

**Round
The
World
In
Eighty
Places**

**Compiled by
J. L. Herrera**

Dedicated to:

Jacquie and Arabella Brodrick
Mother and Daughter Travellers ...
May and Clarke Gerber
Mother and Son Travellers ...
And especially in Memory of Clarke who died
25 June 2010.

And With Thanks to:

Patrick and Nicci Herrera, Beth Bennett,
Ken Herrera, Gail Vardy, Cheryl Perriman,
and those kind people who donate interesting books to stalls and op-shops.

Introduction

After nine Writers' Calendars, of sorts, I thought I would do a collection with a slight difference. These are little snippets from here and there around the world, mostly from places I haven't been. I thought it would be a way to travel at virtually no cost to me and might bring me into contact with some fascinating places and, with luck, some equally fascinating moments in history. Some of the places, as you will discover, aren't places to stay and drink the water but I did want a sense of variety.

It is still a writers' calendar but I have confined my chosen pieces from various writers to pieces which have a connection to PLACE ... And I have usually given priority to writers whose writing imparts a strong sense of PLACE ...

They don't really need any introducing so hop aboard the magic carpet
—oops! I think it could do with a quick vacuum—
and enjoy the journey with me.

J. L. Herrera

Hobart 2016

My computer has played up endlessly with this file and despite my best efforts to get everything the way it was in the original there may still be infelicities. Clearly it didn't appreciate the chance to travel without moving a cog.

ROUND THE WORLD IN EIGHTY PLACES

January 1: Sir James Frazer
Maria Edgeworth
Haiti, Independence Day

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“The island of Cyprus lies but one day’s sail from the coast of Syria. Indeed, on fine summer evenings its mountains may be descried looming low and dark against the red fires of sunset. With its rich mines of copper and its forest of firs and stately cedars, the island naturally attracted a commercial and maritime people like the Phoenicians; while the abundance of its corn, its wine, and its oil must have rendered it in their eyes a Land of Promise by comparison with the niggardly nature of their own rugged coast, hemmed in between the mountains and the sea. Accordingly they settled in Cyprus at a very early date and remained there long after the Greeks had also established themselves on its shores; for we know from inscriptions and coins that Phoenician kings reigned at Citium, the Chittim of the Hebrews, down to the time of Alexander the Great. Naturally the Semitic colonists brought their gods with them from the mother-land. They worshipped Baal of the Lebanon, who may well have been Adonis, and at Amathus on the south coast they instituted the rites of Adonis and Aphrodite, or rather Astarte. Here, as at Byblus, these rites resembled the Egyptian worship of Osiris so closely that some people even identified the Adonis of Amanthus with Osiris.

“But the great seat of worship of Aphrodite and Adonis in Cyprus was Paphos on the south-western side of the island. Among the petty kingdoms into which Cyprus was divided from the earliest times until the end of the fourth century before our era Paphos must have ranked with the best. It is a land of hills and billowy ridges, diversified by fields and vineyards and intersected by rivers, which in the course of ages have carved for themselves beds of such tremendous depth that traveling in the interior is difficult and tedious. The lofty range of Mount Olympus (the modern Troodos), capped with snow the greater part of the year, screens Paphos from the northerly and easterly winds and cuts it off from the rest of the island. On the slopes of the range the last pine-woods of Cyprus linger, sheltering here and there monasteries in scenery not unworthy of the Apennines. The old city of Paphos occupied the summit of a hill about a mile from the sea; the newer city sprang up at the harbour some ten miles off. The sanctuary of Aphrodite at Old Paphos (the modern Kuklia) was one of the most celebrated shrines in the ancient world. According to Herodotus, it was founded by Phoenician colonists from Ascalon; but it is possible that a native goddess of fertility was worshipped on the spot before the arrival of the Phoenicians, and that the newcomers identified her with their own Baalath or Astarte, whom she may have closely resembled. If two deities were thus fused in one, we may suppose that they were both varieties of that great goddess of motherhood and fertility whose worship appears to have been spread all over Western Asia from a very early time. The supposition is confirmed as well by the archaic shape of her image as by the licentious character of her rites; for both that shape and those rites were shared by her with other Asiatic deities. Her image was simply a white cone or pyramid. In like manner, a cone was the emblem of Astarte at Byblus, of the native goddess whom the Greeks called Artemis at Perga in Pamphylia, and of the sun-god Heliogabalus at Emesa in Syria. Conical stones, which apparently served as idols, have also been found at Golgi in Cyprus, and in the Phoenician temples of Malta; and cones of sandstone came to light at the shrine of the ‘Mistress of Torquoise’ among the barren gills and frowning precipices of Sinai.”

