did they come to write this carol or

that … and when? Nahum Tate ('While Shepherds Watched'), Cecil Alexander ('Once in Royal David's City'), Franz Grüber ('Silent Night, Holy Night'), John Hopkins ('We Three Kings of Orient Are'), John Pierpoint ('Jingle Bells') etc … It gets more complicated when the collaboration of composer and writer is taken into account. Some famous carols existed as ballads for centuries before being given their current melody; sometimes popular tunes were later given words (or different words). Some carols have two musical versions. Some are reduced to one or two popular verses and the rest is forgotten. Some began as hymns or folk songs or part of a bigger 'event' such as an oratorio …

So I thought I would take a very brief journey into the history behind that handful of names and see who they were and where and when they lived.

NAHUM TATE: You have probably sung or played or noticed in passing as you enjoyed 'While Shepherds Watched' the name Nahum Tate. Tate was born in Ireland in 1652 where his father Faithful Teate was seen as having Puritan leanings and, worse still, was believed to be a government spy—which led to his house being burnt down and his wife and family badly manhandled leading to the deaths of three of his children. Tate cannot have been a very rigid Puritan as he adapted a lot of dramatic material, such as turning *Eastward Ho* into the less saucy *Cuckold's Haven, or an Alderman no Conjuror*, and, famously or infamously, giving *King Lear* a happy ending. He also wrote poetry and was friendly with John Dryden. He became Poet Laureate in 1692 but made little mark in that post despite filling it for 23 years. His main body of work was the writing and adapting of religious material in partnership with Nicholas Brady. Their *A Supplement to the New Version of the Psalms* eventually could be found in almost every church but in the beginning it was resisted and a bishop criticised it as being "new and modish". Here is part of their adaptation of Psalm 137:

When we, our weary limbs to rest,
Sat down by proud Euphrates stream,
We wept, with doleful thoughts oppressed,
And Zion was our mournful theme,
Our harps, that when with joy we sung
Were wont their tuneful parts to bear,
With silent strings, neglected, hung
On willow trees that withered there
Which you will probably be more familiar with as:
By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.
We hanged our harps upon the willows
in the midst thereof … etc. It is seen as perhaps the world's best known lament of those exiled; yet it is usually overlooked that it is also about the hope for revenge. The last verse goes: Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones …

Hilary Laurie in *Verses of the Poets Laureate* says 'Tate's metrical versions of the psalms were, and still are, much admired' as she introduces his:

As pants the hart for cooling streams
When heated in the chase,
So longs my soul, O God, for Thee,
And Thy refreshing grace.

The DNB says: "Tate is described as an honest, quiet man with a downcast face and somewhat given to 'fuddling'. The patronage of Dorset often shielded him from his creditors. But he was hiding from them in the Mint, Southwark, when death found him, 12 Aug. 1715." I was puzzled by 'fuddling'—what mysterious habit might this be?—but I assume it means fiddling or perhaps getting flustered. I also had the feeling that here was a writer who might have achieved more if he could have withdrawn from the world to somewhere peaceful and pleasant. The Laureate's pay of a yearly cask of wine certainly did not keep his wolves from the door.

CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER: Although we now think of carols as something for Christmas they originally were used all year round, for harvest festivals and for Easter, for spring and for Advent. Now we treat Mrs Alexander's 'Once in Royal David's City' as a carol but her other well-known pieces like 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' and 'There is a Green Hill far Away' as hymns.

She was born in Ireland in 1818 where her father, Major John Humphries, was in the army. She began writing verse as a child and in 1848 brought out *Hymns for Little Children* which was immensely popular, not least because of the growing Sunday School movement. In 1850 she married a clergyman William Alexander who eventually became Protestant Bishop of Derry and wrote on obscure religious subjects. By the time she died her book had been through more than sixty editions.

I know that some churches and Sunday Schools leave out verse three of 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.

because it is seen as being an ossified plea for people to know their place, to accept their lot in life, but I think this is a misunderstanding. Her readers and singers would immediately have seen it as a reference to the story of Dives and Lazarus in St Luke's Gospel, where Dives in his castle refuses the beggar Lazarus so much as the crumbs that fall from his table. Dives goes to hell where he begs for a sip of water. Lazarus is borne happily into heaven. The story isn't about social change but rather a plea for generosity and compassion while there is still time. As we have demonstrated in the 150 years since she wrote it that we aren't very interested in closing the gap between rich and poor I think it would be more useful to leave it in. Dives and Lazarus are as relevant to 21st century society as they were to 19th century society.

FRANZ GRÜBER: Where Mrs Alexander is remembered for the words she wrote Franz Grüber is remembered for just one tune. He was born in Austria in 1787 and eventually became choirmaster and organist in Oberndorf. One day an assistant priest at the church, Josef Mohr, approached him with a set of verses and asked whether he could set them to music in time for Christmas in 1818. The result was the evergreen 'Silent Night'.

Grüber belonged to a musical family; a phenomenon which I think was essential to the great European composers such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. They weren't lonely geniuses coming from nowhere. They grew up in homes steeped in music. They went to churches with professional organists and choirmasters. Their friends and relatives played or sang or composed. We still talk of 'farm families' or 'show-biz families' or 'department-store families' but the break is becoming more obvious as each generation goes in its own direction. There probably will be wonderful composers in the future but they won't be Mozart because we can't recreate that milieu. Grüber's gr-gr-grandson Heinz Karl Gruber has made his mark in the Vienna Boys' Choir and as a double-bass player.

JOHN HOPKINS: Hopkins Senior emigrated to Philadelphia as a child where his Irish mother opened a school. As a young man he was drawn to Paine, Hume and Voltaire, but he apparently decided to do some reading in religious material as well—and ended up becoming an Episcopal minister after working in an ironworks in Pittsburgh and eventually became the first Episcopalian Bishop of Vermont. He wrote a stream of books, sermons, and pamphlets, also a lecture first given in New York in 1851 on 'Slavery: Its Religious sanction, Its Political Dangers, and its Best Mode of Doing it Away' in which he said slavery is not a sin as the Bible sanctions it but it is political and socially damaging and should be abolished. He brought out his *Autobiography* on his golden wedding anniversary as a gift for his wife, though I would've thought she probably had a fair idea of the highlights of his life after fifty years with him, and for their thirteen children. But it is his son also John Henry, also a minister, but a much less flamboyant and public

one, who is remembered for just that one evergreen carol 'We Three Kings of Orient Are' which he brought out in his book of *Carols, Hymns, and Songs* in 1882.

JOHN PIERPONT: He started out as a lawyer but as he got no briefs he turned to managing a dry goods store and became an ordained minister in 1819. But he had already begun writing poems and songs with *The Portrait* in 1812, *Airs of Palestine* in 1816, and an expanded version in 1840, then *The Anti-Slavery Poems of John Pierpont* in 1843. He also produced several school readers, and advocated abolishing state militias and imprisonment for debt; he was interested in phrenology, spiritualism, temperance, abolition of slavery, and peace issues. His interests brought him into conflict with his very conservative Unitarian congregation, not least because they were renting the church cellar out as a storage vault for barrels of rum!

But I suspect that he is more likely to be remembered as the grandfather of John Pierpont Morgan than as the writer of 'Jingle Bells'.

While I was choosing a couple of Christmas carol books in the library I noticed they had one called *Edward Heath's Christmas Carol Book*. I immediately thought of a rather uninspiring British Prime Minister notable mainly because he loved yachting. My first impulse was to put it back. But then I thought 'it's a common enough name, it's probably someone else', so I borrowed it. It turned out to be by EH the PM after all. But, to my surprise, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Not only did he obviously love music, choirs, and singing, but the book was infused with a warm sense of real joy in Christmas, a feeling of nostalgia which never overwhelmed the purpose of the book, and a genuine sense of togetherness and community. His little introductions of the history of each carol and his memories of performing are interesting and sometimes wryly amusing …

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"Carols are songs with a religious impulse that are simple, hilarious, popular, and modern. They are generally spontaneous and direct in expression, and their simplicity of form causes them sometimes to ramble on like a ballad. Carol literature and music are rich in true folk-poetry and remain fresh and buoyant even when the subject is a grave one. But they vary a good deal: some are narrative, some dramatic, some personal, a few are secular; and there are some which do not possess all the typical characteristics. Simplicity, for instance, was often lost in the conceits of Jacobean poets, who yet wrote some charming carols.

"Hilarity also has sometimes been forgotten, or obscured in the texts. The word 'Carol' has a dancing origin, and once meant to dance in a ring: it may go back, through the Old French '*caroler*' and the Latin 'CHORAULA', to the Greek 'CHORAULES', a flute-player for chorus dancing, and ultimately to the 'CHOROS' which was originally a circling dance and the origin of the Attic drama. The carol, in fact, by forsaking the timeless contemplative melodies of the Church, began the era of modern music, which has throughout been based upon the dance. But, none the less, joyfulness in the words has been sometimes discarded by those who were professionally afraid of gaiety. Some French carols were rewritten by well-meaning clergymen into frigid expositions of edifying theology; some of the English tunes were used by excellent Methodists of the eighteenth century to preach their favourite doctrines. Before their time the British tendency to lugubriousness had occasionally shown itself in the folk-carol: but even in such cases the dancing tunes remained, happily to belie the words; and in France behind the ecclesiastical propriety of modern noels there lurk many carols like 'Guillô, pran ton tamborin' to bear witness to the spirit of a more spontaneous and undoubting faith."

(*The Oxford Book of Carols*, Percy Deamer, R. Vaughan Williams, Martin Shaw)

Cheerful, yes, but I must admit I had never thought of carols as 'hilarious'. For hilarity I have usually gone to parodies and send-ups of traditional carols, such as this by Julie and John Hope in their *Christmas Carols for Cats*. 'The Twelve Days of Catmas':

On the first day of Catmas there came a gift from me
A tear in your precious settee
On the second day of Catmas there came a gift from me
Two headless mice and a tear in your precious settee

On the third day of Catmas there came a gift from me
Three fur balls
Two headless mice and a tear in your precious settee
On the fourth day of Catmas there came a gift from me
Four feathered birds
Three fur balls
Two headless mice and a tear in your precious settee
On the fifth day of Catmas there came a gift from me
Five furry things
Four feathered birds
Three fur balls
Two headless mice and a tear in your precious settee
You've got the idea now? Come sing along...
…Six strays a-spraying…
…Seven trays a-brimming…
…Eight fish heads reeking…
…Nine fleas a-leaping…
…Ten toms a-wailing…
…Eleven kittens mewling…
…Twelve vet bills coming…

The Oxford Book goes on to say that carols grew out of the mystery play tradition in which the people, rather than the church, claimed 'ownership' of the key Christian stories and expressed them in the vernacular rather than the church Latin. The first carol collection in English of which something survives was brought out in 1521 by Wynkyn de Worde, Caxton's apprentice and successor. Other books followed but carols declined, or re-invented themselves as folk songs, in the Puritan era. And they did not reclaim the attention and participation of ordinary people until the nineteenth century when a range of new carols appeared in English. Also appearing in English for the first time were translated carols from the rare 16th century Swedish book, *Piae Cantiones*, as well as some old carols given new tunes or modernised words. Although we have come to think of carols as a Christmas phenomenon, and I feel a great degree of sympathy for shop assistants who face all carols all day every day up to Christmas day, and although the Nativity was always the most popular theme, originally carols were sung throughout the year on special occasions …

And they look at the curious little question: what carol did Shakespeare have in mind when he wrote in *As You Like It*: This carol they began that hour,

With a hey, and a ho, and a hey nonino,
How that a life was but a flower,
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time.

Their answer is that it was probably 'The Bellman's Carol' which goes:

The moon shines bright, and the stars give a light:
A little before it was day
Our Lord, our God, he called on us,
And bid us awake and pray.

Awake, awake, good people all;
Awake, and you shall hear,
Our Lord. our God, died on the cross
For us whom he loved so dear.

O fair, O fair Jerusalem,
When shall I come to thee?
When shall my sorrows have an end,
Thy joy that I may see.

The fields were green as green could be,
  When from his glorious seat
Our Lord, our God, he watered us,
  With his heavenly dew so sweet.

And for the saving of our souls
  Christ died upon the cross;
We ne'er shall do for Jesus Christ
  As he hath done for us.

