

**A
FINAL
CHAPTER**

Compiled
By

J. L. HERRERA

A FINAL CHAPTER

DEDICATED TO:

The memory of my father,
Godfrey ('Geoff') Allman Clarke;
who saw a good book and a comfortable chair as true pleasures ...

AND WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Mirka Hercun-Facilli, Eve Masterman, Ellen Naef, Cheryl Perriman,
Patrick Herrera, Sheila Given, Marie Cameron, Poppy Lopatniuk,
and the Meeting House Library.

INTRODUCTION

So much for thinking it was time to cut and run, or descend heavily into a comfortable armchair, and say "No more". I did actually say just that. And then the old itch came over me. Like someone becoming antsy at the sight of a card table or roulette wheel. *One more go won't hurt—*

The trouble is—the world may be drowning under books most of which I don't particularly want to read but there are always those which throw up an idea, a thought, a curiosity, a sense of delight, a desire to know more about someone or something. They sneak in when I'm not on guard. I say "I wonder—" before I realise the implications.

On the other hand they, the ubiquitous 'they', keep telling us ordinary mortals to use our brains. Although I think that creating writers' calendars is the ultimate in self-indulgence I suppose it can be argued that it does exercise my brain. And as I am hopeless at crossword puzzles but don't want my brain to turn into mush ... here we go round the mulberry bush and Pop! goes the weasel, once more. I wonder who wrote that rhyme? At a guess I would say that wonderful author Anon but now I will go and see if I can answer my question and I might be back tomorrow to write something more profound.

In the meantime may you be surrounded by the happiness of books ...

J. L. Herrera

Hobart 2013

P.S. You've been wondering too? I was in Book City and saw a book called *Pop Goes the Weasel* by Albert Jack. Of course our rhyme—All around the mulberry bush/the monkey chased the weasel/The monkey stopped to pull up his socks/Pop! goes the weasel—was a playground parody. But Jack suggests the rhyme might originally have referred to the Huguenot weavers who carved out small livings on the edges of the more settled London communities in the 1700s because a weasel was a machine for measuring thread and it made a popping sound as it was used. On the other hand it might also be an instance of Cockney rhyming slang. Yet, given the long pedigree of many nursery rhymes, the first suggestion is more than possible. (And, sadly, since writing that Book City has closed.)

A FINAL CHAPTER

January 1: James Frazer
Mary Beard

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“Why was it called golden, and why a bough, that grey-green tuffet, pearled and dotted with tiny moons? Apparently because it will turn golden if you keep it long enough, but as in this country mistletoe usually comes down with the rest of the Christmas decorations it never gets the chance of assuming this different aspect of beauty.

“Shakespeare called it baleful; but, as everybody knows, it is possessed of most serviceable properties if only you treat it right. It can avert lightning and thunderbolts, witchcraft and sorcery; it can extinguish fire; it can discover gold buried in the earth; it can cure ulcers and epilepsy; it can stimulate fertility in women and cattle. On the other hand, if you do not treat it right it can do dreadful things to you. It may even kill you as it killed Balder the Beautiful, whose mother neglected to exact an oath from it not to hurt her son “because it seemed too young to swear.”

“The important thing, therefore, seems to be to learn as quickly and thoroughly as possible how to treat it right.

“You must never cut it with iron, but always with gold. You must never let it touch the ground, but must catch it in a white cloth as it falls. This seems easy compared with the first stipulation, since even in these days most people do still possess a white cloth of some sort, a sheet, or a large handkerchief, whereas few of us can command a golden bagging-hook or even a knife with a blade of pure gold. You must never put it into a vase but must always suspend it, and after every traditional kiss the man must pick off one fruit — which is not a berry, although it looks like one — and when all the fruits have gone the magic of the kiss has gone also.

“Folk-tales? He would be a bold man who attempted to explain or to explain away such ancient and widespread superstitions, ranging from furthest Asia into Europe and Africa. Mysterious and magical throughout all countries and all centuries, these tales may be read in Sir James Frazer’s monumental work in which he honoured that queer parasite, the mistletoe, with the title *The Golden Bough*.

“So here let me concentrate rather on some botanical facts which Sir James Frazer disregards, and try to correct some popular misconceptions about the nature of the mistletoe.

“We think of it as a parasite, but it is not a true parasite, only a semi-parasite, meaning that it does not entirely depend upon its host for nourishment, but gains some of its life from its own leaves. It belongs to an exceptional family, the *Loranthaceae*, comprising more than five hundred members, only one of which is a British-born subject — *Viscum album*, the Latin name for our English mistletoe.

“The mistletoe, as we know it, grows on some trees and not on others. The worst mistake that we make is to believe that it grows most freely on the oak. It seldom does; and that is the reason why the Druids particularly esteemed the oak-borne mistletoe, for this was a rarity and thus had a special value. The mistletoe prefers the soft-barked: the apple, the ash, the hawthorn, the birch, the poplar, the willow, the maple, the Scots pine, the sycamore, the lime, and the cedar. It is seldom found on the pear, the alder, or the beech; and is most rare on the oak.

“Another popular mistake concerning the propagation of this queer plant. It is commonly believed that birds carry the seeds. This is only half true. What really happens, by one of those extraordinarily complicated arrangements which Nature appears to favour, is that the bird (usually the missel-thrush) pecks off the white fruit for the sake of the seed inside it, and then gets worried by the sticky mess round the seed and wipes his beak, much as we might wipe our muddy shoes on a doormat, and thereby deposits the seed in a crack of the bark, where it may, or may not, germinate.

“Such are a few, a very few, legends and facts about the strange and wanton bunch we shall hang somewhere in our house this Christmas.”

From *In Your Garden* by Vita Sackville-West.

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“Who does not know Turner’s picture of the Golden Bough? The scene, suffused with the golden glow of imagination in which the divine mind of Turner steeped and transfigured even the fairest natural landscape, is a dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi — ‘Diana’s Mirror’, as it was called by the ancients. No one who has seen that calm water, lapped in a green hollow of the Alban hills, can ever forget it. The two characteristic Italian villages which slumber on its banks, and the equally Italian palace whose terraced gardens descend steeply to the lake, hardly break the stillness and even the solitariness of the scene. Diana herself might still linger by this lonely shore, still haunt these woodlands wild.

“In antiquity this sylvan landscape was the scene of a strange and recurring tragedy. On the northern shore of the lake, right under the precipitous cliffs on which the modern village of Nemi is perched, stood the sacred grove and sanctuary of Diana Nemorensis, or Diana of the Wood. The lake and the grove were sometimes known as the lake and grove of Aricia. But the town of Aricia (the modern La Riccia) was situated about three miles off, at the foot of the Alban Mount, and separated by a steep descent from the lake, which lies in a small crater-like hollow on the mountain side. In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at every instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.”

And “Of the worship of Diana at Nemi some leading features can still be made out. From the votive offerings which have been found on the site, it appears that she was conceived of especially as a huntress,” (though at her annual festival “hunting dogs were crowned and wild beasts were not molested”) “and further as blessing men and women with offspring, and granting expectant mothers an easy delivery.” Her festival was held on the 13th of August.

James Frazer says, “The questions which we have set ourselves to answer are mainly two: first, why had Diana’s priest at Nemi, the King of the Wood, to slay his predecessor? second, why before doing so had he to pluck the branch of a certain tree which the public opinion of the ancients identified with Virgil’s Golden Bough?”

He then sets off to trawl the world’s collection of rituals, ancient beliefs, superstitions, myths and stories in the hope of finding overlapping and similar ideas. It is a massive collection which took him a lifetime. At the end he returns to that lake amid the oak trees with their drooping mistletoe and he writes, “It only remains to ask, Why was the mistletoe called the Golden Bough? The whitish-yellow of the mistletoe berries is hardly enough to account for the name, for Virgil says that the bough was altogether golden, stem as well as leaves. Perhaps the name may be derived from the rich golden yellow which a bough of mistletoe assumes when it has been cut and kept for some months; the bright tint is not confined to the leaves, but spreads to the stalks as well, so that the whole branch appears to be indeed a Golden Bough.”

But he says ‘we’ so who was ‘we’? In fact he collaborated with his wife Lilly Grove described as a “French authority on the ethnology of the dance” throughout his working life. But he rarely traveled and his accounts of strange and bizarre customs and beliefs were not gained at first hand. Rather he was a voracious reader of other people’s accounts and he sent out questionnaires to missionaries, colonial administrators, travelers in various capacities, and incorporated their accounts in his books. So his work depended considerably upon other people’s accuracy and understanding and opportunities to see and

hear rituals. Where he differed from people like Margaret Mead is both in his detachment and in the sheer volume of material he brought together. There is an irony in that customs and beliefs that the missionaries shared with him and which they were busily trying to stamp out encouraged, with the publication of his books, a renewed interest in paganism. It wasn't that people wanted to recreate some of these rituals, some of which are deeply callous and cruel, but rather that he gave readers a sense of the incredible diversity of belief in the world and suggested it as a legitimate subject for further study.

So when he says 'we' he is acknowledging that his books were collaborative efforts. A lot of people had had some input. And that input must have varied considerably in its truth and insight and understanding.

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The other day I came across a mid-nineteenth century collection of *Nursery Tales* and I was curious to see what those little Victorian Age children were being offered. This book came out in 1844 and contains many old favourites including Little Red Riding Hood, though called here Little Red Cap and getting a sequel so that two wolves depart this world, Cinderella, and Beauty and the Beast.

But although the stories were not greatly different to their modern versions the book was special for the wonderful old engravings which illustrated it. Long before children, or anyone else, got colour pictures there were the engravings which made each page a work of art. Did children gain a particular aesthetic sense from the beautiful art work or did they skip over the illustrations as being dark and old-fashioned?

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A little book missing its cover was left over after a stall so I took it home and read it. It was Thomas Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable*. Bulfinch was a nineteenth-century American writer from Boston who skirted anything "offensive to pure taste and good morals" yet the brief introduction says of him: "His book has the singular merit of provoking further enquiry and leaving the reader tantalized and quite unsatisfied. His Ulysses and Æneas send the new-come traveller in these realms of gold clamoring to Homer, and his notes on the Dryads and Water Deities open the road at the end of which waves the Golden Bough of the new classical mythologists." One of the interests in his book is his simple introduction to the characters of Greek and Roman myth. For example: "The Muses were the daughters of Jupiter and Mnemosyne (Memory). They presided over song, and prompted the memory. They were nine in number, to each of whom was assigned the presidency over some particular department of literature, art, or science. Calliope was the muse of epic poetry, Clio of history, Euterpe of lyric poetry, Melpomene of tragedy, Terpsichore of choral dance and song, Erato of love poetry, Polyhymnia of sacred poetry, Urania of astronomy, Thalia of comedy.

"The Graces were goddesses presiding over the banquet, the dance, and all social enjoyments and elegant arts. They were three in number. Their names were Euphrosyne, Aglaia, and Thalia."

"The Fates were also three — Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Their office was to spin the thread of human destiny, and they were armed with shears, with which they cut it off when they pleased. They were the daughters of Themis (Law), who sits by Jove on his throne to give him counsel."

"The Erinnyes, or Furies, were three goddesses who punished by their secret stings the crimes of those who escaped or defied public justice. The heads of the Furies were wreathed with serpents, and their whole appearance was terrific and appalling. Their names were Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megaera. They were also called Eumenides."

"The Satyrs were deities of the woods and fields. They were conceived to be covered with bristly hair, their heads decorated with short, sprouting horns, and their feet like goats' feet."

The Golden Bough took the scholarship of men like Bulfinch and expanded it. No longer was it just the mythology of Greece and Rome. Now it was the whole world waiting to be explored and recorded ...

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“In his massive compilation, *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer assembled the oddities of religious ritual as industriously as Darwin had pieced together the oddities of animal and plant behaviour, and he came up with a similar evolutionary conclusion. In the closing paragraphs of his twelve volumes, he describes himself standing in what had once been a sacrificial grove of Diana. He hears the Angelus ring out from a near-by church. ‘*Le roi est mort, vive le roi*’ is his final comment. Christian ritual follows the basic pattern of birth, death and rebirth. It is, he implied, higher on the evolutionary scale than primitive religions, but not intrinsically different — nor necessarily at the top of the scale, for evolution goes on and the pattern of development which Frazer himself found in his material was that of magic, replaced by religion, replaced by science (it is a scheme which anthropologists no longer accept, but it was symptomatic of its time). Naturally Christianity’s more sophisticated rivals now also come under the same kind of scrutiny. There was a growing interest in the sacred books of the east and Frazer himself praised Christ and Buddha in the same breath, in a manner highly shocking to the conventional Christian: they were ‘two of those beautiful spirits who appeared at rare intervals on earth like beings come from a better world to support and guide our weak and erring nature’.”

From *The Christians* by Bamber Gascoigne.

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Emanuel Velikovsky assembled many of the same materials, the folk stories of catastrophes from around the world, and put them to a different purpose in *Worlds in Collision*: his effort to prove that the planet of Venus is a very recent addition to the night sky, that it was thrown out of Jupiter and comet-like sped past the Earth upsetting its equilibrium and darkening its sky, before developing its own orbit round the Sun. Albert de Grazia in *The Velikovsky Affair* brings together articles on the scientific outrage the book caused back in 1950. “What must be called the scientific establishment rose in arms, not only against the new Velikovsky theories but against the man himself. Efforts were made to block dissemination of Dr. Velikovsky’s ideas, and even to punish supporters of his investigations. Universities, scientific societies, publishing houses, the popular press were approached and threatened; social pressures and professional sanctions were invoked to control public opinion. There can be little doubt that in a totalitarian society, not only would Dr. Velikovsky’s reputation have been at stake, but also his right to pursue his inquiry, and perhaps his personal safety.

“As it was, the “establishment” succeeded in building a wall of unfavourable sentiment around him: to thousands of scholars the name of Velikovsky bears the taint of fantasy, science-fiction and publicity.”

Yet just as James Frazer’s collection of stories of floods and catastrophes should not be read as an anthropological treatise so Emanuel Velikovsky never intended his work to be seen as a work of astronomy. Born in Russia in 1895 he was a doctor and psychiatrist who had read those same ancient texts and asked if there was a possible natural explanation rather than the blanket assumption that they should all be read as allegories. He saw his book as something for the general reader and it found a wide popular readership. But the scientific world was outraged by his suggestions. So furious was their denunciation that his publisher Macmillan passed the book to Doubleday because of threats to Macmillan’s textbook sales. Yet surely if there is one vital aspect to producing good science it is an open mind. Velikovsky’s claims have neither been proved nor disproved. But his ideas were meant to be thought-provoking and many ordinary readers found them just that. It was only the scientific establishment which responded with undignified threats and bluster.

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When I came upon James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* many years ago I was not particularly impressed. Although he had obviously collected myths and rituals from around the world with great industry the book seemed to leap without connection from one idea and one place to another. Only later I discovered that *The Golden Bough* was originally a twelve-volume set of his collections. The attempt to cram the most interesting bits into one book was largely responsible for what I saw as its lack of cohesion.

In a way this is a pity because it is really all that is on offer, I have never come upon the original set, but I'm sure a crammed introduction to his life and passion is better than no introduction at all.

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January 2: Isaac Asimov
January 3: J. R. Tolkien
Henry Handel Richardson
January 4: Jacob Grimm
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
Edward William Cole
January 5: Umberto Eco
January 6: Antonya Nelson
Carl Sandburg
January 7: Lolo Houbein
Robert Duncan
Arnold Ridley
January 8: Wilkie Collins
January 9: Robert Drewe
Morris Gleitzman
January 10: Philip Levine
Robinson Jeffers
January 11: Alan Paton
January 12: Dorothy Wall
Ferenc Molnár

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I think it was the name Molnár which initially caught my attention. Les Tanner introducing *Humour in The Weekly* writes, "I got to share a room with Geoff Turton, laughed at John Mills' jokes, made jokes about Wynne W. Davies, drew with Frank Broadhurst, was respectful to Tom Hughes, stood in awe of Arthur Boothroyd, was amazed by George Finey, couldn't stand George Molnar" though he doesn't say why he didn't like George Molnar. In fact Molnar regularly appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* with a cartoon of apparently great simplicity on the front page, usually two very large men in suits talking to each other. Someone told me Molnar would sit down early each morning, do one cartoon, then go off to lecture at the University of Sydney. I cannot honestly say I remember the cartoons as being very funny but they probably had political connotations that went over my head in those days.

And Ferenc Molnár, though they both probably had a Hungarian background, had a very different life. He was a playwright. Judi Dench in *And furthermore* says, "It was the year after that before Michael and I rejoined the RSC, and moved back to Stratford ourselves. After the York disaster, Frank Hauser asked me to return to Oxford for *The Wolf*, written in 1911 by the Hungarian writer Ferenc Molnár. This was another British premiere by Frank for a classic European play unknown here, and it was wonderful to be directed by him again, you just felt totally confident that there was somebody on the bridge."

And it didn't surprise me to learn that there was an 'insanely jealous husband' in the play. But was he *The Wolf* or was there perhaps a real *Wolf*?

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Although Molnár (1878 – 1952) trained as a lawyer he became a short story writer, a journalist, and a war correspondent. But his plays brought him success; not success for the kind of deep dark threatening plays I had imagined but rather for what *The Theatre Guide* by Trevor R. Griffiths describes as "farces and light-hearted satirical comedies of Hungarian city life". And although I didn't think I had ever come across any of his work I discovered that I had—only in rather different guises.

Griffiths mentions *The Devil* as a “reworking of the Faust theme”, *The Wolf* becoming a West End success in London in 1973, *The Guardsman* played first as a play then turned into a musical, *The Swan* as a screen success with Grace Kelly and Alec Guinness, P. G. Wodehouse turned *The Play in the Castle* into *The Play’s the Thing* for Broadway, and *Liliom* turned into the popular musical, *Carousel*.

But whether he was always well-served by those who translated or adapted his work is another matter. Griffiths writes of Tom Stoppard turning his piece called *The Play in the Castle* into a farce he called *Rough Crossing* on a transatlantic liner “complicating the plot and turning an elegant trifle into a heavy-handed wreck”. Even so Stoppard’s version gained some popularity in the USA but then I don’t really think of Americans (or Australians either) rushing to see an “elegant trifle”. Griffiths says of it, “In the original version a young composer overhears his fiancée in a passionate exchange with another man: to save the situation a playwright dashes off a short play (a pastiche of one by Sardou) to convince the composer that all he heard was a snatch of a rehearsal. Molnár’s touch is almost always light and his work often has elements of fantasy, as in the father’s return to earth in *Liliom* and the usherette’s dream adventures in *The Good Fairy*.”

So was *The Wolf* not a jealous husband but perhaps a creature of fantasy? When I went looking to see if it has been revived since the version Judi Dench played in I found there had been revivals in both Australia and more recently in Britain including a version which gave this information “Eugene Kelemen is not witty. He is not charming. He is not handsome. He does not know how to offer Vilma, his beloved wife, the wild ecstatic declarations of love that would get her heart racing. But he knows how to make money. If this business deal works, he will give her a million that will be his declaration of love. Only time is running out, because someone is coming ... A shapeless figure from her past that has promised to take her away.” That suggests suspense rather than elegance. And another take on the play says “an intense, claustrophobic play” with, yes, a jealous husband and a beautiful wife. So you might like to keep an eye out for a revival to answer the questions I hope this suggestive little introduction has raised ...

In 1939 Molnár moved to New York and died there.

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January 13: Amanda Cross
January 14: Yukio Mishima
January 15: Ernest J. Gaines
January 16: Robert Service
 Laura Riding Jackson
January 17: Benjamin Franklin
 William Stafford
January 18: A. A. Milne
 Arthur Ransome
January 19: Edgar Allan Poe

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One day I came upon a Purefoy Poe marrying a Margaret Izod in Ireland; the thing which made me stop and think was that I had never thought of Poe, name or man, as being Irish. I had never really thought of him as being anything but a writer of horror who died young. So I thought I would just have a quick look into his background. Ireland in the 19th century certainly threw up its share of writers of the macabre, Sheridan Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, FitzJames O’Brien, and more. So why not Poe?

And in fact the Poes *were* Irish. David Poe lived in Dring in Co Cavan as a tenant farmer; his son John and grandson David emigrated to Pennsylvania where David’s son David married Elizabeth Arnold, a young actress whose English mother had come to America to try her luck on the stage. David and Elizabeth had Edgar in 1809 in Boston. It doesn’t answer any questions on whether the Poe family might have brought a strong sense of superstition and Celtic gloom with them. And even if they had it

may not have made very much impact as both his parents died when he was only young and he was brought up by a Mr and Mrs Allan. But perhaps greater minds than mine can read Poe and decide whether there is an Irish influence underlying his well-known stories ...

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And while I was looking at odd little titbits about Poe I came upon the suggestion that Japanese writer of mysteries Edogawa Rampo took his pseudonym from Edgar Allan Poe. I went looking for him to see if this was the case. Tarō Hirai (1894 – 1965) actually trained in economics but became fascinated by the detective story, endeavouring to translate Sherlock Holmes into Japanese (and his later detective Kogoro Akechi with his ‘Boy Detectives’ Gang’ or ‘Shōnen tantei dan’ seems to owe something to the Baker Street Irregulars). Though he wasn’t the first Japanese writer in the mystery genre he helped to create a uniquely Japanese take on the whodunit and to create a readership through his stories and serials in pulp magazines and later in book form. But the fact that he borrowed a pseudonym from Edgar Allan Poe and a style of detection from Arthur Conan Doyle gives an insight into his world where it is said logic and careful detective work jostle with a dark underground of, often, homosexual leanings.

Though some of his work has been translated into English I have yet to find something of his to read ...

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January 20: Ernesto Cardenal

January 21: Richard Palmer Blackmur

January 22: August Strindberg

January 23: Derek Walcott

January 24: Edith Wharton

Joice NanKivell Loch

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Joice NanKivell Loch may be unknown to most Australians yet she was a remarkable woman and as Susanna De Vries says in *Blue Ribbons Bitter Bread*, “Through decades of hard work in refugee camps in Poland and Greece, and by organising Operation Pied Piper for Polish and Jewish women and children to escape Nazi persecution, Joice Loch saved thousands of lives. In addition her rescue work in an earthquake and her successful anti-malaria program explain why she received eleven medals from Kings, Queens and Presidents of Greece, Poland, Rumania and Britain. Joice Loch may well be the world’s most highly decorated woman for humanitarian work. She is certainly Australia’s most decorated woman.”

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Sydney Loch, an Englishman, had been with the Anzacs at Gallipoli and was invalided back to Australia in 1916 where he wrote a book about his experiences, both in the hope of making some money and to help him deal with the nightmares he still suffered. Called *The Straits Impregnable* it was published by Harry Champion in Melbourne as a novel so as to get around the military censor. It quickly sold out. Susanna and Jake De Vries write, “The Champions and their group of friends, which included Vida Goldstein, lawyer Maurice Blackburn and his wife, Doris, were distressed by the soaring death toll on the Western Front. They had read that the average life expectancy of a young man in the trenches in France was only four weeks. They resented the fact that Prime Minister Billy Hughes insisted that it was Australia’s duty to provide men for the Imperial government and continued to press for conscription. Harry Champion hoped that publishing Sydney’s narrative as fact rather than fiction might help end the deadlocked trench warfare in France.”

So he brought out the second edition with a note to say it was a true story. The book was immediately banned and all unsold copies withdrawn. Harry Champion eventually went broke. Ironically the first edition and the few sold copies of the second edition immediately went up in value and a thriving under-the-counter market developed. It didn’t do Champion or Loch any good.

There are many ironies in the situation; not least that the idea behind the Gallipoli landings, to bottle up the Turks, was pointless. Where were they going to go? They could not march troops across Europe to support Austria and Germany because in the way were some of the most hostile nations to them, Serbia, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Their small navy could be launched into the Aegean but the British Navy could lurk around the thousands of Greek islands and pick them off one by one. They could go southwards in the hope that they could block the Suez Canal. But that would only have lengthened sea voyages for colonial troops by a few weeks. And it would have risked Turkey developing strong antagonisms among the nomadic Arab peoples who had reluctantly accepted their colonial status within the Ottoman Empire, not least because the Turkish Government left many of the desert tribes fairly much to their own devices; the more pressures Turkey put on them, to provide troops, supplies, camels, guarded routes, the more the tribes grew restless. But by landing on the sacred soil of the Fatherland, the heart of the Turkish world, the British brought out all the patriotism and tough fighting qualities of the Turkish soldier. If the strategy was poor then so was its execution. And I think, another irony, that the military leadership wasn't so worried about the accounts of death in Sydney's book but by the sheer ineptitude of the military leadership which an ordinary soldier had laid bare. Troops didn't know where they should be, where their battalion was, what they should be doing, where the supplies should be taken or the wounded removed to; confusion, chaos, bad planning, poor discipline, wrong equipment, and changing objectives all contributed to the debacle. Loch has one colonel say, 'If we're not allowed to fight, why for Heaven's sake do they bring us here? One might just as well be in Melbourne, where one could get a drink and some decent cigarettes. How much ammunition has arrived with the new howitzers, do you think? Fifty rounds, that's all! Good God! Why don't we shoot off all we've got, pack up the guns and send them home, and go to Hell like gentlemen!' Presented as fictitious words in the mouth of a fictitious colonel Loch could get away with his criticisms. But suddenly this became a real colonel mouthing off real anger and I am not surprised that the military did not want the public to see the book in this light. And once banned it gradually dropped out of people's thoughts. It was republished in 2007 as *To Hell and Back; The banned account of Gallipoli by Sydney Loch*. I wonder what a first edition is now worth?

But the book did bring two people together. "At this juncture, Harry Champion introduced Sydney to the Melbourne journalist Joice NanKivell, who had given a favourable review of *The Straits Impregnable* in a Melbourne paper.

"Joice NanKivell had come to Harry Champion's offices to deliver the manuscript of her second book, *The Solitary Pedestrian*, which Champion had undertaken to publish. The book was intended as a tribute to Joice's younger brother, Geoff NanKivell, who had been killed in northern France."

Joice and Sydney liked each other, married, went to Europe and began a long, happy and remarkable partnership. First they went to Ireland, where they found themselves caught up in the Troubles and wrote a book called *Ireland in Travail*, then they came to London and went to visit Ruth Fry to see about working for war victims. The De Vries write, "By now the Russian Imperial family was dead. The Bolsheviks under Lenin sent Russian troops to invade eastern Poland where they wreaked vengeance on devout Polish Catholic peasants who refused to embrace Marxism. Lenin ordered his troops to burn Polish villages and destroy their crops, to rape Polish women and kill Polish men. Once again clever spin doctoring was used to present the Russian side of the story, while the truth remained hidden. The War Victims' Relief arm of the Quakers (or the Society of Friends) found it hard to raise money for starving Poles, while most donations went to Lenin's brave new Socialist-Marxist experiment.

"Thousands of Polish war victims would have starved to death had it not been for Friends' War Relief. The starving Poles faced a harsh winter in sub-zero temperatures without food or housing. In order to write a book about the 'forgotten' Russo-Polish war the Lochs became unpaid volunteer aid workers with the Society of Friends on the Polish-Russian frontier.

“In Poland Sydney set up imaginative aid schemes to rebuild entire Polish villages and, using his knowledge of farming methods, he established and ran a Farm School for orphaned boys. Joice worked in medical centres where she deloused war victims and learned basic medical practices.”

As things improved they moved to work with the more than a million Greek refugees fleeing Asia Minor. Greece was ultimately to become the place they didn't want to leave and they stayed on, both dying there.

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I came upon A. Ruth Fry's book *A Quaker Adventure* in the library in the Friends' Meeting House I stayed in while in Melbourne. Unfortunately it was too old and precious to be loaned and I didn't have time to read it there. But when I got back to Hobart I found we had her abridged edition (along with two more of her books, *A Quaker Way* and *John Bellers*, a biography of the seventeenth-century reformer) and although she rarely mentions names in the short edition it does give a useful overview of the relief effort in Poland.

“Poland is a country which seems doomed to ceaseless conflict with one enemy or another. In 1772, the third partition took away its very existence as a country, dividing its inhabitants between Germany, Russia and Austria. When, therefore, the country was reconstructed by the Peace Treaty, its people were unversed in the art of Government. “We have no experienced politicians, and have to make them out of our philosophers.” As a Polish leader once said to me. And these inexperienced rulers had the problem of uniting three very widely differing areas into one whole, to form a constitution, and this in a country on whose four frontiers skirmishes were still going on.

“From various sources appeals for help had reached us.”

The first problem they faced was the typhus epidemic. “The work was started in Zawiercie, a dreary industrial town in South-west Poland. Typhus is a hunger and dirt disease, and the only known method of combating it is to cleanse the people, their clothes and their houses of lice, the disease-carriers. The people and their clothes were disinfected at the baths, while another group of workers were engaged in drastically cleansing their homes. That this work was effective was shown by the fact that at the time of the Unit's arrival there were 200 new cases weekly, with 27 deaths; a few months later there was only one case in five weeks. The work is both disagreeable and dangerous, as can easily be imagined, and six of our workers (three of whom died) caught typhus.”

As the epidemic lessened they turned to long term needs; horses for carting and ploughing, rebuilding houses, distributing seeds. “In 1922 more than 1½ million kilos of corn, potato and vegetable seeds were distributed, and 18,000 garden seed packets were added.” To this was added “scythes, sickles, hoes, 3000 ploughs and 8000 German trench spades” as well as geese and sheep. Weaving and embroidery opportunities for women were established.

“The life was Spartan and rough, and the cold, as in Russia, called for real endurance. Travelling in sledges in winter, or in the primitive springless peasant carts known as *furmankas*, in summer, over long miles of roadless country, needs all the undoubted beauty of the Polish country and colouring to make it endurable; the monotony, however, was not infrequently broken by a wheel coming off, or the overturning of a sledge in the snow. The women workers had a large share of such travelling on account of their work.” Joice Loch was one of those women workers.

And Fry ends her account with what was probably Sydney's contribution. “As a final gift to the country a small agricultural training school orphanage was founded and handed over to a Committee. This school was meant to train orphans to take charge of the land of which so many of them were owners, as well as forming a home for some younger children.”

Fry wrote other books including *Quaker Ways* and *John Bellers 1654 – 1725 Quaker, Economist, Social Reformer*. This is an interesting little insight into his ideas and his writing. He was a London man born into an early Quaker family and following his father into the grocery trade. But he is remembered for his pamphlets on a variety of contentious subjects. The titles give an idea of his many interests and concerns: ‘A Proposal for a General Council of all the Several Christian Persuasions in

Europe', 'Some Reasons against putting of Fellons to Death', 'A Caution against Anger', essays on improving hospitals, education, elections; he wrote at length on his idea for Colleges of Industry which would train people in trades, provide health care and children's education, whilst also keeping body and soul together for people fallen on hard times; the Workhouse came out of this idea but it was a poor relation of Bellers' much more comprehensive and helpful proposal. He also wrote 'Some Reasons for an European State' in 1710 in which he 'Proposed To the Powers of Europe by an Universal Guarantee, and an Annual Congress, Senate, Dyet, or Parliament to Settle any Disputes about the Bounds and Rights of Princes and States hereafter.' He says he based this on the ideas of King Henry VI of France. His writing is somewhat difficult to read now but he was clearly a man full of ideas and innovations, some of which took another 300 years to come to fruition.

Fry says, "Concerning penal reform, Bellers is believed to have been the very first person to propose the abolition of the death penalty, holding that the reform of the criminal is the first aim of punishment. Credit for this is usually attributed to the Italian Jurist Cesare Bonessano de Beccaria (1738-94), but Dr. Jorns has pointed out that his essay was not published till 1764. Bellers criticizes the law which made no difference between the punishment of theft and of murder. He urged that the "potential angels" in prisons should be visited, and advocated that one of the first duties was to feed them, suggesting that cheap and nutritious meals could be supplied from baked legs and shin of beef and ox cheeks. For in those days when prisoners had to pay for their food, they must often have been too nearly starved to be capable of doing any work, even if it were provided for them, as Bellers further advocated."

Ruth Fry says more generally, "his proposals for improving the world fall mainly under the following heads: education, to fit people for life, hospitals to keep them well, Colleges of Industry to keep them employed, reformed prisons and criminal law to deal with the morally sick, reformed elections to ensure good statesmen, and, lastly, a European Senate to keep the peace—virtually the germ idea of the League of Nations."

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Joice NanKivell Loch wrote her own memoir in old age which she called *A Fringe of Blue* and although it depended on memory rather than careful scholarship (and where she depended on hearsay she says some strange things: 'The Queensland blacks were finer than the Victorian; the Tasmanian were the lowest of all, for they could not speak in the dark; their language was still at the stage when it was chiefly gestures'—I wonder who told her that) it makes for a lively account of her life and I feel sure she had the strength and flexibility to take poverty and struggle in her stride because of the many difficulties of her childhood where her father went from one failed farming venture to the next. To give an idea of her style and the many things which interested her I have chosen four excerpts from her autobiography:

—"I had not seen blacks since I was in Queensland; but the blacks at Lake Tyres had lost the art of being blacks. They made no dilly bags and hats, but they did make boomerangs for the tourist trade. They practiced throwing them, sending them off with a long curving movement which brought them finally curling back to the thrower's feet. The blacks lived in a mission station. Their children were taken to school in a motor boat. They were Christians and were christened Lily Green, or Rosey White; and there were Willies and Georgies, and Toms; but in spite of the intensive work the mission station lavished on them, and the hymn singing, the blacks remained the same. They had to 'go bush'. And every few months a 'walkabout' was allowed. Signs of an impending 'walkabout' was total, instead of partial, inertia; a far-away, wistful look in the eye, and complete loss of appetite. It hit everyone at the same time, and if they did not go they sickened of nostalgia. They slipped into the bush and vanished. They lived on what they gathered as their fathers had done. Naked and unashamed they hunted and fished; their water soaks appeared near the edges of the beaches, lined with bracken fern for the water to filter through. They tore the thick bark from the trees in search of the huge white grubs their bellies ached for; they killed and ate snakes, and guinas; and beetles; and fish, and they cooked their kill as

their forefathers did in deep holes in the earth. These they lined with wet grass. On top of the grass was packed red hot stones, then more wet grass followed by the wallaby in its skin, or the bird in its feathers; wet grass; again hot stones, and finally the cooking pit was filled in with earth. A meal fit for kings of the palaeolithic age was the result. They ate until the cords round their waists burst and then they lay down to sleep it off, under their light bough shelters. They returned from their ‘walkabout’ robust, with a look of physical and spiritual renewal, a something those unfortunate, hardworking missionaries could never achieve. They had to go ‘bush’ for that.”

—“A ‘native’ name was demanded. Why call the federal capital after a defunct statesman of another country?

‘For God’s sake’, wrote one man in the press, ‘have a name that is truly Australian.’

A long weekend was spent on the site in quest of the name, and the oldest black, chief of a local tribe, was called in.

‘What place?’ he was asked. He looked puzzled and rubbed one bare foot over the other. There was much pointing to the ground, then, through the help of a local drover who knew the tribe, light dawned on him:

‘Canberra,’ he said.

He was asked again, and with much more confidence, for he saw everyone was delighted. He repeated: ‘Canberra.’

They broke a bottle of champagne over the thirsty earth and the black and they drank a lot more, shouting:

‘Canberra!’

The name was added to the Royal Decree and in due course received the royal signature, and everyone was satisfied, until Mr Macdonald pointed out that there was no such word.

A final picnic was called, and Mr Macdonald was at it.

The oldest black with his drover friend was produced. They stood on the same hill, and pointed to the same ground:

‘Canberra!’ said the black.

Mr Macdonald chuckled, the chuckle became a guffaw.

‘He knows no other *English!*’ he gasped, ‘he means a “can of beer”! And really when you see the litter of bottles you can’t blame him!’ If there was consternation before, there was a rout now. The name of the federal capital, proclaimed before the whole world, literally meant a can of beer. They looked bitterly at the ground which was littered with the empties of many a picnic, and went home licking their wounds. None had the courage to admit what had happened or to suggest a change of name. They felt they would be the laughing-stock of Australia. The press dropped the subject, and the incident closed—and after all it is a good enough name.”

—“In the (Polish) marshes we came upon a black mole, and did not know that we looked on a valuable specimen, for they are very rare. We left him where we found him on a little knoll white with the grass of Parnassus, gay with butterflies, and lightly shaded with the spring green of a slender young silver birch. That tree which marches in delicate forests across the sky line wrings the heart with its exquisite soul-stirring beauty. I have seen it flaming with autumn colours standing like rose and golden shadows over fields of snow. Its lovely leaves are gradually stripped by the harsh fingers of winter, but droop with colour until the fall of the last leaf. Silver-birch crosses marked the graves of the soldier dead of both Russia and Germany. Silver-birch bark was twisted into the thonged sandals for peasant feet; into harness for horses; and silver-birch horns sounded their melancholy notes over the utter still whiteness of the deep snow. But it was spring when we marched from the Stochod to the country round Lake Narocz; and nightingales poured song into the flower-laden air, where lily-of-the-valley was crowded like tall grasses. We came to a river, and the approaches to the ferry were bright with a plant

of the salvia family, which the peasants call ‘Joseph and Mary’. It had large, brilliant orange flowers and deep violet leaves and stalks. The men went wild over it, and soon each horse flaunted a purple and gold head-dress, while every man carried a sprig behind his ear.”

—“The pine tree where he had been killed dominated the landscape; one only had to raise one’s eyes to see it towering over the white dusty road which slipped underneath it to plunge over runnels of decaying granite. It was a blood-drenched tree; for the old bee-keeper, who had travelled his bees that way for years from the high mountains of Cholomonda to the higher sacred mountain of Athos, following the flower-crops, had been bound to it and beaten to death in the sight and hearing of the village. The bee-keeper was well-known to me before the war. He travelled at night to avoid the heat of the summer sun melting his wax, and in order to let his bees forage for honey by day. Sometimes in the golden age before the war I would meet him at night on the mountains, with his long line of mules, their great eyes luminous in the darkness. One could follow the line as it wound through the forest track by the glowing eyes of the mules; one got the scent of honey, the acrid whiff of sweating mules; heard the wooden saddles and the soft breathing. The bee-keeper came from Stagyra, where Aristotle was born. It is one of the oldest Greek mountain villages, and it lives by wood-cutting and the occupations of forest-dwellers. The ruins of the ancient town are said to run back into the gullies, with the base of an old tower poised on a cliff. He was a mild old man, full of forest lore. His life was taken up with bees; his main interest was the honey season, and his honey was something to dream about, even in a country where honey is good. Other men’s honey lacked something which his had, through his intimate knowledge of the bees and the flowers. When the war came and I departed, he remained; for this was his country, and, war or no war, honey was always needed in mountains where sugar might become scarce. He followed his calling and gathered and sold his honey, robbing no man, and many an escaping Allied soldier must have trodden beside him through the night on the road to liberty, which was his way, too, over the mountains to that third finger of Chalkidhiki.”

After the war he was killed by the Communist insurgents. “They killed him to rob him not only of his money but of his bees; for at that time they killed and robbed anyone who possessed even a whole pair of shoes. But they reckoned without the bees; for bees can never be possessed except by those who really know and love them, so that, apart from the honey that had been gathered on the road, the Andartes gained nothing but the man’s clothing, and the hillside was strewn with empty skeps until the day I returned to the village for the first time after the war.”

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Sydney died in Greece in 1954 and was buried there, a poem he had written in his youth engraved on a memorial tablet. Joice lived on till 1982, dying at the age of ninety-five. She was placed beside Sydney. A little museum was opened in their home at Ouranoupolis in 2006. The poem goes:

Let me take wing as swallows wing
To where summer dwells,
Striking the clouds as autumn’s sting
On the meadow falls
My fleshy home with gladness leave,
And to thee return,
Cleaving to thee as swallows cleave
To where summers burn.
Let me approach to thee, so pass
On as swallows speed,
That skim a last time o’er the grass
Of the watered mead.
This ailing flesh my green fields are
Where autumn runs,

And I arriving from afar
Towards new suns.

Susanna De Vries in *Blue Ribbons Bitter Bread* wrote, “Fani Mitropoulou, Joice Loch’s widowed housekeeper and Martha Handschin, Joice’s former assistant, led us along the steep path from the village through silver-leaved olive-trees to reach her grave. Wild thyme perfumed the air and the humming of cicadas rang in our ears. Away to the right, the snow-covered peak of Athos, the Holy Mountain, glinted in the sun. Far below, silhouetted against the peacock-blue Aegean, lay the mediaeval stone tower where Joice lived while she wrote seven books, ran Pirgos Rugs, delivered babies, and, in her words, ‘*patched up the wounds of monks and villagers*’.

Fani and Martha explained that, following the Greek Orthodox custom, after four years the remains of the dead are exhumed and the bones stored in the village bone-house so that graves, hacked out of unyielding granite, can be re-used. But Joice Loch was so loved and honoured in the village of Ouranoupoulis that she and her husband are permitted to remain in their quiet grave in the shadow of the Holy Mountain.”

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January 25: Robert Burns
January 26: Brian Garfield
January 27: Lewis Carroll
 Julius Lester
January 28: Colette
January 29: Emanuel Swedenborg
 Allan Baillie
January 30: Barbara Tuchman
January 31: John O’Hara
 Zane Grey
February 1: Muriel Spark
 Langston Hughes
February 2: James Joyce
February 3: Simone Weil

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Many years ago a friend sent me a book of Simone Weil’s thoughts. I don’t think I really appreciated it then. (Just the other day I remembered back to someone sending me Don Maquis’ *Archie and Mehitabel* and it didn’t really grab me—but years later I heard it read aloud and enjoyed it; perhaps there is a right time and a wrong time for ... many things.) I recently came across Simone Weil’s *Waiting on God* on a stall and thought I would read something of hers again.

I was intrigued by her statement: “The Key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention.” She goes on to say, “It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.” And, “It is the highest part of the attention only which makes contact with God, when prayer is intense and pure enough for such a contact to be established; but the whole attention is turned towards God.”

In fact Weil is full of provocative thoughts and ideas. For example:

‘One might lay down as a postulate:

All conceptions of God which are incompatible with a movement of pure charity are false.

All other conceptions of Him, in varying degree, are true.’

I do not read very much on prayer but one book which seems to attract other readers in this field is *Living Prayer* by Russian Orthodox priest Metropolitan Anthony. He would certainly agree with Weil’s words on attention and also, I think, his ideas on martyrdom are very similar. It is not enough to

have courage, to be steadfast, to hold to the position chosen with integrity. He takes this further. A martyr forgives.

“One of the reasons why we find it so difficult to be attentive is that the act of faith which we make in affirming: ‘God is here,’ carries too little weight for us. We are intellectually aware that God is here, but not aware of it physically in a way that would collect and focus all our energies, thoughts, emotions and will, making us nothing but attention.” He goes on to say, “Meditation is an activity of thought, while prayer is the rejection of every thought. According to the teaching of the eastern Fathers, even pious thoughts and the deepest and loftiest theological considerations, if they occur during prayer, must be considered as a temptation and suppressed; because, as the Fathers say, it is foolish to think about God and forget that you are in his presence. All the spiritual guides of Orthodoxy warn us against replacing this meeting with God by thinking about him. Prayer is essentially standing face to face with God, consciously striving to remain collected and absolutely still and attentive in his presence, which means standing with an undivided mind, an undivided heart and an undivided will in the presence of the Lord; and that is not easy. Whatever our training may give us, there is always a short cut open at any time; undividedness can be attained by the person for whom the love of God is everything, who has broken all ties, who is completely given to God; then there is no longer personal striving, but the working of the radiant grace of God.”

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February 4: Sue Townsend
February 5: Susan Hill
February 6: Pramoedya Ananta Toer
Melvin B. Tolson
February 7: Charles Dickens
Sinclair Lewis
Laura Ingalls Wilder

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The Ingalls family lived the life that Laura would later turn into her popular books. Her father Charles Ingalls was one of those people for whom the grass is always greener somewhere else and that green grass proved a chimera. They went from Wisconsin to Kansas and back to Wisconsin and then to Minnesota, then back to Wisconsin, then to Dakota where Laura met Almanzo Wilder. After her marriage there were more moves till they finally settled in Missouri and Laura began a column in a local newspaper, the *Missouri Ruralist*, titled “As a Farm Woman Thinks”.

She was sixty-five when her first book *Little House in the Big Woods* was published in 1932 and was immediately popular. She followed it with *Farmer Boy*, *Little House on the Prairie*, *On the Banks of Plum Creek*, *By the Shores of Silver Lake*, *The Long Winter*, *Little Town on the Prairie* and *These Happy Golden Years*. *The First Four Years* was put together from her notes and published posthumously. She died at ninety in 1957.

Her books caught some of the nostalgia for a romanticised Wild West era, she came from a homespun tradition of story-telling round the hearth, she had led a varied and roving life, and despite the troubles which had dogged her father she seems to have had a strong and affectionate family. But underpinning her books was her philosophy which Americans until very recently liked to think was their philosophy as well: “It is still best to be honest and truthful; to make the most of what we have; to be happy with simple pleasures and to be cheerful and have courage when things go wrong.”

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February 8: Elizabeth Bishop
Jules Verne
Kel Richards
February 9: Alice Walker
Joseph E. Stiglitz

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“There are 24 million living veterans in America, of whom roughly 3.5 million (and their survivors) receive disability benefits. Overall, in 2005 the United States was paying \$34.5 billion in annual disability entitlement pay to veterans from previous wars, including 211,729 from the first Gulf War, 916,220 from Vietnam, 161,512 from Korea, 356,190 from World War II, and 3 from World War I.”

Quoted in *The Three Trillion Dollar War: The True Cost of the Iraq Conflict* by Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes. And this is only looking at the costs, human, social, financial, to the USA. It does not engage with the costs to Iraq, human, social, environmental and financial. Saddam Hussein was a very unpleasant man, right up there alongside Suharto, Mobutu, Mugabe, Kim-II-Jong, Pinochet, Marcos and others—but was his departure, and more so given his age, really worth three trillion dollars? Even three million would seem a lot to pay to see him leave the country. Think of all the running water and electricity to villages and better medical care and schools that could have been provided for three trillion dollars ... And as Keith Suter has pointed out the war has left Iraq poorer and the situation of its women worse. Was that the outcome the financial planners wanted? And they have responded, it seems, by suggesting that as Iraq has now increased its pumping of oil it will eventually be able to afford to rebuild. So far as I can see this mainly brings forward the date when Iraq will run out of oil. None of that money is going into a Future Fund nor is it being invested in productive industries for a post-oil future ...

Reading books about economic issues isn't something I do very much, just something about pages of figures, but I do occasionally when it is about a specific issue. More to the point the question should be asked: can America afford its wars? The answer, given a level of indebtedness which boggles the mind, is surely no.

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One day I took down a book in the Quaker Library called *Morals Since 1900* by Gerald Heard and found that it had never been borrowed. Thinking it might like a walk in the fresh air I took it home with me. The book is not memorable but Heard writes: “As Renatus, the German finance expert said in his “Twelfth Hour of Capitalism”, the Eleventh Commandment is, “Thou shalt not lend on non-productive projects”. ”

Wars, takeover bids, conspicuous consumption ... it is clearly a Commandment which has never been dinned into generations of economics students, budding bankers, financial planners ...

And, curiously, Gerald Heard was a much more interesting writer than that book would have led me to believe. His name was actually Henry Fitzgerald Heard which he simplified and he wrote thrillers, sci fi, ghost stories, plays, short stories ... as well as heavier books on religious and philosophical subjects, including his opus *The Five Ages of Man*.

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George Monbiot writes in *The Age of Consent*, “Such was the impact of his book (*Globalization and its Discontents*) that it would, perhaps, be appropriate to divide the public perception of the global justice movement into two periods: before and after Stiglitz. Before Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel laureate who was formerly the chief economist of the World Bank and the chairman of the US president's Council of Economic Advisors, published the discoveries he had made during his terms of office, the complaints of the movement were routinely dismissed by the rich world's pundits and politicians. After Stiglitz, even some of the market fundamentalists were forced to admit that our analysis was, in one respect, correct.

“The intended purpose of the International Monetary Fund is to maintain global economic stability, by helping countries which have balance of payments problems; stabilizing exchange rates; and promoting economic growth, employment and workers' incomes. These duties would, its founders hoped, prevent the economic difficulties faced by one nation from infecting other nations, causing a

global slump of the kind which established the preconditions for the Second World War. The IMF, Stiglitz shows, has in the past few years done precisely the opposite. By imposing policies designed to help the rich world's private banks and financial speculators rather than the poor world's struggling economies, it has destabilized exchange rates, exacerbated balance of payments problems, forced countries into debt and recession, and destroyed the jobs and incomes of tens of millions of workers.

"The IMF programmes, Stiglitz demonstrates, reflect 'the interests and ideology of the Western financial community.' They are forced upon weaker nations regardless of their circumstances: every country the Fund instructs must place the control of inflation ahead of other economic objectives; immediately remove its barriers to trade and the flow of capital; liberalize its banking system; reduce government spending on everything except debt repayments; and privatize the assets which can be sold to foreign investors. These happen to be precisely the policies which suit the rich world's financial speculators. 'In a sense', Stiglitz writes, 'it is the IMF that keeps the speculators in business.' The weaker nations, knowing that the IMF can both cut off its own funds and recommend that private banks take the same action, are 'scared to disagree openly'. The Fund 'effectively stifles any discussions within a client government — let alone more broadly within the country — about alternative economic policies'. Citizens of those countries whose IMF programmes Stiglitz studied were 'not only barred from discussions of agreements; they were not even told what the agreements were'.

"In the 1980s the IMF began to destabilize some of the most successful economies in the developing world." Countries like Thailand and South Korea were doing well by using things which the IMF didn't like such as tariffs and controls on money flows. The IMF pressure to liberalise helped bring on the economic disasters in South-East Asia. Speculators moved in on currencies such as the Thai *baht*. The IMF helped turn bouncing young tigers into sickly little pussy cats. Only those nations which largely ignored the IMF, such as Malaysia, or which stood outside its sphere of influence, like China, or which had massive domestic savings, like Japan, were able to avoid the worst of the late 90's recession.

I remember as a child hearing somewhere that 'a rich person is always in debt'. Perhaps, I thought, this was why we were poor. My parents had a horror of being in debt. But when I said this to my mother she said she would rather not be in debt and sleep easily at night. So I wonder what she would think of Monbiot's little aside: "As Heinrich Haussmann has shown, a single *pfennig* (about half a US cent) invested at five per cent compound interest in the year AD 0 would have yielded, by 1990, a volume of gold 134 billion times the weight of the planet. Interest repayments, in other words, are feasible only in the short term. As debt can be paid only by generating value, capitalism seems destined to destroy the planet."

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Joseph Stiglitz's latest book is *The Price of Inequality* in which he says, "Markets, by themselves, even when they are stable, often lead to high levels of inequality, outcomes that are widely viewed as unfair. Recent research in economics and psychology has shown the importance that individuals attach to fairness. More than anything else, a sense that the economic and political systems were unfair is what motivates the protests around the world. In Tunisia and Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, it wasn't merely that jobs were hard to come by but that those jobs that were available went to those with connections.

"In the United States and Europe, things seemed more fair, but only superficially so. Those who graduated from the best schools with the best grades had a better chance at the good jobs. But the system was stacked because wealthy parents sent their children to the best kindergartens, grade schools, and high schools, and those students had a far better chance of getting into the elite universities.

"Americans grasped that the Occupy Wall Street protesters were speaking to *their* values, which was why, while the numbers protesting may have been relatively small, two-thirds of Americans said that they supported the protesters. If there was any doubt of this support, the ability of the protesters to gather 300,000 signatures to keep their protests alive, almost overnight, when Mayor Michael

Bloomberg of New York first suggested that he would shut down the camp at Zuccotti Park, near Wall Street, showed otherwise. And support came not just from the poor and the disaffected. While the police may have been excessively rough with protesters in Oakland—and the thirty thousand who joined the protests the day after the downtown encampment was violently disbanded seemed to think so—it was noteworthy that some of the police themselves expressed support for the protesters.

“The financial crisis unleashed a new realization that our economic system was not only inefficient and unstable but also fundamentally unfair. Indeed, in the aftermath of the crisis (and the response of the Bush and the Obama administrations), almost half thought so, according to a recent poll. It was rightly perceived to be grossly unfair that many in the financial sector ... walked off with outsize bonuses, while those who suffered from the crisis brought on by these bankers went without a job; or that government bailed out the banks, but was reluctant to even extend unemployment insurance for those who, through no fault of their own, could not get employment after searching for months and months; or that government failed to provide anything except token help to the millions who were losing their homes. What happened in the midst of the crisis made clear that it was *not* contribution to society that determined relative pay, but something else: bankers received large rewards, though their contribution to society—and even to their firms—had been *negative*. The wealth given to the elites and to the bankers seemed to arise out of their ability and willingness to take advantage of others.

“One aspect of fairness that is deeply ingrained in American values is opportunity. America has always thought of itself as a land of *equal opportunity*. Horatio Alger stories, of individuals who made it from the bottom to the top, are part of American folklore. But ... increasingly, the American dream that saw the country as a land of opportunity began to seem just that: a dream, a myth reinforced by anecdotes and stories, but not supported by the data. The chances of an American citizen making his way from the bottom to the top are less than those of citizens in other advanced industrial countries.”

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“Anyone who believes that economic growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.”

Kenneth Boulding.

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February 10: Boris Pasternak

February 11: Sidney Sheldon

February 12: Charles Darwin

C. F. (Charles Freer) Andrews

Judy Blume

February 13: Georges Simenon

Judith Rodriguez

Sarojini Naidu (Chattopadhyay)

February 14: Daniel Corkery

February 15: Bruce Dawe

February 16: Richard Ford

Christopher John Boyce

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Robert Lindsey wrote two books about Christopher Boyce, *The Falcon and the Snowman* and *The Flight of the Falcon*, Boyce being the young man convicted in the USA of spying for the Soviet Union. The part that beggars belief is that Boyce, a college drop-out, was hired by TRW Systems Group in California and almost immediately given a Top Security clearance—by the US Defense Department, the CIA, and the National Security Agency—and “was assigned to a communications vault processing classified messages between TRW, CIA Headquarters in Langley, Virginia, and two secret CIA bases near Alice Springs, Australia, which process data sent back from space by American satellites that maintain surveillance over the Soviet Union, the People’s Republic of China and other

countries.” TRW manufactured satellites. And Christopher Boyce, for reasons to do with disillusionment with his country’s foreign policy and money, began selling the information which passed through his 21-year-old hands to the KGB. Falcon was Boyce’s code name during his career in espionage.

Australians cannot enter Pine Gap except under special circumstances. It is on Australian soil but it effectively belongs to the United States, and the Americans only share with Australia what they feel like sharing. Yet Christopher Boyce and unknown numbers of other feckless young Americans like him had easy access to the secrets and knew exactly what Pine Gap was doing ...

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Much has been written about the so-called demise of the spy story since the USSR crumbled and the Berlin Wall came down. Of course there are still walls for writers to write about. The Israelis have built a very large and intrusive one but I haven’t come on a novel about it. And it came to me the other day that there is a form of spying which is very much still with us. The Special Branch services run by police in Australia, Britain, and elsewhere. I have been reading two non-fiction books which deal with South Australia (*The Salisbury Affair* by Stewart Cockburn) and the U.K. (*Stalker* by John Stalker) and this number could be added to. The first book deals with Harold Salisbury who was ‘head-hunted’ from the U.K. to run South Australia’s police force when Don Dunstan was Premier. Cockburn was sympathetic to Salisbury and although the six officers of the Special Branch office there may well have been inept and heavy-handed at the time of Vietnam and other issues they were not the bogey-men the Left made them out to be. But it was enough to bring Salisbury down and create a Royal Commission which did nothing to exonerate Salisbury but probably also did nothing to make South Australia a safer saner place. In fact given the difficulties English police officers have faced, from non-cooperation to outright undermining and insubordination, when they’ve been brought to Australia to provide uncorrupted independent leadership, I would be inclined to think that this attitude was as much in play as any suggestion that Salisbury should have reined in his Special Branch officers sooner and better ...

And in *Stalker* John Stalker writes, “In May 1984 I was asked to undertake an investigation in Northern Ireland that very soon pointed towards possible offences of murder and conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, these offences committed by members of the proud Royal Ulster Constabulary. I devoted two years of my life to this task, and I failed.” He was a Deputy Chief Constable in Manchester and his book deals with the shooting deaths of seven men in Northern Ireland, all of them unarmed.

“I addressed a wide range of operational matters, including the lack of accountability and dubious practices within Special Branch. I commented in general terms, and so far as I was able, on the role of informants and paid agents, and I was critical of the methods and control over the enormous payments to them. I expressed my unease at the potential for *agents provocateurs* and bounty hunters. I spoke of the inadequacies of, and lack of definition in, CID investigations in cases in which Special Branch was involved, and of the dangerously loose use of important words such as ‘wanted’ when referring to suspects. Too often that word meant nothing more than ‘slightly suspected’, but had the effect of raising the stakes unacceptably in cases where the police were asked to make an arrest. I criticized the introduction of, and the reliance on, the unofficial Official Secrets form that prevented policemen who had signed it from telling the truth. I supported the role of the Tasking and Co-ordination Group within Special Branch, and criticized its level of staffing. I discussed at considerable length the inordinately long working hours required for some of the armed officers, and expressed my concern about the manner in which they might then be required to raise themselves at very short notice to combat pitch. It seemed to me very undesirable that tired policemen should be thrust into such situations.

“I strongly disapproved of the fact that some policemen who had been involved in these fatal shootings were allowed to continue on similar armed duties before their earlier actions had been critically examined. I believed that this placed an intolerable pressure on the men themselves, and could inhibit their actions in a way that could endanger their lives. I scrutinized the selection and

training methods of members of the special police squads, and reflected on the impossibility of expecting policemen to fulfil a military role in SAS style operations. In a more philosophical vein I looked at ways in which some RUC practices had had the effect of reducing the confidence in them of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the coroners, the press, the relatives of men killed by police, and the mainland policemen investigating the conduct of the Force.

“At a lower but still important level I made recommendations about the proper use of pathologists at controversial deaths, the poorly co-ordinated role of scenes-of-crime officers and forensic scientists, the abysmal quality of official photographs, and the abuse of police evidence notebooks. I made further recommendations about cross-border activities and the lack of any instructions about them. But probably the two most important issues I argued were those of Force spirit and morale, and my recommended future procedures for investigating controversial deaths at the hands of police. I spent some time in describing the traumatic effects the three incidents had had on the morale of the officers of the Special Support units. They were left to flounder on their own, and they felt ostracized, isolated and abandoned by their senior officers, to whom they had displayed, and continued to display, a high degree of loyalty. In my view, no serious attempt had ever been made to restore their confidence in the leadership of the Force, and I feared for their health and well-being. Finally, I presented three options for handling future controversial shooting enquiries, two of which involved independent mainland police supervision within the first twenty-four hours. The debacles of the three incidents I investigated must never be allowed to happen again, and I said so strongly.”

Clearly they haven't been addressed. Since then we have seen a Brazilian electrician shot dead by Special Branch officers in London because they believed him to be a Middle Eastern terrorist ...

So with so many issues and dilemmas waiting for the novelist why has Special Branch been allowed to remain in the shadows while we all have a working knowledge of spies and spy agencies?

* * * * *

It was widely believed that East Timor activists were spied on and their phones tapped. At the first meeting of a group to set up the Hobart East Timor Committee a man, widely believed to be with ASIO, came skulking round and noted down all the numbers on the cars outside. In 1986 George Preston in Melbourne rang me to say he was coming down to lobby at the ALP National Conference in Hobart. As soon as he would begin to speak to tell me when and how he was arriving he would be cut off. He tried about eight times before going round to a neighbour's house and getting through. Someone was obviously just sitting there and waiting for him to start speaking before pulling the plug. When he got back to Melbourne he went nationwide on the ABC to complain about phone-tapping. I received anonymous phone calls, anonymous letters, letters regularly went missing (and I got no response when I complained to Australia Post) but I don't know if my phone was ever tapped. I simply assumed it was and got a perverse pleasure out of people possibly having to listen in to long-winded planning for fundraising afternoon teas, discussions on people's health, and all the other trivia that is part of normal conversation. When Edward Snowden got people up in arms by saying the CIA was spying on them I found myself wondering if people *really* believed the government never looked at their bank accounts, listened in to their conversations, checked their welfare status, and generally wanted to know about their private lives.

But the thing which struck me most forcibly about Christopher Boyce, Bradley Munnings, Edward Snowden and their colleagues is their extreme youth. Does a young man of, say, twenty-two no matter how decent or idealistic have the maturity, the knowledge of life, and the perspective to make the call on what he will abstract and possibly make public. I am not a fan of secrecy and a lack of transparency but at the same time people's lives are put at risk by the casual spreading of material. 'Leaking' has a long and checkered history but I would like to think that the people who are doing it have really thought very deeply and carefully about what they are doing and have actually read and considered the material they are leaking. Even if Burgess and McLean and their ilk were not particularly admirable people they had at least thought long and hard on questions of loyalty, politics,

relationships, economics, what they felt they owed and didn't owe and how their actions would impact on other people ...

* * * * *

I think I need to cheer myself up. And perhaps my readers too. So here is the beginning of a little piece in Stephen Leacock's *Frenzied Fiction* called 'My Revelations as a Spy'. "In many people the very name "Spy" excites a shudder of apprehension; we Spies, in fact, get quite used to being shuddered at. None of us Spies mind it at all. Whenever I enter a hotel and register myself as a Spy I am quite accustomed to see a thrill of fear run round the clerks, or clerk, behind the desk.

Us Spies or We Spies—for we call ourselves both—are a race apart. None know us. All fear us. Where do we live? Nowhere. Where are we? Everywhere. Frequently we don't know ourselves where we are. The secret orders that we receive come from so high up that it is often forbidden to us even to ask where we are. A friend of mine, or at least a Fellow Spy—as Spies have no friends—one of the most brilliant men in the Hungarian Secret Service, once spent a month in New York under the impression that he was in Winnipeg. If this happened to the most brilliant, think of the others.

All, I say, fear us. Because they know and have reason to know our power. Hence, in spite of the prejudice against us, we are able to move everywhere, to lodge in the best hotels, and enter any society that we wish to penetrate.

Let me relate an incident to illustrate this: a month ago I entered one of the largest of the New York hotels which I will merely call the B. hotel without naming it: to do so might blast it. We Spies, in fact, never *name* a hotel. At the most we indicate it by a number known only to ourselves, such as 1, 2. or 3.

On my presenting myself at the desk the clerk informed me that he had no rooms vacant. I knew this of course to be a mere subterfuge; whether or not he suspected that I was a Spy I cannot say. I was muffled up, to avoid recognition, in a long overcoat with the collar turned up and reaching well above my ears, while the black beard and the moustache, that I had slipped on in entering the hotel, concealed my face. "Let me speak a moment to the manager," I said. When he came I beckoned him aside and taking his ear in my hand I breathed two words into it. "Good heavens!" he gasped, while his face turned as pale as ashes. "Is it enough?" I asked. "Can I have a room, or must I breathe again?" "No, no," said the manager, still trembling. Then, turning to the clerk: "Give this gentleman a room," he said, "and give him a bath."

What those two words are that will get a room in New York at once I must not divulge. Even now, when the veil of secrecy is being lifted, the international interests involved are too complicated to permit it. Suffice it to say that if these two words had failed I know a couple of others still better.

I narrate this incident, otherwise trivial, as indicating the astounding ramifications and the ubiquity of the international spy system." ...

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February 17: Ruth Rendell

Barry Humphries

February 18: Len Deighton

Toni Morrison (Chloe Anthony Wofford)

February 19: Siri Hustvedt

Svante August Arrhenius

Lee Harding

* * * * *

Fred Pearce wrote a book he called *The Last Generation* not to say that the people alive now will be the world's final generation but rather that we will be the last people to experience stable weather patterns. From here on we journey into the unknown. He starts with, "This story begins with a depressed Swedish chemist, alone in his study in the sunless Nordic winter after his marriage to his beautiful research assistant Sofia had collapsed. It was Christmas Eve. What would he do? Some might

have gone out on the town and found themselves a new partner. Others would have given way to maudlin sentiment and probably a few glasses of beer. Svante Arrhenius chose neither release. Instead, on 24 December 1894, as the rest of his countrymen were celebrating, he rolled up his sleeves, settled down at his desk and began a marathon of mathematical calculation that took him more than a year.

“Arrhenius, then aged thirty-five, was an obdurate fellow, recently installed as a lecturer in Stockholm but already gaining a reputation for rubbing his colleagues up the wrong way. As day-long darkness gave way to months of midnight sun, he laboured on, filling book after book with calculations of the climatic impact of changing concentrations of certain heat-trapping gases. ‘It is unbelievable that so trifling a matter has cost me a full year,’ he later confided to a friend. But with his wife gone, he had few distractions. And the calculations became an obsession.”

He was trying to answer the question of why the world cooled during the ice ages. Scientists knew vast sheets of ice had covered the northern hemisphere. Arrhenius thought it might lie in the actions of gases which could trap heat in the lower atmosphere. Jean Baptiste Fourier and an Irish physicist John Tyndall had already shown that carbon dioxide could trap heat. It could let the sun’s ultraviolet rays through but trapped infrared heat being radiated back from the earth. Too little and the earth grew colder; too much and the earth warmed. This was what Arrhenius hoped to prove by his calculations. And so “when he emerged from his labours, he was able to tell the world that a reduction in atmospheric carbon dioxide levels of between a third and a half would cool the planet by 4 to 5 degrees Celsius (C) — enough to cover most of north Europe, and certainly every scrap of his native Sweden, in ice.”

He could not say why carbon dioxide levels might have fallen but his calculations were shown to be correct many years later when air bubbles in ancient ice were analysed. He also worked on the opposite scenario; a doubling of gas levels would raise temperatures by 5 to 6 degrees. He had no computers or calculators. Instead he divided the earth’s surface in to small squares and calculated the heat absorption qualities of different aspects; ice, sea, forest, grassland, desert, and so on. “It was a remarkable achievement. In the process he had virtually invented the theory of global warming, and with it the principles of modern climate modeling.” He predicted, correctly, that high latitudes would warm faster than the tropics, that warming would be more marked at night, in winter rather than summer, and over land rather than sea.

He presented his paper ‘On the Influence of Carbonic Acid in the Air upon the Temperature of the Ground’, he published it, and—no one was interested.

He won the 1903 Nobel Prize for Chemistry for his work on the electrical conductivity of salt solutions. He looked at immunology, electrical engineering, the Aurora Borealis, he came to believe that oil supplies would soon dry up and that alternatives such as wind and solar power should be developed; he was involved in the development of hydro in Sweden. But he believed that the manmade increase in warming would be extremely slow, centuries rather than decades, and perhaps understandably he thought the warming might be a good thing. He was probably not the only Swede to dream of a world in which he could look out in mid-winter and see flowering gardens and sparkling water.

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The literature on global warming is too huge to be surveyed (at least by me) and much of it remains in scientific journals rather than in the popular market. We keep being given little ways of ‘saving the planet’, from changing our lightbulbs to changing our diet. But no one wants to deal with the root of the problem. People. No matter how simply we live we cannot help but give out both carbon dioxide and methane. It is the way our bodies are constituted. The more of us the more we produce; the more of us the more we damage the planet just by needing to be fed and watered, clothed and sheltered. No matter how gentle our footsteps, and we have destroyed or relocated or undermined the people with the gentlest footsteps such as the Penan people of Borneo, we cannot help our basic additions to global warming.

There is only one simple practical humane way to reduce populations and that is for everyone to have less children. But even that is resisted. Who will buy our goods, we shout. Who will look after our elderly, we cry. Who will do the nasty dirty jobs we cannot seem to mechanise or robotise, we mutter.

It is natural to want children.

It is natural to nibble our planet, our only home, to death. Or is it?

*

Sumner Locke Elliott wrote a futuristic book *Going* many years ago in which in the United States elderly people when they reached a set age were bused away to euthanasia centres. The book deals with one elderly lady's fight to avoid this fate. But far from embracing any such concept we are obsessed with the idea of finding the key to far longer life. Scientists are already talking of making 125 commonplace as an age for humans to live to. Seven billion people each expecting to live a further 20 or 30 or 40 years ... each living and breathing and consuming for a further 20 or 30 or 40 years ...

*

Arrhenius was also the coiner of the description 'panspermia' (meaning 'all seeds' in Greek); the idea that microscopic life floats in space and is always available to colonise a suitable piece of real estate. His idea was that this life was eternal. It had no beginning and it will have no end. This idea still has many people willing to give it some credence and there seems no reason why, as well as free-floating DNA, comets and asteroids might not carry simple and very tough life forms ...

And in the 1920s: " 'Concern about our raw materials casts a dark shadow over mankind,' he wrote, in an early outburst of twentieth-century environmental concern. 'Our descendants surely will censure us for having squandered their just birthright.' "

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February 20: Dame Mary Durack

February 21: Ha Jin

W. H. Auden

* * * * *

Stephen Spender in his autobiography *World within World* writes of meeting W. H. Auden.

"When Auden and I did meet it was not, of course, through any of these (his brother and his brother's friends), but at a luncheon party given by Archie Campbell. Campbell, being a Scot, did not play the Oxford game, which he regarded with a mixture of detachment and amused cynicism. This first meeting appeared to be a humiliating failure. During the greater part of the meal, Auden, after having cast a myopic, clinically appraising glance in my direction, did not address a word to me. When coffee was served, he jerked his head with a gesture which pulled his chin up, and said: 'Who do you think are the best poets writing today?' I answered nervously that I liked the poetry of W——. Auden said: 'If there's anyone who needs kicking in the pants, it's that little ass.' When he left, to my surprise, he asked me to come and see him at his room in Christ Church.

"Calling on Auden was a serious business. One made an appointment. If one arrived early one was liable to find the heavy outer door of his room, called 'the oak', sported as a sign that he was not to be disturbed. When with him, one was liable to be dismissed suddenly and told the interview was at an end.

"On the occasion of my fulfilling my first appointment, he was seated in a darkened room with the curtains drawn, and a lamp on a table at his elbow, so that he could see me clearly and I could only see the light reflected on his pale face. He had almost albino hair and weakly pigmented eyes set closely together, so that they gave the impression of watchfully squinting."

Spender then got grilled about his own likes in poetry, was told that Wilfred Owen, Hopkins, Edward Thomas, Housman and T. S. Eliot were good, was treated to some of Auden's favourite lines, and "He told me that the subject of a poem was only the peg on which to hang the poetry. A poet was a kind of chemist who mixed his poems out of words, whilst remaining detached from his own feelings. Feelings and emotional experiences were only the occasion which precipitated into his mind the idea of

a poem. When this had been suggested he arranged words into patterns with a mind whose aim was not to express a feeling, but to concentrate on the best arrangement that could be derived from the occasion.”

Auden went on to deride most poets but to suggest some as the coming generation including Cecil Day Lewis and Christopher Isherwood; he then drew Spender to his delighted surprise into what he called ‘the Gang’. “Once I told him I wondered whether I ought to write prose, and he answered: ‘You must write nothing but poetry, we do not want to lose you for poetry.’ This remark produced in me a choking moment of hope mingled with despair, in which I cried: ‘But do you really think I am any good?’ ‘Of course,’ he replied frigidly. ‘But why?’ ‘Because you are so infinitely capable of being humiliated. Art is born of humiliation,’ he added in his icy voice — and left me wondering when *he* could feel humiliated.”

I couldn’t help thinking it was Auden who needed that ‘kicking in the pants’. But as he was twenty-one and Spender nineteen when this took place I think much can be forgiven of this youthful egotism.

* * * * *

Spender described Auden as loving poetry with a “monosyllabic, clipped, clear-cut, icy quality”. It doesn’t sound very attractive and I wondered if this would sum up Auden’s own poetry. My memories of reading him was of someone I thought of vaguely as ‘politically engaged’ without asking just what this might mean. And when I sat down the other day with his book *Another Time* I’m not sure if any kind of engagement really expresses that cool detachment. Not icy, but not warm, and certainly not passionate. I thought the poems which have the most emotion in them are the ones in which subject matter and style come together with understated power—such as in his ‘Refugee Blues’—

Say this city has ten million souls,
Some are living in mansions, some are living in holes:
Yet there’s no place for us, my dear, yet there’s no place for us.

Once we had a country and we thought it fair,
Look in the atlas and you’ll find it there:
We cannot go there now, my dear, we cannot go there now.

In the village churchyard there grows an old yew,
Every spring it blossoms anew:
Old passports can’t do that, my dear, old passports can’t do that.

The consul banged the table and said;
‘If you’ve got no passport you’re officially dead’:
But we are still alive, my dear, but we are still alive.

Went to a committee; they offered me a chair;
Asked me politely to return next year:
But where shall we go to-day, my dear, but where shall we go to-day?

Come to a public meeting; the speaker got up and said:
‘If we let them in, they will steal our daily bread’;
He was talking of you and me, my dear, he was talking of you and me.

Thought I heard the thunder rumbling in the sky;
It was Hitler over Europe, saying: ‘They must die’;
O we were in his mind, my dear, O we were in his mind.

Saw a poodle in a jacket fastened with a pin,
Saw a door opened and a cat let in:
But they weren't German Jews, my dear, but they weren't German Jews.

Went down the harbour and stood upon the quay,
Saw the fish swimming as if they were free:
Only ten feet away, my dear, only ten feet away.

Walked through a wood, saw the birds in the trees;
They had no politicians and sang at their ease:
They weren't the human race, my dear, they weren't the human race.

Dreamed I saw a building with a thousand floors,
A thousand windows and a thousand doors;
Not one of them was ours, my dear, not one of them was ours.

Stood on a great plain in the falling snow;
Ten thousand soldiers marched to and fro:
Looking for you and me, my dear, looking for you and me.

* * * * *

Clive James recorded a different kind of meeting with Auden in his 1973 piece 'On His Death': "I was born in the month after Auden wrote "September 1, 1939," and saw him only three times. The first time, in Cambridge, about five years ago, he gave a poetry reading in Great St. Mary's. The second time, on the Cambridge-to-London train a year later, I was edging along to the buffet car when I noticed him sitting in a first-class compartment. When the train pulled in, I waited for him at the barrier and babbled some nonsense about being privileged to travel on the same train. He took it as his due and waved one of his enormous hands. The third time was earlier this year, in the Martini Lounge atop New Zealand House in London, where a reception was thrown for all of us who had taken part in the Poetry International Festival. Auden shuffled through in a suit encrusted with the dirt of years—it was a geological deposit, an archaeological pile-up like the seven cities of Troy. I don't think anybody of my generation knew what to say to him. I know I didn't. But we knew what to think, and on behalf of my contemporaries I have tried to write some of it down here. I can still remember those unlucky hands; one of them holding a brimming glass, the other holding a cigarette, and both of them trembling. The mind boggled at some of the things they had been up to. But one of them had refurbished the language. A few months later he was beyond passion, having gone to the reward which Dante says that poets who have done their duty might well enjoy—talking shop as they walk beneath the moon."

Put like that, I am not sure I want to think about what any pair of hands has been 'up to' ...

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February 22: James Russell Lowell
Edna St Vincent Millay

February 23: William Shirer

February 24: David Williamson
Andrew Inglis Clark
Samuel Lover

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I used to confuse Andrew Inglis Clark and Marcus Andrew Hislop Clarke. Marcus of course wrote the famous convict novel *For the Term of His Natural Life*. But Andrew, the lawyer, found his place in the scheme of things when I came upon this little mention of him in Laurence Rowston's

Baptists in Van Dieman's Land. "On 24 February 1848 a son was born to Ann and Alexander Clark, the couple who had arrived in Hobart Town in November 1832. This son, their youngest, Andrew Inglis Clark, became a notable barrister, politician and judge, in the new land. Delicate as a child, he was taught by his mother until high school. Following the lead of his mother, who at home was a strict disciplinarian — no smoking, dicing, dancing or loose talk permitted, Andrew neither smoked nor drank alcoholic beverages. As a child he passed through the Baptist Sabbath School and must have grown familiar with the preaching of the Revs. Dixon Davies, B. Lemmon and James Allen and the various members who took the pulpit. Following the lead of his father, he became a qualified engineer. Andrew became a member of the church on 21 April 1870 and himself took services.

"Andrew withdrew from the Thursday meetings for a time in July 1871 due to the lack of discipline and proper order of government in worship. He strengthened his case for leaving by reading from the writings of an "intelligent Scotch Baptist minister."

"In connection with doctrinal dispute in April 1872, Andrew Clark moved, and Isaac Livermore seconded, and it was unanimously agreed to, that the church be dissolved. Clark himself never returned when services recommenced. He was somewhat influenced by the widespread scepticism and free thinking which followed Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) and Colenso's *Critical Examination of the Pentateuch* (1862). Clark sought a religion without superstition, without supernaturalism and without dogma. He turned from a deified Christ who cried, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire", to the human Jesus who went about doing good. Doctrine was no longer essential to Christianity. Jesus was primarily a great ethical teacher. Seeing in his own church bigoted and narrow views, he discovered in the Unitarian readings of the New Testament a nobler and truer conception of human nature and the relation of man to God. He considered the Unitarian teachers imaginative, poetic and spiritually minded. He concluded that the people of the Baptist chapel were forever looking backward, absorbed in the preservation of creeds born of a less enlightened reason and forever absorbed in an airless tomblike sanctuary of memories, instead of a living organism throbbing with the heart-beats of a quick and healthy conscience directing its activities by the cry of human despair and need. In the words of Moncure Daniel Conway:

"Woe to him if he shall fail to increase and adapt that bequest to the changing world! Woe to him if through fear he shall bury that talent in a napkin of conventionalism, and to the returning Saviour can only say, "I have kept your faith: lo! thou hast what is thine." "Yes", he will reply, "you have kept it: kept it till the world has outgrown it; kept it till it is no longer currency: until you have identified me with the worn-out superstitions of barbarous tribes and ages. Your talent shall pass to him who has given his to the exchangers — to the changing ages — to the new needs which exposed it, to the new science which preserves its substance and multiplies its value by purifying it in crucibles of criticism and stamping it with the larger truth."

"The year he left the Baptist church he began to study law. Subsequently he became an active member of local debating and literary societies and, with a few Unitarians, was prominent in the Minerva Club where contemporary problems were discussed. In 1874 he edited the *Quadrilateral*, a monthly journal of politics, literature and philosophy. In 1878, when standing for the House of Assembly, the *Mercury* attacked him for holding republican ultra-extreme views, stating that his proper place was among "Communists". Despite what the *Mercury* said, he was elected to the House of Assembly as the member for Norfolk Plains in July 1878. In 1883 he entertained Moncure Conway in Hobart.

"Clark was an earnest and active advocate of Federation. He represented Tasmania at the Federation conferences in 1890 and 1891. He drafted the Constitution Bill which was adopted, with amendments and additions, by the Convention of 1891. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania and held the office of Attorney-General in the Fysh ministry. A member of the House of Assembly a minister of the Crown, he succeeded in getting passed the bill introducing the Hare-Clark system of voting. He died in November 1907, while a judge of the High Court of Tasmania."

Apart from wondering where *The Mercury* found its communists in 1878 I was curious to know who Moncure Conway was. He turned out to be an American born in Virginia into a slave-owning family but who became an abolitionist, a Unitarian minister, and then a freethinker, and a supporter of women's suffrage, and probably an influence on Clark's thinking when it came to the weighty business of a Constitution for Australia. Perhaps he deserves more than a mention in passing ...

* * * * *

The other day I noticed a book about Marcus Clarke on a library shelf. Curiously it was a biography written a hundred years ago and never published, its manuscript languishing in the Mitchell Library until rescued by Laurie Hergenhan, Ken Stewart and Michael Wilding. Its author was Cyril Hopkins, brother to Gerald Manley Hopkins, and he became a diplomat. He was quite well-placed to write about Marcus as they went to school together and Marcus continued to correspond with him after coming to Australia in 1863.

Marcus Clarke came from a Northern Ireland family of Clarkes, originally from Scotland, but his father moved to England and he was brought up in London. Like his father he was not good with money and few of his schemes brought him anything but loss and debts. In Melbourne he worked in a bank, later as a jackeroo, then lived via journalism and library work. He wrote prolifically, short stories, articles, poems, columns, translations, pamphlets, to keep the bailiffs away and provide for his wife and six children. But he continued to make unwise decisions, support wildcat mining schemes, loan money to people who did not pay him back, and generally get further and further into muddle and debt. He died bankrupt and worn down at only thirty-five.

His famous book, originally a 12 part serial, first called *His Natural Life* and later *For the Term of His Natural Life* got generally good reviews and sold quite well. But he didn't manage to complete another full length novel and his modern reputation rests solely on his story of convict life in Tasmania. Yet it is a worthy memorial as he did a lot of research to get his facts correct, visiting Port Arthur and immersing himself in old convict records. But his lively articles about Melbourne and life in Victoria suggest that his early death precluded other books of lasting worth.

And speaking of death I came upon this little anecdote in Chris Wallace Crabbe's book of literary anecdotes *Author! Author!*; this one by Randolph Bedford and his friends Jim and Pat Maloney in Melbourne: "Jim told me the story of the altered ending of *His Natural Life*. Marcus Clarke had listened to his publisher, who required the usual and unnatural happy ending to the book.

'We were drinking and talking at Pat's surgery in Lonsdale Street,' said Jim Maloney, 'with Marcus Clarke and George Walstab, Tom Carrington, Grosvenor Brunster, Bob Whitworth, and other village lads, who used ink and beer. At two in the morning Marcus and I went out to walk, past the gaol and into Carlton, and around by the University Gardens. I was determined that he should give the true artists' ending to the book, and I said to him, "Marcus, Rufus Dawes must die."'

'He pleaded for the life of Dawes as if Dawes were real. But we both thought of Dawes as real.'

'"I can't kill him, Jim," said Marcus. "He's been through the hell of Macquarie Harbour and Port Arthur, and now the heaven of his boyhood's home is waiting for him. His mother is waiting. I can't kill him."'

'And I said, "Marcus, it's cruelty to keep him alive. He's been through hell, you say. What is to cleanse him of the experience? He had grown away from manhood; his experience is indelible. In his old home he will be a stranger, alienated from decent life by the hell he has suffered. His innocence does not make him more capable of return — it makes him only more piteous. Give him a happy death. Let full recognition come in the last moment, and let him drown with Sylvia!"'

'And after an hour of argument, he agreed, and we came back to the studio at moonset ... I said to my brother, Pat, and the few chaps who had stayed, "We've killed Rufus Dawes."'

'And Pat said, "That's fine! Let's have a drink."'

The happy ending of popular fiction, the tragic ending of literary fiction, are both conventions. In real life Rufus and Sylvia would have looked about for a block of land, cut down its trees, put up a bark

hut and bought six cows to milk night and morning. Rufus would've found the hard physical labour of farming cathartic and Sylvia would've wondered if washing in a tin tub and cooking over a badly-drawing fire was the best life could offer.

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Paul Collins wrote in *No Set Agenda* "Extraordinary changes have occurred in all Catholic schools over the last thirty years. We have come from a situation of absolutely no government funds for Catholic schools, to a very high level of funding. The symbolic turning point was the Goulburn 'strike' of 1962, when Catholic parents threatened in the course of one week to close all the Catholic schools in a city with a very large Catholic minority and to demand admission for the children to the state schools. It was a potent gesture that thoroughly frightened the New South Wales state government and Catholics should not forget its power as a symbol." Not content with a spot of blackmail he then goes on to say, "The church must spell out unequivocally that its schools are a major aspect of its ministry, and as such, must be independent of *all* government control."