From *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer.

“When we enquire who were the inhabitants found by the Egyptians when they conquered the

island, we are confronted by a difficult problem. In the Old Testament we find frequent references to Kittim, or Chittim, and the Jewish historian Josephus identifies this with the island of Cyprus. The ancient Phoenician settlement which played a great part in the subsequent history of Cyprus, and close to which was built the modern town of Larnaca, was called Citium, or Kitium, and the name survives to this day in the title of the bishop of the diocese. In the tenth chapter of Genesis we find Kittim mentioned as one of the sons of Javan. We are justified, therefore, in supposing that the race found in the island when the Egyptians invaded it in the fifteenth century were of Javanian, that is to say, of Ionian origin.”

From *Cyprus under British Rule* by C. W. J. Orr.

The New Testament also makes a mention of Paphos. Saul and Barnabas and John Mark arrive. “They went all the way across the island to Paphos, where they met a certain magician named Bar-Jesus, a Jew who claimed to be a prophet. He was a friend of the governor of the island, Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man. The governor called Barnabas and Saul before him because he wanted to hear the word of God. But they were opposed by the magician Elymas (that is his name in Greek), who tried to turn the governor away from the faith. Then Saul—also known as Paul—was filled with the Holy Spirit; he looked straight at the magician and said, “You son of the Devil! You are the enemy of everything that is good. You are full of all kinds of evil tricks, and you always keep trying to turn the Lord’s truths into lies! The Lord’s hand will come down on you now; you will be blind and will not see the light of day for a time.”

At once Elymas felt a dark mist cover his eyes, and he walked about trying to find someone to lead him by the hand. When the governor saw what had happened, he believed; for he was greatly amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

From Acts, Chapter 13. Clearly Paul had not heard of ‘political correctness’ but it is interesting that Paphos undoubtedly was an important place at that time.

“How different from the paradise of Corfu is Cyprus: an island which always disappoints me, even in the legendary promise of its own name and of that of the city of Famagusta, of which the sound is so strangely lovely, though when you visit it you find it to be an undistinguished Cotswold village which has been whitewashed. I must admit, though, the beauty of its floral displays, especially of two, one when the fields are full of anemone fulgens, bright scarlet with charcoal-dusted centres – the other, on the borders of the streams flowing from the mountains, which in February are a mist of light pink, tawny and beige tamarisk in flower. Another delight in Cyprus is to watch the parties of Turkish men and women and children, escorting down to the port of Ktima a fellow-religionist due to embark on his pilgrimage to Mecca: and what a feast of sherbet and sticky, gelatinous Turkish sweets would follow on his departure! Sometimes it would take place at an open-air café, sometimes on a mound in the open air nearby. Turbaned men and veiled women, would sit there, side by side, overlooking the shore, munching their heavily powdered and glutinous lollipops. Below them, only a few yards away, lay the beach of Paphos where Aphrodite was born from a wave, in somewhat the same way that Victorian children were told babies were found in cabbages. On that Paphian shore are still to be discerned remains of the two temples which were subsequently built there, broken pieces of porphyry and basalt and of rare marbles. There, too, at the sea’s edge we picked up one handle of an encrusted stone amphora, in itself a perfect work of art, resembling the volute from the capital of an Ionian pilaster, but turned by long habitation in the sea to an ammonite or some other kindred fossil ...”

Osbert Sitwell in *The Four Continents*.