The life of man is but a span
  And cut down in its flower;
We are here to-day, and to-morrow are gone,
  The creatures of an hour.

* * * * *

The Cowper Powys family was distantly related to William Cowper, something which they took pride in but which also gave them many anxious moments in the fear that his mental instability had been inherited by later generations.

Cowper wrote during one of his bouts of insanity:
Man disavows, and Deity disowns me:
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter;
Therefore hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all
  Bolted against me.

Hard lot! Encompass'd with a thousand dangers!
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors;
I'm called, if vanquish'd, to receive a sentence
  Worse than Abiram's.

Him the vindictive rod of angry justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong;
I, fed with judgment, in a fleshly tomb, am
  Buried above ground.

This suggests there was a strong religious component to Cowper's mental troubles; it also suggests that he was a Freemason or had some knowledge or connection.

I found the Powys family what I might call politely 'difficult' but interesting. Although I had read a couple of books by John Cowper Powys I knew nothing of the writings of his brothers and sisters. So I had a browse to see what of their books might actually be on library shelves—and came up empty-handed.

Nevertheless, I felt this exhortation by Llewelyn Powys was worth framing: 'Burn always with an intense flame, think always of beauty, never of the plaudets of men. Be proud of your calling as a member of the pilgrim band of poets.'

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I am never sure if I actually like some of Cowper's poems (many are now hard-going) for themselves or because I admire him for the way he struggled on despite his mental troubles and other difficulties in his relationships and finances.

But there was, I think, a profound sense of humanity in his work. As the First Fleet was unloading in Australia, Cowper was writing a string of poems with a strong anti-slavery message. Poems such as 'The Negro's Complaint':

Still in thought as free as ever,
  What are England's rights, I ask,

Me from my delights to sever,
  Me to torture, me to task?
Fleecy locks, and black complexion
  Cannot forfeit nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
  Dwells in white and black the same …
    … 'The Morning Dream',
      'Sweet Meat Has Sour Sauce' (Or the Slave-Trader in the Dumps) …
Here's padlocks and bolts, and screws for the thumbs,
That squeeze them so lovingly till the blood comes,
They sweeten the temper like comfits or plums, …
      'Pity For Poor Africans'
I own I am shock'd at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves;
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans,
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum!
Especially sugar, so needful we see!
What? give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea!

Besides, if we do, the French, Dutch, and Danes,
Will heartily thank us, no doubt, for our pains;
If we do not buy the poor creatures, they will,
And tortures and groans will be multiplied still …
      And 'Epigram'
To purify their wine some people bleed
A *lamb* into the barrel, and succeed;
No nostrum, planters say, is half so good
To make fine sugar, as a *negro's* blood.
Now *lambs* and *negroes* both are harmless things,
And thence perhaps this wond'rous virtue springs,
'Tis in the blood of innocence alone—
Good cause why planters never try *their own*.

He also wrote many poems on small domestic subjects (such as 'To The Immortal Memory of the Halibut on Which I Dined This Day'). His most famous poem 'The Task' came about when a female friend challenged him to write a poem about a sofa! And he also wrote compassionately about the non-human world:

  I would not enter on my list of friends
(Tho' grac'd with polish'd manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm …

* * * * *

And what of Olney itself? Thomas Hinde in his overview of *The Domesday Book* says of it: 'Olney is a small, quiet market town, on the Ouse in the northernmost tip of the county (Buckinghamshire), close to the Northamptonshire border. Once celebrated for its manufacture of bone-lace it was more recently the centre of a boot and shoe industry. But it is undoubtedly best known for its Shrove Tuesday pancake race and for being the home of the eighteenth-century poet William Cowper.

'The Bishop of Coutances held Olney manor from the Conquest, when the Buckinghamshire territory previously owned by Burgred (or Borret) was granted to him, until at some unknown date the Crown confiscated it. The mill at 40s was one of the largest in the

district, equaling the combined value of those further down the Ouse at Newport Pagnell (which was a borough!). There were two manorial water mills in use by 1343, but only one recorded in 1411. The present mill is probably on the site of the *Domesday* original. The 200 eels demanded as part of the rent were no doubt caught in traps, as no fishery is mentioned. The manorial woodland in which the pigs rooted would have been part of Yardley Chase, an ancient tract that inevitably diminished as time went on.

'In 1194 Olney passed from the king to the Earl of Chester and thence to his four sisters and their descendants. The Daubeny, Basset and Beauchamp families afterwards held the manor in turn until, in 1492, it reverted to the Crown. By 1237 Olney had become a borough. Courts were held roughly every three weeks to hear pleas and for fines to be imposed. The Monday market, first mentioned in 1205/6, still exists. The town's hilarious Shrove Tuesday pancake race, said to be 500 years old, is heralded by the 'pancake bell'. The ladies, all Olney residents, must wear skirts and aprons with scarves or hats as they run the 400-yard course to the church porch, tossing their sizzling pancakes as they go. The pancakes that survive the race are given to the bellringer, who pays with a kiss. A similar custom is observed at Liberal in Kansas, USA, and there is keen competition between the two towns for the best running time.

'In 1628/9 Olney Manor formed part of the grant made by Charles I to the citizens of London. Ten years later it was bought for the Nicholl family and in the mid-eighteenth century descended by marriage to Lord Dartmouth. It was this influential government minister who recommended the eccentric evangelist John Newton to the curacy at Olney in 1764, where he continued until 1779. Newton's 'awfully mad career', as (he) himself described it, began at the age of 11, when he went to sea on his father's ship. In due course he became a midshipman, but deserted, was flogged and degraded, and in the West Indies was starved and abused. Eventually he became a slave-trader, a profession he abandoned as religious convictions grew. He was Liverpool's tide surveyor, before studying for the ministry.

'He convinced William Cowper to move (with his friend Mrs Unwin and her son) from Huntingdon to Olney in 1767. Newton evidently believed that practical evangelical work would help the young, emotionally unstable poet (he had attempted suicide several times and spent seven months in a madhouse) to put his melancholic thoughts into perspective. During nearly 20 years at Orchard Side, in the Market Place, Cowper taught in the Sunday school, attended Newton's prayer meetings, nurtured his greenhouse exotica, which included pineapples, and looked after three pet hares — Puss, Tiney and Bess — creatures of 'sagacity' and 'humour'.

'With Newton, Cowper wrote the *Olney Hymns* (published in 1779), among which are 'Amazing Grace' and 'God Moves in a Mysterious Way'. When Newton left for a London parish Mrs Unwin encouraged a depressed Cowper to write more substantial verse, the result being 'Table Talk', and 'Expostulation', among other celebrated pieces collected in *Poems* (1782). In the garden of Orchard Side (now the Cowper and Newton Museum) the 'nutshell of a summerhouse' that served as the 'verse manufactory' survives. It was during this period that the poet wrote the best of his many letters. He and Mrs Unwin moved to nearby Weston Underwood in 1786.

'Doubtless today, as in Cowper's time, occurrences in Olney 'are as rare as cucumbers at Christmas'. The town has a quietly dignified character, with many modest Georgian stone façades (especially near the elegant stone bridge) and a magnificent church, which has one of only two medieval spires in Buckinghamshire.'

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November 27: James Agee
November 28: Nancy Mitford
November 29: Louisa May Alcott
November 30: John Lyly (bur.)
Mark Twain
L. M. Montgomery
Sir Philip Sidney
December 1: Henry Williamson

George Bowering
December 2: Thomas Boyle
December 3: Joseph Conrad
Mary Lamb
December 4: Thomas Carlyle
Samuel Butler
December 5: Christina Rosetti
December 6: R. H. Barham
December 7: Gianlorenzo Bernini
December 8: Norman Douglas
Padraic Colum
December 9: John Milton
December 10: George Macdonald
December 11: Harriet Adams
December 12: Joel Chandler Harris
Clarice Lispector
December 13: Heinrich Heine

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Romain Rolland wrote on Thomas Mann in *After the Battle*, in his 1914 chapter titled 'The Idols', "In an access of delirious pride and exasperated fanaticism Mann employs his envenomed pen to justify the worst accusations that have been made against Germany. While an Ostwald endeavours to identify the cause of *Kultur* with that of civilisation, Mann proclaims: "They have nothing in common. The present war is that of *Kultur* (i.e. of Germany) against civilisation." And pushing this outrageous boast of pride to the point of madness, he defines civilisation as Reason (*Vernunft, Aufklärung*), Gentleness (*Sittigung, Sänftigung*), Spirit (*Geist, Anflôsung*), and Kultur as "a spiritual *organisation* of the world" which does not exclude "bloody savagery." Kultur is "the sublimation of the demoniacal" (*die Sublimierung des Dämonischen*). It is "above morality, above reason, and above science." While Ostwald and Haeckel see in militarism merely an arm or instrument of which Kultur makes use to secure victory, Thomas Mann affirms that Kultur and Militarism are brothers—their ideal is the same, their aim the same, their principle the same. Their enemy is peace, is spirit ("*Ja, der Geist ist zivil, ist bürgerlich*"). He finally dares to inscribe on his own and his country's banner the words, "Law is the friend of the weak; it would reduce the world to a level. War brings out strength."

Das Gesetz ist der Freund des Schwachen,
Möchte gern die Welt verflachen
Aber der Krieg lässt die Kraft erscheinen …

In this criminal glorification of violence, Thomas Mann himself has been surpassed. Ostwald preached the victory of Kultur, if necessary by Force; Mann proved that Kultur is Force. Some one was needed to cast aside the last veil of reserve and say "Force alone. All else be silent." We have read extracts from the cynical article in which Maximilian Harden, treating the desperate efforts of his Government to excuse the violation of Belgian neutrality as feeble lies, dared to write:

"Why on earth all this fuss? Might creates our Right. Did a powerful man ever submit himself to the crazy pretensions or to the judgment of a band of weaklings?"

What a testimony to the madness into which German intelligence has been precipitated by pride and struggle, and to the moral anarchy of this Empire, whose *organisation* is imposing only to the eyes of those who do not see farther than the façade! Who cannot see the weakness of a Government which gags its socialist press and yet tolerates such an insulting contradiction as this? Who does not see that such words defame Germany before the whole world for centuries to come? These miserable intellectuals imagine that with their display of infuriated Nietzcheism and Bismarckism they are acting heroically and impressing the world. They merely disgust it. They

wish to be believed. People are only too ready to believe them. The whole of Germany will be made responsible for the delirium of a few writers. Germany will one day realise she has had no more deadly enemy than her own intellectuals."

I have tended to regard Thomas Mann as a writer of dense, almost impenetrable novels; and someone who was fortunate enough or wise enough to leave Germany as Hitler came to power. But even allowing for Rolland's natural anger and disquiet this would seem to suggest that Thomas Mann played a role in developing the mindset which Hitler admired so fervently. Perhaps Mann would have been more worthy of the literary world's praise and admiration if he had insisted on remaining in Germany to experience the renewed upsurge in that particular brand of 'Kultur'. This caught my attention because there has been some disquiet expressed since Gunther Grass won the Nobel Prize (1999) and it was revealed that as a youth he had a Nazi connection. But I am inclined to think that the connections of very young people (he was only twelve when the war began) should not have the same import as the mature attitudes of important writers. Another German writer who has aroused unease is Arthur Koestler who is believed to have used his position as 'important man of letters' to force himself on several women, and that it was his reputation and the importance of his books such as *Darkness at Noon* which led to his behaviour being hushed up.

It is a difficult question: should we avoid the books of writers whose public or private behaviour makes for unease? My feeling is that, yes, there seems no reason to help enrich people whose behaviour disgusts us. No book is so important that anyone should be forced to set aside their disquiet and buy and read it. But I suspect readers are always more willing to forgive the foibles and failings and misdemeanours of writers they particularly like.

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Heinrich Heine was a tormented soul, facing major dilemmas and contradictions in his own life; but in large part they were not of his own making. Paul Johnson wrote of him, "Thanks to the verse of Heine, the most popular of all German lyric poets, the myth of Napoleon, the strong ruler, 'the Man on Horseback,' had already found a home in Germany, where the all-powerful state conceived by his old admirer Hegel became the taproot for both Marxist and Nazi totalitarianism." It is not hard to see why he might be drawn to a man who was also an outsider; yet managed to be accepted and fêted and crowned.