In a world in which state schools get closed and children bussed increasingly long distances, in Queensland for instance country children may travel as much as ninety kilometres to school, those parents could simply have been told that buses would be put on so that their children could all be fitted in to state schools somewhere in the area.

I regularly hear that argument used, that there isn't room in state schools for all the children in private schools, along with the argument that parents of non-State School children are also tax payers and therefore deserve to have their schools funded. I notice they never say that it is quite appropriate for tax payers without children to fund schools. But in all the debates the fundamentals are being missed.

The Australian Constitution specifically separates church and state. The Constitution does not prevent any church making its schools 'a major aspect of its ministry' but the requirement that the State fund that ministry goes against that fundamental separation. The State *does* have a responsibility to provide for all children and does have to provide every child a place in a State school. But if parents prefer a different option then regardless of whether they pay tax or not that preference should cease to be the State's responsibility. We now have the arguments about tax paying and choice so entrenched that we have no right to demur when radical Islamic schools want government funding, when fundamentalist Christian schools want funding, when a variety of sects and beliefs (regardless of what those beliefs may be and whether they are in the children's best interests) want funding because they all meet that same criteria: they pay taxes and they as parents now have the right to school their children as they see fit and expect to receive financial support from the government.

That church and state *are* separate in Australia was predominantly the work of two men. Henry Bourne Higgins and Andrew Inglis Clark. Jean Ely in *Contempt of Court*, the story of the failed attempt by a group called the Defence of Government Schools (DOGS) in the High Court to stop State Aid to non-State Schools, says of Clark, "In Clark's view, for a church, or for its agencies such as Church schools, to be supported by subsidies from the public treasury, was both spiritually weakening for that church, and was also a latent threat to the civil and religious liberty of all citizens."

Disingenuously the Catholic Church told the High Court that its schools were *not* a part of its ministry. But after the case was won and State Aid to church schools continued and increased the Catholic Church came out with statements such as "Because of the High Court Challenge to funding for independent schools mounted by the organization known as DOGS, crucial discussion of educational matters in the Catholic press was unavoidably restricted for some time" and the National Council of Independent Schools wrote to a Catholic priest "Our confounded High Court writ of course causes our lawyers to make NCIS (and perhaps the VCEO) soft pedal on the religious nature of our schools ..."

In other words religious schools became secular schools, no different from State Schools, for the duration of the High Court case. Valuable as having a range of educational opportunities available to all children undoubtedly is I found this kind of hypocrisy deeply disturbing.

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Clark, unlike Clarke, was a model of probity and care. He is remembered for the Andrew Inglis Clark Law Library in Hobart. His opus was *Studies in Australian Constitutional Law* which came out in 1901. He was a republican. He supported female suffrage. It has been asked why the Constitution does not count indigenous people. Was this because there were no obvious indigenous people in Tasmania and Victoria to count, assimilation was thought to be almost complete, and delegates from Queensland and Western Australia didn't care one way or the other? Perhaps. But when I came to think on Clark and what he would say if he could come back I have the impression that he would fully support changes to 'his' Constitution to incorporate genuine recognition of First Peoples, not just a few token words; he comes over as that kind of man.

And he was very fortunate in his wife. Jean Ely writes, "This was some lady, this wife of his: the daughter of a local shipbuilder who was in and out of debts to the Bank of New South Wales. After the death of her mother, she raised eight siblings. At the age of twenty-nine, she transferred ownership of Rosebank to her newly-wed husband, then reared another seven children of her own. The couple added a second storey to accommodate the expanding family. At the same time Grace made herself a useful sounding board for her husband in his various careers as lawyer, Tasmanian Attorney-General, and now — Supreme Court judge." Marcus Clarke may have captured the popular imagination but Andrew had a profounder impact on Australia for the roles he played in achieving Federation, in writing the Australian Constitution, and in giving Tasmania its special voting system.

And *Rosebank* is still there—in Hampden Road, Battery Point.

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February 25: Benedetto Croce

February 26: Gabrielle Lord

February 27: Ralph Nader

February 28: Michel de Montaigne

Linus Pauling

Stephen Spender

Robin Klein

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Linus Pauling is remembered as much for his championing of Vitamin C as for his peace and scientific work now.

In his 1958 book *No More War* he writes "At noon on Monday 15 January 1958 I placed in the hands of Mr. Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary-General of the United Nations, a petition from 9235 scientists, of many countries in the world.

This petition has the title "Petition to the United Nations Urging that an International Agreement to Stop the Testing of Nuclear Bombs be Made Now."

The petition consists of five paragraphs, as follows:

We, the scientists whose names are signed below, urge that an international agreement to stop the testing of nuclear bombs be made now.

Each nuclear bomb test spreads an added burden of radioactive elements over every part of the world. Each added amount of radiation causes damage to the health of human beings all over the world and causes damage to the pool of human germ plasm such as to lead to an increase in the number of seriously defective children that will be born in future generations.

So long as these weapons are in the hands of only three powers an agreement for their control is feasible. If testing continues, and the possession of these weapons spreads to additional governments,

the danger of outbreak of a cataclysmic nuclear war through the reckless action of some irresponsible national leader will be greatly increased.

An international agreement to stop the testing of nuclear bombs now could serve as a first step toward a more general disarmament and the ultimate effective abolition of nuclear weapons, averting the possibility of a nuclear war that would be a catastrophe to all humanity.

We have in common with our fellow men a deep concern for the welfare of all human beings. As scientists we have knowledge of the dangers involved and therefore a special responsibility to make those dangers known. We deem it imperative that immediate action be taken to effect an international agreement to stop the testing of all nuclear weapons.

“This straightforward calculation leads directly to the conclusion that one year of testing at the standard rate of 30 megatons per year will ultimately be responsible for the birth of 230,000 seriously defective children (gross mental or physical defect or stillbirth or childhood death) and also for 420,000 embryonic and neonatal deaths.

“The bomb tests carried out so far (about 150 megatons, including 1958) will ultimately produce about 1 million seriously defective children and about 2 million embryonic and neonatal deaths, and will cause many millions of people to suffer from minor hereditary defects.”

It is one thing to put down statistics. It is quite another to sheet home blame whenever a family has a damaged child. Bomb and missile tests send radioactive material into the stratosphere and troposphere, material which gradually returns to earth, but often far from the area where the tests were carried out. And the relationship between nuclear damage and the individual is not a clear progression of cause and effect.

Pauling largely concentrated on the damage done to human health by fall-out from bomb testing. Dr Rosalie Bertell estimated that millions had been sickened and often killed by the process of mining, transporting, and refining uranium. And an interesting book *Beyond Chernobyl* by Corin Bass and Janet Kenny looked at the damage from a nuclear reactor accident and its subsequent fall-out.

They begin by saying, “After the Chernobyl nuclear power-plant exploded on 26 April 1986 its fallout spread over many countries, affecting the lives of people from widely differing cultures. In every country women bore the brunt of the disaster since they, in the main, were the shoppers, cooks, house-cleaners and child-carers. Pregnant women were haunted by the fear that radiation might have harmed not just their fetus but future generations. Meanwhile, male experts spoke and wrote reassuringly of “acceptable risks”. Women’s experiences were treated as insignificant.”

Authorities first kept it secret, then there was confusion and contradictory instructions, then it became clear that many health officials across Europe simply didn’t know what they were talking about.

— “In the first weeks after the catastrophe huge rallies in major cities everywhere demanded a halt to nuclear programs. “Chernobyl is everywhere!” declared a West German ecology group. Indeed it was. Fish, water, milk, meat, vegetables, cheeses, wild berries and mushrooms, fruit ... all were contaminated. Food in shops was advertised as coming from places thousands of kilometres from Europe or as having been grown “under glass”. It was inspected with great suspicion. Who could tell where the fruit, the cheese or the salad vegetables *really* came from?

“The problem of what to do with contaminated food undoubtedly worried many European governmental bodies, particularly as it took the European Community a full month to decide on new permitted levels of contamination. The third world was the answer. In the months after Chernobyl, shipments of produce deemed too dangerously contaminated for European consumption found their way to South America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.”

— “The public was advised to wash all green vegetables. The government banned produce from Italy and eastern Europe.” (Austria)

— “Sheep’s milk was banned because of high levels of iodine-131.” (Bulgaria)

— “The government banned meat, vegetables, potatoes and fish from the Soviet Union.” (Denmark)

— “On 7 May 225 tonnes of spinach was destroyed. In July 1986 four brands of Dutch powdered milk exported with safety certificates to the Philippines were found to have dangerous levels of caesium-137.” (Netherlands)

— “Chernobyl ruined so much. In the Nordic countries this event broke the pattern of life radically (at least for those who thought about it) as not only was the food ruined but the traditions as well. Planting the vegetable garden in the spring, which provided the fresh chives, dill and new potatoes for the midsummer festival. Gathering berries from garden vines and then from the forests to decorate summer cakes. Picking cherries, apples and pears. Making jam. Pickling cucumbers. Making “summer soup” from the freshly grown vegetables. Then the autumn when the leaves are raked up and the children jump amongst them. Gathering mushrooms from the forests. Catching fish from the lakes and marinating it. So much was lost.” (Finland)

— “Today is the 26th April 1989 and I heard on the radio a program in memory of Chernobyl. It has been found that mushrooms and products of uncultivated areas in the Alps are still highly contaminated.” (Austria)

— “The radio warns: do not drink any fresh milk; do not let the cows out to grass; do not eat any fresh vegetables or lettuce; do not let the children play on the grass or in the sand-box.” (Germany)

— “Greek wheat was contaminated and some found its way into Italian pasta. Italians ate 500,000 tonnes of pasta produced from radioactive durum wheat, Franco Giustolisi reported in *L'Espresso* in December 1989. Radioactivity measured 1550 becquerels a kilo in 2364 tonnes of wheat that arrived in Bari from Salonika on a Cypriot ship on 23 September 1988. Five more shiploads of radioactive grain, totaling 40,000 tonnes were found.” (Italy)

— “The government decided to destroy all large-leaved vegetables and all milk, and to slaughter all rabbits.” (Italy)

— “The situation appeared to be under control and rather orderly. Although there were empty spaces in grocers’ and greengrocers’ supplies. One could forget about buying dairy products, eggs, vegetables and fruits. We heard on the grapevine that all fresh produce had been withdrawn from sale.” (Poland)

— “I knew washing vegetables wouldn’t reduce the levels of surface contamination significantly, but the government told people to boil them and they would be safe. It was like some comic rerun of the war. Subsequent experiments in St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London showed washing vegetables only reduced the contamination by 20 per cent.” (England)

— “Here we are used to living on what nature produces. There won’t be any elk meat in the freezer this year. There will be neither berries nor mushrooms. We don’t know anything about next year, or the next.

“It is a hardship to be a mother of small children in the areas hit by radioactivity. The anguish is almost paralysing and the sorrow deep. Every practical step is hard to take, but worse still is the burden of the feeling of being deprived of life itself during these short years with small children. To be afraid of nature and in spite of that to try not to make the children feel the same.” (Sweden)

— “Three and a half years after the catastrophe, mushrooms, berries, venison and milk from certain alpine regions are still contaminated beyond admissible (what is “admissible”?) limits, and children and pregnant women definitely should avoid these foods. Yet all the adverse effects we had to suffer from the Chernobyl accident (which took place 1000 kilometres from Austria), including the increase in cancer and leukemia, are very small indeed compared to the sufferings of the people in the Chernobyl region.” (Austria)

The authors draw attention to “Land in Belarus and Ukraine that once supplied grain, meat and milk and vegetables to millions of people is now too radioactive to use.” Lapp reindeer were

slaughtered en masse. “In Great Britain, half a million sheep from 600 properties were still under restrictions in 1991.”

I could go on chronicling the problems from just one accident. And is the world any better prepared twenty years later for the next catastrophe?

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UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld is remembered for one book *Markings* (Vägmärken) which was a collection of his opinions and ideas found as a manuscript after his death in a plane crash in 1961. (He is also remembered for a degree of misogyny and an inability to delegate ...) He had left them to a Swedish friend and fellow bureaucrat Leif Belfrage. The thing that surprised people was that his writings weren't about his life, about international diplomacy, about political problems. They are instead thoughts on faith and life.

‘What a farce — your farce, O masters of men! The master of the hounds knows that he is king for a but single day in a kingdom of fools. And he knows there are better ways of dealing with a fox than the one he represents. While, on the other hand....’

‘The feeling of shame over the previous day when consciousness again emerges from the ocean of night. How dreadful must the contrast have been between the daily life and the living waters to make the verdict one of high treason. It is not the repeated mistakes, the long succession of petty betrayals — though, God knows, they would give cause enough for anxiety and self-contempt — but the huge elementary mistake, the betrayal of that within me which is greater than I — in a complacent adjustment to alien demands.’

‘Atonement for the guilt you carry because of your good fortune: without pity for yourself and others, to give all you are, and thus, justify, at least morally, what you possess, knowing that you only have a right to demand anything of others so long as you follow this course.’

‘God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.’

‘Time always seems long to the child who is waiting — for Christmas, for next summer, for becoming a grown-up; long also when he surrenders his whole soul to each moment of a happy day. Then — ’

‘*Respect for the word* is the first commandment in the discipline by which a man can be educated to maturity — intellectual, emotional and moral.

Respect for the word — to employ it with scrupulous care and an incorruptible heart-felt love of truth — is essential if there is to be any growth in a society or in the human race.

To misuse the word is to show contempt for man. It undermines the bridges and poisons the wells. It causes Man to regress down the long path of his evolution. ‘But I say unto you, that every idle word that men speak...’

‘The light died in the low clouds. Falling snow drank in the dusk. Shrouded in silence, the branches wrapped me in their peace. When the boundaries were erased, once again the wonder: that *I* exist.’

‘God desires our independence — which we attain when, ceasing to strive for it ourselves, we ‘fall’ back into God.’

‘It is when Lucifer first congratulated himself upon his angelic behaviour that he became the tool of evil.’

‘Be grateful as your deeds become less and less associated with your name, as your feet ever more lightly tread the earth.’

Hammarskjöld saw himself as a public servant; but instead of parties and ministers he was being directed by nations and UN bodies. It was only a difference in degree. His job to carry out their wishes. At times I found his writing lyrical and insightful. Overall, though, I felt it was an insight into a

rather obsessed and melancholy person. Perhaps the behaviour of nations had something to do with that melancholy ...

* * * * *

Linus Pauling believed that the sheer destructiveness of nuclear weapons and the impact of radioactive fallout (which no nation could control) would make war obsolete; what was later called MAD or Mutually Assured Destruction. That human beings could even toy with the idea, in the vague hope that one side would come out less destroyed than the other, does suggest a pervasive madness in high places. Since then other ideas have been brought forward to bolster the idea that all-out war is no longer an option. The most pervasive is globalisation. The more interdependent we become the less willing we will become to go to war. And then there is the simple fact that we will run out of oil. That will make hi-tech war more difficult though I am sure solar tanks and electric convoys will become a reality.

Burnett and Games in *Who Really Runs the World?* write, “In December 2000, some revealing statistics were published by the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies. As well as describing, in the starkest possible terms, the chasm between rich and poor countries, the report had another, even more pressing, message. Of the world’s 100 largest economic entities, 51 were now corporations and only 49 were countries. Furthermore, the world’s top 200 corporations accounted for over 25 percent of economic activity on the globe while employing less than one percent of its workforce. The tipping point, in terms of world power, had been reached. National governments have lost their grip on the reins of world power. In addition, those same top 200 corporations’ combined sales surpassed the combined economies of 182 countries. And yet, far from improving working conditions in the countries over which they hold such influence, the top 200 have been net job destroyers in recent years. Workers’ wages have languished while executive salaries have skyrocketed. Between 1980 and 1992, the 500 biggest corporations in the US saw their assets rise 227 percent, from \$1.18 trillion to \$2.68 trillion. Over the same period the number of people they employed fell 28 percent from 15.9 million to 11.5 million.

“It is easy to draw the conclusion from these findings that globalization, or the rampant spread of corporate power, is dragging the world down. But globalization still has its defenders. One of its most eloquent apologists is the *New York Times* writer Thomas Friedman. In his recent book *The World is Flat* he argued that globalization, as well as making the world a smaller place, was also making it safer.”

Friedman’s idea being that because component parts for many goods are made in many different countries there is a strong disincentive to go to war. This idea doesn’t really hold up to close scrutiny.

1. War itself makes billions for corporations—and is largely paid for by taxpayers, citizens, and nobodies, not by corporations headquartered in tax havens.
2. The makers of those parts are restless factories, constantly moving to find cheaper labour. They have no commitment to any one country and governments are finding that even tax breaks, a military-dampened-down workforce, and other sweeteners aren’t necessarily enough.
3. The making of components is not spread equally over the world’s nations; it is concentrated in Asia, specifically East, South-East and South Asia. No one is suggesting that Afghanistan would make the ideal place to set up clothing and shoe factories, let alone cars or computers.
4. The behaviour of some corporations or their contractors and sub-contractors is so vile that globalisation is becoming a dirty word. Horrors like Bhopal or the ways of pushing GM products are only the tip of the iceberg. And it might be worth remembering that 9/11 was aimed at the *World Trade Center*—not the Statue of Liberty, or the UN building, or Coney Island or the sex shows in Times Square—or even the White House.

5. And the products made under such a regime are not necessarily good products. This has become most obvious in the food industry. Ideas like ‘Food Miles’ appeal to people. And because different countries have different health and safety regulations we get small children breaking up computers and phones for recoverable elements in scenes of toxic horror—while Western consumers are paid back with contaminated food. Quality is hard to maintain. And some of us, surprise, surprise, don’t want to buy products that exploit anyone.
6. It has been suggested that nationalism is on the rise again; not least in response to the power of corporations. All kinds of things are brought up in support of this, including the rise of neo-Nazis. But if the military-industrial complex wants to sell its weapons, its landmines, its cluster bombs and all their relatives, it has to be willing to take in the resulting refugees. It could be argued that Far Right groups are not the big corporations’ enemies but their stalking horses. And there is the danger of confusing flag-waving patriotism with nationalism. As corporations increasingly spread their operations far from home base there is value in masking their own lack of patriotism with a lot of hoo-ha from ordinary people. But corporations can’t sign Loyalty Oaths or go through naturalisation ceremonies. (Nor do they take in, re-settle, or help refugees.) I don’t think nationalism and globalisation are opposites; quite often they can be found in bed together.
7. But globalisation does have an Achilles heel. We have to want their products. There has been widespread praise for the policy of using taxpayers’ or borrowed money in stimulus packages to keep economies moving. But it is only moving crunch time into the future, not solving the problems. And it could be asked why those corporations that are larger than most economies are not being asked to provide the stimulus packages instead of squirreling their profits away beyond the reach of national governments. After all, they are the beneficiaries of the stimulus deals. And when taxpayers finally run out of staying power—we will all stop buying cigarettes, chocolates, cars, computers, new shoes. Ultimately globalisation built on corporate profit, rather than on mutual friendship and mutual help, is built on sand.
8. Globalisation and the spread of the military-industrial underpinning to corporate profits is a poor look-out for ending war. And it might be worth remembering that revolutions are not powered by the poorest of the poor but by those who have had a glimpse of other people’s obscene greed and complacent wealth ...

Ted and Ben Goertzel did a biography of Pauling and write, “When the Nazi menace threatened Europe, he favored American union with Great Britain as a way of committing his country to the defense of that threatened land where he had so many friends and colleagues. Once the war began, he put his basic science on the back burner to commit himself to the war effort, designing an oxygen meter for airplanes and submarines and synthetic blood plasma for medical emergencies.

“After the war, Pauling refused to be swept up in the anti-Communist and anti-Soviet tenor of the times. He used his scientific credentials to challenge the government’s claims that fallout from nuclear testing was not harmful. When the Senate Internal Security Committee subpoenaed him to testify in the hope of discrediting him, he stood up to them, refusing to name those who helped him collect the signatures of scientists from around the world. He won that confrontation, forcing the committee to back down. Ultimately the government conceded the dangers of fallout and signed an atmospheric test ban with the Soviets.

“But he paid a price scientifically. In 1953, he rushed to the press with an erroneous model of the structure of the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) molecule just before James Watson and Francis Crick published their famous and correct double-helix model. Many believe he might not have made his

mistake had he seen the X-ray crystallography work of Rosalind Franklin that had helped Crick and Watson in their research. But because of his political activities, the U.S. State Department denied him a passport, thereby preventing him from going to Great Britain and seeing this important work.

“The right wing of the 1950s denounced Pauling as a Communist, or at the least a fellow traveler. Pauling and his wife were, in fact, openly active in several organizations dominated by Soviet sympathizers, as well as dozens of others. But they were not apologists for the Soviet party line, or any other organizational dogma, nor did Pauling refrain from challenging the Soviets when he thought them wrong. He opposed Soviet bomb tests as forthrightly as he had U.S. tests. And when the leading Soviet chemists denounced his theories for contradicting the sacred Leninist doctrine of dialectical materialism, Pauling stood his ground, blasting them for corrupting science with political dogma. Years later, the Soviets recognized the error of their ways and granted him the Lenin Prize.

“These victories over Stalinism and McCarthyism were richly satisfying for Pauling, not in the least because each was recognized by a Nobel Prize, the first for chemistry, the second for peace. By middle age, his life had been a remarkable string of successes, in both the personal and the public realms. His marriage to his college sweetheart had been happy. The couple remained devoted to each other throughout their lives, sharing the same political enthusiasms and raising four children. While their family life was not immune from conflict or stress, all of the children pursued professional careers and gave the Paulings twelve grandchildren. They had a lovely custom-built home on Big Sur, its walls meeting at angles mimicking those of the complex molecules that Pauling had first untangled.”

Of those ‘complex molecules’, Suzuki and Knudtson wrote in *Genethics*, “In 1949, the Nobel Prize-winning American chemist Linus Pauling and his colleagues demonstrated that the disease (sickle-cell anemia) could be traced to a structural defect in a single molecule resident in red blood cells – hemoglobin. This defect creates an abnormal protein known as S (for sickle-cell) hemoglobin. The discovery not only opened up a new chapter in the story of sickle-cell anemia but also established an entirely new category of human illness – molecular disease.”

Pauling was uninterested in politics until he got involved in Upton Sinclair’s campaign to become Governor of California in 1934. Although Sinclair accepted Democrat nomination “he continued to advocate many socialist ideas in more acceptable language. His slogan was “End Poverty in California” (EPIC), which he proposed to do by instituting a system in which “the means of producing and distributing the necessities of life should be in the hands of the entire people, to be used for the people’s equal benefit, and not for any privileged class.” To those who accused him of promoting socialism, he simply said that he was interested in solving urgent problems, not debating theory.”

... “Sinclair was an advocate for the common man against the powerful interests. He was defeated in the first electoral campaign in which the establishment used the mass media to manipulate public opinion. Pauling’s views were shaped by this experience. After 1934, he saw politics as a struggle of the common people against the establishment. He was acutely sensitive to the importance of the mass media and learned how to use them effectively. He also learned the importance of not being labeled as an extremist or radical and immediately went on the offensive when the mass media attacked him as a Communist sympathizer in the 1950s and 1960s.”

Undoubtedly his experience of campaigning, even though Sinclair didn’t win, helped him when he fell foul of the attempt by several American Senators to brand him a Communist. His defence of himself and his work and ideas, his insistence that the proceedings be open to the media, his careful refutation of the claims made against him makes inspiring reading. But he had been sufficiently tarnished in the minds of both the media and the public that his extraordinary garnering of two unshared Nobel Prizes gained remarkably little publicity.

And then the ‘Father of Molecular Biology’ got on the Vitamin C bandwagon in the mid 1960s. My mother started us all on Vitamin C when we were young. I don’t know whether it reduced the number of colds we got though she believed it did. But as I read about Pauling’s work in this area I realised I had a puzzle. My mother could not have taken her cue from Pauling’s work. By then I had

left home. So who inspired her to try it out? And perhaps more importantly—is there any advantage in taking large doses of Vitamin C? The jury is still out. Sometimes it seems to help. At other times it seems to hinder. My own feeling is that it is unwise to take large amounts of concentrated anything. Vitamin C in vegetables and fruit makes far more sense; not least because it comes with other benefits and I can't help thinking that the actual business of isolating and drying and compacting and adding other chemicals to bind and preserve may in fact undermine the value of the key ingredient. Just a personal foible ...

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February 29: Howard Nemerov
Unknown and Forgotten Writers

* * * * *

My mother had a good friend in Toowoomba we knew as Paddy McCallum. She wrote lively cheerful verse and was a very nice person. But years later my mother told me her real name was Gladys and that she had once written and published a novel. I was intrigued but my mother's view of it was that it was so sordid and gloomy she felt the less said about it the better. I don't think I ever heard its name even but I always wondered if I too would find it sordid—or was that purely my high-minded mother's view?

I knew Paddy had occasionally written poetry and I managed to track this one down.

Autumn is a sorry season in our garden,
Full of memories of blossoms dead and gone.
The leaves are falling from the cedar tree;
The autumn breeze is strewing them around,
Jeering at the latent glory of the tree.
Wind-tattered shrubs and bushes are so woebegone;
The border beds lie bare to rest the tired ground.
The breeze is wreaking havoc in the summer-weary garden.

Summer is so prodigal, and never counts the cost.
Young Ron is out there raking up discarded relics;
He puts them with his clippings to make a good compost
To rejuvenate the soil. He values every skerrick.
The autumn breeze, in spite of all its teasing,
Knows as well as Ron that garden growth revives
When spring comes after winter's freezing.

But we, in the autumn of our lives,
Feel a slight unease
Even in our sleep
About Ron's compost heap.

'Garden Settlement' by G. R. McCallum.

I'm not sure if her falling cedar leaves are poetic licence. And as for that mysterious novel I still haven't found a copy but I have an idea that as she worked as a nurse in her young life in western Queensland this might have been the setting for her story ... and as my sister Colleen knew her better I asked her if she remembered anything. "Yes, I remember Paddy. I was actually typing up one of her stories for her when I was 16 or 17 and it was pretty long so it could have been "the book". I can't remember anything at all about it except I think it was about country themes." So that intriguing little mystery remains ...

Howard Nemerov is neither overlooked nor forgotten exactly but he is largely unknown in Australia. He was an American poet, at one time their Poet Laureate, described as ‘A poet of urbanity and epigrammatic wit’, but I have not come upon any of his work except in anthologies—which is where I found this little piece:

Sparrows were feeding in a freezing drizzle
That while you watched turned into pieces of snow
Riding a gradient invisible
From silver aslant to random, white, and slow.

There came a moment that you couldn’t tell.
And then they clearly flew instead of fell.

‘Because You Asked About the Line Between Prose and Poetry’

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March 1: Lytton Strachey

Robert Lowell

March 2: Sholom Aleichem

Dr Seuss

March 3: Edward Thomas

Morag Loh

March 4: Henry the Navigator

Khaled Hosseini

March 5: Lady Augusta Gregory

March 6: Gabriel Garcia Márquez

March 7: Nance Donkin

March 8: Kenneth Grahame

March 9: Keri Hulme

Paul Wilson

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Last year a friend mentioned she would like to bring Professor Sheila Jeffreys to Hobart. I’m afraid I hadn’t previously heard of Professor Jeffreys but I said she sounded interesting and I booked the Friends Meeting House for an afternoon seminar. Sheila Jeffreys is a leading light in CATWA (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women Australia), a Melbourne academic, a radical lesbian feminist, author of provocative books such as *The Idea of Prostitution*, *Unpacking Queer Politics*, *Beauty and Misogyny*, and *The Industrial Vagina: The Political Economy of the Sex Trade*; she offered to speak on “Legalising Prostitution = Legalising Violence against Women” which seemed both interesting and timely as the State Government was debating whether it should legalise brothels and follow the Victorian model. (Tasmania allows women to work from home, hotels, or shared premises but does not permit brothels.)

To my surprise I received a phone call soon afterwards from someone speaking for TasCard and the Scarlet Alliance saying if we had Sheila Jeffreys at the Meeting House they would come round and demonstrate and didn’t I know Sheila Jeffreys was an appalling woman and she was surprised that Friends would want anything to do with her. I was rather taken aback but I couldn’t see any reason why we shouldn’t listen to what she had to say. After all, she has spent many years researching trafficking, prostitution, and the global sex trade. I found, over the next few days, that other Quakers had been rung up and warned to have nothing to do with Professor Jeffreys. It had obviously made some people wonder if it was appropriate to have her in the Meeting House. I passed on a copy of her proposed talk and people who had been wondering now said they couldn’t see what the fuss was about, that her speech seemed eminently sensible and the sort of things we all needed to know.

Professor Jeffreys had also been booked to talk at Friends House in London but there the shrill cries of condemnation and threats of disruption reached such a pitch that her booking was cancelled. I found that very sad. After all, Friends by and large believe in free speech even though the Scarlet Alliance and its British counterparts obviously do not.

And the whole thing I found rather strange. When prostitutes came together in collectives for protection, support, information, and general solidarity it seemed to me a good move. But the Scarlet Alliance, when I did a little bit of looking, is not the collective I had assumed but an organisation which promotes the sex industry and is run it would seem by the people who make the big money, the business people who run the brothels rather than the women themselves.

(But nobody, inside or outside of the sex industry, is questioning the fundamental fact that it isn't natural for a woman to allow a complete stranger to use her most intimate orifices for gratification. After all, most people would feel uncomfortable drinking from a glass a stranger has just used. And it is more than 'use'; the prostitute is expected to show pleasure, fake orgasm, smile at the stranger no matter how little she feels like smiling, put up with rudeness and violence. Why are we not questioning the supposed 'normality' of prostitution?)

I was in Book City one day for its closing down sale and I saw a book called *Sex Trafficking: The Dark Side of Australia's Sex Industry?* I thought I probably needed to be better informed and when I took it over to the cash register the lady there said she thought they had another book on trafficking and hunted out *Stop the Traffik* by Steve Chalke which has a global perspective and is not only about sex trafficking but also the trafficking of children for labour and other horrors. It has the blunt sub-title 'People Shouldn't Be Bought & Sold'.

Professor Jeffreys' talk came and went and no one turned up to protest. I thought what she said was sane and sensible. I had been under the impression that legalising brothels might take women off the street and make them safer and I was puzzled that the opposite has happened in Victoria. But I could see from her research why this is so. Brothels are run to make money, they are run by the Abe Saffrons and Tony Mochbels of our world, and profit is their guiding light. So they want the women in them who will make the biggest profits. These are predominantly biddable and docile Asian girls who do what they're told no matter how unpleasant and unnatural. Street prostitutes tend to be Australian girls with problems, addiction, alcoholism, homelessness, poverty, childhood abuse; girls who are often angry and not interested in massaging male egos. And if they aren't wanted in brothels then obviously they are going to work from home or from the street.

She referred to the Nordic Model which I also knew very little about so I was interested enough to help in the setting up of a web-site www.normac.org for other ignorant people like me. In effect Sweden legislated so that it was the buyer of sex rather than the seller of sex who would be charged. The penalties were not huge and counseling is on offer to repeat offenders—but it achieved its aim: it virtually stopped the flow of trafficked women into Sweden. Other countries followed suit, Norway, Iceland, even unexpected places like Albania, Israel, and South Korea. Other countries beset by massive trafficking and its attendant misery, like Holland and Germany, are now looking at the model.

One of the questions she was asked was whether the Nordic Model could have prevented the horror of a 12-year-old girl here being prostituted to hundreds of men and only one of those men being charged. Charges were never brought because it was said the room was too dark for the girl to recognise the men or the men to realise that the girl was only twelve. Apart from the absurdity of men paying money to enjoy a supposedly attractive 18-year-old and then carrying out the transaction in a pitch dark room it violates the safe workplace standards which Professor Jeffreys noted: that the sex worker should examine the man a) to make sure he shows no obvious sign of disease and b) that he is wearing a condom. Every one of those men regardless of whether they knew they were committing statutory rape was in violation of the laws surrounding a safe workplace ...

In the meantime I was asked if I'd like to do something for the web-site so I wrote a review of Paul Wilson's book:

Review of *Sex Trafficking The Dark Side of the Australian Sex Industry?* by Dianne McInnes & Paul Wilson, New Holland Publishers 2012.

The book begins “In Australia today, young women—sometimes those who are just children or adolescents—are being exploited physically, emotionally and financially by criminal elements, people who are determined that they will grow rich over the bodies of those they coerce or cleverly trap into entering the sex industry.”

But the book isn’t an overview of sex trafficking or prostitution more generally. Rather it looks at a number of cases which have come before the courts. The authors do not attempt to suggest the size of the problem, not least because as they point out “Currently Victoria has around 100 licensed brothels and escort agencies, and an estimated 300 illegal brothels”. If we can only estimate the number of illegal brothels equally we can only guess at whether any of those illegal brothels are using trafficked women. Although they mention Asian women trafficked into a legal brothel in Sydney the traffic is predominantly an aspect of the growth in illegal brothels, and brothels which are neither licensed nor inspected raise unanswerable issues as to how many trafficked women are working in the sex industry at any one time.

Recent figures I’ve come across from Victorian Police are of just over 400 cases currently under investigation in that state. But as the authors point out there are three different crimes which the media tend to bundle together and so confuse the issue. These are:

1. Slavery. Although the media comes out with lurid headlines at times such as ‘Sex Slaves Held in Dungeon’ slavery is hard to prosecute. It may involve physical control, such as women without access to passports and other documents or women prevented from leaving their work premises or denied any remuneration for their work, but the authors point out that the slavery can also be psychological. This can involve threats and intimidation, drug addiction, fear for family members, fear of deportation, or women given wrong information.

2. Trafficking. They quote Nina Vallins of Project Respect for her definition of trafficking: “1) a person is moved from place A to place B; 2) the person has either been kidnapped or has agreed to go but been deceived about the circumstances that await them at point B; and 3) the purpose of moving the person is to exploit them.” The legal definition of trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” So it does not have to involve the crossing of borders but often does involve false information, false documents, and false backgrounds. The authors include the cases of several children, including a 12-year-old in Tasmania, who were prostituted hundreds of times before the authorities stepped in. Although these cases did not necessarily involve borders in all of them false information was being peddled.

3. Debt Bondage. This is where women may, or may not, be aware that the jobs being offered involve sex. But they are not told that they will be deprived of their liberty or be unable to change places of employment until huge debts are deemed to have been repaid. The largest debt mentioned in the book is \$200,000 though most were around \$45,000. I have heard that debts of up to \$150,000 are now common. Given that a return fare from Bangkok is less than a thousand dollars it is not hard to see why criminal operators see this as a lucrative way to make money. They mention a legal brothel in NSW where “When the police and immigration officials raided the premises the following day, they found four scantily-dressed Thai women cowering under furniture in a locked room with no door handles below a spa and sauna centre in Fairfield. This room was connected to the brothel premises by a hidden stairway.” They go on to say, “Each woman told a similar story about her ordeal. They were required to pay back debts of between \$35,000 and \$45,000 by working 16 hours per day,

six days a week. They were forced to use crystallised methamphetamine (commonly known as ‘ice’), perform unsafe sexual practices, including not using a condom, and work while they were menstruating and while they were suffering vaginal infections.”

Wilson and McInnes also point to the sheer practical difficulties of getting convictions in the cases they highlight. Lack of English, lack of understanding of the law, lack of documentation (so that it may become the trafficked woman’s word against that of the brothel owner), lack of family support, fear of deportation, and so on. They write, “Tragically, and precisely because the women often come to this country under false pretences, many prosecutions of traffickers that may have merit are unsuccessful. They are seen as only prostitutes, and their evidence and testimony are disregarded or downplayed by the authorities, or they really do not have information about their traffickers that can be used by the prosecution. It is also true that both the legal system and the police rely on testimonies of the women who have experienced trafficking, and often, because resources are limited, they do not collect corroborating evidence, including phone and supporting records, statements from clients and co-workers and other material that would support the allegations.”

And by focusing on the end rather than the beginning, by which time the woman or girl may be infected with chlamydia, herpes, HIV etc, and may suffer long term from Post Traumatic Stress, I found myself wondering how we might prevent the exploitation in the first place.

The authors only really have one suggestion. “Lack of access to legal visas creates a market for sex trafficking. If people applied through legitimate immigration procedures to work in the sex industry, then many of the trafficking problems connected to debt bondage would be alleviated.”

But as the key aspect of trafficking is that it makes big money for the traffickers it isn’t clear how visas would stop trafficking. Equally it isn’t clear how visas would better police the industry. Given that there is resistance to bringing in foreign workers to do jobs that Australians are qualified to do (and none of the trafficked women had skills not available in Australia) this suggestion also raises but doesn’t answer the question of why women are being trafficked from Asia to do work Australian women are quite capable of doing. Again it comes back to the bigger profits to be made from trafficked women.

Implicit in the book is another issue, the ‘Asianisation’ of sex work in Australia. Almost all the trafficked cases were of Asian women or girls, including several underage cases, and more than half the traffickers were also Asian. It raises, in my mind, the concern that we may be underplaying the seriousness of the problem because most trafficking victims are ‘them’ rather than ‘us’. If the criminals are ‘them’ and the victims are ‘them’ then somehow trafficking isn’t really ‘our’ problem. It is a complex issue because it plays out against that widespread Australian belief that Asian women are sexier (and like sex more), they are more biddable and compliant, and they may have access to exciting and esoteric practices to attract jaded male palates. The authors note in passing that trafficking victims at times turn into traffickers—which also raises the question of whether people with an intimate knowledge of trafficking are going to prefer to operate transparently and legally.

The authors say, “The murders of sex workers are often unreported or the women are not recorded as missing persons. According to Helen Pringle from the University of New South Wales this occurs because the victims’ work stigmatises them as dirty and worthless. To those who loved them, these sex workers were mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. To the people who murdered and dumped their bodies, they were disposable. And their sex-worker colleagues are often afraid to go to the authorities because they may be working illegally or have fears for their own safety.”

Fiddling around with the visa system is not really the answer. Rather, we need to be asking tough questions of a culture which makes trafficking a lucrative option. Why do we as a society believe that we have a right to buy sex, no questions asked, and why do we believe that one person’s body should be for sale to another person, usually a stranger. Equally questions about the numbers of trafficking victims aren’t really the issue. One trafficked woman in an Australian brothel is one too many. One Australian male taking advantage of that trafficked woman is one too many.

Sex Trafficking is a horrifying book and, more so, given Australia's much-vaunted belief in freedom, openness, fair play, and respect for human rights. It is also a useful place to start looking into this important issue. But because of its limited brief, the attempt to prosecute traffickers in Australian courts, don't treat it as the only book you need to read about trafficking.

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I didn't put it in my review but one thing struck me as strange as I re-read the book: Paul Wilson chronicles horrors which should never happen in a supposedly open society like Australia, such as trafficked women kept behind barred windows and locked doors, yet he doesn't seem to see these as the horrors they are. I can only speculate that Paul Wilson has spent so long looking at crime that he has become hardened to things which shock me or, perhaps, that he grew up in an era when women were blamed for their own rape or abuse and something of those old attitudes remains with him.

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March 10: Fanny Trollope

March 11: Dell Shannon

Jack Davis

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Years ago there was a whole row of Dell Shannon mysteries in the library and I always thought vaguely I would try one some day. When I finally got round to it I found they had been superseded by newer practitioners and were gone from the shelves. But I did pick up one, *Exploit of Death*, second-hand and found it quite interesting; not for its characters who have little personality or memorability but because it is far more like real life in a police precinct than most novels of the sixties and seventies. The dead bodies come in a steady stream, accidents, suicides, overdoses, murders, and the key case is always under threat of being swamped by the sheer relentless nature of crime in a big city.

George J. Becker wrote in *Realism in Modern Literature*, "What these various observations on the actual plotting of a realistic narrative add up to is that such a work should be a "slice of life" with minimal structuring or emphasis. Without beginning, end, or middle, without sharply contrasting elements, and, as we shall see later, without rhetorical emphasis or distortion, it is somehow to be a fragment of actual experience which has pulled loose from its moorings and floats before our eyes for our perusal, putting us in the same position of observer-evaluator that we are in before events of our own lives. It constitutes a random, yet representative sample—a day in the life of so and so, a ride from 116th Street to Times Square, a tape recording of conversations in bar, cafeteria, or bus station. The format is so well established that we now see it as one of the staples even of detective fiction, in John Creasey's "Gideon" series and in the novels of Dell Shannon and others in which the normal grist of the police mill in a given city—Manchester, Los Angeles, New York—is the novel, some crimes being solved, some left up in the air, clues or some new ones just coming in as the book ends. Where these works depart from the realistic pattern is, of course, in their tendency toward idealization of one figure—Gideon, Lieutenant Mendoza, etc.—though this may be the result of initial success in a more strictly realistic vein which has led to centering the series around a popular protagonist."

Dell Shannon's real name was Elizabeth Linington and as well as using Dell Shannon she also wrote as Lesley Egan and other pseudonymns. "Early in the 1960s, Elizabeth Linington simultaneously launched several mystery series under various names and was immensely successful with one of them. Although born in Illinois, she grew up in California and her detective procedural novels were set in the Los Angeles area. She graduated from Glendale Junior College in 1942 (she used Glendale as the setting for one (of) her series). Early in her writing career she wrote for radio and for the stage.

"The best-known work by Linington is the series of novels she published as Dell Shannon : the Luis Mendoza mysteries which premiered with *Case Pending* (1960)." (*The Encyclopedia of Murder & Mystery* by Brice F. Murphy.) This goes on to say, "Anthony Boucher, one of her admirers, noticed that the criminals in her books commit crimes mostly for stupid reasons, as in real life. Life is not art,

however, and Linington was not interested in embellishing it with Napoleons of Crime or other such inventions. In an article written in 1970 she took to task “self-proclaimed” intellectuals who tried to make the mystery story into “an esoteric mystique” instead of entertainment.”

But they have one other interest now: long before the hugeness of Los Angeles’ Hispanic population was visible to the wider world she created an Hispanic detective and filled her books—victims, suspects, witnesses, police and murderers—with Hispanic characters. The trouble is, though she peppers her writing with bits of Spanish, the characters are largely indistinguishable from their American neighbours ...

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P. D. James when she was being interviewed about her book *Talking about Detective Fiction* took another crack at Agatha Christie. Hercule Poirot, she says, was a caricature. Well, of course he was. Golden Age mystery writers all struggled to make their series detective stand out above the pack. Their detectives were blind, they cultivated orchids, they sat in wheelchairs, they had odd personal foibles, they belonged to the aristocracy, they had unexpected hobbies ...

But although P. D. James might not like me saying it her Adam Dalgliesh is also a caricature. Less obviously certainly. But her Dalgliesh with his poetry is like Sherlock Holmes with his violin. It implies he is not just a plodding solver of mysteries. He is also a cultured man. Yet we never hear what Dalgliesh thinks about modern trends in British poetry. We don’t get to read any of his work and a couple of deprecating lines in *Death in Holy Orders* don’t count. We don’t see him interacting at poetry readings and launchings. It is about on the level of Hercule Poirot with his vegetable marrows ...

(Her explanation for this is that if Dalgliesh gave out his hobbies and details of his personal life it would be easier for the crooks he has put away to hit back at him—but this simply won’t wash. Any such person would have no difficulty in finding out where he lived, what car he drove, where he usually ate out, his friends and family, his routines and habits. It is much harder to believe that they would brave the probably uncharted terrain of a poetry reading or book launch. What James is not saying is that she wants her readers to believe in his talent as a poet without being expected to ever showcase that talent. And I have another, albeit untested, belief. Fictional detectives deal with the big cases, usually murderers, who are most likely to be sent away for long stretches. Police are far more at risk from more minor criminals, the ones who are regularly in court for assault, car theft, forgery, possession, the things that see them sent down for a year or two. They are out and about again while their sense of grievance is still burning hot. And it is in the smaller cases that police are more likely to use slipshod work, to fudge the truth, to bend the boundaries. It is far easier to fit up a small time crook who probably has only a young Legal Aid lawyer or may even be reduced to defending himself, and only gets a busy magistrate who has seen him in and out of court before—than it is in a major murder trial with the media and high profile lawyers present. It can still happen in major trials (and does) but there are more people watching and testing the evidence ...)

And hidden behind James’s criticisms is, I think, a tinge of jealousy. Don’t get me wrong. I admire the way James overcame personal and family problems to carve out a career for herself. I think she has been a good promoter of British detective fiction. But the fact remains that Christie was the better writer and the more versatile writer. All James’s novels have that sense of being a good solid read but their plotting is average. Their writing is clear but unremarkable. She describes each character in some detail but doesn’t have the knack of making them come alive. (I have just been re-testing this belief by reading *The Lighthouse* and *Lord Edgeware Dies*; neither book can be praised as its author’s best and both books showcase their author’s failings; the first plods along, only leavened by some attractive descriptions of the setting, the second is full of clichés and ‘significant’ looks and falls back on the murderer’s own writing to tie up the loose ends.) And she hasn’t been able to make her mark in other branches of writing. Christie wrote some very clever short stories. Her romances still are worth reading. Her autobiography is interesting. And her plays are still being staged; apart from ‘The Mousetrap’ her other plays particularly ‘Witness for the Prosecution’ still get regular airings. And more

than that she frequently and almost artlessly sketches in an era, with all its prejudices and attitudes and privileges and quirks, with a few deft strokes.

I also think that James cuts her cloth to fit her audience. When she speaks at Writer's Festivals, on literary shows, in writings aimed more at the students of the genre rather than its general readers, she is critical. When she is asked to write a brief blurb for a Christie reprint she is generous, almost effusive—such as this one on the back of Christie's *The Tuesday Club Murders* (originally *The Thirteen Problems*) “Agatha Christie is a brilliant literary conjuror. She places her characters face downwards like playing cards, shuffles them with cunning hands, and time after time we point to the wrong card. She has intrigued, thrilled, and baffled readers for nearly ninety years and the magic is as potent as ever”—which is a reminder that Christie's readers are frequently James's readers. What she might equally have said is that both she and Christie only have the same basic building blocks, *words*, on which to erect both their mysteries and their reputations.

Writers using series detectives still face that formidable problem: how to make *their* central character stand out above a packed field. They can give their detective culture, a complicated home life, a drinking problem, a connection to the aristocracy, the difficulties of homosexuality; they can make him black or her Hispanic, but they are rarely prepared to take the risk and simply make their hero part of a large personally unremarkable working team of detectives. That Dell Shannon was so popular, despite embedding her main detective in such a team and having him work on a range of crimes at any one time, some of which don't get solved, is a reminder that readers do, at times, also want a glimpse of a world in which the detective is not a prima donna but merely one cog in the machine ...

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March 12: Kylie Tenant

Jack Kerouac

Virginia Hamilton

March 13: Roy Bridges

Hugh Walpole

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Stephen Spender said of Hugh Walpole in *World Within World*, “The conversation passed from politics to gossip about personalities, quite possibly to Hugh Walpole. Now some stories seem so familiar to me that they have become inseparable from this life of literary London, as though it were woven out of them. For example, the story of how Hugh Walpole sat up all one night reading an advance copy of Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale*, to recognize himself in the cruel analysis of the career of the best-selling novelist.”

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Hugh Walpole had quite a successful and prolific career as a novelist, without setting the world on fire, but with popular books like *Rogue Herries*. He was born in New Zealand in 1884 where his father George was an Anglican minister in Auckland. But the thing which puzzled me was which character in *Cakes and Ale* was Walpole? The novel is about three men: Edward Driffield a best-selling Victorian novelist who by the time of his death has been raised on a plinth as the Grand Old Man of Letters; the narrator, Willy Ashenden, who knew Driffield when he was a boy in a Kentish village and Driffield was not yet famous and was rather looked down upon because his own father had been a bailiff and he had married a barmaid Rosie; and Alroy Kear who is a successful writer in the bluff manly rather insensitive style of perhaps a John Buchan.

Kear has been asked to write the biography of Driffield by the second Mrs Driffield and he asks the narrator to share his memories of Driffield's early years. The trouble is, he is determined to present Driffield not as he was in his early, most productive, and most successful early years, but as the admired gentleman that the world and the second Mrs Driffield have recreated him as. Kear dismisses the narrator's attempts to tell the truth about those early years, about the Driffields' moonlight flit to

London leaving unpaid bills behind them, about Rosie's unfaithfulness, about the death of their only child, about their lively and unsophisticated entertaining, because such stories do not fit the image of the man he wants to portray. The narrator is unkind about Kear's talents. "I had watched with admiration his rise in the world of letters. His career might well have served as a model for any young man entering upon the pursuit of literature. I could think of no one among my contemporaries who had achieved so considerable a position on so little talent. This, like the wise man's daily dose of Bemax, might have gone into a heaped up tablespoon."

I assumed Maugham had modeled Kear on Walpole and although he reiterates Kear's hearty kindness and generosity it is hardly a flattering portrait. But as I knew nothing about Walpole's life and early years, I initially wondered if Maugham had been thinking of Walpole as Ted Driffield, the man who succeeds by mining his early years and life with Rosie for 'new' subject matter with which to shock a staid readership.

In fact, the general consensus is that Ashenden is Maugham himself, Driffield is Thomas Hardy (and the second Mrs Hardy was hurt by the portrayal of the second Mrs Driffield), and Kear is Walpole.

Selina Hastings in her biography of Maugham says of the whole sorry saga, "Hugh, his pink face aglow, failed to realise how closely he was being observed. Aware he was making an impression, it never crossed his mind that that impression might be ridiculous, and that with his plump face, bulging eyes and little mouth snuffling with excitement he reminded his companion irresistibly of a guinea-pig. Later Maugham was to make devastating use of Walpole in his fiction, but for the time being all was harmonious between them, and Hugh blissfully happy with his kind new friend."

Maugham first used him in *The Moon and Sixpence*. A different friend of Maugham's, Gerald Kelly, "suspected that he himself had served as the inspiration for Stroeve, the chocolate-box painter. 'I am always sure,' as he cheerfully admitted, 'that all Willie's bad painters are portraits of myself.' But in this he was wrong: the character of Stroeve is modelled on Maugham's fellow novelist Hugh Walpole. This fact was fortunately undetected by Hugh, who failed to recognise himself in the plump, silly creature who with his bald head and pink cheeks was 'one of those unlucky persons whose most sincere emotions are ridiculous', whose work was 'hackneyed and vulgar beyond belief', and whose manner reminded the narrator of nothing so much as 'an agitated guinea-pig'. Had Walpole discovered his contribution no doubt there would have been a squeal of anguish, if nothing like the anguish suffered later when coming face to face with himself as Alroy Kear in *Cakes and Ale*."

To me, the placing of real people as characters in fiction, unless they are historical characters, is a failure of the imagination. A character simply lifted from real life is not 'your' character until it has gone through the complex alchemy of the imagination and ceased to be that real person. Now I think readers come to Maugham because his stories are 'period pieces' rather than because of the way they used people of the period. But in his lifetime his admirers were legion; for instance Ross Campbell wrote this in *The Women's Weekly* of 1957 "Most good books are written by men and women of battered appearance.

"Look at old Somerset Maugham. He's got a face like a tired monkey. But he's easy to read." So possibly Maugham should not have been rude about Walpole's face! I have heard people say they find his writing rather pedestrian at times. But my criticism is a different one. Their endings are often unsatisfying. They sometimes leave me with the feeling that Maugham had not sought out the best ending but had just grown tired of his plot or his characters and ended up any-old-how.

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People have of course mined the lives of others for subject matter since time immemorial. Shakespeare was said to have modeled his Justice Shallow on neighbouring landowner Sir Thomas Lucy, the one who supposedly caught Shakespeare poaching deer though the story is unlikely. A dead deer is *rather* hard to hide. Even earlier Chaucer was supposed to have been inspired to tell his Reeve's Tale by a real Mr Reeves. Connections between the real and the imagined are everywhere. But in

Maugham's case Walpole was still alive and the caricature was not a passing reference or a minor character. Even if close to the truth it must have been very hurtful, not least because it became for a time the talk of the literary world in London and Maugham's vehement claims that there was no connection probably only helped to convince people there *was* a connection.

It undoubtedly hurt Walpole's pride and confidence in himself. But did it affect his sales?

Personally if someone caricatured a writer I was fond of I would not stop reading that writer. The book, after all, is the thing and it would take something very unpleasant or discreditable to change or undermine my pleasure in a writer's work. But the answer in Walpole's case seems to be that it both cast a cloud over his later life and affected his writing and his sales. Unlike the nine-day-wonder of something cruel said at a dinner party or as a book review in a newspaper, Hugh remained a figure of fun so long as *Cakes and Ale* remained popular—and *Cakes and Ale* remained popular throughout the rest of his life. There was no escape.

It is also a danger in reading biographies. To come away from someone's life with a bad taste in the mouth is to risk spoiling the enjoyment of their work. And if they are still living I have the added doubt: why should I add to their bank balance by buying their work? I would rather support the writing of people whose lives I admire. But although I came away from the portrayal of Alroy Kear with the feeling that he was a hide-bound fool I didn't dislike him. *Cakes and Ale* is as much about the horrors of the English class system as about the perils of writing a biography. In a way all three men in the book are victims of that system.

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So what of Walpole's books? *Rogue Herries* is the one most likely to turn up in op-shops and on stalls and I have just been reading it. Francis Herries is the Rogue of the title, a difficult bad-tempered man of whom his children say:

'Deb, why is it that they hate father so?'

For how long now had this question been hovering between them!

'There is a separateness about father.' She stared into the golden cavern that hung, lit with sparks of fire, between the black logs. 'They cannot understand him nor he them.'

'Deb, do you understand him?'

'Yes, I fancy so. He dreams of what life should be and because it falls so far behind his dream he abuses it.'

The book is a family saga. But, basically, it just doesn't work. Walpole is a competent writer. Many of his descriptions are attractive, his dialogue is fine, but the plot lacks cohesion. And he lavishes descriptions on ephemeral characters but lacks the ability to make the central characters absorb the reader. I never felt he had truly come to grips with the story he wanted to tell. Except for moments here and there the story left me dissatisfied.

For Walpole having to face the humiliation of being very publicly made fun of there was perhaps also the secret despair: that he just wasn't good enough at what he did to justify a place among the literati. Perhaps his bluff and bumptious behaviour was designed to hide a secret sense of inferiority?

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"What extraordinary obits. poor Hugh got! A new terror is added to death." (Rose Macaulay.)

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March 14: Valerie Martin

March 15: Lady Augusta Gregory

March 16: Sully Prudhomme

March 17: Jean Ingelow

March 18: Edgar Cayce

John Updike

March 19: Philip Roth

Etheridge Knight

March 20: David Malouf
Lois Lowry
March 21: Thomas Shapcott
Frank Hardy
March 22: Rosie Scott
March 23: Bruce Bennett
Charmian Clift
March 24: Olive Schreiner
Fanny Jane Crosby
March 25: Anne Brontë
March 26: Robert Frost
March 27: Kenneth Slessor
Frank O'Hara
March 28: Nelson Algren
March 29: Sigurdur Magnusson
March 30: Anna Sewell
March 31: Marge Piercy
Andrew Lang
April 1: Edgar Wallace

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I remember my mother telling the story of someone ringing Edgar Wallace only to be told 'I'm in the middle of a book' to which the caller replied, 'that's all right, old chap, I'll hold on.' This exists in various versions and says much for the way people regarded the speed and prolificness of his writing. As he took up dictating his work on to a Dictaphone for his secretary to transcribe he did in fact compose very quickly—just not that fast!

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Edgar's mother, Polly Richards, was a bit player in Alice Marriott's touring theatre troupe. Margaret Lane in her biography of Edgar Wallace says of Marriott, "Playing a fortnight in one theatre and a week in another, travelling sometimes fourteen hours a day between towns in the uncomfortable unheated railway trains of the 'fifties and 'sixties, she worked regularly for fifty weeks in the year, and was never known to be defeated even by illness. When one considers the length and difficulty of the parts she played, the responsibilities she shouldered, the discomfort of the interminable succession of theatrical lodgings, her vitality and her output become nothing short of prodigious. In one week in 1861 under the direction of J.A. Cave at the Marylebone she played on six successive nights Romeo, Meg Merrilies, Rosalind, Hamlet, Bianca and Mrs. Haller (the last a part made famous by Mrs. Siddons) and in such a week of exhausting changes saw nothing unusual. She was never known to forget a line, never appeared to need to refresh her memory. She could turn from Romeo to Rosalind, from Hamlet to Jeanie Deans, from the Duchess of Malfi to East Lynne without a tremor, and she carried her company and her family along on the impetus of her own inexhaustible vitality. When on Christmas night, 1900, she died suddenly in her seventy-seventh year, it was after no gentle period of invalidism and retirement, but still working, with her boots on. She collapsed quietly after a set of charades at a family party, and when they carried her upstairs her daughter found open beside her bed the marked copy of the new part she was learning—Juliet's nurse, one of the few Shakespearean parts she had never attempted."

Despite all the hard work there wasn't much money in touring. Polly Richards, briefly and unwisely, had a fling with Alice's son, fellow actor Richard Edgar Marriott and found herself pregnant. But he was already engaged to her best friend. She couldn't bring herself to spoil their happiness. She could have taken the child to an institution or a baby farmer. Instead she found a family, the Freemans, who would foster the baby boy she called Edgar Wallace; two weeks after the birth she was back on

tour. Mr Freeman was a fish porter at the Billingsgate markets, there were already ten children, but it was a lucky choice. Edgar was loved and cared for there even if the family only just managed to skate along above destitution and Polly's five shillings a week didn't go far. Eventually she found, as she grew older and got fewer parts, that this was a struggle and she asked the Freemans if they would like to adopt Edgar. They said yes. It was an unselfish thing to do but Edgar never forgave her for what he saw as this 'giving away' and possibly the Freemans reinforced this attitude of secret resentment.

He left school at twelve, was in and out of various dead-end jobs, then joined the army and was sent to South Africa. Eventually he left the army and fell into a job as a war correspondent as the Boer War was heating up. He already knew he liked writing as he had tried some music hall skits and some barrack room ballads in imitation of Rudyard Kipling. When he returned to London he found work as a journalist. He had a remarkable capacity to pick himself up again after every disappointment and rejection—and a willingness to try every kind of writing. Novels, short stories, articles, columns, racing tips, they all flowed almost ceaselessly from his pen.

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"It was during his first few weeks in London that Edgar received an unexpected visit from Polly Richards. How she had discovered him is not difficult to imagine: his name had in all probability appeared in the *Daily Mail* over London news stories, and once she had realised that he was in England he would be easy to trace. Polly, it seemed, was growing old, and she had gone down in the world. Her only daughter, Joey, had died many years before, and although she had kept in touch with her daughter's child (christened Alice Grace Adeline, after Miss Marriott and her daughters) she had become somewhat estranged since her son-in-law's second marriage. For some years she had been with a touring company run by Miss Emma Hutchison, who had proved herself a friend and had allowed her to act as her housekeeper during the increasingly long periods when she was out of work, or, as it is professionally expressed, "resting"; but now Miss Hutchison's company was temporarily idle, and Polly herself was failing, and alone. Exactly what she hoped to achieve by making herself known to the son whom she had never wanted, and whom she had not seen for more than twenty years, one can only guess. She was old and poor, and would no doubt have been thankful to be relieved of the weary necessity of work. Her son, though by no means a rich man, had at least made some name for himself in the newspaper world, and she probably hoped that he would be persuaded to help her. Certainly she can never, until this last interview, have guessed how strong and deep-seated was his bitterness against her; how he had been brought up to regard her as the heartless betrayer who had abandoned him at birth, or how little time had done to soften the harshness of his prejudice. This unrelenting hostility is not easy to understand in a man whose natural impulses were generous, who knew through experience the cruel pinch of poverty, and whose open-handedness in later years became a legend. Indeed, his childhood conception of her, unconsciously fostered by the indignant Freemans, is the only possible explanation of the one completely ungenerous action of his life. For Polly was unsympathetically received. The interview was a short and, one cannot but suppose, a painful one. Ivy (his wife) learned with distress, when Mrs. Richards had gone, that Edgar had frankly told her to expect nothing.

"It is unlikely that she was sent away empty-handed, but she was certainly not encouraged to hope that he would help her further, and did not appeal again. When, a few months later, playing a small part with a touring company in Bradford, her frail health finally gave way, she appears to have been quite penniless. She was removed to Bradford Infirmary, and the company of necessity went on without her. She died in November of the same year, while Edgar was in Canada; she was described by the registrar as "an actress of no fixed place of residence," and certified as having died of senile phthisis. She had no money, and was moreover not insured, and it was only by the intervention of Joey's husband (who had been informed, too late, of her illness) that she was saved the final ignominy of being "buried by the parish." It was owing, too, to his kind offices that this lonely woman, of whom nothing was known in Bradford, was buried in Catholic ground, and her prayer book sent as a last relic to her son.

“His mother’s death, and the wretched circumstances in which she had died, affected Edgar deeply, and one cannot help suspecting that his chief emotion was one of self-reproach. At all events, there is some suggestion of an attempt to make amends for repented harshness in the fact that, learning a few years later that his half-sister, Josephine Donovan, had left a child, he wrote kindly to the girl, claiming her as his niece, and made a special journey to Cheshire to see her. Miss Donovan, who had been seventeen at the time of Polly’s death, remembered her grandmother vividly, and with affection. Until the time of her father’s second marriage she had received many visits from “Grandma Richards,” and had kept up a childish correspondence with her; so that she was able in some measure to correct Edgar’s original opinion of his mother. It is, indeed, through Miss Donovan’s eyes that we have our last authentic glimpse of Polly Richards. She remembers her as tolerant, kindly, and rather stout, still possessed of some of the quiet humour which poverty and misfortune had not entirely quenched, a “most lovable and affectionate woman—generous to a fault.” Careless and improvident, like many actresses, she would (though rarely in her latter years earning more than a pittance) “give her last penny away.” In temperament she thus seems to have been not unlike her son, though she lacked his spark of genius, and her life was unrewarded and obscure. There seems at least to have been something of his stoical indifference to defeat in the way in which she accepted the rebuff of their last encounter, turned her back on London, and went on alone to Bradford to work and die.”

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I don’t know that a love of acting and the theatre can ever be said to be genetic but Edgar always nourished this vague idea. “On the first night of *The Ringer*, however, his heart had no excuse to sink, and long before the final curtain it was borne in on him that the theatrical ambition which had haunted him all his life had at last been realised. It was thirty years since he had sat, bright-eyed and breathless, in the gallery of the Prince of Wales’s, and heard Arthur Roberts sing his popular song; thirty years since he had first wildly dreamed of fame in the theatre, the dream with which Alice Marriott, Richard Edgar and Polly Richards had been familiar all their lives, and which ran its hereditary course in his own blood. It had been a long time to wait, but now that the dream had at last become reality he recognised his satisfaction as something far deeper than the pleasure of any other kind of success. He had wanted the theatre always, with a nostalgia which he had never entirely understood, and now, at the age of fifty-one, he had at last come home.”

He also had success with plays like *The Calendar* and *The Case of the Frightened Lady*. But my question is the underlying one: was this a case of nature over nurture? Did it represent current thinking where success on the stage was esteemed more highly than writing a popular novel? Did it represent a deep longing in his foster family—they would go to a play or the music hall if only they had the money? Or was it, more prosaically, because he’d been told his ear for dialogue was particularly good?

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April 2: Hans Christian Andersen

April 3: Reginald Hill

April 4: Mrs Oliphant

April 5: Algernon Charles Swinburne

April 6: Graeme Base

April 7: William Wordsworth

April 8: Ursula Curtiss

April 9: Lord David Cecil

Victor Gollancz

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Gollancz made his mark as a publisher in London as the founder of the Left Book Club and the publisher of many famous writers such as Dorothy Sayers and John le Carré. Remember those yellow covers? But he was also quite a prolific writer himself, bringing out much more personal stories about

his life and faith and philosophy. The other day I thought I might try a couple of his own books to see how he wrote and what he wrote ...

So I borrowed his *A Year of Grace* and *From Darkness to Light* from the Quaker Library but when I got them home I realised they were both anthologies. He makes a few comments but mostly they are writings which inspired him. Fairly conventional but occasionally thought provoking as in—

‘All that happens is divine’. Léon Bloy.

‘Even Mme. de Staël was shocked because I had made God the Father so friendly to the Devil.—What will she say if she meets him again in a higher sphere, perhaps even in heaven itself?’ Goethe.

‘*Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life*’. Erich Fromm.

‘Friend, let this be enough. If thou wouldst go on reading,

Go and thyself become the writing and the meaning’. Angelus Silesius.

But the added interest comes through the many Jewish legends and insights he includes, such as this Hasidic story: ‘A Rabbi ordered his Warden to assemble ten men for a Minyan to chant Psalms for the recovery of a sick man. When they entered, a friend of the Rabbi exclaimed: “I see among them notorious thieves.”

“Excellent,” retorted the Rabbi. “When all the Heavenly Gates of Mercy are closed, it requires experts to open them.”’

And for the insights the collections give into Gollancz himself.

His statement that ‘Ethics are responsibility without limit towards all that lives’ is a statement worth taking away to ponder on.

His own writing is at times attractive as in this bit about Florence—‘I had often been about for hours before breakfast. I would get up while it was still dark and go down to the Duomo. As the sun rose, the tower became lovelier even than Giotto had made it: all airy and transparent, it glowed like a piece of the rose-quartz that had given me so much pleasure when, as a boy of nine or ten, I had formed my little collection of minerals and rocks. The steps of the Cathedral itself had disappeared beneath the hillock of flowers, brought in by the market women, that rose against the marbled façade to the height of a man. The smell and the look of them in the morning air were as sweet to my senses as anything I had experienced before or have experienced since; not even sunrise in Venice, or flying into London on a summer night when all the lamps are lit, has seemed more beautiful.

And when I got back to our balcony, itself still grey with the earliness of the dawn, the houses on the opposite bank would be a long unbroken stretch of flaming brown’ ...

And he obviously cared deeply about social questions. He gives this insight into his thinking in an excerpt from *More for Timothy*, ‘There’s more in the papers this morning to fill one with horror and shame. “Town demands the cat”; “They say flog”; “Bring back the lash”—these are some of the headlines I’ve read on my way to the office. At a Wimbledon meeting dissentients were howled down; and a single word, in enormous letters, caught my eye on the poster of a weekly with millions of readers—“FLOGGING”. Why can’t they be honest about it, and say “Bring back torture”? Because they dare not: because they must pay lip-service to Christianity. But I repeat and repeat again that the cat o’ nine tails is torture, and I challenge anyone to deny it. In terms of the pain involved—the subject is so disgusting that one can hardly go on with it—there is little difference, for the time being, between lashing a man and flaying him: the two processes, indeed, are not dissimilar. And pain apart, what is the object, or if you like the result, of a lashing? Degradation: and to degrade still more thoroughly a man already steeped in degradation is the meanest, wickedest, stupidest thing I ever heard of. If you’re going to make anything out of him, for the good of his own soul and of the society he menaces (and will continue to menace if he emerges from prison unchanged, not to say worsened), your object above all must be to give him, or give him back, self-respect.

A paragraph has just appeared in the papers about the flogging of a prisoner at Dartmoor. He was given twelve strokes of the cat, and “the doctor and Governor were present. *The man was medically examined after each stroke*”. You understand why? His heart may give out, you may kill him: and

while torture is permissible, murder isn't. So you flay and examine, you flay and examine, you flay and examine ... up to ten, up to eleven, up to twelve, God in heaven, can we ever feel clean again?"

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Gollancz also included a number of quotes from Nicolas Berdyaev 1874 – 1948 who was a Russian philosopher born in Kiev. He was interested in politics but got into continuing trouble for his independence of mind and suffered two terms in prison before being expelled in 1922. He settled first in Berlin and later in France where he lectured at the Sorbonne and died there in 1948. Gollancz calls Berdyaev a 'poet-theologian' and quotes his words, "God himself ... awaits man's help and contribution towards Creation. But we, instead of turning towards him his own image in ourselves and offering him freely the fruits of our creative strength, have wasted and squandered that strength in superficial self-affirmation."

Gollancz goes on to say "I am sorry that Berdyaev has passed out of fashion: he writes of the God-man with a more communicative sense of involvement than do any of such regular theologians as I happen to have read. Even his most famous fellow-countrymen—Bulgakov, Soloviev—cannot rival him in this particular."

E. L. Allen wrote a small book he called *Freedom in God: A guide to the thought of Nicholas Berdyaev*. He says "Berdyaev's place is not so much with religion as with mysticism. Religion for him is a social phenomenon and is adapted to the needs of the masses; as such, it is embodied in visible institutions and in authoritative formulas. The mystic, on the other hand, is aristocratic in temperament and never quite at home where the masses are catered for. He cannot remain in the world of form and convention and second-hand truths which is all about us and with which official religion has to come to terms; he aspires to a contact with spiritual reality as it is, a return to the ultimate sources of his being. When he returns from this experience, he can only express what he has found by a language of symbols which the Church is inclined to brand as heretical but which in its wiser moods it does not reject outright.

"What are we to say of the mystic's goal? What is this indescribable thing which he has found and of which he seeks to tell us with stammering lips and strange signs? It is the experience of unity with God."

And what of his idea of the God-man which obviously appealed to Gollancz? " 'Christianity,' he wrote, 'is the revelation of a perfect God in a perfect man.' " The idea that "God becomes man so that man may one day become God."

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"I got a job at the London office of 20th Century-Fox, where I worked briefly as a reader of manuscripts, looking for ones I thought had film potential. But I found steadier work with Victor Gollancz, reading manuscripts for a guinea or two each. He'd hired me not only because he'd known my father when Daddy lived in England but because his regular and longtime reader had been assaulted by an unhinged Irishman whose stories about the Ulster Legends and Cuchulainn she'd rejected after reading the opening section.

"Somehow the Irishman had learned her name, waited until she was on her way home, and sent her to the hospital with broken ribs and a bruised face. She was not expected to return to the Gollancz offices for six weeks. After telling me this, Victor warned me not to speak to anyone about where and in what capacity I was employed."

Paula Fox in *The Coldest Winter: A Stringer in Liberated Europe*.

You didn't appreciate what a dangerous job it is reading through a slush pile and rejecting manuscripts?

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Gollancz also wrote on peace issues. "I am horrified by the decay of pacifism in the world: I am horrified that so few Americans should have said before being drafted "I will not do it". How different it was in 1914. A respectable minority, of Englishmen at any rate, preferred prison or ambulance work

to military service, and several were killed when succouring the wounded, whether ‘their own’ men or not, including one of my best friends (Ralph Rooper, quem honoris causa memoro). And what has come of 1915, anyhow?”

From the Daily Mail, September 8th, 1966:

“The sergeant explained that some of the casualties happened when one of their own planes accidentally dropped napalm on their own positions.

“ ‘I saw one GI—he was cooked. Done to a rare turn. He was screaming, twitching, moaning. When a man’s been hit by napalm you have to take a knife and scrape it off. You scrape meat.’

“But he did not blame the pilot for bombing close to the U.S. positions.

“ ‘Charlie (the Vietcong) was right up close to us. That’s where the bombing should be. When you get a few people being wounded by your own bombs and artillery, you know you’re in the right place.’

“The sergeant was sorry but not sentimental about the men who had died.” ”

Reminiscences of Affection

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“Gollancz was founded in 1919 by Victor Gollancz. He established himself as a publisher of radical political titles, such as *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell and the distinctive orange or yellow soft cloth covers became familiar to a generation of readers. The company remained in the family, run by Victor Gollancz’s daughter Livia, until it was sold in 1988 to the huge American publishing conglomerate, Houghton Mifflin. It did not take long for Houghton Mifflin to realise that Gollancz did not really fit into their global plans, and it had no real part to play in a company with a turnover of £500 million. At present Gollancz is a typical general list still publishing crime and thrillers together with science fiction, children’s books, books on bridge, biography, autobiography and literary fiction.”

Heather Godwin in the spring 1993 edition of *Writing Magazine*.

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April 10: Stuart Dybek

Hugo Grotius

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“I sensed his exceptionality early on, at university. I say sensed because my view originated not so much in mind as in my nerves, guts, heart, liver and bones. Instinctively I knew Donovan to be that rare thing, a man who really matters. Reading his texts over and over again and each time discovering fresh evidence of his powers, I came to the conclusion that he was potentially the greatest international lawyer since Hugo Grotius, the founding father of international law. Grotius (1583-1645) was, in my view, truly a man of genius. Sometimes it is alleged that he was not an original thinker – that he was simply a man of extreme learning and trod paths laid down by people like Suarez and Gentili. That is a slur. Whilst it may be true that Grotius appropriated the concepts of *societas humana* and *jus gentium*, he did so to dramatic and innovative effect. To heat and hammer and pressurize the juridical materials he inherited in the way he did, into new and durable shapes, to produce such a work as *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, which resonates and bells to this day, is a creative, imaginative feat.

Armed with my accumulating knowledge of Donovan, I began to draw parallels between Grotius, a Dutchman four centuries dead, and Donovan, an Irishman at the Bar of England and Wales. I thought that there might be a thesis in the subject, comparing and contrasting the two men. In many ways they were different. Not only was Grotius a great jurist, he was also a philologist, theologian and statesman of distinction. Donovan was purely a lawyer, and furthermore, although he was absorbed by the academic side of his work, he also relished the pugilism of litigation; Grotius, by contrast, never enjoyed practising law, and was principally occupied as a politician, jailbird and diplomat. And while Donovan was precociously talented and several years ahead of his contemporaries (he graduated from Cambridge with a starred first aged twenty), Grotius was truly prodigious. As a child he published

brilliant poems in Latin and Greek, was paraded in front of Henri IV of France, went to university at eleven and was awarded a doctorate at sixteen. He was a Mozart of erudition.

But then I discerned some similarities. Both men had remarkable memories; both possessed relentless energy; both worked unceasingly; and, perhaps more tellingly, both were acutely conscious of the passage of time. Grotius's motto was *Ruit hora*, and it was one which Donovan could easily have shared."

From *This is the Life* by Joseph O'Neill.

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Hugo Grotius or Huig de Groot was born in Delft in 1583 to an influential family and went to university; he went on diplomatic missions, he wrote poetry, he did translations from French and Latin, he found himself in prison at one stage but escaped to France. He wrote his influential essay, *Mare Liberum* to promote the idea of the freedom of the seas but then argued against it when the Dutch realised it would damage the activities of Dutch merchants and traders and colonists who didn't want to grant freedoms to the English or French. He argued for religious toleration. And in 1625 he brought out his famous work *De Jure Belli* which he introduced by saying "God, by the laws which He has given, has rendered these principles more clear and evident, even to those whose minds are less capable of strict reasoning. And He has also forbidden submission to those reckless impulses which, contrary to our own and others' good, prevent us observing the rules of reason and Nature; and thus does He control and restrain, within certain limits, our more violent passions."

In the case of different rules of law, feudal law, Roman law, municipal law, natural law and more, he sees God's divine law as the bedrock on which is built Natural law and reason. And he applies these three levels of consideration primarily to war. "War is not one of the social arts. Rather, it is something so horrible that only sheer necessity or perfect charity can make it lawful." Though he draws on earlier writers it is to his writings that we attribute the first discussions of what we have come to call, though with underlying unease, 'just war'. And with the difficulty of working his way through to the pronouncement of a just war it isn't surprising that he saw peace as pragmatic and utilitarian. It did not have to fight its way through the thickets of competing laws.

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"The Dutch negotiating team was a distinguished one, led by the noted jurist Hugo Grotius who had published his celebrated *Mare Librum* in the previous year. Grotius, whose book had the significant subtitle, *A Discourse concerning the right which the Hollanders claim of trade to India*, argued, as had the Dutch in Manhattan, that as soon as a nation erected a building on a piece of land, the land automatically became the property of that nation. He added that the Dutch, unlike the English, had spent vast sums of money fighting the natives in the East Indies and, in view of that, it was totally unfair of the English to dispute their rights to trade with these islands. The English East India Company disagreed, maintaining its right to trade with the Spice Islands by virtue of the fact that it got there first. 'Before these regions were known to you,' announced the directors grandly, 'we stood legally approved by their leaders and peoples, in pacts and agreements, as we can easily prove.' The conference ended with no formal agreement, but it had achieved the useful result of bringing the two sides together and many felt that it would be foolish not to continue the dialogue."

From *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* by Giles Milton.

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April 11: Cyril Pearl

April 12: Scott Turow

Alan Ayckbourn

Gary Soto

April 13: Samuel Beckett

Seamus Heaney

April 14: Arnold Toynbee

April 15: Jeffrey Archer
Tomas Transtromer
April 16: Marion Halligan
J. M. Synge
April 17: Isek Dinesen
April 18: Richard Bausch
April 19: Melville Post
April 20: Dinah Craik
Deborah Barham (d)

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Peter Barham in *The Invisible Girl* wrote about his daughter, D. A. ‘Debs’ Barham, who died of anorexia in her twenties. I had not heard of her but she was an immensely talented and successful gag writer in England, churning out one-liners, captions, skits, columns, material for comedians like Graham Norton, in other words one of the people who keep the business of comedy rolling. The book is Peter Barham’s chance to scarify himself for not being there through his daughter’s difficult childhood but he does provide some insight into both her success and the drive to succeed which eventually killed her.

“I am about to get an insight into Debs’ obsessional work routine and the way she goes about her craft. I am instructed to go to the newsagent and get various newspapers. These, along with Internet links to a number of news sites, give her the complete picture of the events of the day. I watch as she scans the pages, carefully making notes about the stories that stimulate her wicked sense of humour. This is the fodder for her next round of ‘topicals’ – newsy gags – that she will send out to various clients in newspapers, TV, and radio.

“Some stories she stores away for future sketches, sitcom ideas, even plays. She reads incredibly fast, but misses nothing, finishing each paper in minutes, and then, with all useful gossip and celebrity misfortune filed away in her photographic memory, consigns the paper to the bin. She rarely needs to refer back to the stories. Notebook after notebook lists each day’s headlines, and these offer a fascinating snapshot of the important, or bizarre, events of the day. The stories that catch her eye today, 25 June 1999, are:

Dyke appointed Director General of the BBC; 500,000 passport backlog; Clapton guitar goes for £300,000; EU to block GM research; Glastonbury Music Festival starts; Baby left at Palace; London traders ‘dress down’; Cinema in car plan; Jonathon Aitken’s poetry published; Eurotunnel sniffer dogs retired; Welsh African to coach England cricketers; Human cloning ban; world’s longest sermon preached; mad cow disease from contact lenses; Bush wife smuggles dresses/jewels; Another Marks and Spencer profit warning ...

We watch in awe as she types at frantic speed, despite the restrictions of only a palm-sized keyboard. Instead of using all her fingers, like on a conventional computer, she holds the small contraption with her hands and types with her thumbs, her long, slender digits ideal for covering all the characters.”

He only provides the occasional piece of writing but it becomes clear that a major preoccupation of hers was death; something which she treated with savage and macabre humour:

‘The writer of *The Joy of Sex* has died. He’s now writing a posthumous chapter on how to stay permanently stiff.’

‘Legendary animator Chuck Jones has died. As a mark of respect his body will be splatted with a 16-ton weight before being dropped off a cliff top where it will remain suspended in the air for several seconds before plummeting 300 ft down and leaving a body-shaped hole in the ground.’

There is an image of comedians and comic writers battling depression behind the mask of laughter but whether they suffer more than most, whether they use humour as a way of keeping the black dogs at bay, whether writing humour is a health hazard—if anyone has ever seriously looked at this question I have not come across their findings. But I am inclined to think that comic writers are born and bred, despite various articles on how to write humour I don't think you can do more than learn to edit and polish humour, so the depression may be incidental and no worse than for serious writers or it may belong to a particular personality type. It may even be that people who push the boundaries of horror, of tragedy, of humour, of acceptability, of anything, are more susceptible. It may also be why some of the most successful comedy writers have preferred to work in tandem ...

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But did I want to write about anorexia or about writing comedy? The curious thing is that although there are now many books about anorexia and bulimia very few people write about writing comedy. They write about comedians. Comedians and comedy actors write about themselves. But books telling you how to write funny dialogue, amusing plots, laughable scenarios, hold-your-sides narrative, comic characters, fall-about-laughing one-liners—all and any of the above are hard to find. Why is this?

Humour is personal. What one person finds funny ... but then what one person finds romantic ...

Yet there are guidelines for romances. When it comes to humour tutors and practitioners can say things like 'keep it simple', 'keep it sharp', 'have a good punch-line' but that isn't always good advice. It depends what you're writing.

Clever things for a stand-up comic aren't quite the same as a skit which requires superb timing for, say, the Two Ronnies, and that isn't quite what's needed for a comic novel where the humour is embedded in the situation. The person doing saucy seaside postcards is looking at a different kind of humour to a P.G. Wodehouse ... One of Banjo Paterson's humorous ballads such as 'A Bush Christening' is using humour in a different way to Kaz Cooke in one of her biting columns ...

But one thing I think all humour needs is an underlying sense of the absurd ...

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April 21: Charlotte Brontë

Alistair MacLean

April 22: Henry Fielding

April 23: Charles Johnson

William Shakespeare

Halldor Laxness

April 24: Sue Grafton

Marcus Clarke

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"If you're using a computer, make use of your word processing program's spell checker—but beware. Most programs won't detect misused words or inverted word order, and sometimes they can be downright dangerous to proper nouns. A friend of mine had already called FedEx to pick up her manuscript when she decided to give it one last look—to her horror, she realized that a character named "Brian" had been rechristened by her spell checker and was now known as "Brain" throughout the manuscript."

Jan Burke in *Writing Mysteries*, edited by Sue Grafton.

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I could not help a wry smile when I read this little item in *The Sunday Tasmanian's* Bookchat column (2/5/2010), now sadly defunct, "There were giggles and one red face at a book presentation at Fullers in Hobart.

“Kirsty Manning-Wilcox, co-author with Peta Heine of *We Love Food*, a garden-to-table guide for parents wanting to nurture a love of food, was horrified when told by a Tassie cook that the book’s instructions for baking lamb pies called for freshly ground “black people” instead of black pepper.

“Publisher Hardie Grant could blame the proofreaders or a computer’s wonky spell-checker, but this is not the only instance of such a mistake.

“Penguin Australia confirmed it had been forced to pulp 7000 copies of a cookbook, *Pasta Bible*, because a tagliatelle with sardines and prosciutto recipe incorrectly suggested adding salt and freshly ground “black people”.

“A Penguin spokesman apologised for “any offence” the error may have caused and offered readers the choice of either a full refund or a replacement copy when a new edition is printed later this month.

“The mistake cost Penguin \$20,000.”

Publishing companies have, bit by bit, put off editors and proofreaders or handed this important job over to computers. Perhaps a bill for \$20,000 will encourage publishing companies to see reliance on computers’ spell-checkers as a false economy.

And more recently I have come on this (*The Sunday Tasmanian* 17/10/2010), “You wouldn’t read about such publicity for an author ... unless, of course, that author happened to be American Jonathan Franzen. Firstly, Franzen’s new novel *Freedom* created such a stir in the US that he became the first living author in more than a decade to appear on the cover of *Time*.

“However in Britain Franzen begged readers not to buy his book until HarperCollins imprint Fourth Estate replaced his missing commas and made other corrections. Typesetters in Britain — and Australia — had accidentally opened and copied a computer file of an uncorrected draft.

“HarperCollins Australia has set up a hotline, 1300 551 721, for booksellers and customers wanting to exchange copies. It will pulp 20,000 uncorrected copies.”