If that was Paphos then—what of modern Paphos? I noticed a book called *101 Places Not To Visit* in the library one day and casually picked it up to see what kind of places tourists were being warned off. The book opened up as if by design at the section on Paphos!

I'm not sure that I was surprised. Parts of Cyprus obviously are a bit iffy when it comes to nice relaxing holidays. The author Adam Russ says of it, "Paphos markets itself as the most unspoilt resort on the island, which shows just how much spoiling has gone on since the tour operators earmarked it for homogenisation. Below-par golf courses nestle behind mid-rise hotel developments that look as if they've been flown over from a Polish housing estate and given a coat of white paint. Bad tiling and urgent repair jobs pass for mosaics and ruins and most restaurants offer artery-blocking full English breakfasts all day."

And what of the town's sites and ancient ruins? "The Baths of Aphrodite are worthy of particular mention. Recently named the worst signposted attraction in the Mediterranean, they lie a mere hour and a half's white-knuckle drive up the coast from Paphos. Park your rental car, leave it unlocked and ensure valuables are clearly on show so that you won't need to pay for broken windows after the inevitable break-in, and set off up the Akamas Peninsula for a sight as (good as) any you're likely to come across. The leaking faucet suspended above a stagnant pond is allegedly where Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, bathed before her marriage to Adonis, the most handsome man ever to have lived. While running water is not always to be relied upon on the island, you can't help but think she could have found a grotto with a little less grot and slightly clearer eau without too much trouble."

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"Realizing that they will never be a world power, the Cypriots have decided to settle for being a world nuisance." So wrote Georg Mikes. Unkind? Untrue? His words made me feel an instant sympathy with the Cypriots ...

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January 2: Isaac Asimov

January 3: Henry Handel Richardson

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"Spring is the least predictable of Melbourne's notoriously mercurial seasons, with swiftly alternating phases of sharpish showers, and tenuous sunshine, as the cold fronts move relentlessly eastward across the Australian continent, and bitter winds surging up from the trackless polar region contribute incisively to the cold snaps.

"A September evening in 1888 was no exception to the pattern, but the broad-shouldered young man who strode purposefully along one of the rustic paths which twined through the Fitzroy Gardens paid it scant attention—though a cape was slung over his shoulders in deference to passing showers, and one had just passed. Dressed in evening clothes, a white waistcoat flashing in the gloom, an elegant stick in his right hand, his top-hat set squarely on his head, his appearance was as crisp as the gravel crunching under his thin-soled shoes. He was making for the eastern side of the gardens, still a quarter of a mile distant.

"Seemingly not too far above his head, dark clouds fled across the sky—torn, as though riven by cannon shot—and the moon, when it was revealed, appeared tethered to the skeletal elm trees. Glistening in the moonlight, marble statues of neoclassical figures resided in leafy arbours.

"The prospect was as romantic, as forlorn, as the paintings of nocturnal European ruins which graced many a fashionable dining room in the southern city. 'Lo! the Fitzroy Gardens...' a poet of the day might have begun an ode—and, they were worthy of one. Designed in 1857, they covered more than sixty-four acres, and by 1888, were a mosaic of glades, woodlands, avenues and fern gullies, the whole studded into the city's heart like a big emerald into a coronet."

The Gilded Cage by Marshall Browne.

"Scotch College was founded in 1851 by Robert Lawson, a Scotch parson. The other four famous public schools of Victoria are Geelong Grammar (1855), Melbourne Grammar (1858), Wesley College (1866) and Xavier College, the date of which I do not know. But all these, and also Eton, Winchester, Harrow and Rugby were completely ordinary schools in comparison with Scotch College at the time of

the Airbubbles. When Henry and his brother went to Scotch College at the end of the nineteenth or beginning of the twentieth century its Principal or Head was Dr. Alexander Morrison, M.A., LL.D, etc., etc., then a white-haired erect and powerful man of stern appearance who always wore a black frock-coat. The Morrisons were a famous family, one of their members being the well-known ‘Chinese’ Morrison, adviser to the first Chinese Republic. Magnificent to look at, a strict disciplinarian, the Doctor—the ‘Doc’, as he was called by the boys—was nevertheless a warm-hearted, genial man, who had collected around him as the teaching staff of his school some rare personalities not all likely to fit comfortably into a very rigid conception of what a schoolmaster should be.”