Gunther Grass in his essay 'What Shall We Tell Our Children?' says he was inspired to research and write about the Jews of Danzig by Heine's struggle to write his last book *The Rabbi of Bacherach*.

"His defeat by so overwhelming a subject had aroused my ambition. Today I know that without the detour through Heine's "Bacherach" I would not have found my way to the Jews of Danzig, through whom I hoped to bring the Jewish community of a medieval Rhenish town back to life and uncover threads of destiny that lay buried beneath the sands of time. Three chapters totaling less than sixty pages are all we possess of "The Rabbi of Bacherach." The tale seems to end in mid-sentence. The author assures his readers in parentheses that the ensuing chapters and the end of the tale were lost through no fault of his. And yet, so often was his work on the manuscript interrupted, so unwieldy and unmanageable did the material become, and so compelling were the arguments against publishing the story as a whole or even the fragment at the time, that Heine busied himself with the material for a full fifteen years. The story of the writing of 'The Rabbi" reads like a chronicle of failure.

"In the summer of 1824, a year after the Napoleonic Edict of Tolerance was partly revoked in Prussia (whereupon it became possible to deprive Jews of teaching positions in schools and universities), the law student (and author of *Die Harzreise—Travels in the Harz Mountains*), began his preliminary work at the Gottingen Library. He who as a poet subscribed as a matter of principle to "indifferentism," who scorned all positive religion, who looked upon Judaism and Christianity alike as expressions of contempt for humanity, whose sole attachment to his origins consisted in an occasional sentimental impulse (and this in exasperation at the dominance of Christianity), he, the liberal who believed only in reason, began to delve into the history of the Jewish people's millennial sufferings. To his friend Moser he wrote: "I am also immersed in the

study of chronicles and especially in *historia judaica*. The latter because of its connection with the 'Rabbi' and perhaps also out of inner need. Very special feelings move me when I leaf through those sorrowful annals; in them I find an abundance of instruction and grief."

… "Shortly before his graduation in June 1825, Heinrich Heine was baptized as a Protestant. He wished to lecture on philosophy and history in Berlin and also had social ambitions. Yet, though he adapted himself to the servitudes of the day, he continued to work on "The Rabbi of Bacherach" until new interruptions relieved him of a task that was becoming increasingly burdensome. For a time he planned to publish a short version in the second part of his *Reisebilder* (*Travel Scenes*), but that too was abandoned. In 1833, when a fire in his mother's home in Hamburg destroyed a large part of the manuscripts stored there, the manuscript of "The Rabbi," which in the meantime had swollen to two volumes, was lost. All that remained were fragmentary rough drafts, with which the author, then an exile in Paris, planned to go on working."

It wasn't only the practical problems, the difficulty of drawing a coherent story from the mass of tragic background, the need to rewrite lost material, the everyday pressures of continuing his poetry and journalism, it was also the concern over the book's possible reception which inhibited him. "In a letter to his friend Moser, written before starting work on "The Rabbi," Heine had shown in advance a better appreciation of the provocative quality inherent in the work as it now stands: "I admit that I shall come out vigorously for the rights and civic equality of the Jews, and in the hard times that are sure to come the Germanic mob will hear my voice and responses will be roared in German beer halls and mansions." He was prophetic in more ways than one.

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December 14: Shirley Jackson
December 15: Edna O'Brien
Ludovic Zamenhof

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Richard Powers in *Galatea 2.2* wrote: "Could we invent a synthetic language?" I asked Lentz. "Something unlike any formal symbol system ever implemented? I don't know. Shape-based. Picto-tonal. Raise baby humans on it?" Sculpt an unprecedented brain?

He laughed, ready to write the grant proposal for solving the impossible chicken-egg problem. "It would still be the human brain, inventing the symbolic."

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Ludovic Zamenhof was thinking in terms of a far more modest synthetic language when he created Esperanto. He was a Pole, of Jewish background, and an oculist in everyday life. The name of the language came from his pseudonym 'Dr Esperanto' in which he first published his ideas in 1887 and his definitive book *Fundamento de Esperanto* came out in 1908. He tried to make the grammar and spelling very simple: all words to be spelled as pronounced, simple grammar, no gender for nouns, one definite article ('la') and no indefinite articles, adjectives to end in 'a', regular verbs (eg. *mi havas* = I have, *vi havas* = you have, *si havas* = she has, *ili havas* = they have), and a range of suffixes to be available to use for greater nuances and complexities, like spices to be added to recipes.

Esperanto has been criticised as being solely based on European languages, and predominantly the Romance languages. This is true. Though, strictly speaking, it is hard to see how any one language could draw on all the world's languages. The more important question is perhaps whether the universal take-up of Esperanto, as a supplementary lingua franca or pidgin, would be less damaging to other languages than the universalising of English.

It is certainly the most successful of the 'artificial' languages with more than thirty thousand books published in it and hundreds of thousands of speakers worldwide. But the English horse has already bolted and it is too late to close the stable door …

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December 16: Jane Austen
Elizabeth Carter
Philip Dick

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Jane Austen began her novel *Persuasion* with these words:

"Sir Walter Elliot, of Kellynch Hall, in Somersetshire, was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and consolation in a distressed one; there his faculties were roused into admiration and respect, by contemplating the limited remnant of the earliest patents; there any unwelcome sensations, arising from domestic affairs, changed naturally into pity and contempt, as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century—and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read his own history, with an interest which never failed—this was the page at which the favoured volume always opened:

'ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL.

'Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq. of South Park, in the county of Gloucester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 5, 1789; Mary, born Nov. 20, 1791.'

Precisely such had the paragraph originally stood from the printer's hands; but Sir Walter had improved it by adding, for the information of himself and his family, these words, after the date of Mary's birth—'married, Dec. 16, 1810, Charles, son and heir of Charles Musgrove, Esq. of Upper-cross, in the county of Somerset,'—and by inserting most accurately the day of the month on which he had lost his wife.

Then followed the history and rise of the ancient and respectable family, in the usual terms; how it had been first settled in Cheshire; how mentioned in Dugdale—serving the office of High Sheriff, representing a borough in three successive parliament, exertions of loyalty, and dignity of baronet, in the first year of Charles II,. With all the Marys and Elizabeths they had married; forming altogether two handsome duodecimo pages, and concluding with the arms and motto: 'Principal seat, Kellynch Hall, in the county of Somerset,' and Sir Walter's hand-writing again in this finale:

'Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot, Esq., great grandson of the second Sir Walter.'

Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character … '

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The Dugdale mentioned there was William Dugdale, the man who made the collecting and publishing of such books into an accepted operation. He was born in 1605 and was known as an antiquarian and herald. He aroused controversy by researching and writing on the objects and buildings and monuments that were 'dissolved' by Henry VIII. People objected because they thought his work might make it easier for Catholics to claim back what had been taken by the Crown, by Henry's cronies, and by later adventurers. But it was his *Baronage* which made him famous and which his son carried on. Although he has been superceded by names such as Debrett, Burke, and Vicary Gibbs, they were not yet in business or not better known when Jane Austen wrote *Persuasion*. Vicary Gibbs was a judge known because of his acid tongue as 'Vinegar Gibbs' who did massive research into early parliamentary rolls. The material in the *Complete Peerage* is material based on his original research but written by later contributors. John Burke did not bring out his first book of genealogy until 1826. It was said of him that he collected up the lies that people told him and gave them credence by printing them and certainly there are discrepancies, gaps, and confusions in the books that still come out regularly in his name. But anyone who has ever asked families to provide correct information on their ancestors will understand the difficulties he faced. And Debrett … It is a curious thing that he was an ordinary journeyman-printer who took over the business of John Almon in London in 1781 and in 1802 brought out his first *Peerage*. He continued to bring out new editions up to his death in 1822. Other people continued his work of updating the book regularly. "He is described as a kindly, good-natured man, but without business aptitude". It is a curious thing that his name is now forever associated with a world in which he did not move.

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"Jane Austen's novels do not ramble. Each story is tightly constructed and covers a short period of time. In the novels, only Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Sir Walter Elliot take much notice of ancestry and pride themselves on it, and neither is an advertisement for the preoccupation. Jane Austen also chose to write about small families; the Bennets with their five daughters was the largest to be put under close scrutiny. Her experience in life was different. Not only was she one of eight, she lived with a perpetual awareness of a *cousinage* extending over many counties and even beyond England. Family history and connections on both sides were seen as important. The large numbers of brothers, cousins, uncles and aunts, the repeated names, the convolutions of the family trees, are dismaying to outsiders; but they have to be sorted out, summarily at least, by anyone who aims to inhabit the world in which she was at home."

From *Jane Austen* by Claire Tomalin.

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'Proper names will illustrate the point. In life, our surnames are determined by chance, our Christian names by our parents: in both cases we have no control over the names. (On those occasions when we do have control over our names, as when we change them for professional reasons, quasi literary considerations govern the choice.) Thus we do not expect to find any correspondence between a person's name and a person's character, and if some such correspondence does strike us we feel that in some freakish way art has trespassed into life. In the fictional world, however, characters rise up before the mind of the artist and, like Adam, he has to name them. Novelists respond to this task in different ways: some delight in the possibilities of symbolic names, while others seek an unobtrusive ordinariness in their names. But even in the latter case a process of selection has taken place, one out of innumerable possibilities has been chosen, and the only possible motive for the ultimate choice is an aesthetic one. Ian Watt has pointed out that earlier English novelists, Defoe and Richardson, broke with previous literary tradition in giving their characters ordinary, non-symbolic names, but notes that this was not incompatible with a certain discreet appropriateness in the names. The point is quickly made if we try to imagine Moll Flanders and Clarissa Harlowe with their names exchanged. I have a colleague and good friend whose name is Brewer. Not until the moment of writing have I been conscious of the associations of this name with the various contexts of the word *brew*. But it seems to me impossible that a sensitive novelist should choose such a name, or a sensitive reader encounter it, without bringing some of these associations into play.

'The novelist, then, can never reproduce the neutrality, the 'givenness' of names in the real world. And the same conclusion applies to the whole apparatus of phenomenal particularity. Nothing in the novel can be wholly neutral.' (*Language of Fiction* by David Lodge.)

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"Marian Chesney had returned from a holiday in remote northern Scotland, where the wind screamed across the landscape, and she mentioned the trip to a book editor during a walk in Manhatten.

It would be a good setting for a murder mystery, she remarked.

"Who would your detective be?" the editor asked.

"The village policeman," popped out of the writer's mouth.

"What's his name?"

"Hamish Macbeth."

In this way, Hamish Macbeth, laid-back constable of tiny, fictional Lochdubh in Scotland, was born in an instant on Fifth Avenue in New York in 1983." She said she based Hamish on a "divinity student called Donald McKenzie, tall and very gangly, his bony wrists sticking out of his sleeves. He had absolutely no airs or pretensions — this is the charm of the Highlands people. They think they're equal to everyone. It's not an arrogance. They treat everyone the same. It struck in my mind as an amiable characteristic."

(from *The Mercury* 8/9/1988)

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"English names were also doled out by the missionaries, with little explanation. This resulted in substantial cultural confusion. "This elder wanted to give the name Jonah to his daughter," says Elijah, recalling an old tale, "But the priest said, 'You can't have that name. It's a boy's name.' " The elder forever remained perplexed by this religion so bizarre that it determined name by gender."

(From *Elijah* by Pauline Comeau.)

At first glance this sounds odd. Of course, I thought, names reflect gender. But when I came to think on it I realised this was very seldom the case. Many names, from Kim to Ashley, are bisexual. Many sound the same but are spelled differently. Toni/Tony. Terri/Terry. Peter/Peta. Others have become more firmly of one sex. Douglas, five hundred years ago, was almost as popular as a girl's name as it was a boy's. Beverly, popular once for boys, is now almost exclusively a girl's name. Many names started out as surnames, including Hilton, Mortimer, Stanford, Evelyn, and many more. And names like Georgia, Georgina, and Georgiana all derived from the era of the Hanoverian kings; other names like Philippa, Edwina, Alfreda, Alberta, and Louisa can also thank kings.