In the old days authors received and checked and if necessary corrected galley proofs. It would save a lot of trees if they reintroduced the practice. Although I haven’t read *Freedom* I did come across his earlier novel *Corrections* and gave it a whirl. (Now the name seems to have a greater significance!) But in the end I felt Franzen wasn’t my cup of tea, despite the imprimatur of Oprah Winfrey’s Book Club. It seemed to be a number of different ‘books’, a campus novel, a story about old age, etc, linked up with some precious waffle. And I think that was my fundamental problem with it. The narrative is written in a modestly literary style but the dialogue is so appallingly banal that I cringed at times. I hear more interesting conversations on buses ...

So why was it so popular in the USA? I suspect that Oprah was right in divining that many American families would see something of themselves in the book ... And although I couldn’t get excited about his writing I did like it that he is a passionate birdwatcher; most of the world’s birds need all the help they can get.

* * * * *

And I notice that Sue Grafton is asking that readers not write to her if they find some small error in one of her mysteries. Was this because she gets more mail than she can cope with? Or because she doesn’t contemplate a second edition so there isn’t very much point in stewing over minor problems? Or does she believe, like Harriet Vane, in *Gaudy Night*, “I’ve never yet succeeded in producing a plot without at least six major howlers. Fortunately, nine readers out of ten get mixed up too, so it doesn’t matter. The tenth writes me a letter, and I promise to make the correction in the second edition, but I never do. After all, my books are only meant for fun; it’s not like a work of scholarship.”

Yet a mistake is a mistake, no matter how innocently done, and I always cringe when I came back to something I’ve written and find a very obvious mistake ... even if I am its sole reader ... just that feeling of falling short ... of doing something silly ... of being careless ...

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April 25: Walter de la Mare

Ted Kooser

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Ted Kooser was the United States 13th Poet Laureate. I don't know how well they remunerate such poets but I'm sure they get more than a butt of wine. In his *The Poetry Home Repair Manual* he writes, "A noted contemporary poet and critic has said we ought to keep poetry a secret from the masses. Another, the editor of a prestigious anthology of poetry, said that each nation ought to have no more than a handful of poets. Both sound pretty elitest, don't they? Well, we'll always have among us those who think the best should be reserved for the few. Considering the ways in which so many of us waste our time, what would be wrong with a world in which *everybody* were writing poems? After all, there's a significant service to humanity in spending time doing no harm. While you're writing your poem, there's one less scoundrel in the world. And I'd like a world, wouldn't you, in which people actually took time to think about what they were saying? It would be, I'm certain, a more peaceful, more reasonable place. I don't think there could ever be too many poets. By writing poetry, even those poems that fail and fail miserably, we honor and affirm life. We say "We loved the earth but could not stay." "

He speaks of his own early influences. "Most poets can recall some early reading experience that triggered their interest in writing. For example, I first read Walter de la Mare's poem "The Listeners" when I was thirteen or fourteen, and I've never quite recovered. "The Listeners" was in a junior high English textbook, and my class discussed it at great length, puzzling over its mystery. It's about an anonymous horseman who stops by a darkened house one night, pounds on the door, and calls out to the absent occupants. Nobody answers his knock, but inside the house are ghostly listeners."

Fifteen years later Kooser put this idea of an unresolved mystery into his own poem, 'Abandoned Farmhouse':

He was a big man, says the size of his shoes
on a pile of broken dishes by the house;
a tall man too, says the length of the bed
in an upstairs room; and a good, God-fearing man,
says the bible with a broken back
on the floor below a window, dusty with sun;
but not a man for farming, say the fields
cluttered with boulders and the leaky barn.

A woman lived with him, say the bedroom wall
papered with lilacs and the kitchen shelves
covered with oilcloth, and they had a child,
says the sandbox made from a tractor tire.
Money was scarce, say the jars of plum preserves
and canned tomatoes sealed in the cellar hole,
and the winters cold, say the rags in the window frames.
It was lonely here, says the narrow country road.

Something went wrong, says the empty house
in the weed-choked yard. Stones in the fields
say he was not a farmer; the still-sealed jars
in the cellar say she left in a nervous haste.
And the child? Its toys are strewn in the yard
like branches after a storm—a rubber cow,
a rusty tractor with a broken plow,
a doll in overalls. Something went wrong, they say.

Like ‘The Listeners’ this poem is now in the reading books of thirteen and fourteen year olds. I don’t like poems to simply be obscure but I do like that underlying sense of mystery.

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Walter de la Mare said to Sir Russell Brain: ‘I believe that telepathy is almost continuous. If you and I were not in telepathic communication now we couldn’t carry on our conversation.’

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April 26: Morris West

A. E. van Vogt

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“The writer who carried his dream work to the greatest extremes was science fiction author A.E. van Vogt. He used to set an alarm clock to go off every 45 minutes. He would wake up, consider how what he’d dreamed in the previous period might advance the story he was writing and try to figure out any story problems, then go back to sleep. This went on all night. It sounds a bit mad, but van Vogt wrote hundreds of short stories and many novels, and was considered one of the top science fiction writers of the mid-twentieth century.”

From *The Mothman Prophecies* by John A. Keel.

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Neil Barron wrote of van Vogt’s *The Book of Ptath* in his encyclopaedia of fantasy books: “Novel of the very far future first published in *Unknown* (1943). Having reincarnated himself in the twentieth century to get a taste of the human perspective, the god Ptath returns home to discover that one of his two goddess/wives has brought off an Olympian *coup d’etat*, and he faces an uphill struggle to restore his supremacy. Most of van Vogt’s SF features men who have or acquire godlike power; it is entirely appropriate that his one overt foray into fantasy should feature gods striving for manlike power.”

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But van Vogt did not only depend on his dreams for ideas. He had spent his early childhood in a Russian Mennonite farming community in Canada, he had written for the pulp magazines, he had been a bureaucrat, and then he had moved to California where he was surrounded by fantasy, cults, ideas, and strange beliefs. What I found interesting was the very varied responses to his fiction from the critics. So I thought it was time to ‘see for myself’ because you can never go by what the critics say, for or against, and no matter how eruditely or entertainingly they write.

The library had one on their shelves. *Slan Hunter* by Alfred van Vogt and Kevin J. Anderson. This was van Vogt’s last book. He was suffering from Alzheimer’s and died before he could finish it. Kevin Anderson with help from van Vogt’s wife Lydia got it finished and published. It is a humans versus aliens story with a twist in the tail. But it is more complex than good humans versus bad aliens because there are slans with tendrils which help them read minds and communicate telepathically already living secretly on Earth and there are slans without tendrils who live on Mars and invade Earth and who, rather clumsily, are referred to as the Tendrillless.

It isn’t very well written but then it is probably amazing that van Vogt in his last difficult months managed to plot a story with complicated twists and turns and moral dilemmas and jammed with action. (Since then I have found a copy of his 1939 novel *Slan*, to which *Slan Hunter* is the sequel; strictly speaking there is not a great deal of difference in the writing; the earlier book seems to have a greater freshness and richness and more interplay between the characters—and less action—but no, I have not become a slan-fan ...) And although we enjoyed stories with secret civilisations and invasion fleets on Mars sixty years ago now they are harder to accept—what with little robot vehicles running round Mars and scooping up its rocks and failing to find those secret civilisations. But he asks the key question for all invasion stories: would any high technology aliens really want to acquire what he calls a ‘charred ball’? And if they are genuinely more advanced would they merely discuss whether to enslave or exterminate humans or would they want to understand how humans might fit a vital

ecological niche on Earth? We have seen it happen over and over. Remove one species, say snakes, and another species, say rodents, explodes. So it begs the question: what ecological niche do, or did, humans evolve to fill?

And I have a much more domestic query: how did Lydia van Vogt cope as her husband's alarm clock went off every forty-five minutes? Did she sleep at the other end of the house perhaps or with ear-muffs?

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April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft

April 28: Terry Pratchett

Harper Lee

April 29: Jill Paton Walsh

April 30: Paul Jennings

John Crowe Ransom

May 1: Terry Southern

May 2: Alan Marshall

Jerome K. Jerome

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Jerome K. Jerome wrote in *Three Men on the Bummel*, which isn't a kind of bicycle and which was published in 1900, "To Hanover one should go, they say, to learn the best German. The disadvantage is that outside Hanover, which is only a small province, nobody understands this best German. Thus you have to decide whether to speak good German and remain in Hanover, or bad German and travel about. Germany being separated so many centuries into a dozen principalities, is unfortunate in possessing a variety of dialects. Germans from Posen wishful to converse with men from Württemberg, have to talk as often as not in French or English; and young ladies who have received an expensive education in Westphalia surprise and disappoint their parents by being unable to understand a word said to them in Mechlenburg. An English-speaking foreigner, it is true, would find himself equally nonplussed among the Yorkshire wolds, or in the purlieus of Whitechapel; but the cases are not on all fours. Throughout Germany it is only in the country districts and among the uneducated that dialects are maintained. Every province has practically its own language, of which it is proud and retentive. An educated Bavarian will admit to you that, academically speaking, the North German is more correct; but he will continue to speak South German and to teach it to his children.

"In the course of the century, I am inclined to think that Germany will solve her difficulty in this respect by speaking English. Every boy and girl in Germany, above the peasant class, speaks English. Were English pronunciation less arbitrary, there is not the slightest doubt but that in the course of a very few years, comparatively speaking, it would become the language of the world. All foreigners agree that, grammatically, it is the easiest language of any to learn. A German, comparing it with his own language, where every word in every sentence is governed by at least four distinct and separate rules, tells you that English has no grammar. A good many English people would seem to have come to the same conclusion; but they are wrong. As a matter of fact, there is an English grammar, and one of these days our schools will recognize the fact, and it will be taught to our children, penetrating maybe even into literary and journalistic circles. But at present we appear to agree with the foreigner that it is a quantity neglectable. English pronunciation is the stumbling-block to our progress. English spelling would seem to have been designed chiefly as a disguise to pronunciation. It is a clever idea, calculated to check presumption on the part of the foreigner; but for that he would learn it in a year."

And so it came to pass ... and English ultimately swept the world ...

* * * * *

If you had happened to leap out from the bushes to demand not my money or my life but what I knew about Terence Rattigan I would first have looked blank and then I would have conjured up a nervous smile and said, "French Without Tears."

That was all I knew, and then only because I saw the film version many years ago; certainly I knew nothing of Rattigan's career or indeed the play's career. But I have just been reading Geoffrey Wansell's biography of Rattigan and the play actually started out under the title *Gone Away*. The change of name was felicitous but the rehearsals were disastrous and its cast expected it to be a flop. Instead, when it opened in London in 1936—"At the theatre, it was soon clear that the audience, even though they had struggled through the rain to see 'A Light Comedy in Three Acts', were in extremely good humour. When the curtain rose on Trevor Howard trying to finish his French composition, the actress Cicely Courtneidge giggled loudly in the stalls. By the time Guy Middleton had joined him in the living-room of Miramar, Monsieur Maingot's villa in a small seaside town in the south of France, to order his breakfast in the worst schoolboy French anyone had ever heard, the mood was set.

KENNETH: If you're so hot, you'd better tell me how to say she has ideas above her station.

BRIAN: Oh, yes, I forgot. It's fairly easy, old boy. Elle a des idées au-dessus de sa gare.

The audience roared, and for years to come, at cocktail parties and country house weekends, the exchange was repeated with affection and its eternal pay-off: 'You see, it wasn't that sort of station.' "

The play brought him almost instant success. "Within four weeks of the show's opening he was earning more than £1,000 a month in royalties alone, and within eighteen months it had brought him more than £23,000. At the age of twenty-five, Terence Rattigan had become one of the most talked-about young men in London."

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But Wansell also says of Rattigan, "If my father had had the slightest inkling of Terence Rattigan's own sexual preferences, it would have coloured his views about him, but fortunately he never had. Rattigan was careful to disguise the truth about his own sexuality for the simple and compelling reason that to have revealed it would have endangered his appeal to my father, and to millions of other ordinary British theatregoers like him. It was a precise reflection of the time.

"But it was not the potential prejudice of the ordinary members of the theatre audience, like my father, that ultimately destroyed Terence Rattigan's reputation as a dramatist in Britain and around the world – far from it. Rattigan was denied his place at the pinnacle of contemporary English drama by the bigotry, jealousy and shortsightedness of an influential group of individuals in what came to be the English theatrical establishment. As a result of their prejudice, and for no sound reason, he was suddenly, unforgivably and unreasonably dismissed as a playwright of no consequence. It was to break his spirit, I believe, and shorten his life."

Terence Rattigan remained 'within the closet' all his life. Even after the law in Britain was changed and homosexual acts no longer led to a prison sentence he remained reticent and circumspect. But it wasn't his sexuality which undermined his popularity. A good dollop of envy came into it. Along with the enduring belief that it is easier to write light comedy than 'serious stuff'—which naturally raises the question why there is so little good light comedy around if it is a breeze to write and always popular—and Rattigan himself probably didn't help matters when he wrote in his preface to his first *Collected Plays*, "These five plays, however, as I have already had the honesty to confess, did please the million, and I find myself thus inevitably 'one down'. I am not able, as is my 'one up' rival, to attack the state of the modern theatre, to deplore the commercialism of Shaftesbury Avenue (all these plays were performed either in Shaftesbury Avenue or within a hundred yards of it), to revile the shortsightedness of West End managers (all my managers have had offices in the West End, and none of them, with regard to my own plays, has seemed noticeably myopic), to pay tribute to the courage and enterprise of small repertory theatres outside London. (I would willingly do so, were I not deterred by the memory of one earnest young repertory manager who once said to me, in all good faith: 'What's so nice about doing your plays in my theatre is that their profits pay for the good ones.')

 While, of course,

the claims of gratitude, no less than of ordinary self-preservation, prevent me from flattering my dear but as yet untried friend, the reader, at the expense of my old and trusted ally, the audience.

“Yet, to me at least, the impartiality of my hypothetical rival, the unpopular dramatist, in prefatorially attacking the West End theatre, is also rather suspect. Lady Bracknell’s reproof to her nephew seems apposite in this context: ‘Never speak disrespectfully of Society, Algernon. Only people who can’t get into it do that.’ I don’t want to be as snobbish as Lady Bracknell nor to patronize my highbrow rival from the pinnacle of my lowbrow success, but I sometimes mildly wonder, when reading his vituperations against Shaftesbury Avenue, whether a nice solid two-year run for one of his plays at, say, the Globe Theatre, would not have slightly mellowed his views.”

Reminding less-popular-playwrights that the money generated from his successes was helping to put on their offerings might have been honest but was hardly the best way to win friends. And now it is easier to see that the plays which have delight in their nostalgia, their sense of an ease and comfort, an almost Edwardian elegance, got up the noses of many young people. They were a reminder of all the inequalities and discriminations and put-downs that many people experienced in Britain. Rattigan’s leisured world with its parlour maids and its little servilities was a clear illustration of the way that leisure was built on the hard work and low pay of a different class. The new playwrights, the John Osbornes and Arnold Weskers and Harold Pinters, were writing about a different class and a different experience of life. They weren’t necessarily better written or better constructed. But now theatre goers would see the wife, not the maid, doing the ironing. It had its attractions. Unfortunately Rattigan brought up in a different world, his father had been a diplomat, could only see that audiences and critics were turning their attention to the new playwrights with their blunter language and rougher manners and fewer euphemisms. His dismay and sense of neglect was understandable.

Perhaps Shakespeare was wise to retire peacefully to Stratford. Every style is overtaken ...

So what of *French Without Tears*? Does it still raise a smile? As no one is offering to put on a production I have been reading the script. And it came with an odd sense of *déjà vu* almost—as my son Ken had just gone off to Montpellier in the south of France to go to a French language college—because the play starts with the instruction: *As the curtain rises KENNETH is discovered sitting at the table. He is about twenty, good-looking in a rather vacuous way ...* except that my Ken is good-looking but older and certainly not vacuous and I take heart that the character was first played by Trevor Howard ...

It probably helps the enjoyment of the play if you do know some French but it isn’t essential. And like virtually all Rattigan’s plays it is about the relationships of young high-spirited comfortably-off people. They probably don’t learn much French. But yes, the play does still raise a smile.

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And what of the other way around? Jerome says, “In England we have a method that for obtaining the least possible result at the greatest possible expenditure of time and money is perhaps unequalled. An English boy who has been through a good middle-class school in England can talk to a Frenchman, slowly and with difficulty, about female gardeners and aunts; conversation which, to a man possessed perhaps of neither, is liable to pall. Possibly, if he be a bright exception, he may be able to tell the time, or make a few guarded observations concerning the weather. No doubt he could repeat a goodly number of irregular verbs by heart; only, as a matter of fact, few foreigners care to listen to their own irregular verbs, recited by young Englishmen. Likewise he might be able to remember a choice selection of grotesquely involved French idioms, such as no modern Frenchman has ever heard or understands when he does hear.

“The explanation is that, in nine cases out of ten, he has learnt French from ‘Ahn’s First-Course.’ The history of this famous work is remarkable and instructive. The book was originally written for a joke by a witty Frenchman who had resided for some years in England. He intended it as a satire upon the conversational powers of British society. From this point of view it was distinctly good. He

submitted it to a London publishing firm. The manager was a shrewd man. He read the book through. Then he sent for the author.

‘This book of yours,’ said he to the author, ‘is very clever. I have laughed over it myself till the tears came.’

‘I am delighted to hear you say so,’ replied the pleased Frenchman. ‘I tried to be truthful without being unnecessarily offensive.’

‘It is most amusing,’ concurred the manager; ‘and yet published as a harmless joke, I feel it would fail.’

The author’s face fell.

‘Its humour,’ proceeded the manager, ‘would be denounced as forced and extravagant. It would amuse the thoughtful and intelligent, but from a business point of view that portion of the public are never worth considering. But I have an idea,’ continued the manager. He glanced round the room to be sure they were alone, and leaning forward sunk his voice to a whisper. ‘My notion is to publish it as a serious work for the use of schools!’

The author stared, speechless.

‘I know the English schoolman,’ said the manager; ‘this book will appeal to him. It will exactly fit in with his method. Nothing sillier, nothing more useless for the purpose will he ever discover. He will smack his lips over the book, as a puppy licks up blacking.’

The author, sacrificing art to greed, consented. They altered the title and added a vocabulary, but left the book otherwise as it was.

“The result is known to every schoolboy. ‘Ahn’ became the palladium of English philological education. If it no longer retains its ubiquity, it is because something even less adaptable to the object in view has been since invented.

“Lest, in spite of all, the British schoolboy should obtain, even from the like of ‘Ahn,’ some glimmering of French, the British educational method further handicaps him by bestowing upon him the assistance of, what is termed in the prospectus, ‘A native gentleman.’ This native French gentleman, who, by the by, is generally a Belgian, is no doubt a most worthy person, and can, it is true, understand and speak his own language with tolerable fluency. There his qualifications cease. Invariably he is a man with a quite remarkable inability to teach anybody anything. Indeed, he would seem to be chosen not so much as an instructor as an amuser of youth. He is always a comic figure. No Frenchman of a dignified appearance would be engaged for any English school. If he possess by nature a few harmless peculiarities, calculated to cause merriment, so much the more is he esteemed by his employers. The class naturally regards him as an animated joke. The two to four hours a week that are deliberately wasted on this ancient farce, are looked forward to by the boys as a merry interlude in an otherwise monotonous existence. And then, when the proud parent takes his son and heir to Dieppe merely to discover that the lad does not know enough to call a cab, he abuses not the system but its innocent victim.”

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And will you find ‘Bummel’ in your German phrase-book or set of conversation tapes?

‘It has been a pleasant Bummel, on the whole,’ said Harris; ‘I shall be glad to get back, and yet I am sorry it is over, if you understand me.’

‘What is a “Bummel”?’ said George. ‘How would you translate it?’

‘A “Bummel,”’ I explained, ‘I should describe as a journey, long or short, without an end; the only thing regulating it being the necessity of getting back within a given time to the point from which one started. Sometimes it is through busy streets, and sometimes through the fields and lanes; sometimes we can be spared for a few hours, and sometimes for a few days. But long or short, but here or there, our thoughts are ever on the running of the sand. We nod and smile to many as we pass; with some we stop and talk awhile; and with a few we walk a little way. We have been much interested, and often a little tired. But on the whole we have had a pleasant time, and are sorry ’tis over.’

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May 3: May Sarton
Niccolò Machiavelli
May 4: William Prescott
May 5: Karl Marx
May 6: Rabindranath Tagore
Randall Jarrell
May 7: Peter Carey
May 8: Thomas Pynchon
Edward Gibbon
May 9: Herbert Russell Wakefield

* * * * *

I love a good ghost story and Wakefield was a good writer of ghost stories. In fact John Betjeman said of him “M. R. James is the greatest master of the ghost story. Henry James, Sheridan Le Fanu, and H. Russell Wakefield are equal second.” But he was unfortunate that he began his career just as the popularity of the ghost story was waning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and was given a temporary death knell with the horrors of World War I. By the time people wanted ghosts and hauntings and the macabre again Wakefield was an old man who felt his career hadn’t brought him the level of success and readership he had hoped for. Nevertheless he had a busy life, being for a while a private secretary to Lord Northcliffe and on the Western Front in WWI with the Royal Scots Fusiliers and as an ARP Warden in WW2. And not all his writings were ghost stories, for instance he wrote several whodunits, although the ghost story was obviously his favoured genre.

The *St James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* says, “Although H. R. Wakefield wrote over 60 ghost stories his work became neglected even in his own lifetime and remains so, despite a small but avid following. Yet he was one of the master writers of the ghost story of the first half of this century. He was one of the few English writers whose work spanned the period from the heyday of supernatural fiction in the 1920s to its re-emergence in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, due to the paucity of markets, Wakefield wrote little during the 1950s and what remained unpublished he destroyed shortly before his death.” He said his material would be of no interest to anyone which, sadly, seems to have been the case.

For all that they are a little dated they are still very readable. And I see that some of his stories are still being anthologised. I’ve just been re-reading his Haunted House story ‘Blind Man’s Buff’ in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Ghost Stories*. It isn’t the same, I know, because a book of stories gives a much better insight into a writer’s style and leanings and anthologies sometimes choose out atypical stories but it *is* better than being forgotten.

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To transfer the conventions of the European ghost story to Australia, haunted castles and fairy rings, diaphanous white ladies and headless horsemen, loch creatures and giant rats, was quite a challenge. Rosa Campbell Praed wrote in ‘The Bunyip’, “Every one who has lived in Australia has heard of the Bunyip. It is the one respectable flesh-curdling horror of which Australia can boast. The old world has her tales of ghoul and vampire, of Lorelei, spook, and pixie, but Australia has nothing but her Bunyip. There never were any fauns in the eucalyptus forests, nor any naiads in the running creeks. No mythological hero left behind him stories of wonder and enchantment. No white man’s hand has carved record of a poetic past on the grey volcanic-looking boulders that over-shadow some lonely gullies which I know. There are no sepulchres hewn in the mountain rampart surrounding a certain dried-up lake—probably the crater of an extinct volcano—familiar to my childhood, and which in truth suggests possibilities of a forgotten city of Kör. Nature and civilisation have been very niggard here in all that makes romance.”

If nothing else the late twentieth century brought home the understanding that ghosts and horror do not require all the traditional trappings to be effective. Yet Australia hasn't produced much that impresses in the fields of horror or the supernatural. Perhaps we are burdened with the knowledge that the ghosts which might people the landscape are most likely to be the victims of the many massacres of indigenous people at the hands of white arrivals. It has an inhibiting effect.

* * * * *

Mark Barber in *Urban Legends* tells a version of the Vanishing Hitch-hiker story (in which a motorist picks up a young girl late at night, delivers her home and finds she has vanished; the people at the address she gave say it is the anniversary of their daughter's death) and writes "It is widely believed by folklorists that The Vanishing Hitch-hiker is derived from old European supernatural folk legends and was spread to the USA by European immigrants who had started a new life in New York, with the earliest known versions dating back to the end of the nineteenth century.

"It could even be said that there is a version in the most famous book of all time (no, no, I am not talking about a Harry Potter book, I mean the Bible.) You don't believe me? Well, if you think back to your glorious days of Sunday school, you may remember the story of the Ethiopian who picks up the apostle Philip in his chariot, and how the latter baptises the Ethiopian and then promptly disappears. (Acts 8: 26-39, New Testament). Not many ULs can stake a claim to being in the Bible.

"In order to be believable, ULs must adapt to stay tuned with the different time periods in which it is being related. In the earliest versions known, the girl would disappear on horseback. As the centuries rolled on, the form of transport changed to the horse and wagon, and eventually to the car, as we know it today." Then he asks "So what makes this UL so special that it has remained a popular story throughout the centuries? The main reason is that if you strip the story down to the bone, you are left with a classic ghost story. The fact that the ghost appears to be so realistic and actually speaks with the driver makes this UL even more disturbing. This isn't a *Scooby Doo* ghost, which ends up being the old professor with a sheet over his head. This is more like a ragged looking Bruce Willis with 'I see dead people' still ringing in his ear.

"If you peel away the surface of this legend, it appears that the dead girl is lost between worlds and the scenario of the girl's fatal journey home that Saturday night years before is being replayed over and over again like a scratched record, with her final thought of getting home safely still haunting her."

Strictly speaking, this would appear to be a psychic imprint, as it is so closely linked to a route where something tragic happened. A ghost in the sense of a lost soul is not linked necessarily to a particular place.

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M. R. James was just a little older than Wakefield and a little better known; perhaps because he started publishing his ghost stories when there were many outlets for them or because he had achieved some fame for his other writings. Certainly at least one of his stories seems to appear in each anthology of ghost stories published. But when I was reading Michael Cox's biography of him I found he had occasionally turned his hand to verse including this piece he wrote for his sister Grace in 1888:

All through the rushes, and in the bushes,
Odd creatures slip in the dark,
And sulky owls with feathery cowl
Go sweeping about the park.

You hear on the breeze from behind the trees
The Ampton clock begin,
And when it is still, how thin and shrill
The bell of the Hall chimes in.

Then the horses stir and the sleepy cats purr

And something moves in the fern.
And did you not see in the hollow oak tree
Two eyes begin to burn?

You heard a foot pass, it trailed over the grass,
You shivered, it came so near.
And was it the head of a man long dead
That raised itself out of the mere?

It isn't deathless verse but I felt that poetry is curiously suitable for creating that moment of the cold shiver; the very form discourages the heavy handed use of too many adjectives, of the impulse to pile awfulness on awfulness until it becomes mere melodrama, and poetry also seems to ask for the ambiguity and mystery that clings round the best ghost stories ...

M. R. James was a rather dry Cambridge don, an amateur archeologist, an antiquarian with a particular interest in old manuscripts, a translator, a cataloguer, a writer of books such as a *Guide to the Windows of King's College Chapel* and an *Apocryphal New Testament*, a lifelong bachelor with no particular interest in women or in any sort of relationship other than friendship but also, surprisingly, a man who had disciples in his chosen genre such as E. G. Swain. His ghost stories seem to have been more than an occasional bit of light relief in an academic life; he does seem to have believed there is an element of the inexplicable beyond the every day.

Darryl Jones describes them—"In the typical James story, a bachelor don or antiquarian scholar discovers a lost manuscript or artefact which unleashes supernatural forces, often causing him to rethink his comfortable assumptions about the nature of reality." He says some of his James' stories are set in schools or university colleges but "more usually the stories take the scholar away from institutional security, and it is here that danger really lurks. It is for this reason that the hotel or inn features so heavily as the locus for horror in James—in 'Canon Alberic's Scrap-book', 'Number 13', 'Oh, Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad', 'A Warning to the Curious', 'Rats', and others. To step outside of institutions is to court danger."

Yet he took little interest in groups such as the Society for Psychical Research and he was usually critical of other writers on the supernatural; on Herbert Russell Wakefield's first book *They Return at Evening* which came out in 1928 he said the book "gives us a mixed bag, from which I should remove one or two that leave a nasty taste". As his own ghosts and demons were never friendly helpful souls I found myself wondering just what he meant by a 'nasty taste' ...

And although the two men had very similar backgrounds, both being sons of Anglican clergymen, I find Wakefield much the more sympathetic writer and person. James with his cold detachment and misogyny in fact leaves more in the way of a 'nasty taste'. Yet perhaps kind warm friendly helpful neighbourly people, loving husbands and fathers, do not make the best writers of ghost stories ...

* * * * *

"The hope of all religions is that the person achieves peace after death. And despite the fact that many spooky stories are set in the churchyard, when sitting in the one at St. Edward's, Leek, in Staffordshire where I live, I always pick up a great sense of wellbeing there, of nature and of peace. I think this is common to most churchyards. They are in fact some of the most peaceful of places on earth."

From *Living with Ghosts* by Paul Gater.

* * * * *

So what makes a good ghost story? The general consensus seems to be that it is important for the writer to leave things to the imagination; that unlike Hercule Poirot dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't' the reader is left slightly adrift and can choose to read the supernatural into it rather than be left with the writer's firm conviction that there is no other answer. Yet it is this very sense of uncertainty which

leaves non-admirers of the ghost story cold. They see it as a cop-out. The writer has set up a mystery and failed to solve it.

This thought led me on to another thought. The best writers of ghost stories are rarely strongly rationalist people but rather people with a religious background (Wakefield was a son of an Anglican Bishop of Birmingham) or with an interest in religion. An interest in the mysteries of life and life beyond death, of faith and resurrection and the unseen and unknowable, seems to add verisimilitude to the writing. Perhaps it has a lot to do with that old adage on writing about what interests you. And people who ponder on the things which can't be pinned and sliced and counted and measured and magnified are more likely to leave that intriguing hint of uncertainty ...

Wakefield himself wrote a piece 'Why I Write Ghost Stories' in which he says: "We have to remember and face the fact that we have not, and cannot have, any acquaintance with, let us say, more than a millionth part of what is loosely called 'reality', or the final truth about the universe, which may be, indeed, from our point of view, fundamentally irrational. Remember that we can see only one octave of all the myriad wave-lengths. We are almost totally blind. It is said that bees can see infra-red rays. If so, they are a little less blind than we are, and they see an entirely different world from ours. We can see only what we are capable of seeing, and our minds have nothing more than their sensory data to work with. Therefore we can understand so much and no more, for our apparatus of cognition is utterly inadequate to grasp the whole. We see perhaps only one octave of the rays of reality, and ghosts, it may be, lie outside that octave, or rather just in and just out of it; they are Dwellers on the Threshold. The realm in which they have their being lies just outside our area of comprehension, but not absolutely and at all times, though there is evidence that some persons are quite blind to all suggestive psychic phenomena – animals, apparently, are more suggestible than we are, which is odd." But then animals are not troubled with a sceptical mind ... And I like his image: Dwellers on the Threshold. It is very evocative.

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May 10: Monica Dickens

May 11: Stanley Elkin

May 12: Edward Lear

May 13: Daphne du Maurier

Jephson Beauchamp Cameron

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I remember my Uncle Jeph as an indefatigable writer of Letters to the Editor in his old age but I did not know he wrote poems in his youth until his daughter Marie brought out a lovely little memoir of his life; helped by the fact that he had kept a detailed diary of his early life when he went looking for work in the last years of the Depression. He was a keen observer and a precise recorder of details. Just two of his entries:

From 1936 in Gympie: 'In the morning A. took me for a stroll round one of the dumps and showed me where a friend of his makes bricks in his spare time. He must have had a thousand or more stacked up, drying in the shade, ready or nearly ready for firing. A. tried to make one, but without success. There were a few men picking over the mullock dumps. He says they make a sort of a living, sometimes getting a couple of ounces in one stone, sometimes working for weeks for nothing. The old cemetery is not far off. Most of the graves are of young men, miners apparently. A. said in the old days when a man was broke he would dig up a few Chinese graves. There were a few bob buried in each.'

And from later that year: 'We started cutting cane a week ago today. It is a filthy job when burnt, and backbreaking till you get used to it. We shave only on Saturday evening, so that the resultant crop will protect our faces from the sharp cane leaves. Mr Wyllie went to Brisbane on Wednesday to get his nose attended to, and Eric and I are batching. I do the cooking, as Eric cried off. My first johnny cake was like leather, my apple sago sticky, my tapioca cream nice but unspeakably rich, and my rock cakes not in the least like the ones they make at home, but I am improving now. The trouble is that we have

to cook at night, as we are busy all day. The railway had the first truck two days late last week, which messed us up a bit. However, we cut and loaded two trucks, and planted a few spuds. This week we may have three trucks, but will be into better cane. The first patch was very light. We went into Maryborough yesterday for the day. It is not a bad town, but flat and the road leading to it is rough, as Eric found to his cost. I was struck by the immense bell tower of the Church of England, like a mediaeval keep. I got a new spark plug, as I think the old one was done for. We had to roast meat on Saturday, and I burnt the fat a bit, but not badly. On Saturday afternoon we did our washing, and had a good swim.

‘There is a wonderful selection of eerie night voices round here. Curlews, flying foxes, swamp pheasants, owls, sea eagles, and I know not what else.’

He became a dairy farmer on the Darling Downs, he went to World War II and was in Syria and Palestine and North Africa then in New Guinea where he was wounded and while he was convalescing in Brisbane he met his future wife. In his old age he retired to Toowoomba. He continued to keep a diary in the war years and also wrote a short piece about the men threatening to descend on a German POW camp and kill the inmates. ‘I don’t know what they expected to see inside the wire. Probably they had a mental picture of arrogant and brutal Nazis, boasting and sneering at us in the manner of Lord Haw-Haw, cheekily sure that they were winning, and that we would soon be licking their boots. What they did see was just a bunch of soldiers down on their luck.

‘We all knew what that was like. We may have had a bad run at two-up, or tripped over one of the pitfalls in A.M.R. & O. and had to front the C.O. Or it may have been bad news from home, and us half a world away and unable to help. But these poor beggars were in more strife than Speed Gordon. They were enduring the same heat and dust as were we, but they couldn’t scrounge odds and ends and build dugouts. They couldn’t visit the beach or the canteen, or wash their clothes in the smelly water from the rock cisterns. They couldn’t expect any beer ration or food parcels, probably no letters for a long time to come. Only a dreary journey into a captivity of unknown duration.

‘Our men took one look and made a bee line for the canteen, to spend their loose cash on cigarettes. When I passed, they were handing these through the wire to their fellow soldiers. I felt then that, whoever lost the war, God was going to win in the end.’

On the surface it wasn’t a very exciting life but I always felt he got a lot of interest and enjoyment out of small things. And I felt sorry that he hadn’t continued to write poetry and develop as a poet. Here are a couple of those early poems, what would now be classed as juvenilia if he had gone on writing poetry, and which seem to me to show a definite poetic bent.

He called this piece written in 1932 ‘Sir Walter Scott’.

A century ago he died
Whose name shall live for long;
The minstrel of the Border side,
The King of Scottish song.

He died? Not so; he lives today
To those who understand
The love of Nature, of Mankind,
And of a native land.

The stir of courts, war’s wild alarms,
The cooing of a dove,
The fiery cross’s call to arms,
A maiden’s bashful love.

The hills and dales in gold arrayed

At close of summer's day,
The beauty of a highland glade,
The streamlet's idle lay.

All these he knew, and of them made
A lamp for Wisdom's shrine,
A light that nevermore shall fade,
Kindled by spark divine.

While life to mankind does belong,
While Earth can boast a single Scot,
In any clime, through ages long,
The minstrel passionate and strong,
The chiefest bard of Scottish song
Shall never, never be forgot.

And this one he called 'The Aftermath':
Before the freshening sou'west wind the scattered clouds fleet past,
There's a touch of chill and dampness in the fingers of the blast,
O'erhead the sky is velvet black, with stars like specks of light,
And moonshine over all, soft and white.

The storm, in impotent assault, has raged and passed away,
A foe that roars but cannot harm, that strikes but cannot slay.
Not desolation strews his path, but breeze and soft, dim light,
And wild things singing through the night.

The northern sky is still disturbed by flash and roar of strife,
But all around are peace and sound of reawakened life.
The bullfrogs in the waterhole, the horsebells in the lane,
And the fragrance of the Earth after rain.

And through the night, in wondrous flight, the bat and nightjar pass,
The merry crickets scrape their bows in every tuft of grass.
The mopoke sounds his solemn note from faint and far away,
And the frogs toll the prelude of the day.

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May 14: Maria Irene Fornés

May 15: Ephraim Chambers (d)

Xavier Herbert

Frank Baum

Peter and Anthony Shaffer

Bill Peach

May 16: Sigmund Freud

May 17: Dorothy Richardson

Gary Paulsen

May 18: Bertrand Russell

May 19: Victoria Wood

May 20: Honoré de Balzac

Margery Allingham

May 21: Dorothy Hewett
Glen Tomasetti
May 22: Arthur Conan Doyle
May 23: Margaret Wise Brown
Carl Linnaeus
May 24: Mary Grant Bruce
May 25: Ralph Waldo Emerson
May 26: Edmond Goncourt
May 27: Herman Wouk
Dashiell Hammett

* * * * *

Herman Wouk wrote in *The 'Caine' Mutiny*, "Any recent book of military history is likely to contain the remark that by the beginning of 1944, World War II was really won. Quite rightly, too. The great turning points, Guadalcanal, El Alamein, Midway and Stalingrad, were in the past. Italy had surrendered. The murdering Germans were at last recoiling. The Japanese, their meagre power spread thin over a swollen empire, had begun to crack. The industrial power of the Allies was coming to flood; that of their enemies was waning. It was a bright picture."

But of course the people fighting and dying didn't necessarily see that bigger picture. I came across this editorial in *The Observer* in London for Sunday, May 13, 1945. "Nobody on the Allies' side would venture to predict how long Japan will last against the undivided attentions of Great Britain and the United States. Russia has as yet given no hint of her intentions. But, as matters stand now, Russia's help is not necessary for the defeat of Japan; and that, one is at least safe in saying, will come much sooner than was gloomily predicted in 1942.

"It is a solemn thought that, with all her advantages and in spite of the Allies' struggles with Germany, Japan has lost all her huge inland conquests and Burma, almost as suddenly as she made them.

"Eleven months ago Japan still held the Marianas, the most important of all her "floating fortresses," where now the American naval headquarters are installed; and she was threatening India in Manipur. It is under seven months since General MacArthur landed in Leyte; he has now such complete control of the Philippines that he can effectually bar the passage between them and South China and launch out as he pleases for further invasions.

"There is no indication yet of Lord Mountbatten's next move, but with the Burma campaign virtually over, the fine port of Rangoon already being used by deep-water ships, the invincible 14th Army and absolute command of sea and air, Lord Mountbatten can strike anywhere.

"In passing, one feature of the capture of Rangoon deserves more notice than it has had, that is, the valiant help given by the Burma National Army and its Commander Aung San. The Japanese recruited, armed, and trained this Army after granting a bogus independence to Burma in 1943. Immediately after the fall of Mandalay, the B.N.A. got in touch with the 14th Army to signify its resolve to rise against Japan and in the rush to Rangoon it did most valuable work, continually obstructing the Japanese efforts to form a new defense line, bringing in prisoners for interrogation, and once ambushing and killing a Japanese divisional commander and all his staff.

"The actions of the B.N.A. are a happy omen, not only for the future of Burma but much further afield. If the Siamese stand up for Japan, they will be the only Asiatics to do so. The underground movement in Indo-China broke out prematurely, but is still there. In China it goes without saying that every man in the puppet troops will turn on Japan when the word is given. The "mainland fortress" is very big, but its foundations are sand.

"Thus Japan, losing the great ring of defences, which she built up in 1942 thousands of miles from her shores, is driven back upon herself. Her navy has been whittled down to about the size of one section of either of the Anglo-American fleets. She cannot reach the hundreds of thousands of her

soldiers isolated in the South Seas or draw upon the wealth they were sent to guard. "Suicide" aeroplanes and boats in the Ryukus are a nuisance, but only a nuisance; they cannot save these islands, on which, Tokyo radio has said, Japan stands or falls.

"Against an invasion Japan has certain advantages. Her odd configuration and length of coastline make it something of a problem to choose the point of attack; while roads and railways enable troops to be concentrated swiftly wherever needed. One point, small but worth remembering, is that the typhoons begin in July and last till October, making the sea impossible for landing craft.

"Against this, Allied warships have overcome the distance of their bases by moving about with trains of supply and repairing ships. Fighting from aircraft-carriers has been so greatly perfected that the former unquestioned superiority of land-based planes has been neutralised. Lastly, the Americans have all the means ready to blast Japanese factories, airfields, ports and railways to atoms, and will do so. American bitterness against Japan is very deep.

"It has often been said that the Japanese will suffer anything rather than give in; their conduct in battle certainly supports that view. Yet one cannot help wondering whether, in the background, the half-dozen big firms, Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Okura, etc., which control all Japan's industry, commerce, and finance, are suggesting to the soldiers that Japan could do better now by giving in than by persisting in a hopeless struggle.

"Japan, they might say, would of course lose all her colonies, but she would save her homes and factories from obliteration; she could build up the national wealth again on materials brought from abroad as she did before; and in 50 or 100 years (what is that in Japan's eternity?) she could start her "holy mission" once more.

"Big business" in Japan is powerful, as it has proved more than once—in the withdrawal from Siberia in 1920, for instance, and from Shantung in 1928. The present issue of course is far greater than those, but that might lend force to the arguments of big business as here imagined. For the soldiers can no longer pay the dividends for which the business-men trusted them."

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Wouk's most famous book, and almost the only one to pop up regularly in op-shops, is undoubtedly *The 'Caine' Mutiny*, the story of a mutiny on board a US warship in WW2 and the trial of its captain for cowardice. But the other day I came upon his *Inside Outside* and was curious to find out what else he had chosen to write about. This book too deals with American public life, values, ideas, beliefs, but it is very strongly Jewish; the story of a devout Jewish family from Minsk who better themselves in the United States. It is a strange term 'making good' as it means rather 'making money' and 'fitting in'. Wouk's book differs a little from many immigrant novels because he says, "The Jewish immigrants had a saying, "When the boat is halfway to America, throw overboard your prayer shawl and phylacteries." To some, this meant a release from a galling yoke; to others, a sad yielding to the facts of the new world. In America in those days, you worked on Saturday or you didn't eat. For those old-country Jews, once the holy Sabbath went, the entire hoary structure tended to collapse. Some stalwarts like Reb Mendel Apkowitz fought the tide and kept the faith, all down the line. But lurid stories of new world impiety were rife in the old country. Some zealots called the Golden Medina by another name: "Wicked America." This discouraged very few Russian Jews who could raise the steamship fare. Plenty of the zealots, even, were willing to chance the wickedness for a shot at the gold and the freedom. They found out soon enough that the streets weren't paved with gold. But the freedom was real. You made of it what you would."

* * * * *

Wouk fairly obviously bases his character Peter Quat in *Inside Outside* on Norman Mailer. Quat brings out a novel he calls *My Cock*. When various heavyweights, the Book-of-the-Month Club, the Literary Guild, Reader's Digest, express an interest but would like a different title, Quat declaims in *Penthouse*, "Either truth matters in art, or it does not." Wouk describes the book as being "a dialogue two hundred and thirty-seven printed pages long between the hero of the book and his penis."

He goes on to say “The book is about a Jewish college professor, of course. All American Jewish novelists are college professors, and they all write about Jewish college professors. It is a strict literary convention of the genre, like the fourteen lines of sonnet form. This professor is named Yehezkel Dienstag, and one day Dienstag’s penis starts talking to him.”

The book is full of double-entendres, allegories etc (anti-Semitism is actually penis-envy) and the book brings in all sorts of historical characters; Spinoza is his scrotum and so on. But it is the title which is the sticking-point. The Guild finally publishes it but doesn’t put the title on the front cover. “I’ve seen their advance brochure. PETER QUAT’S NEW MASTERPIECE in huge type fills the cover. The subscriber has to look inside to find out the title, and then either turns purple and cancels his membership, or sends off the acceptance card with a drool.”

But if Peter Quat is Norman Mailer then is David Goodkind, the central character, Herman Wouk—or was he far removed from the Lithuanian Jewish background of the book and this is purely a novel? As I was reading Wouk’s *Don’t Stop the Carnival* I felt that he is fairly pedestrian writer. His dialogue rarely grips, his characters are unmemorable, his descriptions are adequate, his narrative moves along but rarely sparkles. What he does tend to do though is set up moral dilemmas and ask the reader to respond. Sometimes they are private dilemmas as in *Don’t Stop the Carnival*, sometimes they are public dilemmas as in *The Winds of War*. I think it is this which keeps me reading. And was that sense of moral dilemmas waiting something the family brought with them to America—or something they found lying in wait?

In fact Wouk was born in New York into a family of Russian Jews and it was possibly their dilemmas, what of their faith did they want to keep and pass on, which helped add this dimension to his writing ...

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May 28: Patrick White

May Swenson

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“My spiritual self has always shriveled in contact with organised religion, whether externalised in that grisly museum Westminster Abbey, the great rococo bed for an operatic courtesan in St Peter’s Rome, or the petulant Orthodox communities of Mount Athos. I have come closest to what one always hopes for in Ayia Sophia, Constantinople, alone in the Parthenon on winter afternoons after the Germans had been driven out, in the Friends’ Meeting House at Jordans, Bucks, in a garden full of birds, in my own silent room. All of them moments which remain inklings rather than confirmation. The ultimate spiritual union is probably as impossible to achieve as the perfect work of art or the unflawed human relationship. In matters of faith, art, and love I have had to reconcile myself to starting again where I began.” (from *Flaws in the Glass* by Patrick White)

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I notice interviewers of well-known writers like to slip in a question about said writer’s belief system. And said writer is expected to respond in a brief sound byte or a couple of lines in a published interview. It would take me several sound bytes merely to get my chaotic thoughts into some semblance of order. So I am not surprised that few well-known writers come up with anything particularly profound or memorable ... But I like that word ‘inklings’, that sense that something is there but just beyond your firm grasp.

And inklings itself is a curious word.

The OED gives various meanings: Mentioning in an undertone; a faint or slight mention, report, or rumour—A hint, a slight intimation, or suggestion—An intimation given by a wink or nod. A hint or slight intimation given by a wink or nod—A hint or slight intimation received; hence a slight or vague knowledge or notion, however acquired; a suspicion—A suspicion *of* or *against* a person—A vague hope or notion of doing something—An inclination, slight desire ...

I had never thought of writing of what might be called ‘religious inklings’ and yet I think we all have them at moments. Sometimes we dismiss them. Sometimes we grasp them. Sometimes we misunderstand ...

“The miracle of turning inklings into thoughts and thoughts into words and words into metal and print and ink never palls for me; the technical aspects of bookmaking, from type to font to binding glue, interest me. The distinction between a thing well done and a thing done ill obtains everywhere—in all circles of Paradise and Inferno.”

From *Conversations with John Updike* edited by James Plath.

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Fellow countryman and novelist Morris West was much more imbued with a sense of religious quest. Maryanne Confoy in *Morris West, a Writer and a Spirituality* points to the way that each of West’s books engages with one or more of the ‘big’ questions of life; good and evil, death, martyrdom, loss of a loved one, relationships, intimacy, faith, doubt, love. She says, “Perhaps all of West’s novels may be described as parables ‘of pragmatic morality’ because each one explores his foundational belief that we all live with ideas about ourselves that are put to the test by life circumstances”. And each of his books is underpinned by his own commitment to the Catholic Church. This may explain why he seems less comfortable in a book like *The World is Made of Glass* where he attempts to walk in the shoes of Carl Jung.

West in his autobiography *The View from the Ridge* gives an insight into his own personal understanding of his faith. “The old divines talked about the gift of faith. It seems to me that there is an earlier gift: a desire, an openness to receive the light when and if it is offered. This openness is a quality of perception like poetry or divination or the wonderful imagination of a happy child.

“If you have not the grace – or if you have lost it or mislaid it – you are thrust back on reason, noblest of the faculties according to the old Greeks, but no key to the mystery and the paradox and the tragedy of the human condition. On the contrary, reason may become an executioner’s axe, or an atomic trigger, unless the reasons of the heart are spoken to protest the tragic nonsense of human syllogisms.

“What has been left to us? The imprint of the Maker’s hand on every stone and shard and living tissue on the planet; the simplicity of Jesus’s repeated message, ‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another’; and, finally, the promise of the abiding Spirit, the enlightener, the comforter, which like the wind breathes where it will, ruffling alike the wheatfields of the homestead and what, in our tribal arrogance, we sometimes call the alien corn.”

* * * * *

But does this mean that White by his antipathy to organised religion, to churchgoing, is less interested in a spiritual dimension to his writing—or is it just less obvious? Take for instance this exchange in *Voss*:

‘You are upset,’ he said, ‘because you would like to pity me, and you cannot.’

‘If that were the case, I would certainly have cause to be upset,’ she blurted most wildly.

‘You would like to mention me in your prayers.’

By this time Laura Trevelyan had become lost somewhere in the dark of the garden. But I, too, am self-sufficient, she remembered, with some lingering repugnance for her dead prayers.

‘I do not pray,’ she answered, miserably.

‘Ach,’ he pounced, ‘you are not *atheistisch*?’

‘I do not know,’ she said.

She had begun to tear a cluster of the white camellias from that biggest bush. In passing, she had snapped the hot flowers, which were now poor lumps of things. She was tearing them across, as if they had not been flesh, but some passive stuff, like blotting-paper.

‘Atheists are atheists usually for mean reasons,’ Voss was saying. ‘The meanest of these is that they themselves are so lacking in magnificence they cannot conceive the idea of a Divine Power.’

He was glittering coldly. The wind that the young woman had promised had sprung up, she realized dully. The stars were trembling. Leaves were slashing at one another.

‘Their reasons,’ said Laura, ‘are simple, honest, personal ones. As far as I can tell. For such steps are usually taken in privacy. Certainly after considerable anguish of thought.’

The darkness was becoming furious.

‘But the God they have abandoned is of mean conception,’ Voss pursued. ‘Easily destroyed, because in their own image. Pitiful because such destruction does not prove the destroyer’s power. *Atheism* is self-murder. Do you not understand?’

‘I am to understand that I have destroyed myself. But you, Mr Voss,’ Laura cried, ‘it is for you I am concerned. To watch the same fate approaching someone else is far, far worse.’

In the passion of their relationship, she had encountered his wrist. She held his bones. All their gestures had ugliness, convulsiveness in common. They stood with their legs apart inside their innocent clothes, the better to grip the reeling earth.

‘I am aware of no similarity between us,’ Voss replied.

He was again cold, but still arrested. Her hands had eaten into his wrist.

‘It is for our pride that each of us is probably damned,’ Laura said.

Then he shook her off, and the whole situation of an hysterical young woman. He was wiping his lips, which had begun to twitch, though in anger, certainly, not from weakness. He breathed deeply. He drank from the great arid skies of fluctuating stars. The woman beside him had begun to suggest the presence of something soft and defenceless.

Indeed, Laura Trevelyan did not feel she would attempt anything further, whatever might be revealed to her.

‘For some reason of intellectual vanity, you decided to do away with God,’ Voss was saying; she knew he would be smiling. ‘But the consequences are yours alone. I assure you.’

It was true; he made her know.

I am not sure what you might draw from that of White’s own views. Inklings, perhaps.

* * * * *

May 29: André Brink

May 30: Cornelia Otis Skinner

John Sligo

May 31: Walt Whitman

Judith Wright

June 1: John Masefield

The Times

June 2: Thomas Hardy

June 3: Larry McMurtry

Allen Ginsberg

Rev. Sydney Smith

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Quotes from Anglican cleric the Reverend Sydney Smith (1771 – 1845) regularly turn up in anthologies and books of quotations and wise or witty sayings. I just came upon this one: “To do anything in this world worth doing, we must not stand back shivering and thinking of the cold and danger, but jump in, and scramble through as best we can.”

But I came upon a far odder contribution from him in Jane Gregson’s *Vegetable Book*: “The Reverend Sydney Smith, greatest of English wits, perfected a special sauce for salads which became so popular that he turned the recipe into a poem.

To make this condiment, your poet begs
 The pounded yellow of two hard-boil'd eggs;
 Two boiled potatoes, passed through kitchen sieve,
 Smoothness and softness to the salad give.
 Let onion atoms lurk within the bowl,
 And, half-suspected, animate the whole.
 Of mordant mustard add a single spoon,
 Distrust the condiment that bites so soon;
 But deem it not, thou man of herbs, a fault
 To add a double quantity of salt;
 Four times the spoon with oil of Lucca crown,
 And twice with vinegar procur'd from town;
 And lastly o'er the flavour'd compound toss
 A magic soupçon of anchovy sauce.
 Oh, green and glorious! Oh, herbaceous treat!
 Twould tempt the dying anchorite to eat;
 Back to the world he'd turn his fleeting soul,
 And plunge his fingers in the salad bowl!
 Serenely full, the epicure would say,
 'Fate cannot harm me, I have dined today.'

Or, in Jane Gregson's plain English: 4 ozs of cooked potato, use a teaspoon for the seasonings and a tablespoon for the olive oil and wine vinegar, with a scant teaspoon of anchovy sauce. Put into a bowl with items like water cress, cos lettuce or chicory, and mix at the table.

And, curiously, I noticed Frank Muir put the same poem in his *Frank Muir Goes Into ...* except—it wasn't quite the same. He punctuates it differently; he says 'soup-spoon' instead of soupçon and 'scarce-suspected' instead of half-suspected; he leaves out two lines ...

Perhaps the reverend wrote several versions of the poem. But it is a useful reminder that what I sometimes copy down as THE original is sometimes nothing of the sort.

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'Soup and fish explain half the emotions of life.' Rev. Sydney Smith.

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June 4: J. Jefferson Farjeon
 Elizabeth Jolley
 Mabel Lucie Attwell

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When I was young there was a Mabel Lucie Attwell book washing around in my life. I don't remember if I borrowed it or it was given to me and I don't remember the subject matter except that it had a little girl, an old lady, and some patchwork. It obviously wasn't a gripping book. And being an Attwell book it would've been a gentle read with a happy ending. That was my enduring image of Mabel Lucie Attwell. But the other day I came upon a book by John Henty called *The Collectable World of Mabel Lucie Attwell* and I found it quite an eye-opener.

She was born in 1879, one of eleven children of a butcher in London's East End. Her father made a respectable living. And many of the children were talented artists, musicians, or singers. Mabel sold her first picture when she was only fifteen. It was the beginning of a long career as a freelance artist but the early days were not easy, partly because the world of artists and illustrators was still very much a man's world. But Mabel had talent, determination, imagination, and an increasingly distinctive style. The work eventually flowed in: book and magazine illustrations, cards and postcards, jigsaws, posters, and eventually her own books. Before and after her marriage (her husband Harold Earnshaw, also a

freelance artist, lost an arm in the First World War and had to learn to draw with his left hand) she continued to earn a good income.

Her ‘children’, instantly recognisable because of their round pink cheeks and straight up and down legs, kept her extremely busy even when she had three young children of her own. She was too quiet and retiring a personality to be taken as an inspiration for the new wave of feminism, and she seems simply to have seen herself as someone with a talent which brought her in a regular income, but I couldn’t help comparing her to someone like Kate Chopin, loved by the writers of ‘mothers of feminism’ type books. Chopin wrote one novel of a failed marriage set in the Creole world of New Orleans where a mother leaves her children; it is a world of discrimination and despair and was banned by libraries when it came out as being immoral. I could not help thinking that Chopin gave up too easily. Every freelance faces knockbacks, times when it is a struggle to meet deadlines, times when illness and family troubles intervene, times when work doesn’t meet a publisher’s requirements, times when inspiration fails.

The contents of Mabel Lucie Attwell’s immense production weren’t messages of change and challenge but by her life she demonstrated that a woman could succeed in a man’s world, could live independently, and could eventually set her own terms. I think that message is at least as important as the occasional ‘cry from the heart’ about sexism and discrimination. And when Dale Spender and Germaine Greer threw away their Attwell items from their childhoods as being impossibly twee and unrealistic they also threw away a very nice accretion in prices. Mabel items are now strongly sought after by collectors. I am so sorry I don’t know what happened to that little book from my childhood!

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It’s not that I have no sympathy with Kate Chopin. I came upon this information as an introduction to a reprint of her novel *The Awakening*. “That such forbidden passion was a major theme for Kate Chopin became clear to American readers two months later, when *The Awakening*—a novel that might be seen as a book-length vindication of the rights of women like the “fair, frail” heroine of “The Haunted Chamber”—was published on April 22 (1899) by Herbert S. Stone & Company. But the irony and urbanity of Chopin’s poem suggest that she was hardly prepared for the outrage that greeted her novel on the same subject. Beginning with the remark that he has “an excellent story to tell,” the sardonically sketched narrator of “The Haunted Chamber” concludes with a sort of impatient sympathy:

So now I must listen the whole night through
To the torment with which I had nothing to do—
But women forever will whine and cry
And men forever must listen—and sigh—

From the first, however, reviewers of *The Awakening* made it very clear that they did not consider Kate Chopin’s masterwork “an excellent story,” that they felt no compassion for “the torment” of her Edna Pontellier and that, indeed, they intended neither to “listen” nor “sigh.” The novel “leaves one sick of human nature,” complained one critic; “it is not a healthy book,” declared another; “the purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication,” asserted a third. Even a sister novelist like Willa Cather, who admired Chopin’s art and who was eventually to produce her own tales of lost ladies, deplored the fact that the author had “devoted so exquisite and sensitive ... a style to so trite and sordid a theme.” Within a few more months, the libraries of St. Louis, Chopin’s native city, had banned the book; Chopin was shunned by a number of acquaintances; and, according to her biographer Per Seyersted, she was refused membership in the St. Louis Fine Arts Club.”

Nor did banning and talk of scandal sell the book for her. She apparently received \$102 in royalties in 1899, \$40 in 1900, and \$3 in 1901. And when she sent her next collection of stories to Herbert S. Stone the publisher turned it down.

In a way it isn’t hard to understand why. In a world where many women truly lived horrendous lives Edna Pontellier seems to be complaining about very little. And the idea of personal integrity and

being true to yourself doesn't really come through in the book. Equally many people probably wondered how a mother could leave a child unless under the extremes of poverty, abuse, or violence. The irony for Chopin is that while she made little from the book it has gone into reprint after reprint. *Someone*, I don't know *who*, has made a lot of money out of it ...

It is a recurring question. For instance, Virginia Woolf is seen as writing feminist novels and L. M. Montgomery isn't. And yet Montgomery had her heroine Anne Shirley going to university to get her BA in the late nineteenth century and then taking on the principalship of Summerside High. She doesn't minimise the problems a young woman faced, the costs, the work, the occasional resentments. She doesn't beat any particular drum yet I cannot help wondering whether books read by girls in their teens might have had more impact than the novels and short stories they read in their adult lives.

Both Woolf and Montgomery are regularly reprinted (though not with the same audience in mind!) but a first edition of any of Woolf's books is far more valuable than a first edition of anything Montgomery ever wrote ... though Larry McMurtry in *Books* points out that a first edition copy of *Anne of Green Gables* with its dust jacket *is* valuable ...

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June 5: Margaret Drabble

Federico García Lorca

June 6: Thomas Mann

June 7: Elizabeth Bowen

Gwendolyn Brooks

June 8: Gwen Harwood

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I have an unease about the modern mania for 'mining' a writer's life. When I hear of yet another book about Charlotte Brontë or Jane Austen or Charles Dickens I cannot help wondering what new unexplored 'nugget' has got their book over the publishing line. I was thinking this the other day when I came upon Cassandra Atherton's book *Flashing Eyes and Floating Hair* which she subtitles *A Reading of Gwen Harwood's Pseudonymous Poetry*. I thought this might mean that some more of Gwen's poems not published under her own name had been found. But no. This is a book which sets out to determine the subpersonalities that Gwen supposedly hid behind her pseudonyms.

Atherton says, "For such a gifted and important Australian poet, there is very little written about her poetry. There are only two main books, three smaller monographs, one book of essays, a senior school study guide and a pamphlet of notes on her poetry written between 1987 and 1992. Although there have been many favourable reviews of Harwood's books, and several essays in journals discussing aspects of her poetry, this volume of material is surprisingly limited. What prevails tends to be her lively interviews and reminiscences; and stories other poets, friends and literati compose about their relationship with Harwood. This culminates in some very moving obituaries and reflective pieces published in the year of her death, 1995, but not detailed analyses of her poetry."

This, to me, seems quite a lot of writing *about*; after all, how Gwen's poems will be seen by posterity can be safely left for the moment. More to the point Atherton makes it clear that she looked to Gwen's letters and interviews, rather than the poems themselves, to determine the subpersonalities behind the pseudonyms. I felt this as not quite misleading but perilously close ...

She says, "Harwood's aversion to psychoanalysis demonstrates a fear of the unconscious."

Does it?

I would think the majority of Australians and certainly older Australians still see psychoanalysis as anything from 'pernicious poppycock' to self-indulgent navel-gazing; they would see it as 'the American disease' or more kindly 'the American preoccupation', a waste of money, and would suggest a brisk walk in the park or an hour working in the garden as a better and cheaper alternative. I would also think that many older Australians having lived through the Great Depression, World War II and other ups and downs, as Gwen had, would suggest that no one can be happy all the time and the current

belief that you need Prozac the minute your spirits plummet is the real danger to our mental health. I didn't know Gwen well but my own impression was of a very positive hard-working woman with the gift of a wonderful sense of humour and the knack of inspiring love in the people around her. I find it very hard to accept the unprovable view that she had a fear of the unconscious. Catherine Cole in *The Poet Who Forgot* said of A. D. Hope that he "was uneasy about the ways in which psychoanalysis might spirit away the artistic with the neurotic". But the more I thought about it the more I thought two things have been conflated. Psychoanalysis digs out things buried deeply in memory but this isn't automatically the same thing as the subconscious. I would think most writers use the things which drift up from the 'buried deep'; it is a source of ideas and insights and in the process of using those insights they tend to be stripped of their fears and traumas and regrets ...

And psychoanalysis, far from being the tried and tested 'science' its supporters claim, is a very flawed discipline which has done untold harm to women. I have always seen myself not as a mass of subpersonalities but more simply as a split personality; an angry disillusioned cynical person living alongside a little mouse, quiet, self-effacing, unsure, but most of the time they rub along quite well together. I don't have any wish to have a stranger guddling round in my mind trying to bring them in to 'balance' or to eliminate one in favour of the other.

Years ago Maree Kennedy sent me a chapter from a book called *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman in which she says that Freud after writing *The Aetiology of Hysteria* repudiated it. "His correspondence makes clear that he was increasingly troubled by the radical social implications of his hypothesis. Hysteria was so common among women that if his patients' stories were true, and if his theory was correct, he would be forced to conclude that what he called "perverted acts against children" were endemic. Not only among the proletariat of Paris, where he had first studied hysteria, but also among the respectable bourgeois families of Vienna, where he had established his practice. This idea was simply unacceptable. It was beyond credibility.

"Faced with this dilemma, Freud stopped listening to his female patients. The turning point is documented in the famous case of Dora. This, the last of Freud's case studies on hysteria, reads more like a battle of wits than a cooperative venture. The interaction between Freud and Dora has been described as "emotional combat." In this case Freud still acknowledged the reality of his patient's experience: the adolescent Dora was being used as a pawn in her father's elaborate sex intrigues. Her father had essentially offered her to his friends as a sexual toy. Freud refused, however, to validate Dora's feelings of outrage and humiliation. Instead, he insisted upon exploring her feelings of erotic excitement, as if the exploitative situation were a fulfillment of her desire. In an act Freud viewed as revenge, Dora broke off the treatment." Not surprisingly, "The breach of their alliance marked the bitter end of an era of collaboration between ambitious investigators and hysterical patients. For close to a century, these patients would again be scorned and silenced." And not surprisingly many women did become hysterical in an era when the man who abused them was also often the one who arranged and forced them into a marriage in which they were expected to prove that they came to it a virgin. Hysteria was almost the only escape available.

And more recently I have been reading Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson's book *The Assault on Truth*. He says Freud was well aware of child abuse from his time in France where he visited the morgue and witnessed autopsies, owned and read the books by the leading French researchers such as Jean Martin Charcot, Ambroise Tardieu, Paul Brouardel and Paul Bernard, and was aware of the official statistics. For example, Tardieu noted that between 1858 and 1869 there were 11,576 reported cases of rape in France of which 9,125 were rapes or attempted rapes of children, ie under sixteens; and Bernard notes that between 1827 and 1870 in France there were 36,176 reported cases of "rape and assaults on the morality" of children fifteen years and under. Clearly the vast majority of cases would have gone unreported. Some of these cases resulted in the death of the child. What no one was looking at was the long term effects on the children concerned. When Freud returned to Vienna he was open to the very

real possibility that women with neuroses could have been the victims of childhood physical and sexual abuse.

But his friendship with Wilhelm Fliess took him in a different direction. Fliess recommended an operation on her nose for one of Freud's patients, Emma Eckstein, to cure her of painful periods. Why her nose? Well, Fliess believed it was masturbation which had caused the problem. He wrote "Women who masturbate are generally dysmenorrheal. They can only be finally cured through an operation on the nose if they truly give up this bad practice." So Freud invited him to remove a bone from Emma's nose. When the unfortunate woman showed no sign of healing and discharged massive amounts of putrid matter Fliess looked again and found a large piece of gauze had accidentally been left inside her nose; this was hauled out along with chips of bone, the woman haemorrhaged and nearly died, and when she finally recovered she was left with a lop-sided face. It sounds like two witch doctors hovering over their victim. No one ever looked for an organic cause and Freud was reluctant to look for any record of abuse in her childhood; partly because of a misplaced loyalty to Fliess, who was an ear, nose, and throat doctor and totally incompetent in the gynaecological field anyway, and partly it seems because of growing claims by other doctors such as Conrad Rieger who described women's stories of abuse as 'paranoid drivel with a sexual content' and said they were in danger of creating an 'old wives' psychiatry'. Freud was reluctant to be at odds with his colleagues and gradually tailored his early views into what they would regard as acceptable. At no time does he appear to have gone to the morgue in Vienna or attended autopsies to see if local records might compare with the French experience of child abuse.

"In fact in my opinion, Freud had abandoned an important truth: the sexual, physical, and emotional violence that is a real and tragic part of the lives of many children. If this abandoned truth was to be erased from the history of psychoanalysis (it was certainly there at the beginning), traces of it would also have to be removed from the later theory. This was a task best left to the psychoanalysts who came after Freud. I believe they have succeeded: by and large most analysts would not agree with Freud's insights that in my view are implicit in the 1896 paper "The Aetiology of Hysteria" — that many (probably most) of their patients had violent and unhappy childhoods, not because of some defect in their character, but because of something terrible that had been done to them by their parents." He suggests that it is impossible to completely cure a neurosis if this fact is ignored. "But whether it is openly stated or merely accepted as a hidden theoretical premise, the analyst who sees such a patient is trained to believe her memories are fantasies. As such, the analyst, no matter how benevolent otherwise, does violence to the inner life of his patient and is in covert collusion with what made her ill in the first place."

Much is currently made of 'false memories' rather than of fantasies, people apparently believing things which didn't happen. But Masson also deals with its opposite: people not believing, or not remembering, things which *had* happened. He quotes a study published in 1994 where all cases of girls brought to a US hospital in the early 1970s for treatment for sexual abuse, ranging in age from 10 months to 12 years, were contacted in the early 1990s. An incredible 38% appeared to have no memory of abuse so serious it had seen them hospitalised—or they believed the abuse had happened to someone else in the family. Memory is truly a strange thing.

Freud took the position that it didn't matter whether memories were real or fantasies; it was only the psychological effects in later life which mattered. "But in actuality there is an essential difference between the effects of an act that took place and one that was imagined.

"To tell someone who has suffered the effects of a childhood filled with sexual violence that it does not matter whether his memories are anchored in reality or not is to do further violence to that person and is bound to have a pernicious effect. A real memory demands some form of validation from the outside world—denial of those memories by others can lead to a break with reality, and a psychosis. The lack of interest in a person's store of personal memories does violence to the integrity of that person."

From my very limited observations it is when victims get apologies and genuine contrition from the people who abused them that they have the best chance to heal and put it all behind them; and the thousands of women who were dismissed as liars or fantasists had very little chance of getting validation and remorse from the perpetrators ... Only one leading figure in the psychoanalytical community appears to have continued to believe in the reality of childhood abuse, the Hungarian psychiatrist Sándor Ferenczi, and he was effectively frozen out and boycotted ...

“If it is not possible for the therapeutic community to address this serious issue in an honest and open-minded manner, then it is time for their patients to stop subjecting themselves to needless repetition of their deepest and earliest sorrow.” The passion he brings to the book seems greater when it is realised that Masson was a traditional psychoanalyst himself and had been in charge of the Freud Archives. I can understand how difficult it must have been for him to turn around and accuse Freud of a lack of moral courage and to write “True, he enabled people to speak about their sexual lives in ways that were impossible before his writings. But by shifting the emphasis from an actual world of sadness, misery, and cruelty to an internal stage on which actors performed invented dramas for an invisible audience of their own creation, Freud began a trend away from the real world that, it seems to me, is at the root of the present-day sterility of psychoanalysis and psychiatry throughout the world.”

At the end of Atherton’s book I didn’t feel much the wiser. And she hadn’t linked Gwen’s pseudonyms into other aspects of Australian life—from the impact of children’s books, serials and radio shows, where ghost writers hid in the shadows behind many of the popular names, to the rise of feminism, to the impact of post WWII migration. But if it helps other readers get more out of the poems I don’t mind in the least. And although Gwen was quite often approached for interviews, she was accessible and approachable in ways that writers like Patrick White were not, I don’t know that it is honest to say she kept control of her literary output and reputation by the stories she told and the explanations she gave about her writing. Readers’ responses are rarely tied to what the poet says about her poetry ...

And Atherton never touched on the subject I was curious about: what was it about the philosopher Wittgenstein which seemed to fascinate Gwen?

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The other day I was reading a curious book called *The Book of Dead Philosophers* by Simon Critchley in which he looks at both the ways in which some of the most famous of philosophers died and what they had to say about death. “Wittgenstein died the day after his birthday and his friend Mrs Bevan gave him an electric blanket saying ‘Many happy returns’; Wittgenstein replied, staring at her, ‘There will be no returns’ ” which might suggest that he was psychic or just feeling old and tired. He was suffering from terminal cancer but it had not stopped him writing his last book *On Certainty*.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) was born in Vienna, was in the German army in WWI, then moved to Cambridge, where he championed what you might call a philosophy of the everyday. The family he grew up in, according to Alexander Waugh in *The House of Wittgenstein*, was extremely wealthy, extremely repressed and rigid, with two and possibly three of Ludwig’s brothers suiciding under the unrealistic pressures their father put on them. Critchley says of him that his life was defined by “austerity, frugality, inner torment, a deeply troubled relation to sexuality, and utter ethical earnestness.” Wittgenstein wrote “Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present. Our life has no end in just the same way in which our visual field has no limits.” I liked that but I wondered what it was about Wittgenstein, his life or his writings, which particularly appealed to Gwen Harwood. So this week I have been browsing in her poems again.

Sometimes she just mentions him in passing—as in—

“The old philosophy’s dead and finished.

Dazzled by positivistic light

it lay while Wittgenstein dispatched it

and Russell kicked it out of sight.
A few old men in musty studies
study the dead brute's photograph."
So the young scientist in his laboratory
said to his keen, admiring staff.

(‘Hesperian’)

Sometimes she uses quotes from him in poems or as titles—as in—
“The human body is the best picture of the human soul.”

Or

“Thought is surrounded by a Halo.”

Or

“Has the verb “to dream” a present tense?”

And sometimes she writes more particularly about him—as in—
Olmütz, Moravia: Wittgenstein
is walking side by side
with Engelmann, who lived to write
after his friend had died,

“I sought, between the world that is
and the world that ought to be,
in my own troubled self the source
of the discrepancy,

“and in his lonely mind this touched
a sympathetic chord.
I offered friendship, and was given
his friendship, a reward

“no gift of mine could match.” They walk
as friends do, late at night,
two men of cultivated taste
talking, in reason's light,

of music (Wittgenstein had learned
to play the clarinet;
could whistle, too, in perfect pitch,
one part from a quartet)

(‘Wittgenstein and Engelmann’)

Or

Wittgenstein once said he wrote
for men who'd breathe a different air.
Did his truth-tables tell him this,
or his beloved composer, Schubert?
Or did the birds of Galway bear
a note to his pure seriousness?
On metal wings a mortal front
high above summer. Landscape shown
like a child's picture book. I hear
those names whose power can not be lost

bridging the known and the unknown,
and feel the sense of life is clear.

(‘Some Thoughts in the 727’)

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John Gray in *Gray’s Anatomy* offers this curious little insight, though whether or not it influenced Gwen Harwood I cannot say, “The visits that Wittgenstein made to the Soviet Union in the late 1930s must be among the least researched episodes in his life. Most of his biographers mention the visit he made in 1935, and a few refer to a later visit in 1939. None tells us anything of substance about what he did there, and, in particular, none of them gives any clue to how his experiences in the USSR might have influenced his philosophical development. We learn that during his first visit Wittgenstein was offered a chair in philosophy at the University of Kazan (where Tolstoy had studied) and that for a while he considered seriously the possibility of settling in the Soviet Union. We learn nothing, or little, of his intellectual contacts in the Soviet Union. It is only very recently, in fact, that we have come to know of the most formative of his intellectual encounters in the Soviet Union, which occurred in his conversations in 1935 and 1939 with the neglected Hungarian Marxist thinker, L. Revai.” I had not heard of Revai but his life’s work was “the development of a Marxist theory of language” and his work *The Word as Deed: Studies in the Labour Theory of Meaning* was unfinished when he died.

This did not do anything to change my image of Wittgenstein as someone wandering round Vienna and Central Europe in a dark overcoat and black hat, pondering on important aspects of life and consciousness, but the other day I came upon a rather different image of him. I discovered that my grandmother had a second cousin called Maurice O’Connor Drury (their grandmothers were sisters) who eventually became a psychiatrist domiciled at St Patrick’s Hospital in Dublin. But Maurice had started out by studying philosophy which brought him in touch with many of the twentieth century’s most famous philosophers, including Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He and Wittgenstein became friends and Wittgenstein traveled with him to a cottage in Salruck in Galway on the wild west coast of Ireland where it rained day after day and they, no doubt, had profound discussions around the hearth with its turf fire. Drury wrote books such as *The Danger of Words* and *Conversations with Wittgenstein*. But as I read something of his life I couldn’t help thinking that Gwen Harwood also knew something of this sojourn, those ‘birds of Galway’, and how much she would have loved to be the extra presence at that fireside ...

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June 9: Brian Friel

Julian Burnside

June 10: Saul Bellow

June 11: Anna Akhmatova

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Jay Parini says at the beginning of *Why Poetry Matters*, “The complex issue of voice also obsesses poets. Young poets try to cultivate their own voice. But what exactly is this magical thing, its gold panned for in the stream of common language? How does a poet’s voice differ from the larger voice, or voices, of the culture, which are loud and insistent, often overwhelming? Can you drown out MTV? Or CNN? Or Fox? How does a poet’s voice relate to the development of his or her persona or mask: the self that is created through language? I will argue in these pages that poetry matters, in part, because of voice.”

I remember a publisher, when he returned a little poetry book of mine, (it may have been Ron Pretty; I forget), saying I had no ‘voice’. I can’t say I went away in a fit of despair or spent the intervening years trying to create a ‘voice’ for myself. I usually only write poetry when I have a story I want to write and which doesn’t seem to fit into the novel or short story form. It is the story, not the voice, which matters to me.

But how many poets have a distinctive enough voice to really justify calling it “this magical thing”? The other day someone donated dozens and dozens of copies of *Poetry Australia* to a stall and I have been having a lovely time browsing. And now I have put down brief excerpts from the poems of a half dozen well-known Australian poets from the twentieth century. Would you have chosen out any of their work on the basis of voice? Or, indeed, recognised the poet?

1.

In the limbo of middle air
drowned in high cloud, we cruise
between somewhere and somewhere
with no sound but the screws
in the old Electra creaking,
and “This is your Captain speaking ...”

Indifferent to night
the God in the machine
tells us our speed and height,
names crisply the unseen
landmarks and towns below –
nothing I need to know.

I see those well-known places
like snatches of old song:
my house, my children’s faces;
late roses left too long
in a rosé bottle, dying.
O, that we two were lying –

O that we two were – Christ,
what do I want, or need?
Once, when the world sufficed
I’d sit for hours to read
to a sick child, or spend
evenings, world without end

in children’s games, or rest
like a gentle animal
with a baby at my breast
watching slow darkness fall,
wrapped in earth’s tenderness;
blessed, and with power to bless.

2.

the elements are older
earth fire dust
trembling horizon
round the silver-diggings

probably still be there
still be found

under some layers
at best a kidman landscape

southeast of ronan country
north of sladden
northwest of dalby davison:
the knight's move

desert strategy
move by night
avoid cultivation
foreign tongues

stay off the roads
burn any agencies
destroy the large machinery
take no prisoners

3.
Picking narcissus in the long grass
of the fenced acre by my house,
for twenty years long I stilled and heard
in the blackbean tree that greenvoiced bird,
Oriole is his singing name,
His wings a green stir in the green.
Oriole, oriole,
I whistle you up, I wait to hear.
No orioles sing to me this year.

Does poison creep through earth or air?
Did the last nest fall with a felled tree?
Has every oriole gone away
and left my acre lonely?
Not a stirring heard or seen
of green wing, green melody.
Oriole, oriole,
I whistle you up, my green-in-green,
but day after silent day
you leave my acre lonely.

4.
All the world freaks and glares in our sittingroom,
programme by programme testifying (look!) that
Janus has two faces,
for news keeps thrusting in against us.
The very hour we had
Prokofiev opening Point Bennelong at last
in a bright continuous roll
of strings and martial glory

brought me also this
abrupt cancellation of life.

Safaris through the psyche pleased you much,
artful author of alliterations
whose late work bore many a gaud and trinket
but never a hoot of prophecy:
you sloughed that off with a sigh,
old crumpleface, old Christian
whose flat tones yet could joyfully proclaim
that "spirit may climb counterwise
from a death". Yours
will indeed. We owe you much. Farewell.

5.

In the cemeteries
of dying towns
the wind is always
in a copse of gums
and in the bladey grass.

You stop the car
to stroll among names
noting sociology
the skyward rhetoric
or maybe the fashions
of masons.

But it is
the earth that holds you,
the texture of its coffin-wood
and bones ... and something
in the gusting air.

You soar and dive
like a kite,
aloft in the joy
of one more blowing day

and held by a thread.

6.

Midnights
I sit in the bath
writing;
dead upright
(you'd laugh)
unseeing and quite asleep.

Poem drafts
and sketches go
slapping down into the drink;
I come to

and have them all out in no time,
childhood ink bleeding.
Blood's better off
—it clots—
and jottings in biro;
but old heartfelt inks
flush and merge
to the touch of sea. Nightly
I dab with towels
at ink-stains, flood-blotches,
the remains of washed-out words,
identify
and encourage survivors
gathering their draggled crowds
—laying out the sheets to dry.

7.
Rocking on two sticks
or down on all fours
to meet hell.
HERE I AM!
Bare-faced,
armoured in bone,
back at that lonely place
where I began.
Anything's possible
now that I am alone,
anything at all,
now Heaven is impossible,
and all's well.

“While of unsound mind
keep out of the reach of children.”
The bottle on the shelf.
The girl sitting dead in the park,
Crowned with five robins dropping leaves.
Sitting there ... all by herself:
they couldn't uncurl her fingers
from the lysol bottle.
“Don't touch ... Don't touch.”

“Some day MY prince will come.”
You old woman in long underpants
crying for Mother.

Feed me *that* poisoned apple ...

I had forgotten this place:
sitting there, dead in the park,
unconscious of self at last,
robed by robins and swallows, cold.
One does not do it again; the old,
tight-fisted, arthritic, swollen,
lose their grace.

8.

We are the old men of the pear country, minds
Distorted by pear, the folds of our cortex curving
Over in pear-gullies, forearms thick as pear-trunk.
We walk through phantom groves and in our night-shirts
Wander holding a candle through pear-nightmares,
Calling for our lost cattle, the roan herds chewing
Amongst the temples of cactus, the green embankments.
Our nights grow trees with a hundred eyeless heads,
Leaning at all angles, ears cocked to the wind.

Our cattle when we saw them were small, tough beasts
A strange new race which bred amongst the thorns
With horny palates and nimble, dodging gait.
We tried to muster them, our horses jumping
And crashing in the pear, cracking our whips
On pads while the cattle vanished in green tunnels.
In fear we walked the moonlit track to the privy
Striking blindly with sticks at slits in the moonlight,
The small death-adders who swarmed amongst the cactus.
We bred and we hacked in the great pear-loneliness,
Our manners crabbed, our lips always moving softly
As we dug and cut and burned, our children half-starved,
Close neighbours total strangers never seen
Through walls of cactus, the world a flimsy patch
Of daylight at the end of a telescope
Of pear, our boundaries, old wire fences lost
In the tangle of spines, creeks and even hills
Lost, no one quite knew where. We cut, we slept,
With only one track out we could keep clear,
Always afraid that one day we would lose it
And the town would forget us and we would turn to green pulp.
At night from our verandas we would stare
Into thorn-darkness looking for neighbour's lights
And saw just pear regiments polished in the moonlight.

And when cactoblastis came the pear
Collapsed, a moth winged through the dropping arcades,
And we blinked at the sky and country stretching for miles,

Our houses rusting and unpainted standing
In acres of pear-slime and melting branches.
We slid and waded through the slush to shake
The hands of neighbours whom we had forgotten,
Our tongues stiff and our mouths sore from the pear,
And there were dances every night, our children
Skidding in pumps to foxtrots from gramophones,
But we stood beyond the hissing pressure lamps,
Not speaking, thinking still in pear-country,
Picking up thorns and splitting them with our fingers.

Some poets only write in the first person, some put their poems in strange configurations, some leave out all capitals, but I suspect when we talk of voice we aren't referring to single poems but to the sense that gradually builds up over a collection. And then there are the poets who are instantly recognisable as soon as they bring in a regular feature of their work, such as Gwen Harwood's Kröte, where we say immediately 'Ah yes, Gwen Harwood—'

So did you guess the poets? 1) Gwen Harwood. 2) Michael Dransfield. 3) Judith Wright. 4) Chris Wallace-Crabbe. 5) Geoff Page. 6) Judith Rodriguez. 7) Dorothy Hewett. 8) Geoffrey Lehmann.

* * * * *

When it comes to the giants should we expect an even more distinctive voice—or simply a better poet? I was thinking of this when I came upon a book of Akhmatova's poems. But the first hurdle was obviously that I needed to read them in translation. I would be reading not one but two voices. The second hurdle seemed to be that I knew something of her difficult and tragic life. It is hard not to read the person and the life into the poem—whether they are there or not. Her poems, it seemed to me, are suffused with a sense of melancholy but how much of this is her? Her personality? Her life experiences? Her beliefs about what a poem is and does? And how much of it is the melancholy which I see as an undercurrent in all Russian writing?

Joseph Brodsky introduces her: "Anna Akhmatova belongs to the category of poets who have neither genealogy nor discernable "development." She is the kind of poet that simply "happens"; that arrives into the world with an already established diction and his/her own unique sensibility. She came fully equipped, and she never resembled anyone. ...Akhmatova is the poet of strict meters, exact rhymes and short sentences. Her syntax is simple and free of subordinate clauses whose gnomic convolutions are responsible for most of Russian literature; in fact, in its simplicity, her syntax resembles English. From the very threshold of her career to its very end she was always perfectly clear and coherent."