‘Science at Scotch College’ from *Blow for Balloons* by Walter James Turner.

“There seemed no limits to the material progress of Melbourne, but cultural progress lagged far behind. Francis Adams was one of the many visitors who were appalled by the materialistic outlook of Melbourne’s dominant middle classes. In many ways, however, the results of the Education Act of 1872 were all that its sponsors had hoped. In every suburb substantial Birmingham-Gothic schools were erected to provide sufficient classroom space to make compulsory education possible. The builders should not be blamed for the fact that most schools lacked light and playground-space; uninspired though their constructions appear, they were far in advance of anything previously known. Elementary education only was provided by the state but the opening of a Teachers’ College in the university grounds in 1891 omened well. The Roman Catholics were building up a complete educational system of their own. For the time being the church schools, run on conservative lines, retained their monopoly of secondary education; alongside them flourished a motley collection of private establishments. In 1874 the Presbyterian Church opened the first denominational secondary school for girls, the Presbyterian Ladies’ College; the other denominations soon followed suit. The University proceeded quietly. Its first substantial private benefaction was used to build the worthy Gothic Wilson Hall in 1879. Next year, women were admitted as students; and few if any of the expected catastrophic results followed. The most important development in this period was the foundation of three denominational residential colleges. The pioneer, Trinity, was founded in 1870 by Bishop Perry, Chief Justice Stawell and Professor Wilson; Francis Ormond endowed the Presbyterian college named after him in 1879; in 1887 the Methodists marked the jubilee by founding Queen’s College. Yet, despite these advances, the University’s influence remained limited; although a successful professional training school, it attracted little support from Melbourne’s ‘wealthy lower orders’.

“None the less the professors were an important element in the intellectual world, whose high quality and type of thought is best illustrated by reference to the *Melbourne* and *Victorian Reviews* which ran between 1876 and 1886. A wide variety of interests are represented by their contributors, who included Higinbotham, Syme, W. E. Hearn, C. H. Pearson, von Mueller, Alfred Felton and Henry Gyles Turner. Their creed was an enlightened humanitarianism; their object, composed as they were of expatriates of various periods, was to spread the values of the society and period in which they had been reared. It might almost be said that for them the criterion of successful colonizing was the extent to which the civilization and values of Britain and Europe were reproduced. Their ideals and their contribution were immensely valuable as a counter to the colonial frontiers-man’s contempt for things of the mind.”

The Melbourne Scene 1803-1956 by Grant and Serle.

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“After having been nearly three weeks in Quarantine we were released on Thursday the 12th August (1875) went up the harbour and cast anchor at Pinchgut ... Sydney is certainly a large town or rather city and with many fine buildings and institutions but I will, at present, reserve my remarks concerning it and its inhabitants. There is great rivalry going on between New South Wales and Victoria especially on the part of the former who have I fancy the most reason to be envious. It will be

a long time before the people of Sydney will recognize the supremacy of Melbourne. Certainly the sooner the various colonies in Australia are united under one head the better for the colonies both collectively and individually. That Melbourne ought to be the capital of Australia no unprejudiced person can reasonably doubt ... Melbourne itself is I believe a much finer and better planned city than Sydney. Nevertheless I like Sydney myself; apart from political or commercial reason, for a fine city, well situated near fine scenery, and healthy, it is an extremely pleasant place.”

Havelock Ellis. *Diary*.

Hesba Brinsmead in her 1960s children’s book *Pastures of the Blue Crane* also has her young heroine at school in Melbourne. Melbourne had a reputation as a place for good schools. And there was also a belief that children learnt better in a cool climate. She begins her book, “Melbourne was drenched in sunshine. Winter was past, with its grey days of fog, its biting winds and sad rain, and November had come again; the city was sunlit, the grey cathedral towers soft against a water-colour sky, its parks bright with young leaves, and in Collins Street the multi-coloured umbrellas were open again above the pavement cafés, close to the bright splash of colour that was Jonas’s Fruitshop.”