It is strange that Europeans, as they spread out into the rest of the world and found that white was a minority colour and that they had better take 'steps' if they wanted to retain their separateness, and their steps as they found that law and order was not very effective instead turned to the promotion of whiteness as a superior virtue and mixed marriages were 'contamination', 'taint', 'shame', 'mongrel', the mixing of something pure and indefinably superior with the 'lesser breeds', nevertheless scattered their names with wild abandon on to people who usually had attractive, interesting, euphonious, and appropriate names already. Why should blood, which is inevitably a confused and sometimes volatile mixture, be seen as something too precious to mix … while surnames with their ancient, illuminating, and interesting lineage could be scattered with a liberal and unconcerned hand? What makes 'blood' a measure of anything?

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"Throughout his years of fame, Alf was amused to receive letters from some of his fans enquiring whether he could be related to them. People with the name of Herriot, fully believing it to be his real name, were hoping that the famous author was a long-lost cousin.

One particular incident in 1972 amused him. His second book had just been published when he was approached by one of the local Thirsk solicitors.

'I hadn't realized that you were so intelligent!' the man said.

'What do you mean?' Alf asked.

'Just that!' carried on the solicitor. 'And a scholar with a deep knowledge of medieval history as well.'

'Oh yes?'

'Certainly. I'm very impressed that you chose the name of Herriot.'

'Oh … yes?'

The man continued. 'I'm amazed that you knew that a 'herriot' was the best calf in the herd that the feudal lord exacted from his serf every year. What an inspired choice!'

Alf gave the man a knowing look. 'Well, there you are!' he said. 'Don't you be so quick to judge a person in future.'

(from *The Real James Herriot* by Jim Wight)

He had actually taken the name of a well-known goalkeeper for Birmingham City's soccer team, Jim Herriot, but anyone picking up a Scottish telephone directory will have no diffculty in finding the name Herriot.

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Jean Webster in *Daddy-Long-Legs* wrote, "I wish Mrs. Lippett would use a little more ingenuity about choosing babies' names. She gets the last names out of the telephone books—you'll find Abbott on the first page—and she picks the Christian names up anywhere; she got Jerusha from a tombstone. I've always hated it, but I rather like Judy. It's such a silly name. It belongs to the kind of girl I'm not—a sweet little blue-eyed thing, petted and spoiled by all the

family, who romps her way through life without any cares. Wouldn't it be nice to be like that? Whatever faults I may have, no one can ever accuse me of having been spoiled by my family! But it's sort of fun to pretend I've been. In the future please always address me as Judy."

It is a curious thing that Judith and Judy (not to mention Jerusha) can create different pictures in a reader's mind. Elizabeth and Lizzie, Beth, Bessie, Betsy, Elspeth … each creates its own mental picture.

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"Nowadays, in order to delve into family history one has to overcome inner resistance; that is, habits ingrained by fear or snobbery must be got rid of. Theories that lay the burden of original sin at the doorstep of individuals who happen to come from the "wrong" class or race create various taboos. There are few of us who have not witnessed some grand masquerading on this account. But nowhere was the spectacle so grand as in countries whose political life was dominated by a single party. Jews took Slavic names, affected anti-Semitism, and sold out their several-thousand-year primacy for a mess of pottage. Leaders of egalitarian movements (who rarely came from the proletariat) padded their genealogies to fit the prevailing ideal. Aristocrats described their parents as peasants in order to obtain the job of office clerk. But since even a peasant background was liable to suspicion, the career-bent young man passed himself off as the son of a worker. The worker's son, in turn, tried to cover up the fact that at one time his father had been active in trade unions. The model citizen was one who appeared out of nowhere, with neither memory nor traditions. An ancestor—not a matter of choice, after all—be he rabbi, apartment-house owner or miller, was no asset; he inspired fear and could bring on death or misfortune.

Snobbery has been equally effective in spreading atomization and uprootedness. Not so very long ago, it was customery for an Eastern European, newly arrived in the West and desirous of building up an image, to flaunt a title and tell stories of mythical riches. A cliché type was born, and innumerable novels and films cast every Russian as a prince or every Pole as a count. Basically, this was a case of mistaken sociology. In no matter what Carpathia, where towns and industry began to develop late, a title of nobility, conferring the right to use de or von, was a perfectly common thing: streetcar conductors, workers, cobblers, or petty officials could own one. Today, the fear of looking ridiculous and plebeian influences from America have almost entirely wiped out that mania. What is not durable must be amputated, whether it involves lost privileges or generations of small artisans working in wood or metal.

Curiously enough, much is said these days about history. But unless we can relate it to ourselves personally, history will always be more or less of an abstraction, and its content the clash of impersonal forces and ideas. Although generalizations are necessary to order its vast, chaotic material, they kill the individual detail that tends to stray from the schema. Doubtless every family archive that perishes, every account book that is burned, every effacement of the past reinforces classifications and ideas at the expense of reality. Afterward, all that remains of entire centuries is a kind of popular digest. And not one of us today is immune to that contagion.

If I mention my ancestors, it is because they are a source of strength for me, Thanks to them, the clothing and the furniture of past epochs, the handwriting on yellowed documents, are not completely dead objects. The awareness of one's origins is like an anchor line plunged into the deep, keeping one within a certain range. Without it, historical intuition is virtually impossible."

(from *Native Realm* by Czeslaw Milosz)

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I find surnames a fascinating subject. And one thing which intrigued me was this piece in the introduction to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames* where its compiler, P. H. Reaney, wrote, "The most valuable modern work on English surnames has been produced in Sweden. Olof von Feilitzen's book on the pre-Conquest personal names in Domesday Book has been invaluable. Tengvik has dealt with old English bynames, Löfvenberg with Middle English local surnames, Fransson and Thuresson with Middle English occupational names. Ekwall, too, turning

aside from English place-names has already made valuable additions to our knowledge of surnames, particularly those of London."

I wondered if the Viking 'connection' was the prompter for this interest. Or are Swedes just fascinated by surnames?

Jane Austen has been studied for the care she brought to her relationships, their intimate sense of position and class and how firmly their feet were set on the ladder of the landed gentry … She has been criticised for dwelling so much on wealth and position rather than emotions but I think this is to misunderstand the world she lived in where the intimate gradations of social position, the amounts people inherited or derived from land or church livings, the complex web of family relationships, were the key talking-points whenever families gathered round the table, went to balls and dinners, chatted after church or at weddings and funerals.

I think she also chose all her names, first names, second names, surnames, with great precision. Where Dickens chose names which included a sense of the absurd Austen went to the other extreme. Her names are perfectly chosen to suggest upper middle class Anglicanism shading into the lower reaches of the minor aristocracy, respectability, solid worth, and a sense of gently hovering ambition to move that little bit further upwards. Is it any wonder that her books became immensely popular in the 1980s and have remained so ever since?

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December 17: Francis Trevelyan Buckland
Sir Roger L'Estrange
December 18: Christopher Fry
December 19: Jean Genet
December 20: Paul Brickhill
Sir Aston Cockayne (bap)
December 21: Heinrich Böll
Robert Brown
December 22: Sara Coleridge
December 23: Michael Drayton (d)
December 24: Matthew Arnold
George Crabbe
Eliza Cooke
Mary Higgins Clark
December 25: Sir Isaac Newton (Old Style)

* * * * *

Two ever-popular questions are: What Books Changed Your Life? And What Books, do you think, Changed the World? You may feel obliged to say something conventional like *The Bible* but it is an interesting idea to explore because the first asks questions about us as private selves and the second asks us for our views on society, civilization, and history …

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"Descartes created the conceptual framework for seventeenth-century science, but his view of nature as a perfect machine, governed by exact mathematical laws, had to remain a vision during his lifetime. He could not do more than sketch the outlines of his theory of natural phenomena. The man who realized the Cartesian dream and completed the Scientific Revolution was Isaac Newton, born in England in 1642, the year of Galileo's death. Newton developed a complete mathematical formulation of the mechanistic view of nature, and thus accomplished a grand synthesis of the works of Copernicus and Kepler, Bacon, Galileo, and Descartes. Newtonian physics, the crowning achievement of seventeenth-century science, provided a consistent mathematical theory of the world that remained the solid foundation of scientific thought well into the twentieth century. Newton's grasp of mathematics was far more powerful than that of his contemporaries. He invented a completely new method, known today as differential calculus, to describe the motion of solid bodies; a method that went far beyond the mathematical techniques of Galileo and Descartes. This tremendous intellectual achievement has

been praised by Einstein as 'perhaps the greatest advance in thought that a single individual was ever privileged to make.'

"Kepler had derived empirical laws of planetary motion by studying astronomical tables, and Galileo had performed ingenious experiments to discover the laws of falling bodies. Newton combined those two discoveries by formulating the general laws of motion governing all objects in the solar system, from stones to planets.

"According to legend, the decisive insight occurred to Newton in a sudden flash of inspiration when he saw an apple fall from a tree. He realized that the apple was pulled toward the earth by the same force that pulled the planets toward the sun, and thus found the key to his grand synthesis. He then used his new mathematical method to formulate the exact laws of motion for all bodies under the influence of the force of gravity. The significance of these laws lay in their universal application. They were found to be valid throughout the solar system and thus seemed to confirm the Cartesian view of nature. The Newtonian universe was, indeed, one huge mechanical system, operating according to exact mathematical laws.

"Newton presented his theory of the world in great detail in his *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. *The Principia*, as the work is usually called for short after its original Latin title, comprises a comprehensive system of definitions, propositions, and proofs which scientists regarded as the correct description of nature for more than two hundred years. It also contains an explicit discussion of Newton's experimental method, which he saw as a systematic procedure whereby the mathematical description is based, at every step, on critical evaluation of experimental evidence:

> Whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is to be called a hypothesis; and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy. In this philosophy, particular propositions are inferred from the phenomena, and afterwards rendered general by induction.

"Before Newton there had been two opposing trends in seventeenth-century science; the empirical, inductive method represented by Bacon and the rational, deductive method represented by Descartes. Newton, in his *Principia*, introduced the proper mixture of both methods, emphasizing that neither experiments without systematic interpretation nor deduction from first principles without experimental evidence will lead to a reliable theory. Going beyond Bacon in his systematic experimentation and beyond Descartes in his mathematical analysis, Newton unified the two trends and developed the methodology upon which natural science has been based ever since.

"Isaac Newton was a much more complex personality than one would think from a reading of his scientific writings. He excelled not only as a scientist and mathematician but also, at various stages of his life, as a lawyer, historian, and theologian, and he was deeply involved in research into occult and esoteric knowledge. He looked at the world as a riddle and believed that its clues could be found not only through scientific experiments but also in the cryptic revelations of esoteric traditions. Newton was tempted to think, like Descartes, that his powerful mind could unravel all the secrets of the universe, and he applied it with equal intensity to the study of natural and esoteric science. While working at Trinity College, Cambridge, on the *Principia*, he accumulated, during the very same years, voluminous notes on alchemy, apocalyptic texts, unorthodox theological theories, and various occult matters. Most of these esoteric writings have never been published, but what is known of them indicates that Newton, the great genius of the Scientific Revolution, was at the same time the 'last of the magicians.' " (Dr Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point*.) In fact those esoteric writings only came to light in the twentieth century. "When, in 1940, the economist John Maynard Keynes opened a box of Newton's papers that had lain undisturbed for 250 years, he was amazed to discover a collection of notebooks in which Newton had recorded his numerous attempts to make gold. In the years when he was writing his great works on physics and mathematics, he was actually spending much of his time carrying out

alchemical experiments and copying out ancient alchemical texts." (John Emsley, *The Elements of Murder*.)

I haven't read Newton's great work; I suspect most people haven't. Yet its influence on how we see things is so great that it is almost impossible to enter the mindset of people who lived before it and vested all order in God whilst doing their best to live in a world they didn't understand and didn't believe they could control. Equally importantly its vision of a world understandable through laws, formulae, rules and immutable cause and effect now infiltrates every part of our lives, not just those associated with the laws of physics.

With this on my mind I suddenly realised that everything I picked up seemed sooner or later to suggest a law, no matter what the subject. For example:

Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks in *Understanding Poetry*: "Here is an example of an eminent scientist trying to make a precise statement about a subject different from his professional concern:

> For sentimental pacifism is, after all, but a return to the method of the jungle. It is in the jungle that emotionalism alone determines conduct, and wherever that is true no other than the law of the jungle is possible. For the emotion of hate is sure sooner or later to follow on the emotion of love, and then there is a spring for the throat. It is altogether obvious that the only quality which really distinguishes man from the brutes is his reason.