She has many memorable moments—'The meeting that somehow did not take place
Still sobs outside the door'—but I thought I would include
two of her longer poems which have their share of melancholy but also offset it—

THE THREE AUTUMNS

I don't understand summer smiles at all,
And winter holds no charm for me,
Yet as for autumn, almost without fail
I've noticed every year has three.

And the first one is holiday disorder
Spiteful of yesterday's summer fling.
The leaves fly like shreds of notebooks and the odor
Of haze is incense-sweet. Everything

Is moist, many-colored, shining.

The birches are the first to join the dance since they're
Draped in see-through lace and since
They've already shaken off every transient tear
Onto the neighbor over the fence.

Here's what happens when you use a story to
break the silence:
A second goes by, a minute, and then
Comes the second autumn as dispassionate
as conscience,
As somber as an air raid siren.

Everyone immediately appears pale and old.
Summer closeness doesn't exist.
And far away trumpets are parading their gold
—Music floats through the fragrant mist.

And in the waves of frankincense, cold and gray,
Is locked the high unflooded land.
But the wind stormed, things opened up,
and right away
Everyone understood: that's the end of the play.
And this isn't an autumn but death
showing its hand.

LOT'S WIFE

*And Lot's wife looked back
and became a pillar of salt.*

And the just man followed God's ambassador here,
Huge and bright against the mountain black.
But alarm spoke loudly in the woman's ear:
It's not too late, you can still look back.

At red-towered Sodom where you were born,
At the square where you sang, where you sat to spin,
At the windows of the high house, forlorn,
Where you bore your beloved husband children.

She looked,—deadly pain found the fault,
Her eyes couldn't see if they saw or not:
And her body became translucent salt,
Her lively feet were rooted to the spot.

She's seen as a kind of loss and yet
Who will grieve for this woman, cry for this wife?
My heart alone will never forget:

For a single look, she gave up her life.

* * * * *

June 12: Harriet Martineau

June 13: William Butler Yeats

Gordon Kirkpatrick (Slim Dusty)

* * * * *

Slim Dusty wrote a number of his own songs, as well as using material his wife had written, but what of his most famous song, 'A Pub With No Beer'? Was that one of his? Ruth Erlich in the *Slim Dusty Song Book* says that "Slim Dusty became known to everyone in Australia, not just to country people and the show audiences, and the reason for that was 'A Pub With No Beer'. The song was written by Gordon Parsons, who had had it in mind for a while, and who finished it one drunken night with Chad Morgan." He sang it himself but Slim was doing a recording session in April 1957 and was a song short. He asked Gordon if he could record it.

It took off. Six months on the charts, played on radio and television, taken on tour by Slim and his wife Joy McKean; it became popular overseas, even in countries without a beer-drinking pub culture, it sold and sold, it became *the* song when people talked about Australian country music.

Slim Dusty himself said of it, "This is more than a song, it's part of our folklore now. It's the biggest hit I ever made, something like half a million records sold throughout the world. It was a hit in Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Canada, but not the United States where DJs wouldn't play it because it was about booze. The song started out as a poem written by Dan Sheahan in Northern Queensland. Then Gordon Parsons built the verses up, added characters, changed the structure and set it to a good tune. Gordon Parsons worked on it one night when he was drinking with Chad Morgan, who had the sense to write it down. I recorded it first in 1957 as the B-side to my song 'Saddle Boy' and, as far as I was concerned, it was just a good B-side. I didn't recognise it at first as the great song it is."

*

Everything, from a Shakespeare play to a popular song, wanders through various stages. Even something which seems to spring full-formed into the mind or to be the result of a strange dream can be broken down into moments of influence. The other day I came across some notes my son had collected up while he was rehearsing for Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. I'm sorry it didn't include the author but I found it interesting: "Nevertheless, several likely literary sources may be mentioned. A number of details of Falstaff's escapes from the jealous Ford may have been anticipated in a story from Giovanni Fiorentino's collection *Il Pecorone (The Simpleton)*, published in Milan (1558) and a source for *The Merchant of Venice*. A comical English prose work, Robert Copland's *Gyl of Braintfords Testament* (1560) may have suggested Falstaff's disguise as the old woman at Brainford, and his departure in the laundry basket may derive from a story by Barnabe Rich (I) in his *Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581). The personality of the Host was probably influenced by Geoffrey Chaucer's famous innkeeper in *The Canterbury Tales*, and George Chapman's *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596), a highly successful comedy of humours, contained a character whose comical overuse of the word 'humour' clearly contributed to the creation of Shakespeare's Nym. The famous 'Latin' scene, 4.1, is representative of a set piece in several contemporary French farces, which Shakespeare would have known of and may have read. Lastly, Falstaff's torment at the hands of fairy-impersonators was perhaps based on a scene in John Lyly's play *Endimion* (1588), in which a lecher is punished for his lust by fairies."

*

The song begins and ends on that same mournful verse:

It's lonesome away

From your kindred and all,

By the campfire at night

Where the wild dingoes call;
But there's nothing so lonesome,
So morbid or drear,
Than to stand in a bar
Of a pub with no beer.

But the following verses, the staff, the stockman, the swaggie, the dog, Billy the Blacksmith, the winos, are both humorous and sorrowing in the way the best Country & Western songs are, the smile and the catch in the throat. And although the tune is eminently suited to the words it is unremarkable. It was the words which people could be heard singing or using to hang their own pub jokes on. Slim went on to have other hits in a long life but he never quite hit the jackpot in the way that song which came along when he was only 29 did for him. The same story could be told of many writers who struggled to write another *Great Gatsby*, another *Catcher in the Rye*, tried to Kill another Mockingbird. But Slim was a down-to-earth and practical man and if audiences wanted 'A Pub With No Beer' fifty years on in preference to his later songs then he was quite happy to sing it once more ... and once more ...

* * * * *

June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe
Jerzy Kosinski
Laurence Yep

* * * * *

I came upon an article about Jerzy Kosinski's way of writing in the 1990 *Writer's Yearbook*. "In 1982, Jerzy Kosinski became embroiled in a controversy that many authors would have found difficult to survive. On June 22 of that year, *The Village Voice* ran a front-page "investigative" piece, entitled "Jerzy Kosinski's Tainted Words," which all but accused Kosinski of not writing his own books. Over the years, Kosinski had privately employed editors and proof-readers (to) go over his work, check for inconsistencies, and make suggestions for improvement or rewriting. In some instances, Kosinski's freelance editors and proofreaders even supplied him with alternate words and phrases for the ones he'd used in the original drafts. Such intimate interference with the creative process, the *Voice* writers felt, flew in the face of what serious writing was all about; it was more assembly-line fiction than the creative process was supposed to allow. "For almost ten years now, Jerzy Kosinski has been treating his art as though it were just another commodity, a widget to be assembled by anonymous hands," the writers scoffed.

"Kosinski disagreed. His editors and proofreaders, he argued, were doing no more than was traditionally done by editors and copy-editors in major publishing houses. By hiring freelance editors and proofreaders, Kosinski claimed, he was actually maintaining more control and approval of the contents of his fiction than he might have been afforded by publishers. The ultimate decisions were his.

"The controversy was picked up by national newspapers and magazines, and Kosinski was soon a writer under siege. It seemed to make no difference that, more than a year prior to the publication of the article in *The Voice*, Kosinski had meticulously explained his method in *Horizon* magazine. Nor did his immediate post-*Voice* responses seem to slacken the attention. It was an irony that did not escape Kosinski. Here he was, an author often criticized for writing autobiography disguised as fiction, now accused of not taking an active enough hand in writing his own work."

The article goes on to say "Kosinski is nothing if not a survivor" but then the writing world has also been changing. Traditionally, when you bought a book, you assumed it had been edited and proofread by the publishing house. Now the publishers are crying poor and expecting the writer to get it edited and proofread. And in between these changing expectations are the disappointing moments when you pay good money for a book only to find it riddled with typos which should've been picked up along the way.

Of course that charge has been directed at other books. When *The Eagle Has Landed* became a best-seller it was claimed that it was mostly written by an editor, that Jack Higgins had provided the

idea and someone else had done the work. I have no idea if there was any truth in this. And clearly the public did not care who had written it. They just wanted an exciting read. In the case of popular fiction this might be said to be all that matters. But in the case of literary novels up for literary prizes and literary authors being offered prestigious positions it becomes more problematical. It seems to be that editing and proofreading is one thing, major re-writing another.

A quite different problem is now raised at times. With the popularity of Creative Writing courses the charge is leveled that they produce the same kind of writing. The eccentricities of a Laurence Sterne or a Samuel Butler are less likely to be on show. As I am not a major buyer of literary fiction I do not spend a lot of time worrying about a certain sameness. Yet it would be a pity if we lose those quirky and unusual books which can be so memorable.

But as more and more of the writing available is on the internet where much of it is neither edited nor proofread a very different problem rears its head. Our children are growing up with this kind of writing and instead of getting the best we can provide, meticulously edited and corrected, they are getting the worst. The internet is an ‘anything goes’ zone so far as spelling, punctuation, and grammar goes.

And when they get off the internet and go out into the real world it too is full of infelicities. All those sale signs urging you to ‘Get in Quick’, all those spellings from nite to thru to Xmas to linc ... Is it any wonder that kids struggle? After all, the people dumping bad spelling and poor grammar on to them are highly-paid adults, in some cases better paid than the teachers who are trying to maintain the dyke against the crashing waves of ‘anything goes’ ...

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June 15: Toss Gascoigne

June 16: Joyce Carol Oates

Isabelle Carmody

June 17: Henry Lawson

John Hersey

John Tierney (Brian James)

* * * * *

John Hersey was a man of parts; war correspondent, novelist, short story writer, social commentator and critic, Pulitzer Prize winner—and secretary for a time to Sinclair Lewis. I can’t help thinking this might have been the hardest job of all. I have just been reading his *The Algiers Motel Incident*; in which in 1967 in Detroit, three young black men were shot at the Motel. Hersey writes, “Were the shots of a blank pistol the sound of ‘snipers’ that had caused Warrant Officer Thomas to call high command and tell them that he and his men were being fired upon; that caused the alarm that brought the police that killed the boys – ‘Army under heavy fire,’ two cops had quoted their dispatcher as saying? I have not been able to find any other plausible explanation. Not one of the scores of witnesses has ever said, in court or to me or to anyone else I have been able to trace, that he saw real snipers at or near the Algiers that night.

“What greater – or more bitter – irony could there be than that the three boys at the Algiers may have been executed as snipers because one of them, satirizing the uniformed men who had made them all laugh in the midst of their fear during the search that morning, had been playing with a pistol designed to start foot races, from which it was not even possible to shoot bullets?

“Except, of course, that as it turned out the boys were not executed as snipers at all. They were executed for being thought to be pimps, for being considered punks, for making out with white girls, for being in some vague way killers of a white cop named Jerry Olshove, for running riot – for being, after all and all, black young men and part of the black rage of the time.”

* * * * *

What Lewis was like as an employer is unclear. John Braine in *Writing a Novel* says “Once the late Sinclair Lewis arrived at Harvard drunk as usual (alcoholism is our main occupational disease) to

talk about writing. ‘Hands up, all those who want to be writers!’ he yelled. Everyone’s hand went up. ‘Then why the hell aren’t you at home writing?’ he asked, and staggered off the platform.”

But I think we can assume Lewis didn’t have pleasant little chats with his secretary when Hersey said he would like to try and write a book. And it’s funny, isn’t it, the way that it is assumed that a writer has to drink to write. Even though the writers who have lasted much better than Sinclair Lewis don’t seem to have done much staggering round drunk ...

I think we have a reluctance to put the writers who simply sit down and write ahead of the writers who are regularly drunk or stoned, who have wild private lives and a half dozen marriages and affairs, who posture and grab headlines. There is an increasing tendency to want the writer, not the book, to be the talking point, the star, the focus. I wonder why? Perhaps that is a naïve question. Yet it is the *book* which will take up our hours ...

* * * * *

The shooting of the three young men was followed by days of rioting in which many more people died. Hersey writes of how he came to be involved: “At this point in the narrative, enter myself. Reluctantly. I have always, before this, stayed out of my journalism, even as a manipulative pronoun, having believed that it sufficed for a writer to ‘come through’ to the reader – by the nature of his selections from the whole, his filtering of all that had gone through his eyes and ears and mind; by the intensity of feeling that might be read in the lines; by his ‘voice’. But this account is too urgent, too complex, too dangerous to too many people to be told in a way that might leave doubts strewn along its path; I cannot afford, this time, the luxury of invisibility. For the uses of invisibility, as Ralph Ellison has made so vividly and painfully clear – an inability or unwillingness to see the particularity of one’s fellow man, and with it a crucial indifference as to whether one is seen truly as oneself – these uses of not-seeing and of not-being-seen are of the essence of racism.

“In August 1967, soon after the Detroit riot of that summer, David Ginsburg, who had been appointed executive director of the President’s Commission on Civil Disorders, asked me if I would write part of the commission’s report. After much thought I declined, on the ground that I did not want to attach my work to a document over which, as a whole, I would have no control at all. In the aftermath of that decision, however, I came to feel that I owed some sort of debt of work to this, the most intransigent and fear-ridden issue in American life, and I broke off the writing of a novel in order to undertake a piece of reportage on one of the summer rebellions. I went to Detroit, with a general intention of writing overall about the devastating uprising there, and I began to interview various officials, starting with Mayor Jerome P. Cavanagh and Police Commissioner Ray Girardin and certain Negro leaders and some young black militants.

“As I explored Detroit’s riot in those first weeks, the incident at the Algiers Motel kept insisting upon attention, and eventually I determined to focus on it. This episode contained all the mythic themes of racial strife in the United States: the arm of the law taking the law into its own hands; interracial sex; the subtle poison of racist thinking by ‘decent’ men who deny that they are racists; the societal limbo into which, ever since slavery, so many young black men have been driven in our country; ambiguous justice in the courts; and the devastation in both black and white human lives that follows in the wake of violence as surely as ruinous and indiscriminate flood after torrents.”

He goes on to say, “My own education in the course of the researches that followed was a staggering one. At the outset I learned how little I knew. I learned that experiences that I might have considered as credentials for this task had not given me sufficient insights for all that I was to confront. I had been born in China, had felt as a child the puzzling guilt of being pulled through the streets in a rickshaw by a yellow man; I had witnessed death and pain in war; I had tried to learn something about racism while writing several novels with racial themes; I had lived for part of the anxious summer of 1964 in the home of a black farmer (*I* was anxious; it was truly dangerous for him) in Holmes County, Mississippi; and for the past two years I had lived in intimacy with college students, the most open, most threatened, most serious, most generous people I had ever known. But these were not enough.

Now I learned all sorts of new things, both about reality and about myself, and I learned how much more I have to learn about issues of race in my country.”

* * * * *

Richard Wright wrote several powerful autobiographical works about the impact of racism. I have just been reading his childhood memoir, *Black Boy*, about his childhood in Jackson, Alabama, in a chaotic, dysfunctional and sometimes violent family, about his efforts to get an education and find work, about the racism that undermined and distorted every aspect of life and brought with it fear and cringing, and his escape first to Memphis and then northwards. “With ever watchful eyes and bearing scars, visible and invisible, I headed North, full of a hazy notion that life could be lived with dignity, that the personalities of others should not be violated, that men should be able to confront other men without fear or shame, and that if men were lucky in their living on earth they might win some redeeming meaning for their having struggled and suffered here beneath the stars.”

Martin Luther King Jnr wrote, “The slum of Lawndale was truly an island of poverty in the midst of an ocean of plenty. Chicago boasted the highest per capita income of any city in the world, but you would never believe it looking out of the windows of my apartment in the slum of Lawndale. From this vantage point you saw only hundreds of children playing in the streets. You saw the light of intelligence glowing in their beautiful dark eyes. Then you realized their overwhelming joy because someone had simply stopped to say hello; for they lived in a world where even their parents were often forced to ignore them. In the tight squeeze of economic pressure, their mothers and fathers both had to work; indeed, more often than not, the father will hold two jobs, one in the day and another at night. With the long distances ghetto parents had to travel to work and the emotional exhaustion that comes from the daily struggle to survive in a hostile world, they were left with too little time or energy to attend to the emotional needs of their growing children.

Too soon you begin to see the effects of this emotional and environmental deprivation. The children’s clothes were too skimpy to protect them from the Chicago wind, and a closer look revealed the mucus in the corners of their bright eyes, and you were reminded that vitamin pills and flu shots were luxuries which they could ill afford. The “runny noses” of ghetto children became a graphic symbol of medical neglect in a society which had mastered most of the diseases from which they will too soon die. There was something wrong in a society which allowed this to happen.

My neighbors paid more rent in the substandard slums of Lawndale than the whites paid for modern apartments in the suburbs. The situation was much the same for consumer goods, purchase prices of homes, and a variety of other services. This exploitation was possible because so many of the residents of the ghetto had no personal means of transportation. It was a vicious circle. You could not get a job because you were poorly educated, and you had to depend on welfare to feed your children; but if you received public aid in Chicago, you could not own property, not even an automobile, so you were condemned to the jobs and shops closest to your home. Once confined to this isolated community, one no longer participated in a free economy, but was subject to price fixing and wholesale robbery by many of the merchants of the area.”

Before poverty, overcrowding, and lack of opportunity in the slums of the northern cities burst into rioting the ghettos had been swollen with hundreds and thousands of young men escaping the overt racism of the south, all bringing with them unspoken furies and dysfunctional ways of dealing with conflict. Instead of arming northern police with riot shields and tear gas it might have made more sense to send them home to read Richard Wright ...

* * * * *

Professor Leon Litwack wrote that “more than one hundred years ago, Negro and white ‘Freedom Riders’ challenged racial segregation on public transportation facilities in the North. Employing the weapons of nonviolent resistance and agitation, they pleaded their case for equal rights before a generally hostile or indifferent public. Although finally victorious, these early ‘Freedom Riders’ had to

wage a long and often bitter struggle, marked by occasional violence, before the proprietors of Northern railroads, omnibuses, and streetcars reluctantly agreed to give up segregation practices.”

James Baldwin, introducing James Peck’s *Freedom Ride*, the actions taken across the southern United States from the late 1940s onwards, reads much into the action: “I think the Freedom Riders—not all of them, for some are mediocre in spirit or perhaps just bewildered and confused—are, themselves, experiencing a new and terrible strength. They are, sometimes—at least, it seems so from the quiet talks I have had with them—wrestling, like Jacob, with the angel. They are discovering that suffering does have redemptive power. They have in a sense memorized that phrase, but when the test comes, and they survive it, mauled and beaten and slashed but without hate and often without fear, it does something tremendous to them. A journalist recently said—let me paraphrase—that the Southern student, certainly the Negro student, does not seem as afraid of belief in God, not as ashamed of prayer, as his Northern student friends. I think the journalist felt something true: something we might call naiveté but, again, we might call it a newborn wisdom. And the sophisticated may, once more, as has happened throughout history, be led by the profound and childlike faith of those who are not afraid of accepting the unchangeable fact of the human condition: what we deeply believe, and must believe, *can never be proved*.”

I think we are, once more, completing a spiral curve: the absurd and naïve skepticism, the disbelief nineteenth century and much of the twentieth is turning into a new faith, a faith frankly based on the uncertainties, frankly grounded on the knowledge that while more and more can be proved by science, the questioners always arrive at an invisible line where proof ends. Heisenberg says it in brilliant words that scientists can respect; the sit-in students, the Freedom Riders, are saying it in a simpler, more earthy way. They are acting this out: human beings are on this earth for an unknown purpose; hence every one is important and in a sense holy, for there is something we call “human relations” which must be created and re-created again and again in new patterns, and who knows which of the three billion earth children is needed for a special point in the intricate design.

Their acts are saying this: dehumanization will cease only when we learn to believe that we have no inalienable right to a proof or an answer; the time has come when we must acknowledge that small answers won’t do; the North’s and the South’s and the world’s small answers must be brushed away so that the questions, Who am I? What is death? Who is God? can be heard again. We are men; and as men we must declare our right to move freely in our search for meaning; we have a God-given right to be and to become. Sitting at lunch counters, riding the buses are symbolic rights. They are small, but we need to claim them, not because they are enough or because we really want them, but because an unclaimed human right bars a man in his search for significance.”

* * * * *

The other day I came upon a very different Detroit—in Joyce Maynard’s *Internal Combustion*, the story of a murder in a comfortable and still affluent community, the sort of place where people did *not* sell their homes to African-Americans. But it did not save the Seaman family from the stresses and strains that led Nancy Seaman to murder her husband Bob. Maynard writes, “The Ramblewood subdivision, where the Seaman family made their home for seventeen years at 29812 Briarwood Court, was what’s known as a gated community. A guard house stood at the entrance to the development, assuring residents that only individuals who had been given specific permission might pass through onto the well-maintained streets: Driftwood, Fox Chance, Turtle Creek, Greenspring. Driving through the development, a visitor was apt to pass several groups of women in pastel-colored jogging suits power-walking together, and a few younger ones pushing well-designed and expensive-looking strollers, but mostly those making their way along the flawlessly paved streets, past lawns green as golf links, do so in SUVs. Houses, too, were oversized, with expansive decks and gas-fired barbecues substantial enough to cook a dozen steaks. A half hour’s drive from downtown Detroit, Ramblewood felt like another world from the bombed-out-looking city.”

When Nancy Seaman was growing up in nearby Lincoln, “These were the years of the Detroit race riots (beginning with the terrible summer of 1967, when you could smell smoke and see flames nearly every night). Back in 1967, if someone said the word “nigger” in Lincoln Park, it wasn’t likely that anybody would take offense at the term. Detroit might be the home of Motown—a place where the Supremes, Temptations, Four Tops, Smokey Robinson, and Gladys Knight were turning out hits for Berry Gordy, just a few miles away—but to white working-class people in a town like Lincoln Park, Detroit meant the riots and a place to stay away from. Beginning in 1967, anyone living in the city of Detroit who could get away from there, did—to the point where, within a span of five years, the population had declined by seven hundred thousand.

But of the many places where people fled from Detroit, Lincoln Park was not one. Not if you were black, anyway. No way would a black family have been welcomed there.”

To what extent the decline of the automotive industry played in communal and individual tensions is a complex question. “There had been a time when this town prospered, I knew—back in the heyday of the American automobile industry. Then came the Japanese cars, the outsourcing of automotive production to places outside of Michigan, downsizing, layoffs.”

Ford, Chrysler, General Motors, they all could’ve competed with small nippy fuel-efficient cars but they remained wedded to big SUV’s, huge utes, the progeny of those old gas-guzzlers with their giant fins. The Seaman family was also caught up in the downs of the automobile industry but when Nancy Seaman hacked her husband to death she appears to have been playing out the role, more often male, of refusing to agree to a partner leaving the marriage. If he would not stay and retain the façade of a marriage, no matter how miserable, then he wasn’t going to walk away unscathed ...

* * * * *

John Hersey’s most famous book was not about Detroit at all. It was *Hiroshima*, his account of the bombing of the Japanese city in 1945—or more particularly his moving account of the experiences of several of the survivors. But after writing this I find myself wondering: if life hadn’t prepared him for Detroit then what could possibly prepare him, or anyone else, for Hiroshima?

* * * * *

June 18: Gail Godwin

Rosemary Dobson

June 19: King James VI/I

June 20: Vikram Seth

Errol West

* * * * *

I remember Rolf Shankley telling me his favourite book was Vikram Seth’s *The Golden Gate*. I had waded through *A Suitable Boy* (which has its moments but I was still profoundly glad to get to the end) but I hadn’t heard of this one. Out of curiosity I tracked down a copy and although I never really warmed to his characters I did think it was extremely accomplished and clever. It is set in San Francisco and Anderson Tepper in *The salon.com Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Authors* says of it, “*The Golden Gate* not only captured the temporal and moral dilemmas of a group of Bay Area yuppies, it was also written as a long narrative poem comprising nearly six hundred sonnets in iambic tetrameter. Seth had blended his puckish erudition with a pop culture fluency. The result was a witty, sweetly profound, and entirely engaging rendering of the West Coast zeitgeist.”

For someone who couldn’t write even one sonnet I think it was those six hundred sonnets which astonished and dazzled me ...

* * * * *

At the time I didn’t realise that Rolf also wrote poetry. But the other day I was tidying out some books that had got pushed to the back of a cupboard in the Meeting House and one of them was *Five Tasmanians* introduced by Leslie Greener and one of the five was Rolf. (Another was Karen Knight

(Pridmore); also Don Hutton, Tony Ryan, and John Heathcote.) I liked Rolf's contributions and thought I would copy this one out.

VIGIL

My Love's asleep amidst the hills of vigilance,
where morning creeps to her in breaths of mist refined.
I watch her sleep from shadowed trees of sustenance,
where-in I through the branches peep, lest I go blind.

I did not think that she would wake again,
although my ears had hoped she would (to hear her voice).
But when she did the silence clove upon my name
and all she spoke was in her eyes with trembling choice.

I sometimes close my eyes to bring the grace of sight,
and sometimes stare upon the space that moves the air.
My open eyes can't see, but now with greater might
create a fantasy of one who isn't there.

It was Karen Knight from those five who went on to make a national name as a poet but I couldn't help feeling a little sorry that Rolf didn't do more as a poet.

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The other day someone was talking about Vikram Seth and his other books and I was curious enough to look out for his more recent writings. I also wondered—was he domiciled in India or San Francisco? Because it seemed to require a long presence, a long immersion, to write such different books as *A Suitable Boy* and *The Golden Gate*. In fact he has had a very varied life; born in India, living in England, India, and the USA where he studied economics at Stanford University, and now back in England where he lives in a house once owned by the poet George Herbert. He speaks Chinese among other languages. He is a man of many talents. It may even be that he is a far more interesting person than any of his characters ...

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June 21: Chester Wilmot
Jean-Paul Sartre

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“I got a place on the Melbourne team partly because the debates were being held in Tasmania and it was known that I had more than a nodding acquaintance with the island. Anyway there was my name on the bulletin board along with those of Chester Wilmot and others. Chester was leader of the team: sturdy, ebullient, booming and utterly incorruptible. He was even then excelling at the type of tough flexible argumentation and passionate curiosity to get at the facts which was to land him in trouble with General Blamey in New Guinea in World War II and later to earn him world-wide fame as a B.B.C. war correspondent, and some degree of immortality as the author of *The Struggle for Europe*. He organized us all and kept us working.”

Graham McInnes in *Humping My Bluey*.

*

Hugh Mackay wrote in *Advance Australia ... Where?:* “Wikipedia, billed as the largest encyclopedia-of-everything in the history of the universe, includes rubbish, falsehoods and fiction (whether deliberately misleading or not) as well as authentic, accurate and illuminating entries.”

(True. I looked up my gr-gr-grandfather and found him supposedly doing something 40 years after he'd died. Perhaps they also believe in miracles.)

“Since we half-know all that, does our exposure to the internet condition us to be less strict about the accuracy of the information we encounter there? Does that, in turn, lead us to be less strict about the

integrity of information in general? The evidence suggests it does, and that the traditional mass media are playing a part in the process as well: The Ipsos Mackay Report has been noting a steady decline in respect for TV news and current affairs, as viewers have felt increasingly unable to distinguish the ‘truth’ from the carefully contrived tales of political spin doctors, or the opinions of journalists or commentators. The embedding of journalists in combat units in Iraq was a particularly disturbing development for many TV viewers: ‘are we just seeing what the US military wants us to see?’ In that case, the internet gave millions of viewers the chance to see alternative versions of the war story from other sources but this only reinforced the view that ‘the news’ is a more slippery thing than we used to imagine.”

*

But which falsehoods in the media matter? All—or only some? I came upon this amusing little insight into what may go on behind the scenes in the Letters to the Editor column in English journalist Derek Lambert’s *Don’t Quote Me...But*, “Another fringe journalistic activity was filling up the blank spaces with letters from readers.

Such malpractices were not uncommon in those days and I recall a six foot five inch reporter who wrote a weekly column about rugby and signed himself Oval Ball. Not only that but he played rugby himself and every other week Oval Ball would suggest that it was about time he was picked to play for the county. Eventually he was selected and made such a dismal showing that even Oval Ball had subsequently to admit that he should be dropped.

My aim was to create controversy. *Dear Sir*, I would write, *I am writing to bring to your attention the deplorable moral standards of the youth of today*. We were in the throes of reaction to war-time immorality and a quiet snog in a shop doorway was the subject for outrage, much of it envious. I would elaborate on this theme until I had expended the requisite number of words to fill the blank space and then sign myself *Disgusted of Goodrington*.

The response to such letters was usually indifferent. Or, to be more precise, non-existent. So the following week I would pen an indignant reply signed *A Teenager*.

It took me some time to appreciate that my letters were misguided. Controversy in a local newspaper has to be local. And many a bright spark from Fleet Street who has become editor of a local rag has gone awry by applying city slickness to parochial issues: the reader wants the lists of mourners and dog-show winners and, however much it might hurt his professional pride, the editor must print them.

When I finally cottoned on I wrote indignant letters about local issues which led to the only occasion when I have fabricated a news story.

The issue was the summer illuminations at Brixham. They were mediocre; nothing more, nothing less. Nevertheless, the subject of raging ferment following the publication in the *Chronicle* of a letter signed *Lamp-Lighter*.

In that letter I castigated those illuminations. By rights the loops of fairy lights, their colours reflected on the sea and pulled into fusions of colour in the harbour waters, should have exploded.

Chewing whatever he chewed, Sellar-Hay said to me: “Good story, laddie, get a follow-up.”

It so happened that, at the time, my two greatest friends from school days, Barrie Mullins and Peter Pritchard, were staying with me at my parents’ home in Paignton. Ahead of us lay a day of exciting decadence realised only by my assignment which was to interview grockels in Brixham and get their views on the illuminations.

I chose my grockels carefully — Barrie Mullins and Peter Pritchard. I interviewed them at length in their bedroom and they duly responded with forthright but utterly conflicting views on the lights extended on the waters of Brixham. To those I added the views of holiday-makers who wished to remain anonymous and in the next edition of the *Chronicle* I had the front-page lead story.

The main problem with creating correspondence, however, was psychological. Before I learned to concentrate on local controversy I ran a grave risk of becoming a certifiable schizophrenic.

It is all very well penning a polemic letter attacking blood sports; it is another matter when, owing to public indifference, you have to subsequently defend what you have lambasted. *“Dear Sir, I was appalled to read the barbaric details of a recent fox-hunt in which hounds in full cry chased their hapless quarry through the grounds of an old folks’ home. Needless to say, the emotional shock to these people in the autumn of their lives is incalculable ... ”*

At first my outrage was spurious but, by the time I had reached the kill with the hounds snapping at the exhausted fox, my emotions had become genuine — even if the old folk had leaped from their wheel-chairs with whoops of encouragement.

Unfortunately I failed to arouse either compassionate support or splenetic fury and one week later I was faced with the task of heaping ridicule on my own head.

“Dear Sir, In normal circumstances I would ignore the fatuous and ill-informed views on fox-hunting expressed by your correspondent in these columns last week. But in view of the wide circulation of your estimable newspaper I feel it incumbent upon me to reply. The fact, of course, is that the fox is a pest that must be controlled and the hunt is far more humane than other methods of eradication such as shooting. Perhaps your correspondent would prefer farmers to stalk Reynard with shot-guns thereby leaving him to bleed slowly to death in his lair. The naivety of these do-gooders never fails to astound me ... ”

Take that, Derek Lambert!

The result of these introverted debates was the emergence of a dual personality in company. If someone asked my views on blood sports I would respond with a virulent attack. If the person to whom I was talking was sympathetic he would make his own contribution only to find himself under attack for expressing the self-same views as me. Usually he would wander away in bewilderment and I would observe him later nodding in my direction as he confided to companions that the new young man on the *Chronicle* was as nutty as a fruit-cake.

One week I would be a rabid Socialist; the following week I would emerge as a die-hard Tory. One week a vegetarian, the next a slaving meat-eating freak.

Sometimes the scorn heaped on the head of a correspondent was actionable and readers must have wondered why no libel actions were ever instigated; but, of course, the readers were unaware of the dual roles involved and therefore couldn’t comprehend that it would be both masochistic and frivolous to take oneself to the law courts.”

These days I suspect editors have more than enough letters to choose from. But it would make an interesting exercise for schoolchildren: to argue passionately both pro and con, in fictional Letters to the Editor ...

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And speaking of the comic side of news-making there is Evelyn Waugh’s novel *Scoop*: ‘Many of Corker’s anecdotes dealt with the fabulous Wenlock Jakes. ‘...syndicated all over America. Gets a thousand dollars a week. When he turns up in a place you can bet your life that as long as he’s there it’ll be the news centre of the world.

‘ ‘Why, once Jakes went out to cover a revolution in one of the Balkan capitals. He overslept in his carriage, woke up at the wrong station, didn’t know any different, got out, went straight to an hotel, and cabled off a thousand-word story about barricades in the streets, flaming churches, machine-guns answering the rattle of his type-writer as he wrote, a dead child, a broken doll, spreadeagled in the deserted roadway below his window – *you* know.

‘ ‘Well, they were pretty surprised at his office, getting a story like that from the wrong country, but they trusted Jakes and splashed it in six national newspapers. That day every special in Europe got orders to rush to the new revolution. They arrived in shoals. Everything seemed quiet enough, but it was as much as their jobs were worth to say so, with Jakes filing a thousand words of blood and thunder a day. So they chimed in too. Government stocks dropped, financial panic, state of emergency

declared, army mobilized, famine, mutiny and in less than a week there *was* an honest to God revolution under way, just as Jakes had said. There's the power of the press for you.' ... '

*

'He (Teodor Szacki) took a look at the newspaper.

'Bugger all was happening. President Kwaśniewski was appealing to Cimoszewicz to run for President. Why bother to write about such boring stuff? Szacki reckoned there should be a ban on the daily reporting of politics. A two-column article once a month would be quite enough.

'Politicians lived in an isolated world, convinced they were doing something madly important all the time, which they absolutely had to describe at a press conference. Then they were given confirmation by excited political commentators, convinced of their own importance, who also believed in the significance of the events, probably just to rationalize their pointless jobs. Even so, despite the efforts of both groups and the mass attempt of the media to present unimportant information as essential, the entire nation couldn't give a shit about them. In the winter Szacki, Weronika and Helka had gone on holiday – they'd been away for two weeks. All that time he hadn't read a single newspaper. He'd come home and everything was the same as before. Absolutely nothing had happened. But when he looked at the press, it turned out the world had been collapsing on a daily basis, the government was toppling, the opposition was tearing its hair out, the Internal Security Agency had compromised itself, the polls were indicating a new line-up every hour, the parliamentary committees were talking themselves to death, etc. The effect: zero.'

From *Entanglement* by Zygmunt Miłoszewski.

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"A man so crippled by arthritis that his life was spent in an invalid chair often visited us, being pushed to our home by Father or by some schoolboy anxious to earn sixpence. He was a naturalist named Frank Radcliffe, and ran a 'Nature Notes' column in the *Australasian* under the initials 'F.R.'

Suffering had not embittered him nor hostility crushed the spirit that rested secure behind his steady, amused and tolerant glance. He experienced hostility more than most. He was an atheist in a community where the very word roused fear and repulsion as at the sight of a snake. He always faced his detractors without resentment, certain it was they who needed compassion and help, not himself.

His twisted hands, curled on his knees, would beat time to the music of a fiddle or a piano, and his eyes would become bright with eager appreciation at a voice singing a Jacobean ballad.

When the choir of the little Presbyterian church were to sing excerpts from *The Messiah* or the organist was to play a noble offertory, he would be pushed into an open space beneath the pulpit. Here he would listen to the singing and the organ music, his eyes closed, his head lifted in a still, rapt commitment to beauty under the sombre gaze of the congregation.

He wrote for the Sydney *Bulletin*, the English *Field* and *Country Life*. Father's stories supplied him with material and in his written tales he became a drover, a boundary-rider, a bush-hawker, according to the demands of the story Father told him.

He was the only man I met in my childhood who talked of painting, literature and music with reverence and understanding. I often sat at his feet, my hand clutching the kangaroo-skin rug that covered his poor legs while he told me 'Uncle Remus' stories—'The Tar Baby', 'Br'er Rabbit Goes Fishing', and tales of 'Miss Meadows and the Gals'.

It was at Frank Radcliffe's feet I first felt a longing to write. He saw in Mary a mind that responded to good prose and he gave her books at Christmas and on her birthday. She built up a little library of the great English poets, the novels of George Eliot, Gogol and Dickens.

Frank Radcliffe left the district. Years later, deserted, alone, he was pushed into a flat, low vehicle built to hold his chair, by a man he paid for the service. He set off for Melbourne, 130 miles away, seeking his last remaining friends, holding his horse's reins in hands that could not manipulate them. He was found days later on a lonely back road where his horse had taken him. The horse was feeding on the grass while he was slouched forward in his chair slowly dying.

He was put in a Melbourne hospital where Father, having been notified of his plight, sat beside him in silence, watching him smile his understanding and regard before death took him. He was a great and good man.”

Alan Marshall in *This is the Grass*.

Tom Griffiths in Marion Halligan’s *Storykeepers* tells the story of a Francis Ratcliffe who came to Australia to research flying foxes and wrote *Flying Fox and Drifting Sand*. At first I thought it might be the same person, though one story dealt with his early life and the other with its end. But then I realised that couldn’t be the case as this man only arrived in Australia from England in 1929. Clearly there were two different but perhaps equally interesting men wandering round Australia and looking at and writing about the natural world.

Griffiths says of Ratcliffe’s book, “Its popularity is in some ways surprising. The book was well written, full of stories, and offered many engaging evocations of nature, but it also contained severe and sobering judgments of the Australian environment and its limited potential for European settlement. Its truths are still resisted by some Australians today.” Although an ‘Empire man’ he was ahead of his times in other ways. “He came to Australia to study single-issue problems and he responded with holistic ecological studies and social commentaries. He came as much to study people as nature, to listen more than to teach, his concerns ranged across wildlife and ecology, he looked for whole landscape solutions, he bravely argued the reality of environmental limits, and he took seriously his duty to communicate his findings to a general public.”

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Lindsay Baly wrote *Horseman, Pass By* about the Australian Army in the Middle East in WWI and he begins by taking a swipe at journalists: “This story will be understood only if some acquaintance is made with army anatomy. Nowadays, journalists tend to call any army unit a ‘brigade’, all warships ‘battleships’ and lump all air force ranks together as ‘airman’ and without exception they commemorated the death of the last Australian soldier at Gallipoli as the ‘last ANZAC’. The whole country followed suit in apparent ignorance that there were a dozen ANZACs still alive – not counting any New Zealanders. They were of course, infantry men from the Western Front and Light Horseman Whitmore.

“A brigade is not a catch-all title for any wandering gaggle of men, but three regiments. The trend needs arresting, before we sink to ‘thingummies in one of the services’.”

He then gives a simple rundown:

Unit	Manpower	Commander
Mounted regiment	600	Lieutenant-Colonel
Brigade	1,800	Brigadier General
(3 regiments)		
Division	7 – 8,000	Major General
(3 or 4 brigades and Division HQ, artillery, engineers, signals, medical, transport etc.)		
Mounted corps	approx. 20,000	Lieutenant General
(2 or more divisions)		

But if our understanding of how the military structures itself is abysmal then Australian, indeed Western writing, about the Arabs, and particularly the Palestinians, of the Ottoman Empire is even more appalling. I will try to condense the problems into three simple complaints.

- a) that the Arab peasants did not support or help the Light Horsemen and other army arrivals, sometimes even carrying out sneak attacks on the ANZACs and others. But the peasants had no way of knowing who would win this contest, what its genesis was, how a change in colonial masters would affect them. They knew and understood Turkish colonialism; after all, they had lived under it for centuries. To act to undermine it in the hope that British colonialism would be milder or better was effectively to ask those peasants to take a leap into the unknown.

- b) that the Arabs were treacherous and passed on intelligence to the Turks. The benefits of keeping in with their Muslim overlords were clearly defined. More to the point it was not treachery but loyalty to pass on information to their long established rulers. Each time they passed information to the British or Australians they were effectively committing treason. Lawrence of Arabia seems to have understood that. But it is rare to find anything but careless denigration of the difficult choices Palestine's peasants faced in any Australian report of the campaign. For instance, when an Arab thieved from a New Zealand army camp suddenly planted without permission on Arab land the reprisal involved the burning of a Palestine village and the killing of thirty people, men, women, and children.
- c) that the Arabs did not appreciate what 'we' were doing for 'them'. Of course we weren't doing anything for them. Vague promises about future liberation (which were ignored at war's end anyway) need to be set against the damage of having hundreds of horses and riders barging through your little fields, killing your poultry, stealing your livestock, taking your precious water, knocking down your fences and terrifying your family. And at war's end there was no compensation for villagers who had seen their livelihoods stolen, damaged, or ruined by 'our' troops.

* * * * *

("One of the most famous diviners of this century (20th century) was Sapper Stephen Kelly, of the 3rd Australian Light Horse Brigade, who found water in the desert for an entire army in the Gallipoli campaign in 1915. His exploits were meticulously recorded by army bureaucrats: challenged by a sceptical Brigadier General Hughes to tell him where under the endless sands he should have his men dig, Kelly didn't hesitate, found water at the first go, "and in little time had thirty wells going, with sufficient water to supply every man with a gallon a day and every mule with its six gallons, and this of pure cold spring water instead of the lukewarm liquor from kerosene tins off the transport." Marq de Villiers in *Water Wars*. But did this sudden massive demand for water seriously deplete and lower the aquifers village people depended on via their small shallow wells?)

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Defamation is about individuals; peoples, tribes, sects, groups, cannot be defamed—although vilifying certain groups will see you in trouble. Gail Phillips and Mia Lindgren in *The Australian Broadcast Journalism Manual* provide some simple guidelines. Defamation requires that information has been published, that it relates to an identifiable person (even if they are not named), and that the information has damaged their reputation in some way. Verbal defamation is slander. Written defamation is libel. It can apply to any living person, but not to a dead one (though this is somewhat rubbery), and to institutions and businesses. Governments and government entities cannot be defamed.

In Australia defamation is a tort, a civil wrong, which means it is up to the defamed person to take action through a civil court. This makes it hard for ordinary people to repair their reputations. On the other hand the liability can extend to everyone and everything involved in the defamation; not only the offending journalist, reporter or talk show host, but editorial staff, production staff, management, even bookshops and newsagents if they are aware that publications contain defamatory material.

Often newspapers simply publish a retraction or an apology but it may go to court and damages be awarded or a book or magazine may be ordered to be destroyed; such as the book which was said to defame Tony Abbott and Peter Costello.

But journalists do have one important means of redress. Truth. Phillips and Lindgren write "In Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory truth alone is a complete defence—in other words a defamatory statement can be published if it is true and its truth is provable in court. This may be easier said than done, since it depends first on whether the journalist possesses information strong enough to stand up to full legal examination—hearsay or circumstantial evidence is not good enough—and second on whether the journalist or the journalist's employer has the financial resources to cover legal proceedings. ... In New South Wales, you need to show not only that the

defamatory comment is true, but also that it relates to a matter of public interest. In Queensland, the ACT, and Tasmania, the test is truth and public benefit. The aim here is to restrain journalists from gratuitously intruding into people's private lives."

But you burn to let fly against someone? You can. Inside parliament and inside our courts. There is an irony in all this. Defamatory statements made in court against someone can be openly reported in the media without the law intervening—even though the statements may be completely untrue and may at some stage of the trial be shown to be untrue ... There is no requirement on the media that they report any later challenges or refutations ...

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Wilmot's opus was *The Struggle for Europe*. Enid Moodie Heddle said of him, "On the night of Sunday, January 10, 1954, when a Comet airliner crashed in the Mediterranean near the Italian island of Elba, among those who lost their lives was Chester Wilmot. Notices of Wilmot's death described him as probably the greatest broadcaster of his time—"the eyes and ears of the world"—an observer with 'an acute and ordered mind, allied with ability in speaking and writing'. He understood men and politics and he had no time for humbug and sham."

Here is a little taste of his writing style (dealing with the Normandy landings): "The guns were moving into place soon after dawn, by which time Gale had set up his H.Q. in a chateau at Ranville. In the grounds the chestnut horse and a dozen sleek cows cropped the rich grass, somewhat disturbed by explosions on all sides as the airborne troops blew slit-trenches for themselves with plastic charges. These made such a noise that the occasional whine of a sniper's bullet or the crump of a mortar-bomb passed almost unheeded. But the predominant note in this medley was the gobbling of a flock of turkeys which had taken refuge in a large tree and felt constrained to give throat in answer to each explosion.

Into this bedlam rode Gale in a jeep, fresh from a visit to the captured bridges. At the top of the front steps he paused and looked around his newly-won domain, across the fields strewn with parachutes of many colours, and across the glider landing-zone to the wooded ridge where already, he hoped, the 3rd Parachute Brigade was established. As he turned in through the door, he muttered, half to himself,

"And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here." "

Chester Wilmot was a remarkable man in his time and it seems a pity that he has been allowed to fall into obscurity, almost as deep as that of Frank Radcliffe. Yet his book *The Struggle for Europe* remains eminently readable, thorough, and interesting. He could bring to his plain prose a wry sense of humour, as when he writes, "To the Germans the Pas de Calais was of vital importance and they made the common German mistake of assuming that it must therefore bulk equally large in the eyes of their adversaries. In working to strengthen these preconceptions, the British played upon the notorious tendency of German Intelligence Officers to approach problems with a card-index mind, indefatigable in collecting information, but incompetent in assessing it". Perhaps even more importantly he was always his own man. When he writes about things which have since been strait-jacketed into a particular view I think we should be listening. Three simple examples are:

1. Dunkirk is regularly described as a defeat. He didn't see it this way. A retreat wasn't a defeat and he believed that getting the troops out of a potential long stalemate in France gave the Allied commanders much greater flexibility in how to deploy them to best advantage.

2. The lack of aircraft-building in Britain through the 30s is regularly denigrated. But he points out that had Britain matched Germany in the 30s many of these planes by 1939 would have been out of date, even obsolete. When Britain began building planes in the late thirties they were built with the understanding of a new kind of war and were state-of-the-art and equivalent or superior to the German

planes. Each plane took around a week to build, a speed and commitment which peacetime probably could not have matched.

3. It is often asked why the train lines to Auchwitz were not bombed. He notes that long and sometimes acrimonious discussions were held on the subject of bombing railways and the accuracy of bombing then (and indeed now if the American experience is anything to go by) simply wasn't there for targets only feet wide and the lines themselves if hit could be replaced in days. The arguments revolved around whether it was a better deployment of resources to bomb industrial plants or marshalling yards. The general consensus was for the marshalling yards but unlike in an industrial plant where a fire in one part could spread to other parts marshalling yards offered no one large clear target and the bombing raids had limited success unless backed up by sabotage 'on the ground'.

Despite the huge numbers of books, films, articles, stories, memoirs, plays, on World War Two which have come out since *The Struggle for Europe* in 1952 it remains an excellent overview. And he met and interviewed many of the key players, he sat through the Nuremberg Trials, yet he seems to have avoided the dangers of being too close to his material. He writes with a sense of dispassion which is more convincing than a sense of partisanship would have been. He sums up: "The two most serious miscalculations of the Second World War both concerned the Soviet Union: Hitler's miscalculation of Russia's military strength, and Roosevelt's miscalculation of Russia's political ambition." And he ends with Tom Paine's words from 1776: *Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered.*

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June 22: Anne Spencer Morrow Lindbergh

June 23: Frank Dalby Davison

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Robyn Boyd wrote *The Australian Ugliness* about the lack of beauty in Australia's suburbs. Although it is more than fifty years since it made its mark many of Boyd's observations remain depressingly true. The interest in the book is not only that nothing, not multiculturalism, no migration, no new materials or new ideas, has changed the underlying problem. His book contains some very perceptive insights into the character and history of Australians which are an essential part of the problem; but also in the goal he holds out and which remains our unfound Holy Grail: a built environment which fits into its landscape rather than wrecks and rapes it, a sense of harmony and cohesion in the way that the built environment 'works' collectively (what he describes as our lack of a 'mutual visual goal'); a sense in which everything about a building, its use, its materials, its setting, its relationship to other buildings, comes together in an attractive whole.

Boyd concludes his book: "The universal visual art: the art of shaping the human environment, is an intellectual, ethical, and emotional exercise as well as a means of expression. It involves the strange sort of possessive love with which people have always regarded their shelters. The Australian ugliness begins with fear of reality, denial of the need for the everyday environment to reflect the heart of the human problem, satisfaction with veneer and cosmetic effects. It ends in betrayal of the element of love and a chill near the root of national self-respect."

But of course he wasn't the only one to notice. Frank Dalby Davison wrote (15/8/1934), "We took with us about half-a-ton of luggage, but forgot to include the supply of rose-coloured spectacles. It seemed to me, as the map unrolled itself, that we Australians have plundered the delicate beauty of our continent and disfigured it with a careless tin-shanty semi-civilisation. We saw bare little farms without so much as a tree to hide their ugliness, frowsy little hamlets, and big towns that could hardly have been more dreary-looking than they were. I don't know why I should have so suddenly wakened up to it. But there it was. It was painful at times.

We saw a great deal of mutilated natural beauty, a small amount of accidental beauty, almost no created beauty, and a very great deal of created ugliness."

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Many years ago I worked as a mother's help, looking after the two boys of architect Tom Heath, for a while in Sydney. It came back to me while I was thinking about the question of Australia's built ugliness—because at the time he was writing a book called *The Principles of Aesthetics*. He designed various buildings, Sydney University Law School, the Randwick Technical College, and I can't say I found them aesthetically very attractive, though they may have been comfortable to work in. But I lived in the house he'd built for his family and when I was visiting Sydney last year I went out briefly to Woollahra to see if it was still there. Though it had been changed slightly I still thought it was an attractive and unusual building.

So what of his book? When I looked up that title I found that an American author Dewitt H. Palmer had a book of that name. So I wondered if the book's title had been changed along the way, that my memory was at fault, or that the book hadn't been published. Curious. But the idea of making our buildings aesthetically pleasing appeals to me. To be surrounded by built ugliness seems a betrayal of the landscape ... and if we can't make things like warehouses beautiful surely we could do more with trees, shrubs and vines to help them blend in rather than assault the eye?

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'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever'; so begins John Keats' poem 'Endymion' ... Until we plough it up, spray it, cover it with concrete, implode it, you name it ... we'll do it ...

* * * * *

"Many men's minds have sought beauty. Some have seen it in a view from some mountain-top, some in a venerable cathedral sanctified by prayer and good thoughts, others in moonlight beside western waters where the tidal streams flow. There are those who draw near to beauty through music, not human music alone, uplifting as this is, but the music of the wind and of the waves. Through its perception of beauty the soul rises above things seen and visualizes those mysterious pathways leading on through boundless space to the realm of the divine. Then comes a flood of realization of the light that is shining steadfastly ahead, although dark clouds so often dim it from our mortal senses. The tang of seaweed at the hour of dawn brings health to mind and body. At dawn when the tide ebbs curlew feed beside the sea and fly wailing through the velvet twilight. Elfin pipe notes carry far across the silent air, sounding sometimes slow and mournful, then falling fast on the ear, as though played for a dance. But we cannot always hear the fairy music, nor climb by aerial stairways of golden moonbeams towards the great silence where was no beginning and will be no end; where time and space exist not. It is only when our hearts are uplifted that we can make this journey—uplifted, it may be, by inspiring music or steadfast prayer. Plato, a wise philosopher and scholar, wrote that life reaches its glory when some fair object or some loved person of a sudden draws back the curtain from our eyes so that we dwell in eternal beauty."

Seton Gordon in *Islands of the West*.

* * * * *

Many years ago my mother's god-daughter came to stay and my mother asked what she liked to read. She said *Man-Shy*. My mother went over to the little book shelf in the corner and plucked out a copy. This seemed remarkable to me at the time. As though someone only had to ask and there would be their favourite book. But when I got round to reading it sometime later I couldn't find the magic. It was about a red heifer. I was surrounded by cows. I had to take my turn bringing them in for milking. This one was wild and the book ends unhappily. Unlike my mother who loved cows I wasn't enamoured of heifers, wild or tame. But the other day I re-read the book and although it isn't on a par with a book like *Tarka the Otter* I can now see something of the imagination that went in to the book and the attraction of some of Davison's writing ...

"All cow-brutes abhor solitude. Pricking her ears, the heifer listened and looked about her. She heard the carol of a magpie, and, far away, the echo of a jackass' laugh, but no sight or sound of a beast greeted her. Turning round, she faced the way she had come. For a minute she stood looking back. Twice she shook her head as though dismissing the suggestion that she should return in search of her

mates. Or perhaps it was in anger at the thought of recent ill-treatment. Once she bellowed. No answer came back. It was late afternoon, the shadows were lengthening, and the wistfulness peculiar to evening was beginning to steal through the bush.”

“Away on her right, the moon in her third quarter came up from behind the black trees. Pale limbs gleamed silvery in the light. The bare earth was striped and patterned with long shadows, and the stars were dimmed. The red heifer could hear the small creatures of the bush scuttling out of her way, or pausing to watch her pass. A kangaroo rat leaped with startled hiss from his nest in the tall grass. She heard the flip-flop of wallabies at play; and a couple of possums checked their quarrelling to peer down at her passing swiftly on her journey.”

In a different vein he had a success with his WWI book *The Wells of Beersheba* which is a collection of short stories. I felt that short story was something of a misnomer. The stories come across more as reportage laced with a little imaginative licence. But one story ‘Sojourners’ struck me. I have lost track of the number of people I’ve heard say that Europeans ‘took up’ land, they ‘settled’ land, they put unused land to good use; they certainly never saw themselves as stealing land, that that is a modern way of looking at the matter. But Davison ends this story:

‘I believe Mrs Vachell’s reply was intended as a sort of valedictory address. There was a quaver in her voice.

‘“I think you’re all very wonderful,” she said. “But I just can’t stand the country!” It wasn’t all of what she meant, I know, but she was being as gracious as she could.

‘I was standing rolling a cigarette. I looked up at the speakers. I thought there might be a clash, an exchange of parting shots. Flo was of old Australian stock, a simple-hearted patriot, and by nature quite direct.

‘There were no fireworks. Flo threw a comradely glance in my direction. When she spoke she fell back on a saying common among the pioneers in difficult times, an inverted gauge of their faith and courage. “Yes,” she said, with a slow smile, “I’ve often heard my mother say, ‘It’s a pity we stole it from the blacks!’ ”

A pity we stole it from the blacks. But whose was the pity?

I also found his children’s book *Children of the Dark People* while I was looking for a couple of his titles. It seems to owe quite a lot to the *Swiss Family Robinson* with everything necessary virtually on tap and the children, Jackadgery and Nimmitybel, owe more to European children in their behaviour than to still-tribalised children. They and their elders belong to a kind of generic tribe. But for all that I had quibbles it was still an attractive story and I hoped that many children read it when it came out in 1936 as a way of offsetting the negative stereotypes that were everywhere then—and I hope they also read it simply because it infuses the Australian landscape with fantasy and mystery and adventure with its kindly spirits of the Bush.

“As they went on their way they wondered if they would meet the Spirit of the Mist, and what she would be like. They did not know that they could pass quite close to her without her knowing they were there for she was the blind Spirit of the Bush. Not that she was unhappy on this account, because, for one reason, she had never known sight; she had always been with closed eyes. For other reasons: she had had many happy experiences not known to those who can see. She loved to feel her way through the land, touching hills and valleys and trees. In cool weather, when her journey was ended, she dissolved into dew on the bushflowers and grasses, and went back into the quiet earth, in part to rest and in part to make the flowers and grasses grow. In warm weather she rose towards the sun and became a soft white cloud drifting through the blue and dreaming of the happy journey she had had. Things happened to her that happened to no one else in the world.”

He ends it with, “Time rolled on, the years uncounted. Still, the Spirits of the Bush dwelt in their appointed places, and still Old Mr Bunyip went to and fro, leading the rains and the winds and caring for all that made leaf or drew breath in his wide domain, for he was the Guardian Spirit of the Land, ageless and unwearying.

“There came a day when, from the high ranges, he saw for the first time, on the hunting-ground of a tribe, the square green patches of the white men’s crops, the slow sails of their gristing mills, and their cattle, sheep and horses grazing northward, southward, and westward across the country. For a long while, without moving, he watched these things with deeply troubled eyes. Then, in his nobility, he took them also into his care.

“By that time the story of Jackadgery and Nimmitybel had passed from tribe to tribe. It was called “The Story of the Lost Children”; a story about people whose deeds were remembered, told by the mothers when the little fires burned in the darkness between the mia-mias, the gunyahs, and the wurleys—a story of the olden time.”

* * * * *

So what of Davison’s writing career? I remember hearing many years ago that he sold his first book door-to-door. John Hetherington wrote in *Forty-Two Faces*, “His father was running a monthly magazine, *The Australian*, in Sydney, so Davison moved to the city and joined the magazine staff, doubling as advertising canvasser and fiction writer. That was how he came to write *Man-Shy*, he turned the tale out as part of his job, and it was published in instalments. Then the magazine went bung, as magazines have a habit of doing, and he was at a loose end again. He wasn’t worried, even though he had a young family to keep; no fit and willing young man had much need to worry in the 1920s. After due consideration, he opened a real estate office in a Sydney suburb, and set out to make a fortune. He was doing nicely until the economic depression arrived at the beginning of the 1930s. Nobody wanted to buy real estate, and, without a job or prospects, he went to the back files of *The Australian*, clipped out the instalments of *Man-Shy*, and tried to find a publisher for that story. Failing to do so, he paid a local suburban printer to print *Man-Shy*, took the printed sheets home to fold and stitch, then bound them into books with wallpaper bought cheaply at Anthony Hordern’s. He hawked his do-it-yourself book from door to door through the Sydney suburbs. Even at sixpence a copy, the public did not rush it, but it sold steadily, if slowly. Then an astonishing thing happened: *Man-Shy* was awarded the Australian Literature Society’s medal for the best novel of the year. ‘This made me a bit sorry for myself,’ Davison recalls. ‘I had become an author, but I was still hawking my book and being chivvied by other people’s dogs.’”

I wonder what one of those do-it-yourself copies would be worth now?

* * * * *

June 24: Anita Desai

June 25: George Orwell

June 26: Colin Wilson

June 27: Lafcadio Hearn

June 28: Luigi Pirandello

June 29: Oriana Fallaci

June 30: Czeslaw Milosz

July 1: Dorothea MacKellar

July 2: Herman Hesse

William Le Queux

Beryl Philp-Carmichael Yungha-Dhu

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Lance Collins and Warren Reed in *Plunging Point*, a book about intelligence failures and cover-ups, write of the impact of spy fiction, “Writers from the Continent also fed the genre, but it was spy novels in Britain that had a most curious role. Of these, William Le Queux’s work was to play, according to Phillip Knightley, ‘such an important role in the founding and development of Britain’s first formal civilian intelligence service agency that an examination of his amazing background is essential’.

“Born in London in 1864, Le Queux had a French father and English mother. Educated partly in Britain and partly on the Continent, he spoke a number of languages well. Eventually, he went into journalism, becoming a war correspondent for the London *Daily Mail*. He traveled widely and in the process became fascinated by espionage, even claiming to dabble in it himself. Novels on the spying theme soon followed and were immediately successful. He became obsessed with the ‘German menace’ and insisted that a friend of his in Berlin had not only revealed to him the existence of a huge German spy network in Britain, but had also handed him a list of key traitors in Parliament, the Foreign Office, the Admiralty and the War Office. Despite his hounding of the authorities, he was not taken seriously until 1906, when he teamed up with a disaffected soldier, Field Marshall Lord Roberts, who shared the same obsession about the Germans. Together, they concocted a fictionalized story about a German invasion of Britain, set four years later, which they managed to have serialized in the *Daily Mail*. It was an instant success, though it led to Le Queux being labelled a ‘scaremonger’ in the House of Commons. The owner of the newspaper was unfazed – after all, the *Daily Mail’s* circulation soared. The book version of the articles, *The Invasion of 1910*, sold more than a million copies in twenty-seven languages – including Icelandic and Urdu.

“Le Queux continued with his spying activities abroad, and his counter-intelligence work inside Britain, writing more articles and flooding the War Office with more reports on the perfidious Germans. Another book, *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England*, appeared in 1909 and was an instant bestseller, Le Queux made himself the hero of his own story, claiming that it was based on his own personal inquiry into the presence on British soil of some 5000 German spies. Because of its presentation as fact in fictional form, many of his readers and followers took it as the truth. Spy mania swept the country. Le Queux encouraged his readers to be on the alert and to report on suspicious Germans in Britain. Soon he was inundated with letters, which he passed on to the authorities. This happened to coincide with the deliberations of a high-powered government committee appointed on the instructions of the Prime Minister, which was looking into the danger posed to the country by German espionage.

“The chairman of the committee – R.B.Haldane, the Secretary of State for War – was at first sanguine about the threat. But he too succumbed when ‘secret German documents’, possibly planted by the French Government, fortuitously came into the committee’s possession. They purported to show Britain’s most vulnerable points in the event that war were to break out. The committee therefore decided to act.

“In 1909 Haldane recommended that a Secret Service Bureau should be established – divided into two sections, Home and Foreign. The domestic branch would concern itself with the catching of foreign spies in Britain – in effect, counter-intelligence. This was the forerunner of today’s MI5. The foreign branch would collect intelligence overseas – and would become MI6, or the Secret Intelligence Service.”

* * * * *

“*The Enormous Shadow* must also rank as one of the first spy thrillers to depict what was then a new dimension to treachery. Here we are at a far remove from the cloak-and-dagger fantasies of William Le Queux, the simple nationalism of John Buchan, the thick-ear heroics of Bulldog Drummond and the licensed-to-kill extravaganzas woven round the character of James Bond. We are at once in a more complex universe in which the scientist, making discoveries which he perceives to have far-reaching consequences for mankind, feels the dubious pull of a duty which, in his view, transcends the claims of patriotism. It is the shadowy area of personal conflict which produced the atomic traitors, men who believed that their allegiance to the world, or their idea of the world, was greater than their allegiance to their homeland.”

So wrote Matthew Coady introducing Robert Harling’s 1955 *The Enormous Shadow* which is still worth reading as it is a reminder that people like Harling and Eric Ambler were the forerunners of John Le Carré. And Harling, by setting his story in the newspaper world, engages with that difficult

question of when, where, and how—and if—a newspaper should break a story of possible espionage—before anything is proven, before court cases or official pronouncements—and what responsibilities do newspapers have to the innocent victims of such stories.

* * * * *

Hugh and Graham Greene dipped heavily into William Le Queux's writings for their *The Spy's Bedside Book*. It's not hard to see why. Le Queux's writing of early spy stories was not only immensely prolific in that small world of a new genre but also immensely popular. Stella Rimington, introducing the Greenes' book, says he wrote several hundred novels and short stories, "which test the furthest limits of credulity, embracing every villainy of which spies are capable and some of which no one could be. Le Queux was one of those not so uncommon people in whom reality and fiction, farce and melodrama, flow in a single stream. He was successively a diplomat, newspaper editor, aviation pioneer, explorer, early radio buff, spy and, in collusion with Field Marshal Lord Roberts, with whom he formed a sort of voluntary Secret Service Dept, defender of the realm."

Not all his adventure stories of course were about spies but she mentions a handful: *The Czar's Spy: The Mystery of a Silent Love* and *The Tickencote Treasure: Being the Story of a Silent Man, a Sealed Script and a Singular Secret*. In 1903 he invented the character of Duckworth Drew of the Secret Service who was certainly not silent but was 'a man held in fear by the diplomatic circle in Europe ... upon [whom] rests the ... most perilous task of obtaining the well guarded secrets of other nations and combating the machinations of England's enemies'. And Duckworth set in train that fascination with 'useful' gadgets. He used exploding cigars long before the CIA had thought of them. And his enemies were not far behind, one of them inserting a poisoned pin in his handtowel, and perhaps inspiring a poisoned umbrella point seventy years later.

* * * * *

Another early writer of spy stories was Somerset Maugham. And like early spies he virtually fell, untrained and unprepared, into the role. Anthony Curtis in a short biography of Maugham writes, "He also turned his mind to more practical ways of helping with the war. Here again Syrie (his wife) provided him with inspiration. She had a friend who was the mistress of someone high up in Intelligence. She arranged a meeting between this gentleman and Maugham as a result of which it was proposed that he should go to Switzerland, a hotbed of espionage. While living there, behind his front of play-writing, Maugham would be able to work as an agent for the Department. With his perfectly genuine 'cover' and his fluency in various languages, Maugham appeared to be ideally qualified as an operator."

Later he was sent to Russia, perhaps in the naïve hope he could prevent Russia collapsing and the Bolsheviks taking over. He spoke barely a word of Russian and seems to have spent most of his time there trying to get an insight into the Russian character. So how successful were his spying activities? The answer is probably 'not very' but his experiences did provide him with a wonderful fund of experiences which he turned into his short stories about a British spy called Ashenden. These were popular and were eventually published as a book, also called *Ashenden*, in 1928. This was the era of the 'gentleman spy' (if that is not an oxymoron) in which it was who you knew which mattered more than what you knew.

Le Queux too peppered his novels and serials with people who had money and influence. The spy as nondescript suburban husband in a drab raincoat was still a long way in the future.

* * * * *

Neil Barron sums up one of Le Queux's forays into fantasy: *The Great White Queen*. 'Lost race story set in Africa, the first of two novels which Le Queux wrote in imitation of Rider Haggard's *She*; the second was *The Eye of Istar* (1897). Both run out of inspiration toward the end, but the second is unusual in having an Arab hero and draws upon the same resources as the author's exotic thriller *Zoraida* (1895), provocatively subtitled "A Romance of the Harem and the Great Sahara." '

Fantasy, thriller, spy story—are any of Le Queux’s offerings still around? I enquired at the library and they said, yes, quite a few in fact—but all in the various reference sections so only to be read within the sacred precincts of a library. So this week I have been sitting in Glenorchy Library to read Le Queux’s provocative *Spies of the Kaiser: Plotting the Downfall of England* from Launceston’s Victorian and Edwardian collection. It came out in 1909.

At times the writing is a little pompous. People ‘elucidate’. Things are ‘yonder’. Yet the young heroes, Ray Raymond who is a “typical athletic young Englishman, aged about thirty, clean-shaven, clean-limbed, with an intelligent and slightly aquiline face, a pair of merry grey eyes, and light brown hair closely cropped”, and the narrator John James Jacox who is clearly the mouthpiece for Le Queux himself, are virtually a spy service in themselves. Jacox says, “The Government refused to admit that German spies are at work in England” to which Raymond replies, “Yes, Jack. That’s just why I’m down here on the Firth of Forth—in order to accomplish the task I set myself, namely, to prove that German secret agents are at this moment actively at work amongst us. I intend to furnish proof of the gov’nor’s statements, and by exposing the methods of these inquisitive gentry, compel the Government to introduce fresh legislation in order that the authorities may be able to deal with them. At present spies may work their will in England, and the law is powerless to prevent them.”

Though the book is episodic in nature, more like a number of linked stories, the pace cracks along and he rarely takes time out for much scene-setting, and even then Germany is always uppermost in their thoughts, such as in “That same grey chilly afternoon, in the grey falling light, we sat upon one of the seats of the pier at Cromer gazing seaward, towards where the German coast lay beyond the indistinct horizon. The place was deserted save for ourselves. On the cliff behind us stood the long red façade and many gables of the Hotel de Paris, where we had put up, while in the background rose the square old church tower, the landmark of mariners from Haisborough Gat to the Dowsing.”

But the cases of espionage are realistic, bridges, new prototypes of planes and balloons, secret places to store ammunition, interest in new steelmaking processes, as is the spy chief Hartmann who unlike a James Bond villain does nothing to draw attention to himself, and at times he might be writing of espionage eighty years later. “He was a young, good-looking, smartly dressed man, with dark eyes and hair and a rather sallow complexion. I put him down to be an Italian, but I had never set eyes upon him before. No doubt he was one of Hartmann’s travelling agents—a man who went up and down England visiting the fixed spies of Germany, or “letter-boxes,” as they are known in the business of secret police in Berlin—collecting their reports and making payments for information or services rendered.”

Although they only account for about twelve German spies the reader is left with the sense that this is the tip of the iceberg and hundreds more are out there. But what gives the book its verisimilitude and helped to convince readers Le Queux knew what he was talking about is the way he incorporates the information that the spies have collected on military planning and installations and the careful maps and background they have prepared. It isn’t hard to believe that these are the sorts of reports spies would be sending back to their own government. And although the pace is lively and most of the erstwhile spies one-dimensional there is an ordinariness about most of them which is more convincing than the melodrama which grew up around the idea of spying. And the curious aspect of it all is that the young spycatchers see the answer to the problem in changing the law. At first this struck me as odd but in fact though ferocious penalties existed for treason, that is for people spying on their own country and sending that information elsewhere, there was a curiously laissez-faire attitude to people from elsewhere turning up and quietly collecting information. I wonder if Le Queux did manage to bring in ‘fresh legislation’?

He ends the book with:

“And to-day, with Ray Raymond, I am wondering what is to be the outcome of all this organised espionage in England.

What will happen? When will Germany strike?

WHO KNOWS?"

He had to wait another five years for an answer to his question.

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July 3: Evelyn Anthony

July 4: Fay Zwicky

Helena Sumner Locke

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I see Fay Zwicky as a strong-minded woman who stood up for the things she believed in. But I am going to dedicate this date to a different strong-minded woman, a woman of great courage, a woman who disappeared on this day in 1975. Juanita Nielsen.

Occasionally she receives a brief mention in the media but the other day I picked up John Pinkney's *Great Australian Mysteries* in the Moonah Book Exchange and it begins the chapter on her:

"Juanita Nielsen — one of the bravest journalists Australia has produced — lived in an old handsome terrace house at 202 Victoria Street, Kings Cross. Her home was part of a grand avenue, lined with overarching plane trees, often described as Sydney's Montmartre. The street commands stunning views of the Harbour and of Hyde Park and St Mary's Cathedral. All this, paradoxically, within a few blocks of the seething Kings Cross red light district.

"With idyllic Victoria Street as her springboard, Juanita, heiress to the Mark Foy retail fortune, could have enjoyed a pleasant, work-free existence filled with social engagements and overseas holidays. But she was an idealist. She chose instead to use her journalistic talent to write exposes of the official corruption, gambling and vice that stained Sydney. Eventually these courageous campaigns would cost Juanita Nielsen her life.

"From a home office Juanita produced her own weekly newspaper. *Now*. This journal, letterboxed around Kings Cross and environs, was unlike most other suburban giveaways. Its news stories and editorials ruthlessly outed and attacked greedy public officials, corrupt police and cynical state governments. Juanita received numerous death threats from the powerful people she had offended. She ignored the warnings. Ugly things were happening in her city. She saw it as her responsibility to investigate and lay blame where it belonged.

"At about 10.30 a.m. on 4 July 1975, Juanita Nielsen left her house to keep an appointment with the manager of a Sydney nightclub. She was never seen again."

At the time a proposal to build two 45-storey blocks on Victoria Street was being strongly pushed. It would destroy the street's historic ambience and throw it into permanent gloom. But it wasn't the only issue she was devoting her newspaper to. "It was well-known in Sydney's underworld that Juanita Nielsen had been investigating the networks that funnelled drugs into Kings Cross. She had also been planning an article about the white-slaving pimps who 'tamed' their prostitutes by keeping them in heroin-addicted misery."

Eight days after her disappearance her handbag was found in western Sydney by a roadside. Two men later did time for conspiracy to abduct her but weren't seen as her killers. Yet no one doubts that she is dead and that one of the issues she was campaigning on killed her. But as I looked at it I realised there was another aspect which hadn't been taken into account. *She had a lot of money*. Did someone hope to become very rich—if they were prepared to wait quietly for seven years and the presumption of death?

"Juanita Nielsen's extraordinary courage in defying the dark lords of Sydney's underworld has inspired numerous books and two feature films. In *The Killing of Angel Street*, director Donald Crombie explored a young woman's crusade against official corruption in a property development — misdeeds which resulted in kidnap and murder. In the Phillip Noyce production *Heatwave*, Judy Davis portrayed a character clearly based on Juanita, as she campaigned to save a low income inner-city street from destruction."

John Pinkney wrote that in 2003 and it was reprinted in 2004. But have there been any developments since then? Tony Reeves in *The Real George Freeman* (2001) says of corrupt ex-cop Fred Krahe, “Krahe was later engaged as a security adviser to developer Frank Theeman in Kings Cross, helping to evict squatters from houses slotted for redevelopment and using more than a modest amount of violence. Infamously, anti-development campaigner Juanita Nielsen was murdered in 1975. Lennie McPherson later told a senior federal policeman that he had rejected the contract to kill Nielsen, but that it had been taken up ‘by that man that killed Don Fergusson in the CIB’ – a clear allusion (so the source told me) to Fred Krahe.

“Writer Barry Ward and I in 1976 made a statutory declaration that Krahe had ‘committed or organised’ with three others the murder of Juanita Nielsen, but few in positions of authority wanted to hear such information about this vicious man.

“In the mid-1970s Krahe was briefly employed by the *Sun* newspaper in Sydney, although his main contribution was to prevent stories exposing police corruption from seeing the light of day. He died of cancer on 6 December 1981.” And he names one of those ‘three others’. John Marcus Muller. “Muller spent a number of stints in gaol, and in 1975, fresh from a prison sentence, was one of the three men hired by former detective Fred Krahe to kill Kings Cross activist Juanita Nielsen. At the time he was a regular doorman at one of the illegal casinos in the Cross.”

Kerry Greenwood in *Meaner than Fiction* also looks at the case: “On 4 July 1975 Juanita Nielsen, wearing a tangerine leather coat, went to the Carousel Club in Kings Cross for what turned out to be her last newspaper job. Owned by Abe Saffron – aka Mr Sin or Boss of the Cross (and allegedly one of the major players in Australian organised crime in the latter half of the 20th century) – the Carousel Club was managed by James Anderson (who happened to owe developer Frank Theeman a lot of money), and run by a known gangster, Eddie Trigg.

“The tangerine coat should have made her hard to miss, but only one person ever said that they saw her again, and that person was probably lying. Juanita went into the Carousel that day to meet Eddie Trigg and his wannabe-gangster sidekick Shane Martin-Simmonds; she never walked out again.

“Despite a remarkable amount of effort from two of the few straight policemen that New South Wales employed at that time, little progress was made with finding Juanita, dead or alive, although everyone involved was pretty sure that she was dead. The location of her body, however, eluded them, as did a straight narrative about what happened to her.

“Eddie Trigg and Shane Martin-Simmonds were jailed for ‘conspiracy to abduct’ Juanita, but no-one has ever found her body. A later inquest returned an open finding, and when the National Crime Authority had a chance to investigate the matter, they blew it in an ultimately futile attempt to snare Abe Saffron for tax evasion.

“It was left to an indefatigable Sydney journalist, Peter Rees, to track down and re-interview Loretta, the transsexual receptionist of the Carousel Club, and Marilyn, Trigg’s lover of the time.

“Rees pursued his investigation of Juanita’s disappearance for over 25 years, forcing a federal parliamentary inquiry and a secret reopening of the case under the personal orders of the former NSW Police commissioner, Peter Ryan.

“In his book *Killing Juanita* (2004) Loretta and Marilyn say the same thing: Juanita Nielsen was shot in the little room under the stairs, and her body disposed of in some final way. She might have been cut to pieces and fed through the kitchen disposal unit, the mince being taken out in the boat and used for ground bait; or she might repose in the concrete foundations of the Glebe Point Bridge.”

Keith Moor in *Crims in Grass Castles* also looks at the possibility that Krahe was involved in the murder of Griffiths’ anti-drugs campaigner Donald Mackay. “(James) Bazley’s nominating of Krahe as the killer of Mackay probably came from the well-documented fact that Krahe was in Griffith around the time of Mackay’s disappearance and that Krahe was certainly a man capable of such an act, rather than any secret information Bazley possesses about Krahe.” Bob Bottom in his book *Without Fear or Favour* looked at this possible connection and wrote, “Though cleared of any connection with the

Mackay disappearance, probing of the Krahe link with Griffith served to throw the first public spotlight on to the notorious Nugan Hand Bank, since proved to have been used for drug trafficking, arms dealing and other international illicit activities” but Krahe was almost certainly involved in another less high profile murder. David Hickie in *The Prince and the Premier* also looked at Krahe’s record and the story of prostitute Shirley Brifman who said she was forced to pay protection money to him and that he had organised about eight bank robberies. Keith Moor writes, “Hickie says in his book that there was much talk among CIB officers that Krahe had gone to Brisbane and, with the help of a Queensland policeman, forced drugs down Brifman’s throat with a tube.” Moor goes on to say, “Hickie also writes of Tony Reeves, a Sydney City Council alderman and journalist, giving a statement to police saying a Commonwealth Police Force officer had told him that Sydney crime figure Lennie McPherson had said Krahe was responsible for the 1975 murder of Kings Cross publisher Juanita Nielsen.”

Many speculations and searches have been made, even as far away as the Blue Mountains, but the mystery of where her body was taken remains ...

Pinkney says, “Countless tributes have been paid to Juanita Nielsen. But a visitor to Kings Cross need only walk a few hundred metres to experience her most enduring legacy. Thanks to her sacrifice, many of Victoria Street’s shady plane trees and beautiful terrace houses still stand.”

* * * * *

“For the artist, this balancing of the tension between awareness of self as individual and as fragment of society is the most complex and insoluble aspect of life and work.

“How can this tension be resolved, if at all? Again, the matter of responsibility insists, in its dull decency, on a hearing. For the writer, lured out to play by the magical tools of his craft, the development of tragic irony may serve, through the power to empathise with suffering, to reveal and warn about latent human cruelty. This power is linked with the preservation and intuition of a sense of evil. If the writer fails to be aware of his own complicity with evil, it is likely that he will also lack the compassion that mitigates its effects.”

Fay Zwicky in *The Lyre in the Pawnshop*.

Fay Zwicky’s poetry has a strength and dynamism which is very attractive. I cannot imagine she would say ‘oh no, that is not a subject for a poem’; everything would offer possibilities. And I like the hint of mystery she incorporates. Her poem ‘Isaac Babel’s Fiddle Reaches the Indian Ocean’ begins with a quote from Isaac Babel’s *Awakening*: ‘Mr Zagursky ran a factory of infant prodigies, a factory of Jewish dwarfs in lace collars and patent-leather pumps. He hunted them out in the slums of Moldavanka, in the evil-smelling courtyards of the Old Market ... My father decided that I should emulate them ... I was fettered to the instruments of my torture, and dragged them about with me ... One day I left home laden like a beast of burden with violin-case, violin music, and twelve roubles in cash—payment for a month’s tuition. I was going along Nezhin Street; to get to Zagursky’s I should have turned into Dvoryanskaya but instead of that I ... found myself at the harbour ... So began my liberation.’

She begins her poem:
Just try and cast a piano
In the sea
Romantically.
Take it from me, you’ll
Never make it.

I tried it once
Or twice. My
Polished albatross
Kicked me as we
Sank through

Coral gardens.

It is a long poem but you might like to seek it and her other work out. It ends:

The final feathered clamp
And suck of blind anemones
Rock the ancestral fate to jar
A host of ghostly swimmers,
Measuring their buoyant gravity

Beyond Odessa's black sandbar. It perhaps helps to know that she had been a classical pianist.

And in another poem she writes:

And forgive, if you can, the safety of a poem

sharpened on a grieving night.

She was writing of Chinese dissidents but I found myself

thinking of Juanita Nielsen ...

* * * * *

July 5: George Borrow

July 6: Bessie Head

July 7: Robert Heinlein

Max Dann

July 8: Fergus Hume

July 9: Barbara Cartland

July 10: E. C. Bentley

Robert Chambers

Kevin Gilbert

* * * * *

I picked up a little magazine called *What's on in The Borders* at a Scottish festival a few years ago and it gave me this snippet: "Crossword and Scrabble addicts owe a debt to Peebles, for it is the birthplace of the Chambers brothers, creators of what is now *Chambers 20th Century Dictionary*. They gave the town the library which bears their name."

The brothers were Robert and William and they started out very modestly with a bookstall but eventually formed a company called W & R Chambers which brought out *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, an encyclopaedia, books of history, travel, folk lore, dictionaries, and the book that brought Robert to the attention of the scientific community including piquing the interest of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, which came out in 1844.

Was it still possible to track down a copy of *Vestiges*? I asked at the Library and they said the University of Chicago had reprinted it and it might be possible to buy in a copy. My son then came to the rescue and bought me a copy for my birthday.

It is an intriguing book. Although Darwin's work is sometimes seen as its progeny a more natural child is a book like D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's *On Form*. Robert published it anonymously, not least because William was worried that it might damage their publishing firm which depended on the school text-book trade for a sizable part of its income and this was seen as an heretical, even dangerous book in some quarters.

James Secord says, "There are three reasons why *Vestiges* and (its sequel) *Explanations* remain important. First, these are the books that introduced a developmental cosmology based on natural law to the English-speaking world. Nebula-to-man cosmologies had been associated with French revolutionaries, working-class atheists, and the horrors of the dissecting room; here they became polite reading matter for respectable, largely middle-class, gentlemen and ladies. *Vestiges* became a best-seller, with fourteen editions in Britain and at least that many in America." All kinds of well-known people, from queens and presidents down, bought it and discussed it. "Alfred Russel Wallace, began his search for a lawful explanation of species after reading *Vestiges* in 1845. The book had a profound effect on literature, most notably in the writings of Alfred Tennyson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and

George Eliot. All of this makes *Vestiges* and *Explanations* key texts for understanding the rise of secular ideologies in Western culture.

“A second reason has to do with the received history of theories of species origins during the past two centuries. It is well known that organic evolution, or “transmutation” as it was generally termed, was hardly a new idea when Charles Darwin published the *Origin of Species* in 1859. Moreover, it is also well known that Darwin failed to convert scientists to natural selection. The modern synthetic theory of evolution, in which natural selection plays a crucial role, is a twentieth-century creation. So too is the overwhelming centrality given to Darwin and the “Darwinian Revolution” by biologists from Julian Huxley to Ernst Mayr. From this perspective, *Vestiges* is dismissed as an amateurish “forerunner,” a curious episode on the road to the *Origin*. In recent years, however, the consensus surrounding the synthetic theory has begun to fragment, and the artificial character of the all-roads-lead-to-Darwin story has become clear. As a result a much broader and more interesting history has been revealed, uncovering a range of issues that the single-minded focus on Darwin had almost totally obscured. This new history restores *Vestiges* to a position of central importance.

“The third reason involves questions of authority. Today science is a specialized vocation, pursued by trained experts. In Britain this discipline-orientated structure was largely forged during the nineteenth century. In the wake of widespread political and social unrest, a newly literate mass reading public had to be kept at a distance from the production of knowledge about nature. Otherwise science could be used to undermine established institutions, just as was thought to have happened in France before the Revolution. From 1800 onward specialized experts increasingly assumed authority for the making of knowledge, which could then be repackaged for the public in the benign form of “popular science.” (Paid professionals became usual in Britain only toward the end of the century, and their emergence is a largely separate problem.) Chambers witnessed the widening gap between “high” and “low” knowledge, and deplored its consequences. His books (especially *Explanations*) are eloquent in denouncing the limited vision of the specialists, and their failure to engage with larger moral, philosophical, and religious issues. The writings reprinted here thus deserve to be read for what they reveal about the relation of science to its public at a crucial moment.”