Alongside its schools Melbourne has been famous for its horses. (Not to mention its fruitshops!) Hugh Buggy in his biography, *The Real John Wren*, comes close to hagiography at times but he does have some interesting sidelights on life in Melbourne. “Our Edwardian decade in Melbourne opened with the horse at the very pinnacle of his power and importance. Bourke Street, a river of tossing manes, echoed day and night to the jingle of harness and the stamp of impatient hooves.

“Our grandfathers saw more horses in the city in one day than we see in five years. Their social position was assessed largely by the quality of the horses they rode or drove. To own a spirited pair, of course, was to command a measure of deference from those less favored. To drive four-in-hand on gala occasions was to enter the exalted ranks of those who imported their butlers and suitings from England and their special blend of whisky from Scotland.

“Carriage horses, supercilious as powdered vicomtes, were the patricians in this daily pageant. Blue-blooded hacks and their elegantly accoutred riders, who also longed for a dash of indigo in their veins, were their nearest rivals. But the racehorse, attended by a retinue of chamberlains, strappers, and assorted minions, held unchallenged pride of place in the equine Debrett.

“Brewery horses, ample, sleek, and as curvy as any pantomime principal boy of their day, rumbled from pub to pub. Brightly painted and varnished delivery carts that glimmered in the sunshine were drawn by a regiment of light horses. Then a sprightly lot of colts and well-fed ponies pranced in front of gigs, phaetons, dog-carts, and buggies.”

And, “There was no need to wonder why the V.R.C. enjoyed opulent revenues, an army of bookmakers prospered, and the betting clubs flourished. Apart from dodging horses at every city corner, Melburnians had the racehorse, in all his glory, before their eyes through every waking hour.

“Framed and tinted pictures of Melbourne Cup winners—Grand Flaneur, Martini-Henry, Mentor and Sheet Anchor—covered the walls of most Bourke Street bars. More Cup winners—Malvolio, Auraria, Clean Sweep and Revenue—looked down on sporting buck and “wowser” alike as they lay back in their barber’s chairs. Hotel guests found that pictured Cup winners—Merriwee, Briseis, Malua, and others—had invaded their bedrooms. Some awakened to greet the great Carbine, obviously in the best room in the house. Others in the morning saluted pictures of The Assyrian, Glenloth or Arsenal.

“And when the picture postcard craze gripped Melbourne round 1903, the bright lads round town had at their hand pictures of whole stables of racehorses back to Archer and Newminster. That craze also offered the more romantic youth a gallery of stage lovelies—Grace Palotta, Nellie Stewart, Carrie Moore, Minnie Tittell Brune, Madge Titheradge, Harrie Ireland, Frances Ross, and many others.”

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So what does Henry Handel Richardson actually have to say about Melbourne in *The Getting of*

Wisdom? Surprisingly little. The school, based on the Presbyterian Ladies' College, is a little world of its own. Only now and then does the heroine, Laura, venture out into the wider world that surrounds it.