"The author of this statement was Robert Andrews Millikan, an internationally famous physicist and winner of the Nobel Prize. He was making a plea for the scientific attitude in political and international affairs, but when one inspects this statement carefully one finds that it is not "scientific." Some of the propositions asserted could not be proved by Millikan, or by anyone else, in the same way that one can prove certain formulas of physics in the laboratory. The comparisons concerning the jungle and the leap of one infuriated beast at the throat of another represent the sort of comparison one finds in poetry, for the comparisons are not based on any scientific analogy; the resemblance is prompted by the emotional attitude of the speaker and is calculated to incite a corresponding attitude in the reader. But the coloring of the general statement—that is, the bringing in of an implied interpretation of the statement—extends beyond the mere use of a "poetic" comparison.

"In the first sentence, for example, the word *pacifism* is qualified by the word *sentimental;* presumably, it is a particular sort of pacifism to which Millikan's objections applied. But does the adjective *sentimental* really set off a "bad" kind of pacifism from a "good" kind? Could the reader determine from Millikan's statement whether or not he would consider the pacifism of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, a sentimental or a nonsentimental sort? Since the only kind of pacifism that Millikan admired was a scientific pacifism operating through an organization of sociologists and economists, one might conceivably assume that Jesus Christ would fall into the former classification. Or, to state the matter otherwise: is the basic argument for peace to be found in the fact that war is unprofitable or is horrible, or in the belief that it is wrong to kill one's fellow man? As a matter of fact, the adjective *sentimental*, is on logical grounds, a bogus qualification: its real function is to set up an attitude in the reader that will forbid the inspection of the basis of the statement."

Not only is the statement neither precise nor scientific but it is also insidiously dangerous. We talk about a formula romance or whodunit. The idea of laws determining human conduct has become so persuasive that it is used in such personal matters as falling-in-love, the growth of children, and dealing with grief. This possibly doesn't matter—except that people tend to blame themselves or feel they are somehow not normal if their emotions or development don't follow an accepted pattern. But the idea of a law of the jungle came via Newton's influence on Darwin to the general public where it became accepted as a literary metaphor for a certain, but unprecise and certainly unscientific, type of human behaviour. For it to creep back into scientific statements in this form is destructive. There is no 'law of the jungle' and to imply that animals, birds, reptiles, insects, plants, go about their daily lives impelled by the emotions of love, hate, greed,

fear, sadism, sentimentalism, and all the rest, rather than the natural meeting of physical needs, dangerously contaminates science.

Warren and Brooks go on to quote Walker Percy in *The Message in the Bottle*: "There is a secret about the scientific method which every scientist knows and takes as a matter of course, but which the layman does not know. The layman's ignorance would not matter if it were not the case that the spirit of the age had been informed by the triumphant spirit of science. As it is, the layman's ignorance can be fatal, not for the scientist but for the layman.

"The secret is this: Science cannot utter a single world about an individual molecule, thing, or creature in so far as it is an individual but only in so far as it is like other individuals. The layman thinks that only science can utter the true word about anything, individuals included. But the layman is an individual. So science cannot say a single word to him or about him except as he resembles others. It comes to pass then that the denizen of a scientific-technological society finds himself in the strangest of predicaments: he lives in a cocoon of dead silence, in which no one can speak to him nor can he reply."

Perhaps this explains the seduction of cloning for scientists … and the layperson's deep sense of largely inarticulate unease.

And another example; this time on euthanasia from M. Scott Peck's *Denial of the Soul* when he writes of his private decision to terminate a patient's life: "My chief would have been willing to terminate Tony's mechanical life support had our patient been certifiably brain-dead by the new formula of the day. Actually the development of that formula was one of the early steps forward in the liberalization of the climate so that pulling the plug became a subject for legitimate debate.

"It is still a useful formula in at least one circumstance: it is accepted procedure for organ donors who have suffered massive head trauma and are still alive to be sacrificed so that their organs can be harvested for transplant recipients—if there is no longer any electrical activity in the donor's brain.

"But note that I pulled the plug on Tony even though there was brain-wave activity. I did so because it seemed to me that while he was not yet certifiably brain-dead, he was in essence "body-dead." In other words, I believed that the brain-dead formula was not an appropriate one in his case. I suspect the vast majority of authorities today would agree.

"Then what is the appropriate formula? There isn't one in most cases.

"This answer may go against the grain. In regard to virtually every aspect of existence, the most frequent request I receive is for a formula. "Tell me, Dr. Peck, how can I know when I'm being loving and when I'm being a doormat? How do I know when to intervene in my child's life and when to leave him alone? Please give me a formula so that I can know that I'm doing the right thing!" It almost seems to be a human instinct to desire formulas that will totally relieve us of uncertainty and the necessity to agonize over important decisions."

Perhaps it doesn't matter, this modern desire for something we can hang on to, but it is just as dangerous in medicine as it is in science, if not seen for what it is. One day I was browsing in an English magazine someone had left behind and I noticed that the fundamental thing which continues to drive the use of animal experiments in our laboratories is the huge amount of money attached. In the words of Ray Greek, "Animal experimentation is a multi-billion-pound business. Universities, animal breeders, suppliers of cages and equipment, and pharmaceutical companies all profit. Sales of laboratory mice alone amount to £200 million per year. Many doctors and scientists oppose animal testing, but very powerful vested interests ensure its continuation." Mice, it seems, are big business. But the use of animal experiments as a way of avoiding law-suits is equally worrying. If a company has carried out the required range and number of animal experiments before releasing a new drug on to the market then it becomes very hard to sue them for negligence. The only hope for sufferers is to prove that the company did not inform them of possible dangerous side-effects.

This seems to me both 'bad' science and 'bad' law. Not even monkeys react in the same way as human systems. Thalilomide was tested and found to be 'safe' on laboratory guinea-pigs …

* * * * *

João Magueijo wrote in *Faster than the Speed of Light*, his book which had to be cut to avoid charges of libel, "Here's how Newton attempted to explain why everything falls the same way: "Larger" or more "massive" objects resist forces more, as we know. This resistance is called inertia, and is measured by the so-called *inertial mass*. The larger the inertial mass of an object, the larger the force required to give it a certain acceleration.

But gravity counters this effect with a peculiarity: It pulls more massive bodies harder, so that the larger the body the larger the force of gravity. This fact is measured by the weight, or *gravitational mass* of an object. Now it just so happens that the gravitational and inertial masses of all objects are the same, a fact so obvious that one seldom even notices that this need not be true.

Thus the "larger" and "denser" an object is, the greater its inertia (that is, its resistance to being accelerated), but its weight is then also greater and so is the force of gravity acting on it. Therefore, the body resists gravity more, but gravity also pulls it harder, the two effects combining *perfectly* so that the same acceleration is imparted upon all objects regardless of their masses.

Why is this a big hole in the Newtonian theory of gravity? Because the theory provides no explanation for the exact equality of the inertial and gravitational masses. In Newtonian theory, this equality of the inertial and gravitational masses is a coincidence, even a curiosity. By observation, we find between two rather different quantities an exact equality that applies to all objects without distinction, yet our theory cannot offer an explanation for this striking fact. It merely states that it is true.

Still, the successes of the Newtonian theory of gravity were and are so great that for many centuries no one really cared about this conceptual deficiency. At some point, a major factor in the success of every theory is whether it is operationally correct. And to this day, rocket launches are based on Newton's theory of gravity, and no one has ever gotten lost in space."

The problem for the Newtonian idea of the world came, according to John Boslough in *Masters of Time*, in the 1920s: "A crucial year in the young life of quantum mechanics was 1927, when a young German physicist named Werner Heisenberg formulated the uncertainty principle. He proposed that we could know either where a subatomic particle was at any given moment or we could know where it was going in terms of its momentum. We could not know both. Moreover, according to Heisenberg, the more precisely we knew the momentum of a particle, the less precisely we would be able to know its position. Heisenberg demonstrated the remarkable proposition by means of a penetrating mathematical analysis that showed that the limitations of the observer did not result from limitations in experimental technique now or at some imagined future time when those technical restrictions might very well be lifted.

"Rather, the limitations were imposed by the very nature of the subatomic world itself. It was *impossible* to measure simultaneously both the precise momentum and the precise position of a subatomic particle, not just technically difficult. We were, Heisenberg had showed, fundamentally limited in our ability to gather knowledge about the subatomic world.

"The classical Newtonian version of the laws of physics had implied that knowledge of the exact position and momentum of everything in the universe—from galaxies all the way down to the smallest of particles in the subatomic world—should be theoretically, if not actually, attainable. Heisenberg's 1927 principle was the final break with the Newtonian universe. Nature on the atomic-scale, it appeared after all, was not determined by mechanistic laws."

Faster Than the Speed of Light is a very interesting book, not least for the way that scientists treat each other, but I must admit I had no problem with the idea that light, despite Einstein, may not always travel through a vacuum at a constant speed. Theories exist to be proved and disproved … and the exception, far from proving the rule, may bring it crashing down. I found the simplified image of the universe as made up of light or visible matter, dark or invisible matter, hot gases, and vacuum energy, all held together by gravity and shot through by cosmic radiation, an almost graspable place.

But one thing which has always intrigued me is the idea of the Big Bang and its aftermath. If everything went whirling away from a central point—then at the centre of the universe would be an ever-expanding 'empty space'. Yet—is there such a thing as a 'centre' of the universe? But he explains that the model of the inflationary universe means that it is the space between objects which is expanding. This might suggest that objects are being pushed into every useable space rather than invariably moving outwards. Scientists cautiously say that space is 'changing' but are less willing to say the universe is growing outwards. Could it also be growing inwards into the space of frustrated vacuum? Probably not—because the vacuum if capable of drawing it back would gain an increasing momentum. This doesn't seem to be the end result of expanding space; rather it is the apparent fact that vacuum energy can be transformed into matter. So the vacuum left by a big bang will eventually produce new matter which may, in its turn, explode. Which would then suggest that the universe has no beginning and no end. In fact, the universe becomes a kind of gigantic cosmic onion; each Big Bang creating a layer which moves outwards, a new centre of matter forming in the empty centre and eventually exploding to form the next layer. This is fascinating because it means each layer has its own time, measured from the moment of its central explosion, so that the outer layers, older and wiser than us, may gradually 'brown and wither' while the tender heart begins time anew … And perhaps black holes are really black tunnels, openings between one layer and another and thus not to do with space but between different measurements in time …

But the usefulness of Newton in all this is that gravity provides a degree of balance. The expansionary tendency is partly offset by gravity which draws objects in space towards one another and slows the process. Newton's ideas have undergone change and criticism and limitations. But he was able to put them forward in a strongly positive environment; if the world was a sphere which both rotated on its access and circled the sun then he was answering a very pertinent question: why don't we all fall off? And the undermining and obsolescence of some of his ideas came long after his death. The Catholic Church gave Galileo a hard time, something which most writers on science understandably dwell upon, yet physicists and scientists in general seem to have no problem in getting out the 'sharp knives', particularly when bumptious young people come along with bumptious new theories or older people are treated as embarrassing has-beens who should retire forthwith … Yet, despite the history books, all was *not* sweetness and light when Isaac Newton brought his ideas forward, not least because he failed to give credit where credit was due.

John Gribbin writes in *The Fellowship*: "At the second meeting of the Royal Society following the return of the Fellows after the plague, on 21 March 1666, (Robert) Hooke described his experiments involving weighing objects on top of tall buildings and down deep wells, saying that he was carrying out these experiments because gravity is 'one of the most universal active principles in the world'. He was interested in finding out whether this 'attractive power', as he called it, was 'inherent in the parts of the earth', and whether 'it be magnetical, electrical, or some other nature distant from either', as well as, particularly significantly, 'to what distance the gravitating power of the earth acts'. To this end, he carried out a series of magnetic experiments, and satisfied himself that although there were similarities between the two forces, they were not the same. At the meeting on 23 May, he returned to the theme:

I have often wondered why the planets should move about the sun according to Copernicus' supposition, being not included in any solid orbs … nor tied to it, as their centre, by any visible strings.