* * * * *

Chambers sets out to cover everything; from the massive to the microscopic, from the sublime to the curious and I think now this is the major impact of his book: it is a snapshot of the state of knowledge about natural history in the mid 19th century. The controversy he courted was not so much about evolution, I suspect, but that he trawled the idea that human beings had several origins and he puts ‘the cradle of mankind’ in India, not in the Middle East as the Bible postulated or in Africa as scientists now believe. And he doesn’t talk about evolution but rather about ‘transmutation’, ‘progression’ and ‘development’. But as he trawls among the stars and among the microbes he develops his theme that matter is governed by natural laws and the work of science is to understand these laws. And when we understand these laws we will understand the past and know what to expect in the future. He speaks of God as ‘Author’, ‘Being’, ‘Architect’, ‘Designer’ of these laws and underlying these laws is a sense of balance in everything from our emotions to the formation of galaxies.

He writes in *Explanations*, “I am not to attempt a particular defence of the new view of nature from various odiums thrown upon it, for this can only be rightly done when time has abated prejudice, and shown more clearly the relation of this philosophy to all other views cherished by civilized nations. But I may meanwhile remark its harmony with the great practical principle of Christianity, in establishing the universal brotherhood and social communion of man. And not only this, but it extends the principle of humanity to the meaner creatures also. LIFE is everywhere ONE. The inferior animals are only less advanced types of that form of being perfected in ourselves. Constituted as its head—with a peculiar psychical character and destiny by virtue of that position—we are yet essentially connected with the humbler vehicles of vitality and intelligence, and placed in moral relations towards them. We

are bound to respect the rights of animals as of our human associates. We are bound to respect even their feelings. And from obeying these moral laws, we shall reap as certain a harvest of benefit to ourselves, as by obeying any code of law that ever was penned. The rule of force and of cruelty has hitherto prevailed in this department of the world's economy as between man and man; but the day of true knowledge will bring a better rule here also, and the many good qualities of these patient and unresisting ministers of our convenience will yet be acknowledged and dwelt on by all with admiration and love."

I came away from the book with the feeling that Chambers was a humble man, a man who stood outside at night and gazed up in wonder at the stars, and I sympathised with his youthful view: "God is too great, Providence too vast, and "the World" too wholly beautiful—a subject for man to span, to understand, to see. He can only indefinitely wonder,—and silently praise." It seems to make his own efforts to understand and explain the universe and life eternal all the more admirable.

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July 11: Harold Bloom

July 12: Pablo Neruda

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Jean Franco, introducing Neruda's *Selected Poems*, wrote of his last months "he published 'Four French poems' in 1972 and, in the same year, *Geografía infructuosa (Fruitless Geography)*. However, soon after receiving the (Nobel) prize, he returned to Isla Negra, already a sick man, believing that he had earned his retirement to 'winter quarters'. He found himself, instead, in a country already on the edge of civil war. 'This is a heart-rending moment for Chile,' he declared in an interview with his long-time friend and biographer, Margarita Aguirre, 'it invades my study and there is no option but to go on participating in this great struggle.' Long experience of Chilean politics made him singularly aware of the imminence of the tragic confrontation. In the same interview, published in August 1973, he described what was happening as a 'silent Vietnam without bombs or gunfire ... But otherwise, every possible weapon is being used inside and outside the country against Chile. We are at this very moment fighting an undeclared war.' On 11 September, as he lay mortally sick in Isla Negra, the navy rebelled, then the army. La Moneda palace was bombed and Allende killed. Neruda had lived long enough to see the results of half a century of struggle liquidated. He died on 23 September. Fittingly, his funeral became the first public demonstration against the military government; and not surprisingly, his house in Santiago was broken into and many of the books and papers there destroyed.

"His last poems are full of prescient irony. Early in 1973, he had published the *Incitación al Nixonicidio y alabanza de la revolución chilena (Incitement to Nixonicide and Celebration of the Chilean Revolution)* in which he had recourse to 'the most ancient weapons of poetry – the song and the broadsheet which had been used by both classical and romantic poets against the enemy'. Despite the fury of the title, it is one of the most consciously literary of his collections, rich in references to other poets and other texts, to Whitman, Quevedo and to the sixteenth-century poet Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga who wrote the first Chilean epic, *La Araucana*. It is as if he were shoring up his defences against the approach of barbarism. Just before he died, the Buenos Aires magazine, *Crisis*, published a group of poems which grin astonishingly in the face of death, a latter-day *Estravagario*, recording his struggles with the dictionary, and including odd fantasies like the expulsion of the Ostrogoth family from their house and garden by an army of corpses, or the vision of a world flooded by a 'great urinator'. On the edge of the final silence, Neruda writes his own best epitaph, the epitaph of an 'animal of light' who has exhausted all that can be said in words:

And today in the depth of the lost forest
he hears the sound of the enemy and runs away
not from the others but from himself
from that interminable conversation
from the chorus which always accompanied us

and from the meaning of life.

Because this once, because just once, because
a syllable or an interval of silence
or the unstifled noise of a wave
leave me face to face with the truth
and there is nothing more to interpret,
nothing more to say; this was everything.
Closed were the forest doors.
The sun goes round opening up the leaves
The moon appears like a white fruit
and man bows to his destiny.

* * * * *

In one respect the death of Neruda and the loss of his books and manuscripts, though tragic and terrible, is not as terrible as the loss of younger poets and songwriters who were just beginning their careers such as Victor Jara.

Marc Cooper was for a time a translator in the office of President Allende. He writes in *Pinochet and Me*, "On the afternoon of September 11 1983, the tenth anniversary of General Pinochet's coup, the Chilean national soccer team was squaring off against that of another dictatorship – Uruguay. For a few hours, politics would be put aside as 60,000 fans followed the match inside Santiago's National Stadium and hundreds of thousands more tuned in via the military government's National Television.

"But with barely twenty minutes left in the game, and with the Chilean team leading 2-0, more than half the fans in the stadium suddenly stood up and, stealing the tune of a popular sports jingle, began to sing in unison: "It's going to fall! It's going to fall! The military dictatorship is going to fall!"

"The sound of the protest song reverberating around the soccer field was a far cry from the rat-tat-tat of the executioners' machine guns and the screams of the tortured that ten years ago had made this same stadium an international symbol of terror and human degradation."

Among those who died in that stadium was Victor Jara. Cooper writes, "on a recent bus commute through downtown Santiago I witnessed a moving scene. A street troubadour boarded the bus to sing for his supper. This all-too-common occurrence has driven Chilean commuters beyond boredom, so barely anybody made eye contact with the roughly dressed middle-aged singer. While most of these beggars scratch out three or four tunes before asking for money, this fellow sang only one song. "*Tu, no eres nada, ni chichi ni limonada,*" he crooned, reviving the signature song of Victor Jara, the leftist folk singer whose hands were smashed before he was killed by Pinochet's military in the weeks following the coup. "You are nothing, neither hard cider nor lemonade. Get out of the middle of the road, join up and save your dignity ..." Two or three young people clapped their Walkman earphones on as soon as he strummed his first chord. The thirty or so others on the packed bus listened quietly as they stared ahead or out of the window. But when he finished, almost everyone put coins in his cup."

Jacobo Timerman in *Chile: Death in the South* writes, "Contemporary Chile has produced two great singer-composers, perhaps the greatest in Latin America. Violeta Parra committed suicide a decade ago. Victor Jara, held in the National Stadium after the fall of Allende, began to sing the anthem of Popular Unity, Allende's party, to raise the morale of the other prisoners. It was an act of heroism and of suicide. The military guards smashed his hands, those hands that had so often held a guitar, before they murdered him."

Timerman also writes of Jara's wife. "In the Café del Cerro there is a dance school, a theater workshop, and an exhibition of paintings. It is a typical Spanish-style building with a large central patio and a rickety staircase that leads to the upper floor. I am in the patio with Joan Jara, the English ballerina who returned to Chile after ten years in exile. Before she left Chile with her two small daughters, under the protection of the British consul, she had to search among hundreds of anonymous

corpses for the body of her husband, Victor Jara, who was murdered in the National Stadium, where Pinochet's first concentration camp functioned. She took his body and placed it in a niche in the General Cemetery in Santiago.

"She had agreed to see me for an interview because I too had been a political prisoner of the military. She recalled that I was the first to publish what had happened to Victor Jara. She doesn't give interviews anymore. We spoke less about the past and more about her work as director of the dance school in the Café del Cerro. She gives free classes to poor students and produces shows for the people of the marginal settlements. She gave me a copy of the book she has written about the life of Victor Jara, *An Unfinished Song*, and she underlined the first paragraph of the preface for me: "It is a relief, at last, to tell this story quietly, in my own way, instead of responding to sudden questions which allow me to tell only the parts of it which interest the person who is interviewing me."

"I was not interviewing her, so our silences were not uncomfortable. She is quite at home here. One of her daughters came up to greet me. She had that extraordinary serenity that I have noted in other children whose parents have been murdered by the military. They are like missionaries who have a hope that cannot be shaken. Joan returned to Chile because her identity is here and because of her loyalty to what Victor Jara signifies in this tormented country. Identity and loyalty, those beautiful examples of human architecture that the military dictatorships would like to demolish. Joan Jara is a complete, warmhearted woman. She does her work, she dances. And she waits."

Bands and folk singers continue to sing Jara's songs. A form of immortality. But reading this reminded me of seeing John Denver on a TV program about Chile. He was at a posh party and was asked what he thought of Pinochet's rule. He said he could see nothing wrong with it. I used to like John Denver. And then, witnessing this moronic summing-up of a country from the vantage point of a lush social event, I suddenly felt I never wanted to listen to John Denver ever again. But perhaps even worse, after all Denver made no claims to be a social commentator or even an observant man, was the claim by Niall Ferguson who implied the Pinochet dictatorship was a good thing because it brought in a pension plan. Bearing in mind that only employees, not employers, contribute but the employers get to garnishee the wages and pass, or frequently not pass, the money on to the pension funds, it has been a vehicle for widespread corruption. More importantly it begs the question: the best pension plans are in democracies so since when was a brutal military dictatorship a requisite for a pension plan? And he clearly hadn't done his homework. Timmerman writes, "It is known, for example, that in 1985 there was less output than in 1970 of essential economic products: steel, paper, and glass, for example. In 1985 the Chileans consumed 15 percent less than they did in 1970, although the 20 percent of the population that is in the upper income bracket consumed 30 percent more in 1985 than in 1970 and the 40 percent of the population that constitute Chile's poor consumed 50 percent less in 1985 than in 1970. Yes, 50 percent less." How a pension plan which did not extend to the unemployed, the beggars, the people eking out a living from occasional labour or a small market stall might benefit from a pension plan which ignored them is a mystery. I hope Niall Ferguson writhes in embarrassment every time he recalls this profoundly insensitive claim.

Cooper finishes his book by going to what was once a notorious torture centre, the Villa Grimaldi, now a park. "Chile is a country that was ripped apart from within. The pain was so great, the horrors so chilling, the brutality and hypocrisy so shocking that it is hard to comprehend, even today, twenty-five years after the worst excesses. The establishment of living monuments like this park is only a first and incomplete step towards healing. No organism, not the human body nor the body politic of a nation, is ever really healed until the illness is identified, isolated, and expunged. Chile will be whole not when more visitors show up to Villa Grimaldi on their weekends off. Nor when school children are bussed in for a quick walking tour. No. Chile will only be whole when the fence around Villa Grimaldi is finally torn down and the horrifying truths and consequences contained within are fully exposed to the society around it.

“The struggle for Chile’s future resides in interpreting its past. As the inscription on the wall of the disappeared cautions: “The forgotten past is full of memory.” ”

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July 13: John Clare
Archie Weller
Isaac Babel

* * * * *

American writer Travis Holland wrote a novel he called *The Archivist’s Story*. It deals with a Soviet bureaucrat in the 1930s tasked with suppressing and destroying the writings of those who have transgressed the Stalinist line and who therefore are to be expunged from the canon. One such writer is Isaac Babel. “After Kuttyrev has gone, as Pavel is carrying yet another box of manuscripts to the well, a thought stops him cold. If, as Kuttyrev claims, they are waiting upstairs for the archives to be put in order, then what will become of the archives once that has been achieved? He sees now that he has allowed himself to be lulled into believing that this fortress of letters Denegin built would never fall, despite all Kuttyrev’s frustrated hammering.

Back among the shelves, Pavel wonders: How long would it take to destroy all this? Every file, every folder, down to the last story, the last poem. He lays a hand against one of the boxes, feels the manuscripts in it shift when he pushes against the cardboard, as if something living lay inside, asleep, dreaming. He moves on to another box, then another, letting his hand rest a moment on each of them. *The magnificent grave of the human heart.*

And here is, the master himself. Babel. A single box, twenty-seven green folders. Pavel sets the heavy cardboard box onto the concrete floor. In the topmost folder lies Babel’s unsigned, unfinished, beautiful story. Kneeling under the bare lightbulb in its wire cage, he reads it straight through. Afterward, when he returns to his desk, Pavel is almost surprised to discover that he is still holding the story in his hands. After that, what follows is surprisingly simple. The story, a mere eleven pages long, folded and tucked tightly under his belt, brushes the small of his back. His shirt and coat conceal the tiny bulge entirely. Upstairs, the guard posted at the main entrance of the Lubyanka barely glances at his identification card. But then the entrance guards are not really concerned with those leaving the building, only those coming in. In all Pavel’s time here, no prisoner has ever escaped. Nor has he ever been searched. Today is no different.

That night he slips Babel’s manuscript under the mattress of his bed. Tomorrow he will find a better place.”

* * * * *

George Steiner wrote a book called *My Unwritten Books* which he introduces with these words, “A book unwritten is more than a void. It accompanies the work one has done like an active shadow, both ironic and sorrowful. It is one of the lives we could have lived, one of the journeys we did not take.”

Of course millions of books never get written. They are too difficult, too mundane, too time-consuming, too ... something. Other manuscripts get lost. Some are deliberately suppressed or burnt. Some get overlooked. Some are put away and forgotten. Steiner’s reason for not writing those particular books are various. But the void does not touch other people, only as in his suggestion that those books might have had worth, might have changed his life ...

He does touch on a different kind of Babel, not Isaac but the loss of language. “I have argued in *After Babel* (1975) that the thousandfold multiplicity of mutually incomprehensible languages once spoken on this Earth – so many are now extinct or disappearing – is not, as mythologies and allegories of disaster would have it, a curse. It is, on the contrary, a blessing and a jubilation. Each and every human tongue is a window on being, on creation. A window like no other. There are no ‘small’ languages, however reduced their demographic or environmental setting. Certain languages spoken in the Kalahari desert feature more and subtler ramifications of the subjunctive than were available to

Aristotle. Hopi grammars possess nuances of temporality and motion more consonant with the physics of relativity and undecidability than are our own Indo-European and Anglo-Saxon resources. By virtue of the cultural-psychological roots and development embedded within it, roots which also in the etymological sense reach back into the subconscious, every tongue voices identity and experience in its own, irreducibly particular way. It segments time in manifold and diverse units. Numerous grammars do not formally divide tenses into past, present and future. The ‘stasis’ of Hebrew verb forms entails a metaphysics and, indeed, a theological model of history. There are languages, for example in the Andes, in which, most reasonably, the future lies behind the speaker, being invisible, whereas the horizons of the past lie open to view before him (there are intriguing analogies here with Heidegger’s ontology). Space, which is a social no less than a neuro-physiological construct, is linguistically mapped and inflected. Languages inhabit it differently. Via their ‘cartography’ and nominations, the relevant linguistic communities underline or efface varying contours and features. The spectrum of precise discrimination between various tints and textures of snow in Eskimo languages, the colour charts which differentiate the pelts of horses in the jargon of the Argentine gaucho, are standard examples. The axes of the human body whereby we orient ourselves in our local spaces are linguistically labelled and realised. British dialects produce more than one hundred words and phrases for left-handedness. The equation between left-handedness and evil (*sinistra*) is enshrined in Mediterranean cultures. Structural anthropology has taught us that concepts and identifications of kinship are ineluctably linguistic. Even such basic notions as parenthood or incest depend on taxonomies, on lexical and grammatical encoding inseparable from the options – collective, economic, historical, ritual – set out in speech. We verbalise, we ‘phrase’, as does music, our relations to ourselves and to others. ‘I’ and ‘thou’ are facts of syntax. There are linguistic vestiges in which this distinction is blurred, e.g. in the archaic Greek dual. Though it may take on ‘surrealist’ modes, the grammarology of our dreams is linguistically organised and diversified far beyond the historically, socially circumscribed provincialities of the psychoanalytic. How enriching it might be to have nightmares or wet dreams in, say, Albanian.”

Can losing a book be equated with losing a language?

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Isaac Babel was born in 1894 in Odessa to a Jewish family. And curiously the family called themselves Bobel rather than Babel so my thoughts about a babel of languages was misguided—apart from not knowing the meanings of Babel and Bobel in Russian. It is hard to disentangle the place that politics and private entanglements played in his final ending in front of a firing squad in a Soviet prison under Stalin. While I was wondering whether it was his life or his writings I might look for I came upon a book with the intriguing title of *Russia’s Dangerous Texts* by Kathleen F. Parthé. He was predominantly a writer of short stories, and Penguin describes his *Collected Stories* as “masterpieces of violence, irony, and lyricism”, and a journalist; sympathetic in the beginning to the new Soviet regime but gradually becoming more critical.

“Not every work had so fortunate a fate (as Nikolai Bukharin’s), and Vitaly Shentalinsky, who in 1988 began to press for the release of the KGB’s archival material relating to writers confesses at the end of his first book” (this was *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime*) “that the impossibility of locating the twenty-four folders confiscated from Isaac Babel, and the death of the one agent who might have known their location, reminded him of the other things that have been lost, or are still hidden away in the deep recesses of the Party and presidential archives.” “For years, Shentalinsky tells us, “a soot-stained chimney released a stream of smoke over the Lubyanka and for decades sprinkled Moscow with the ash of incinerated manuscripts. How many books were consumed by that chimney, never to be read again.” ”

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July 14: Irving Stone

July 15: Gavin Maxwell

I must admit I found Iris Murdoch's later novels extremely hard to read. Well, to be honest, I didn't find her early novels all that easy. (I have just been reading her early novels *The Italian Girl* and *The Sandcastle* to see if I still agree with that assessment and the answer is an unemphatic 'Yes'.) But then I make no claim to being a sophisticated reader. The other day I came across A. N. Wilson's biography of her, *Iris Murdoch as I Knew Her*, and it raised a different problem. The book is almost as much about Wilson and Iris's husband John Bayley as it is about her. But the issue he raises is that perennial one of privacy and respect.

Wilson begins by mentioning the film *Iris*, "Some of the critics — and they all loved this film — spoke of it as the greatest love story ever told. Newspapers and magazines printed dozens of articles by pundits, all to the effect that the film taught us the meaning of true love. Here was a man so completely devoted to a woman that he cared for her to the end; their love story went on being a love story, even, or especially, when they were wading round their house ankle-deep in filth.

"Why this pair, perfectly comfortably off (Dame Iris left more than £2 million in her will), did not employ a cleaner, or a nurse, and why John Bayley needed to be King of this particular castle or mud-pie was a mystery too mundane or too difficult for a film to answer. Iris Murdoch's novels, by contrast, are a coruscating analysis of the human capacity to turn love into power-games; the most uncompromising scrutiny of what takes place in the tyrant's cage which masquerades as a happy marriage. More than any English writer of her generation, she stared with wide-awake intensity into the muddied waters of our emotional lives, exposing our confusions, our need to deceive ourselves and other people."

Catherine Cole in *The Poet Who Forgot* looks at it from a slightly different perspective: "The Dublin-born writer, Iris Murdoch, suffered a similar fate to Alec Hope, and if *Iris*, Richard Eyre's 2001 film about her last years, is accurate she swung between anger and oblivion, the former when something retained came back, tentatively, briefly, to taunt her, like a ray of sunlight penetrating a dungeon. Initially Murdoch had suspected she was suffering from writer's block until the awful reality unfolded, her reduced vocabulary offering later researchers in dementia some clues into how a writer's proficiency in words can shrink with the onset of the disease. All Murdoch's books, her well-lived life, seemed to have come to nothing, for what good are books when a writer's last years are lived like a confused child, a dotty old woman dancing in a nursing home corridor? Books are no consolation at all.

"Murdoch's life partner, John Bayley, was criticised for his memoir about her demise and on which the film *Iris* is based, and one can understand why. Murdoch was still alive when it was written, and her dementia ensured she had no say in the manner in which she was represented. There is something deeply invasive in the writer, so alive in all her writing, offered for the inspection of a voyeuristic reader or a dread-filled cinema audience, their thoughts dwelling not on Murdoch's achievements but an anxiety about what might await them as they age."

Wilson acknowledges that no film could show what made Iris Murdoch one of the most famous writers of her generation. And acknowledging that impossibility makes understandable why the film was about a young woman having love affairs and an old woman suffering from Alzheimer's, not about a writer ...

"The last time I saw the Eyre film, I came out blinking into the Soho afternoon, possessed by a sensation like rage. It was like rage, rather than being rage itself. I was not angry with Richard Eyre, who had made a very good film about an old woman suffering from Alzheimer's disease, and whose actors deserved the plaudits of the critics. I was not angry with John Bayley, either, though I was sickened by his repeated claims in the public prints that his wife, such an intensely private person, would have wanted 'fame' of this kind. The books that he wrote about her, which began as an exercise in tender recollection, appeared to me a Pandora's box of which he quite clearly lost control. The resentments, envy, poisonously strong misogyny and outright hatred of his wife which seemed to me to

come from the books, like some ghastly truth-drug, or course of psychotherapy, brought to the surface of the page, were things of which he probably had only a hazy consciousness. To one old friend who expressed her dismay at the books, he admitted that he thought he had gone mad.”

But how private was ‘intensely private’? When her publisher talked about a biography she suggested Wilson who was a friend. But when she approached him he pointed out that she didn’t need to accept the idea of *anyone* writing her biography, that she could say her papers were off-limits and ask her friends and colleagues not to co-operate with a biographer. But she seemed to take the position that a biography was inevitable. I found that rather sad. Her protestations might merely have been for form’s sake and not a genuine sense of dismay at such an intrusion. But I find the idea that we must have the lives of the better-known turned inside-out for our careless and prurient scrutiny rather horrible.

I am interested in the lives of writers because I want to know how they began their careers, how they wrote their books, where and how and when they found their inspiration and turned it into memorable writing. But I really don’t want to know about their affairs or their alcoholic binges or whether they could cook ... and knowing more about their private lives, such as knowing that Doris Lessing abandoned her children, cannot help but diminish the pleasure of reading their work ...

I went back and read a couple of Murdoch’s earlier books and although I could see her skill I came away, both from her fiction and from A. N. Wilson’s book, with the thought that whatever made her popular and loveable to many people remains hidden from me ...

And Wilson draws attention to the other pitfall in the ways her life and legacy have been distorted. “Little did we know then what would happen next, of the dark that would engulf her last days, or of the distortion of her image in the public mind by various books, and by the film. She was doomed to become the Alzheimer’s Lady. Her face is used now by the picture editors of newspapers to illustrate the medical pages, when doctors believe they have some clue about possible cures or alleviations for that wretched condition. She appears more often in such pages than in the part of the paper concerned with literature. Clumsy Oxford seeks to perpetuate her memory, not by a Chair of Literature or Philosophy but of Alzheimers. The great are now to be remembered by the diseases which killed them rather than by their gifts” ...

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July 16: Christopher Koch

Rex Marshall

July 17: Christina Stead

July 18: Clifford Odets

July 19: A. J. Cronin

July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith

July 21: A. D. Hope

Harold Hart Crane

July 22: Tom Robbins

July 23: Raymond Chandler

Coventry Patmore

July 24: Aaron Elkins

Zelda Fitzgerald

July 25: Elias Canetti

July 26: George Bernard Shaw

July 27: Hilaire Belloc

July 28: Beatrix Potter

July 29: Max Nordau

Booth Tarkington

Don Marquis

July 30: William H. Gass
July 31: Primo Levi
August 1: Herman Melville
M. R. James
August 2: Isabel Allende
Geoffrey Dutton
August 3: Rupert Brooke
P. D. James
Max Fatchen

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Rupert Brooke's collected up and reissued poems *1914 & other Poems* is now treated as the end of an era; that the gay dazzle of Edwardian life had been brought to an abrupt end by the beginning of the First World War. Rupert Brooke was part of the gay dazzle, comfortably off, educated, handsome, and yet the thing which struck me most strongly about his poems was an underlying sense of sadness. Did he have an intimation that he and millions of young men would soon be dead? Or was he like many people who feel that when things seem to be going along well that it can't last? Or was a sense of melancholy an integral part of his nature? Or was it that youthful pose that constantly dwells on death?

THE SOLDIER

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

SONNET (*Suggested by some of the Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*)

Not with vain tears, when we're beyond the sun,
We'll beat on the substantial doors, nor tread
Those dusty high-roads of the aimless dead
Plaintive for Earth; but rather turn and run
Down some close-covered by-way of the air,
Some low sweet alley between wind and wind,
Stoop under faint gleams, thread the shadows, find
Some whispering ghost-forgotten nook, and there

Spend in pure converse our eternal day;
Think each in each, immediately wise;
Learn all we lacked before; hear, know, and say
What this tumultuous body now denies;
And feel, who have laid our groping hands away;

And see, no longer blinded by our eyes.

Or did he, intensely patriotic though he undoubtedly was, understand that no nation, no people, is ever given more than a brief moment of supreme power? A century. Two centuries. Sometimes a little more. Very often a lot less. And few nations have handled the transition to greater or lesser power with much dignity, compassion, or deep understanding. But we all, great in outward terms or not, come to our 'eternal day'.

This might seem obvious if you believe—and a load of nonsense if you don't—but it often strikes me that poetry which is not underpinned by a sense of a spiritual dimension lacks something. There is very good poetry about love, about death, about everyday things, something more is not essential, but the poems which pass down, century after century, which urge reading and re-reading are the ones which have that indefinable something more. Perhaps Rupert Brooke if he had not died in 1914 on his way to the Dardenelles would have produced nothing more. But I have the feeling of an apprentice still feeling his way and that his best poems were still to come ...

But then that might be said of every young man who dies in war: their greater skills, their greater depths of understanding, their development as fathers, husbands, as human beings, all that potential was cut short. That is the crime for which we all have to answer ...

* * * * *

Edward Marsh in his memoir of Brooke has this interesting sidelight: "It is, of course, absurdly untrue that, as has been said, he felt he ought to make up for his personal beauty by being ugly in his poetry. To begin with, ugliness had a quite unaffected attraction for him; he thought it just as *interesting* as anything else; he didn't like it—he loathed it—but he liked thinking about it. 'The poetical character,' as Keats said, 'lives in gusto.' Then he still had at this age (24) a good deal of what soon afterwards faded completely away—the bravado, the feeling that it was fun to shock and astonish the respectable, which came out in his school letters. Again, he was incensed by the usual attitude of criticism—in his view, either stupid or hypocritical—towards 'coarseness' in literature. "Indeed," he wrote early this year in a review, "the Elizabethans *were* unrefined. Their stories were shocking, their thoughts nasty, their language indelicate. It is absurd to want them otherwise. It is intolerable that these critics should shake the pedagogic finger of amazed reproof at them.....Such people do not understand that the vitality of the Elizabethan Drama is inseparable from [its coarseness]. Their wail that its realism is mingled with indecency is more than once repeated. True literary realism, they think, is a fearless reproduction of what real living men say when there is a clergyman in the room." The feeling here expressed urged him to make a demonstration; it dignified the boyish impulse into a duty."

So why does he still retain, nearly a hundred years after his death, that aura of the 'golden lad'? What was it about him? His poems are capable but unremarkable. His life was quite conventional. He was handsome but that in itself doesn't seem enough. People spoke of his charm and kindness. But as I was reading this from his letters I thought it probably also included an openness and *joie de vive* that people everywhere responded to ... and remembered long after he was gone ...

Julie Andrews in her memoir *Home* wrote, "Catherine Nesbitt, who played Henry Higgins's mother, was a woman of grace and beauty. She had actually played a small role in the 1938 film version of *Pygmalion*. Beaton had dressed her exquisitely in the show, with frills about her wrists and gloves on her hands. You would never have guessed that she suffered dreadfully from rheumatoid arthritis. The great love of her life had been the poet Rupert Brooke, who died tragically in the First World War. She often talked about him.

"When she heard about the Dictabelts (a kind of dictaphone recording) Tony and I sent each other, she said, "Oh, if *only* Rupert and I had had that opportunity! I would have him with me still."

Rupert Brooke wrote, "It's very perplexing. These people—Samoans and Fijians—are so much nicer, and so *much* better-mannered, than oneself. They are stronger, beautifuller, kindlier, more hospitable and courteous, greater lovers of beauty, and even wittier, than average Europeans. And they

are—under our influence—a dying race. We gradually fill their lands with plantations and Indian coolies. The Hawaiians, up in the Sandwich Islands, have almost altogether gone, and their arts and music with them, and their islands are a replica of America. A cheerful thought, that all these places are to become indistinguishable from Denver and Birmingham and Stuttgart, and the people of dress and behaviour precisely like Herr Schmidt, and Mr Robinson, and Hiram O. Guggenheim. And now they're so ... it's impossible to describe how far nearer the Kingdom of Heaven—or the Garden of Eden—these good, naked, laughing people are than oneself or one's friends ... ”

And he encapsulates that sense of a lost generation. His 1913 poem 'The Funeral of Youth: Threnody' begins:

The day that *Youth* had died,
There came to his grave-side,
In decent mourning, from the county's ends,
Those scatter'd friends
Who had liv'd the boon companions of his prime,
And laugh'd with him and sung with him and wasted,
In feast and wine and many-crown'd carouse,
The days and nights and dawns of the time
When *Youth* kept open house,
Nor left untasted
Aught of his high emprise and ventures dear,
No quest of his unshar'd—
All these, with loitering feet and sad head bar'd,
Follow'd their old friend's bier. ...

* * * * *

August 4: Tim Winton

Robert Hayden

Walter Pater

August 5: Guy de Maupassant

Wendell Berry

August 6: Rolf Boldrewood

August 7: Dean Farrar

August 8: Frank Richards

August 9: John Dryden

Philip Larkin

Walter Starkie.

* * * * *

Walter Starkie, remembered for his writings on gypsies, described his recreations as “violin playing, wandering”. I like that. Could I describe my recreations as “pottering”? I always found it extremely difficult to know what to say about myself in the rare times I was asked to send a brief bio to something. Did they want my history as a *person* or as a *writer*? Or both? Or the way I might place myself in the world? Whatever I wrote never seemed to sound quite right. In the end I decided I would just say the simplest thing possible. ‘Jennie Herrera is a housewife and currently lives in Hobart.’ That seemed to cover everything. After all, if it came under a piece of writing then obviously I had also done some writing. And if I put ‘currently’ that implied I hadn’t always lived here. And if I said ‘housewife’ that said that I was married and didn’t have a career. I wasn’t tossing off stories as light relief from seeing patients or selling cosmetics ...

I still go back and read *Raggle-Taggle* every so often. But the romance is in Walter Starkie, in his storytelling ability, in his travels, in his music, rather than in Gypsy life per se. In fact if you took away the horses and the violins much about Gypsy life merely seems squalid, misogynistic, petty and violent.

In other words people romanticise Gypsies until they get their purse stolen on a European railway platform. This doesn't alter the fact that Gypsies or Roma are an ethnic minority in Europe and elsewhere and have the rights to safety and respect that all minorities should have.

Charles Dickens belonged to the romanticiser school—as did John Keats with his Meg Merrilies who 'was a Gipsy/And liv'd upon the Moors' and 'Her Brothers were the craggy hills,

Her Sisters larchen trees—

Alone with her great family

She liv'd as she did please'—and if anyone set

out to make Gypsy life seem wonderfully desirable it was surely him. Gypsy children, in his view, were living lives of great freedom untrammelled by the dreadful brutal schools of nineteenth century England. Given the restrictions and unhappinesses of his own childhood this was probably a genuinely held view. Generations of children since have longed to be 'Out with Romany' and it was only the greater freedoms of most children's lives in the second half of the twentieth century which showed up more clearly the restrictions and disadvantages of real Gypsy life ...

George Orwell in his 'Hop-Picking Diary' wrote "Out of about 200 pickers at Blest's farm, 50 or 60 were gypsies. They are curiously like oriental peasants – the same heavy faces, at once dull and sly, and the same sharpness in their own line and startling ignorance outside it. Most of them could not read even a word, and none of their children seemed ever to have gone to school. One gypsy, aged about 40, used to ask me such questions as, 'How far is Paris from France?' 'How many days' journey by caravan to Paris?' etc. A youth, aged twenty, used to ask this riddle half a dozen times a day – 'I'll tell you something you can't do?' – 'What?' – 'Tickle a gnat's arse with a telegraph pole.' (At this, never-failing yells of laughter.) The gypsies seem to be quite rich, owning caravans, horses etc. yet they go on all the year round working as itinerant labourers and saving money. They used to say that our way of life (living in houses etc.) seemed disgusting to them, and to explain how clever they had been in dodging the army during the war. Talking to them, you had the feeling of talking to people from another century. I often heard a gypsy say, 'If I knew where so and so was, I'd ride my horse till it hadn't a shoe left to catch him' – not a 20th century metaphor at all. One day some gypsies were talking about a noted horse-thief called George Bigland, and one man, defending him, said, 'I don't think George is as bad as you make out. I've known him to steal Gorgias' [Gentiles'] horses, but he wouldn't go so far as to steal from one of us.'

"The gypsies call us Gorgias and themselves Romanies, but they are nicknamed Didecais (not certain of spelling). They all knew Romany, and occasionally used a word or two when they didn't want to be understood. A curious thing I noticed about the gypsies – I don't know whether it is the same everywhere – was that you would often see a whole family who were totally unlike one another. It almost seems to countenance the stories about gypsies stealing children; more likely, though, it is because it's a wise child etc."

The other day I came across a book called *The Gorse and the Briar* by Patrick McEvoy of his travels and camping with his brother in Wiltshire. The book came out in 1940. It was a reminder of two other aspects of Gypsy life which have intrigued people. A supposed knowledge of plant lore and a psychic dimension to life.

'I asked him what part an expectant mother played in the laying of an earth-bound spirit.

' "She must be a young lawfully wedded woman bearing her first *chavie*," said Luke Smith. "She must go to the place that the spirit haunts with six clergymen, a spaded bitch, and a bantam cock. It may be out in a field. The six clergymen stand round the woman, who takes the bantam cock on her wrist and calls the spirit to her. When the spirit comes the cock begins to crow and the spaded bitch to wail. The woman asks the spirit what troubles its mind, and why it can neither rest nor leave the earth. It may be something very deep that troubles the spirit—something so deep that neither the woman in child nor the six clergymen can understand. If they understand the spirit, they promise to put to right

the matter that troubles it, they give the spirit their blessing and they sprinkle holy water on the grass. Then the six clergymen go back to their churches, the woman to her man, the cock to its hen, and the bitch to its kennel.” ’

‘Without a doubt, tents and ponies are the true possessions of a Gypsy. The more he strays from them, the quicker he loses the characteristics and customs of his race. The Gypsy musician of Budapest dislikes being classed with the wandering Gypsy of Rumania; he has become a snob, a victim of class distinction, a fatal error of which the true Gypsy is ignorant. They are an exceptionally race-proud people with strong racial prejudices, but these prejudices crystallize against all *gorgios*, who in nearly every country in the world have inflamed the Gypsy’s hatred as much from fear as from contempt and persecution. In England it is strange how modern conditions, roads, cheap manufacture, and sixpenny bazaars have robbed the Gypsy of his prosperity and obliged him to return to the same raggle-taggle tent that he erected nearly four hundred years ago, when he first set foot in this country.’

‘The Gypsy man, like the Gypsy woman, has his traditional methods of revenge. The woman cuts up the harness, rips the tent and bedding, and breaks the crockery; the man smashes up the trap with the kettle iron, sells the pony for half its worth, and does as much damage as he can about the camping-place in order to annoy the neighbouring farmers. The police arrive and order him to move, the harness is lying cut up on the grass, the tent is ripped to pieces, the trap is smashed, and the horse is sold. He then feels he has sufficiently annoyed his wife.’

* * * * *

I came upon several pieces of music from the earliest known book of English renaissance music, a manuscript in the British library of around 1525, which includes some anonymous pieces and some by Hugh Aston who died in 1522. He may also have composed some of the anonymous music such as ‘My Lady Carey’s Dompe’ and ‘The Short Mesure off My Lady Wynkfyld’s Rownde’. I thought a dompe might be a romp but no, it comes from the Irish dompe or dump meaning a lament (from where we get our expression ‘down in the dumps’) and a rownde was not quite the same as a round with voices entering bit by bit; instead it was “simply a piece in several sections which returned to the 1st section after playing the 2nd. In this case it also returns to the 2nd section after repeating the 1st, thus it “goeth rownde.”. It is not clear which Lady Carey might have inspired the ‘Dompe’; there are six possible candidates though the last two, Margaret Spencer and Mary Boleyne, are the most likely; the Careys being Devonshire knights. While Lady Wynkfyld may be Lady Wingfield, wife of a minor baron, Sir John Wingfield, a Norfolk knight. Which perhaps suggests that Aston did not aspire to write music for queens and duchesses. And there is no hint as to how women felt when a dance or a song was dedicated to them. In the case of Mark Smeaton, a musician at the court of Henry VIII, it signed his death warrant when Henry accused him of adultery with Anne Boleyne.

But while I was looking into the possible backgrounds for these ladies and what might have given their names to this music I came upon another Tudor with a rather different claim to have inspired a song, in fact two songs as ‘The Gipsy Countess’ was also said to be based on her life: Lady Berners shocked the court when she ran away with a Gypsy, called in those days an Egyptian, and mainly concentrated in the south of England round Kent.

The song came later and it too is anonymous.

What care I for my house and land?

What care I for my treasure, O?

What care I for my new-wedded lord,

I’m off with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!

Last night you slept on a goose-feather bed,

with the sheet turned down so bravely, O!

And tonight you’ll sleep in a cold, open field,

along with the raggle-taggle Gypsies, O!

What care I for a goose-feather bed,
with the sheet turned down so bravely, O!
For to-night I shall sleep in a cold, open field
along with the raggie-taggle Gypsies, O!

The only trouble is—I haven't so far found a Lady Berners to fit. I found a Lucy who married a John Field in 1728 in Reading, he given as a carpenter which might have been seen as a comedown in the Berners family, but it doesn't necessarily make him a Gypsy, though Field was sometimes seen as a Gypsy name, and she didn't have the title Lady Berners. In fact the title had fallen into abeyance with John Bouchier, the last Lord Berners who died in 1533 leaving a daughter Jane who married Edmund Knyvett; Lucy was their gr-gr-gr-granddaughter. But as I kept looking I came upon two explanations which suggest that that statement should not be taken literally. The first is the claim that the Berners family had both a hint of Jewish and a hint of Gypsy blood, neither idea proven, and the second is that the idea on the ballad's origin took its current form in the 19th century when George Borrow wrote in *Lavengro* of meeting the gipsy 'queen' Isopel Berners when he was camping near Dereham. I suspect that like many good ballads it has developed and changed over time and stories and folklore have formed around it along the way ...

“The earliest texts of this song date from the 18th century. Later versions, such as this one, omit the casting of a spell at the beginning, and the hanging of the gypsies by the husband at the end.”

From the song-book *Strawberry Fair, 51 Traditional Songs*.

* * * * *

“In one of those miracles of coincidence that seem almost common on the pilgrimage Road, during our first visit to this museum in 1974 the only other browser turned out to be Walter Starkie, the 80-year-old Irish adventurer-scholar whose 1957 memoir, *The Way of Saint James*, had first kindled David's enthusiasm for the Road. Starkie had come by car, and was using a cane, but he told us with a twinkling eye that although that was his umpteenth journey to Compostela, he hoped it wouldn't be his last. He seemed bemused to learn that his book's relationship to our pilgrim sally was similar to *Amadis de Gaula's* influence on Don Quijote. Starkie died in 1976.”

David M. Gitlitz and Linda Kay Davidson in *The Pilgrimage Road to Santiago*. (They were referring to the Museum of the Pilgrimage in Astorga.)

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“The winter will ask what we did in the summer.” Welsh Gypsy Proverb.

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August 10: Laurence Binyon

August 11: Andre Dubus

Louise Bogan

August 12: Robert Southey

August 13: Ridgwell Cullum

Mrs Robert Henrey

August 14: John Galsworthy

August 15: Sir Walter Scott

Stieg Larsson

Garry Disher

* * * * *

Not long ago, if you ran into someone with a book under their arm or tucked in their bag there was a very high chance it would be a Stieg Larsson. Several such people told me they loved his books and were devastated to think there would be no more.

It didn't make me rush out to borrow one. Nor did I say "Never mind, someone's sure to take up where he left off." But it struck me later as interesting that Scandinavian whodunits have recently become very popular. The English country house. The mean streets of New York. They've been done to death. Now writers are taking their detectives back, or more occasionally forward in time. They are seeking out exotic locations. They are turning famous real figures like Jane Austen and fictitious characters into detectives. There are the large books from writers like Cornwell and Reichs which delve more deeply into the facts of death. It is a packed field and I can understand publishers looking for something which might be able to stand up above the horde, to pop its head over the parapet, and Scandinavian writers are benefiting. I hadn't so far read anything which really gripped me. Not even the much-touted *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow*. So the other day I thought 'perhaps Stieg Larsson is the one' and I have been reading *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* ...

My son told me the story of his partner; because he died unexpectedly young he didn't have a will so the benefits from his books have gone to his family, a family he reportedly didn't get along with, while his partner has been denied the benefit of his royalties even though she helped and supported him in the writing of his best sellers. This surprised me as I thought Sweden was very progressive when it came to recognising the rights of de facto partners. I suppose the moral in there is to rush out and write a will the minute a publisher says 'We love your manuscript' ...

Although I thought it was a good solid read his style is unexciting (though admittedly I was only reading a translation), I found the characters rather confusing, and although it gives some insight into Swedish law-and-order structures it is surprisingly lacking in any sense of Sweden as a place. So why has he been so popular? I suspect because the book is a whodunit, a thriller, a spy story, a courtroom drama, all wrapped up in one so it probably appeals to readers in all these genres. My son said I was starting with the third book in the trilogy and I should go back and read the first two but I'm not sure that I really want to bother ... perhaps one day when I'm at a loose end ...

And now, of course, every crime novel which comes out of Sweden is compared to Larsson's work; I've just been reading *Three Seconds* by Roslund and Hellström and the blurb says "*Three Seconds* is the new thriller from Roslund and Hellström, the heirs apparent to Stieg Larsson and Henning Mankell as the masters of Scandinavian crime." I didn't like the book particularly but perhaps more importantly I thought it would be a great pity if Scandinavian crime writing becomes strait-jacketed just at the moment when it is finding a readership in English-speaking countries. It would be akin to Scandinavian readers expecting all English crime writing to be in the vein of Agatha Christie or all American crime writing to be clones of Raymond Chandler. But even more than that, I don't really like to see any writer being promoted under the banner of another writer, no matter how close the similarities. Each writer is unique. I would like to think their books will express something of this uniqueness ...

* * * * *

While I had that puzzle about Larsson's legacy on my mind I came upon a book called *The Man Who Left Too Soon* which is a biography written by Barry Forshaw. Of that conflict over Larsson's legacy he says, "The suggestion that Stieg Larsson did not talk to his brother and father for many years is disputed, but it is certainly true that he never married his partner Eva Gabrielsson – and by the dictates of the Swedish legal system, she, accordingly, did not inherit his estate or literary legacy (which is principally, of course, the three novels of the *Millennium Trilogy*). The legatees were, in fact, his father Erland and his brother Joakim. The reason why Stieg and Eva did not marry is now ... common knowledge: he considered that his well-known battles with extremist groups put him in some considerable danger, and he felt that he would (to some extent) shield Eva from some of this danger by avoiding marriage. Had he realised the brouhaha that would ensue – a bitter dispute in which his legacy (both artistic and financial) would be fought over – it is entirely possible that he might have rethought this strategy to obviate the pain and acrimony that would follow his death" and because of Sweden's

laws on intestacy 50 % of his earnings go to the Swedish government before anything goes to his father and brother. So every time you buy a Stieg Larsson you are supporting the coffers of the Swedish state.

Although Erland and Joakim said they would offer Eva something this seems to have been contingent on her returning Larsson's laptop on which he had reportedly begun his fourth book. Forshaw goes on, "There had, in fact, already been a variety of attempts to support Eva in the campaign to gain access to the monies which she felt to be her due, having been an integral part of Larsson's creative process when he was writing the three novels of the *Millennium Trilogy*, and various campaigns were mounted by such people as the Norwegian publisher Jan Moberg. So incendiary is the situation involving the dispute that there have even been movements to bring about change in Sweden's inheritance laws."

There is an irony in that if he had chosen to move to Tasmania his estate would have automatically gone to his partner of 32 years rather than his father and brother.

* * * * *

The other night I was watching a program about a little scrap of papyrus, the so-called Book of Jesus' Wife, which some scholars say provides proof that Jesus was married. Curiously, the program made me think of Stieg Larsson. I don't mind if Jesus was married, even if he had ten children, it is his message, his life, his death and resurrection which matter to us now. But I didn't find the program at all convincing and as I was lying in bed afterwards I tried to pin down my reasons for scepticism.

1. Where things come from anonymous sources, with no opportunity to check the how, when, and where of manuscripts or fragments, with no knowledge of what was paid or who did the selling, I am always dubious. People with nothing to hide do not skulk in the shadows. This does not necessarily mean that the fragment is a fake or a hoax or stolen property, just that it starts out with this very necessary doubt clinging to it.

2. A marriage in the Jewish world involved a rabbi, family and friends and community. It couldn't be done with a civil celebrant in the back yard or like a Scottish 'irregular' marriage with merely a promise before witnesses. If Jesus had married, hundreds, probably thousands of people would eventually have known about it. It couldn't be written out of the record just because later people in Rome didn't think it sounded appropriate. I do understand the attempt by scholars to raise the position of women in Jesus' life and the early church and I understand the idea that they wanted Jesus to have the 'normal joys of life'. But I think this misses the point of someone who felt entrusted with a mission and knew there was probably not very long in which to carry it out.

3. There is no sign of Jesus ever having a home of his own. He stayed in other people's houses, in inns, probably in tents and out under the stars. He did go off on his own in moments of solitude which are seen as so significant by the gospel writers that they mention them; not least probably because this was a communal world. Only prophets, madmen, lepers, and Jesus sought solitude. Every day life was lived in full view of everyone else. Nor is there any suggestion that Jesus continued to make a living as a carpenter once he began on his teaching mission. Where would a wife and family have stayed? Probably with his parents. But there is no hint of this even though Jesus' siblings and mother are mentioned. And in the period after the crucifixion when the first Christian community was formed there is again no mention of a wife or children, even though they, if they existed, would form a natural nucleus at such a time.

4. Much is made of Mary Magdalene at the tomb and it is very unlikely she would have gone to the burial ground on her own. Scholars think that women were written out of the early church records deliberately because there are so few women actually named. But then most of the men aren't named either; we don't know the names of most of the people healed by Jesus, we don't know the names of the children blessed by Jesus, we don't know the names of most of the people in the parables, yet we do in fact know a number of the women in Jesus' history: Elizabeth, Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene, Susannah, Mary and Martha, Joanna, Mary wife of Zebedee, Salome—and that other Salome, daughter of Herodias. And even into quite modern times women frequently disappeared into

the shadows, only as Mrs Smith or Miss Smith, or after a list of sons 'and three daughters' or the even more anonymous 'and other issue'. But I suspect this is a key point behind the creation of these 'gospels' in Egypt. The idea of young single women traveling or helping Jesus and the disciples was seen as unacceptable and therefore they had to become wives or mothers.

So what actually do the Gospel writers say about Mary Magdalene?

"There were many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee and helped him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the wife of Zebedee." (Matthew 27, 55 & 56)

"Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there, facing the tomb." (Matthew 27, 60 & 61)

"After the Sabbath, as Sunday morning was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake; an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled the stone away, and sat on it." (Matthew 28, 1 & 2.)

"Some women were there, looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and of Joseph, and Salome. They had followed Jesus while he was in Galilee and had helped him. Many other women who had come to Jerusalem with him were there also." (Mark 15, 40 & 41)

"Then he rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph were watching and saw where the body of Jesus was placed." (Mark 15, 46 & 47)

"After the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the tomb." (Mark 16, 1 & 2)

"After Jesus rose from death early on Sunday, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had driven out seven demons." (Mark 16, 9. An old ending.)

"Some time later Jesus travelled through towns and villages, preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God. The twelve disciples went with him, and so did some women who had been healed of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (who was called Magdalene), from whom seven demons had been driven out; Joanna, whose husband Chuza was an officer in Herod's court; and Susanna, and many other women who used their own resources to help Jesus and his disciples." (Luke 8, 1 to 3)

"Very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared." The stone is rolled away and Jesus is not there. "Then the women remembered his words, returned from the tomb, and told all these things to the eleven disciples and all the rest. The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; they and the other women with them told these things to the apostles." (Luke 24, 8 to 10)

"Standing close to Jesus' cross were his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing there; so he said to his mother, "He is your son." (John 19, 25 & 26)

"Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance." She goes to Peter and James and says, "They have taken the Lord from the tomb and we don't know where they have put him!" They find the tomb empty and go away again. But Mary stays there crying and sees two angels and then Jesus whom she mistakes for the gardener. When she goes towards him he asks her not to touch him but to go and "So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and related to them what he had told her." (John 20, 1 to 18) This is the only account which might suggest some degree of closeness and it is a curious one. First Mary says "we don't know where they have put him" but there is no indication of who 'we' might be. Then the disciples have a look and simply go away again. And then Mary alone sees both the two angels and Jesus and goes to touch Jesus and he tells her not to. John's was the last gospel to be written and he may well have been responding to a new generation of people who had no

personal knowledge of Jesus and wanted something slightly different from his account. But I still would not read into it anything more than gratitude and affection on Mary Magdalene's part.

5. How many people in the gospels were actually literate? Matthew gathering taxes obviously needed to be literate and numerate, Luke as some kind of physician likewise, we are told Jesus wrote something on the ground. But most of the people in the stories would either have been illiterate or only able to read and write with difficulty. Paper, whether papyrus or vellum (or even clay tablets), was scarce and expensive. Few people would have written with ease and fluency. Those who needed a document would go to a professional scribe. The stories from and about Jesus were shared orally and people undoubtedly passed stories on this way from generation to generation. The explosion in written records came much later, as monasteries and religious communities were set up and men had the time and opportunity to begin creating devotional books. And their reasons for writing things such as the Gospel of Thomas were different to the needs of the people who had known, seen, met, listened to Jesus.

6. Jesus always knew his preaching and healing would set him at odds with the religious establishment; that he was risking stoning, imprisonment, banishment, general anger, and possibly a very public death. It would've been the ultimate in selfishness to have exposed a wife and children to that anger and that danger. To recreate that Jesus would require us to set aside his teachings and his example. Which brings me to where I began. Stieg Larsson believed his crusading journalism would put his partner at risk if she was known to be his wife. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps he was over-cautious. But it was a risk he felt he couldn't take. To suggest that Jesus would have shown less concern than Stieg Larsson ...

No, I think my Jesus is not a married Jesus, not a Jesus with his own little children round his knee. Jesus is the Jesus of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I bought a book on a stall many years ago called *The Four Gospels Translated from the Sinaitic Palimpsest*; this was a book found at St Catherine's monastery in Sinai in the late 19th century by two English travelers; and underneath a later story of women saints was a very early set of the four gospels, dated to around 150 AD, and although much is missing (and palimpsests are a reminder of how valuable material to write on actually was) it has the four gospels which suggests these were what people used, copied, passed around. The other gospels have a more varied and sometimes a more dubious history ...

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Stieg Larsson was a crusading journalist for many years before he decided to try his hand at a novel; exposing neo-Nazi groups, raising issues of racism and anti-semitism, drawing attention to violence against women. I would've liked to know more about this part of his life. In fact 'biography' is a misnomer. Forshaw's book is more about his books and the responses of readers and critics than about Larsson's life. His hero, Lisbeth Salander, is seen as the answer to male violence particularly extremist violence, having some very satisfying and very violent revenge against a variety of men. Although interesting I did not find Lisbeth believable.

And this may have been Larsson's intention. Forshaw draws a comparison between Salander and Sweden's famous child hero, Pippi Longstocking, star of books by Astrid Lindgren. Lisbeth isn't quite real. She comes from nowhere already infused by an extraordinary talent to hack computers and use complicated technology. She is a mythic hero who achieves the impossible. And like Pippi she is a slob, she is anarchic and chaotic and allergic to any kind of discipline or organisation. But she doesn't have the touchingly homely details of a monkey called Mr Nelson or a little house and garden called Vilekulla Cottage. Nor does she have Pippi's strange sense of humour.

Eva Gabrielsson writes in *Stieg & Me*, "If Lisbeth takes after anyone, it's Pippi Longstocking, our national heroine conjured up by children's book author Astrid Lindgren. This delightful and formidable little girl has been a champion of equality between the sexes: she doesn't depend on anyone, can use a revolver, has sailed the seven seas, and not only can she beat Mighty Adolf, the strongest man in the world ... she can lift up her pet horse! But the main thing about Pippi is that she has her own ideas

about right and wrong—and she lives by them, no matter what the law or adults say. After one of her adventures, she announces, “When I grow up, I’m going to be a pirate.” One evening toward the end of the 1990s, Stieg and some journalists at TT had fun imagining what all the favorite storybook idols of Swedish children might really have grown up to be. Pippi Longstocking? Lisbeth Salander, perhaps. And what about Kalle Blomkvist (or Bill Bergson, as he’s known in English), the young hero of Astrid Lindgren’s trilogy about an ordinary boy who loves to solve mysteries and even real crimes that baffle the police and other adults? Maybe Mikael Blomkvist. The readers of *The Millenium Trilogy* may decide for themselves.”

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August 16: Dame Mary Gilmore

August 17: V.S. Naipaul

Gene Stratton Porter

Ted Hughes

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From Porter’s *Freckles* (1915): “No,” said Freckles. “The gang got there a little after noon and took out the tree, but I must tell you, and you must tell the Bird Woman, that there’s no doubt but they will be coming back, and they will have to make it before long now, for it’s soon the gang will be there to work on the swamp.”

“Oh, what a shame!” cried the Angel. “They’ll clear out roads, cut down the beautiful trees, and tear up everything. They’ll drive away the birds and spoil the cathedral. When they have done their worst, then all these mills close here will follow in and take out the cheap timber. Then the land-owners will dig a few ditches, build some fires, and in two summers the Limberlost will be corn and potatoes.”

They looked at each other, and groaned despairingly in unison.

“You like it too,” said Freckles.

“Yes,” said the Angel; “I love it. Your room is a little piece right out of the heart of fairyland, and the cathedral is God’s work, not yours. You only found it and opened the door after He had it completed. The birds, flowers, and vines are all so lovely. The Bird Woman says it is really a fact that the mallows, foxfire, iris, and lilies are larger and of richer colouring there than in the remainder of the country. She says it’s because of the rich loam and muck. I hate seeing the swamp torn up, and to you it will be like losing your best friend; won’t it?”

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Arthur Gardner wrote in 1948 in *Western Highlands*: “Work has begun on four or five hydro-electric schemes which will alter the face of the country, not without much damage to its amenities. The most damaging of these is that in Glen Affric and Glen Cannich, which have been designated as one of the proposed national parks. Protests from nature-lovers have caused some modification of the original plans, and Loch Affric itself may be spared with its ancient pine forests, but Loch Beneveian and Loch Mullardoch in Glen Cannich will be converted into reservoirs with huge dams and destruction of their natural shores. So far Strath Farrar seems to have been spared.

The Loch Sloy Scheme is less disastrous, as the loch is seldom visited and is so high up that its shores would be rather bleak anyhow. Here the amount of damage will depend upon the design and siting of the power house on Loch Lomond. The northern scheme is also away from the very finest Scenery, and Loch Fannich is also high up that its banks are wild rather than lovely. The smaller project at Morar will destroy a lovely little salmon river, but the damage will be restricted to a comparatively small area.

The old plan to tap Loch Quoich and Glen Garry which was twice rejected by Parliament has not yet been revived, but if it is it should be opposed by all lovers of the finest scenery in Scotland.

The Tunnel-Tay project, being nearer to more populous areas, seems likely to be very detrimental to a favourite tourist neighbourhood, but is rather outside the country to which this volume is dedicated.

The report of the National Parks Committee for Scotland has also appeared (late 1947). To lovers of unspoilt nature it is rather a disappointing document.” He goes on to say that neither hydro nor forestry can be seen as saving the countryside but places his hopes in the National Trust. “This is a depressing note on which to conclude, but it may render this volume greater value as a description of what the country was like between the two world wars and before the hand of the despoiler was let loose upon it.”

“Roughly speaking, visitors to the Highlands may be divided into five categories.” His people are “the cragsmen or climbers”, walkers, sportsmen, tourists, and “the unspeakable class of tripper who scatters orange peel and sandwich papers in show places, and whose object is to let off his animal spirits in noise and vulgarity. Fortunately the last do not penetrate far into the Highlands where the inhabitant, whatever his shortcomings, is a born gentleman.”

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Rosa Luxemburg wrote to Sonya Liebknecht from prison, Wronke, 2 May 1917, “Yesterday I was reading about the reasons for the disappearance of song birds in Germany. The spread of scientific forestry, horticulture, and agriculture, have cut them off from their nesting places and their food supply. More and more, with modern methods, we are doing away with hollow trees, wastelands, brushwood, fallen leaves. I felt sore at heart. I was not thinking so much about the loss of pleasure for human beings, but I was so much distressed at the idea of the stealthy and inexorable destruction of these defenseless little creatures that the tears came into my eyes.”

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“One of the more contentious issues was whether to relax Congress’s long-standing ban on oil-drilling offshore, especially off the California coast and in the wide swath of the eastern Gulf of Mexico. Not surprisingly, the coalition in favor of doing so included major oil companies, the American Gas Association, and manufacturing groups hard hit by rising fuel costs. But the most powerful opposition did not come from environmental groups, as you might have expected. Environmental groups did oppose the proposal, but their views did not carry much weight; environmentalists had neither the lobbying heft nor the money to play a major role, and their troops were spread so thin over so many issues that they were almost absent from this battlefield. The opposition was led by the tourist industry. Major hotel and restaurant chains feared that an oil spill might damage Florida’s pristine beaches and California’s dramatic coastline, thereby costing them billions of dollars. Two Republican governors, Jeb Bush of Florida and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California, actively lobbied against the measure. Many representatives from districts on the Gulf were against it. The resulting legislation limited drilling in such a way as to minimize the possible negative effects on tourism.”

Robert B. Reich in *Supercapitalism*. I wonder if he would now like to add a footnote?

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‘I remember when I came to JJ. It was so beautiful at times it took your breath away – saltbush, bluebush, a whole world of native shrubs and grasses, all tough enough to exist in the harsh arid heat of this outback country, and the mallee and the ghost gums shimmering their leaves in the wind, shading the ground from the sun. But now – my God! when I look at what I’ve done to keep that bloody mine going and those blasted miners in booze and women. The land is desert. It’s shagged out. Maurie and Pete, they both say I should burn off like they do to encourage new growth in the spring. They don’t see that that’s the last straw in this poor unhappy land. I’ve tried it, seen the young growth come, and then there are more lambs, more hungry sheep-jaws champing, and before you can say knife the green that should have grown lush and big in the wet, the seedlings that might have been trees – they’re all gone. It never has a chance to seed. And you burn again and it burns the seeds in the ground. Pete’s mentally retarded, a grown child, not caring. But Maurie ought to be able to see it. Betty does, I know, but he’s a pig-headed bastard. Eighteen years I’ve been running sheep here, more

and more every year. Quantity to offset the steady decline in quality, and now I look at the place and I can't recognize it. Even the mulgas are dying with no vegetation to shade their roots in the heat, and this year in the dry those damned sheep were stripping the bark they were so famished for food. And Ed – what will Ed make of it when he comes home? Thank God he'll never know what this country was like when I first came to it. There's nothing left to show him by comparison what I grabbed and what he'll inherit. But my heart bleeds for him. One thing he must do is to get rid of the blasted sheep, get back to cattle – a small herd, and give the land a rest, a chance to recover if it can.'

From *Golden Soak* by Hammond Innes (1973).

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There is a touching belief that concerns about the environment only surfaced in the seventies and eighties. But people have always cared. When H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs wrote in *Aboriginal Autonomy*, "Anxiety about environmental damage is intensified by the religious relationship with the environment and its creatures. It is seen as 'wounding' and is responded to emotionally. No one who has witnessed the response, particularly of older Aborigines, to the sight of unexpected damage to the landscape, for instance by bulldozed tracks or test pits, could doubt the obvious pain it engenders" I felt my response almost as something visceral. How casual and careless we are as we hack and gouge at the surface of our Earth. We call it Mother Earth but few people really believe they have a right to carve up and blast out their Mother ... It is a pointless euphemism which should be dropped. Fred Pearce in *The Last Generation* pointed out that although individual ecosystems may be fragile and destroyable Nature as a whole is a very powerful entity; if we damage it then it will, sooner or later, wreak some form of vengeance—whether by drought, by fiercer hurricanes and cyclones, by changed weather cycles. This is his main hypothesis. We will not be the last generation to live on this planet but we may be the last generation to enjoy relatively stable and predictable weather patterns.

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"Another big issue is the mess uranium mining leaves behind. In the ground the radioactive uranium is stable. Once it is out, the crystalline rocks are aggressively broken up, ground for milling and treated with chemicals to liberate the uranium. Even at Jabiluka, where the ore grade is at its highest, 99.6 per cent of rock dug up would be discarded. These tailings are radioactive and need to be managed and isolated from the environment for at least 10,000 years. This was not always clearly understood. At one of Australia's early uranium mines in the 1970s, Rum Jungle near Darwin in the Northern Territory, the tailings were dumped onto the floodplain where they were eroded every wet season into the Finnis River. The devastating impact of the tailings on the fragile ecosystem was exacerbated by the other effects of mining on the radioactive rock. The tailings contained sulphide minerals such as pyrite which, when broken down by the miners and exposed to oxygen and water, produces sulphuric acid. This in turn breaks down the heavy metals in the rocks and allows them to leach out into the environment. At Rum Jungle in the 1970s, this acid mine drainage devastated 100 square kilometres of the Finnis River ecosystem.

The eventual clean-up of Rum Jungle was not helped by the decision to turn the open-cut mine into a lake when mining stopped in 1971. It was a popular recreation spot for locals because there were no crocodiles. They did not realise high radiation levels were taking a nip at them instead. Capping designed to contain the tailings at the obsolete mine for 100 years failed within the first 20 years."

From *Dirty Money* by Matthew Benns.

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L. M. Montgomery has the priest in her 1923 novel for girls, *Emily of New Moon*, say that "no sensible person is going to destroy for nothing but a grudge those fine old trees that have taken half a century to grow and can never be replaced. Why the man who cuts down such a tree except when it is really necessary should be hanged as high as Haman on a gallows made from the wood av it."

We of course would say we are not cutting down trees for a grudge—but are our reasons really any better? To plant grain or pasture cattle, to provide paper and cardboard ... but only a fraction of the

destroyed trees go for such reasons. Large amounts of destroyed trees and shrubs are simply burnt. My mother wrote a little essay to show that the birds and wildlife suffer twice; first when the trees are brought down, smashing nests and leaving creatures wounded and traumatised and homeless and again after the piles of trees and bushes have been bulldozed up into piles and allowed to dry out before being burnt, giving little wild creatures the illusion of safety as they creep in and try to establish new homes inside these piles.

Other trees are used for junk mail or endless throwaway packaging. Not a grudge but reasons so ephemeral they might as well be ...

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But Neil Astley in his collection of eco-poems, *Earth Shattering*, brings out some powerful writings much earlier than the children's books of L. M. Montgomery and Gene Stratton Porter. The problem, though, is the question it throws up: is a nature poem, an animal poem, a landscape poem, whether by an ancient Chinese sage or William Wordsworth, an eco-poem? The majority of the poems in his book deal with loss of species, loss of habitat, loss of wilderness, pollution, damage ... loss ... so I think an eco-poem can be seen more narrowly as dealing with human impacts on ecosystems. This one by NZ poet Fleur Adcock, 'The Last Moa', was fairly typical.

Somewhere in the bush, the last moa
is not still lingering in some hidden valley.
She is not searching her swanlike neck
(but longer, more massive than any swan's)
for a high cluster of miro berries,
or grubbing up fern roots with her beak.

Alice McKenzie didn't see her
among the sandhills at Martin's Bay
in 1880 – a large blue bird
as tall as herself, which turned and chased her.
Moas were taller than seven-year-old
pioneer children; moas weren't blue.

Twenty or thirty distinct species –
all of them, even the small bush moa,
taller than Alice – and none of their bones
carbon-dated to less than five centuries.
The sad, affronted mummified head
in the museum is as old as a Pharaoh.

Not the last moa, that; but neither
was Alice's harshly grunting pursuer.
Possibly Alice met a takahe,
the extinct bird that rose from extinction
in 1948, near Te Anau.
No late reprieve, though, for the moa.

Her thigh-bones, longer than a giraffe's,
are lying steeped in a swamp, or smashed
in a midden, with her unstrung vertebrae.
Our predecessors hunted and ate her,
gobbled her up: as we'd have done

in their place; as we're gobbling the world.

* * * * *

While I was reading Jamie Kirkpatrick's *A Continent Transformed* I suddenly saw that we are coming at the whole question of bushfires from a very partial and ultimately dangerous perspective. He writes, "Although little effort has been expended in trying to keep fire out of our remaining rainforest, a lot of thought and effort has gone into preventing fire from gaining access to pine plantations, tall eucalypt forest and built-up areas. The major approach currently favoured by fire authorities has invariably been the reduction of 'hazard' through the agency of fire. This is variously called fuel reduction burning, hazard reduction burning, control burning or biomass reduction burning." As we cannot control either the weather or arsonists "the only way to control wildfire is to reduce the fuel."

"The logical leap that has caused much unnecessary change and damage to the Australian bush is that if fuel reduction works to reduce the dangers of wildfire for houses and commercial trees, it is a good thing that will reduce fire hazard everywhere. Thus, throughout much of Australia teams of volunteers and government employees can be seen with torches, fire guns, lasers and fire bombing planes; all having great fun burning the bush. Hazard reduction burning has become an Australian spring rite."

The problems he draws attention to are:

Loss of species. This is particularly the case with alpine and sub-alpine species and non-eucalyptus species.

The maintenance of fire breaks around plantations too young to risk fuel reduction burns is inadequate in extreme weather, and can lead to dangerous complacency. And even where massive fuel reduction has occurred 'spotting' can carry embers for several kilometres.

Frequent burning leads to a change in the ecology of an area; fire resistant plants, eucalypts and grasses, gradually take over. The grasses smother other species making it hard for them to regenerate even if their seeds in the topsoil haven't been burnt and the eucalypts because they are more flammable and ignite more quickly than other species actually make future fires more likely.

The loss of species which fix nitrogen such as bush peas and some wattles lead to impoverishment of the soil; as does the loss of leaf litter and humus.

The removal of undercover helps to heat and bake soils and reduce the protection for everything; insects, microbes, ground-nesting birds, rare orchids, in fact the whole diversity of an ecosystem.

Impoverished ecosystems are less effective in attracting and holding moisture. And we aid this drying out process by pushing roads through bushland, clearing for housing (the much-loved 'bush block'), agriculture, plantations, and 'regeneration'. Not only catastrophic fires but catastrophic floods are aided by this process.

No fuel reduction burn is one hundred percent effective in removing hazards. And watching news coverage of fires is a reminder that what happens on the ground is largely irrelevant to fires leaping from tree-top to tree-top fanned by gale-force winds.

With global warming, more people, more clearing, and a less-well-defined pattern of weather we are likely to burn our ecosystems to death eventually. We do need to think more broadly, more holistically, and with more concern for the small and the overlooked.

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In an article titled *1491* Charles C. Mann writes, "In college I took an introductory anthropology class in which I read *Amazonia: Man and Culture in a Counterfeit Paradise* (1971), perhaps the most influential book ever written about the Amazon, and one that deeply impressed me at the time. Written by Betty J. Meggers, the Smithsonian archeologist, *Amazonia* says that the apparent lushness of the rain forest is a sham. The soils are poor and can't hold nutrients—the jungle flora exists only because it snatches up everything worthwhile before it leaches away in the rain. Agriculture, which depends on extracting the wealth of the soil, therefore faces inherent ecological limitations in the wet desert of Amazonia.

“As a result, Meggers argued, Indian villages were forced to remain small—any report of “more than a few hundred” people in permanent settlements, she told me recently, “makes my alarm bells go off.” Bigger, more complex societies would inevitably overtax the forest soils, laying waste to their own foundations. Beginning in 1948 Meggers and her late husband, Clifford Evans, excavated a chiefdom on Marajò, an island twice the size of New Jersey that sits like a gigantic stopper in the mouth of the Amazon. The Marajoara, they concluded, were failed off-shoots of a sophisticated culture in the Andes. Transplanted to the lush trap of the Amazon, the culture choked and died.

“Green activists saw the implication: development in tropical forests destroys both the forests and their developers. Meggers’s account had enormous public impact—*Amazonia* is one of the wellsprings of the campaign to save rain forests.

“Then Anna C. Roosevelt, the curator of archeology at Chicago’s Field Museum of Natural History, re-excavated Marajo. Her complete report, *Moundbuilders of the Amazon* (1991), was like the anti-matter version of *Amazonia*. Marajo, she argued, was “one of the outstanding indigenous cultural achievements of the New World,” a powerhouse that lasted for more than a thousand years, had “possibly well over 100,000” inhabitants, and covered thousands of square miles. Rather than damaging the forest, Marajo’s “earth construction” and “large, dense populations” had *improved* it: the most luxuriant and diverse growth was on the mounds formerly occupied by the Marajoara. “If you listened to Meggers’s theory, these places should have been ruined,” Roosevelt says.”

The arguments wound on, people took sides; not surprisingly environmentalists veer towards Meggers and developers like the idea that the Amazon can support large populations and diverse industries. It was at times very personal. But the irony is that both Meggers and Roosevelt were correct. Rain forests removed from infertile laterite soils such as in Borneo see a damaging loss of diversity and fertility. A Dutch scientist told me years ago that the island is being turned from forest to savannah but that the savannah is very vulnerable; ploughed, over-used, with insufficient protection, it could eventually become a desert. But the Amazon, or parts of it, had a ‘secret ingredient’, *terra preta* or black earth. This is soil which is believed to have been created over many years by human beings. One report I saw years ago suggested that the indigenous people incorporated charcoal into the soil to improve it. But Mann is saying that the soil has effectively been inoculated by micro organisms which can replenish the fertility; much as legumes, properly inoculated with the right bacteria, can increase the fertility of a soil. The hope in this idea is that the same micro organisms could be used to improve poor soils elsewhere round the world. The problem is a simple and depressing one: the pace of forest destruction on tropical soils is far out-distancing the tentative attempts to understand and improve those soils. *Terra preta* cannot work the miracles the planet is going to need ...

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No one was listening to Gene Stratton Porter a hundred years ago. And no one was listening to Jeffrey K. McKee when he wrote in *Sharing Nature* in 2003, “What about swamps and marshes? They stink. They are also full of life that is very effective at cleaning the water. Furthermore, when floodwaters rage down a river, swamps can absorb the overflow and save the cities downstream from destruction. When storms pound the ocean shore, it is the marshes and estuaries that again save human civilization, for their plant roots and networks of burrows hold the land and absorb the shock. In New Orleans, Louisiana, there is little protection left from hurricanes because artificial structures have altered the natural buffering effects of the Mississippi Delta. Even without a major storm, the Louisiana coast loses one acre of land to the encroaching sea every twenty-four minutes. The loss of the marshes may have huge economic costs, and lead to substantial loss of human life should New Orleans get a direct hit from a hurricane.” Two years later Hurricane Katrina swept in and showed just how damaging that loss of marshes can be ...

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“Pity the meek for
they shall inherit the earth.” E.A.B. Jenner in ‘Homage to Sulpicius Servasius Jnr.’

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August 18: Nettie Palmer

August 19: Ogden Nash

Arthur Waley

August 20: Robert Herrick

August 21: Jan Bassett

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Jan Bassett begins her book *Guns and Brooches*, a history of Australian Army Nursing, “In April 1900 thirty-three-year-old Lydia Mansfield and two other Tasmanian nurses sailed from Hobart, at their own expense, on the *Aberdeen*, bound for South Africa. Lydia, who was bearing letters of introduction to Sir Alfred Milner, British High Commissioner for South Africa and Governor of Cape Colony, was wearing a recent gift from a well-wisher, a beautiful creamy cornelian and silver brooch depicting a dove of peace with an olive branch, which she was to wear constantly until her return from the Boer War of 1899 to 1902.”

This helps to set the scene for so many of the problems which bedeviled the army nurses. Were they civilians or military personnel? Who did they answer to? Who should pay their fares and for their uniforms? Themselves, the army, governments whether state or federal, benevolent funds of various kinds, the hospitals to which they were attached? There was no single answer. Should they have ranks within the army? Were they civilians seconded or serving army personnel? And who should step in if they got sick or wounded or died? And who should help them when they returned home with chronic health problems or with family responsibilities? They weren't war widows, they weren't war veterans, they usually weren't eligible for soldier settlement grants ...

“Australian army nurses have a history of being ‘in but not of’ the army. The main reason has been their gender. Until 1941 they and a small number of masseuses (or physiotherapists) were the only women in the Australian army. Historians, seeing wars as agents of social change, sometimes argue that wars have liberated women. Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, for example, argue that British working women were let ‘out of the cage’ during the two world wars. Superficially, Australian army nurses’ lives may have been broadened through wartime experience, such as travel and new nursing challenges, but in reality the ‘cage’ was merely moved. The doctors and nurses who staffed military hospitals during wars were those who staffed civilian hospitals during peace. All took many of their former practices and prejudices with them when they went to war.

“Financial discrimination is simply the most obvious of many forms of discrimination which army nurses have experienced because of their gender. It has involved such anomalies as a female captain in charge of an operating theatre in Vietnam being paid less than a male corporal in the same theatre. Army authorities have been unwilling to accept changes such as the training of nurses as anaesthetists during the First World War, as a number of nurses found to their cost. Double moral standards have flourished. Army nurses’ social lives have been rigidly controlled, by regulations ranging from bans on smoking and dancing to curfews. Policies about marriage have been altered to suit the army’s purposes at various times, with little concern for their effects on nurses’ lives.”

The army only wanted single women or widows; they were expected to resign if they wanted to marry; something which was a foolish waste of highly skilled training and experience. “The Australian ruling was clumsily introduced, as at least one nurse found to her cost. On 24 October 1915 Sister Anne Douglass, a staff nurse at No. 1 AGH, had asked the Principal Matron of her unit, Miss Knowles (Miss Bell’s replacement), for permission to marry Arthur Upfield on 3 November. Upfield, a driver in the Army Service Corps and later to become famous as the author of the ‘Bony’ books, had already received permission from his CO. Receiving no answer from the hospital, they went ahead and married. Three days later, No. 1 AGH’s CO asked Sister Douglass to resign because of her marriage. Upfield made the following comments in a letter written to Pearce’s Private Secretary on 15 November, the day after Sister Douglass had been sent back to Australia.

It is needless to say, Sir, that we were astounded. Other Sisters, many quite recently, have been married to Officers, while one is at present living at the Continental Hotel, Cairo.

We consider it a great injustice that the Hospital Authorities knowing that we were being married should have given us no hint of their subsequent action. We should certainly not have married had we known, as my wife's career is ruined and her reputation tarnished.

Upfield claimed that the hospital's CO told him on 13 November that he had told Miss Knowles two days before the wedding that: 'as he had received no answer from Head Quatres [*sic*] and as no objection had been raised in other cases he saw no reason why the marriage should not proceed.' Upfield unsuccessfully asked Pearce's Secretary for an inquiry or 'at least my return to Australia in order that I may do everything in my power for her support.' "

And Bassett sums up the women's WWI experience, "Governments had paid lightly for the First World War nurses' service. Most of the nurses, on the other hand, had paid a heavy price for their wartime experience."

"An Australian army nurse has been allowed to be a lady, or, in recent years, 'one of the boys', but never a woman." That could be said of women's experience in many spheres ...

And Upfield's marriage, perhaps not surprisingly, broke down.

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William Kent Krueger writing about Tony Hillerman in *Books to Die For* says, "When I'm asked who has most influenced my writing, I point to Hillerman. Asked the same question, Hillerman pointed to an Australian writer, Arthur W. Upfield, who created Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, a part-Aborigine investigator. 'Upfield,' Hillerman wrote, 'had shown me – and a good many other mystery writers – how both ethnography and geography can be used in a plot and how they can enrich an old literary form.' "

And Upfield gave this insight into his way of working to John Hetherington for his book *Forty-Two Faces*. 'Since the war, I've been able to get along without worrying about keeping the pot boiling. Now I turn out a book every nine or ten months—six months working on it, and three to four months loafing. Given a good run, I work easily enough, but an intrusion throws me for seven. First, I get the germ of an idea. Then I card-index all the characters, and live with them for some weeks before starting to write. After the first writing, I sleep well on it, then completely re-write the story. Whatever each of the characters has felt during the story, I have felt. I've experienced horror, narrow escapes, humorous interludes, sentiment, everything. When it's ended I'm as empty mentally as a discarded bottle.'

In fact, in the last couple of days, I have come across two more books about army nurses. I am glad they are at last getting some genuine and sympathetic attention.

August 22: Ray Bradbury

Dorothy Parker

Ray Bradbury said, introducing a new issue of *Fahrenheit 451*, "Occupying a house with a new baby daughter, we had to consider my trying to find somewhere that was a bit quieter to do my work. I had no money at that time to rent an office, but wandering around UCLA one day I heard typing in the basement of the library and went down to see what was going on. I found that there was a room with twelve typewriters that could be rented for ten cents per half-hour. Excited at the prospect, I brought a bag of dimes with me and moved into the typing room.

... "This early version took exactly nine days and I spent \$9.80 on it, not realizing that the book had some sort of long life ahead."

I know the accepted view is that the longer you have sweated over a book the better it is likely to be. But I sometimes wonder. Agatha Christie wrote her novel *Absent in the Spring* in three days;

Georges Simenon said each Maigret book took him around ten days. Dick Francis said he spent about a year plotting his books but the actual writing only took weeks. Stephen King spent two weeks on one of his novels (and says John Creasey could write a book in two days). James Hadley Chase wrote his popular thriller *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* over six weekends. Now here is Bradbury with his nine days ... Oh yes, and I take around two weeks to write my Country Casebook novelettes—when all is going well.

As Bradbury says, “The grand thing is to plunge ahead and see what your passion can reveal.”

And passion can sometimes carry you through the breaches where careful plotting and meticulous writing falter and fall ...

These thoughts were on my mind when I heard a literary discussion, I think between Laura Miller and Ramona Koval, about a writing competition in the USA where you get a month to write your book. They did not seem to believe such a competition was likely to produce great literature, despite the large numbers of people queuing up to try their hand at the fast novel. But Miller said the real problem is finding *readers* for any book, regardless of how it is written. I would assume that those writers of a book-in-a-month would also have the problem of finding a publisher; publishers expecting writers to sweat long hours, if not long years, over a worthwhile book ...

But I think people go in for such competitions out of curiosity. Can *I* do it?

Think of *Fahrenheit 451* and the words will come ...

* * * * *

August 23: Melanie Rae Thon

Malvina Reynolds

* * * * *

When I was perhaps fifteen I was coming back from a horse event in Brisbane with an old lady called Betty Wilcox and another teenager Robyn Bishop. Mrs Wilcox sang us several songs in a rather tremulous voice, then asked us to sing, and Robyn sang a song called ‘Little Boxes’. I had never heard it before and it remained with me, for both its words and its rather plaintive tune.

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky;
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.

Later I came upon descriptions of tract home communities in the United States and it brought back memories of the song. Perhaps this was what the writer had in mind, I thought. And much later I got a copy of the words and music and found it was by someone called Malvina Reynolds. I had never heard of her and went looking. Had she written other things or was this one of those curious little ‘one-offs’?

In fact Malvina Reynolds was an impressive woman. Born in 1900 in San Francisco she gained her PhD in English Language and Literature in 1939. But although she had sought work as a teacher she had been blacklisted for her political views and had to work in other fields, children’s little heads being very impressionable and it only being acceptable to fill them up with ideas on Capitalism and the American Way of Life, so she turned to songwriting. Among her best known songs were ‘Little Boxes’, ‘What Have They Done to the Rain’, and ‘Morningtown Ride’ and as well as her own singing her songs were hits for people like Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Judy Collins, and The Seekers. It isn’t hard to see where that extra little bit of ‘bite’ comes from now.

She died in 1978.

*

I came upon a quote, in J. M. & M. J. Cohen’s *The New Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, by D. Eardley Wilmot: ‘But with love brooding there, why, no place can compare/With my little grey home in the west.’ (*My Little Grey Home*).

And the only Eardley Wilmot to come to mind was a not very memorable governor of Tasmania in the 1840s but did he take up his pen when he retired? Did his wife or children write? I had no idea.

In fact the song was written in 1911 and became very popular during the First World War so well after the Eardley-Wilmot family had left Tasmania and that particular governor had turned to dust. But then I came upon the curious fact that my great-grandfather's cousin Arthurina Butcher had married an Eardley-Wilmot, grandson of that governor, so I went looking for the family and found that all Eardley Wilmots belong to the one little family where an Eardley married a Wilmot and combined the names. They mostly had quite a lot of children so there would now be hundreds maybe thousands of Eardley-Wilmots around. So where did D fit into the family and what else did he or she write?

In fact D. was a woman whose first name was May and she lived at the Old Malt House in Marlow in Buckinghamshire with her father Sydney who wrote books of naval history and was another grandson of that Governor of Van Diemen's Land. She wrote a number of attractive and sentimental poems, one of which Hermann Lohr put to music. I am surprised that men during WWI would want to sing along with music composed by someone with such a German-sounding name—though they may have seen it only as a catchy tune. But equally I can see how for men in the trenches the gentle melancholy of 'Little Grey Home in the West' with its simple sincerity would be deeply moving. The words go:

When the golden sun sinks in the hills
And the toil of a long day is o'er
Though the road may be long, in the lilt of a song
I forget I was weary before.
Far ahead, where the blue shadows fall
I shall come to contentment and rest
And the toils of the day will be charmed away
In my little grey home of the west.

There are hands that will welcome me in
There are lips I am burning to kiss
There are two eyes that shine just because they are mine
And a thousand things other men miss.
It's a corner of heaven itself
Though it's only a tumble down nest
But with love brooding there, why no place can compare
With my little grey home in the west.

It perhaps owes something to Thomas Gray but it isn't hard to see why it would appeal to the men in the trenches in a way that Gray's 'Elegy' wouldn't.