"The air, Australian air, met them like a prickling champagne: it was incredibly crisp, pure, buoyant. From the top of the eastern hill the spacious white street sloped speedily down, to run awhile in a hollow, then mount again at the other end. Where the two girls turned into it, it was quiet; but the farther they descended, the fuller it grew – fuller of idlers like themselves, out to see and be seen. ... They reached the 'block', that strip of Collins Street which forms the fashionable promenade. Here the road was full of cabs and carriages, and there was a great crowd on the pavement. The girls progressed but slowly. People were meeting their friends, shopping, changing books at the library, eating ices at the confectioner's, fruit at the big fruit-shop round the corner. There were a large number of high-collared young dudes, some Trinity and Ormond men with coloured hat-bands, ladies with little parcels dangling from their wrists, and countless schoolgirls like themselves." And later ... "Collins Street was now as empty as a bush road. The young people went into Bourke Street, where, for want of something better to do, they entered the Eastern Market and strolled about inside. The noise that rose from the livestock, on ground floor and upper storey, was ear-splitting: pigs grunted; cocks crowed, turkeys gobbled, parrots shrieked; while rough human voices echoed and re-echoed under the lofty roof. There was a smell, too, an extraordinary smell, composed of all the individual smells of all these living things: of fruit and vegetables, fresh and decayed; of flowers, and butter, and grain; of meat, and fish, and strong cheeses; of sawdust sprinkled with water, and freshly wet pavements – one great complicated smell, the piquancy of which made Laura sniff like a spaniel. But after a very few minutes Tilly, whose temper was still short, called it a 'vile stink' and clapped her handkerchief to her nose; and so they hurried out, past many enticing little side booths hidden in dark corners on the ground floor, such as a woman without legs, a double-headed calf, and the like."

Henry Handel Richardson left Melbourne for Europe, seemingly without regrets. But perhaps she had moments of missing that now rare commodity: air like 'prickling champagne' ...

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January 4: Casimiro de Abreu

January 5: Umberto Eco

January 6: Kahlil Gibran

Heinrich Schliemann

January 7: Charles Addams

January 8: Wilkie Collins

January 9: Robert Drewe

Richard Halliburton

January 10: Robinson Jeffers

January 11: Alan Paton

Ernie Bradford

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This little poem, 'Declaration of Love', was written by Gianni Ferrara who was a penfriend of mine many years ago—and a remarkable man when it came to writing letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience.

from
a window of train
with difficulty I see you,
between a cement-squalor
and the other one:
how much I love you, Mediterranean

ancient hovels,

of fishermen,
built before that
a mere harbour
moved you:
but I love you, Mediterranean

the dark annuls
what
poisons you;
so
you become again
dream's sea:
and I love you, Mediterranean

The reason I was just thinking about the Mediterranean was because I was reminded, by seeing an old advertisement for Ernle Bradford's offering *Ulysses Found*, of the number of books written about the places supposed to have been visited by Ulysses in Homer's *Odyssey* ... Real or imagined or assumed to be this rather than that ... Ernle Bradford also loved the Mediterranean and spent many years sailing it in his old pilot cutter *Mischief* which he later sold to fellow sailor H. W. (Bill) Tilman who took it to far more remote places and wrote his *Mischief* series before boat and man disappeared ... Among Bradford's other writings on the Mediterranean is his *The Great Siege*. He says of it: "The Great Siege of Malta was one of the decisive actions in the history of the Mediterranean—indeed of the Western World. "Nothing is better known than the siege of Malta", remarked Voltaire." To Voltaire perhaps but not to me. The Turks under 'Suleiman the Magnificent' tried to capture Malta in 1565 in pursuance of their dream to turn the Mediterranean into a 'Turkish lake'. Instead their invasion of the tiny island was defeated by the Knights of St John and the Maltese people after bitter and protracted fighting and destruction. "At the beginning of his diary Balbi had written: "It has pleased God this year, 1565, under the good government of the brave and devout Grand Master Jean de la Valette, that the Order should be attacked in great force by Sultan Soleyman, who felt himself affronted by the great harm done to him on land and sea by the galleys of the Knights of this Order." Now, four months later, the fleet and army of the hitherto almost invincible Sultan had been defeated. Malta, and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, had survived. The price of victory was a high one." The Maltese Cross was taken from the Knights' flag and the new capital which gradually grew up was named for the Grand Master. And Bradford writes a stirring account ...

People follow the trail in the *Da Vinci Code*. Do people follow Ulysses? Are there tours?