"He pointed out that any object under the influence of a single 'impulse' (what we would now call a force) ought to move in a straight line — this is, incidentally, close to spelling out what is now known as Newton's first law of motion — and asked where the second force required to make the planets move in curves came from. Hooke saw only two possibilities. Either the planets were moving through some fluid medium providing a drag which held them in orbit (this would only work if the fluid were denser further out from the Sun, presumably because it was colder), or the Sun must be pulling on the planets. Hooke favoured the second suggestion.

But the second cause of inflecting a direct motion into a curve may be from an attractive property of the body placed in the centre; whereby it continually endeavours to attract or draw it to itself. For if such a principle be supposed, all the phenomena of the planets seem possible to be explained by the common principle of mechanic motions; and possibly the prosecuting this speculation may give us a true hypothesis of their motion, and from some few observations, their motions may be so far brought to a certainty, that we may be able to calculate them to the greatest exactness and certainty, that can be desired … the phenomena of the comets as well as of the planets may [thus] be solved.

"In view of the way history has treated Hooke, it's worth emphasizing that these comments were made twenty-one years before the publication of Newton's *Principia*, when Newton was still only an insignificant Fellow of Trinity College in Cambridge."

It is true that Newton was extremely successful in self-promotion, effectively denying Hooke any role in the process of influence and useful experimentation—and the image of the falling apple is undeniably more attractive than having to reflect on Hooke's crochets and criticisms—but it seems that Hooke is finally coming out of the shadows. I have just been reading Lisa Jardine's *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke*. She writes, 'Winners and losers in the race to define the motions of the planets were, as in any other race, engaged in a pursuit of fame and fortune in which chance, and the actions of others, played an important part. But the achievement of Newton's *Principia* permanently obscures our access to the life and times of the two men, in one London intellectual arena. … I shall try to retrieve Hooke and his genius, and give him back the status he undoubtedly deserves today, as a groundbreaking thinker and brilliant experimentalist, a founding figure in the European scientific revolution.' And she wasn't the only one. 'Dr Stephen Inwood's biography of Hooke, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, came out as I was writing mine.' Whatever the neglect of the past that now seems pretty thoroughly rectified.

One day I was browsing in an old physics textbook (by Robert Hutchings) my son had given me to put on a stall. Hutchings notes that Newton's *Principia Mathematica* came out in 1687 and "It has had a profound effect on the development of science since then and the principles put forward in it are still used a great deal today." He notes that "One newton is the force which causes a mass of one kilogram to have an acceleration of 1 metre second2." This all seemed straightforward and as expected … but then he went on to say, "Gravity is a very mysterious force. How one mass exerts a force on another when there is no contact between them and nothing in the space between them is the mystery. Because gravity is such a familiar force, its strangeness is often overlooked. What can be stated here by the application of the third law is that, as always, forces exist in pairs so that: the gravitational force the Earth exerts on you is equal and opposite to the gravitational force you exert on the Earth." This fascinated me but it also reminded me of a time, years ago, when I was sitting in the car and opened the glovebox to see if there was anything to read in it. My husband trained as an electrical fitter and the only thing there was an electrical manual; I picked it up and was astonished to read that although we can harness electricity (with care) we still don't understand exactly what it is. I had always assumed that electricity is now a completely open book. Would a trade text-book admit to ignorance where none exists? Probably not. This aspect, that we can use forces to our benefit, without understanding them, fascinates me. But I can also see in it many dangers. The scientists who say 'trust us' and 'we can now harness this for the benefit of humanity' (whatever the current 'this' is) aren't actually saying they understand what a particular force or process *is* … I think the distinction is crucial but I can also see the seduction. 'We have (relatively) safely harnessed gravity, electricity, x-rays, radio waves etc etc … so you can feel relaxed and happy as we safely harness genes, atomic power, computer technology etc etc … where would your lives now be if we had waited to fully understand electricity before hooking power lines up to your house and your nice new microwave … ' It is this ability to step into the unknown and this ability to then immediately treat the unknown as the now known, the familiar, even the safe, which seems such an essential part of being human. Yet it too, like gravity, is mysterious.

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The image of the world, the universe, life itself, as organic machines, following knowable mathematical principles, was a very powerful, seductive, and long-lasting one. It could also be argued that by setting out a world which only required a Chief Engineer rather than the capricious Creator and an unknoweable universe, it gave human beings confidence based on knowledge rather than faith. Newton liked this idea of a clockwork universe, where God only needed to wind it up then sit back and let it get on with its ticking. Whether that can be deemed good, bad, or irrelevant, I am not sure. We don't find the idea of coldly determinist actions and beliefs very attractive … but neither do we feel at home with the capricious, the chaotic, the anarchic.

And then …

As physicist David Bohm wrote, "At the end of the nineteenth century, physicists widely believed that classical physics gave the general outlines of a complete mechanical explanation of the universe. Since then, relativity and quantum theory have overturned such notions altogether. It is now clear that no mechanical explanation is available, not for the fundamental particles which constitute all matter, inanimate and animate, nor for the cosmos as a whole (e.g. it is now widely accepted among cosmologists that in 'black holes' there is a singularity, near which all customary notions of causally ordered law break down). So we are now in the strange position that whereas physicists are implying that, fundamentally and in its totality, inanimate matter is not mechanical, molecular biologists are saying that whenever matter is organized so as to be alive, it is completely mechanical.

"Of course, molecular biologists generally ignore the implications of physics, except when these implications support their own position. In this connection, it might be appropriate for them to consider that the nineteenth-century view of physics was enormously more comprehensively and accurately tested than is now possible for the current views of molecular biology. Despite this, classical physics was swept aside and overturned, being retained only as a simplification and an approximation valid in a certain limited domain. Is it not likely that modern molecular biology will sooner or later undergo a similar fate?

"What is needed for unrestricted objectivity is a certain tentative and exploratory quality of mind that is free of final conclusions. [Without this, there is an] ever-present danger that knowledge in broad and deep fields may give rise to the sort of 'hubris' described above, in which there is an unquestioned belief in the complete validity of current forms of thinking … If [this] is allowed to continue in science, this latter will in all probability eventually suffer the sort of decline of influence which has already befallen the religious view of the world. Indeed, there are already signs of such a trend."

Yet I can understand anyone, objective or not, clinging to a theory or idea they've spent a lifetime developing. And more so now when so much more emphasis is put on outcomes (and all that implies; publications, reputation, prizes, tenure, etc) than on processes.

I do not pretend to be able to understand physics of any kind. Yet I find that idea that a particle is only a particle *when looked at* so extraordinary, so fascinating, so strange, that I can lie in bed just dwelling on it. Does the gaze have to be human? What happens if an ant looks at a particle? Can one particle actually 'see' or 'know' another particle? Did the world begin with invisible waves which became 'seeable'? And can the world literally dissolve if it ceases to be 'seen'? And what do we actually mean by 'seeing'? Does it require eyes, lenses, photographic plates—or can it be a sense of 'seeing' which requires no physical apparatus? Such as when I close my eyes and frolic in all the strange and wonderful pictures my mind creates, remembers, stores, juggles, loses …

And then there are the particles which only have existence *when they are in motion* …

* * * * *

Because Newton's world was seen as a mechanical device following certain mathematical principles it was easily overlooked that many, perhaps most, experiments and collections of data were done in a very haphazard and non-mechanical way. I had never particularly thought about this until I came upon a book called *The Lady Tasting Tea* by David Salsburg. To my surprise I found this history of the development of the 'science' of statistics very interesting. He names the 'father of statistics' as an Englishman called Carl Pearson who went to study political science in

Germany where he became enamoured of the writings of Karl Marx and changed his name in consequence. He returned home, having written two books on political science, and set up a Young Men's and Women's Discussion Club where the unchaperoned young people could come to discuss political and philosophical problems. "This little social venture provides some insight into Karl Pearson's original mind and his utter disregard for established tradition."

His real interest was the philosophy of science and the nature of mathematical modeling. "In the 1880s, he published *The Grammar of Science*, which went through a number of editions. For much of the period prior to World War I, this was considered one of the great books on the nature of science and mathematics. It is filled with brilliant, original insights, which make it an important work in the philosophy of science. It was also written in a smooth, simple style that makes it accessible to anyone. You don't have to know mathematics to read and understand the *Grammar of Science*. Although, at this writing, the book is over a hundred years old, the insights and the ideas found in it are pertinent to much mathematical research of the twenty-first century and provide an understanding of the nature of science that holds true even today."

Christopher Milne, in *The Hollow on the Hill*, writes of buying a copy while he was in the army; "it was a happy choice. This I realized as soon as I began to read; but it was many years before I was to appreciate just how well I had chosen. Quite by chance I had met my John the Baptist."

This doesn't mean that many of his methods haven't been developed, dropped, superceded, altered. But he made many of the words we now use part of the new discipline: variation, deviation, variables, parameters, samples, models, control groups and more.

He made statistics his life. "Just before his death, Karl Pearson published a short article entitled "On Jewish-Gentile Relationships," in which he analyzed anthropomorphic data on Jews and Gentiles from various parts of the world. He concluded that the racial theories of the National Socialists, the official name of the Nazis, were sheer nonsense, that there was no such thing as a Jewish race or, for that matter, an Aryan race. This final paper was well written with the clear, logical, carefully reasoned tradition of his previous work."

It didn't mean that there weren't loud and vicious quarrels between practitioners in this new field. But it gradually developed and accepted workable models which today surround us. For instance, one of the most prolific early collectors and users of statistics was Florence Nightingale who, among other things, invented the 'pie chart'. My impression was that it was particularly in the field of publishing theories and models that the personalities and the disagreements got in the way. Among the people who made significiant contributions was this interesting man: "In 1948, the editors of the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics* received a paper from an unknown mathematics professor at the University of Tasmania, on the island off the southern coast of Australia. This remarkable paper solved both problems (on parametric and non-parametric models). Edwin James George Pitman had published three earlier papers in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* and one in the proceedings of the *Cambridge Philosophical Society* that, in retrospect, laid the foundations of his later work but that had been ignored or forgotten."

Born in Melbourne in 1897 he came to Hobart in 1926 to run the infant department of mathematics, himself and one assistant; "By 1948, when he sent his remarkable paper to the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics*, the mathematics department at the University of Tasmania had grown. It now had one professor (Pitman), an associate professor, two lecturers and two tutors."

Statistics now surround us. From opinion polls to the level of pesticides in our drinking water, from the frequency of certain cancers to the number of high school drop-outs to the declining populations of frogs … and we tend to trust statistics more than we trust the pronouncements of politicians or even scientists. People believe the world is warming because we have records of daily temperatures going back to x date rather than because powerful scientific seminars discuss the issue. Yet statistics contain massive variabilities and problems too. Take a medical experiment which gives a new drug to one group and a placebo to another group. We don't stop to consider that everyone in both groups is an individual with an individual body and background. When problems with a drug show up later on we assume there was commercial bias in the original tests (which is certainly possible) but it is equally possible that the group given the

drug simply didn't contain anyone who might react unfavourably to it. And no matter how large the group is this problem of individual response never goes away.

Experiments with inorganic substances, mechanical models, observed movements in the night sky might suggest fewer variables. But impurities still get in. Variations in temperature. Variations in light. Minor mechanical faults. Different technicians. No experiment, no matter how carefully set up, can be exactly the same as a previous experiment. It doesn't remove the usefulness of statistics. But it is worth remembering every time we read about a study in which statistics appear to prove something …

* * * * *

We give our children books with witches cavorting with their friendly black cats, when we send our kids off to parties dressed up in long cloaks and carrying a small broom, we are inadvertently perpetuating the essence of one of the most evil books ever written: the *Malleus Maleficarum.*

Hugh Trevor-Roper wrote in *The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, "When Hansen wrote that the system of the new witch-craze had achieved its final form by the 1480s, he was referring to the two documents of that decade from which the centralized European witch-craze, as distinct from spasmodic local outbursts, can be dated. The first of these is the papal bull *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus*, issued by Pope Innocent VIII in December 1484, deploring the spread of witchcraft in Germany and authorizing his beloved sons, the Dominican inquisitors Heinrich Institor (Krämer) and Jakob Sprenger, to extirpate it. The second is the earliest great printed encyclopedia of demonology, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, 'the Hammer of Witches', published by these same two inquisitors two years later, in 1486. The relationship between these two documents is perfectly clear: they are complementary one to the other. The papal bull had been solicited by the inquisitors, who wished for support in their attempt to launch the witch-hunt in the Rhineland. Having obtained it, they printed it in their book, as if the book had been written in response to the bull. The book thus advertised to all Europe both the new epidemic of witchcraft and the authority which had been given to them to suppress it.