*

"When I'm sittin' in me dug-out wiv me rifle on me knees,
An' a yowlin', 'owlin' chorus comes a-floatin' up the breeze—
Jist a bit o' 'Bonnie Mary' or 'Long Way to Tipperary'—
Then I know I'm in Australia, took an' planted overseas.
They've bin up agin it solid since we crossed the flamin' foam;
But they're singin'—alwiz singin'—since we left the wharf at 'ome.

"O, it's 'On the Mississippi' or 'Me Grey 'Ome in the West'—
If it's death an' 'ell nex' minute they must git it orf their chest.
'Ere's a snatch o' 'When yer Roamin'—When yer Roamin in the Gloamin'.
'Struth! The first time that I 'eard it, wiv me 'ead on Rosie's breast,
We wus comin' from a picnic in a Ferntree Gully train ...

But the shrapnel made the music when I 'eard it sung again."

C. J. Dennis in 'The Singing Soldiers'

*

Tasmania has a more definite connection to a famous songwriter or, more precisely, a famous song as people often don't know the author of what they are singing. Not many people here know that John Woodcock Graves, author of 'D'ye ken John Peel' has a tomb down in St David's Park just by the Davey Street fence. It says he was a hundred years old when he died in Hobart in 1888. John Peel was said to be a Scotsman with a passion for going fox hunting. But who was John Graves and what brought him to Hobart?

My friend Poppy gave me a bundle of copies of *Tasmanian Ancestry*, the little magazine put out by the Genealogical Society of Tasmania, and in a 2001 copy is an article about John Woodcock Graves by Susan Barter. In fact Graves, born in Cumberland in the north of England in 1795 spent much of his life in Tasmania. His father Joseph Graves was a glazier, plumber, and ironmonger in Wigton and died leaving his wife to pay off his many debts. John tried various things including a coal mine and a woolen mill, both of which failed. He married twice and had eight children but his second wife left him. In 1833 he brought part of his family to Tasmania but ill luck or bad decision-making or both continued to dog him. He went to jail for unpaid debts. He spent time in the asylum in New Norfolk but managed to escape and went to New Zealand to work in the flax industry. He came back to Tasmania because his son John needed an operation and he was able to get a grant of land along the Tamar River. He died on the 18 August 1886 so in fact he was only 91 when he died. But in those 91 years of restless difficult and sometimes belligerent life he had tried many things including the development of a natural varnish and the importation to Tasmania of sparrows as well as many plans and inventions which did not come to fruition.

So what of his famous song? Barter writes, "In 1829, JWG sat with his friend John Peel (1776-1854) in the parlour at Caldbeck. They were recalling many a good run, when one of his daughters asked, "Father what do they say to what granny sings?". Granny was singing to his son, John Woodcock, a very old rant called Bonnie (or Cannie) Annie. The pen and paper were on the table and the idea of writing a song to this air resulted in *D'ye ken John Peel*? John Peel was moved to tears. JWG remembered saying at the time, "By Jove, Peel you'll be sung when we're both run to earth."

"The song soon became known throughout Cumberland but it was forty years later, when the song was sung in London by William Metcalfe that it began to grow in national popularity. It became the Cumberland Regiment's song and it has been heard at many a football match in the north of England."

But not perhaps in Tasmania ...

* * * * *

So what makes a good song? What makes one song popular and evergreen and another, seemingly just as good or at times just as bad, disappear without trace? One day I bought Sheila Davis's book called *The Song-Writers Idea Book*. She doesn't pretend to answer those questions but I thought some of her ideas made very good sense. She gives these tips which she calls 'Principles':

Simplicity: Keep to one idea, and eliminate subplots. The plot of a well-crafted lyric can be summarized in a short sentence.

Clarity: Include key pronouns to make clear who is doing the talking or thinking.

Compression: Make every word count.

Emphasis: Use short strong one-syllable words. Place important words at the *end of the line*. Prefer active-voice verbs over passive voice.

Consistency: Keep the tone and the language style the same throughout.

Coherence: Remember that meaning is not retroactive: *Precede* every reaction or effect with a reason or cause.

Specificity: Choose the particulars (apple) over the general (fruit); concrete (the roses you bring) over the abstract (little things you do).

Repetition: To satisfy the listener's need to recognize the familiar repeat important words and/or lines for emphasis.

Unity: Treat elements with a length that's appropriate to their importance. Weave the elements of time, action and place into a harmonious whole.

Genuine Feeling: Write about situations and emotions you understand. There is no substitute for sincerity.

* * * * *

August 24: A. S. Byatt

Jorge Luis Borges

Max Beerbohm

* * * * *

Jorge Luis Borges did not write for children or about children. But I did, once, come across a short review he had written, in 1937, and which raises many questions.

"Displays of hatred are even more obscene and denigrating than exhibitionism. I defy pornographers to show me a picture more vile than any of the twenty-two illustrations that comprise the children's book *Trau keinem Fuchs auf gruener Heid und keinem Jud bei seinem Eid* [Don't Trust Any Fox from a Heath or Any Jew on his Oath] whose fourth edition now infests Bavaria. It was first published a year ago, in 1936, and has already sold 51,000 copies. Its goal is to instill in the children of the Third Reich a distrust and animosity toward Jews. Verse (we know the mnemonic virtues of rhyme) and color engravings (we know how effective images are) collaborate in this veritable textbook of hatred.

Take any page: for example, page 5. Here I find, not without justifiable bewilderment, this didactic poem—"The German is a proud man who knows how to work and struggle. Jews detest him because he is so handsome and enterprising"—followed by an equally informative and explicit quatrain: "Here's the Jew, recognizable to all, the biggest scoundrel in the whole kingdom. He thinks he's wonderful, and he's horrible." The engravings are more astute: the German is a Scandinavian, eighteen-year-old athlete, plainly portrayed as a worker; the Jew is a dark Turk, obese and middle-aged. Another sophistic feature is that the German is clean-shaven and the Jew, while bald, is very hairy. (It is well known that German Jews are *Ashkenazim*, copper-haired Slavs. In this book they are presented as dark half-breeds so that they'll appear to be the exact opposite of the blond beasts. Their attributes also include the permanent use of a fez, a rolled cigar, and ruby rings.)

Another engraving shows a lecherous dwarf trying to seduce a young German lady with a necklace. In another, the father reprimands his daughter for accepting the gifts and promises of Solly Rosenfeld, who certainly will not make her his wife. Another depicts the foul body odor and shoddy negligence of Jewish butchers. (How could this be, with all the precautions they take to make meat kosher?) Another, the disadvantages of being swindled by a lawyer, who solicits from his clients a constant flow of flour, fresh eggs, and veal cutlets. After a year of this, the clients have lost their case but the Jewish lawyer "weighs two hundred and forty pounds." Yet another depicts the opportune expulsion of Jewish professors as a relief for the children: "We want a German teacher," shout the enthusiastic pupils, "a joyful teacher who knows how to play with us and maintain order and discipline. We want a German teacher who will teach us common sense." It is difficult not to share such aspirations.

What can one say about such a book? Personally I am outraged, less for Israel's sake than for Germany's, less for the offended community than for the offensive nation. I don't know if the world can do without German civilization, but I do know that its corruption by the teachings of hatred is a crime."

('A Pedagogy of Hatred' 1937.)

* * * * *

August 25: Bret Harte
August 26: Eleanor Dark
August 27: Antonia Fraser
August 28: Johann von Goethe
August 29: Maurice Maeterlinck
August 30: Carmel Bird
Mary Shelley
August 31: William Saroyan
Charles Lever
September 1: Arthur Upfield
Colin Free
September 2: John Le-Gay Brereton
Henry George

* * * * *

Henry Lawson in his short story 'A Day on a Selection' writes, "It is a broiling hot day in summer, and the dinner consists of hot roast meat, hot baked potatoes, hot cabbage, hot pumpkin and burning-hot plum pudding. The family drinks on an average four cups of tea each per meal. The wife takes her place at the head of the table with a broom to keep the fowls out, and at short intervals she interrupts the conversation with such exclamations as "Shoo! shoo!" "Tommy, can't you see that fowl? Drive it out!" The fowls evidently pass a lot of their time in the house. They mark the circle described by the broom, and take care to keep two or three inches beyond it. Every now and then you see a fowl on the dresser amongst the crockery, and there is great concern to get it out before it breaks something. While dinner is in progress two steers get into the wheat through a broken rail which has been spliced with stringybark, and a calf or two break into the vineyard. And yet this careless Australian selector, who is too shiftless to put up a decent fence, or build a decent house and who knows little or nothing about farming, would seem by his conversation to have read up all the great social and political questions of the day. Here are some fragments of conversation caught at the dinner-table. Present—the selector, the missus, the neighbour, Corney George — nicknamed "Henry George"—Tommy, Jacky, and the younger children. The spaces represent interruptions by the fowls and children:

Corney George (continuing conversation): "But Henry George says, in *Progress and Poverty*, he says——"

Missus (to the fowls): "Shoo! Shoo!"

Corney: "He says——"

Tom: "Marther, jist speak to this Jack."

Missus: (to Jack): "If you can't behave yourself, leave the table."

Tom: "He says in *Progress and*——"

Missus: "Shoo!"

Neighbour: "I think *Lookin' Backwards* is more——"

Missus: "Shoo! Shoo! Tom, can't you see that fowl?"

Selector: "Now I think *Caesar's Column* is more likely——Just look at——"

Missus: "Shoo! Shoo!"

Selector: "Just look at the French Revolution."

Corney: "Now, Henry George——"

Tom: "Marther! I see a old-man kangaroo up on——"

Missus: "Shut up! Eat your dinner an' hold your tongue. Carn't you see someone's speakin'?"

Selector: "Just look at the French——"

Missus: (to the fowls): "Shoo! Shoo!" (turning suddenly and unexpectedly on Jacky): "Take your fingers out of the sugar!—Blast yer! that I should say such a thing."

Neighbour: “But *Lookin’ Backwards*——”

Missus: “There you go, Tom! Didn’t I say you’d spill that tea? Go away from the table!”

Selector: “I think *Caesar’s Column* is the only natural——”

Missus: “Shoo! Shoo!” She loses patience, gets up and fetches a young rooster with the flat of the broom, sending him flying into the yard; he falls with his head towards the door and starts in again.

Later on the conversation is about Deeming.

Selector: “There’s no doubt the man’s mad——”

Missus: “Deeming! That Windsor wretch! Why, if I was in the law I’d have him boiled alive! Don’t tell me he didn’t know what he was doing! Why, I’d have him——”

Corney: “But, missus, you——”

Missus (to the fowls): “Shoo! Shoo!”

*

What Henry George said, according to Lawson’s characters, is condemned to remain forever a mystery. So what *did* Henry George say in his famous book *Progress and Poverty*? The other day I picked up a copy in the antiques shop at the corner of Augusta Road and I have been reading it to see why people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries read and discussed it in their millions and why Karl Marx described it as ‘the capitalist’s last ditch’ ...

George’s famous book was first published in 1879. He writes in a lively rather declamatory style which I actually found quite hard to read so I ‘tips me lid’ to the people who devoured it, discussed it, promoted its ideas, supported the Henry George Foundation, entered essay competitions ‘To Promote the Study of “Progress and Poverty” and Other Works by Henry George’, bought those other works such as *The Condition of Labour* and *The Land Question* ... He discusses wages, rents, capital, interest, and land values (and land speculation) saying, “In all our long investigation we have been advancing to this simple truth : that as land is necessary to the exertion of labour in the production of wealth, to command the land which is necessary to labour, is to command all the fruits of labour save enough to enable labour to exist.”

And: “There is but one way to remove an evil—and that is, to remove its cause. Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labour, is monopolised. To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the labourer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership. Nothing else will go to the cause of the evil—in nothing else is there the slightest hope.

“This, then, is the remedy for the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth apparent in modern civilisation, and for all the evils which flow from it :

“*We must make land common property.*”

*

Henry George began his visit to Britain in 1882 on the wrong foot. He was arrested by mistake as a Fenian while visiting Galway with an Eton master, J. L. Joynes. It was nevertheless publicity for his lecture tour. Michael Holroyd in his biography of George Bernard Shaw says, “George, who spoke with an appealing American intonation, holding the emphasis back to the last syllable of each word, was a deliberate orator. He was simple, he was sentimental, and, like the best avant-garde Americans, he was fifty years behind the times in most of Europe. But he was not a shy man, had no scruples about appealing to his friend The Creator, or calling on the eternal verities, Liberty, Justice and Truth. He gave to politics the powerful orchestration of religion.

“George’s *Progress and Poverty*, which Shaw bought that evening for sixpence, and which was reported as being eagerly read by the working class, offered an explanation as to why increasing economic progress brought increasing poverty. The ownership of land had always been a precondition

of power in Britain. Parliament had been dominated by the opinions of landed interests to an extent where ‘aristocracy’ became another word for the great owners of land. These few landowners monopolized the birthright of the people, but the nationalization of this land would give the people back their birthright and eliminate the social inequalities of the past.”

* * * * *

And who was Deeming, the Windsor ‘wretch’? This refers to a well-known murder at that time. Frederick Deeming had killed two wives, one in England (along with his children) and one in Australia in 1892, but this was seen as more than a sad domestic crime because Deeming claimed he had killed prostitutes in revenge for catching syphilis and various people wondered if he was in fact Jack the Ripper gone to ground in Australia ... His brothers tried to get him certified as insane, saying their father had treated him very badly and that he had suffered ‘brain fever’ while in Calcutta. It is certainly possible that he had suffered brain injuries and wasn’t fully responsible for his actions. But this cut no ice with the court and he was hanged in the Old Melbourne Gaol on the 23rd May, 1892.

* * * * *

“On the other hand, the Australian colonies were never so isolated that they were completely insulated against contact with the ideas and movements stirring the outside world, even if these came in the form of general diffusion or influences upon individuals rather than as main currents of thought. Only occasionally did ideas from the outside world gain some general currency for a period, like the single tax on land proposed by Henry George in his *Progress and Poverty*, which was championed by such writers as John Farrell and Catherine Helen Spence, and the vision of a socialist utopia presented by Edward Bellamy in his *Looking Backward*, a book which was published serially in William Lane’s Queensland *Worker*, inspired Bellamy Clubs, and was discussed hopefully in city and bush alike. Henry Lawson, as realistic in his prose as he was often idealistic in his verse, satirizes a shiftless selector arguing with a neighbour about the respective merits of Henry George and Bellamy, but these reformers made a genuine, if temporary, appeal in the 1890s because they offered versions of the Great Australian Dream.”

T. Inglis Moore in *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*.

So what might Henry Lawson’s selector make of *Poverty & Progress*? Having managed to claim his small farm would he have been sympathetic to the idea of making all land common property? And the things that probably made that selector’s life and that of his children better were the things that were gradually accepted in Australia: a minimum wage, social welfare, suffrage, a better understanding of the soil and the climate, universal schooling ... rather than radical ideas about land ...

Yet there is an irony when it comes to looking at the book in Australia.

At the stroke of a pen the land was declared terra nullius and its indigenous peoples dispossessed of hundreds of millions of acres.

At the stroke of a pen the land became the property of the British Crown. Not common property but a single proprietor. And then the land was given out piecemeal as grants, sales, bribes, land ballots, parks, roads, land for official buildings, reserves, tips, mines, and finally returned fitfully and piecemeal as small Land Rights packages. There was never a policy to treat the land as something by which all inhabitants might benefit and prosper. There was never an acknowledgement that the Crown had stolen land on an unimaginable scale. In fact the British Crown frequently gives the impression of regarding its acquisition with unconcern and even contempt. Perhaps there is still room to consider Henry George’s ideas if only from the standpoint that he regarded land as a precious boon to all people. We rarely do so ...

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September 3: Alison Lurie

September 4: Mary Renault

Cyril Hare

September 5: Arthur Koestler

September 6: Elizabeth Ferrars
September 7: C. J. Dennis
September 8: Siegfried Sassoon
September 9: Phyllis Whitney
Alexander Cordell

* * * * *

One day I was reading a book telling you how to write a best seller, by Dean R. Koontz, *How to Write Best Selling Fiction*, and he advised writers to avoid the Gothic genre as he said it was on the way out, just a few writers like Victoria Holt still managing to make a living from Gothic novels. From being “the hottest fiction category” in the early 1970s “huge numbers of previously faithful readers suddenly abandoned the genre; the number of copies sold fell below the level of profitability; Gothic lists were slashed and then canceled at virtually every publishing house” and Gothic authors found their manuscripts unwanted. But the *Routledge Companion to Gothic* (Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy) is much more upbeat, saying, “Most critics now acknowledge that Gothic has continued until the present day, albeit in constantly evolving forms, and is flourishing particularly strongly at the current time.” Those unwanted authors clearly had to evolve and adapt but I am not sure that I would describe the market for any kind of Gothic as “flourishing”.

*

Elaine Showalter wrote in ‘The Female Gothic’ (in *The salon.com Readers Guide to Contemporary Authors*), “For Angela Carter, however, the Gothic tale’s affinity with fairy tale, pornography, and the surreal made it the ideal form for exploring the feminine creative imagination. Her collection of stories, *The Bloody Chamber*, which rewrites classic fairy tales—including Bluebeard, Beauty and the Beast, and Little Red Riding Hood—alongside material from the Marquis de Sade, is the most revolutionary and intense of all the contemporary Female Gothics. In the title story, the seventeen-year-old heroine marries a fabulously rich libertine marquis, and accompanies him to his remote castle. There she is aroused against her will by his violent and fetishistic sexual initiation. She then disobeys his command and unlocks the door to his secret room, the “bloody chamber” in which she discovers the embalmed bodies of his murdered wives. Horribly different from Virginia Woolf’s famous “room of one’s own,” for Carter, the bloody chamber is nonetheless also an important space for the woman writer to acknowledge and possess. The room/womb is the source of both creation and destruction, the woman writer’s equivalent of Yeats’s “foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart,” from which all poems start.”

*

Peter Ackroyd in a collection of his book reviews, *The Collection*, has this to say of *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales* (edited by Chris Baldick), “To be truly Gothic is, in a sense, to be English. The term has a history almost as devious and mysterious as the stories it represents. Armed with this anthology and such necessary reading as Kliger’s *The Goths in England*, the faint-hearted connoisseur can make his way down the gloomy halls and secret passageways of the genre. The Gothic is English (and was seen to be so in the eighteenth century), precisely because it is not part of the classical European tradition. It came, in some writers, to represent the vigorous national life of a country that rejected the languor of fallen Rome or the effeminacy of Greece. That is why it also became associated with Arthurian legends and druidic lore, and anything else that emphasized a specifically English mythology or folklore.”

He goes on to say that whether it is Horace Walpole in the 18th century or Angela Carter in the 20th “there is the same suggestive use of the past and the same propensity for the irrational and the inexplicable. That is why the genre has flourished over the past 200 years, during a period when the scientific model of reality has been apparently the pre-eminent one. There can be no Gothic in periods when ghosts, miracles and spirits are considered to be a true part of the world; this literature flourishes on repression, marginalized beliefs and panic fear.”

This might explain why the family shielding the madman or the madwoman was a stock plot in so many Gothic novels.

Phyllis Whitney made a long and successful career out of the Gothic. There is always a young and rather vulnerable woman who comes to a place to work or visit or live and finds that things are ... strange. There is always a hint of madness lurking. There are locked doors and mysterious conversations. The formula, though rarely actually 'bloody', can become pretty tedious but Phyllis Whitney was one of the better practitioners. Her settings were often vivid, the sense of apprehension palpable, and her characters usually believable and likeable.

She also wrote about writing. I remember one of her bits of advice was simply to sit down and doodle a first paragraph until you come up with something which intrigues you and sets your imagination to work. I know that the perceived wisdom when writing any kind of mystery is to know your end as you begin on your first paragraph. This can certainly make writing *easier*. But I like Phyllis Whitney's way simply because a story where you don't know the ending yourself is much more fun to write. You are setting out on a journey to answer your own questions.

But her skill wasn't enough to save the genre. As Brenda Walker says in *Reading by Moonlight*, "In Gothic fiction, characters must contend with the dead, with active hauntings or with hallucinations of hauntings, as well as whatever other trying circumstances they might find themselves in: orphanhood, lunacy, imprisonment, inheritances that go astray, troubling romantic situations. The Gothic novel does not strive for subtlety, and it isn't to everyone's taste. It can seem adolescent, an immature version of the stately, measured, grown-up realist novel, except that the line between the Gothic and the realist is never clear. A disdain for the Gothic is limiting, since this literature, in all its flagrancy, has something to say about emotional as well as physical death, and a tale of a haunting can have a narrative vitality that is far from conclusive. Gothic stories linger especially in the mind."

I am tempted to ask where else stories might linger if not in the mind. But this might explain why the thriller, the horror novel, and the mystery, in the hands of people like Mary Higgins Clark, have spread out into what was once the Gothic's territory and squeezed it into a declining corner. Because they too are about death. Now, 'Gothic' is more likely to refer to a landscape, an atmosphere, a time or a place, than to a particular designation for a piece of fiction. And yet, if we take Peter Ackroyd's definition, then there will always be a Gothic element to our fiction because science itself represses and marginalises ...

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September 10: Franz Werfel
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)
September 11: O. Henry
D. H. Lawrence

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In *Kangaroo* D. H. Lawrence creates a movement which at first seems a harmless version of a sporting club for old diggers but gradually it takes on serious far right political clothing. "Well now," he said in Somers' ear, in a soothed tone. "There's quite a number of us in Sydney—and in the other towns as well—we're mostly diggers back from the war—we've joined up into a kind of club—and we're sworn in—and we're sworn to *obey* the leaders, no matter what they command, when the time is ready—and we're sworn to keep silent till then. We don't let out much, nothing of any consequence, to the general run of the members." The clubs are set up like cells, dividing when they reach 50 members, and with an atmosphere of secrecy.

"You get Kangaroo with his Diggers—the cleverest idea in the country, really—to quietly come in with the Reds, and explode a revolution over here. You could soon do it, in the cities: and the country couldn't help itself. You let the Reds appear in the front, and take all the shine. You keep a bit of a brake on them. You let them call a Soviet, or whatever they want, and get into a real mess over it. And then Kangaroo steps in with the balm of Gilead and the New Jerusalem. But let them play Old

Tommy Jenkins first with Capital and State Industries and the free press and religious sects. And then Kangaroo steps in like a redeeming angel, and reminds us that it's God's Own Country, so we're God's Own People, and makes us feel good again. Like Solomon, when David has done the dirty work."

Although the book is fiction this aspect of it has been criticised; Australia did not see the formation of far right groups until the depression years in the thirties and *Kangaroo* was written in 1922. It seems most likely that Lawrence, very aware of the ferment in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, simply transposed some of his ideas to Australia.

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Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* describes Lawrence's books like *Kangaroo* as "unquestionably strident, and unpleasant for a number of reasons, principally a rasping protofascist tone, an increasing fondness of force, a personal arrogance, and innumerable racial, class, and religious bigotries." She summarises the story: "Lovat Somers went to Australia, by his own account, simply to work and be alone, but in no time every man he meets is begging him to take charge of the country. The "Diggers," a fascist group of disgruntled war veterans, want him to be the brains of their coup d'état. What heightens Somers' excitement at the thought of participating in the "masculine sphere" of government is not only the matey company of other males, but the deliberate exclusion of women, especially his bemused and serviceable wife Harriet. Written only a few years after suffrage, *Kangaroo* makes a great point of excluding women even from discussions of politics. In the bright new order, they will be disenfranchised again and below citizen class. Yet in a man who worships the "dark gods" of phallic supremacy, the blemish of not having established seigniorship in his own house is some cause for embarrassment. Lawrence even makes it cause for amusement in the long marital rows that relieve the tedium of his wordy Australian landscapes. And the more the struggle goes on in Lawrence, the more it seems to take out of him, and so the more absolutist and totalitarian he becomes in his male-supremacist beliefs, finally resorting to the magic of phallic religion. Late Lawrence novels have a tendency toward wish-fulfillment, compensatory dreams to offset the author's failures at home. Years after his death Frieda Lawrence recorded without bitterness that in the midst of a terrible quarrel Lawrence backed her up against the wall, throttling her while he ground out, "I am the master. I am the master." She replied that he might be if he liked—and what of it. Lawrence let his hands drop in astonishment; Frieda's ready and purely verbal assent—"Is that all? You can be master as much as you like. I don't care"—had quite outwitted him."

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Vane Lindesay introducing a book of the famous Minties cartoons, you may remember the white peppermint lollies with their amusing cartoons, says "The advertisements quickly established the slogan 'It's Moments Like These ...' as a catch-phrase throughout Australia, with people using it to describe all sorts of bizarre and troublesome situations in their lives.

"Curiously, the artist who created the largest number of comic situations for the 'It's Moments' cartoons was not, as many believe, an Australian. Ted Scorfield was brought out from England in 1925 to draw for the Bulletin. In the First World War Scorfield was with the Royal Engineers at Gallipoli and before coming to Australia had worked with a firm of Newcastle-on-Tyne shipbuilders.

"Ted Scorfield exploited every aspect of the human predicament for his 'Moments' cartoons, also featuring topical events such as elections. He caricatured the Party leaders of the day, including Jack Lang, Joseph Lyons and 'Billy' Hughes among others."

Many interesting artists did a Minties cartoon, including Dorothy Wall of Blinky Bill fame, and many of the pictures that went on the lolly packets were very funny. For instance, poor old Isaac Newton did not peacefully sit under a tree and watch an apple drop. Oh no, a couple of urchins up the tree pelted him with apples—and there were no Minties around to soothe his temper! But I had a different curiosity. Jack Lang appears in their cartoons as a big smiling man with a black moustache and lots of teeth. But my image of Jack Lang is rather grim and serious. He was probably the best

known and most controversial politician of that era. So what was he really like as a man, as a politician, as someone faced with the turmoil of the Great Depression in NSW?

Wendy Lowenstein in *Weevils in the Flour* says “The Bank of England sent Sir Otto Niemeyer and other financiers to advise. ‘Cut your costs and balance the budget,’ he said. Pensions, wages, social services, all public spending must be slashed, then Australia would be able to pay her debts, interest and capital, as the bills fell due. Once respectable in the eyes of the financial world, she could borrow again and put the unemployed to work. Among Australian political leaders only one man said, ‘No!’—Jack Lang, Premier of New South Wales, the most populous and influential state. Under his leadership that State had come to lead Australia in social welfare. Now he prepared to fight against the cuts, to fling defiance in the teeth of the ‘overseas bond-holders’. Lang was to become the legendary hero of the depression, Sir Otto Niemeyer the villain.”

Lang was a ‘can do’ man. Faced with a problem, such as the numbers of people being evicted from their homes he looked around for a better way and put a moratorium on evictions. Faced with the traditional belief that loans could only be raised in England he set about raising loans in NSW. It soon gained him a reputation as a radical, a dangerous man, but Lowenstein says, “We know now that Jack Lang’s plan to suspend payment on overseas loans was hardly radical, let alone revolutionary, a rear-guard action. But he denounced the money-lenders, the Bank of England, the capitalist class in such eloquent terms, always ready with a ‘phrase of revolt’ and a thundering denunciation of the financiers, that he terrified many people who were already much alarmed by the closing of the Government Savings Bank. In the very general and totally unreal fear that the unemployed might rise, elements of the Establishment turned to traditional strengths and certainties, to the right. In New South Wales, the New Guard was formed to protect the state against disorder, against Lang.”

The New Guard took on both military and fascist overtones. But how big was it and was it ever a real threat to the government, the unemployed, the state?

Judah Waten in his 1961 novel *Time of Conflict* has a clash between Right and Left in Sydney in the 30s. “One evening a young party member ran up the stairs of the hall, panting and excited.

“The New Guard’s at the meeting,” he stammered out to Mick and a group of men from the factories and single men’s homes sitting round a table studying Lenin’s *State and Revolution*.

“They’re going to smash it up,” he went on.

The class adjourned and the members hurried down the stairs. The meeting was down at the bottom of the street, outside the semi-circular shaped Hotel Burlington and the entrance to Paddy’s Market with its upside-down funnel-like tower. The men ran all the way. They could hear hoots all the time. There was a large crowd around the stepladder platform from which Kevin Foley with his trumpet-like voice addressed the audience. He could make himself heard despite the interjections and the abuse and he was pleasurablely conscious of the impression he was making on his supporters.

The new arrivals individually and unobtrusively made their way through the audience to take up positions in front, at the sides and back of the platform. Mick placed himself directly behind the speaker, now and then peering round the stump. Many of those in front were New Guardsmen. Mick could distinguish them from the unemployed and workers who came to party meetings. The New Guardsmen wore better clothes; they were the sons of the well-to-do, jobless clerks and salesmen. They were organised on military lines, maintaining a wedge-like formation, while shouting derisive words at the speaker. They were waiting for an order from their commander, an auctioneer who had stepped up to the platform. He was a heavily built man, like a wrestler, with a forceful manner.

“I’m giving you three minutes to finish the meeting,” he said to Foley, glancing at his wrist watch.

“Don’t make a fool of yourself,” Foley replied and continued speaking, informing the audience of the commander’s threat.

“Get down, I’m telling you, you bolshie mongrel,” the commander shouted.

Foley threw back his head and raising his right hand in an attitude of defiance, said:

“This fascist New Guard will learn that the party of the working class doesn’t bow to intimidation.”

The commander was furious at seeing his assumed authority flouted. He suddenly blew a whistle. A group of men rushed towards the platform, striking at Mick with truncheons. Other New Guardsmen using their shoulders like battering rams pushed the platform over on its side. Kevin Foley fell to the ground. There was a terrific yell as someone kicked him in the head.

“Down with disloyalists, down with communists, down with labor governments,” the New Guardsmen shouted as they went into action with truncheons and whips, forcing the crowd to disperse.

Mick fought off several men as he tried to reach Kevin Foley lying on the ground unconscious. All around New Guardsmen were battling with members of the audience who had returned to do battle after the first assault that had forced them to disperse. The commander standing on the footpath announced to onlookers that he intended to impose law and order. New Guardsmen kept running up to him to receive orders.

“You bloody scabby thing,” a man in a cloth cap shouted at him.

“Get him,” the commander said to one of his troop.

At that moment the commander was felled by a blow across his head from an iron bar wielded by a communist sympathiser who had worked his way behind him. Several New Guardsmen ran up to the assailant, throwing him to the ground. The street resembled a battlefield with men lying on the pavement and in the gutters. Those among the New Guard who were timid and had said little were now anxious to distinguish themselves. Panic drove them to excesses. They tried to exact vengeance for their unconscious leader and they laid about them with their whips and truncheons knocking over men and women. To Mick, lifting Kevin Foley onto his shoulder, the New Guardsmen were like the Italian black shirts and the German nazis he had been reading about lately; they showed that the savagery and bigotry of the wealthy and their followers more than rivalled the frenzy of the most savage rabble or demented mob anywhere. Seemingly educated men, good husbands and fathers, praiseworthy sons, behaved like wild animals when they feared the loss of their property or what they believed were their positions in society; the fear of the working class made them inhuman. So it seemed to Mick, carrying the still half-conscious Foley back to the hall.

The battle was still undecided, neither side giving ground when the police arrived. Previously the only policemen were plain clothes officers, members of the secret police section, merely making notes of the affray, recording the descriptions of the chief participants. Now they seemed to pour out of the divisional vans that pulled up at the kerbside.

The crowd began to disperse again when the police produced their batons. Several communists picked up pieces of the broken platform before departing. A well-known waterfront communist began to make a speech, standing in the middle of the road. He did not get far before he was hustled away by the uniformed policemen.

A police inspector and a sergeant took particulars of the *mêlée* from the commander’s side. The muscular, thickset commander who had just staggered to his feet could not speak coherently; he had suffered too violent a physical and emotional upset. Hurt and humiliated he loudly and disjointedly cursed the communists plotting to seize New South Wales.”

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Charlie Fox in *Fighting Back* has this to say about the Depression years in Victoria, “Did those thrown out of work in the Great Depression organize? Did they fight back? No, say the classic studies of the unemployed. Jahoda, Lazarsfield and Zeizel’s investigations in the Austrian town of Marienthal found a ‘weary community’, resigned and despairing. E. Wight Bakke watched the unemployed in Greenwich, London and New Haven, Connecticut resign themselves to their new circumstances. The 1938 Pilgrims Trust report on the unemployed in several British towns observed apathy and depression.

“And the classic studies in Australia agree. Ray Broomehill wrote in the 1970s that the unemployed in Depression Adelaide withdrew into themselves, reduced their expectations and rode out

the crisis. Geoffrey Bolton argues that the politics of consensus in inter-war Western Australia froze out unemployed politics and so it never took root. Yet in the 1980s an alternative view grew louder. From relief work strikes in the south west of Western Australia to riots in Cairns; from eviction battles in Newcastle to rent strikes in Sydney; from demonstrations in the streets of Darwin to deputations in Hobart; from dole boycotts in Bulli Creek to beef riots in Adelaide, historians uncovered a culture of protest among unemployed workers that was for too long denied.”

Fox talks of “a vibrant, fractious and unruly politics” in Victoria which was never a real challenge to the power structures but had some small victories. “Could the unemployed have been even more successful if they had been united? The internecine conflict between radicals and moderates may have been an ultimately fruitless expenditure of energy, yet paradoxically it may have benefited the movement as a whole. The moderate labour movement could not afford to be outflanked from the left by people it once counted as constituents, so it needed its own organization. Similarly the radicals could not afford to give ground to those they regarded as rivals for the loyalty of the unemployed masses and as props for the capitalist system. But there was more at stake than organizing the unemployed. In the context of a brutal Depression, when no one could predict the future, there were two world views in competition. One saw a new society where the exploitative relations of capital would be swept away. The other saw a society where each worker was afforded the dignity of a job in a reformed and reforming society.”

The second view, with variations, continues to hold sway.

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But in there is a secret world which has gone virtually unnoticed: the world of neo-fascist militias. Because they were small and disorganized and mostly drilled out of sight their potential power and paranoia has been overlooked. The White Army or the League of National Safety, headed by Victoria’s Police Commissioner Thomas Blamey, continually linked unemployment, Communism, vagrancy and petty crime into absurd claims about Bolshevik takeovers. Fox writes, “But what was all this organization for? These neo-fascist militias disappeared once the Scullin, Hogan and Lang governments had been swept from office, which shows that they were primarily anti-Labor. Yet the White Army and its ally, the Order of the Silent Knights, a 2000-strong body, were certainly not afraid of the Hogan Government. One of the White Army’s leaders, Colonel Francis Derham, told a New Guard emissary in October 1931 that although his organization was progressing rapidly he wished it had the same opportunities as the New Guard in New South Wales. Although there was a Labor government in Victoria, he explained, they were a ‘pretty decent crowd’. A later assessment suggests that these secret armies were driven by a ‘psychotic’ anti-Communism and a ‘deep distrust of democracy’. But the question that concerns us is just how closely conservative opinion linked what they regarded as subversion with unemployment and particularly with unemployed workers.” Another of these bodies called itself the Empire Honour League. It isn’t hard to unravel some of their platforms. Yet there is an irony in the attempt to see the unemployed as a subversive force—because the best way to bring people back into the mainstream of the nation’s life is to provide jobs, something which the militias were totally uninterested in looking at as they put out their manifestos about uprisings on May Days and other inflammatory material, and secretly drilled and plotted.

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Gordon Greenwood wrote in *The Modern World*, “In Australia, the cult of Jack Lang—with its slogan, “Lang is greater than Lenin”—and the rival organization of the New Guard, which enlisted and drilled many staunch representatives of the middle class, showed the perils which confront democracy in times of acute economic depression.”

This is rather misleading. Lang was premier of NSW while the New Guard was a secretive right-wing militia. And Lang wasn’t brought down by the New Guard. Frank Cain in *Jack Lang and the Great Depression* takes the problem right back to Federation. The states gave up their rights to levy customs and excise duties. The new Federal Government would collect the money and return some of it

to the states. But the states had only a fairly general commitment, not something graven in stone, and in the meantime they remained responsible for health, education, social welfare, and infrastructure. But they continued to have the right to raise their own loans. With a less secure economic base there was a deep need to make sure money was borrowed for productive projects, rail networks, the first hydro dams, housing, tolls, and some manufacturing.

But the First World War intervened and Australia found itself with a massive debt. Cain writes, “The cost of the war to Australia by June 1922 was calculated to be £505 million of which £370 was met from loans (£270 raised in Australia and the remainder in Britain) and £135 million paid from annual revenue.” For a nation of four million people this was a huge impost and the Federal treasury was even less willing to return money to the states. The Federal Government began pushing for a central body to do the borrowing, leaving the states to go cap-in-hand to Canberra. It also gave Canberra, as the Depression began to bite, the power to pressure and impose a particular fiscal policy on the states. Jack Lang’s ideas were not markedly radical but he wanted to continue borrowing for infrastructure projects, both to employ people and to create revenues in the future. But first the Scullin Labor government then Joe Lyons’ UAP regime in Canberra were increasingly in thrall to the Bank of England and Otto Niemeyer who had little understanding of what was working and what wasn’t but were securely welded to the idea of deflation. “ ‘Australia is [a] poor country’, he cabled London, ‘probably over-populated with higher percentage unemployment than United Kingdom. [Land] Settlement hitherto has been very costly and unsuccessful; and further development at present seems to be insane.’ ”

Lang had some good ideas, a Milk Board to guarantee farmers a decent price for their milk and improve quality, a Gas and Electricity Board to stabilise prices, the development of Sydney’s underground rail network (something which Sydneysiders should be thankful for), the Sydney Harbour Bridge, restrictions on landlords’ powers to evict without due process, but he couldn’t break Canberra’s stranglehold on the power to borrow. He raised money locally, he started a state lottery, he proposed caps on income and higher taxes on the wealthy, but as most people didn’t understand the fiscal system which undermined his plans it was easier to blame him for the state’s straightened finances.

And he was surrounded by enemies: Prime Ministers James Scullin (Labor) and Joe Lyons (United Australia Party), the wealthy establishment in NSW, the New Guard, and the man who would bring him down, NSW Governor Sir Philip Game. How much of this was ideological and how much was personal is hard to say though tact and negotiation, let alone an occasional spot of flattery, were certainly not his style.

“Game reported that one of the threats to stability was the right-wing private army known as the New Guard consisting of 30,000 members bent on being rid of the Lang government and led by ‘one Eric Campbell probably well meaning but a hot head who has cast himself for the part of Cromwell ... who stated that the New Guard would not allow the Premier to open the bridge. The New Guard petitioned me to dismiss Lang six weeks ago.’ ” He may not have been personally supportive, being English and a firm monarchist, but he played right into the hands of the New Guard by constantly insisting that he rather than the Premier should officially open the Sydney Harbour Bridge but Lang held firm in the face of Game’s letters to London, even to the king, as well as to Canberra—and after all, if it had been left to Game Sydneysiders wouldn’t have a bridge at all. But the New Guard in an ecstasy of sympathy for Game and antipathy to Lang stole the show. A New Guard officer, Francis de Groot, charged forward on his horse and cut the ribbon before Lang could.

Game had no intention of retiring back to Government House and his normal duties. “Game implemented the outrageous action of dismissing the government by writing to the premier at 5 p.m. on Friday 13 May (1932) saying that ‘I could not retain my present Ministers in office, and that I am seeking other advisers’. He sent for Bertie Stevens, leader of the opposition, and ‘asked him to form a government pointing out that if he accepted he made himself responsible for my actions’. Stevens agreed and he was given the commission and ‘I swore him in as Premier later in the evening’. Lacking

a majority in parliament, Stevens did not wish to be voted down as the new premier and Game accommodatingly agreed to prorogue parliament. Sir Philip was also aware that he would thereby be spared any parliamentary investigation of his capricious actions.” He had asked for advice from the Governor-General Sir Isaac Isaacs but he made the final decision himself and the reasons he later gave were confused and contradictory, not least because he couldn’t come out and say honestly that he personally hated Jack Lang, nor could he say that he objected to Lang’s attempts to circumvent Canberra’s veto on borrowing—when only days after he had dismissed Lang Canberra made new funds available and took over some of NSW’s debt. That would be too obvious a reminder that it was Canberra’s intransigence which had been a major part of the problem.

“Lang departed, but the Commonwealth was compelled to pour money into the badly damaged NSW economy, far in excess of what was required had it not launched its war against Lang.” And “Destabilising the NSW Labor government had been an expensive exercise; it worsened the Depression and after Lang’s defeat it required heavy Commonwealth subventions to restore the economic viability of the Stevens government.” But Cain ends on a fairly positive note. “Lang’s battle to make the federal system function more fairly was not fought in vain. These necessary changes could have been achieved at smaller human and financial costs.”

And the New Guard, in a reminder that it wasn’t poverty and unemployment which had raised them in the first place but rather antipathy to a mildly socialist government, gradually dwindled away.

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September 12: Michael Ondaatje

September 13: Roald Dahl

September 14: Eric Bentley

September 15: Agatha Christie

Sara Henderson

September 16: William Burchett

September 17: William Carlos Williams

September 18: Dr Samuel Johnson

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Dr Johnson had this to say about ‘second sight’ on his journey through Scotland in *A Journey to the Western Isles*: “The Second Sight is an impression made either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind, by which things distant or future are perceived, and seen as if they were present. A man a journey far from home falls from his horse, another, who is perhaps at work about the house, sees him bleeding on the ground, commonly with a landscape of the place where the accident befalls him. Another seer, driving home his cattle, or wandering in idleness, or musing in the sunshine, is suddenly surprised by the appearance of a bridal ceremony, or funeral procession, and counts the mourners or attendants, of whom, if he knows them, he relates the names, if he knows them not, he can describe the dresses. Things distant are seen at the instant when they happen. Of things future I know not that there is any rule determining the time between the Sight and the event ... This receptive faculty, for power it cannot be called, is neither voluntary nor constant. The appearances have no dependence upon choice: they cannot be summoned, detained, or recalled. The impression is sudden, and the effect often painful ... By pretension to Second Sight, no profit was ever sought or gained. It is an involuntary affection, in which neither hope nor fear are known to have any part. Those who profess to feel it, do not boast of it as a privilege, nor are considered by others as advantageously distinguished. They have no temptation to feign; and their hearers have no motive to encourage the imposture.”

The most famous case of ‘second sight’ in Scotland is probably that of the ‘Brahan Seer’. Ronald Macdonald Douglas in *Scottish Lore and Folklore* says of him, “The most famous seer of the last two or three centuries was Coinneach Odhar, usually referred to as The Brahan Seer from the fact that he worked as a labourer, or in some such other humble capacity, on the Brahan Estate.

Coinneach Odhar, or Kenneth the Sallow, was born at Baille na Cille in the Lews about three hundred years ago, but such an impression did his prophecies make that he is still discussed in the Highlands as though he died no more than a year or two ago.

The Brahan Seer prophesied the linking up of the chain of lochs in the Great Glen about a hundred and fifty years before Telford's Caledonian Canal came into being. The skeptics put that down to natural shrewdness; but natural shrewdness does not explain away Kenneth's prophecy of the battle of Culloden—delivered actually at Culloden, where his words were taken down and preserved. Passing over what later became the battlefield, he stopped, and said: 'This bleak moor, ere many generations have passed, shall be stained with the best blood of Scotland. Glad am I that I will not see that day.'

It must be remembered that there was scarcely a road at all in the Highlands when Kenneth truly prophesied that 'the day will come when there will be a road through the hills of Ross, and a bridge upon every stream.' And there was certainly no thought in the minds of men of such a tragedy to come as what was later to be known as the Highland Clearances; but long before the rapacity of alien land-owners drove out men that sheep might feed on the hills, Kenneth said: 'The clans will become so effeminate as to allow themselves to be driven from their native land by an army of sheep.'

But Kenneth's greatest prophecy—his best known, and, incidentally, his last—was the one that foretold the doom of the great House of Seaforth.

Kenneth Mackenzie, the third Earl of Seaforth, chief of his clan, and controller of vast tracts of land, visited Paris on some business for the king a year or two after the Restoration of Charles II. His jealous countess he left behind at Brahan Castle. Seaforth's stay in Paris was too prolonged for the lady's peace of mind; and strange rumours of his conduct among the Parisiennes coming to her ears, she sent for Kenneth.

At first Kenneth would tell her nothing but that her lord was safe. 'Be satisfied,' he said, in answer to all her queries, 'ask no questions, let it suffice you to know that your lord is well and merry.'

But the countess wanted more than that; and with entreaties, bribes, and threats, she managed at last to get at the truth. Kenneth's long harangue ended with his telling her that the earl was 'in a gay gilded room,' and that he was 'grandly decked out in velvets, with silks and cloth of gold,' and, more than that, that he could see the chief 'on his knees before a fair lady, his arm round her waist, and her hand pressed to his lips.'

At this, we are told 'the rage of the lady knew no bounds.' Poor Kenneth, unfortunately, came in for the rage that she should have waited to vent on her husband. Illogically, she blamed him for his insolence in daring to speak slightingly of the great Seaforth, and, immediately, before all who were assembled there, she denounced him for a slandering charlatan, and demanded his life as the penalty for speaking evil of her lord.

This was scarcely the reward that Kenneth had expected. At first he refused to believe the countess was serious; but, to cut a long story short, within a few hours the unfortunate seer was conducted to Chanonry Point, and there burned to death in a tar-barrel on a charge of witchcraft.

But before his death he uttered the doom of Seaforth.

'I see far into the future,' he said; 'and I read the doom of the race of my oppressor. The long-descended line of Seaforth will, ere many generations have passed, end in extinction and in sorrow. I see a chief, the last of his house, both deaf and dumb. He will be the father of four fair sons, all of whom he will follow to the tomb. He will live careworn, and die mourning, knowing that the honours of his line are to be extinguished for ever, and that no future chief of the Mackenzies shall bear rule at Brahan or in Kintail. After lamenting over the last and most promising of his sons, he himself shall sink in to the grave, and the remnant of his possessions shall be inherited by a white-hooded lass from the east, and she is to kill her sister. And as a sign by which it may be known that these things are coming to pass, there shall be four great lairds in the days of the last Seaforth—the deaf and dumb chief; and these lairds shall be: Gairloch, Chisholm, Grant, and Raasay. And one shall be buck-toothed, another hair-lipped, another half-witted, and the fourth a stammerer. Chiefs like these shall be allies and the

neighbours of the last of the Seaforths; and when he looks around him and sees them, he may know that his sons are doomed to death, that his broad lands shall pass away to the stranger, and that his race shall come to an end.’

And, in time, all that the Seer predicted came to pass.

In 1794 there was born Francis Humberston Mackenzie, who became deaf, and latterly dumb; and when four sons were born to him, he looked around to find his neighbours and allies all as Kenneth had foretold a hundred years before. One after another the sons of Seaforth died—the most promising of them last of all. And, on January the 11th, 1815, Lord Seaforth himself died—the last of his race. His title became extinct, and the chiefship of the Mackenzie’s, for what it was worth, passed to a remote collateral who succeeded to none of the lands: the Seaforth estates were inherited by Lord Seaforth’s daughter—the white-hooded lass from the east. She was the widow of Sir Samuel Hood, who had command of the Indian seas. She returned to Scotland in white weeds, and doubly ‘Hooded’ by name.

Some years later she married again. She married a grandson of the Earl of Galloway, who was a Stewart. One day, driving out with her younger sister in a pony carriage, the ponies took fright, and both women were flung from the carriage. The younger one was so severely injured that, after a lingering illness, she died. As the ‘white-hooded lass from the east’ had been driving the carriage and had failed to control the ponies, she was considered to have caused her sister’s death.

And in such a way was the greatest prophecy of Coinneach Odhar fulfilled.”

Elizabeth Sutherland turned this story into a novel, *The Seer of Kintail*, but she says in the introduction, “there is no written evidence that Coinnrach Odhar was a Mackenzie, that he was born in Lewis or died a criminal’s death at Fortrose. Nor is there mention of him in the ecclesiastical archives of the day.” As the church, still burning witches in the 1600s, had a lot to hide this is perhaps not surprising. And I have found that although Scottish records are good they do have major gaps in them—and the further north you go the poorer they tend to become ...

John Gregorson Campbell did a study *Witchcraft and Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*. This is a fascinating collection of oral accounts by a man who was the minister on the small island of Tiree in the late nineteenth century. He says “The Gaelic name *da-shealladh* does not literally mean “the second sight,” but “the two sights.” The vision of the world of sense is *one* sight, ordinarily possessed by all, but the world of spirits is visible only to certain persons, and the possession of this additional vision gives them “the two sights,” or what comes to the same thing, “a second sight.” Through this faculty they see the ghosts of the dead revisiting the earth, and the fetches, doubles, or apparitions of the living.”

He goes on to say, “The gift of second sight was not in any case looked upon as enviable or desirable. Seers frequently expressed a wish that they had no such gift. In some instances it ran in the family; in others, but rarer cases, the seer was the only one of his kindred who “saw sights” (*chì sealladh*). Some had it early in life, upon others it did not come till they were advanced in life.” He then goes on to try and come up with a rational explanation. “These characteristics alone show it to be in its origin the same as spectral illusions. It arose from hereditary disease, malformation, or weakness of the visual organs, and derangements of mind or bodily health. It was not *voluntary*; the visions went and came without the option of the seer, and his being visited by them was deemed by himself and others a misfortune rather than a gift.” But the problem remains: how can a physical explanation be adequate to explain an apparent glimpse into the future? Margaret Reeves in *A Strange Bird on the Lagoon* wrote “Grandfather cancelled his bookings on the “Gothenburg”, in which another of his brothers, and several of the Cox family drowned when it was wrecked on the Australian coast. He had a premonition, but could not persuade the rest of the family to take it seriously.” Her grandfather was my great grandfather W. J. B. Cameron and his brother George, his uncle and aunt Pryce and Mary Cox and their three children were all drowned when the Gothenburg went down off the coast near Townsville in February 1875. That is the other troubling part of the equation. How to respond when someone believes they have been vouchsafed a brief glimpse into the future?

And Patrick Taylor wrote in *An Irish Country Doctor* “The country folk believed that the sudden death of a loved one could confer the gift of second sight.”

Great love, great sorrow, great trauma, deep belief, undying hope. Perhaps it is rooted in the psyche of all of us and just waiting for something to trigger a manifestation?

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September 19: William Golding
Henry Cecil Leon
Libby Gleeson

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“Henry Cecil, an English writer, who flourished during the last 30 years, produced many best sellers based on the humorous side of the law courts.” E. R. Henry in *Revelations of a Retired Lawyer*. And Anthony Boucher said of him that “few men write so wittily and perceptively about The Law as Henry Cecil”.

Recently I came upon a couple of the novels of Henry Cecil, *Natural Causes* and *Daughters in Law*, and they were a delightful surprise. Cecil was a lawyer and wrote a number of books and plays, with wry names such as *Sober as a Judge* and *Friends at Court*, which range from mysteries and murders to more light-hearted legal farces—and those two novels come in at that end of the spectrum. Julian Symons wrote in the *Sunday Times*, “Mr Henry Cecil’s comedies of criminal life are ingenious, sprightly, immensely amusing from page to page.” They are funny and clever and contain a lot of law but not in any sense dumped on the reader. In the first the England cricket team’s selectors are accused of favouritism. In the second a man borrows a lawn-mower and then finds every absurd excuse not to return it. Trivial issues are turned into major issues, a lot of legal effort, time and money is expended and both books end with a little twist in the tail. They do seem rather old-fashioned now (Cecil was born in 1906) but that is part of their charm. The thing which struck me though is that a good mystery does not need an horrific crime, a Hannibal Lecter, to be a gripping read.

Or does it?

That I am on the lookout for more Henry Cecil’s does not necessarily mean that the increasingly violent expectations of many readers can be rolled back. But perhaps I am jumping to conclusions. Perhaps there are many readers out there who *would* buy a Henry Cecil, the sort of readers perhaps who buy a Hazel Holt, if a publisher would reprint his best books ...

He was a contemporary of Cyril Hare who also wrote mysteries with a legal theme, his most famous being *Tragedy at Law*. This too has its amusing moments but whereas Cecil uses ‘the law is an ass’ idea to good effect Hare uses the pomposity of its practitioners, in particular Judge Barber, to raise a smile. A later practitioner of amusing legal mysteries, John Mortimer, uses instead the character and style of his narrator Rumpole to get a laugh.

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September 20: Stephen King
Ion L. Idriess
Upton Sinclair

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“I have noticed a curious thing—I make my heroes out of the same fellows that you make your villains of.”

Upton Sinclair to Zane Grey.

“It’s sometimes difficult to tell the difference between the hero and the villain in a romance novel. Near as we can tell, the most reliable indicator seems to be dental hygiene. (The motto of the

International coalition of Villains: Flossing is for Pussies!) That, and the fact that the hero actually gets away with his stunts instead of being killed in some horrible fashion by the end of the book.”

From *Beyond Heaving Bosoms* by Sarah Wendell and Candy Tam.

‘The question can’t be *why* but only “Why yours and not mine?” We have taught our children in a thousand ways, sometimes with flag-waving and sometimes with a laugh track, that the bad guy deserves to die. But we easily forget a crucial component of this formula: “Bad” is defined by the aggressor. Any of our children may someday be, in someone’s mind, the bad guy.’

Barbara Kingsolver in *Small Wonder*.

“The villain is thus a supplementary figure in the thriller. His role is to conspire, and it is the conspiracy that is a structural necessity. Of course, actions have to be performed by people — although Poe avoided even that minimal contact with villainy in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* by making the murderer an escaped orang-utang — and to that extent villains are necessary. But they scarcely have to appear, and commonly when they do it is in the guise of a perfect citizen — the Least Likely Person.

“The conspiracy, on the other hand, is an absolute structural necessity, for it is the conspiracy that drives the plot into action. Without it, there would be no reason for the hero to act, for the justification of his actions is always that he reacts to *prior* aggression: an otherwise ordered world (a world which is posited as otherwise ordered) is disrupted by villainy, and the hero acts to restore normality. The villain as a character is subordinate to the conspiracy as a function; we do not need to know anything about him. The hero, on the other hand, is in no way subordinate to a narrative function: he *is* a narrative function, among the most important, and his personal qualities are an integral part of that function.”

Jerry Palmer in *Thrillers*.

I was talking about villains with a friend one day and she agreed with me: an interesting villain, a well-developed well-rounded (if that is not an oxymoron) villain, is an absolute essential. T. Macdonald Skillman in *Writing the Thriller* says, “Think about the best suspense novels you’ve read. Which characters remain most vivid in your mind? If you answered, “The villains,” authors of hundreds of thrillers would applaud.” A lot of villains clearly deserve whatever comes to them in the last chapter. But it is sometimes hard to get to the last chapter if the villain is merely an unpleasant nobody, someone whose personality is almost invisible, someone who is defined by violence not by character. So the other day I thought I would conduct an experiment. I would walk along the mystery shelves with my eyes closed and choose out six books at random and see what kind of villains they used to drive the plot. The six were:

Winter and the General by Julian Jay Savarin

The Risk of Infidelity Index by Christopher G. Moore

Skinner’s Trail by Quintin Jardine

The Mocking Program by Alan Dean Foster

The Cat Who Went Bananas by Lilian Jackson Braun

Winged with Death by John Baker

In terms of coming up with an interesting villain it wasn’t very successful but in other ways it was quite an eye-opener—because, except for the Braun book which is a fairly traditional whodunit, all the other books depended on the corruption and venality of systems and structures in varying extents to underpin their crimes. The sleaze and corruption of Bangkok in Moore’s novel. The abuse of power in Germany in Savarin’s book. The movement of tainted business from Edinburgh to Spain in Jardine’s book. The military abuses in Uruguay in Baker’s novel. The horrors of American and Mexican venalities just across the border in futuristic Mexican industrial zones. And although the various detectives come up with answers to specific questions the reader is left with the knowledge that the corruption and the abuse is beyond the power of one man to solve.

Of the six books I think I liked the Foster and the Baker best. Not because their villains were more memorable or more gripping. But Foster provides some innovative thinking to underpin a future scenario which he makes sound genuinely just over the horizon, including the way English and Spanish are merging in North America. And Baker evokes the Uruguay of the Generals and the world of a tango dancer effectively. But beyond an insight into what writers are doing with the mystery genre what else might a reader get?

“In those early days in Uruguay I learned two things from Julio. The first was his credo as an anarcho-communist: from each according to the best of his ability; to each according to his need. And the second was something closer to tango: *life is just a flash in the pan*.

For much of my life I have wrestled with these two, apparently contradictory, concepts. The one stating that life is no more than the fluttering frenzy of those ballerinas above Rusk’s café, and the other laying down an approach to that moment, proclaiming, in effect, that unless the moment is injected, suffused with virtue or principle, then its result will be meaninglessness.”

From *Winged with Death*.

“In soche, a child learned about the psychology of male-female relationships, dating, the institution of marriage, sex, how to open and manage a bank account, how to perform simple household repairs, deal with credit, purchase a residence, handle lawyers, consult with doctors, plan a vacation, shop for goods and services, buy and cook food—all the critical components of everyday life that bumbling previous generations had somehow expected children to learn on their own, usually by utterly inadequate variations of social osmosis. In other words, all the really important things. Science and math, geography and language, history and literature, art and civics—all these were better studied at home, via a household box.”

From *The Mocking Program*.

I had heard Peter Temple described as the best crime writer currently in Australia so I borrowed his novel *The Unknown Shore* to see for myself. I think, if I’d come at it without any hype, I would have been less critical. True, it has quite a good and topical plot, it has some laconic humour, but I didn’t find any of the characters memorable including the ‘bad guys’. Nor did it offer a strong sense of place. Nor did I find myself caring particularly about any of the characters or even about seeing justice done. Perhaps it wasn’t his best book and I should try something else ... (Since then I’ve tried another of his books without really changing my mind.)

But afterwards I was thinking more generally about current Australian crime fiction. Is there a best and a lot of also-rans. Are there bests in the different styles and fields. Those sorts of questions. Is Temple better than Shane Molony—Peter Corris—Marele Day—Jennifer Rowe—Kerry Greenwood—David Owen and more? And I think a part of the problem is that most of the stories are not uniquely Australian. They could happen anywhere and just need to be tweaked into line with an occasional bit of Australian slang, a few real street names, some local vegetation. The influence of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler hangs over many. The influence of the British puzzle is elsewhere in evidence. Their heroes *and* their villains are almost interchangeable at times.

I find myself feeling almost nostalgic for Arthur Upfield. His plots are at times dated. His style a little old-fashioned. But you never doubt that you are in Australia. Does it matter though? After all, the media, the impact of city life, the internet, everywhere a strongly homogenising influence is at work. The days when books were uniquely Australian, their heroes and their villains could never by any stretch of the imagination be anything but Australian, are probably disappearing and I am just going to have to accept and live with that ...

But I think T. Macdonald Skillman makes a good point when she says the villain has to fit the type of book you’re writing. Yet the power of the serial Ted Bundy-type of killer overpowers many books without necessarily giving any insight into what makes such a person ‘tick’. Most of us, despite the prevalence of that type of fictional villain, will never run into a serial killer. But we may well find ourselves living next door to ‘the neighbours from hell’, get caught up in an online scam, find ourselves

enmeshed in some sort of bureaucratic nightmare, buy contaminated food, have a child stolen by a non-custodial parent, be given the wrong medication ... the list goes on ...

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“Now, Proust’s book has no villain; his psychology is too subtle for so static a classification of character. Charlus increasingly grows into an evil genius. He abandons health, reputation, and fortune for his vices. Nevertheless, even in the humiliating scene near the end of the book, where he is being flagellated by a young man in Jupien’s male bordello, a curious innocence hangs over the events. We are told that Charlus really has a good heart. None of the hired hands is vicious enough to get any kick out of whipping the old man; they do it reluctantly, only for money. And in the penultimate moment when Marcel meets Charlus on the Champs-Élysées after the latter has had a ravaging heart attack, Proust paints the semiparalyzed Baron both as an indomitable Lear and as a senile puppet bowing to old enemies at Jupien’s prodding. The most pathetic vice is not excluded from the comic vision.”

From *Proust’s Way* by Roger Shattuck.

And unless you believe that people are born evil then the Dr No or Goldfinger type of villain is unsatisfying. How did people take those first tentative steps which eventually led them to the noose or the War Crimes court or the life sentence? It is the making of the villain rather than the requirement of a villain as foil to the hero which is the intriguing issue.

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The villain or villains in a horror story are a little different. It can be an ordinary person possessed, a place haunted, an alien influence intruding. Stephen King gripped readers because he placed the horror of a lot of his early fiction in ‘ordinary’ suburban situations. It no longer needed those haunted mansions and all the accoutrements of *frisson*. A locker room, a basement, a suburban yard could be overlaid by a sense of apprehension. Recently I came on Stephen King’s book *On Writing* in which he gives the seemingly unremarkable little incidents which sparked off some of his stories. But he also suggests something I’ve often noticed: that a lot of stories take off when two small ideas collide.

His ideas about writing are also unremarkable but sensible and down-to-earth. “This is not an autobiography. It is, rather, a kind of *curriculum vitae* — my attempt to show how one writer was formed. Not how one writer was *made*; I don’t believe writers *can* be made, either by circumstances or by self-will (although I did believe those things once). The equipment comes with the original package. Yet it is by no means unusual equipment; I believe large numbers of people have at least some talents as writers and storytellers, and that those talents can be strengthened and sharpened.”

... “I’m often asked if I think the beginning writer of fiction can benefit from writing classes or seminars. The people who ask are, all too often looking for a magic bullet or a secret ingredient or possibly Dumbo’s magic feather, none of which can be found in classrooms or at writing retreats, no matter how enticing the brochures may be. As for myself, I’m doubtful about writing classes, but not entirely against them.”

He thinks they can help give confidence, they provide much needed income to writers, but they can also turn into occasions where writers talk about their writing rather than actually writing and that critiques given are often not sufficiently focused and precise to be much help. His own advice is simple: “You learn best by reading a lot and writing a lot, and the most valuable lessons of all are the ones you teach yourself.”

And the most effective villains are those who come to life as ‘real’ characters—not those who exist merely as plot devices ...

But as someone who has just finished reading King’s *Duma Key* I would add this: after ploughing through 400 pages which struck me as pretty pointless and tedious, and I only kept reading because of King’s reputation that things would eventually come to a dramatic head, even the most highly-lauded practitioners do need to keep in mind the importance of not allowing their villain to be lost in a wasteland of verbiage.

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Bruce Murphy in *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery* says of thrillers: “A piece of literary terminology nearly as useless as “suspense,” and liable to the same criticisms Jacques Barzun made against the suspense label. If a thriller is supposed to be thrilling, then the term could as well describe *Moby Dick*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Macbeth*. As a result of this imprecision, “thriller” is often used in conjunction with some other term; there is the spy thriller, the mystery thriller, the detective thriller, and the techno-thriller. Publishers often refer to books as “thrillers” when they do not want to admit that they are spy novels or mysteries. This fatuous attempt to make the “thriller” more respectable than genre fiction is all the more ludicrous because the thriller category includes as much if not more junk than the detective genre; the thriller is more prone to humorlessness and heavy-handed writing.”

Thriller writers may want to challenge his views ... They may even want to use some of that violence that marks a thriller off from a whodunit ...

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September 21: H. G. Wells

September 22: Arthur Lowe

Alice Meynell

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When Stephen Lowe wrote a biography of his father, *Arthur Lowe: A Life*, he gave out the feeling that he was only doing it because people wanted to know more about Arthur Lowe after the success of *Dad's Army*. Certainly Lowe is very good in the role of Captain Mainwaring but the book chronicles the not-terribly-interesting life of a jobbing actor who was fortunate to get a memorable series in later life. It didn't leave me thinking that I would have liked to know Arthur Lowe in real life. Of course children may not be the right people to write memoirs of their parents. They are usually too close to the principals to sum them up objectively. And they may find it deeply confronting to write about embarrassing, scandalous, or very personal aspects of their parents' lives. Still, they often have interesting insights, fascinating little anecdotes which a more objective biographer may reject as being ‘not part of the bigger picture’, and they are an essential part of the life they are recording. Judith Golding writing about William Golding, Margaret Salinger writing about J. D. Salinger, and many more such grown children do have something important to say about a famous parent.

Then I came upon the memoir of another *Dad's Army* stalwart, Nicolas Ridley's book *Godfrey's Ghost*, about his father Arnold Ridley who played Private Godfrey in the series. “As a character, Private Godfrey, the oldest member of the Walmington-on-Sea platoon, has always been a *Dad's Army* favourite. Gentle, fumbling, innocently willing, Godfrey was particularly popular among the very old and the very young. ‘My sister cried last night when the bank manager was rude to you,’ wrote a ten-year-old boy. ‘He shouldn't have been because, although you're very stupid, you do try.’ It was a part my father loved to play. ‘A Bear of Very Little Brain’. But, as a picture of my father, the deferential, weak-bladdered bachelor residing with his sisters Dolly and Cissy in Cherry Tree Cottage will not serve.” (Arthur Lowe's wife Joan played Dolly.)

“Which is why – does this sound absurd? – I felt a need to rescue him. To prise Arnold Ridley from Private Godfrey. To free him from age and frailty. To revive and restore him. I wanted to paint a true portrait of my father for my son. For others, too, including – as I have come to realise – for myself.

“I was born when my father was fifty-one. It seemed to me so much of his life had been lived already. His distant childhood in Bath. The horrors of the first World War. The astonishing success of his first play, *The Ghost Train*. The life of a celebrated playwright. Wealth and fame. Rooms at Garlands Hotel, winters in Nice or Juan-les-Pins. After which, an interval of alcoholism, a doomed affair, a first divorce, financial ruin, calamitous and complete. He returned to France to fight in another war. Shell-shock, blackouts, nervous collapse. And then – in some ways worst of all – the writer's block that robbed him of his confidence and his craft. Through most of my childhood he lived the

hand-to-mouth existence of an ageing actor, struggling for small parts, harried by bank managers, bullied by bailiffs, pursued by implacable tax inspectors.

“For me and for my mother, my father’s triumphs were in the past. Ours was quite unlike the plush life he had known at the height of his success. As a family, we may sometimes have shared a wistful sense of what had been and was no more, but that was all. Which is why my admiration for my father had – and has – little to do with his public achievements. He was, for me, remarkable because he was my father; and because – faced with more than his fair share of life’s vicissitudes – through love, courage and the kind of well-grounded philosophy that doesn’t recognise itself as such, he lived his life so valiantly and well.”

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In fact Arnold Ridley had been quite a prolific and successful playwright while playing mostly small parts in the theatre. Yet I have never seen *The Ghost Train* played, nor any of his other successes such as *Easy Money* or *Keepers of Youth* or *The Wrecker*. So I can only offer Nicolas Ridley’s description of the play. “The action of *The Ghost Train* takes place at night in the dismal waiting-room at Fal Vale, a station on a branch line of the South Cornwall Joint Railway Company. The curtain rises on a most depressing scene. The fire is smoking and a single gas-jet burns faintly, throwing gloomy shadows about the room. Outside the rain falls heavily. Everything is damp and clammy and strips of wallpaper hang from the walls.

“A train enters the station. There are cries of ‘All change! All change!’ and the sound of carriage doors slamming. The whistle blows and, through the waiting-room windows, lights from the railway carriages can be seen as the train moves slowly out of the station.

“Enter Saul Hodgkin, the stationmaster, who turns up the gas and exits. Enter, in turn, the rest of the cast. A man and a woman whose marriage is going through difficulties; a honeymoon couple who will soon have to part; Miss Bourne, an elderly lady carrying a parrot-cage, who at the beginning of the second act empties a flask of brandy, becomes tipsy, falls asleep and misses the rest of the action; and Teddie Deakin, a dandified young man with an eyeglass and cigarette holder, who is quite plainly an idiot except that, equally plainly, he is not.” The potential passengers are in fact dead people who do not realise they have died when the train crashed. And the complexities of their ‘lives’ in that dreary waiting-room were mirrored by the ups and downs the play experienced before finally being accepted as a hit and a must-see production. It has been played around the world but not in my time in Hobart. Is this because it has dated too much or people here are looking for more action ... or no one has considered it when, each year, they plan their theatre programs?

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September 23: Alan Villiers

September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald

September 25: William Faulkner

Ronnie Barker

September 26: T. S. Eliot

September 27: Faith Bandler

September 28: ‘Sapper’

Vincent O’Sullivan

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“A notable Victorian case was that of Dr. Crippen. He had apparently sacrificed a great deal to his wife’s ambition, while she openly flaunted affairs. He purchased the vegetable drug hyoscine hydrobromide, now used in treatments of motion sickness. He knew from working with psychiatric patients in the United States that it dampened the sexual ardors of those who took it, and it’s supposed he bought it to stop his wife’s philanderings. However, he accidentally killed her instead. The hyoscine traces were found at postmortem examination. He appears to be the first recorded murderer in history to use the drug.”

From *Deadly Doses* by Serita Deborah Stevens and Anne Klarner.

Cora Crippen took a notion
To wink and flirt, to cheat and preen;
Dr. Crippen fixed a potion
Of lethal-dosage hyoscine.

Friends missed the missus by and by,
They asked the Doc where Cora'd flown;
He forged a farewell alibi
To bring her back from marrowbone.

The Doc had found a sweet new belle
To ring and brood with Cora's gems;
He chanced it, tolled his missus' knell,
Without a corpse for requiems.

Inspector Dew of Scotland Yard
Dropped in, found Crippen meek and mild;
Home free, Doc pierced his own canard
And fled, his belle dressed like a child.

The Yard then plumbed his cellar's floor,
Found skin and flesh like albacore;
They caught the Doc off Labrador,
And hanged him back on England's shore.

'The Ballad of Doctor Crippen' by Gerald Tomlinson.

Julian Burnside wrote in his book of articles and essays *Watching Brief*, "in late 2007, after this book was first printed, researchers obtained tissue samples from descendents of Cora Crippen, and a piece of the flesh which had been found under the cellar floor at 39 Hilldrop Crescent. Mitochondrial DNA testing showed that the remains under the cellar could not have been Cora Crippen. There was never a suggestion that Crippen had taken to killing generally. Whatever other mysteries remain about the case, it is now clear that Crippen was innocent."

I found this very interesting but the two statements are not automatically cause and effect and it does stretch coincidence *pretty* far. Did a stranger bring a strange woman into the Crippens' household while they were in residence and bury her in the cellar? And how to explain away the range of other telling evidence against Crippen?

And who was used for the DNA tests? Cora Crippen had no children. She had a sister, we know, because she came to the trial of Dr Crippen. Did the sister have daughters? Was she a full sister or a half-sister? Or even an adopted sister?

I think, though it is probably not provable now, the lab after each case was in the habit of placing various remains and 'bits' of corpses into a single coffin and burying them. After all, Dr Crippen wasn't about to insist his wife be buried with all due dignity. And a constant stream of body parts and unidentified or unclaimed corpses came through the coroner's office. I suspect many coffins contained a muddle of parts. What was buried as the remains of Mrs Crippen in 1910 (in Islington Borough Cemetery in Finchley) could well have had other bits mixed in. And there is another point: those remains had been de-skeletonised. Unless they were buried in an expensive lead-lined coffin what would now remain? Or did the lab retain several bits of the corpse in formaldehyde? And if it did—

how reliable was their collecting and storing? Even now, with many more checks and balances, laboratories still make embarrassing mistakes.

And men who abuse and kill wives, particularly so that they can remarry, are rarely a danger to the general population. Rory Jack Thompson killed his unfortunate wife and cut her in small pieces—but no one has ever linked him to any other killings ...

Yet Julian Burnside points up a curious development: the efforts to re-position Dr Crippen as the victim, not the killer, or if not completely innocent then a man driven to extremes by an appalling wife.

Adrian Vincent in *A Gallery of Poisoners* says, “Whenever a writer has dealt with the case of Dr Crippen, the story has always been tinged with some sympathy for this seemingly inoffensive little man, who is invariably portrayed as the long-suffering husband of a zero-rated music hall artiste who called herself Belle Elmore, and was bleeding him dry when he met and fell in love with Ethel Le Neve.

“This myth of a gentle doctor who killed for love has been perpetuated in books, on the stage and in films, and even in the musical *Belle, or The Ballad of Dr. Crippen*, written by Wolf Mankowitz, with music by Monty Norman, and staged in London in 1961 with George Benson as Dr Crippen. I had the pleasure of seeing the show during its pre-London run in Brighton, and remember it as a tuneful musical with melodies that evoked the old music hall days. It failed at the box office, mainly because of an attack made on it by the writer Ursula Bloom who wrote an article in the *Sunday Despatch*, saying that as Ethel Le Neve was still alive, it should never have been put on.

“In a sense, Ursula Bloom was right, but not for the reason she stated. What *The Ballad of Dr. Crippen* did, putting aside possibly hurting Ethel Le Neve’s feelings, was to keep alive the idea that Crippen was basically a nice man.

“The facts about Crippen are somewhat different.”

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(There was a precedent for Bloom’s concern though 60s audiences probably had no memory of it. “Maugham’s play *The Letter*, adapted from his short story, opened at the Playhouse in London’s West End on 24 February 1927 with Gladys Cooper in the role of Leslie Crosbie. The set — a planter’s bungalow boasting rattan furniture, sun hats, blow pipes and a mounted tiger’s head — was praised for its realism and was, according to Maugham, ‘a faithful copy from a photograph I brought back from my last voyage to that part of the world’.” So wrote Eric Lawlor in *Murder on the Verandah*. “Under the headline, ‘KL Tragedy Recalled’, the *Malay Mail* reviewed *The Letter* on 31 March, remarking that Maugham had ‘followed pretty closely the lines of a *cause célèbre* which actually occurred here in Selangor 15 or 16 years ago, though whether he has provided the correct solution of the accused woman’s for shooting her victim is still a matter of conjecture’.”

Charles Allen in *Tales from the South China Seas* describes *The Letter* as “based on a notorious case of adultery and murder that took place in Kuala Lumpur in 1911.” Ethel Proudlock had shot a man called William Steward dead outside her bungalow in Malaya. He was probably her lover but it isn’t absolutely certain. She spent a short time in prison and then was sent home to England. Her husband William Proudlock lost his teaching job and followed her home. They then disappeared back into a quiet anonymity. But they were certainly alive when Maugham’s play came on. It aroused minor concern in Malaya: should it have been turned into a play? But this aspect went unnoticed in London. Did the Proudlocks know about the play? By then they had emigrated to Canada but there is still the strong possibility they would have heard; they still had connections in England. But unlike the play about Crippen Maugham wasn’t trying to score points or raise questions about the justice system by making Mrs Proudlock out to be one thing or another; he was interested rather in good theatre and the Proudlocks were merely the vehicle.)

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I did a simple timeline of known information:
1862 Hawley Harvey Crippen born in the USA.

1887 married Charlotte Bell and had a son Otto.

1891 Charlotte Bell died suddenly and Otto was sent to California to live with his maternal grandmother. This death was, then and now, treated as a natural death ...

1/9/1892 Crippen married Kunigunde Mackamotzki, a teenage girl in New York of German and Polish Jewish background. She was either 17 or 19 and had taken the name of Cora Turner in the hope of becoming a singer. Crippen said she was living with a stove manufacturer but left him because a doctor was a step up. Crippen appears to be the only source for this claim which denigrates Cora slightly and raises him; then again for a poor immigrant family she might well have been sent out to make her way—

1900 the Crippens moved to England.

1905 they moved into 39 Hilldrop Crescent in Camden Town.

1909 Cora had taken the stage name of Belle Elmore and got several small 'smoking' concerts (ie. men-only entertainments). Dr Crippen was working in the patent medicine and medical gadgets field, for Munyon's Remedies and Tooth Specialists, and earning around £3 a week.

15/12/1909 Cora gave notice that she would like to withdraw their money from the bank. She was friendly with an American music hall artist called Bruce Miller. It was assumed to be more than a friendship. And she had just learned of her husband's affair with Ethel Le Neve.

19/1/1910 Dr Crippen picked up 5 grains of hyoscin hydrobromide from Lewis & Burrows in New Oxford St.

31/1/1910 the Crippens had £600 on deposit, half of it in Cora's name. This appears to be what she hoped to withdraw, in part or in whole, depending on the maturation details. On the same evening the Crippens had Mr and Mrs Martinetti round for supper and whist. They were the last people, other than Dr Crippen, to see Mrs Crippen alive.

2/2/1910 Crippen pawned his wife's rings and a pair of ear rings for £80. On the same day the Music Hall Ladies Guild received a letter, signed Belle Elmore but not in her writing, saying she was going to America because a relative was sick and tendering her resignation.

February 1910 Crippen continued to sell off his wife's jewelry, making a further £115.

12/3/1910 he brought Ethel Le Neve to Hilldrop Crescent to live. He had earlier taken her to a function of the Music Hall Benevolent Fund where she was seen wearing Mrs Crippen's brooch.

20/3/1910 he wrote to the Martinettis to say he had heard his wife was seriously ill with pleuro-pneumonia in Los Angeles.

24/3/1910 he sent the Martinettis a telegram to say 'Belle died yesterday at six o'clock'. He then sent a notice of his wife's death to *The Era*.

Cora Crippen may have been devoid of talent, probably to her own deep disappointment, but the English music hall ladies, including Marie Lloyd, genuinely liked her. Brash and overbearing she may have been but she was also full of life and energy. And they refused to believe that she would have gone away to America without letting them know and without taking her jewelry and furs. They finally went to Scotland Yard to share their suspicions and an Inspector Dew came round to Hilldrop Crescent. Crippen changed his story, saying his wife had run away to Chicago with Bruce Miller, and that he had been too embarrassed to say so. Inspector Dew seems to have accepted his story, only saying he would try to find Cora Crippen and make sure she was alive.

But then Crippen and Le Neve paid their household bills, did a hurried packing, and left for the Continent. When Inspector Dew came back merely to clarify a small point he found the house abandoned. He had another look through the house and was surprised to find Cora Crippen's furs still there.

13/7/1910 after a thorough search he found human remains beneath the floor of the cellar. The same day a team of pathologists, including Bernard Spilsbury, was called in.

16/7/1910 a warrant for the arrest of Dr Crippen and Ethel Le Neve was taken out.

20/7/1910 Crippen and Ethel, now traveling as Mr and Master Robinson embarked on the SS Montrose from Antwerp sailing to Canada. But Captain Kendall grew suspicious when he saw the ostensible father and son holding hands. He sent a wireless message to Liverpool police who passed it on to Scotland Yard. Inspector Dew embarked on a faster ship, the SS Laurentic, and came aboard the Montrose in Canadian waters. Crippen, when confronted, reportedly said "I am not sorry. The anxiety has been too much."

28/8/1910 they reached England again.

28/10/1910 Crippen went on trial. The key point in the trial was a piece of skin "about 5½ by 7 inches with several hairs on its edge which resembled pubic hair". Could it be located on the mostly missing body and did it show a hysterectomy scar, something which Cora Crippen was known to have had? Jürgen Thorwald in *Dead Men Tell Tales* (or in this case dead women) writes of the weeks of work A. J. Pepper and Bernard Spilsbury had put in. "They would know they were right only if muscle or sinew tissue characteristic of the abdominal region between pubis and navel were found attached to the skin. And they were lucky; part of the rectus muscle of the abdominal wall, several broad sinews or aponeuroses, and some of the smaller muscles attached to the rectus muscle were actually found." They had proved the piece came from the middle part of the abdomen but what of that apparent scar? "But microscopic examination of cross-sections of tissue from the vicinity of the scar showed that the two 'heels' of this horseshoe-shaped mark were very different. One of them had obviously resulted from the skin's wrinkling while it lay buried in the cellar, for here the structure of the skin was normal. Hair roots and above all sebaceous glands were visible, whereas operation scars are characterized by hard, hairless and glandless tissue. ... The other four-inch-long 'heel' of the horseshoe was entirely different. It consisted of a firm, light-coloured stripe widening somewhat towards the bottom. Pepper and Spilsbury recognized this widening as a common feature of operation scars which run from the navel down. The downward pressure of the intestines widens the lower portion of the scar." And there were "tiny traces of the needle" which had sewn up the incision. If any piece from Mrs Crippen was saved then it was likely to have been this piece of skin.

5/11/1910 Crippen lost his appeal.

23/11/1910 Crippen was hanged. But Ethel Le Neve was found innocent of being an accessory.

The remains in the cellar did not include head, limbs or skeleton but 2.7 grains of hyoscine were found and a few strands of bleached hair and that small piece of skin. It suggested a careful plan to bury only those parts which would rapidly decay. At the trial it was suggested the remains had been buried before the Crippens came to the house five years earlier but that was very unlikely. They had occasionally had male lodgers but none were known to be missing and were unlikely to bleach their hair.

Margaret Lane in her biography *Edgar Wallace* provides an intriguing insight into one of the members of Crippen's defence team: "Few criminal cases have excited a more avid curiosity than the trial of Dr. Crippen for the murder of his wife, Belle Elmore. It appeared to be that rare thing in English criminal history, a *crime passionel*, and it had, beside the sexual aspect, all those elements of physical horror which so pleasantly divert the popular fancy. The trial had been followed in breathless detail by all the newspapers, and in the weeks following Crippen's conviction and the failure of his appeal the possibility of a last-minute confession kept the news-rooms uneasy. A few days before November 23rd, 1910, which was the date fixed for the execution, a man called at the *Evening Times* office and asked to see the editor. He was reticent and evasive in manner, but finally, under urgent promises of secrecy, confided to Bernard Falk that Crippen had made a confession to his solicitor, Mr. Arthur Newton, and that the said Mr. Newton was willing to consider selling the confession to the *Evening Times* for £1,000. This possibility, if it were genuine, seemed almost too good to be true, and it was agreed that Arthur Findon should immediately interview the solicitor and discuss terms. It was privately decided that £1,000 was too high a price, even for a new paper anxious to increase its circulation, and Findon

was authorised to offer a maximum of £500—an offer which the solicitor accepted without much argument. The confession, he explained, was not a written document signed by Crippen, but had been made verbally by his client during his imprisonment, and was embodied in the notes taken by himself, Newton, at the time.”

More interviews took place, Newton wanted the money in cash and received it. The paper publicised the forthcoming confession very widely. And then Newton changed his mind, apparently believing the Law Society knew about the offer and his unprofessional conduct. The newspaper threatened to make the whole saga, including his acceptance of the money public. Newton gave in, gave the confession to a friend who arrived at Arthur Findon’s flat at 3 a.m. on the morning of Crippen’s execution, insisted on dictating it to Findon and a colleague, then threw his copy in the fire. Findon rescued the scorched remnant and by 5 a.m. the confession was typed up and being read by the *Evening Times*’ staff. “It was not, perhaps, as hair-raising as they had hoped, but at least it contained the definite statement that Crippen had intentionally poisoned his wife by administering two doses of hyoscine in indigestion tablets, and had dismembered the body with a surgeon’s knife which he had afterwards hidden in the garden of an empty house in Hilldrop Crescent.”

Edgar Wallace wrote up the article which included the confession and the paper came out and was snapped up that evening. And then—Newton denied there had ever been a confession. And the *Evening Times* with nothing more tangible than a cash payout, a scrap of burned paper, and the solemn word of two of its staff, looked decidedly fraudulent and its circulation plummeted. Other papers leapt on the case with huge headlines of ‘NO CONFESSION’. The paper sought legal advice. “The solicitor consulted unhesitatingly advised the directors to publish the whole story, making clear Newton’s part in the affair and the fact that he had offered, and been paid for, an authentic confession compiled from his own notes of Crippen’s statements; but Sir Samuel Scott, one of the members of Parliament financing the paper, was against taking such a step, it being his opinion that while the *Evening Times* would eventually live the matter down such an exposure would inevitably ruin Newton.”

It is hard to feel sympathy for Newton who walked away with £500 and his reputation. But my questions are different. Did any one ever try to find the knife in that deserted garden? And did Crippen confess to this before or after his trial or his appeal? And more fundamentally—was the confession Arthur Newton claimed to have taken down in his interviews with Dr Crippen a true confession?

And this question remains: what happened to Ethel Le Neve after Hawley Harvey Crippen was hanged? I had thought the name sounded French and I wondered if she had some secret *chic* which had enticed Crippen, (but then Cora had enticed him twenty years earlier and he had tired of her), but I have since discovered it was an old Norfolk name. Ethel herself was living in London when she met Crippen. Browne and Tullett say of her in their biography of Spilsbury, “At the earlier proceedings at Bow Street Police Court another figure, in black, heavily veiled, sat beside him in the dock. Ethel Le Neve moves through the tragedy like a ghost. She never seems to come to life, as both Cora Crippen, with her cheerful vulgarity and vitality, and Crippen himself, by his very lack of conspicuous qualities, quite recognizably do. Crippen had known her for eight years, and for the last three she had been his mistress. After office hours they used to meet furtively in obscure hotel bedrooms. She took over the household at 39 Hilldrop Crescent, lived there with Crippen as his wife, and imported a French maid. But there is no real clue to what she thought, or knew, or suspected, during those months between the vanishing of Mrs Crippen and her own flight with her lover, disguised as a boy, to Antwerp and the s.s. *Montrose*. She is a completely baffling character, who glides from the scene without leaving trace or impression.”

(There is, of course, another mystery in there. How did the Crippens come by £600? It was a lot of money in 1910. Crippen was keeping a wife and a mistress on £3 a week. So either he was making more on the side with his quack medicines than he was letting on or Belle was more successful as a

music hall artiste than anyone has thought—or money came from an unidentified source such as a legacy ...

(In late January 1911 Cora's estate came up for distribution; her only sister Theresa Hunn applied for the estate of £175 from the sale of Cora Crippen's remaining jewelry and furs; Crippen had already sold most of it; Cora and Theresa had five half-brothers and sisters. But Crippen had left a will, making Ethel Clara Le Neve his sole executor, and the argument was whether she could benefit from his estate or should it be included with Cora's amount. Given that Crippen had been selling off his wife's possessions it should possibly have gone to Theresa but the court eventually ruled that Crippen's estate was not the proceeds of crime but simply the amount he had in his account in two London banks and Ethel Le Neve found herself richer by £268 6s. 9d. A very nice windfall for a girl in 1911. Would she rather have kept Crippen or had the money? Whichever way it was—she could certainly afford to travel and perhaps set herself up somewhere quite comfortably.)

Ethel was believed to have gone to America, married, and later returned to England. Tullett and Browne writing in 1951 said "A report of her death in Australia has lately appeared in the Press. By other accounts she died some years ago." But I assume Ursula Bloom knew what she was talking about when she said Ethel was still alive in 1961.

NZ novelist Vincent O'Sullivan, though perhaps better known as a poet, turned the real Ethel Le Neve into a fictional character in his novel *Believers to the Bright Coast*. She changes her name and comes to NZ where she starts a new life for herself as a madam or perhaps more correctly a pimp. He makes her loyal to Crippen, a believer in his innocence, but even with the blank slate of fiction to play upon she still remains, purposely or not, a person of no obvious personality. She seems to dissolve back into his pages. Was the real Ethel a cipher or was she simply overwhelmed by the awfulness of the situation Crippen created and thus retreated from any public scrutiny? Or was O'Sullivan unable to decide what characteristics his fictional Ethel should have, given that there was so little to go by in the published reports?

So the question remains: what did she do, where did she go, after Crippen was sentenced to death? *Did* she ever come to New Zealand?

And there is another ghostly character in there: Crippen's son Otto Crippen. His father does not appear to have given him much thought or love or attention. So what was his life like? And did Otto and Ethel, who would've been around the same age, ever meet?

* * * * *

September 29: Elizabeth Gaskell

September 30: Truman Capote

W. S. Merwin

October 1: Louis Untermeyer

* * * * *

' "Gee, remember the time he caught you putting your initials on the desk? Remember, Bugsie?"

Bruno remembered all right. His hands still tingled at the thought. He had merely been examining the combinations of words made by the initials of the other boys and girls in the class. It was something he was very sensitive about, because his own—B.U.G.—were emblazoned on his bag for everyone to see and giggle at. The agony he had endured from his father's thoughtlessness or family pride or tradition or whatever it was that had made him fasten "Untermeyer"—some relic from an ancient branch of the Gunther family tree—on Bruno as a second name, would never be known outside of his own heart. But he felt that those initials, and the nickname he carried about with him as a result, were a terrible monument to silly parents who christened their children with second names that started with vowels, and still sillier fathers who rushed off to register their babies' names without first examining the combinations that those initials made with their surnames.'

Probably hundreds, thousands, hundreds of thousands of little German babies grew up happily with the name of Untermeyer (unter = under; meyer means a dairy farmer, in some cases it can be a corruption of meir = the Hebrew word for light, but in this case a German-speaking friend believed an unter meyer would mean a farm labourer) but the only one I have come across was the American poet Louis Untermeyer. He was German Jewish which raises the possibility that Colin Thiele's character also had an ancient Jewish branch in the family tree ...

Playwright Arthur Miller in *Timebends* wrote of Untermeyer in the McCarthy era: "Louis Untermeyer, then in his sixties, was a poet and anthologist, a distinguished-looking old New York type with a large aristocratic nose and a passion for conversation, especially about writers and writing. Forty years before, he had left the family jewelry business to become a poet. He had married four times—twice to the same woman, the poet Jean Starr—had taught and written and published, and with the swift rise of television had suddenly become nationally known as one of the original regulars on *What's My Line?*, a popular early show in which he, along with columnist Dorothy Kilgallen, publisher Bennett Cerf, and Arlene Francis, would try to guess the occupation of a studio guest by asking the fewest possible questions in the brief time allowed. All this with wisecracking and banter, at which Louis was a lovable master, what with his instant recall of every joke and pun he had ever heard.

Louis loved poetry, and young women, not necessarily in that order; on his eighty-fifth birthday he would say, "I'm still chasing them. The only difference is that now I can't remember why." He had old friendships with many of the great American poets—among them William Carlos Williams, Robert Frost, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Marianne Moore—and was a fellow who could easily spend an afternoon just talking and witticizing with kindred souls. One evening I saw an unusual deference paid him by the kingly and much older Robert Frost, who sat still for a lengthy lecture from Louis on etymology."

And then the paranoia of those years intervened. Louis was told the advertisers wanted him off the show because of his left-wing sympathies (or perhaps his free speech sympathies). He was devastated. "Louis didn't leave his apartment for almost a year and a half. An overwhelming and paralyzing fear had risen in him. More than a political fear, it was really that he had witnessed the tenuousness of human connection and it had left him in terror. He had always loved a lot and been loved, especially on his TV program where his quips were vastly appreciated, and suddenly he had been thrown into the street, abolished."

The curious thing is that although Untermeyer became the US Poet Laureate and was a prolific poet his work is surprisingly hard to find. Does this mean that it doesn't appeal to modern anthologists? Or did his foray into popular culture and quiz shows convince people he wasn't a poet to be taken seriously?

The Cambridge History of American Literature says (in the words of Andrew DuBois and Frank Lentricchia) "(Conrad) Aikin argued that Untermeyer's soft socialist politics, grafted onto a happy version of Whitman, blinded him to the force of the true revolutionaries who were "throwing their bombs into the aesthetic arena"." In effect Untermeyer was caught between the Realist school of Robert Frost, which he favoured, and the Modernist school. They say, "America was changing and, as an untraditional literary voice himself, Untermeyer, the revisionist literary historian as anthologist, found himself in the sensitive political position to disseminate his vision of an America in which poetry emerged not from one or two culturally elite centers but from everywhere; a poetry which, in refusing legendary, traditional, and classical sources, was fashioning itself as a revolutionary literature standing against what literature had been."

He upset the traditionalists and the Modernists who saw themselves as doing something new with the traditions—by including in his *Modern American Poetry* which came out in 1919 and remained

popular with readers for decades, Irish-American, Italian-American, Jewish, even Black voices. “Modern American poetry, Untermeyer thought, would be recognizable by its unliterary (vernacular) borrowing directly from life itself: like Frost and the realists, by “life” he meant the lives of the historically unsung. Therein lay the radical, the “modern,” and the “American” character of “modern American poetry.”

The Modernists saw revolution in terms of coming up with new poetic forms and styles; though they themselves tended to come from a small cultural elite of white university-educated men. Untermeyer saw revolution as including voices which had never been included in the canon, regardless of their style of poetry. His was the broader more inclusive view but his lack of representation suggests the Modernist view continues to hold sway in the world of American poetry.

* * * * *

October 2: Graham Greene
Wallace Stevens

October 3: James Herriot

October 4: Damon Runyon

October 5: Vaclav Havel

October 6: Thor Heyerdahl

Stanley Ellin

David Pinner

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (d)

* * * * *

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman’s boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.
“Break, break, break”

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar.

“Crossing the Bar”

These two poems of Tennyson’s were in our reading books in primary school. I know that now the understanding is that children should have access to poems written for children—from A. A. Milne to Dr Seuss, from John Agard to Mem Fox—and it is true that there are some excellent poems being written for young readers, aiding their sense of rhythm and giving them powerful messages, along with some fun along the way. But I think children can still gain from being exposed to the classics from the past.

The other day I heard someone who works with seriously disadvantaged families, not necessarily financially disadvantaged; some families bringing in more than a thousand dollars a week in welfare payments, but disadvantaged in terms of living life in more than the narrowest, meanest, most limited terms—and she said the one thing she found missing in so many homes was any sense of joy. People were sometimes pleased with themselves—for finding a bargain, buying a new car, getting the better of someone or of the system, of winning a fight or a game of poker, of finding a new girlfriend—but the sense by which joy lifts people out of a very narrow mindset was lacking.

These might not be the obvious poems to give people a sense of joy, both being about death and remembered loss, but I think there is a sense of joy in grandeur. I don’t remember feeling in the least sad when I first read the two poems, perhaps because they didn’t link to anyone I knew personally, but I do remember being taken out of myself, being given the sense that there were ideas and words and images that were much *larger* than me; for a moment there was a sense of transcendence. These poems may not do the same for other young readers. But I firmly believe if they look they will find there are other poems from the past that will offer a sense that there is more to life than the routine round. It is a matter of giving children access to a range of the poems which have defied time and fashion ...

* * * * *

“It was a good story, all right. Matter of fact, Jimmy, you tell your experiences very well, with something of the dash and humour of the great Damon Kipling himself.”

“Well, what d’you know!” Jimmy beamed, realising that praise from a scholar like Chicka was praise indeed. “And I never had a lesson in my life.”

“It was Kipling wrote The Lady of the Lake, wasn’t it?” Spotto wanted to know.

“No, no ...” Chicka smiled tolerantly. “That was Dickens. He was a far cry from Damon Kipling, who writes about all the smart characters along Broadway.”

“The smartest characters along Broadway that I know of,” Moss Martin said, “are a couple of brothers name Grace. They’ve got a great big ...”

“Chicka’s not talking about Sydney’s Broadway, you mug!” I said. “He’s talking about Broadway in Chicago.”

“New York, actually,” Chicka corrected.

“Well, New York’s the capital of Chicago, isn’t it?” I argued.

“It was Kipling who first wrote about Harry the Horse,” Chicka informed us.

“Sergeant Harrie, d’you mean?” Moss queried.

“No, no ... he was nicknamed after Damon Kipling’s Harry the Horse.”

“Why?” Moss demanded.

“Because his name’s Harrie, I suppose.”

“That doesn’t make sense,” Moss Martin objected. “What about Sir Harry Lauder? Nobody calls him Sir Harry the Horse.”

Ray Slattery in *As You Were*, one of his tales of Australian Army life in New Guinea in WWII. And for those who worry that our education system is going to the dogs ... It was of course Scott who wrote ‘The Lady of the Lake’ while Tennyson wrote ‘The Lady of Shalott’. Yet the confusion is in some ways understandable. The poems that become classics somehow cut their moorings to their author, to their time and place, and seem to exist in a world not tied to clocks and calendars ...

Tennyson effectively outlived his age and his friends and contemporaries and some of his poems, too, have taken on this sense of something ageless.

*

My great-grandfather’s brother, Jephson Huband Smith, wrote a book about Tennyson and despite what I would see as a less-than-catchy title, *Notes and marginalia illustrative of the public life and works of Alfred Tennyson poet laureate*, it did quite well for him. Perhaps this was because when it was published in 1873 Tennyson was at the height of his fame. Perhaps almost anything about the Grand Old Man found a ready readership. It sounded to me like one of those little booklets of Notes that students buy to help them cram before an exam. But, no, it was a sizeable book. And I recently managed to track down a copy to see just what he meant by ‘notes’ and ‘marginalia’ ...

Cornell University in the US reprinted it as part of their Victorian Poetry collection and its interest now, I think, is that he draws attention to Tennyson’s publication in various long-defunct magazines and he provides a window on attitudes to Tennyson in those years when he had become an institution yet most of his best and best-known poems, such as ‘The Lady of Shalott’, were in his distant past. People were becoming critical. The Grand Old Man was resting on his laurels. Perhaps it was time for someone younger ...

Huband Smith says little about himself other than an occasional throwaway line such as ‘as we say in Ireland’ and he is at times critical of some of Tennyson’s work but I came away from his book with both the comfortable family feeling that he was obviously a well-read man and, more importantly, that he was writing the book as a (rather waffly) defence against Tennyson’s detractors. I hope he felt his efforts were worthwhile.

* * * * *

If Jephson Huband Smith trawled through defunct magazines to find ‘forgotten’ poems by Tennyson then Winston Graham may have found a truly forgotten poem. He writes of his life in Perranporth in Cornwall in *Memoirs of a Private Man*: “It was visited frequently by Tennyson, accompanied by his friend Henry Sewell Stokes, in the 1850s, and five years after Tennyson’s death in 1892 a poem was published in the *Echo*, for the first time, I believe, and attributed to him. I don’t think it has been included in any collected edition of his poems, but Henry Sewell Stokes should have known.

Hast thou ever in a travel
Through the Cornish lands,
Heard the freat Atlantic roaring
On the firm, wide tawny flooring
Of the Perran sands?

Sea-rent gully where the billows
Come in great unrest;
Fugitives all white and reeking,
Flying from the vengeful Sea-king,
Striking from the west.

Level Broadway, ever ermined
By the ocean verge;
Girt by sandhill, swelling, shoaling,
Down to imitate the rolling
Of the lordly surge.

Nine large files of troubled water
Turbulently come;
From the bosom of his mother,
Each one leaping on his brother,
Scatters lusty foam.

In the sky a wondrous silence,
Cloud-surge, mute and weird;
In the distance, still uplifting,
Ghostly fountains vanish, drifting,
Like a Druid's beard.

Spreading out a cloth of silver,
Moan the broken waves;
Sheet of phosphorescent foaming,
Sweeping up to break the gloaming
Stillness of the caves.

It sounds like something tossed off after a walk on the beach and given to Stokes as a souvenir of their visit. Still, I wish I could toss off poems worth giving to anyone as a souvenir after a walk on the beach ...

* * * * *

October 7: Thomas Keneally

October 8: John Cowper Powys

R. L. Stine

October 9: Miguel Cervantes (bap)

October 10: Harold Pinter

George 'Kootenai' Brown

Nora Roberts

* * * * *

I heard Harold Pinter, I think some years ago on Ramona Koval's 'The Book Show', give a powerful Nobel acceptance speech in 2005. He tore into George W. Bush and the invasion of Iraq and made mincemeat of his beliefs and actions but he didn't actually say much about his plays or his ideas about writing. It is an excellent soapbox to reach the world and I agreed with much of what Pinter was saying. And yet it left me with a faint sense of ... I'm not sure what to call it ... regret perhaps. I do not have a problem with Pinter talking about contemporary and very important issues but I somehow felt it should be deeper and more profound than a personal attack on a now superceded American president.

One day I was looking for something else on a reference library shelf and I noticed they had a book of Nobel acceptance speeches, called *Nobel Lectures*, so the other day I went back to read it and find out what other laureates had done with their brief moment on that famous ‘soapbox’ ...

And the key point I took away from it was that *virtually all* the Nobel Laureates for Literature were political in some way. They all cared passionately about something, some issue, sometimes in fairly general terms of language, human rights, the effects of globalisation, but often referring to more specific issues. For example: Imre Kertész (2002) deals with Nazism and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956; V. S. Naipaul (2001) talks of the genocide of the indigenous people of Trinidad; Dario Fo (1997) mentions human rights abuses committed by Turkey against the Kurds; Kenzaburo Oe (1994) talks of the pressures on Japan to ditch its Peace Constitution; Nadine Gordimer (1991) speaks about the banning of books; Naguib Mahfouz (1988) refers to Gaza and the West Bank; Wole Soyinka (1986) mentions European abuses and exploitation in Africa ...

And a couple thank their wives ...

* * * * *

Strictly speaking, Pinter does refer briefly to his writing which I found interesting. He said, “I always start a play by calling the characters A, B and C.

“In the play that becomes *The Homecoming* I saw a man enter a stark room and ask his question of a younger man sitting on an ugly sofa reading a racing paper. I somehow suspected that A was a father and that B was his son, but I had no proof. This was however confirmed a short time later when B (later to become Lenny) says to A (later to become Max), ‘Dad, do you mind if I change the subject? I want to ask you something. The dinner we had before, what was the name of it? What do you call it? Why don’t you buy a dog? You’re a dog cook. Honest. You think you’re cooking for a lot of dogs.’ So since B calls A ‘Dad’ it seemed to me reasonable to assume that they were father and son. A was clearly the cook and his cooking did not seem to be held in high regard. Did this mean that there was no mother? I didn’t know. But, as I told myself at the time, our beginnings never know our ends.”

He goes on to say, “It’s a strange moment, the moment of creating characters who up to that moment have had no existence. What follows is fitful, uncertain, even hallucinatory, although sometimes it can be an unstoppable avalanche. The author’s position is an odd one. In a sense he is not welcomed by the characters. The characters resist him, they are not easy to live with, they are impossible to define. You certainly can’t dictate to them. To a certain extent you play a never-ending game with them, cat and mouse, blind man’s buff, hide and seek. But finally you find that you have people of flesh and blood on your hands, people with will and an individual sensibility of their own, made out of component parts you are unable to change, manipulate or distort.”

* * * * *

So what of Lenny and Max? Michael Billington in *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter* says, “What seems clear is that Morris Wernick’s situation — that of a Jewish East Ender who married a Gentile girl, emigrated to Canada and kept his marriage secret from his family — acted as a springboard for Pinter’s dramatic imagination. Wernick’s ‘homecoming’ in 1964 coincided with the writing of the play and indeed Pinter sent his old friend a first draft, freely acknowledging that he had expanded on the idea. Michael Goldstein, in conversation, also claims that Max was ‘a dead ringer’ for Morris Wernick’s father and recalls that Morris was one of three sons and that their relationships were not unlike those depicted in the play. But Goldstein adds that he himself had a brother who, like Joey in the play, was training to become a boxer. And one can’t forget that there was a boxer, Uncle Judah, in Pinter’s own family. Yet none of this makes the play a specifically Jewish drama. What it does suggest is that *The Homecoming* was triggered, in part, by a particular domestic situation and is much closer to observed reality than has ever been acknowledged.

“At the same time, it also grows out of Pinter’s imagination, as you can see from studying his Archive. The play doesn’t start with the image of Max or a fractious household. It begins with a fragment of conversation, written in pencil on a few sheets of lined paper, between two characters

simply called A (a man) and B (a woman). We don't know who they are. We don't know if they are married. We know nothing of their setting. All we deduce is that he is anxious and overbearing, she is restless and independent-minded." And then he adds in C who is "lewd, aggressive, posturing; a cocksure prattler" and despite the confusions in those A, B, and Cs, Billington says, "what is clear from the very start is that he is haunted by the idea of a marriage that is under threat both from its own internal tensions and the external manoeuvres of a third party."

* * * * *

Antonia Fraser in *Must You Go? My Life with Harold Pinter* rarely mentions his methods of working but here and there are some interesting little sidelights. "Living with Harold the writer was a rewarding experience since he behaved exactly like artists behave in books but seldom do in real life. He never wrote unless he had a sudden inspiration, an image, as he often used to explain. The image might come to him at any time and anywhere — in a taxi, in a bar, late at night at his desk looking out of his window into the street lamps punctuating the darkness. Once or twice I was commissioned to write down a sentence or a phrase. At the same time he worked on his work, as it were, extremely hard. Poems or plays might be dashed off in the first instance but then a process of grind, revision began. One poem took a year to perfect.

"He also felt strongly that his characters took on a life of their own which had to be respected. I was reminded of this years later when I read an anecdote about Pushkin during the writing of *Eugene Onegin*: 'Imagine what happened to my Tatiana!' he told a certain princess at dinner. 'She upped and rejected Onegin ... I never expected it of her.' Harold too believed in the autonomy of Emma and Ruth, Hirst and Spooner, and so forth."

And: "Harold has been reading the play, jokingly called *Unsolicited Manuscript*, to me. I see that it has completely taken off from the original image, as Harold tells me all his plays do wherever they start. It has become as much about the masculine non-homoerotic friendship, which means so much to Harold, witness his passion for cricket and his affection for cricketers. ... I notice he resents any effort to link his plays closely to a particular incident in his past, i.e. *The Homecoming*, sometimes claimed by this person or the other. (Who would want to claim *The Homecoming*?) I point out that it's human nature to make these links. He doesn't accept that.

"The play is very funny, but there is also a lot of pain there. I wonder what its real title will be?"

The play became *Torcello*, then *Betrayal*, then *White Wedding* and finally settled on *Betrayal*. And I think she was right to ask who would want to claim *The Homecoming*. Lenny boasts to Teddy's wife Ruth about beating up a prostitute "So I just gave her another belt in the nose and a couple of turns of the boot and sort of left it at that" and Max describes Ruth as "a filthy scrubber" and later says "We'll put her on the game. That's a stroke of genius, that's a marvellous idea. You mean she can earn the money herself — on her back?" The only consolation for the audience perhaps being that Ruth comes across as an equally tough cookie and quite capable of stringing along the awful men of the family she's married into—

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Another passion of Pinter's was words—or how we use them. Billington writes, "it was his Channel four talk that was the most revealing in that he returned to one of his favourite themes: the idea of language as 'a permanent masquerade' that conceals substantive reality. One of the sources of Pinter's anger is that we frequently use language, both on the social and political level, to camouflage truth — an issue he addressed directly in his radio broadcast:

Do the structures of language and the structures of reality (by which I mean what actually *happens*) move along parallel lines? Does reality essentially remain outside language, separate, obdurate, alien, not susceptible to description? Is an accurate and vital correspondence between what *is* said and our perception of it impossible? Or is it that we are obliged to use language only in order to obscure and distort reality — to distort what *is* — to distort what *happens* — because we fear it? We can't face the dead. But we must face the dead, because they die in our name. We

must pay attention to what is being done in our name. I believe it's because of the way we use language that we have got ourselves into this terrible trap.

This anguished talk, with its insistent questions, is as close as Pinter comes to a statement of his credo in later years; in particular, his despair over the growing gulf between the rhetoric and euphemisms of political discourse and brutal reality.”

Pinter was too unwell to go to Stockholm to receive his prize in person and recorded his acceptance speech in London. He died three years later.

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October 11: Elmore Leonard

October 12: James McAuley

F. F. (Frederick Fyvie) Bruce

October 13: Guy Boothby

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I was recently reading *The Oxford Book of Australian Ghost Stories* which contains John Lang's story, 'The Ghost Upon the Rail', which was based on a real event. A Mr Fisher was murdered near Penrith by a friend and neighbour, Mr Smith, who claimed that Fisher had returned to England to see his family and had asked him to sell his property. Several men saw what they believed was the ghost of Mr Fisher sitting on the fence of his property. They went to local magistrate Mr Cox and an investigation was begun. Smith was eventually found guilty and hanged. Mr Cox and I assume many of the other characters in Lang's story were real people. Fictitious ghosts had not yet got well-established in the infant colony.

Fisher's Ghost became famous. It became a character in dramas and stories. It even became a famous buckjumper. There was a time when a mention of Fisher's Ghost immediately resonated.

But my private query was to what extent the other stories were inspired by real events or contained real people. Guy Boothby's story, 'With Three Phantoms', is set in the little far west Queensland town of Boulia where "The Sub-inspector of Police in charge of the district came of pedigreed stock, and rejoiced in the name of Vesey. He was a well-conditioned youth, of glib speech and easy manners, visibly impressed with the belief that to tail-twist niggers was his special mission upon earth."

Boothby goes on to say, "His district comprised a tract of country about twice the size of England, and when the natives in any quarter made themselves more than usually objectionable, he would descend upon them tooth and nail, until there remained not a man among them to tell the story. Humanitarians would have called his work murder, but lonely men, compelled to dwell in the Far West, derived a feeling of security from the bare sound of his name. In his own phraseology 'he was the hand of Providence engaged upon the extermination of the aboriginal in the interests of a higher civilization.' "

The ghostly element deals with the men of an expedition sent out to try and find what had happened to Ludwig Leichardt. The story came from Boothby's 1897 book *Bushigrams*. Leichardt certainly existed but my question was: did Vesey? Well, yes, he did. But was this a realistic portrait of him? Watch this space ...

Boulia has another connection to the ghostly. John Pinkney in *Great Australian Mysteries* writes, "Although Min-Mins had always been locally reported they decisively entered the consciousness of the general Australian public in the early 20th century — when they began to appear near the old Min-Min Hotel, 73 kilometres east of Boulia in central-west Queensland. The inn, which was to give Min-Min lights their English name, burned down in 1918. In the same year a regional newspaper reported that a stockman, headed toward Boulia, had been 'followed by a large, strange light, oval in shape and of an unknown nature'. The stockman first saw the brilliantly glowing intruder hovering above the cemetery

behind the burnt-out hotel. It proceeded to pursue him relentlessly as he rode, at increasing speed, across the open downs country. After keeping pace with him for several kilometres it vanished abruptly into the darkness.”

And a more recent comment from Pam Shilton in *The Journal of Meteorology*: “Around Boulia and Winton there appears from time to time an unmistakable light — a luminous fluorescent shape that fades and brightens, recedes and advances across the flat never-ending plain. It has mystified men for centuries. It fascinates. It begs you to follow. And it can be eerie and frightening on that lonely dark plain at night.”

I once came across a book written by a woman who had taken a great many photos around deathbeds and funerals and when she developed the pictures she was surprised to find that they often contained mysterious ‘globes’ of light. I suppose it is drawing a long bow but do the lights either presage a death or are they a visible manifestation of a departing spirit not yet willing to leave this temporal world behind?

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“I want to see a Reader especially written for bairns. I want to see many complete stories, filled with bright dialogue. Every yarn should commence with dialogue. I always think kindly of the late Guy Boothby, because he usually begins with, “Hands up, or I fire!” or a kindred sentence.”

A. S. Neill in *A Dominie’s Log* (a dominie being a schoolteacher in Scotland).

This is an exaggeration. But Boothby was seen as a dramatic, exciting, and adventurous writer in his day. His books sold by the thousands, even the hundreds of thousands, but they seem a bit pedantic to modern readers. The lack, I think, is in the area of ‘bright dialogue’. And some of his plots simply fizzle out. And, just for the record, he begins ‘With Three Phantoms’ thus: “I date the whole business from one muggy, horrible night, such as can only be produced by Port Darwin in her Season of Torment.” Did that grip you?

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I don’t know how much Boothby was influenced by the loss of the Leichardt expedition, probably in 1848, but it did have an impact on the public—that it could apparently disappear without trace—and the criticisms over Leichhardt’s bushmanship and leadership leading to the tragedy probably rankled in his ghostly bosom. The temptation to come back and lead people to the last camp may have been overwhelming. It is a story which has continued to resonate. I am sure schoolchildren liked Leichhardt better than Cook or Flinders or Sturt who were all presented as such Goody-Two-Shoes. At least Leichhardt got *lost* and we didn’t have to learn the names and details of the places he had discovered ...

The best known novel inspired by Leichhardt is undoubtedly Patrick White’s *Voss*. John Bailey in his life of Leichhardt, *Into the Unknown*, writes, “Patrick White never claimed that *Voss* (1957) was other than a work of fiction. Veering markedly from the facts of Leichhardt’s life, *Voss* is certainly not an adaptation, nor even a disguised analysis of Leichhardt’s character. Yet White’s incisive portrayal of ‘the German explorer’ has led to the Vossification of Leichhardt, marking him in the public’s mind as an unworldly oddball at a loss in a shuttered colonial society – and when he finally gets to the outback, a vague and impractical idealist leading his motley crew across an Arabian-like desert. In an early scene, White has a character describing Voss as undergoing ‘a battle between German precision and German mysticism ... Wonder which will win?’ ”

Bailey says of Leichhardt on his arrival in Australia: “Leichhardt was twenty-eight. He had been studying for ten years, yet he held no degree or diploma. He was competent in six languages and knowledgeable in many matters excepting that of how to make a living. He had never had a job, or earned a day’s pay. His wealth consisted of books, a collection of rocks and William’s borrowed £200, of which almost half was gone. His aim, which he dared not mention because it was so outlandish, was to explore Australia to its very centre. Yet he knew nothing of bushmanship, horses or the Australian

outback; nor had he any experience of leading men. He knew no one of influence in the colony and had no firm plan of how he would raise the money for his expeditions.”

In there can be seen the seeds of his problems; he wanted to be the leader, respected, obeyed, looked up to, but the strong dilettantish streak within him undercut any sense of authority he tried to wield. Put simply, he just wasn't good at choosing and dealing with people. He was essentially a loner ... and had he traveled alone he might have survived ...

“By late February 1848 Leichhardt's column had wound its way to Canning Downs Station, near the present-day town of Warwick. One evening Leichhardt left his men to accept an invitation to dine with the station owner, George Leslie and his pretty nineteen-year-old wife of two-and-a-half months. It must have been a painful occasion for Leichhardt, for before her marriage he had admired her as Emmeline Macarthur. After dinner, his farewell to the couple was a wry smile and the words, ‘Don't despair of me for four years.’

Settlement ended at Allan Macpherson's station Cogoan, near Mount Abundance. On 5 April Leichhardt mounted the leading horse, and with the rising sun warm on his back, he turned west.

And there Leichhardt's story ends. Despite the passing of more than a century and a half and at least nine full-scale searches, no tidings indicating the expedition's fate has ever been validated.

Leichhardt and his six men simply vanished.”

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In 1959 the Queensland Museum brought out a little booklet to mark its *Centenary of Queensland Historical Exhibition*. It is a paean to the well-known explorers and to chopping down trees, digging up minerals, and building large buildings. The people who had occupied the area for up to 60,000 years are reduced to half-a-dozen mentions of ‘attacks by natives’. It is not alone in this kind of attitude. Take the little segment on the Jardines: “When it was decided to establish a settlement at Cape York, John Jardine, Police Magistrate at Rockhampton, was selected as the senior official in control. He proceeded to Cape York by sea, and it was arranged that his two sons, Frank and Alexander, 22 and 20 years of age respectively, should travel overland with 250 head of cattle.

“These two young men, accompanied by four other Europeans and four Aborigines, accomplished the task in five months despite great difficulties seldom experienced by other, better known explorers. They had to contend with constant attacks by the natives, swim the great rivers of western Cape Yorke Peninsula when swollen with the rains of the wet season, and finally walk because of the loss of many horses by poisoning, drowning, and native attack.”

This one-sidedness was so frequent it used to go unnoticed. I was just reading *the story of the Solomons* by Charles E. Fox in which he writes, “Burns Philp's *Handbook* of 1899 said of the Solomons in those days: “They are stained with the blood of travellers, traders and missionaries. Cannibals and headhunters, they murder all they can lay their hands on, feasting on their bodies and carrying off their heads”. Nothing is said of what our people suffered at the hands of Europeans.” It never seems to have occurred to Europeans that to go barging on to other people's land, taking their people, their goods, their water, their food and ultimately their land, without so much as a please was something they would not tolerate if the situation had been reversed.

The same attitude permeates our older histories, our newspapers, our almanacks and stories and encyclopaedias. *The Australian Encyclopaedia* has the Jardines as pioneers with a capital P; John out from Scotland and becoming a police magistrate, Alexander becoming Chief Engineer for Harbours and Rivers in Queensland and Frank and Alexander “For their services to geographical research both brothers were awarded the Murchison grant of the Royal Geographical Society, London, and elected Fellows. The river at the north of Cape York was later named the Jardine.”

What we didn't get told was the horrifying story Alan Marshall in *These Were My Tribesmen* tells: “I had visited Somerset when I first arrived at Cape York. Somerset had been the home of John Jardine, who in 1863 was appointed Government Resident of this area.

“His two sons, Frank and Aleck, reached there in 1865, after an amazing overland trip from Rockhampton with cattle and horses.

“It is recorded that, from the first, these two boys were fair and considerate to the blacks, but were determined “to stand no nonsense.”

“About fifty blacks “fell” to the rifles of the brothers during the trip.

“Frank settled at Somerset after his father returned to Rockhampton and directed his activities to pearl-shelling and controlling the natives.

“It was Frank Jardine who, in 1869, discovered that the crew of a boat called “The Sperwer” had been murdered by the natives of Prince of Wales Island. He avenged the murder by massacring all the natives living there.

“Somerset homestead was situated about five miles from the actual cape and was built looking across Albany passage to Albany Island. Now it is deserted and white ants live in its timbers. The once lovely garden is a wilderness which frangipani and cascara bean trees struggle against the jungle vines encircling their trunks.

“Hundreds of coconut palms stand among a litter of fallen coconuts. Inside the house cockroaches and centipedes scuttle and crawl. Thick spider-webs join ceiling to wall. There is a mouldy smell of decay in the big rooms and broken shutters rattle on the wide verandah.

“Can you tell me any stories about Frank Jardine?” I asked Dan.

“When I was a boy,” said Dan “I sit down and watch native trooper drill. Jardine, he have them. He use them shoot people. When Jardine go in bush, he have one horse, two dog. When he camp in bush he cut log and cover it with blanket and lay it in tent. Then he sleep in bush. When native come, they spear tent and Jardine, he shoot seven or eight from bush.”

“Did he have many men on the place?” I asked. “Men who were friendly with him?”

“Many men work for Jardine — Kanaka, Malaya, Manila man. If they too much humbug they get killed.”

“Do you know any story of an actual killing?” I asked.

“I remember one time, Mr. Jardine looking out along spy glass. He looked out across place called Albany Passage to Albany Island. He look over and he see native stand on rock with spear in hand. He see big shell tied on native’s neck. This shell hang on chest, like. He fire rifle from verandah, then he blow whistle and native trooper come up.”

“He say, ‘Go down and get whaleboat. Go over and get alligator I shoot.’

“And they go over and see native man and they say, ‘This is no alligator. This, man.’

“The native man was lying with his spear and there be hole in shell and he be dead there with spear on ground.

“My fader go over in whaleboat and he come back and tell my mudder and they be frightened with fear feeling.”

“We were silent awhile, then I asked, ‘Did your father get on well with Jardine?’

“Mr. Jardine never point no gun to my fader. My fader great help to Mr. Jardine. He the only man get on with him.”

“I met a white man some weeks later, a man whose father had worked for Jardine. I mentioned the punitive expeditions and shootings which were features of Jardine’s administration in the Torres Strait Islands and the Cape.

“Shoot them,” he exclaimed. “My dad told me they dragged the bodies away with horses!”

“He told me of one old black who, with two others, raided Somerset in Jardine’s absence and stole some stores. Jardine pursued them, killing this man’s two companions and wounding him badly. The black hid in a swamp, breathing through a hollow reed, one end of which he held in his mouth beneath the water. Jardine knew he was somewhere there and sat on the bank with his rifle, waiting. But the native, knowing Jardine would do this, stayed beneath the water till nightfall, when he escaped.

“So was written the first page in our history of civilising the Cape York Peninsula blacks.”

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And Ted Kennedy in a eulogy for Mum Shirl in *Eremos* magazine says she was born in 1924 in Cowra; “It seemed to accentuate the precarious makeshift existence she was born into. Her birth-date and birth-place silently mark the centenary of the awful tragedy for her tribe the Wiradjuri. One hundred years before Governor Thomas Brisbane proclaimed Martial Law which virtually amounted to open season of gunfire on the Wiradjuri tribe. The Governor’s edict extended from 14 August 1824 until 11 December 1824. In excess of 100 blacks, most of them women and children, lay dead. William Cox, Senior, a pastoralist with impeccable family connections and impeccable British manners called on the 49th Regiment to ‘shoot all the Blacks and manure the ground with their carcasses’. So the army did. No charges were ever laid; no official account ever given. More than 100 of the Wiradjuri were massacred, the whole Wiradjuri tribe was cast into mourning. Such is the oral living memory of Aboriginal people that 100 years is but a day when it comes to freshness of memory.”

Was this William Cox of Blue Mountains fame? Although he belonged to the 117th Foot, then the 68th Foot, then the NSW Corps, he was certainly known as William Cox Senior and he had acquired a good deal of authority and influence by 1824, being a magistrate and a confidante of governors and senior officials. He died in 1837. So I think it is very likely that Kennedy was referring to the ‘Old Man of Windsor’. It tarnishes the image of a hard-working and sympathetic pioneer ...

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Jeff Waters in *Gone for a Song* about events on Palm Island and the underpinnings of racism writes, “Any observant resident or visitor, can find a very telling example of Queensland’s record on race relations simply by walking into Brisbane’s civic focal point for most of its history: King George Square.

“There, high above the main entrance to the distinctive City Hall, is a massive stone monument to what would these days be called attempted genocide. And most of the population is oblivious to it.

“When Brisbane City Hall was opened back in 1950 it was the second most expensive structure in the country; only the Sydney Harbour Bridge cost more. As it was built in the classical style, a huge relief sculpture was commissioned for the tympanum above its entrance. Daphne Mayo, a Brisbane artist who was the first woman to be awarded a gold medal for sculpture at London’s Royal Academy, was asked to create it. She was given a brief to depict white settlement and that, perhaps inevitably, included the submission of the Aborigines.

“The resulting ‘Progress of Civilisation in the State of Queensland’ depicts a central female figure, representing the state, sending forth settlers and their stock to apparently subdue the natives. To the viewer’s right is a series of proud-looking explorers and other Europeans marching purposefully forward. To the left is an Aboriginal man with spear and shield in a defensive pose. Further along to the left is what appears to be a dead indigenous man. He has been lying there – a murdered human – above Brisbane’s main square for more than seventy-five years.

“In preparing a film on this sculpture for the ABC’s *Stateline* program, I encountered some scepticism. Some of those I discussed the matter with asserted that the man could have been asleep. But, with the assistance of a kind archivist, a description of the sculpture was uncovered in the official program for the opening of the Brisbane City Hall. ‘On the left hand side [of the tympanum] the native life is represented dying out before the approach of the white man.’

“A curator from the Queensland Museum, Dr Judith McKay, knew Daphne Mayo, and has written a book about her work. In an interview for the *Stateline* program, she said that Ms Mayo had always held indigenous people in high regard. Dr McKay felt the City Hall sculpture should be considered a product of its time.”

The Museum’s fathers and the City Hall’s fathers were quite likely the same men. But I am not sure that well-paid, respected, influential, and presumably intelligent men should be so glibly let off the hook by those constant suggestions that gross insensitivity was ‘a product of its time’ ...

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Of course Sub-inspector Vesey in Boulia was not the only outback policeman with blood on his hands. Stuart Rintoul in *The Wailing: A National Black Oral History* writes:

“Up to 1,000 Aboriginal people were shot within 300 kilometres of Alice Springs between 1881 and 1891. (M. C Hartwig, *The Progress of White Settlement in the Alice Springs District and its effects upon the Aboriginal Inhabitants.*) Hermannsburg Mission became a sanctuary. The Hermannsburg missionary W. F. Schwarz wrote in December 1884, ‘At the present time there are many ... here for fear of the police, who had shot a number of natives round the neighbouring cattle stations. In recent weeks the police also visited Hermannsburg on numerous occasions and took four of them away. As a result of our mediation one was returned, but the others have been shot.’ In 1885, the missionary A. H. Kempe believed that he was witnessing genocide: ‘In ten years time there will not be many blacks left in this area and this is just what the white man wants. With all the shooting that is taking place, it is hard to conceive that the native people have any kind of future and our only hope is that they are rescued from this intolerable position.’ (John Harris quoting in *One Blood – 200 years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity.*)

“In his memoirs in 1896, *The Land of the Dawning*, Mounted Constable W. H. Willshire, a brutal man responsible for hundreds of Aboriginal deaths, wrote of one attack on Aboriginal people: ‘... at 3.00 p.m. came upon a large mob of natives camped amongst rocks of enormous magnitude ... It’s no use mincing matters – the Martini-Henry carbines at this critical moment were talking English in the silent majesty of those great eternal rocks...’ He described the use of Aboriginal women as the white bushman’s God-given right, but loathed the ‘half-caste’ children who resulted: ‘Men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women, and perhaps the Almighty meant them for use as he has placed them wherever the pioneers go ... what I am speaking about is only natural, especially for men who are isolated away in the bush at outstations where women of all ages and sizes are running at large ... I certainly do object to the mongrel half-caste ... I hold out no gleam of hope for such a repulsive breed ... a nameless child, an intrusive creature, the bastard gift of a shameless nature, conjecturally condemned ...’ When, a few years later, Willshire was charged with murder, his bail of £2,000 was paid by sixty Central Australian settlers. Defended by Sir John Downer, former Premier of South Australia, he was found not guilty. Willshire subsequently described the ‘practical bushmen’ of Central Australia as ‘the brave pioneers who push out to the frontier and are exposed to the full force of the naked barbarians’.

“In an editorial in 1886, the *North Australian* newspaper opined, ‘As for the shooting of the blacks, we uphold it defiantly.’ ”

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Guy Boothby then went to England and had great success with his mysteries and his series about the enigmatic Dr Nikola. Yet unlike other writers who seemed to ‘take Australia with them’ he gives little hint to his background in his later books. Perhaps he would have returned to an imagined Australia in old age but he wasn’t given the chance: he was still a young man when he died in 1905. Then again, as a well-travelled young man who wrote of his travels in *On the Wallaby* perhaps there was much about Australia he preferred to leave behind ...

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October 14: Miles Franklin
Katherine Mansfield
e.e.cummings

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Thomas Mallon wrote *A Book of One’s Own* about people’s diary-keeping (and publishing). He describes diary-keeping as ‘the poor man’s art’ and starts out with Samuel Pepys’ famous diaries which he describes thus: “The diary gurgles like a full stomach and jingles like a full pocket.” But “Japanese women were confiding their emotions to “pillow books,” kept in a slipcase and away from a husband’s eyes, for centuries before there was anything like a tradition of diary-keeping in the West.” He goes on

to say, “The history of women is being written as much from their diaries as anything else. And the social history of all people is more detailed than it would otherwise be because of women’s attention to the texture of the everyday in the diaries their men permitted them.”

“Good girls keep diaries, bad girls don’t have the time.” Tallulah Bankhead.

“A few decades earlier Katherine Mansfield makes her diaries serve many different functions: prophet (“I’ve re-read my diary. Tell me, Is there a God?”); punching bag (“What a vile little diary!”); and votive candle for the brother who was killed in the First World War: “If I write every day faithfully a little record of how I have kept faith with you — that is what I must do.” She uses them to exhort herself toward her art, and to plan some of her stories’ settings. She is also aware, as many writers of fiction come to be, of the diaries’ possibilities by themselves, as more than just the scaffoldings for other imaginary towers. On January 22, 1916, when she is momentarily considering the alternatives to fiction she might use to make New Zealand “leap into the eyes of the Old World,” she concludes: “Lastly, I want to keep a kind of *minute notebook*, to be published some day. That’s all. No novels, no problem stories, nothing that is not simple, open.”

But six years later she is dying, and using the journal to enumerate the reasons she has for trying to stay alive.

Now, Katherine, what do you mean by health? And what do you want it for?

Answer: By health I mean the power to live a full, adult, living, breathing life in close contact with what I love ... Then I want to *work*. At what? I want so to live that I work with my hands and my feeling and my brain. I want a garden, a small house, grass, animals, books, pictures, music. And out of this, the expression of this, I want to be writing.”

* * * * *

Mansfield, perhaps understandably after a stultifyingly conventional upbringing in turn-of-the-century New Zealand, embraced the bohemian life in Europe with gusto for the freedom and opportunities it seemed to offer. She probably didn’t understand the risks—to health and safety and reputation—the discomforts and the times of poverty until she was fully engaged in an unconventional lifestyle. Out of it came some very good short stories and some completely uninteresting ones.

Claire Tomalin wrote, in *Katherine Mansfield A Secret Life*, of her successful short story ‘A Birthday’, “Yet there is a feeling of randomness about the achievement too. Katherine did not seem to be interested in building on a successful piece of work, but persistently dispersed herself in different styles and tones. In her writing, as in her life, she revelled in change, disguise, mystery and mimicry: the last she saw as the key to creation and understanding of character. It gave her freedom, but it also became a weakness; lacking stamina, she dispersed herself too widely in different effects. Considering how good ‘A Birthday’ is, you can’t help regretting that she wasted energy on so much lesser work.”

NZ academic C. K. Stead wrote a novel called *Mansfield* which covers three years of the First World War; placing imaginary thoughts and words and actions over known facts. He suggests that she was driven by a need to create a new way of writing. She was not content with the conventions which bound the short story (the straitjacket of beginning, middle, and end) and wrote and re-wrote what she saw as her best pieces in the hope that they could break new ground. Perhaps they did. I’m not sure.

Usually when someone dies young, whether their life has been as chaotic and contradictory as Mansfield’s or not, you tend to say ‘What a pity! So much potential wasted!’ But in Mansfield’s case it is impossible to know what she might’ve gone on to do, if she’d been given health and more years, because there is always the possibility that she wouldn’t have done better work—or any work at all. I suspect she was often looking for love and excitement more than she was looking for literary fame. But it may be heresy to say so ...

And how would Tallulah Bankhead have classed her?

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October 15: C. P. Snow

Helen Hunt Jackson

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Dennis McDougal in *Prodigal Son*, a biography of the family which owned *The Los Angeles Times*, also touches on the curious career of American woman Helen Hunt Jackson. “Some day the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce should erect a great bronze statue of Helen Hunt Jackson at the entrance to Cajon Pass,” wrote pioneering L.A. historian Carey McWilliams. “Beneath the statue should be inscribed no flowering dedication, but the simple inscription: ‘H.H.—In Gratitude.’”

He says she counted Emily Dickinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James among her friends and calls her “the first Boston Brahmin to widely publicize white America’s shameful racism toward the American Indian.” He likens her influence to that of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In 1879 she wrote “a widely distributed tract titled *A Century of Dishonor*, which blasted the U.S. military’s blatant extermination of Indians. The popular pamphlet landed her a presidential appointment as a commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1881—a job that took her, amongst other places, to Southern California, where she was asked to write a Government report on the plight of the few survivors of the coastal Mission Indian tribes.”

“Before Mrs. Jackson arrived in L.A. in 1882, the truth about Father Junipero Serra and his greedy entourage of disease-carrying, slave-driving Franciscan monks had already given way to a revisionist history of quaint Mission life: submissive heathens overseen by pious priests in a bountiful primeval setting of olive trees, grape fields, citrus orchards, and semitropical gardens—all shielded inside the sunbaked adobe sanctuary of a Californian version of Eden.” What people chose to ignore was that “Father Serra and his evangelical band of colonial Spanish zealots also brought smallpox, cholera, imprisonment, starvation, torture, and lynching to the Indians; they decimated tribes and reduced the remaining Native American population by more than 90 per cent. All this would be carefully excised from California’s history texts for most of the next century.”

It wasn’t that she sheeted blame home to the monks. She saw the people who came in their wake, Mexican peasants and the arriving white Americans, as more culpable. But she had aroused people’s interest and indeed their sense of guilt. She then proceeded to write a novel called *Ramona* described as an “Indian tragedy owing a huge debt to the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*.” She described it as a “sugar-coated pill” to expose the mistreatment and exploitation of Mission Indians. It was immensely popular though it probably didn’t influence the people who mattered in the US Government. The trouble was—people liked the sugar and ignored the pill. She did help change underlying attitudes but California created a whole new swag of myths to direct attention away from any understanding of the grim realities for its indigenous peoples. New legends, new buildings in the Mission style, new stories about a bucolic Spanish past, all were grist to Hollywood’s greedy mill. It was insatiable in its search for a ‘usable past’. What McDougal calls, “a slough of fictitious early Californian legends, including such early matinee heroes as Zorro, the Cisco Kid, and Joaquin Murieta—a mid-nineteenth-century serial murderer rehabilitated on the silver screen as “The Robin Hood of the West”, were too powerful for one woman to hold back the tide. But that she tried and she cared do make her worthy of being remembered. I’m just not fussed on large bronze statues.

*

That was all I knew about Helen Hunt Jackson and her interesting life. So imagine my surprise when I just turned over the page to September on my calendar in the kitchen and found a quote from Helen Hunt Jackson gracing a picture of a lavender field.

By all these lovely tokens
September days are here
with summer’s best of weather
and autumn’s best of cheer.

* * * * *

October 16: Oscar Wilde
Debby Barben
October 17: Les Murray
Elinor Glyn
Arthur Miller
Sumner Locke Elliot

* * * * *

I always associated Elinor Glyn with decadent and rather caddish minor aristocracy. I always pictured her lying on tiger skin rugs while she wrote her novels of society scandal and improbable romance. But I was intrigued to discover that she spent many years in Hollywood writing scripts for the silent films. David Robinson in *Hollywood in the Twenties* says she “owed her enormous success in Hollywood throughout most of the Twenties to her success in marrying the old romanticism and the new morality in her novels and screenplays”.

“A surprising number of the most successful scenarists of silent days were women – Metro’s June Mathis, who devised the best Valentino vehicles and died only a year after the star; Frances Marion, Mary Pickford’s favourite writer who later scripted such distinguished films as *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wind*; Anita Loos, the child prodigy who at fifteen was supplying the Biograph Studios with ingenious story ideas; DeMille’s Jeanie Macpherson; Bess Meredith and Lenore Coffee, better known as a writer of talking pictures. Among the innumerable male scenarists were Jules Furthman who wrote Sternberg’s *Underworld* and Stiller’s *Hotel Imperial*, Howard Estabrook and Benjamin Glazer.

“Soon after the war producers began their long-maintained policy of trying to achieve prestige for their productions by attracting authors of distinction to work in Hollywood. In 1920 Lasky invited Maeterlinck, Edward Knoblock and Somerset Maugham among others. Few stayed long, once they discovered that “All authors, living or dead, famous or obscure, shared the same fate. Their stories were re-written and completely altered by the stenographers and continuity girls of the scenario department, or by the Assistant Director and his lady-love, or by the leading lady, or by anyone else who happened to pass through the studio; and even when at last after infinite struggle a scene was shot which bore some resemblance to the original story it was certain to be left out in the cutting-room, or pared away to such an extent that all meaning which it might once have had was lost.”

“Elinor Glyn, who wrote this, was one of those who stayed on. Unpredictably, the sensational Edwardian English novelist, nearly sixty when she arrived in Hollywood, stayed there for years, made (and partly spent) a fortune, achieved new fame and, sending the gospel of “It” across the world, had immense influence upon the film capital. For one thing she claimed to have taught American screen heroes how to make love. Valentino learned from Glyn to kiss the *palm* of a woman’s hand. Her insistence upon accurate staging of the worlds she portrayed awoke designers to new responsibilities.”

She worked very hard and acquired a ‘cinematic sense’ which helped her films like *The Great Moment*, *Beyond the Rocks*, *Man and Maid*, *It*, and *Red Hair* achieve great popularity. They were light romance, froth and bubble, but silent films often brought out the talents of their actors and were art works in their own right—and of course *It* launched Clara Bow on to the world and became shorthand throughout the English-speaking world for sex appeal. For example Dorothy Sayers writes in *Unnatural Death*, “Never had he met a woman in whom ‘the great It’, eloquently hymned by Mrs Elinor Glyn, was so completely lacking.”

She wrote her autobiography and called it, surprise, surprise, *Romantic Adventure*.

* * * * *

IT in the 1920s referred to Sex Appeal. IT later came to mean sex. But while I was pondering on this usage it occurred to me that IT is a word of many subtle meanings.

“‘Oh! really. I say. He must be no end of a fellow.’

‘The Boss, sir,’ said Alfred, ‘is It.’ ”

Agatha Christie in *Partners in Crime*. This usage is what my mother would've described as 'the bee's knees', another curious expression, but it immediately sums up the desired persona, in this case for Tommy in the Tommy and Tuppence stories.

Margery Allingham has a character in *The Crime at Black Dudley*: 'She certainly has IT,' he said. 'Once seen never forgotten.' But in this case he was referring to a car!

And IT can refer to the big moment. 'This is IT, chaps,' leaders said to their men in all sorts of situations. Little IT carries big responsibilities.

* * * * *

I haven't been able to track down *Romantic Adventure* so far but the library did get me a copy of her 1914 book *Letters to Caroline*, a collection of 'letters' which she began publishing in *Nash's Magazine* in 1912. This in a way is so remote from the brash new world of Hollywood that I cannot help wondering what Hollywood made of her—or she of Hollywood. It is a series of letters purporting to be from Glyn to her goddaughter who is at a finishing school in Paris and will soon be making her debut in front of the king and queen in London.

Glyn begins by giving Caroline something of her religious beliefs by saying "no happiness is lasting without goodness". She writes, "I refused to credit the idea that we were all born miserable sinners. I felt we were glorious creatures who should stand upright and rise into space. I resented the attitude of all saints and martyrs as depicted in statuary and painting—a *mea culpa* attitude—pleading for the charity of some omnipotent being to overlook a personal fault—as it were to say, "If I grovel enough your vanity will be appeased and you won't punish me." I looked round at the glorious world of nature and at the wonder of my own body, full of health and vitality, and I wanted to cry aloud to God, "Dear God, I am so glad you have made me, and I mean to do the very best I can for your creation in return." '

Her idea is that we each have as soul a spark of the Divine Consciousness which is loaned to us for our lifetime and which we should try to return, like all borrowed things, undamaged and untarnished. She goes on to say that 'when God made man I do believe He left out one colossal quality in him—the faculty of seeing the obvious. Women can see it sometimes, but men!—almost never! So I shall have to tell it to you in plain words. *God is love!*'

She then goes on to such subjects as Manners, Marriage, Clothes and Deportment, and ends up with the curious question of whether Caroline should learn the Tango or not. Her thoughts on marriage include: 'the happy and glorious goal of a woman is to strive to be a refining influence, the inspiration and the worshipped joy of a man.' And 'In one of my books, I once wrote this maxim: "It is better to marry the life you like, because after a while the man does not matter!" It was a very cynical sentence, but unfortunately true.' She also says '*If I were to give girls only one sentence of advice as to how to keep their husbands in love with them, I should choose this one—Never revolt the man's senses.*' She says men are stronger, freer, and more open to flattery. It is easier for them to walk out, they are more likely to have the money and the ability to do so. Which suggests that Caroline would be wise to cultivate the art of flattery.

She is very picky when it comes to clothes. A shirt is a plain garment worn in the mornings. A blouse can be fancier and is worn in the afternoon. And of personal habits she says, 'If you have acquired the habit already (smoking), be very careful of your teeth as you get older, and to have your hair beautifully brushed both night and morning—the smell of stale smoke in the hair and breath and clothes is so disgusting.'

Caroline is an heiress. She probably will have no trouble finding a husband even if she doesn't follow her godmother's precepts. But will she be happy? And the tango, a dance of 'low Argentine origin' can be taken up, providing Caroline has taken careful thought first. Fads and fashions come and go and there is no reason to stand out against them—provided you have asked yourself carefully whether this new fad will make for happiness. Caroline is not to be part of the mindless herd rushing forward to embrace the new solely because it *is* the new ...

Her ideals for the young debutante, modesty, tact, self-respect, good manners, gracefulness, care of the self, intelligent conversation, thought for others, seem a little at odds with that famous photograph of Elinor Glyn lying in an abandoned pose on a tiger skin—but for all that they were probably taken to heart by numerous young debs and their hopeful mothers. And there still seems to be room for manners, grace, thoughtfulness, and intelligence. But to what extent she found them in the Hollywood of the Twenties is an intriguing question.

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October 18: Charles Mudie
Timothy Evans (pardoned)

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“On October 18th, 1966, the last chapter in the tragic story of Timothy Evans was written, when on the recommendation of the Home Secretary, Mr Roy Jenkins, the Queen granted him a free pardon. This final, pathetic act of redress owed little to this country’s politicians and even less to its lawyers, many of whom behaved shabbily and cravenly throughout.”

Ludovic Kennedy in *10 Rillington Place*.

The problem with redress, in this case, was that Timothy Evans had already been hanged for a crime done by Reginald Christie. Perhaps it provided a little comfort for his family ... but the emphasis is probably on ‘little’ ...

*

M. R. Hall’s *The Coroner* is fiction but I do not doubt that the centre described in the book has its real life counterparts: “The centre was equipped to hold up to a hundred trainees between the ages of twelve and seventeen. While child custody had virtually ceased to exist in some parts of Europe, Britain’s appetite for incarcerating children was increasing. Over four thousand were currently imprisoned, nearly five times the number of its nearest rival, France.

“To cope with the ever-rising numbers, the government had created the Youth Justice Board, a quango charged with commissioning places for young offenders. Private companies would bid to build and run new secure training centres and the board would pick the winners. Portshead Farm was owned by UKAM Secure Solutions Ltd, a company with a portfolio of correctional facilities across the USA and now the UK. UKAM’s business was security: concrete, bars, wire, cameras and attendant personnel. Catering, cleaning, laundry, healthcare and education were all subcontracted out. For this burgeoning industry the growing army of young inmates was very good news indeed.”

And “What the system did to young offenders was, in her long experience, far more calculatedly brutal than anything most of them had done on the outside. To remove all love, affection and human contact from kids at their most vulnerable was barbarism of a kind she had never begun to understand.”

Ah, but then, the system must keep making more criminals to fill up those profitable centres ...

*

I have come upon several memoirs written by men who had been incarcerated as boys in the Westbrook Farm Home. *Brutal* by Al ‘Crow’ Fletcher and *Westbrook* by William Stokes. It was Australia’s toughest most brutal home for delinquent boys, many of whom ended up there for petty thieving, wagging school, or general neglect by their parents. An inside view resonated partly because I grew up only about thirty miles away from Westbrook but as a child I knew no one who had been incarcerated there (or escaped from there) and I had no idea what it was like inside. But people *did* know. Staff, visitors, ex-inmates, and of course the magistrates that sent them there and the governments which set up and kept the place running. I suppose if I ever thought about it it was only to assume that boys went there to learn about farming. And there is a kind of unjustified cosiness in the combination of ‘Farm’ and ‘Home’.

In fact the boys learnt precious little. They came out unqualified, uneducated, and often still illiterate. They also came out brutalised and hardened. And they came out into no form of half-way house or support. When they walked out the gate they were on their own. Not surprisingly many of

them turned to crime, large and small, so as to end up back in the structured organised life which was the only thing they understood. Westbrook became notable as a forcing ground for adult criminals. It was finally closed but only after doing its worst for more than half a century ...

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We naturally feel outraged when innocent people go to jail or worse—to the gallows or electric chair. But spare a thought for the many people who die because of the carelessness, the stupidity, or the recklessness that surrounds every aspect of our lives. This is very much on my mind as I see that the Aboriginal Elder who died of heat stroke in a Western Australian prison van is to be treated as an unfortunate incident. No one will be held responsible. But why was he being transported 350 kilometres for drink driving? Why was he not simply fined on the spot, lost points on his licence, or barred from driving for three months? I cannot believe that WA transports every drink driver in its remote communities hundreds of kilometres in baking hot prison vans. Aboriginal people are right to be angry and suspicious.

I came upon this paragraph in *Cause of Death* by Keith D. Wilson: “A recent article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) reported that over one thousand teenagers have been killed by Coke machines. It sounds absurd, but it’s true. Teenage boys, mad about losing their quarters to stubborn machines, wrestle with them to get their change back; the heavy machines tumble back and crush their victims. As mentioned earlier, in one year, more than twelve thousand infants and children were injured by falling out of grocery carts! More than 180 infants have drowned by falling into household cleaning buckets. One hundred sixty adults were killed by garage door openers! And forty-seven children crushed when the door closed on them.”

*

“In criminal investigations, the one person more suspicious than the butler is the grown man still living at home with his mother. In 1996, I was at the Atlanta Olympic Games and just a few blocks away when someone detonated a bomb in Centennial Olympic Park, killing one passer-by and wounding 111 others. The initial hero of the occurrence was a thirty-three-year-old security guard by the name of Richard Jewell, who had been in the park just before 1 A.M. He spotted a suspicious backpack and cleared the immediate area just before it exploded. For two days he was feted, lauded as the embodiment of everything that was great about an American everyman who rose to the occasion when called upon to go above and beyond the call of duty, until ...

“Until it was discovered that he was still living at home with his mother. Within two days the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* pinned him as an FBI suspect on its front page—quickly followed by newspapers world-wide, CNN, NBC, and the like—and his life was never the same again. A terrible trial by media ensued, and always—I followed the case closely—the fact that he lived at home with his mother was at least mentioned, if not focused upon. Though there was never a scintilla of evidence, suspicion hovered all over him until 2005, when an antigovernment militant, Eric Rudolph, was convicted of the crime and Jewell was completely exonerated. Too late. Jewell died in late August 2007, still a broken man.”

Peter Fitzsimons in *How Hemlines Predict the Economy*.

*

John Grisham wrote *The Innocent Man* about a case in Oklahoma where a man, Ron Williamson, was only five days away from the electric chair after many years on death row in appalling conditions when the action of concerned lawyers gained him a stay of execution and eventually a re-trial. Police had simply refused to look at the man who far more closely fitted the evidence. It wasn’t that the innocent man was terribly likeable. He was an addict, a drunk, suffering from both bipolar and schizophrenia, almost always chaotic, but he hadn’t murdered anyone. It seemed to encapsulate the major problem we have with guilt and innocence. Those wrongly convicted are very often poor (and poorly defended), sometimes mentally retarded like Timothy Evans, often addicted to something, often with other problems of self-control, and they are more likely to live in deprived and unruly

neighbourhoods targeted by police. And Grisham points to the failure of the system to treat prisoners on death row humanely; the general attitude being ‘they are going to die anyway so why worry about medical or dental care, why assess their mental health, why worry about sunlight and fresh air and edible food.’ When Williamson was finally set free his mental state had seriously deteriorated, most of his teeth had rotted, and he looked twenty years older than his age. Grisham writes, “The financial waste was frustrating enough, but the human toll was far more damaging. Obviously, Ron’s mental problems were greatly exacerbated by the wrongful conviction, and, once freed, he never recovered. Most exonerees do not.”

John Bryson wrote *Evil Angels* not so much to declare Lindy Chamberlain’s innocence from a soapbox but rather to draw attention to the many flaws in the investigation. He left people to make up their own minds. It was the finding of the baby’s jacket which changed everything.

Helen Morrison in *My Life Among the Serial Killers* drew attention to another wrongful incarceration. “On the basis of this forensic evidence, (Richard) Milone was eventually freed—after having served twenty years in jail for a crime he did not commit. He would try to reenter a life that was so mistakenly and unnecessarily interrupted and placed on hold. And though he would go on because there was nothing else to do, he would look upon that time long ago with occasional sadness ... and much bitterness.” (The real killer was found to be Richard Macek.)

And Noel Fellowes wrote his own story in *Killing Time*, his incarceration in England for a death he had no involvement with. For him it was even worse than for many innocent people imprisoned because as an ex-cop he was targeted and bashed. Ludovic Kennedy wrote the foreword to his book in which he says, “What sometimes happens is this. The police light on some tiny circumstantial piece of evidence to connect some person with the crime. Unable to find any further evidence, yet desperate to get results, they allow their suspicions to harden into certainty. Believing they are serving the best interests of justice, they then:

- a) Try to browbeat the suspect into a confession.
- b) Pressurize witnesses to say what they want them to say.
- c) Suppress or ignore the evidence of other witnesses whose evidence is favourable to the accused.
- d) ‘Lose’ documents such as timesheets that support the accused’s alibi.

(And Lynne Weathered who set up Australia’s first Innocence Project identifies 10 factors leading to wrong convictions: 1. Faulty eyewitness identification, 2. Incorrect informer evidence, 3. Overzealous or improper police investigation or prosecution, 4. Tunnel vision, 5. Bad defence lawyers, 6. Incorrect scientific evidence, 7. Plea bargaining, 8. False confessions, 9. Media attention, 10. Race.)

The case of Noel Fellowes, a taxi-driver and former policeman, is a classic example of this sort of malpractice. Arrested in 1970 for the murder of a 67-year-old debt-collector called Harold Parkinson, the only evidence against him was that his mother-in-law’s name had been found in Parkinson’s debt collection book, and that someone had seen Parkinson get into a taxi on the day of the murder!

And Tasmania has its own terrible perversion of justice. The case of Sue Neill-Fraser. She was sentenced to 26 years for the supposed murder of her long-time partner Bob Chappell even though his body has never been found and it is not even known for sure that he is dead. (In 2003 Leonard Fraser was on trial for the alleged murder of Natasha Ryan when she turned up alive.) Police have told the family they never looked beyond Sue as a suspect even though Bob disappeared from his yacht on the night of Australia Day 2009; probably the most dangerous night of the year to be out alone on a yacht. Even worse, to my mind, is that several of the jurors found her guilty because they thought she was a ‘cold’ person and they didn’t ‘like’ her. Reserve and reticence is not coldness—and even if it was it is a slap in the face for justice that a case might be decided on emotions rather than facts. Every judge worth his or her salt stresses that the jury’s job is to decide the case solely on the facts presented to them ... but in this case, sadly, the judge’s bias was obvious in his summing up for the jury ...

Nothing can give back those years. Perhaps they would not have been very exciting or fulfilling but they belonged to the person wrongly convicted. Jail took away any options. And at times for such people to be hanged for a crime they did not commit probably only seemed marginally worse. Waking up and going to bed every day for twenty years knowing you are innocent but cannot get out of jail must often have seemed worse than death. But most books are about the campaigns to get people into or out of jail. Few people write about the way the Richard Milones of this world try to re-establish some sort of life ‘on the outside’.

* * * * *

Scott Turow as well as his novels such as *Presumed Innocent* wrote a non-fiction book called *Ultimate Punishment*. When the Governor of Illinois, George Ryan, announced a moratorium on executions in his state it got mentioned around the world. What I didn’t know was that he also set up a commission to look at all the evidence for and against the death penalty and Scott Turow was invited to be on that commission. His book is a very balanced and fair look at the whole question, including that most vexed question of the conviction of the innocent and, perhaps more helpfully, the question of people who are not innocent but who are not the monsters the media may paint them as. He started out with the belief that the death penalty is at times warranted but he writes: “One reason our capital jurisprudence is such a mess is because even the justices of the U.S. Supreme court, who have long experience in making and sticking with hard decisions, have waffled. Harry Blackmun is hardly alone. In the last twenty-five years, Justices Stewart, White, Powell, and Stevens have also taken varying positions when confronted with the question of whether or not capital punishment as currently practiced is constitutionally tolerable. I take myself as no better than they. Long after that day in fall 2001, when Senator Simon called upon us all to offer a definitive judgment on the death penalty, a number of my fellow commissioners revised their positions. But I appear to have finally come to rest on the issue. Today, I would still do as I did when Paul Simon asked whether Illinois should retain capital punishment. I voted no.”

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And Australia like England has cases for which no pardon is adequate. On the 30 December 1921 a 12-year-old girl Alma Tirtschke was raped and strangled in Melbourne. And on the 24th April 1922 a young saloonkeeper Colin Ross was hanged for her murder. But even at the time grave doubts were held by his family and friends, his lawyers, and people who knew he could not have been in that alley strangling young Alma because he was hard at work in his saloon in the key time ...

But the jury took the three witnesses the police conjured up, a prostitute, a prisoner, and a supposed psychic (who received some of the reward money), as truthful, they accepted appallingly bad forensic evidence, and in the hysteria surrounding the case they believed the police over the witnesses to Ross’s presence serving customers. Ross was denied leave to appeal the decision in Melbourne. He was denied the right to appeal to the Privy Council in England. His lawyer wrote a book called *The Gun Alley Tragedy* to assert Ross’s innocence. Many years later artist Charles Blackman did a series of paintings about the case which were seen by a young librarian Kevin Morgan who became interested in finding out what had really happened. “He set himself to research the tragedy ever more deeply – finding documents along the way that convinced him Ross had been an innocent man, framed by police.” He managed to get DNA tests done on the hairs which were said to have come from Alma into Colin Ross’s possession and found they didn’t match the little girl. And he set out to write his own book.

But no book, no indignation or regret, no posthumous pardon, can bring back Colin Ross any more than it can bring back Timothy Evans.

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October 19: John le Carré

October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Joyce Brothers

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Tim Severin wrote in his mixture of history, travel, and literature, *Seeking Robinson Crusoe*, of the privateer *Speedwell*, “Simon Hatley, the first mate, knew all about the legal squabbles that had denied Woodes Rogers’ crew a quick pay-out of their plunder. Hatley had been aboard the *Duchess* when Woodes Rogers picked up Alexander Selkirk from Juan Fernandez, and must have seen the Scotsman dressed in his goatskins. Now, as the *Speedwell* struggled her way around the Horn and was driven by constant bad weather as far south as latitude 61° 30’, Hatley was to have another brush with literary history. For several days the ocean had been empty. The sailors had seen only the grey Southern Ocean waves and the low scudding clouds. There had been none of the usual fish and birds normally encountered in those waters, except for one ‘disconsolate black albatross’ which Shelvocke wrote, ‘accompanied us for several days, hovering about us as if he had lost himself.’ In his frustration at the slow progress of the ship, Hatley eventually interpreted the presence of the great black bird as an ill omen. He decided that if he could get rid of it, better weather would follow. After several attempts, he succeeded in downing the bird with a well-aimed shot, but to little effect: there were another six weeks of heavy weather and headwinds before the *Speedwell* sighted the coast of Chile.

“Hatley’s deed lived on. Like other privateers before him Shelvocke published an account of his voyage when he came home. Fifty years later the book was read by William Wordsworth. He mentioned Hatley’s killing of the albatross to his friend Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was working on a poem. Wordsworth suggested the theme that slaying an albatross brought bad luck, and Coleridge immortalized the idea in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* with his verse

God save thee, Ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!
Why look’st thou so? — ‘With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.’

Wordsworth and Coleridge had little knowledge of sea custom. Hatley used a musket or a shotgun, not a crossbow, to bring down the bird, and albatrosses were sometimes killed for food by hungry sailors. They set special fishing lines. The hooks loaded with floating bait and trailed in the wake of the ship to catch the giant seabirds. But the ill luck which soon enveloped Hatley’s ship at Juan Fernández seemed to justify what became a lingering and gloomy superstition.”

Well, perhaps not so gloomy for the birds which were thus left alone ...

* * * * *

October 21: Ursula Le Guin
Edogawa Rampo
October 22: Doris Lessing
Thomas Hughes

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“To read a great deal of Doris Lessing over a short span of time is to feel that the original hound of heaven has commandeered the attic. She holds the mind’s other guests in ardent contempt. She appears for meals only to dismiss as decadent the household’s own preoccupations with writing well. For more than twenty years now she has been registering, in a torrent of fiction that increasingly seems conceived in a stubborn rage against the very idea of fiction, every tremor along her emotional fault system, every slippage in her self-education. *Look here*, she is forever demanding, a missionary devoid of any but the most didactic irony: *The Communist Party is not the answer. There is a life beyond vaginal orgasm. St John of the Cross was not as dotty as certain Anglicans would have had you believe.* She comes hard to ideas, and, once she has collared one, worries it with Victorian doggedness.

“That she is a writer of considerable native power, a ‘natural’ writer in the Dreiserian mold, someone who can close her eyes and ‘give’ a situation by the sheer force of her emotional energy,

seems almost a stain on her conscience. She views her real gift for fiction much as she views her own biology, as another trick to entrap her. She does not want to 'write well.' Her leaden disregard for even the simplest rhythms of language, her arrogantly bad ear for dialogue – all of that is beside her own point. More and more, Mrs Lessing writes exclusively in the service of immediate cosmic reform: she wants to write, as the writer Anna in *The Golden Notebook* wanted to write, only to 'create a new way of looking at life.' ”

Joan Didion in 'Doris Lessing' (1971)

One day I came upon Lessing's *Briefing For a Descent Into Hell* on a stall and bought it. Didion is not kind to it: "Consider *Briefing for a Descent into Hell*. Here Mrs Lessing gave us a novel exclusively of 'ideas,' not a novel about the play of ideas in the lives of certain characters but a novel in which the characters exist only as markers in the presentation of an idea."

Lessing herself described it as 'inner-space fiction'. It is a curious book. A man is found wandering without any apparent identity. The doctors disagree over what drugs and treatment might help him recover his identity. His mind is still full of thoughts and these take the reader on various strange journeys of possibility. But then we learn that he is a missing Cambridge professor with a wife and family. Though the book brims with possibilities it is not satisfying really. I pondered on this and felt that Lessing herself had grown tired of it. It is almost as though the book has let her down. I'm not sure what to make of this feeling. Did she hope that a fascinating idea would be enough to carry her on through the days and weeks of writing? Or did I not give enough weight to the simple fact that behind the strange and the alien the everyday tends to lurk, waiting to claim it back?

Margaret Moan Rowe in *Doris Lessing* says the book "reflects Lessing's well-documented interest in Sufi thought. Even more, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* reflects Sufi method, what 'The Sufi Path' describes as 'the interplay of the minds of the teacher and the taught'. Lessing seeks to structure a parable that will engage and challenge the reader." And Rowe quotes two other comments on the book; from Betsy Draine that it delivers what she calls 'a "Message" that is at once an admonition, a proposition about reality, and a way of seeing the world' while Lorna Sage suggests 'that, having turned her style and her way of thinking inside out, Lessing had for the moment depleted her resources as a writer. Whatever her convictions on the matter, the territory of speculative fiction was new to her; and she explored it, to begin with, without subtlety.'

Didion continues to write critically of Doris Lessing, suggesting her first book *The Grass is Singing* was both an insight into the background which had made her, in what was then Rhodesia, but also the making of a sense of injustice which came to overwhelm her fiction with a didactic impulse. As Didion says, "the impulse to final solutions has been not only Mrs Lessing's dilemma but the guiding delusion of her time. It is not an impulse I hold high, but there is something finally very moving about her tenacity."

So what in Lessing's fiction persuaded the Nobel Committee to grant her their ultimate accolade?

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October 23: Gore Vidal

Robert Bridges

October 24: Denise Levertov

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Nancy Willard said "Denise Levertov is the poet laureate of rabbits and serpents, llamas and armadillos, cats and dragonflies, pigs, clouds, willows, and wells."

Fay Zwicky interviewing Denise Levertov records her account of her family: "My mother was Welsh, and my father was a Russian Jew. When he was a student at the University of Königsberg in Prussia (to which he was sent because a Jew couldn't go to the University in Tzarist Russia), he read the New Testament and became convinced that Jesus had indeed been the Messiah. He then rushed home to give the people at home the Gospel. They thought he was crazy, locked him up in his room, but he climbed out of the window and escaped. He eventually became an Anglican clergyman not long

great web.

(‘Web’)

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October 25: Thomas Macauley

John Berryman

October 26: Andrew Motion

John Romeril

October 27: Dylan Thomas

A. N. Wilson

Sylvia Plath

October 28: Simon Brett

October 29: John Keats

October 30: Paul Valéry

Ezra Pound

October 31: Dick Francis

Katherine Paterson

November 1: C. J. Brennan

November 2: Odysseus Elytis

November 3: Karl Baedeker

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“Side by side with half-crown editions of English poets and philosophers, flanked on the right by Bartlett’s *Familiar Quotations* and on the left by that handy police publication which dissects and catalogues crimes according to the method of their commission, stood, tall and menacing, the two blue volumes of Taylor’s *Medical Jurisprudence*, that canon of uncanonical practice and Baedeker of the back doors to death.”

Dorothy L. Sayers in *Busman’s Honeymoon*.

“Armed with their Baedekers (back in 1829 an enterprising German publisher, Karl Baedeker, had published the first modern guidebook), the middle classes set off by rail in search of the sublime and the picturesque. They brought with them sketching equipment, butterfly nets and flower-pressing gear, as well as the weighty journals that would accommodate all their observations. By 1870 postcards ‘wishing you were here’ were being sent home and souvenirs – the inevitable cuckoo clock from Switzerland, the miniature Eiffel Tower (1889) from Paris – began to adorn the parlours of the travelled.”

(*The Great Composers* series.)

“How often I have cursed Baron Baedeker for sending me through the dust to see some nauseating Sodoma or drearily respectable Andrea del Sarto! How angry I have been with him for starrng what is old merely because it is old! And how I have hated him for his lack of discrimination! He has a way of lumping all old things of one class together and treating them as if, being made at the same period, their merit were exactly equal. For example, the stained-glass windows at Sens are treated by the guide-books as though they were just like all other stained glass of the fourteenth century, when in fact they are unique in boldness and beauty of design. Some very great artist made the series of Bible illustrations at Sens. The Baron speaks as highly of the competent craftsman’s work at Chartres and Canterbury.”

Aldous Huxley in his essay ‘Guide-Books’.

Legion are the books in which someone consults their Baedeker or describes someone’s literary effusion as being about on the level of a Baedeker. The name of course refers to the line of guidebooks

which were immensely popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. But what of the man behind the books? How did he come to think that publishing guide books would be a good career move?

Certainly there were guide books before Baedeker but they usually came out of one person's knowledge of a particular place or one person's visit to a particular place. Baedeker's idea was to cover whole countries for the benefit of the traveler.

Berlitz was a common throwaway later and then came the rush of modern guidebooks such as Lonely Planet but mention of a Baedeker still brings with it the sense of more leisurely traveling in an age of horse-and-coach, trains and steamers ...

So what of Baedeker's advice to his readers and travelers? Frank Muir in *Frank Muir Goes Into ...* has a chapter on 'Holidays' and writes: "Nowadays an increasing number of people go abroad for their holidays, and many are unprepared for the adjustment they have to make to the customs and manners of the country in which they arrive. It is fortunate that there are books available to instruct the traveller. Here is some handy advice from Baedeker's *Guide to the Mediterranean*, published in 1911:

Intercourse with Orientals.

The objects and pleasures of travel are so unintelligible to most Orientals that they are apt to regard the European traveller as a lunatic, or at all events a Croesus, and therefore to be exploited on every possible occasion. Hence their constant demands for 'bakshish' (a gift). To check this demoralizing cupidity the traveller should never give bakshish except for services rendered, unless occasionally to aged or crippled beggars.

Here's another useful tip from the 1902 version of Baedeker's *Egypt*:

The traveller [in Cairo and Alexandria] should keep his eye on the direction taken by the cab, as sometimes the cabman drives straight ahead in complete ignorance of the way and requires to be guided, e.g., by being touched with a stick on the right or left arm according to the turning."

To this Muir adds "That system of directions is not to be recommended with London cabbies." But I have a different question: How does that traveler, new to the country, know where the cab should turn? Answer: He undoubtedly has one of Baedeker's excellent maps with him and spends more time perusing it than enjoying the scenery.

So what of Baedeker the man? He was born in Essen in Germany where his father was a printer and a bookseller and his first modest production was a guidebook to Koblenz. People found it helpful and he began to do the same for other places. The *Britannica* says, "His aim was to give the traveller the practical information necessary to enable him to dispense with paid guides. He checked the reliability of his publications by making incognito journeys and by consulting the best sources and experts. A notable feature of Baedeker's guides was the use of "stars" to indicate objects and views of special interest, as well as to designate reliable hotels. By the time of his death much of Europe had been covered by his guidebooks."

I wonder if he also traveled incognito so that people who made their living from guiding tourists would not gang up on him? His sons, Ernst, Karl and Fritz, took over from him and began publishing in French and English as well as German. By the early twentieth century Baedeker had become synonymous with guidebook ... and then other publishers, small and large, began to enter the field ...

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November 4: Eden Phillpotts
Colin Simpson

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Peter Haining in *The Art of Mystery & Detective Stories* wrote: “Murder on the railway was a popular theme with several early detective story writers, and Eden Phillpotts’ novel, *My Adventure in the Flying Scotsman* (1888), is both one of the earliest on the theme and most famous. Phillpotts, who is better known for his rural novels, did write several mysteries under the pen-name of Harrington Hext, and he played an important part in encouraging Agatha Christie to take up crime writing.”

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Agatha Christie wrote in *An Autobiography*, “My mother then suggested, rather hesitantly, that I might ask Eden Philpotts if he could give me help or advice. Eden Philpotts was then at the height of his fame. His novels of Dartmoor were celebrated. As it happened, he was a neighbour of ours, and a personal friend of the family. I was shy about it, but in the end agreed. Eden Philpotts was an odd-looking man, with a face more like a faun’s than an ordinary human being’s: an interesting face, with its long eyes turned up at the corners. He suffered terribly from gout, and often when we went to see him was sitting with his leg bound up with masses of bandages on a stool. He hated social functions and hardly ever went out; in fact he disliked seeing people. His wife, on the other hand, was extremely sociable – a handsome and charming woman, who had many friends. Eden Philpotts had been very fond of my father, and was also fond of my mother, who seldom bothered him with social invitations but used to admire his garden and his many rare plants and shrubs. He said that of course he would read Agatha’s literary attempt.

“I can hardly express the gratitude I feel to him. He could so easily have uttered a few careless words of well-justified criticism, and possibly discouraged me for life. As it was, he set out to help. He realized perfectly how shy I was and how difficult it was for me to speak of things. The letter he wrote contained very good advice.

‘Some of these things that you have written,’ he said, ‘are capital. You have a great feeling for dialogue. You should stick to ... natural dialogue. Try and cut all moralizations out of your novels; you are much too fond of them, and nothing is more boring to read. Try and leave your characters *alone*, so that *they* can speak for *themselves*, instead of always rushing in to tell them what they ought to say, or to explain to the reader what they mean by what they are saying. That is for the reader to judge for himself. You have two plots here, rather than one, but that is a beginner’s fault; you soon won’t want to waste plots in such a spend-free way. I am sending you a letter to my own literary agent, Hughes Massie. He will criticise this for you and tell you what chance it has of being accepted. I am afraid it is not easy to get a first novel accepted, so you mustn’t be disappointed. I should like to recommend you a course of reading which I think you will find helpful. Read De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater* – this will increase your vocabulary enormously – he used some very interesting words. Read *The Story of my Life* by Jefferys, for descriptions and a feeling for nature.”

Hughes Massie sent back her manuscript but suggested she write another book—which eventually she did. It became *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. But by the time she realised she really did need an agent Massie had died and it was his associate Edmund Cork who became her lifelong agent and friend. But she remembered Phillpotts by dedicating her novel *Peril at End House* to him and saying, “I shall always be grateful for his friendship and the encouragement he gave me many years ago.”