"The importance of the papal bull of 1484 is incontestable. Apologists for the papacy have protested that it made no change: it was merely a routine document which authorized the Dominicans to go on doing what they were already doing and told other authorities — bishops and secular powers — not to obstruct their work. No doubt it did this; but it also did something else, which was new. What the Dominicans had been doing hitherto was local. They had been persecuting and burning witches locally. From now on a general mandate was given or implied. And the *Malleus*, which is inseparable from the bull, gave force and substance to that mandate. First, by its content, by gathering together all the curiosities and credulities of Alpine peasants and their confessors, it built up a solid basis for the new mythology, as a truth recognized by the Church, over all Christendom. Finally, the *Malleus* explicitly called on other authorities, lay and secular, not merely not to obstruct, but positively to assist the inquisitors in their task of exterminating witches. From now on, the persecution, which had been sporadic, was — at least in theory — made general, and secular authorities were encouraged to use the methods and mythology of the Inquisition."

The Encyclopedia of Religion says, "The invention of the printing press did its part in spreading the evil. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull confirming papal support for inquisitorial proceedings against the witches, and this bull was included as a preface to the *Malleus maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), a book by two Dominican inquisitors. Published in 1486, the *Malleus* went into many editions in many languages, selling more copies in Protestant and Catholic regions combined than any other book except the Bible. The *Malleus* colorfully detailed the diabolical, orgiastic activities of the witches and helped persuade public opinion that a cosmic plot directed by Satan threatened all Christian society."

The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says, "When belief in demons began to assume truly epidemic proportions, Pope Innocent VIII (1482-92) issued his bull against witches, *Summis desiderantes affectibus* (1484), and ordered the Inquisition to investigate persons accused of

practicing witchcraft. The Dominicans Henry Institoris and James Sprenger, making use of inquisitorial writing for the purpose (that of Nicholas Eymericus, 1320-99, among others), composed a commentary for court procedure, the notorious "Hammer of Witches" (*Malleus maleficarum*) of 1487. This work exercised a long and marked influence on forensic practice." "Forensic practice" isn't what we might now assume but included denunciations, ordeals, and torture. And how and why did that belief in demons assume "truly epidemic proportions"?

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* says, "The attitude of the Church towards the belief in magic was twofold. On the one hand, it accepted magic as an indisputable reality. On the other hand, it ranged itself with the civil legislation in an uncompromising opposition to certain dangerous popular superstitions. But in the 13th cent. came a momentous change in the Church's standpoint. The doctrine of Satan was now made the basis of the doctrine of magic and witchcraft. The nightly journeys of witches, the transformation of human beings into animals, the sexual intercourse of men with female demons, and the operation of sorcery in the sexual functions—all these things were now accepted as facts not to be gainsaid. Then in the 14th cent. the two currents of heresy and sorcery, which had hitherto run side by side, became amalgamated with each other, and merged in the belief in witchcraft. While among the Teutonic tribes the practice of magic had hitherto been penalized—to speak strictly—only because of the mischief which it might work, in the 13th cent. the civil legislatures in Germany likewise resolved upon a new policy. The Old Saxon code (*Sachsen-spiegel*) sent those who practiced magic of any kind to the stake, and its example was followed by other municipal and territorial codes. In spite of the rigour of the Inquisition, it is true, the earlier penal law (which threatened with excommunication the users of incantations, amulets, or other magic devices) was still pleaded for by the councils and by certain outstanding men among the clergy. But the Inquisition at length silenced every stricture against its competence to deal with magic."

Certainly there had been accusations of witchcraft down the centuries, with occasional burnings, the most famous I suppose being the attempt to treat Joan of Arc as a witch. And the Plantagenet line of kings in England were referred to as the 'Devil's spawn' because of a legend that they descended from a witch. But the holocaust (and I use the word in its true sense of holo = whole and kaustos = to burn) gained credence, structure, and church support in the late fifteenth century and raged on, with only occasional lulls, for the next two centuries. How many people died? By torture, drowning, hanging, related injuries, and by being burnt at the stake? I have come upon figures ranging between one million and five million people. Even if we take the lowest figure possible it is still a mind-boggling madness that overtook apparently sane and reasonably intelligent people. Perhaps we need to remember the *Malleus* as a way of reminding succeeding ages what a book can do to influence a society … but I'm not sure that we should give credence to its nonsensical beliefs on what defines a witch or see it all as 'harmless fun' …

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This question of influence from the past is a fascinating one. For many books claims are made. Take for example the *Domesday Book*. Thomas Hinde in his overview writes, "There is nothing quite like the *Domesday Book*—indeed, there is nothing remotely like it. This much historians agree about. There is no comparable 900-year-old inventory of a complete country, village by village, manor by manor. Alongside the Bible and the Koran, *Domesday* is probably one of the three best-known titles of the western world. What is more, the original book itself survives, preserved for centuries at Winchester, capital of the ancient Saxon kingdom of Wessex, now held in London at the Public Record Office."

And yet there are problems with this claim and with the book itself. It was written in Latin "but in a highly abbreviated form of Latin" which requires two sets of translators; firstly into readable 'everyday' Latin, then into English. And the book is an inventory. In that it differs only in degree from the ancient Syrian clay tablets found in Nineveh or the lists made for holdings in Charlemagne's empire. Its completeness is also its ethical dilemma. "Domesday was commissioned by William I at his Christmas Court, 1085, and the whole enormous work of collecting the information and turning it into the book we have today was probably completed well before 1086." At heart it is a book documenting pillage and plunder, who got what and why

and in what relationship; but I have never come upon an historian truly engaging with this question. The book is simply too useful for any little qualms to get in the way. And it happened too long ago. And too many people and governments have done similar things since, not least in Australia …

I remember hearing a quite impassioned debate years ago on whether the records of medical experiments done by the Nazis should be incorporated into modern medical knowledge such as the effect of freezing and barometric pressure on the human body. One side of the debate said the information should be used because people had died providing it, in a sense it was a way of honouring and remembering them. The other side had two problems with its use; firstly that it wasn't good science, it did not have checks and balances, it did not have informed consent, it did not have control groups; and secondly, the agreement to use this material might end up lowering the barriers of what could be used in the future and how it might be obtained.

Of course no animal experiments are done with informed consent; nor are many medical experiments done in poor Third World countries. But then it is debatable how many scientists would be willing to swear on a stack of Bibles that these experiments are good science. They are simply seen as the most cost effective way of doing things.

Another fascinating ancient question was the struggle to date history. We know William the Conqueror landed in England in 1066 and the *Domesday Book* was finished in 1086 because a number of people, mainly monks, wrestled with the dating of our era. These days I come upon books using BCE (Before Common Era) rather than BC (Before Christ) on the grounds that it is more inclusive in a multifaith world. Although I can appreciate it is done with the best of intentions I still think it misses the point. I like the fact that Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Chinese, Japanese, and many other groups use the dating system which is fundamental to themselves and their way of seeing the world. Nor should we ask them to reduce their ways to a common bland denominator for fear of offending us. And we risk losing the insights and the wisdom that people struggled to formulate, such as this, "The Easter Table is a piece of ecclesiastical apparatus made necessary by the fact that Easter is a moveable feast, related in a complicated way to the phases of the moon. In our period and for some centuries both before and after it, the complications were increased by disputes within the church about the precise way in which these calculations should be made. To assist individual churches to celebrate the Christian year correctly, various scholars prepared Tables showing the date on which Easter should fall over a number of years.

"In 457 a certain Victorius of Aquitaine produced such a Table giving the date of Easter for every year from the Passion or Crucifixion down to his own day. He then continued to calculate dates into the future, and discovered that in the five hundred and thirty-third year after the Passion, Easter would fall on the same day of the same month and the same phase of the moon as in the year of the Passion itself. Victorius had thus discovered, accidentally or at least empirically, the so-called Great Cycle of 532 years." (from *Arthur's Britain* by Leslie Alcock.)

Business would like to see Easter cease to be a movable feast. Homogenity is better for sales and advertising. I hope they don't succeed. Sufficient of our dates and times and ideas and beliefs have already been bludgeoned into a kind of bland one-size-fits-all. And I notice that those who do not believe in Easter still want to have it as a holiday or make money out of it.

*

But the more specific question of the influence of Isaac Newton also raises some interesting progeny; and the influences that live on. The other day I was in the reference library looking for something else when I noticed a book called *The Philosophy of Robert Boyle* by Peter R. Anstey. Boyle was one of the founders of the Royal Society in Britain and his assistant Robert Hooke became its first paid administrator and secretary and functionary. It was into this body that the young Isaac Newton came. Newton has had a profound influence on the directions that science has taken. But reading Anstey's book is also a reminder that the philosophy and methodology that influenced Newton's development already existed. Yet that idea which was so new then and so influential through the next centuries, of the "mechanical universe" and Boyle's "mechanical philosophy" described by Anstey as, "Boyle commonly calls the world itself a 'great automaton'. Yet in taking this step, Boyle and others were cutting themselves adrift from the conceptual

foundations that gave rise to the ancient study of mechanics. For, according to Pseudo-Aristotle, mechanics is the study of nature deviating from her course through the manipulative action of machines; that is, there is a dichotomy between phenomena brought about by nature, the study of which is *physics*, and phenomena induced by art of mechanical skill, the study of which is *mechanics*. Whereas for Boyle *et al*. this distinction effectively collapses. Nature herself is a machine. So the mechanical philosophy is the study of nature and is equivalent to physics. So Boyle's mechanical philosophy is a philosophy of all natural and non-natural material phenomena" is not quite what we, overwhelmed by machines, might assume it to be. "The point of comparison with Boyle is that, for Newton, the laws arise from the nature of matter, whereas for Boyle they are expressions of God's will. For Newton, matter has power and the laws of action are manifestations of those powers. Vary the nature of matter and the laws vary. But for Boyle, the laws can change in some other world simply if God wills it."

Although I came away from this brief foray with mixed feelings about Newton there is something touchingly humble about his own assessment. "I picked up a few shells by the sea-shore, but the great sea of truth lay undiscovered before me."

* * * * *

December 26: Dion Boucicault
Thomas Gray
December 27: Louis Bromfield
December 28: Herb Wharton
December 29: William Ewart Gladstone
December 30: Douglas Coupland
Geoffrey Robertson
December 31: Holbrook Jackson
Fumiko Hayashi

* * * * *

I had come across quotes from Holbrook Jackson's *Maxims of Books and Reading* which contained things like—'Books are aids to forgetting as frequently as to remembering.'

'There are books you must read, but none you ought to read.'

'A fool and his books are soon parted. Unfortunately, the only person who is not parted from his books is the one who refuses to let you near them.'

'It is better to give books than to lend them.'

'Reading to pass the time is sleeping without the advantages of sleep.'

—and I pictured him as someone who liked coming out with bon mots, quotable quotes, lists of aphorisms. This is certainly true. I also found him described as an historian and as a critic. But it is his writing on writing and books, with titles such as *The Anatomy of Bibliomania* and *The Fear of Books*, which have endured, modestly.

* * * * *

At the beginning of World War Two people were exhorted not to take unnecessary journeys, to go out less, in fact to stay home and read more. *The Times* in a leader in 1939 told its readers, "Even that great and experienced reader in bed and out of bed, Mr. Holbrook Jackson who in his "Anatomy of Bibliomania" tells of many other great readers in bed, admits that the choice of a bed book is a personal matter. His list of suitable "works of culture or urbanity" may be of service to some hardened readers in bed, but seeing that his own favourites include the "Anthropometamorphosis" of John Bulwer, and Lovell's "Pan-zoologicomineralogia" it is possible that his list might seem to the inexperienced a thought too cultured or too urbane. But he has the heart of the matter in him. He brushes aside the timorous objections—injury to eyesight, destruction of the will to sleep, and danger of fire through mishap to candle or lamp (small indeed, in these days of electric light, but has he forgotten what happened to Dr. Folliott's cook in Peacock's "Crotchet Castle"?); or he knows that, to enjoy reading in bed to the full, the reader must be conscious of his bed as well as his book. Those who habitually fall asleep in libraries, which is the converse of reading in bed, say the same about the armchair."