In fact Phillpotts’ reply to Agatha Christie’s naïve young request for advice is the sort of reply many young writers wish they had received at the beginning of their career. But my initial response was surprise that she had asked him about writing and publishing whodunits. My image of Phillpotts was of a writer like Howard Spring or perhaps H. R. Delderfield. Someone successful in a quite different field, in his case novels of rural life, and in fact these make up the bulk of his output and he

was passionate about preserving Dartmoor. But as soon as I read that little bit in Haining's book I thought 'Ah ha! So that was why!' She would almost certainly have come across *My Adventure in the Flying Scotsman*. She was quite likely familiar with his less well known mysteries such as *The Thing at Their Heels*, *Found Drowned*, or *The Red Redmaynes*. And hard on its heels came the second thought: is any of his work still around, perhaps as a reprint?

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While I was looking out for a Phillpotts novel I came across a short play he had written. I didn't know he wrote plays so I was curious to see if it was of bucolic surroundings or of murder and mayhem. The piece is called *The Carrier Pigeon*. Leslie Rees says of it, "Phillpotts is the playwright and novelist of Devon and may be considered typical of many writers who have exploited a "regional" vein in various areas of the English provinces. He was born in 1862 and was still living—and writing—in 1953. He began his career as a writer in the nineties. He has pictured the quaint and domestic side of West Country life. Sometimes it is too quaint and wordy and rather artificial, but in pieces like *The Carrier Pigeon* it is indeed acceptable. His most famous long play is *The Farmer's Wife*, which in London ran over 1200 performances. This tells of the great search of Farmer Sweetland for a wife. The "Mrs Sweetland" mentioned in *The Carrier Pigeon* is no doubt the successful lady. There is also a Miss Tapper in both plays.

"The old Devon song about the ride to Widdicombe Fair brought in a string of names, ending with "Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all". Among these names was Harry Hawke, perhaps the old villain of this text. Elias Cobleigh was, for all we know, a relation of Uncle Tom.

"*The Carrier Pigeon* was written about 1912."

(Phillpotts actually called one of his novels *Widcombe Fair*.)

It has only the three characters: Harry Hawke, an old reprobate, misogynistic, grumpy, a lifetime poacher; his wife Milly who has to put up with him as he lies dying; and the next-door-neighbour Elias Cobleigh. Harry takes up his old rifle and says 'You be safe enough—but, but—oh, Milly, I should dearly like to kill something afore I die! I don't mean you; but if 'twas only a blackbird, or a screech thrush, 'twould be summat. Ope the winder, there's a kind woman. The elm be right in the line of fire. I'll get a shot for sartain afore dark. There's often a rook do perch there flying home in the dimpsy light.'

Milly tries to talk him out of it. But Harry goes to the window, raises his rifle—and shoots his neighbour's valuable carrier pigeon dead—and exhausted with his effort he falls dead, leaving Milly to face their irate neighbour ...

*

In fact he tried many kinds of writing including fantasy and sci fi later in life including his aliens story *Saurus*. Perhaps this is why Julian Symons said his stories were "among the most ridiculous of the time". He saw no reason to confine his plots to the everyday and the banal. Perhaps Agatha Christie should have dedicated her Harley Quin stories to Eden Phillpotts. And I would like to think that other diffident young writers will be fortunate enough to know a man like Eden Phillpotts ...

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November 5: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox

November 6: Thomas Kyd (bap)

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Thomas Kyd holds a position as 'the grand old man' of Elizabethan Theatre, the 'father', the 'pioneer' but it is only by a series of chances that he holds any position at all. B. L. Joseph, introducing his play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, writes: "From the Restoration onwards *The Spanish Tragedy* was regarded as anonymous until in 1773 Hawkins noticed that Kyd is given as the author in Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (1612). This is the only external evidence for Kyd's authorship, but it is supported in modern opinion by the presence in the play of images which seem to be derived from *Cornelia*, the tragedy which he translated from Garnier, and which appeared in 1594. Contributory

evidence may be found in the tradition that Kyd wrote the lost play of *Hamlet* some time before 1589. As this is considered to be the source of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, it is significant that there are similarities between this latter play (especially the first Quarto) and *The Spanish Tragedy*.

"It has been usual to suggest that Kyd is the object of Nashe's attack in his Preface to Greene's *Menaphon* (1589). But modern scholars do not regard Nashe's reference to 'the Kid in Aesop' as directed at *The Spanish Tragedy*. He is now thought to be attacking a group of writers, among whom Kyd may not even have been included.

"When *The Spanish Tragedy* was written is uncertain. T.W. Baldwin suggests that it may have been as early as between 1582 and 1585; but Edwards gives 1592 as the probable year of publication.

"On the assumption that he is indeed the author of *The Spanish Tragedy*, Kyd has also been credited with having written *Soliman and Perseda*, as this has the same plot as the play which Hieronimo stages in order to have his revenge.

"Little is known for certain about the life of Kyd. He is mentioned by Ben Jonson in his dedicatory poem to Shakespeare in the First Folio (1623). Francis Meres declares Kyd to be 'among our best for tragedy' in *Palladia Tamis* (1598). He is also mentioned in Dekker's *A Knight's Conjuring* (1607), and in Heywood's *Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels* (1635). It is usual to identify the playwright with the Thomas Kyd, son of Francis Kyd, scrivener, entered 6 November 1558 in the baptismal register of St. Mary Woolnorth in the City of London. This Thomas Kyd was entered at Merchant Taylors' School in October 1565. The only other record of him is the legal renunciation by Francis Kyd's wife, Anna, of the administration of the estate of her deceased son, Thomas. As the act dissociated her from his debts as well as his property, it has been viewed as a confirmation of the suggestion that he was the dramatist. For Thomas Kyd, the playwright, certainly appears to have died in 1593 or 1594.

"All that is known for certain of Kyd's life is to be found in a letter which he wrote to Puckering, the Lord Keeper, probably in the summer of 1593. He speaks of having served for almost six years in the household of an unnamed lord (possibly Lord Strange), whose favour he had lost, and for whose plays he had written. It seems, too, that Kyd and Marlowe had shared lodgings about 1591, 'writing in one chamber'.

"The association had unpleasant consequences when the Privy Council ordered measures to be taken to find and punish the author of attacks on foreign workmen in London. A day later Kyd was imprisoned; search of the lodgings disclosed the 'atheistical disputations' which he declared were written not by him but by Marlowe, who was brought before the Privy Council on 18 May. It is not known how long Kyd was in prison, or whether his claim to have been tortured was true. He was apparently not convicted of the libellous writings or of atheism, but seems not to have regained his lord's favour.

"Nothing is recorded of Kyd's life after his declaration of his miserable circumstances in his dedication to the Countess of Suffolk of his translation, *Cornelia*, which was written before January 1594."

Lorenzo. My lord, though Bel-imperia seems thus coy,
Let reason hold you in your wonted joy:
In time the savage bull sustains the yoke,
In time all haggard hawks will stoop to lure,
In time small wedges cleave the hardest oak,
In time the flint is pierc'd with softest shower,
And she in time will fall from her disdain,
And rue the sufferance of your friendly pain.
Balthazar. No, she is wilder, and more hard withal,
Than beast, or bird, or tree, or stony wall.

But wherefore blot I Bel-imperia's name?
 It is my fault, not she, that merits blame.
 My feature is not to content her sight,
 My words are rude and work her no delight.
 The lines I send her are but harsh and ill,
 Such as do drop from Pan and Marsyas' quill.
 My presents are not of sufficient cost,
 And being worthless all my labour's lost.
 Yet might she love me for my valiancy,
 Ay, but that's slander'd by captivity.
 Yet might she love me to content her sire,
 Ay, but her reason masters his desire.
 Yet might she love me as her brother's friend,
 Ay, but her hopes aim at some other end.
 Yet might she love me to uprear her state,
 Ay, but perhaps she hopes some nobler mate.
 Yet might she love me as her beauty's thrall,
 Ay, but I fear she cannot love at all.
Lorenzo. My lord, for my sake leave these ecstasies,
 And doubt not but we'll find some remedy.
 Some cause there is that lets you not be lov'd:
 First that must needs be known and then remov'd.
 What if my sister love some other knight?
Balthazar. My summer's day will turn to winter's night.
Lorenzo. I have already found a stratagem,
 To sound the bottom of this doubtful theme.
 My lord, for once you shall be rul'd by me:
 Hinder me not whate'er you hear or see.
 By force or fair means will I cast about
 To find the truth of all this question out.

(Lorenzo: the Duke of Castile's son. Balthazar: son of the Viceroy of Portugal. Bel-imperia: Lorenzo's sister.)

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November 7: Helen Garner
 November 8: Bram Stoker
 November 9: Ivan Turgenev
 Anne Sexton
 November 10: Johann von Schiller
 November 11: Fyodor Dostoyevsky
 November 12: Janet Turner Hospital
 November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson
 November 14: Steele Rudd
 November 15: Marianne Moore
 Charlotte Mew

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David Leigh in *The Wilson Plot* offers this odd little sidelight on James Jesus Angleton: "He edited a little literary magazine at Yale — *Furioso* — until 1941. His last contribution to the magazine was in the summer of that year, when he commented on the poet Marianne Moore's discovery of

‘Imaginary gardens with red toads in them’. Angleton was not a very successful academic, but this interesting phrase could serve as a motto for the rest of his professional career.” I’m not sure why American poets were keen on red objects, red toads, red wheelbarrows, but it isn’t hard to see why they were red flags to a man who saw reds under every bed ...

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As I was looking for some of Denise Levertov’s poems I came, unsurprisingly, on some of Moore’s. Moore, Bishop, Levertov. They tend to get mentioned in a similar breath. The one who ‘escaped’, Sylvia Plath, gets biographies and collections and articles but the ones who remained at home in the USA receive far less attention. Perhaps this is not so actually within the USA but I have never come upon anyone here ready to champion them in the way they are sometimes prepared to champion Plath. Is this merely because they died peacefully in their beds? Their lives were not a long howl of angst. Or is it because they are seen as lesser poets?

In fact Denise Levertov is still alive. And Moore was a character, memorable to those who met her, if not so memorable in posterity’s terms. Ted Hughes wrote a poem, ‘The Literary Life’, which begins:

We climbed Marianne Moore’s narrow stair
To her bower-bird bric-à-brac nest, in Brooklyn.
Daintiest curio-relic of Americana.
Her talk, a needle
Unresisting—darning incessantly
Chain-mail with crewel-work flowers,
Birds and fish of the reef
In phosphor-bronze wire.
Her face, tiny American treen bobbin
On a spindle,
Her voice the flickering hum of the old wheel.
Then the coin, compulsory,
For the subway
Back to our quotidian scramble.
Why shouldn’t we cherish her?
Far from cherishing Hughes gets more and more dismissive.
I carried you back up.
And she, Marianne, tight, brisk,
Neat and hard as an ant,
Slid into the second or third circle
Of my Inferno.

It turns out that Moore has not done the right thing and praised the poems Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes have sent her, not least because they sent carbon copies, and then Moore has done something even worse: she has praised some of Plath’s poems after Plath’s suicide.

The image of a narrow petty ungenerous woman may be a realistic portrait of Moore but I doubt it. And carbon copies are what you keep for yourself; or were in the days before disks and memory sticks. You did not send them out to anybody and ask them to read and comment. I can remember the endless work when novel manuscripts came back dirty and dog-eared and had to be re-typed and I couldn’t help thinking: surely Plath could have typed up her couple of poems to send to Marianne Moore on fresh clean paper and a crisp ribbon? It would only have been a matter of two or three pages. And although it is nice when a well-known poet takes the time to read and comment I do not think any other poet has the right to expect that unsolicited material will be read and discussed. Poets are poets not editors or publishers.

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And while I had Marianne Moore (1887 – 1972) on my mind I came upon an interesting book called *Life Saving: Why We Need Poetry* which is a collection of the Poetry Hour readings put together and introduced by Irish writer Josephine Hart. In it she said of Marianne Moore: “In 1918 when she was thirty-one Marianne Moore moved to New York – ‘the savage’s romance’ that gave her accessibility to experience’. Since she worked for the New York Public Library and later edited the prestigious *The Dial*, a literary journal, which counted Yeats, Eliot and Pound among its contributors, it also gave her accessibility to virtually every major literary figure in America. Marianne Moore’s was a long and brilliant life in literature, in which the black-caped, three-corner-hatted, white-haired woman became an icon of American letters.”

But even if Hughes and Plath had been approaching Moore in her capacity as editor (and I think she was retired by then) you still don’t send carbons.

Moore said of herself, ‘I like country fairs, roller-coasters, merry-go-rounds, dog shows, museums, avenues of trees, old elms, vehicles, experiments in timing, like our ex-Museum of Science and Invention’s two roller-bearings in a gravity chute, synchronized with a ring-bearing, revolving vertically. I am fond of animals and take inordinate interest in mongooses, squirrels, crows, elephants.’ She wrote poems about such animals as pangolins and mules but, alas, the ones Josephine Hart chooses out are more conventional.

So here is one of them. ‘To Be Liked by You Would Be a Calamity’:

‘Attack is more piquant than concord,’ but when

You tell me frankly that you would like to feel

My flesh beneath your feet,

I’m all abroad; I can but put my weapon up, and

Bow you out.

Gesticulation—it is half the language.

Let unsheathed gesticulation be the steel

Your courtesy must meet,

Since in your hearing words are mute, which to my senses

Are a shout.

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November 16: Chinua Achebe

Joan Phipson

Colin Thiele

November 17: Auberon Waugh

Alison Lester

November 18: Rodney Hall

Margaret Atwood

November 19: Penelope Leach

November 20: Sir John Harington (d)

Deborah Barham

Nadine Gordimer

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Constance Holme wrote a short story collection called *The Wisdom of the Simple* in which she has a story called ‘A Bone for My Servante’. The squire of Killington has buried his wife and got the stonemason to include her details on the tombstone but then, instead of a quote from the Bible or something suitably grave and kind, he has put ‘A bone would contente my servante’. The squire’s wife was much loved and many people are angry. Her sister comes to see the Vicar to complain. The Vicar isn’t a strong character and he is very reluctant to confront the squire. But one day when he sees some of his flock giggling at the inscription he finally plucks up the courage to go and see the squire.

He suggests that something more conventional would have been appropriate. The squire doesn't argue, merely handing him a book with some marked pages and going over to look out the window.

"It contained, he found, an account of that lively Elizabethan, Sir John Harrington, and his appreciation of his dog; a loving testimony to loving-kindness which has survived for three centuries.

"In a letter to the young Prince Henry, heir to King James I, Sir John speaks of his 'rare dogge', and proposes to 'give a brief historie of his good deedes and straunge feats ... after what sorte his tacklinge was wherewith he did sojourn from my house at the Bathe to the Greenwich Palace, and deliver up to the cowrite there such matters as were entrusted to his care. This he hath often done, and came safe to the Bathe, or my house here at Kelstone, with goodlie returnes from such nobilitie as were pleased to emploie him. Neither must it be forgotten as how he once was sente with two charges of sack wine from the Bathe to my howse by my man Combe, and on his way the cordage did slackene, but my trustie bearer did now beare himself so wisely as to covertly hide one flasket in the rushes, and take the other in his teethe to the howse, after which he went forthe, and returnede with the other parte of his burden to dinner ...'

"This famous dog was stolen, and 'conveyed to the Spanish ambassadors,' who set so much store by him that they could not be got to part with him. Sir John, however, was able to prove that the dog was his, by means of certain tricks which he made him perform, and started to take him homewards. 'But, *jubes renovare dolorem*; I will now saie in what manner he died. As we traveled towards the Bathe, he leapede on my horses necke, and was more earneste in fawninge and courtinge my notice, than what I had observed for time backe; and, after my chidinge his disturbinge my passinge forwardes, he gave me some glances of such affection as moved me to cajole him; but, alas! he crept suddenly into a thorny brake, and died in a short time.'

"Towards the end of the letter comes the following passage:

'As I doubt not but your Highnesse would love my dogge, if not myselve, I have been thus tedious in his storie; and again saie, that of all the dogges near your father's court, not one hath more love, more diligence to please, or less paye for pleasinge, than him I write of; for verily *a bone would contente my servante*, when some expecte greater matters ...'

"The Vicar sat still for some time after he had finished reading the story, his thoughts busy with a dog-ghost of his own that followed him down the years. No matter what doubts he might feel in the future about that inscription, at that moment it seemed to him quite justified. How passionately, he thought, lifting his eyes to the figure still blocking the long window, do we run to the misunderstanding of our fellow-creatures! He saw now that the Squire had been well aware of his wife's value all the time. There had been no need of any officious intruder to tell him what angel had blessed his days. While she had lived, he had seemed indifferent to that special grace; but, when she was dead, he had chosen a lovely story to illustrate its memory. He must have chosen it, too, for its very ambiguity, so that none should guess at his hidden pain. The foolish might laugh as much as they liked; they could never reach to the truth behind ... 'A bone *did* contente my servante!' the Vicar found himself saying, almost with tears, recalling the lost beauty of that mind and character. To how many of us, he thought, with our egotism and greed, will it be possible to pay that homage at the Judgment?

"He got up, after a while, and went softly towards the door, feeling that only by going in silence could he show his acceptance and contrition. But, just as he reached it, the Squire spoke, though without turning.

'She liked dogs,' was all he said."

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His father, John Harrington, married a woman called Etheldreda who was said to be a daughter of Joanna Dyngley or Dobson and Henry VIII and to have been given to his tailor John Malte to raise as his daughter. Etheldreda Harrington had no children which might suggest that like others of Henry's children she was sickly; but I have my doubts about that paternity. Henry, whatever his many faults, wasn't out there putting the hard word on parlourmaids and laundry girls; and that her name isn't

known for sure suggests she wasn't a titled lady; Henry seems to have felt he owed his position *something*—unlike Charles II and others. But the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is wrong in giving Etheldreda as the mother of the son John. Etheldreda died and John Harrington then married in 1554 one of Elizabeth I's ladies-in-waiting, Isabella Markham, and had son John in 1561 and Elizabeth I agreed to be godmother. So it suggests that Etheldreda was born after Henry VIII met Anne Boleyn but before he married her. But as Henry, for a while, was besotted with Anne, would he have been sneaking out to the nether regions at court? Perhaps.

Sir John had a colourful career, being banished from court at one stage “till he had grown sober” and being banished another time for passing round bawdy bits from his translation of *Orlando Furioso* to Elizabeth's ladies. At one stage she reportedly called him “that saucy poet, my godson”, and he was one of those people who tried his hand at many things, letters, poems, stories, translations, but without ever excelling at anything. Yet clearly he was still finding readers in the twentieth century ... if Constance Holme was any guide ...

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November 21: Beryl Bainbridge

November 22: George Eliot

Mum Shirl (Colleen Shirley Perry)

November 23: Nigel Tranter

November 24: Garson Kanin

November 25: Rev. John Flynn

November 26: Charles Schulz

November 27: L. Sprague De Camp

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“For the Maya, time was born and had a name when the sky didn't exist and the earth had not yet awakened.

The days set out from the east and started walking.

The first day produced from its entrails the sky and the earth.

The second day made the stairway for the rain to run down.

The cycles of the sea and the land, and the multitude of things, were the work of the third day.

The fourth day willed the earth and the sky to tilt so that they could meet.

The fifth day decided that everyone had to work.

The first light emanated from the sixth day.

In places where there was nothing, the seventh day put soil; the eighth plunged its hands and feet in the soil.

The ninth day created the nether worlds; the tenth earmarked for them those who had poison in their souls.

Inside the sun, the eleventh day modeled stone and tree.

It was the twelfth that made the wind. Wind blew, and it was called spirit because there was no death in it.

The thirteenth day moistened the earth and kneaded the mud into a body like ours.

Thus it is remembered in Yucatán.”

‘Time’ by Eduardo Galeano in *Memory of Fire*.

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De Camp, with his wife Catherine, wrote a book called *Citadels of Mystery* which contains all the usual suspects including Atlantis. He also has this to say about the Mayas: “One sixteenth-century invader of the New World was Diego de Landa, a Spanish monk who came in with the conquistadores and rose to be bishop of Yucatán. The Mayan Indians over whom he presided had a considerable native literature, written on books made of long strips of tree-bark paper folded zigzag and bound between a

pair of wooden covers. From 1562 onwards, Landa, determined to wipe out “heathen” culture and substitute Christian European civilization, burned all of these books he could find. He explained:

“We found a large number of books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which there were not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction.” Landa could not read the books, but that did not stop him from condemning them. For this vandalism the fanatical priest was criticized by some of his own Spanish colleagues and has been consigned to his Christian Hell by scholars ever since.

Subsequently, Landa became interested in the Mayan culture and undertook to learn the Mayan writing. He assumed that the Mayas wrote with a phonetic alphabet like that of Spanish and Latin, whereas they really had an ideographic system of picture writing, something like the systems of early Egyptian and modern Chinese writing. Apparently, Landa’s method of research was to drag in some literate Maya, explain what he wanted, and bark:

“*Qué es A?*”

The poor Indian, no doubt shivering in his sandals for fear of being burned as a heretic, thought the terrible old man wanted the sign for *aac*, “turtle.” So he drew it—a turtle’s head.

“*Qué es B?*”

Now, *be* in Mayan means “road,” so the Maya drew the glyph for “road”—a pair of parallel lines representing a path, and between them the outline of a human footprint. And so on through the alphabet, until Landa had twenty-seven signs and a few compounds, which did not mean at all what he thought they did. He did, however, take down a correct explanation of the Mayan numerals.

In the 1560s Landa was recalled to Spain on charges of exceeding his authority. In preparing his defense (a successful one, we are sorry to say) he wrote a great treatise on the Mayan civilization: *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*, or *Account of the Affairs of Yucatán*. Therein he set forth his “Mayan alphabet.”

In this work, Landa also helped to spread the theory that the American Indians were of Jewish origin. This hypothesis—launched a few years earlier by the Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara—led an active life for over two centuries. Even William Penn adopted it. Some believers suggested that the Amerinds ought to go back to Palestine, but luckily for the peace of the world they showed no interest in doing so.

After Landa’s time, knowledge of Mayan writing was lost, because the Catholic priests continued their campaign against Mayan literature and because the Mayas themselves dropped their cumbersome ideographic writing for the easier Latin alphabet. Even Landa’s treatise disappeared. Only three Mayan books survive. These are the Dresden Codex (damaged in the Second World War), the Codex Perezianus in Paris, and the Tro-Cortesianus Codex in two sections (since reunited) in Madrid.

Mayan writing remained unreadable until in 1864 a diligent but erratic French scholar, Abbé Charles-Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg, found an abridgment of Landa’s *Relación* in the library of the Historical Academy of Madrid. When Brasseur saw Landa’s “Mayan alphabet” he was overjoyed, thinking that he had the key to Mayan writing. Eagerly he undertook to translate the Troano Codex, one of the halves of the Tro-Cortesianus, using this alphabet and an unfettered imagination.

What Brasseur got was a rambling account of a volcanic catastrophe, beginning: “The master is he of the upheaved earth, the master of the calabash, the earth upheaved of the tawny beast (at the place engulfed beneath the floods); it is he, the master of the upheaved earth, of the swollen earth, beyond measure, he the master ... of the basin of water.”

In this manuscript, Brasseur came upon a pair of symbols which he could not otherwise account for. Noting that they looked a little like Landa’s M and U, he inferred that the land destroyed by this convulsion was called “Mu.” That is where the name “Mu” came from.

Other scholars who tried to use this “key” got only gibberish. Now that Mayan writing has been partly deciphered, we know that Brasseur’s translation was completely wrong. The Troano Codex, it turns out, is not the story of an eruption but a treatise on Mayan astrology.”

Singlehandedly, Landa destroyed a literature.

Singlehandedly, Plato created the enduring myth of Atlantis. (And the De Camps are not immune to the fascination of speculating on a real base for Plato's story; setting their Atlantis in southern Spain.)

Singlehandedly, Brassuer created the mysterious continent of Mu.

I am tempted to say something about the Power of One but I cannot read about Landa's barbarism without wishing he had caught yellow fever the minute he landed on American soil.

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November 28: Nancy Mitford

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There was a large family of Mitford girls, six to be precise, and a number of them wrote books. Others made their fame by flirting with Nazism. But Nancy kept her feet firmly on the ground and her pen regularly dipped in vinegar. She wrote newspaper columns and did not mince her words.

"But the fate of animals is a nagging source of disquiet. Certain creatures such as wolves, rats and bluebottles seem to be regarded as inherently wicked, deserving the worst agonies, while others, such as rabbits, guinea-pigs, hens and pigs, are non-creatures, presumably insentient, to whom any treatment can justifiably be handed out.

I was horrified to read in an English paper an account of an interesting experiment carried out on six white hens and six brown ones to see which would die of thirst more quickly. Now death by thirst is an appalling thing: how could anybody, even a scientist, inflict it on these creatures for such a frivolous reason? I didn't write to the editor of the paper because I thought he would receive a deluge of letters; if he did, none was published. One has to be pious in science, as formerly in religion, and accept everything done in its name. Then we come to dogs. You don't have to be a sentimental old lady to know that dogs, having lived for so long with human beings, are more anthropomorphic than other creatures, so that they suffer mentally to a greater degree. They suffer terribly from boredom, for instance. Granted that so many experiments on dogs are necessary (we must try to be pious), I worry about the lives they lead while waiting for the worst. Unfortunately nobody is ever kind to an animal which is doomed — one sees that over and over again in the treatment of beasts on their way to the slaughterhouse. Presumably these dogs bark away their sad lives in prison until their heads are sawn off and sewn on to the bodies of other dogs so that, eventually, old businessmen will be able to have the limbs of young athletes."

1st February 1953; from her columns collected in *A Talent to Annoy*.

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The other day I thought I would look at the family in a little more detail and borrowed *The Mitford Girls* by Mary Lovell. I'm not sure if I would've liked Nancy or her other five sisters or her brother but I was full of admiration for Lovell's difficult juggling act to effectively provide brief biographies of a whole family. Nancy was the eldest daughter of minor peer, Lord Redesdale, then came Pamela, Thomas, Diana, Unity, Jessica and Deborah. Several of the family moved to the extreme right, Diana married Sir Oswald Mosley, Unity hero-worshipped Hitler, and others went to the left, Jessica becoming a member of the Communist Party and Nancy bringing an astringent eye to a milder commitment to socialism.

Her sister Jessica said of her "Nancy was too sharp-tongued and sarcastic to be anyone's Favourite Sister for long" and their mother liked to say "There is a small knife concealed in each of Nancy's letters". But Nancy and her sisters all regretted and resented to some degree their failure to be given an adequate education. Tom went conventionally to Oxford. The girls got chaotic and ad hoc moments of schooling at home or in small establishments. Despite this several of the girls managed to become best-selling authors. Jessica had a major success with *The American Way of Death*, a sharp and witty look at American funeral practices (of which Carey and Sorensen in *The Penguin Book of Dying* say, "Her exposé of the grief industry alerted us to the increasing potential for commercial exploitation

of death in a society that is both fragmented and homogenised by communications media”), Diana had success with her autobiographical writings and her biography of the Duchess of Windsor, and Nancy as well as her popular columns had best-sellers with semi-autobiographical novels such as *Love in a Cold Climate* and her spoof of aristocratic manners and habits in *Noblesse Oblige*.

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November 29: C. S. Lewis

Louisa May Alcott

November 30: Mark Twain

Jonathon Swift

Adeline Yen Mah

John Toland

John Dickson Carr

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“The period ushered in the fiendish brilliance of John Dickson Carr, who devised more ways to enter and leave a locked room than anyone before or since” according to John Curran in *Agatha Christie’s Secret Notebooks*. The ‘period’ is what is sometimes called the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, roughly the 1920s and 1930s, though it might be argued that we are currently seeing a massive resurgence in the genre.

And unlike Christie’s books which regularly get reprinted it is getting quite difficult to find a John Dickson Carr. Except for his long short story ‘The Third Bullet’ in *Locked Room Puzzles* edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin Greenberg I could find none in bookstores or on library shelves and had to order two from the library’s stack. I wondered if they would now seem to modern readers impossibly dated. But then Christie is full of parlourmaids and people who ‘had’ to resort to murder because it was not possible to divorce a spouse who was certifiably insane. Or was his writing pompous, over-wordy, pedantic, and his plots hard to believe?

It was a long time since I last read a Gideon Fell (who was based on G. K. Chesterton) and I was quite looking forward to the arrival of my chosen two, *He Who Whispers* and *Patrick Butler for the Defence*, (and he had a talent for catchy titles, *The Blind Barber*, *The Emperor’s Snuff Box*, *The Sleeping Sphinx* and more; it was quite hard to choose) but I think I understand better now why Carr doesn’t get regularly reprinted. Both books were readable and clever but they lacked something.

I have since pondered on this trying to pin down that vague sense of disappointment. I think I can suggest three reasons:

Women tend to be in the majority as mystery readers and Carr’s books are not tough guy thrillers, though they have the occasional fight, yet they *are* blokey. None of the female characters are particularly interesting or intriguing or amusing.

The mystery of a death in a locked room is not sufficient. The how of the death can never quite make up for a less-than-intriguing why—and the villains in both books were tedious and I didn’t feel that Carr had done the groundwork sufficiently to make their unmasking gripping and believable. Nor was it really possible to see just how Gideon Fell or Patrick Butler leapt to all their conclusions.

The dialogue and the narrative are competently written but at times I found the writing pedantic and the plotting lacking in direction. Of course I often think this about other writers too. But in a world where mysteries are major sellers, and new writers come on stream every week, it takes something special to justify a reprint.

Yet Carr’s reputation for his locked room mysteries is there for ever. No one else has ever had the same enduring fascination with this curious little sub-genre within the wider mystery genre.

Carr was born in Unionstown, Pennsylvania, in 1906 but spent quite a lot of his writing life in the UK. He wrote short stories, pulp fiction, non-mysteries, a biography, but it was his ‘impossible’ mysteries which earned him his place in the pantheon of Golden Age writers.

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December 1: Max Stout
December 2: Ann Patchett
December 3: Joseph Conrad
December 4: Rainer Maria Rilke
Thomas Carlyle

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I knew Thomas Carlyle was a Scotsman and that his wife's name was Jane and that they lived in London. Not a lot to explain why he seems to float in and out of the memoirs and lives of many 19th century British artists and writers. What did he actually do? What did he actually write? And is it worth remembering? While these thoughts were vaguely wandering round I came upon his name listed as a contributor to *The Quaker Reader*. This seemed rather puzzling. He wasn't a Quaker. And I wasn't aware of any particular connection and certainly not in the way that people like Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce found themselves in the company of Quakers in the anti-slavery movement ...

It is a quote from his *Sartor Resartus*, ‘“Perhaps the most remarkable incident in Modern History,” says Teufelsdröckh, “is not the Diet of Worms, still less the Battle of Austerlitz, Waterloo, Peterloo, or any other Battle; but an incident passed carelessly over by most Historians, and treated with some degree of ridicule by others; namely, George Fox’s making to himself a suit of Leather. This man, the first of the Quakers and by trade a Shoemaker, was one of those, to whom, under ruder or purer form, the Divine Idea of the Universe is pleased to manifest itself; and, across all the hulls of Ignorance and earthly Degradation, shine through, in unspeakable Awfulness, unspeakable Beauty, on their souls: who therefore are rightly accounted Prophets, God-possessed; or even Gods, as in some periods it has chanced. Sitting in his stall; working on tanned hides, amid pincers, paste-horns, rosin, swine-bridles, and a nameless flood of rubbish, this youth had, nevertheless, a Living Spirit belonging to him; also an antique Inspired Volume, through which, as through a window, it could look upwards, and discern its celestial Home. The task of a daily pair of shoes, coupled even with some prospect of victuals, and an honourable Mastership in Cordwainery, and perhaps the post of Third-borough in his Hundred, as the crown of long faithful sewing—was nowise satisfaction enough to such a mind; but ever amid the boring and hammering, came tones from that far country, came Splendours and Terrors; for this poor Cordwainer, as we said, was a Man; and the Temple of Immensity, wherein as Man he had been sent to minister, was full of holy mystery to him.” ’

Certainly George Fox wore leather trousers at times, for their greater wearing power, and was sometimes called ‘the Man in Leather’n Breeches’ but it wasn't a suit. And the editor of *The Quaker Reader*, Jessamyn West, writes, “At first thought, Carlyle seems the most un-Quakerly of men. The very look of a page of his writing appears anti-Quaker. This is because the later, pietistic, conforming Quaker has blotted out the image of the earlier, iconoclastic Quaker. For this earlier breed of friend, Carlyle had much sympathy, and he shared a good many of his characteristics; it is not too fanciful to think of Fox as a Carlyle with a reliable digestive system, or of Carlyle as a Fox who never had a vision of Pendle Hill. And the cannonade of Carlyle's prose would have been admirable for purposes of seventeenth-century controversy. Carlyle, it has been said, “preached the gospel of silence in forty volumes.” Some of the Quakers approached this record.

“Fox squared very well with many of Carlyle's theories of the Hero, theories Fox would have denounced. And Carlyle believed in what Fox worked and suffered for: the death, in Carlyle's words, of slavery, world-worship and the Mammon-god.”

“Carlyle is a slipshod reporter of the facts of Fox's exterior life. We have no reason to believe Fox made his own breeches. And he certainly never told a parson, as Carlyle reports, “My fat-faced friend, thou art a damned lie. Thou art pretending to serve God Almighty, and are really serving the devil.” But Carlyle understood the interior facts of the Religious Society of Friends, and he, like Fox, preached “a righteous intolerance of the devil.” ”

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John Kenyon wrote in *The History Men*, “Thomas Carlyle was Scotland’s last great gift to English history, and he was the first of the great Victorian prophets – in the Hebraic sense of that word, meaning self-styled gurus and teachers who denounced the sins of their generation and called for a return to older values or the substitution of new. Had he not lost his faith, and his vocation for the ministry, he would have emerged, no doubt, as one of the ayatollahs of Scottish Calvinism. (Strangely enough, he lost his faith after reading Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, when he was a young schoolteacher at Kirkcaldy.) As it was, he eked out a penurious existence for many years on the fringes of London publishing, writing occasional articles for the reviews and translations from the German. One of these was Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, which gained the author’s enthusiastic approval. At intervals he was forced to retreat to Scotland, to his father’s farm near Dumfries, or that of his in-laws at Craigenputtock, East Lothian. It was not until 1834, when he was nearly forty, that he settled for good at 5 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea (now No. 24).

“His difficulty in establishing himself is not surprising when we contemplate the impenetrability of Carlyle’s writing – his bizarre vocabulary, his contorted syntax and rhetorical violence – not to mention the wild exaggeration with which most of his views were expressed. He was unique amongst nineteenth-century historians in that he rejected the Enlightenment and the Ancien Regime alike, and at the same time rejected Reform. Nor was this violence confined to his published work. Here he responds to an invitation to visit a friend of his in Yorkshire in 1821: ‘York to me is like a city of the mind. In my dreams, I have heard the Humber loud that bears the Scythian name, and seen the field of Marston Moor with the *iron bands* of Cromwell, when the genius of England awoke, descending like reapers to the harvest of death.’ Even so, this is clarity and balance itself compared with much of his later writing, which gives the impression, in the words of one modern critic (and admirer), that he was ‘trying to discover what he wanted to say by the familiar process of writing it down first and then seeing what it meant’. (Monckton Milnes once commented that Carlyle’s ideas might be dangerous if turned into the vernacular’.) Nevertheless, his books are still read, and he has commanded the respect of historians as diverse as James Anthony Froude, G. M. Trevelyan and Hugh Trevor-Roper. To ease the pangs of unrequited love, Trevelyan once spent a weekend at the Bush Hotel in Ecclefechan, Carlyle’s birthplace, re-reading *Sartor Resartus*.”

Sartor Resartus was the first book he wrote but his *The French Revolution* was his first published book in the UK—and this too had a difficult gestation and birth. He lent the first half to John Stuart Mill to read and Mill’s maid accidentally burnt it. This does raise questions about the Mill household. But Carlyle went back to work and rewrote it and got it published. Even despite this setback a ‘cannonade’ sums up its style rather well.

‘Ye have roused her, then, ye Emigrants and Despots of the world. France is roused! Long have ye been lecturing and tutoring this poor Nation, like cruel, uncalled-for pedagogues, shaking over her your ferules of fire and steel: it is long that you have pricked and filliped and affrighted her, there as she sat helpless in her dead cerements of a Constitution, you gathering in on her from all lands, with your armaments and plots, your invadings and truculent bullyings; - and lo now, ye have pricked her to the quick, and she is up, and her blood is up.’

And so on—and on—without time for a breath. Was this what made Carlyle popular as an historian in his time? Because his histories were about passion and engagement rather than the careful recitation of recorded facts. Did people feel they were seeing a revolution unfold and that they were caught up in it willy-nilly?

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Carlyle begins *Sartor Resartus* which translates as The Tailor Retailored, ‘Considering our present advanced state of culture, and how the Torch of Science has now been brandished and borne about, with more or less effect, for five thousand years and upwards; how, in these times especially, not only the Torch still burns, and perhaps more fiercely than ever, but innumerable Rush-lights and

Sulphur matches, kindled thereat, are also glancing in every direction, so that not the smallest cranny or doghole in Nature or Art can remain unilluminated,—it might strike the reflective mind with some surprise that hitherto little or nothing of a fundamental character, whether in the way of Philosophy or History, has been written on the subject of Clothes.

‘Our Theory of Gravitation is as good as perfect: Lagrange, it is well known, has proved that the Planetary System, on this scheme, will endure for ever; Laplace, still more cunningly, even guesses that it could not have been made on any other scheme. Whereby, at least, our nautical Logbooks can be better kept; and water-transport of all kinds has grown more commodious. Of Geology and Geognosy we know enough: what with the labours of our Werners and Huttons, what with the ardent genius of their disciples, it has come about that now, to many a Royal Society, the Creation of a World is little more mysterious than the cooking of a Dumpling; concerning which last, indeed, there have been minds to whom the question, *How the apples were got in*, presented difficulties. Why mention our disquisitions on the Social Contract, on the Standard of Taste, on the Migrations of the Herring? Then, have we not a Doctrine of Rent, a Theory of Value; Philosophies of Language, of History, of Pottery, of Apparitions, of Intoxicating Liquors? Man’s whole life and environment have been laid open and elucidated; scarcely a fragment or fibre of his Soul, Body, and Possessions, but has been probed, dissected, distilled, desiccated, and scientifically decomposed: our spiritual Faculties, of which it appears there are not a few, have their Stewarts, Cousins, Royer Collards: every cellular, vascular, muscular Tissue glories in its Lawrences, Majendies, Bichâts.

‘How, then, comes it, may the reflective mind repeat, that the grand Tissue of all Tissues, the only real *Tissue*, should have been quite overlooked by Science—the vestural Tissue, namely, of woollen or other Cloth; which Man’s Soul wears as its outmost wrappage and overall; wherein his whole other Tissues are included and screened, his whole Faculties work, his whole Self lives, moves, and has its being? For if, now and then, some straggling broken-winged thinker has cast an owl’s-glimpse into this obscure region, the most have soared over it altogether heedless; regarding Clothes as a property, not an accident, as quite natural and spontaneous, like the leaves of trees, like the plumage of birds. In all speculations they have tacitly figured man as a *Clothed Animal*; whereas he is by nature a *Naked Animal*; and only in certain circumstances, by purpose and device, masks himself in Clothes. Shakespeare says, we are creatures that look before and after: the more surprising that we do not look round a little, and see what is passing under our very eyes.

‘But here, as in so many other cases, Germany, learned, indefatigable, deep-thinking Germany comes to our aid.’

Because it is a Professor Teufelsdröckh who has written *Die Kleider ihr Werden und Wirken* or Clothes, their Origin and Influence. This is the thread which runs through the book although Carlyle treats him more as a peg to hang his ideas, opinions, anecdotes, allusions, comparisons, and digressions from. It is not even certain that the Professor exists—and if he does he is a subversive figure, believing a button is a button and a cloak a cloak regardless of whether they adorn the clothes of dukes or poor boys.

He also says of the Professor, ‘George Fox’s “perennial suit,” with all that it held, has been worn quite into ashes for nigh two centuries; why, in a discussion on the *Perfectibility of Society*, reproduce it now? Not out of blind sectarian partisanship: Teufelsdröckh himself is no Quaker; with all his pacific tendencies, did we not see him, in that scene at the North Cape, with the Archangel Smuggler, exhibit fire-arms?’

But the thing which makes this unrelieved torrent of words readable, even enjoyable at times, is the underlying sense of the absurd and the humorous ...

I wonder if he brought the same sense to his history of the French Revolution?

“Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the future of the world.”

Thomas Carlyle.

* * * * *

December 5: Kaz Cooke
December 6: Evelyn Underhill
December 7: Willa Cather
December 8: James Thurber
December 9: John Milton

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I found this little insight in *The Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes*: “The agreement, still preserved in the national museum, between the author, ‘John Milton, gent. of the one parte, and Samuel Symons, printer, of the other parte’, is among the curiosities of our literary history. The curiosity consists not so much in the illustrious name appended (not in autograph) to the deed, as in the contrast between the present fame of the book and the waste-paper price at which the copyright is being valued. The author received £5 down, was to receive a second £5 when the first edition should be sold, a third £5 when the second, and a fourth £5 when the third edition should be gone. Milton lived to receive the second £5, and no more: £10 in all, for *Paradise Lost*.”

When I came to think on it, authors with their million dollar advances for a book which is forgotten in a couple of years, that kind of thinking, I decided there were three basics driving our economy when it comes to the book trade:

1. The cost of the ingredients in a product, including time and labour.
2. Questions of supply and demand. A copy of that first edition is very much more valuable than a reprint simply because of its rarity, though the words on the page are the same.
3. The intangibles. A famous name to write or promote or produce a preface. A hint of scandal. Something banned or forbidden. Curiosity. Fame in another field.

But books follow a mysterious trajectory of their own. The printer follows No I but it doesn't apply to the author. There are old books which are extremely rare but nobody particularly wants them. And banning a book isn't enough to make it a success, despite what is often written about *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. It was only one in a long line of books banned in Britain and most of the others have been forgotten ...

* * * * *

John Toland wrote what was possibly the first biography of Milton. His *Life of Milton*. He was an Irishman, born in Derry in 1670, and he, deliberately or not, courted controversy.

“Many High Churchmen deliberately used the cult of Charles I, particularly in their 30 January sermons, to expose the inconsistencies of the Whig position, to express their own unease at the Revolution of 1688, which most of them nevertheless felt obliged to accept in legal terms, and to intensify their campaign against the Dissenters, who had been granted freedom of worship in 1689, but who could plausibly be associated with the regicide Puritans. Nor were the Whig leaders helped by their own left wing, who insisted on applauding republicanism and justifying regicide. Thus the memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, notorious regicide, republican and general, were drastically remodeled and abridged for publication in 1698 by the Whig publicist John Toland. They provoked a flurry of outraged comment, as did Toland's own biography of Milton the following year, which was regarded as unduly laudatory of a man who had done so much to justify regicide. But in 1700 Toland went on to publish a new edition of Harrington's *Oceana*, that notorious blueprint for a republican utopia, which had first appeared in 1657.”

John Kenyon in *The History Men*.

Toland was not afraid of controversy. His first book, *Christianity not Mysterious* in 1696, suggested that faith was not necessary to see the value in the New Testament. It could be accepted as a straightforward account and that mystery was brought into it by the church so as to keep people subservient to the clergy who alone could be expected to have pierced that sense of mystery. I had mixed feelings about this. I like the practical straightforward aspects of Christianity but I also love the

mystery, the sense of something beyond the obvious and the everyday. In 1698 he brought out his *Life of Milton* and followed it with *Amyntor, or a Defence of Milton's Life*. He turned to, mainly, religious pamphlets after that including *Origines Judaicae* (Origins of the Jews) in which he gave their origins as Egyptian. Without being able to read it I'm not sure if he meant in the practical sense of intermarriage and time spent there (clearly if a few dozen Israelite men went to Egypt and many thousands came home centuries later then they must have found Egyptian wives and been influenced by living those many generations in Egypt) or did he mean that all the peoples of the Near East must obviously have reached there via Egypt? He brought out another pamphlet *Tetradymus* to put forward natural explanations for Old Testament miracles and *Pantheisticon* which was a Christian liturgy but incorporating pagan texts. It is not hard to see why some of his work was banned nor why other people wanted to find it and read it. But controversy is not enough to stop you from being forgotten.

And I find I was incorrect in my assumption. Richard Bradford in *The Complete Critical Guide to John Milton* writes, "Biographical accounts of Milton began to appear soon after his death, principally: Aubrey (1681), Skinner (1687), Wood (1691), Phillips (1694) and Toland (1698). Generally, these relied on three sources: interviews and word of mouth anecdotes; passages from Milton's own pamphlets in which he digresses into autobiography, particularly *The Reason of Church Government* (1642) and *Defensio secunda* (1654); known but disputable accounts of seventeenth-century politics and the Civil War. Phillips had a special advantage in that he was Milton's nephew and from the 1640s onwards his pupil and close acquaintance. His is the most cited of the early biographies, and, despite Phillips' occasionally careless deployment of dates and chronology, remained the principal source for most surveys before Masson (1859 - 94). Apart from Skinner, all of the above were reprinted in Darbishire (1932)." So I could look for Darbishire—but it seems unlikely Toland had anything new and remarkable to say about his subject. The interest might rather be in the way he interpreted his material. He appears to have been a man of independent mind . . .

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Milton took time out from losing and regaining paradise to honour Shakespeare. But had he actually known Shakespeare? I knew Milton had been an old man by the time of Cromwell and Shakespeare had been dead for more than twenty years. But had their lives overlapped in more than time?

What needs my *Shakespear* for his honour'd Bones,
 The labour of an age in piled Stones,
 Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
 Under a Star-ypointing *Pyramid*?
 Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,
 What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
 Thou in our wonder and astonishment
 Hast built thy self a live-long Monument.
 For whilst to th'shame of slow-endeavouring art,
 Thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart
 Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,
 Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,
 Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving,
 Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;
 And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
 That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.

John Milton 'An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatic Poet, W. Shakespeare'.

* * * * *

December 10: Emily Dickinson
 December 11: Naguib Mahfouz

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

December 12: Clarice Lispector

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When we think a thought, and thinking is often on my mind, we effectively prefigure the thought when we decide to think a thought; and so each pre-thought is preceded by a pre-thought and so on back into ... into what? Where and when does a thought effectively begin? We just say vaguely “I had the thought I might—” It effectively fudges the issue. I always want to give a hollow laugh when I read something like ‘Research shows that adolescent boys think about sex 189 times per day’. (Or whatever.) If you ask a boy to note down every time he thinks about sex in a day of course the total will be unrealistically high. If you asked him to note down how many times he thought about apples or cars or kookaburras he would find himself thinking about them more than he might otherwise. If you sent him off to climb Mt Everest he would suddenly cease thinking about sex at all and start thinking about cold winds and safety ropes ...

This idea that every thought is prefigured and prefigurations are preceded ... ad infinitum ... resonated with me as I began on the first page of Clarice Lispector’s *The Hour of the Star*: “Everything in the world began with a yes. One molecule said yes to another molecule and life was born. But before prehistory there was the prehistory of prehistory and there was the never and there was the yes. It was ever so, I do not know why, but I do know that the universe never began.”

And “How does one start at the beginning, if things happen before they actually happen?”

* * * * *

The name Clarice Lispector intrigued me long before I came on one of her novels. I couldn’t begin to slot her into a place, a time, even a continent. So it came as a surprise to learn that she was Brazilian, of “Jewish-Slavonic ancestry”, and that *The Hour of the Star*, her last book, contains some of her nostalgia for her childhood in Recife in north-eastern Brazil and for the innocent young girls who dream of going to Rio as though it cannot help but be the next best thing to Paradise ... She uses a male narrator for the life of her unfortunate young woman, thin, sallow, ignorant and naïve, a hopeless typist, a hopeless romantic, a nonentity, “a creature from nowhere with the expression of someone who apologizes for occupying too much space”, but although Macabéa invites pity she is not sorry for herself or her limited life or her poverty. Not even when her life ends prematurely when she is hit by a car, a yellow Mercedes.

But then the book is only marginally about her. The narrator, Rodrigo, spends much of the book exploring his own feelings and motivations and philosophy about story-telling. Giovanni Pontiero says, “*The Hour of the Star* is not Clarice Lispector’s first attempt to clarify her approach to the craft of fiction. Many of the concepts expressed here have been voiced before in works like *The Foreign Legion* and *Family Ties*. There is, nevertheless, a bolder attempt in this last book to analyse in greater detail the mysterious nature of inspiration and the elusive process of growth and enhancement. In *The Hour of the Star*, Clarice Lispector is intent upon linking the structure of the narrative with a subtle exploration of the creative process as seen by the artist.”

This has its value yet I would much rather have had more story about Macabéa ...

So where does Clarice Lispector fit into the Brazilian canon? And how has her reputation fared since her death in 1977? While thoughts about Lispector were on my mind someone donated several *Literary Reviews* to a stall and the February 2010 edition reviewed a new biography of Lispector, *The Hour of the Star: Why This World: A Biography of Clarice Lispector* by Benjamin Moser. It turns out that Clarice was born while her Jewish parents were fleeing from the Ukraine in 1920. They settled in Recife in north-eastern Brazil where her first book *Near to the Wild Heart* was published when she was only twenty-three. She married a Brazilian diplomat. Her next books were less popular. She was intrigued by both the occult and psychotherapy; a knowledge which I felt helped a little in understanding her way of writing.

The reviewer, Patricia Duncker, writes, “I first encountered Lispector (1920 – 77) in the late 1970s, when she was taken up and celebrated by exponents of *écriture féminine* in France. Hélène Cixous declared that Lispector embodied what Kafka would have been if he had been a woman, ‘if Rilke had been a Jewish Brazilian born in the Ukraine. If Rimbaud had been a mother ... If Heidegger could have ceased being German.’ In one of her lectures in 1984 Cixous declared that she would no longer continue to give her literary seminars ‘if a sufficiently wide world was reading Clarice Lispector’. Lispector is a constant point of reference for Cixous, in whom the writer has found her most devoted reader. Lispector’s early work has been compared to Woolf, Sartre, Proust and Joyce, none of whom she had read until she found herself associated with their influence. Her writing, notoriously difficult to translate from her distinctive, innovative Brazilian Portuguese, has attracted far more serious critical attention in France than in Britain. English translations are hard to come by, and Hans Publishing are to be congratulated on reissuing Gregory Rabassa’s translation of her fourth novel, *The Apple in the Dark* (*A Maçã no Escuro*, 1961), to coincide with their publication of Benjamin Moser’s enthralling biography.”

It seems you will also need to read his biography to find how the Brazilian world of letters views her ... unless you happen to have a literary Brazilian friend ...

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December 13: Laurens van der Post

Heinrich Heine

December 14: Rosemary Sutcliffe

December 15: Edna O’Brien

Muriel Rukeyser

December 16: Jane Austen

December 17: Francis Buckland

December 18: H. H. ‘Saki’ Munro

Christopher Fry

Francis Thompson

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One Saturday I bought a copy of Francis Thompson’s poems from a market stall merely out of curiosity: what else did he write besides ‘The Hound of Heaven’ and were his other poems equally dynamic and exciting? The answer sadly is no. Some of his poems are immensely clever and intricate in their structure, his vocabulary is very impressive. Yet there is something archaic and deadening about many of his poems. Take this part of his long piece in ‘Sister Songs’ ...

And is my song sweet, as they say?
 ’Tis sweet for one whose voice has no reply,
 Save silence’s sad cry:
 And are its plumes a burning bright array?
 They burn for an unincarnated eye.
 A bubble, charioteered by the inward breath
 Which, ardent for its own invisible lure,
 Urges me glittering to aërial death,
 I am rapt towards that bodiless paramour;
 Blindly the uncomprehended tyranny
 Obeying of my heart’s impetuous might.
 The earth and all its planetary kin,
 Starry buds tangled in the whirling hair
 That flames round the Phœbean wassailer,
 Speed no more ignorant, more predestined flight,
 Than I, *her* viewless tresses netted in.

And so on for page after page ...

* * * * *

But while I was putting this book aside with several other poetry books I had got from stalls and wondering which op-shop might like them (and the honest answer would probably be ‘none’ as old books of poetry do not fly off op-shop shelves) I thought how nice it would be to have a little Poetry Centre of some kind, a library, a place to go for intimate readings, a place for mutual help and support for local poets ... not as a mere offshoot of more important novel and non-fiction writing but somewhere special in its own right ...

* * * * *

Ironically, I think the poem I liked best from the book (beside ‘The Hound’) was his little poem of dedication to Wilfrid and Alice Meynell because of its sincerity and simplicity:

If the rose in meek duty
 May dedicate humbly
To her grower the beauty
 Wherewith she is comely;
If the mine to the miner
 The jewels that pined in it,
Earth to diviner
 The springs he divined in it;
To the grapes the wine-pitcher
 Their juice that was crushed in it,
Viol to its witcher
 The music lay hushed in it;
If the lips may pay Gladness
 In laughters she wakened,
And the heart to its sadness
 Weeping unslakened,
If the hid and sealed coffer,
 Whose having not his is,
To the losers may proffer
 Their finding—here this is;
Their lives if all livers
 To the Life of all living,—
To you, O dear givers!
 I give your own giving.

The Meynells were a London couple, writers in their own right, but more likely to be remembered now for their kindness to writers such as Thompson. Alice was a poet and married Wilfrid in 1877 when he was editor of the *Weekly Register*. They had eight children and together launched the magazine *Merry England* which became a vehicle for promoting Thompson’s poetry. He lived with them for a time in his shiftless alcoholic life and appears to have been happy there.

Curiously the *Britannica* says of Alice’s now almost forgotten poetry, “Meynell’s verse is marked by its simple vocabulary and religious sincerity, and it communicates a gentle mournfulness and a sense of the passing of time. Her poetry was so popular that she was mentioned as a possible poet laureate upon the death of Tennyson.”

The child not yet is lulled to rest.
 Too young a nurse, the slender Night
So laxly holds him to her breast
 That throbs with flight.

He plays with her and will not sleep.

For other playfellows she sighs;
An unmaternal fondness keep
Her alien eyes.

‘Cradle-Song at Twilight’

Black mountains pricked with pointed pine
A melancholy sky.
Out-distanced was the German vine,
The sterile fields lay high.
From swarthy Alps I traveled forth
Aloft; it was the north, the north;
Bound for the Noon was I

I seemed to breast the streams that day;
I met, opposed, withstood
The northward rivers on their way,
My heart against the flood—
My heart that pressed to rise and reach,
And felt the love of altering speech,
Of frontiers, in its blood.

But O the unfolding South! the burst
Of summer! O to see
Of all the southward brooks the first!
The traveling heart went free
With endless streams; that strife was stopped;
And down a thousand vales I dropped,
I flowed to Italy.

‘The Watershed’

‘Gentle mournfulness’?

* * * * *

December 19: Jean Genet

December 20: Zoe Fairbairns

December 21: Frank Moorhouse

Benjamin Disraeli

December 22: Edward Arlington Robinson

December 23: Robert Barclay

December 24: Matthew Arnold

Mary Higgins Clark

December 25: Rebecca West

Robert Walker

* * * * *

Robert Walker of the Kokatha people in South Australia was beaten to death by prison officers in Fremantle Prison on Tuesday August 28 1984. The coroner called it death by misadventure. Excuse me while I express some amazement and indignation—!!!!

Have you ever been ordered to strip
Before half a dozen barking eyes,
Forcing you against a wall —
ordering you to part your legs and bend over?

Have you ever had a door slammed
Locking you out of the world,
Propelling you into timeless space —
To the emptiness of silence

Have you ever laid on a wooden bed —
In regulation pyjamas,
And tried to get a bucket to talk —
In all seriousness?

Have you ever begged for blankets
From an eye staring through a hole in the door,
Rubbing at the cold air digging into your flesh —
Biting down on your bottom lip, while mouthing
‘Please, Sir’?

Have you ever heard screams in the middle of the night,
Or the sobbings of a stir-crazy prisoner,
Echo over and over again in the darkness —
Threatening to draw you into its madness?

Have you ever rolled up into a human ball
And prayed for sleep to come?
Have you ever laid awake for hours
Waiting for morning to mark yet another day of
Being alone?

If you’ve ever experienced even one of these,
Then bow your head and thank God.
For it’s a strange thing indeed —
This rehabilitation system!

“Solitary Confinement”

Mary Duroux of the Thungutti people of central coast NSW.
Dyirringan is lost to the tribes of the Yuin,
I am filled with remorse and I weep at the ruin
O beautiful words that were softly spoken,
Now lay in the past, all shattered and broken,
We forgot it somehow when English began,
The sweet sounding dialect of Dyirringan.
If we’re to be civilized whom can we blame,
To have lost you, my language, is my greatest shame.
“Lament for a Dialect”

Kevin Gilbert in *Inside Black Australia* included his own poem:
Remember the hate
the mortality rate
the tumbledown shacks and the rain
the children you bury

the pain that you hide
 the despair and denial out-back
 you're down and you're beaten
 a glimmer of hope
 like a sigh on the wind passes by
 you cannot explain
 but
 you're *their* problem again
 by your stubborn refusal to die
 your water-bag's empty
 the Miners jeer by
 their Toyota dust burns your throat
 November Elections
 the issues are Black
 there's iron where your God-heart won't bend
 remember the rivers of water
 your chant
 falls dead with the horsemen in sight
 you'll 'smell off' the cattle
 'you cannot drink here'
 your tribesmen go thirsty this night
 your tribesmen go thirsting this night.

"Same Old Problem"

"I was born on the banks of the Lachlan (Kalara) River at Condobolin on 10th July 1933. I am the youngest of eight children born to Jack Gilbert and Rachel Naden. From the early 1930s and up to the mid 1950s, I was on the receiving end of White Australia's apartheid system. We were not allowed to be in 'town' later than 30 minutes after the last movie was over. We were separated from the white audience by a roped enclosure, not allowed into hospital dormitories, but kept out on the verandahs of the hospital known as the 'boong' ward where pillows, sheets, bedding were stencilled in black with the word 'Abo' on them.

"Up until the 1950s, there were no pensions or social service payments. Blacks were not counted on the census. When we visited 'missions' where our relatives lived we had to have a 'pass' from the manager, or, if he was in a bad mood, we were kept away from family.

"Children were removed forcibly from mothers and pet dogs shot in target practice by police. Some Blacks were not allowed any closer than ten miles of the township where whites lived, and where, even after the war, I saw my brothers who had served in the second world war as enlisted men, hunted like felons from the bar of the pub where they asked for a beer."

It is not hard to see why many of the poems that Kevin Gilbert gathered for his anthology of Black writing are angry poems. It would've been stranger if they were happy or lyrical or whimsical ...

* * * * *

December 26: Thomas Gray
 Henry Miller
 Shirley Shackleton

December 27: Elizabeth Smart
 December 28: Alasdair Gray

* * * * *

I once heard Alasdair Gray on a literary show and was deeply impressed but when I went to the library the only thing they had of his was his *The Book of Prefaces*. This is a collection and although it

gives an insight into his likes and dislikes and interests, what he chose to include, it isn't quite the same as a book that is all his.

But while I continue to look out for something else of his you might enjoy this little sidelight: He says of William Tyndal, "Tyndal annoyed the catholic orthodoxy by translating the Greek word **Ecclesia** into **Congregation** instead of **Church**. When he translated the Hebrew Bible he made many compound words & phrases now taken for granted: **scapegoat, passover, the Lord's anointed, to fall by the sword** etc" ... And he gives these two versions of the Lord's Prayer:

c. 650
Faeder ure,
Thu the eart on heofonum,
Si thin nama gehalgod.
Tobecume thin rice.
Gewurthe thin willa on eorthan swa swa on heofonum.
Urne gedaeghwamlican half syle us to daeg.
And forgyf us ure gyltas swa swa we forgyfath urum gyltendum.
And ne gelaed thu us on costnunge
Ac alys us of yfele. Sothlice.

c. 1550.
Our father
Whyche art in heaven,
Halowed be thy name.
Thy Kyngdome come.
Thy wyll be doen in yearth, as it is in heaven.
Geve us this daye our dayly breade.
And forgeve us our trespasses, as wee forgeve them that trespasse agaynst us.
And leade us not into temptacion.
But deliver us from evill. Amen.

* * * * *

Clearly Gray is much more than a novelist or a collector of 'bits'. I came upon a review of his recent book *A Life in Pictures* by James Purdon who says of him, "Since the publication of his 1981 novel *Lanark* Alasdair Gray's reputation as a writer has tended to overshadow his extraordinary talents as an illustrator, painter, printmaker, moralist and typographer. Bringing together images from the full span of his career, family snapshots, formative influences and work by friends and collaborators, this superb book should at last correct the imbalance. A running commentary by Gray himself provides an invaluable account of his early life and schooling, his student days at the Glasgow School of Art, and his later successes and setbacks. Gray once told a biographer that the story of his life was 'all in *Lanark*'. Not any more: the missing half can now be found in here."

So what of his art work? Purdon describes it as having "strong outlines, an anatomical sensibility that recalls Gray's nineteenth-century medical namesake, and an Escher-like penchant, in some paintings, for visual paradox. Rather mischievously, he has in the past described his art as deriving 'partly from Walt Disney and partly from the *Beano* and the *Dandy* comics', but *A Life in Pictures* tells a far more complex and interesting story."

So could the library offer up anything more of his, either to illustrate Gray the novelist or Gray the artist? I have now tracked down his illustrated book of short stories, *The Ends of Our Tethers*, which is rude, quirky, unpredictable, and sometimes surprising. And perhaps 'decorated' would be more descriptive than 'illustrated'. His characters probably defy 'illustration'.

* * * * *

The ‘anatomical sensibility’ refers to the 19th century work *Gray’s Anatomy* which suggests the TV show of the same name. But the book behind the name was written for medical students studying the human body and the man behind the book was Henry Gray, a young house surgeon at St George’s Hospital in London, who was only thirty-four when he died in 1861. And the vitally important drawings were done by Henry Vandyke Carter who later went to India as a doctor.

Carmel Bird has a fascinating story called ‘Major Butler’s Kidneys’ about a Tasmanian-domiciled convict artist called Thomas Bock. “When I received, in 1986, the postcard showing the portrait of Eliza Langhorne, I consulted the catalogue for the exhibition and there I found Major Butler’s Kidneys.

“On page fifty-two of the catalogue, underneath a miniature portrait of an unknown gentleman (watercolour on ivory), there is a colour plate reproduction: ‘Anatomical drawing (Major Butler’s Kidneys) c1840, pencil and watercolour on paper. Private collection.’ It’s got writing on the back in Thomas’s hand: ‘Major Butler/23 Oct 1840.’ And the catalogue provides the information that Major James Butler’s death was recorded in the *Hobart Town Courier* on 23 October, and that the likely cause of death was tuberculosis. I could rush out on an archival mission to discover exactly who Major Butler was, but I like to work, as far as I can, with the materials to hand. So the only reference I found to a James Butler was in *The Fatal Shore* by Robert Hughes. This was Commandant James Butler of Hobart, who gave a convict twenty-five lashes for inciting a logging gang to go on strike in 1825. Such curious details history singles out for record. What I wonder is whether this James Butler with the lash was the one whose kidneys came under the scrutiny of Thomas Bock, the one whose kidneys are now lying before me on the open page. Let’s pretend it was.”

She goes on, “I found the watercolour of the kidneys so arresting because it is the only picture of its kind in the catalogue. There are elegant oils of Mr and Mrs Wilkinson and Mr and Mrs Robertson, and landscapes, and drawings and etchings. A small copper engraving of the teeth and underjaw of a platypus is the nearest other thing to Major Butler’s Kidneys.”

There are no answers to the puzzle. Who dissected the Major and why? And why only his kidneys? Doctors regularly autopsied people who were hanged but not usually respectable citizens who died in their beds. Except—nineteenth century Tasmania was notorious for its dissecting surgeons like Dr Crowther who couldn’t wait for the last Aborigines to die so they could cut them up and put their bones on display. William Lanne having his head chopped off as soon as he was dead, Truganini dreading her death knowing that her body would immediately be violated instead of laid to rest with dignity ... Was Thomas Bock actually noting that this passion for dissection had gone beyond Aborigines and convicts, that in fact no citizen was safe and anyone could end up as interesting bones and anatomical drawings?

So why are we fascinated by books about the workings of the human body? The banal answer would seem to be that it is natural for human beings to want to know what goes on, invisibly, inside them. But when I look back and see that it was seen as quite unsuitable for young women to have access to that knowledge, even when it would have helped them in family life to have a good basic knowledge, I can see that it wasn’t really fear of them knowing about blood and bones. It was the deep reluctance to let women have any knowledge of sex and reproduction. And this dreadful ignorance often spawned fear, self-loathing, dismay, and inappropriate responses to basic human functions and commonplace troubles.

* * * * *

And just to confuse you further there is a book called *Gray’s Anatomy*. This is a book of political and philosophical essays by conservative British commentator John Gray, following on his earlier collections, *Heresies* and *Straw Dogs*. He dissects attitudes, ways of thinking, ideas and assumptions, rather than bodies. At times he seems unnecessarily prolix or repetitive, there is at time a whiff of misogyny, but he is also interesting with a touch of dry humour as when he sends up Alan Dershowitz’s advocacy of torture in some circumstances in a style reminiscent of Jonathon Swift’s *A*

Modest Proposal. He writes about philosophers I knew little or nothing about such as Santayana, Hayek, Oakeshott and Revai. And as I was reading him just as the news came through of a man hacked to death on a street in London these words resonated with me: “The idea that political authority could ever be solely or mainly formal or abstract arose in times when a common cultural identity could be taken for granted. For Kant as for the framers of the Declaration of Independence, that common cultural identity was that of European Christendom. Insofar as this cultural identity is depleted or fragmented, political authority will be attenuated. We may see this ominous development occurring in microcosm in Britain, where a minority of fundamentalist Muslims that is estranged from whatever remains of a common culture, and which rejects the tacit norms of toleration that allow a civil society to reproduce itself peacefully, has effectively curbed freedom of expression about Islam in Britain today.” He wrote that in 1992.

* * * * *

December 29: Gerard Windsor
December 30: Rudyard Kipling
 Stephen Leacock
December 31: Herman Boerhaave
 Fumiko Hayashi

* * * * *

I used to think I liked birthdays best because they were your own special day. Of course this was never completely true, even in my own family. Two of my brothers, though born four years apart, shared the same birth date. Looking back, I think my mother should’ve suggested they celebrate on different days. And after doing a clutch of writers’ calendars I know everyone shares a birthday with a famous writer. By the time you key in famous artists, inventors, explorers, tyrants, saints, crooks, as well as millions of forgotten ordinary people—well, your birthday ceases to seem unique. And yet it still is. No one else shares that unique conjunction of time and place, of events and milieu.

Change the smallest thing in the events that led to you and there would be no you.

This sense of the smallest thing is not uniquely Japanese. But it reminds me of the first Japanese story I ever came across. I don’t remember its title or its author. But the woman in the story shows no sign of grief except for the movement of the handkerchief she is clutching in one hand. It is this ‘understatedness’ which draws me to read a Japanese novelist every so often.

*

I kept putting Fumiko Hayashi down at the end of my writer’s calendars without knowing the slightest thing about her. The other day, though, I came upon a story of hers in a book of Japanese short stories about WW2, *The Catch and Other War Stories*; her offering ‘Bones’ at first seems a perfectly straightforward account of a woman left a widow by her husband’s death on Okinawa who turns to prostitution to survive. But the story brings in her brother’s death, her child, her pondering on when her father is going to die, questions of guilt and sorrow, and yet running through the story is something faintly anarchic. I read the little bio about her, born in 1904, graduated from high school, worked in Tokyo, married three times, had a best seller with her youthful experiences in *Horoki* or *Diary of Roaming*, and then it said she “associated with anarchist writers” as she continued writing her own autobiographical novels and short stories, including ‘Bones’ which came out in 1949. She died in 1951.

I felt no surprise but I was intrigued; firstly, because I had not thought of Japan as a hotbed of anarchism (that very ordered deferential society and although I turned to the index in a dozen or more general books about Japan I didn’t come upon a single listing for anarchism) and, secondly, because I had never stopped to ask whether there is an identifiable style of writing which can be called anarchist.

But I finally pinned down some interesting facts about anarchism in Japan in *The Cambridge History of Japan* and *Japan An Illustrated Encyclopedia* which take it as far back as the writings of Lao-tzu but gaining steam under the influence of Russian anarchists particularly Peter Kropotkin. Anarchism, *museifu shugi*, overlapped with arriving ideas of socialism and Christian humanism but the

first ‘wave’ of anarchism received a major setback when the government hanged Kotoku Shusui for the ‘Great Treason Incident’ when in 1911 Japan’s rulers claimed he and other anarchists were plotting to assassinate the emperor. The paranoia following this saw socialism too forced underground; the government going so far as to ban a book called *Konchū Shakai* (*Insect Society*) because it used the word Shakai meaning Society!

Many of these underground activists looked to the Russian Revolution but became disillusioned, believing as they did in spontaneous rather than organised action. Others set up a secret Communist Party. But gradually anarchists dared meet and write and promote their ideas again—only to face a second major setback. “One of the most attractive and influential radical leaders in the early 1920s was Ōsugi Sakae, a former disciple of Kotoku and the main theorist of the anarchosyndicalist position. What made him so appealing to young university students and graduates is clear from his writings, which overflow with feelings of boredom, oppression, and idealism that fostered a diffuse rebelliousness and a sense of affinity with the workers. But above all, Ōsugi appealed to the young because of his conception of revolution as personal emancipation. “It is only when we have developed a personal philosophy,” he wrote in 1917, “that we become free. ... No matter what happens then, we cannot become slaves.”

So “The murder of Ōsugi by a military police captain in September 1923 robbed the anarchosyndicalist movement of its only charismatic leader.” Anarchism dwindled away but communism continued to live a shadowy existence. It was the Liberal Democrats with their more conforming and deferential ideas which formed something of an opposition albeit not very successfully in the increasingly militaristic thirties. It was only in the aftermath of the war with the massive physical destruction and a society in shambles that anarchism provided some Japanese writers with a philosophic underpinning to their attempts to write of that chaotic situation ...

Some stories don’t seem to have any particularly point to them but I wouldn’t necessarily call that anarchist writing. Some stories describe themselves as anti- this and that, such as the current fad for anti-memoirs ... but I don’t see that as anarchic either. There is a recognisable style called Absurdist but that too is not Anarchy. Is it something too elusive to be pinned but equally something you immediately understand whenever you come upon it?

Anarchic perhaps—but there is also an elusive sense of tenderness and sorrow in Hayashi’s writing which suggests that the kind of anarchism which drew her was not the confrontations of earlier anarchists but a gentle sense of using anarchic ideas to make sense of a confusing present.

THE END

End Note One: Every so often I write a little bit about something and then, some time later, I come upon a book which enlarges or sometimes give a rather different ‘take’ on a particular situation. I briefly touched on Palm Island in *A Half-Closed Book*. The other day I was in the Glenorchy Library and came upon Jeff Waters’ book on the behind-the-scenes jockeyings and cover-ups there in *Gone for a Song*. If you, like me, think that the situation there needs a better understanding and greater openness this is a book you might like to seek out.

End Note Two: There are a number of versions of *Sartor Resartus* as Carlyle kept tinkering with it, first for serial publication, and later for book form and the various reprints.

End Note Three: I mentioned the chaotic spelling round an ancestor called Dugdale in another book; since then I have realised I had the wrong wife, the real one was called Alice Serjeantson. But my premise remains and Serjeantson/Sergeantson/Serjentson etc had nearly as many variations.

End Note Four: I mentioned Padraic Colum in *The Ultimate Birthday Book* and Sheila Given later mentioned that she had had to learn one of his poems by heart and recite it in public. Although reciting in public is an agonising business the poem itself has a lovely evergreen quality.

O, to have a little house!

To own the hearth and stool and all!
The heaped-up sods upon the fire,
The pile of turf against the wall!

To have a clock with weights and chains
And pendulum swinging up and down!
A dresser filled with shining delph,
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day
Clearing and sweeping hearth and floor,
And fixing on their shelf again
My white and blue and speckled store!

I could be quiet there at night,
Beside the fire and by myself,
Sure of a bed; and loth to leave
The ticking clock and the shining delph!

Oh! but I’m weary of mist and dark,
And roads where there’s never a house or bush,
And tired I am of the bog, and the road,
And the crying wind and the lonesome hush!

And I am praying to God on high,
And I am praying Him night and day,
For a little house—a house of my own—
Out of the wind’s and the rain’s way.

‘The Old Woman of the Roads’ by Padraic Colum.

End Note Five: SOME NOTES:

Grave doubts remain about the Trial of Susan Neill-Fraser. Was justice done?

No real attempt was made to set the scene for the jury in regard to the date on which the murder of Bob Chappell is alleged to have occurred, the night of Australia Day, January 26th 2009, nor to remind them of the general conditions:

Marieville Esplanade runs along the Sandy Bay foreshore towards Battery Point at the northern end and takes in the Sandy Bay Yacht Club and Rowing Club as you go south. The northern end is popular with dog walkers of an evening. Helen Neill-Fraser, a gentle gracious woman in her eighties, lives at the northern end where, on the night of Australia Day 2009, her front windows opened on to a clear view of her daughter's yacht, the 'Four Winds', moored less than 500 metres offshore and in full view of the house.

The day though fine had seen a fresh north-westerly blowing and a choppy sea had made the moored yachts buck and bob all afternoon. But by the time Helen set out for a little 80th birthday party at a friend's house in the evening the wind was going down and thousands of people were out and about on a balmy summer's evening with many functions, official and unofficial, drawing people to the Derwent's foreshores. With Daylight Saving it would not be properly dark till nearly 9.30 (sunset officially at 8.41 p.m.) and would be lightening again soon after 5 a.m.

The Sandy Bay Regatta had been on all day and post-Regatta celebrations continued in to the night. It also coincided with Chinese New Year. Some hotels had offered special Australia Day parties, and entertainment at Wrest Point continued into the late night. It was still school holidays and many children were allowed to stay up late. Many of the major shops were open all day, some closing at 6, some later.

For young couples and revellers of all ages the warm night was a magnet. The temperature remained in the low twenties well into the late evening and would reach 30 degrees the next day. When Helen came home soon after 9 p.m. the Esplanade was still lined with cars but there was no sign of anyone on the yacht itself. By the early hours of the 27th revelry was turning into drunken brawls round Hobart's pubs and clubs and wild driving on the longer straighter streets. Police were out in force.

A night to be out in. A night for things to get out of hand. A night for too much alcohol and party drugs. But not a night for a cool calculating murder and the unseen disposal of a body.

Yet that is what the Crown insists Sue Neill-Fraser did. At some time on the afternoon of the 26th or late in the evening of the same day or the early hours of the 27th they say she returned to the yacht where her partner of 18 years, Bob Chappell, was spending the night. They say she hit him from behind with a wrench or other heavy tool, tied his body to a heavy-duty fire extinguisher, winched it up on deck, swung it out over the yacht's small white inflatable dinghy, dropped it into the dinghy, then cast off and took the dinghy out to the deepest part of the Derwent and rolled the body with the 15 kilo extinguisher tied on into the Derwent and motored back to the shore where she failed to return the dinghy to its usual place and failed to tie it up. The coolness and the calculation seemingly did not extend to this small aspect of the operation.

At no time did anyone else apparently witness this long and complicated operation, which ran real risks of overturning the dinghy in the process, neither the revellers on shore, the homeless people who sometimes sleep in cars along the esplanade, people out late on any of the other yachts, boats returning late up the Derwent, whether those which had taken a long day cruise, fishing boats leaving or returning, or commercial vessels coming up river to EZ or anywhere else.

1. The jury never heard any evidence on security or activities on that night at the Sandy Bay Yacht Club even though the 'Four Winds' though on a private mooring was visible from the Yacht Club.

2. The only apparent witness to a dinghy going out to the 'Four Winds' that night, a Mr Hughes, first stated he saw a boat being rowed out. When told the dinghy can't be rowed he changed his story and said someone was sitting at the rear of the dinghy. When told the dinghy only had seats at the sides he changed his story again. Yet the jury remained unaware of these crucial changes to his story.
3. The jury was shown a fierce-looking knife with the implication that it was the 'murder weapon' despite no evidence of blood or DNA on it and they were told that Sue Neill-Fraser had a cut on her hand the day after Bob Chappell disappeared. When it was shown that she didn't have a cut and the police had lied, the knife quietly disappeared and a wrench was suddenly posited as the 'murder weapon' although no forensics had been done on any wrenches on board the boat nor was the jury told if any were missing. Yet this mythical wrench was mentioned 27 times during the trial and the judge's summing-up!
4. When Bob Chappell insisted on remaining on the yacht that night to finish some electrical work it was implied that he was abandoned there without help when Sue took the dinghy back to shore. Yet he was a strong swimmer, easily able to cover the short distance to shore; he had a mobile phone, two working radios, flares, an epi-irb, safety jackets etc. As police, reportedly messing with the phone next morning, sent a message already in it any significance of the phone's use or non-use was probably lost.
5. During the night a pipe near the toilet was cut and a sea cock was opened. It was implied that only a yachtee would know to do this to sink a boat. In fact anyone could have found the sea cock and it is an extremely slow and doubtful means of sinking a yacht. Any yachtee would have been able to flood and sink a boat much faster and more efficiently, for example, by opening the engine room cooling water valve. Whether it was done to hide evidence or out of spite against 'rich yachtees' is not known.
6. It was never explained why ropes had been cut on deck or why the winch had been re-wound backwards. Someone familiar with the yacht would not have struggled to cut a heavy rope when there were spare ropes in lockers. A recreation of winching up a dummy of approximately Bob Chappell's weight was carried out. But no one explained how this was all managed by one person, and that a not very large woman in her fifties with a slipped disk in her back, who needed to be carrying a torch as well. No recreation of getting the 'dummy' into a small dinghy and taking it out, plus a weight, and dumping it into the Derwent by one person and without overturning the dinghy was ever carried out. Nor has it ever been proved, rather than assumed, that Bob Chappell *was* dumped in the river. And a 15 kilo weight would be insufficient to hold a body down anyway.
7. A large grey dinghy was seen tied alongside the 'Four Winds' at 3.55 pm on the 26th. Yet the person or people who visited the 'Four Winds' that afternoon have never come forward. Nor does there appear to have been any effort to find them. (The yacht's dinghy is small and white with some blue.) A small dinghy was also claimed to have been seen tied to the stern of the yacht that afternoon although Chappell and Neill-Fraser moored the yacht's own dinghy alongside whenever they went out, for greater safety and ease of access. The identity of this second dinghy also remains a mystery.
8. Forensics found the DNA of three unknown people on board the yacht, a woman and two men. One lot of DNA was identified when a teenage homeless girl was apprehended on a burglary charge later and her DNA put into the system. She stated on oath that she had never been aboard the 'Four Winds'. She was not asked for the identities of the two men. When police later stated that she had given a false address to them for that night, the Defence asked that they be allowed to recall her. The judge refused permission. The identities of those two men remain unknown, at least to the public.

9. The jury was told that Sue Neill-Fraser took a call from a man called Richard King on her landline that night. He claimed that Bob Chappell's daughter Clare was threatening to come down to Sandy Bay to steal the yacht or scare Bob into giving it up and that she was threatening suicide. It was the first and only time he had ever been in touch with Sue. As Clare is known to have some mental problems Sue Neill-Fraser eventually went back to Sandy Bay to check. With no sign of Clare around she went home again. The jury remained in ignorance as to whether Clare Chappell had gone to Sandy Bay that night, tried to phone her father, or done anything to carry out her threat.
10. The jury heard a long rigmarole from Philip Triffett about Sue telling him she wanted both Bob and her brother Patrick Neill-Fraser killed, rolled in chicken wire, and dumped off her previous yacht. What the jury wasn't told was that Bob and Sue had asked Triffett and his partner Maria Hanson to leave their home back in the 1990s because they were deeply disturbed about Hanson's boasts that she and her partner had got away with serious crimes including arson and murder. Nor were they told that Maria Hanson's daughter lives in Queensland under an assumed name and in a secret location because she is terrified of Philip Triffett who bashed her and attempted to rape her.
11. The jury were not told that Hanson and Triffett themselves went to the police with this story, nor that they had previously spread vicious stories that Sue was responsible for the death of the son of private investigator Denis O'Day. The young man apparently took his own life and the police investigation showed clearly that Sue Neill-Fraser could not have been involved in any way in his death. When tackled by police Hanson and Triffett admitted it was a made-up story. The use of Philip Triffett as a key Prosecution witness should have set alarm bells ringing if the jury had been fully aware of the circumstances behind the ending of the relationship between Bob and Sue and Maria and Philip—and later attempts by Maria and Philip to make trouble for Sue Neill-Fraser.
12. It was never spelled out to the jury that when a person disappears their estate cannot be disposed of normally until 7 years have passed. Yet both judge and prosecutor posited a desire by Sue Neill-Fraser to get her hands on Bob's estate as the motive for the crime. No evidence for this, such as debts or money troubles or fights over money on her part, was ever tendered. It was simply an assumption presented as evidence. Making someone disappear is the least effective way possible to get hold of a deceased estate.
13. The jury was never told that the 'Four Winds' is moored in full view of Sue Neill-Fraser's mother's home. Sue understandably did not want her mother drawn into the horrible situation; nor did she want Clare Chappell who has mental problems drawn into the police investigation. Yet the jury remained unaware of Helen Neill-Fraser's proximity. Had they known it may have changed their views. Few people plan to carry out a premeditated murder in view of their mother's front windows.
14. A number of stories have done the rounds and it isn't clear whether any of the jury members had heard them before handing down their verdict. They include the claim that Sue murdered her first husband. Far from being dead Brett Meeker sat through the Trial and Appeal to give Sue his sympathy and support and has stated clearly that he believes in her innocence. Another story claimed that David Gunson's brother was going around claiming that David believed his client was guilty. As he doesn't have a brother it is not clear who floated this rumour or when. Bob Chappell's sister Anne also believes firmly in Sue Neill-Fraser's innocence. I have also heard that one of the detectives, because he believed in Sue Neill-Fraser's innocence, was taken off the case.
15. I have been told by a senior lawyer that when a case is circumstantial there is an expectation that the highest standards of truth and fairness will be adhered to. Instead gossip, innuendo, assumptions, and unproven claims were put forward as evidence. Yet:

- There is no evidence that Bob Chappell is dead. The likelihood that he is does not constitute proof. Nor is there any evidence that he was murdered.
- There is no evidence that he was dumped in the Derwent—other than the claim by psychic Debbie Malone.
- There is no evidence that Sue Neill-Fraser went on board her yacht that night.
- There is no evidence that she premeditated murder—and without evidence of premeditation a murder conviction is unsafe.
- There is no evidence that she was in financial difficulties. Had the jury been told that she had \$80,000 in the bank at the time of Bob's disappearance it may not have endeared her to the poorer jurors but it would have undermined any suggestion that she was so desperate to get her hands on Bob's estate that she was willing to kill him—even if it meant waiting 7 years in limbo for his estate to be settled. For Justice Blow to posit greed as the motive for the 'murder' of Bob Chappell without a scrap of evidence was unprofessional to say the least.
- There is no evidence that she or anyone else hit Bob Chappell with a wrench.

All these are assumptions or unproven claims made by the Prosecution or the Judge. To elevate them to the status of proof should of itself raise grave doubts about the verdict.