Jackson died, I hope "peacefully in bed", in Bournemouth in 1948.

And so it is “good-night” from me too …

THE END

APPENDIX 1: LAFCADIO HEARN

Usually I feel that once I have written about someone I really don’t need to ‘revisit’ them. But occasionally I come upon some more interesting material or, as in the case of Lafcadio Hearn, he seemed to be intent on re-entering my life. I came upon an interesting book about him, I rediscovered the little piece I had meant to include in *On & Off the Page*, and my son came back from Japan bringing me a copy of Hearn’s *In Ghostly Japan* and a brochure from the Lafcadio Hearn Museum in Matsue. So I have been re-immersed in Hearn these last couple of weeks. And, come to think of it, where would we be without those two useful letters: RE- ?

“I do not recall the immense number of different species of fire-flies entomologists have catalogued; to me they all seemed the same, but using the lamp of science, two interesting facts are discovered about them; that their light proceeds from a pair of ovoid spots on the front portion of the thorax and, that unlike glow-worms, both the male and female emit light. To properly understand and appreciate in what esteem these little luminous, elfin miracles should be held, one must travel to the far distant land of the Japanese. In Japan there are places which people visit regularly merely to enjoy the sight of fire-flies, and with the advent of western methods, special trains are now run from the big cities, bringing thousands of eager visitors to the fire-fly districts.

The Japanese professor, Mr. Watasé, a graduate of the John Hopkins University, Baltimore, has collected pretty well all there is to learn about fire-flies. Lafcadio Hearn, one of the most idealistic, serene and exquisite writers of modern time, speaks of them as utilizing their tiny dynamos to converse with, “uttering their emotions in luminous pulsings, their speech in a language of light.”

It may be of interest, in passing, to recall that Lafcadio Hearn was of Graeco-Irish parentage, and that some of his early years were lived under the pale, grey skies of the old city of Dublin. His mother was a native of the Ionian Isles. His father was an army doctor, Surgeon-Major Charles Bush Hearn. The child was born in the island of Levkas, the ancient Leucadia, associated with the self-destruction of Sappho, and so obtained his proper name of Lafcadio.

If you are interested, or have leisure to pursue this subject of fire-flies, you can absorb from the lectures of the erudite Japanese biologist, Watasé, wonder lessons on animal phosphorescence and electricity, the photometry of fire-flies, the chemistry of their luminous substance, the spectroscopic analysis of their light, and the significance of that light in terms of vibration, all conveyed to the unscientific understanding with the same lucidity, directness and mastery of knowledge that make the astronomical works of the late Sir Robert Stawel Ball — *The Romance of the Moon, Star Land*, and the *Story of the Heavens* — such delightful reading. Lafcadio Hearn gives a most interesting account of fire-fly hunting in Japan, that land of mysticism and romance, where the very trees “seem to have little human souls”; the land where Individualism, and its resultant hideous selfishness, exists not; the land where the grace and softness and natural charm of life is still unspoiled — where the art of Hokusai, of Heroshige, of Utamaro, and all the superb limners of those Orientists, from the Ashikaga period downwards, have imprisoned in their creations the Watteau-like daintiness, the nobility, loyalty and worship of existence, as it’s understood only in perfection by the Japanese brain.

Fire-fly hunting in Japan is quite an important small industry. Immediately after sunset, the fire-fly hunter goes forth with a long bamboo pole upon his shoulder and a long bag of mosquito netting wound, like a girdle, around his waist. When he reaches a wooded place frequented by fire-flies — usually some spot where willows are planted on the banks of a river or lake — he

halts and watches the trees. As soon as the trees begin to twinkle satisfactorily, he gets his net ready, and with his long pole strikes the branches. The fire-flies, dislodged by the shock, do not immediately take flight, as more active insects would do under like circumstances, but drop helplessly to the ground where their light — always more brilliant in moments of fear or pain — renders them conspicuous. If suffered to remain on the ground for a few moments they will fly away. But the catcher, picking them up with astonishing quickness, using both hands at once, deftly tosses them *into his mouth*, because he cannot lose the time required to put them, one by one, into the bag. Only when his mouth can hold no more does he drop the fire-flies, unharmed into the netting.

At the fire-fly shops, the captured insects are sorted out as soon as possible, the more luminous being the higher-priced. Then they are put into gauze-covered boxes or cages, with a certain quantity of moist grass in each cage. From one hundred to two hundred fire-flies are placed in a single cage according to grade. To these cages are attached small wooden tablets inscribed with the names of customers — such as hotel proprietors, restaurant keepers, wholesale and retail insect merchants, and private persons who have ordered large quantities of fire-flies for some particular festivity. Great numbers are ordered for display at evening parties in the summer season and are released after dinner for the entertainment of the guests."

(From *The Ten Islands and Ireland* by John Mackay)

Sukehiro Hirakawa in *Rediscovering Lafcadio Hearn* says, "Hearn disliked hunting. He loved insects and animals. He wrote many essays on insects during his fourteen-year stay in Japan." Hearn loved French literature and spoke the language; I suspect one of the French writers he read was Fabré's books on insects. Hirakawa's book is a collection of essays on Hearn, by both Western and Japanese authors, looking at Japan's enduring fondness for his writings and his up-and-down reputation in the West. He is most often compared with the work of Basil Hall Chamberlain (brother of Stewart Houston Chamberlain known for his embrace of Hitler and Nazism); but the two men came at the question of 'explaining' 19th century Japan to the West from a very different perspective. Chamberlain was always an outsider, a scholar, an academic. Hearn was a restless gypsy-like character who was also an outsider but who worked hard to immerse himself within the life and the culture. He became a naturalised Japanese, he took a Japanese wife (and they did a lot of work together on his retellings of folklore), he took a Japanese name, Koizumi Yakumo, his son grew up in Japan, he embraced Shinto. But he remained an outsider because of things beyond his control; his failure to ever become fluent in Japanese, his looks, his poor vision, his age and experiences …

The essays are interesting but I thought I would simply add in two pieces from his own writings about Japan.

Another piece on insects and philosophy, called 'Silkworms':

I was puzzled by the phrase, "silkworm-moth eyebrow," in an old Japanese, or rather Chinese proverb: — *The silkworm-moth eyebrow of a woman is the axe that cuts down the wisdom of man.* So I went to my friend Niimi, who keeps silkworms, to ask for an explanation.

"Is it possible," he exclaimed, "that you never saw a silkworm-moth? The silkworm-moth has very beautiful eyebrows."

"Eyebrows?" I queried, in astonishment.

"Well, call them what you like," returned Niimi; — "the poets call them eyebrows. … Wait a moment, and I will show you."

He left the guest-room, and presently returned with a white paper-fan, on which a silkworm-moth was sleepily reposing.

"We always reserve a few for breeding," he said; — "this one is just out of the cocoon. It cannot fly, of course: none of them can fly. … Now look at the eyebrows."

I looked, and saw that the antennae, very short and feathery, were so arched back over the two jewel-specks of eyes in the velvety head, as to give the appearance of a really handsome pair of eyebrows.

Hearn then goes on to present the habits of the silkworm, he muses on the likeness of its stages of life to human stages, and then he presents the story behind the proverb,

the gist of which is, ‘The suppression of pain — mental or physical, — in any conceivable state of sentient existence, would necessarily involve the suppression also of pleasure.’ The age-old male fantasy of women existing, both on earth and in heaven, for male pleasure would ultimately outweigh any advantages gained by living a good and holy life and send the gratified male plunging down to torment in hell.

And a piece I found fascinating, not least because it seems to open a window on to his own views on reincarnation and women, called ‘Suggestion’:

I had the privilege of meeting him in Tokyo where he was making a brief stay on his way to India; — and we took a long walk together, and talked of Eastern religions, about which he knew incomparably more than I. Whatever I could tell him concerning local beliefs, he would comment upon it in the most startling manner, — citing weird correspondences in some living cult of India, Burmah, or Ceylon. Then, all of a sudden, he turned the conversation into a totally unexpected direction.

“I have been thinking,” he said, “about the constancy of the relative proportion of the sexes, and wondering whether Buddhist doctrine furnishes an explanation. For it seems to me that, under ordinary conditions of karma, human rebirth would necessarily proceed by a regular alternation.”

“Do you mean,” I asked, “that a man would be reborn as a woman, and a woman as a man?”

“Yes,” he replied, “because desire is creative, and the desire of either sex is towards the other.”

“And how many men,” I said, “would want to be reborn as women?”

“Probably very few,” he answered. “But the doctrine that desire is creative does not imply that the individual longing creates its own satisfaction, — quite the contrary. The true teaching is that the result of every selfish wish is in the nature of a penalty, and that what the wish creates must prove — to higher knowledge at least — the folly of wishing.”

“There you are right,” I said; “but I do not yet understand your theory.”

“Well,” he continued, “if the physical conditions of human rebirth are all determined by the karma of the will relating to physical conditions, then sex would be determined by the will in relation to sex. Now the will of either sex is towards the other. Above all things else, excepting life, man desires woman, and woman man. Each individual, moreover, independently of any personal relation, feels perpetually, you say, the influence of some inborn feminine or masculine ideal, which you call ‘a ghostly reflex of countless attachments in countless past lives.’ And the insatiable desire represented by this ideal would of itself suffice to create the masculine or the feminine body of the next existence.”

“But most women,” I observed, “would like to be reborn as men; and the accomplishment of that wish would scarcely be in the nature of a penalty.”

“Why not?” he returned. “The happiness or unhappiness of the new existence would not be decided by sex alone: it would of necessity depend upon many conditions in combination.”

“Your theory is interesting,” I said; — “but I do not know how far it could be made to accord with accepted doctrine. … And what of the person able, through knowledge and practice of the higher law, to remain superior to all weaknesses of sex?”

“Such a one,” he replied, “would be reborn neither as man nor as women, — providing there were no pre-existent karma powerful enough to check or to weaken the results of the self-conquest.”

“Reborn in some one of the heavens?” I queried, — “by the Apparitional Birth?”

“Not necessarily,” he said. “Such a one might be reborn in a world of desire, — like this, — but neither as man only, nor as woman only.”

“Reborn, then, in what form?” I asked.

“In that of a perfect being,” he responded. “A man or a woman is scarcely more than half-a-being, — because in our present imperfect state either sex can be evolved only at the cost of the other. In the mental and the physical composition of every man, there is undeveloped woman;

and in the composition of every woman there is undeveloped man. But a being complete would be both perfect man and perfect woman, possessing the highest faculties of both sexes, with the weaknesses of neither. Some humanity higher than our own, — in other words, — might be thus evolved."

"But you know," I observed, "that there are Buddhist texts, — in the Saddharma Pundarika, for example, and in the Vinayas, — which forbid. … "

"Those texts," he interrupted, "refer to imperfect beings — less than man and less than woman: they could not refer to the condition that I have been supposing. … But, remember, I am not preaching a doctrine; — I am only hazarding a theory."

"May I put your theory some day into print?" I asked.

"Why, yes," he made answer, — "if you believe it worth thinking about."

And long afterwards I wrote it down thus, as fairly as I was able, from memory.

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The little Hearn Museum is in Matsue. 'In 1927, the city of Matsue was presented with Hearn's favourite desk and chair. In 1933, with the help of Dr. Sanki Ichikawa from Tokyo Imperial University, the Yakumo Memorial Society was established. After deciding to build a memorial museum in Matsue in honour of Lafcadio Hearn, manuscripts and other artifacts were collected and fund raising began.' It is open all year round.

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APPENDIX TWO:

At last I have finished counting for the vocabularies …

The Broad Arrow had a vocabulary, conservatively estimated, of 1,707 words.

Of my three books I got these approximate counts:

The Chalk Man …… 2,300

Out to Grass ……..1,940

Safe as Houses ……..1,100

The interesting points I drew from the exercise were that *The Chalk Man* though the shortest book gave the largest vocabulary because it is a poetry book and that each book adds to the vocabulary simply because of its subject matter. So that 37 books would not simply recycle the same vocabulary but would keep adding to the basic stock of words. For instance a book about horses naturally brings in new words to name the parts of a horse, the harness used, the type of riding, betting terms, and so on. A book about sailing or farming would add in the necessary terms. To compare one novel or one thesis with 37 plays is not a fair comparison.