Zachary Mason wrote in *The Lost Books of the Odyssey*, "Despite its complexity, a handful of images are central to the *Odyssey* — black ships drawn up on a white beach, a cannibal ogre guarding a cave mouth, a man searching a trackless sea for a home that forgot him. Nearly three millennia ago a particular ordering of these images crystallised into the *Odyssey* as we know it, but before that the Homeric material was formless, fluid, its elements shuffled into new narratives like cards in a deck. Echoes of the other Odysseys survive in Hellenistic friezes, on Cycladic funerary urns, and in a pre-Ptolemaic papyrus excavated from the desiccated rubbish mounds of Oxyrhynchus: this last contains forty-four concise variations on Odysseus's story that omit stock epic formulae in favour of honing a single trope or image down to an extreme of clarity."

And Peter Turchi wrote in *Maps of the Imagination*, "Countless poems, stories, and novels have been based on or influenced by Homer's *Odyssey*, including works by writers who, like Dante, never had the opportunity to read it. That epic poem has been an extraordinarily useful guide."

But a guide to what? To the Mediterranean? Or to the imagination of the ancient Greek storytellers?

I could not come up with Bradford's book but while I was looking I came across Richard Halliburton's *The Glorious Adventure*, his own attempt to follow in the imagined wake of Ulysses. He sets the tone of his book by writing, "I had once spread my wings,—and now that I had returned to my nest again, I was dissatisfied. I had security, and I did not want it; I had comfort, and I did not enjoy it. I wanted only to sail beyond the sunset. I wanted to follow Ulysses' example and fill life once more to overflowing. Ulysses' example,—and then the idea flashed through my brain: Ulysses' very *trail*, his *battle-fields*, his *dramatic wanderings*,—why not follow these too!"

He and a friend begin their journey by climbing Mount Olympus in Greece and then a side journey to visit Rupert Brooke's grave on Skyros and a swim to show that Leander could have swum the Hellespont (Dardenelles) to visit Hero.

There is no complete agreement on where Ulysses, according to Homer, actually went. Halliburton suggests that Stromboli was the home of King Æolus, that Lotus Land was the island of Jerba off the coast of Tunisia, that the Straits of Messina flowed between the Rock of Scylla and the Whirlpool of Charybdis, and that Calypso's island was Gozo in Malta. And he comes to the end of his own voyage. "I go ashore in the Bay of Vathy,—the very shore where Ulysses was landed by the Scherian sailors. I deposit my baggage at the little hotel. Burdened with only a large map of Ithica and my faithful pocket *Odyssey*, I strike out down the beach to the place where Athena, Ulysses' best friend among the gods, comes to aid him. She is aware of the fact that a swarm of indolent suitors of Penelope are living wantonly in his castle, and that he must approach cautiously and incognito." Ulysses, disguised as an old beggar goes to the Rock of Korax; "From it I can see the coast of Greece, twenty miles to the east, and there, far away, and high, gleams the snowy summit of Parnassus rising above the clouds." From there, "It is a nine-mile walk to the Homeric city,—up and over the narrow isthmus which connects the two sections of the island. The site of the royal home is on a flat hilltop overlooking the little Bay of Polis from which the twelve Ithican ships and twelve hundred men had sailed away to Troy." Ulysses falls upon the 'indolent suitors' and there is a bloodbath before he reveals himself to Penelope.

"The last scene of Homer's epic poem has been played, the last page read. I close the book regretfully, and turn my eyes from the precious little volume to the sunset which viewed through the shining olive trees on Ulysses' castle site, is enflaming the western sea. Never had I known a sky to be so radiant, so gold,—a glorious end of a glorious day and an immortal story. On such a scarlet sky as this, three thousand years ago, Ulysses and Penelope, reunited, had watched the darkness creep.

"And now, once more, the darkness creeps on Ithica—and me. The scarlet fades. The evening stars come out. Peacefully falls the curtain of my play. I pocket my faithful little book and leave the twilight stage. My *Odyssey*—is ended."

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January 12: Dorothy Wall

January 13: A. B. Guthrie

January 14: Pierre Loti

January 15: Moliere

Giles Milton

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"Caroline Cox first visited Indonesia in April 2000. As she flew into Ambon, the Moluccas' largest city, she was amazed by the area's breathtaking scenery: high mountains covered with forests and lush vegetation, beautiful coastlines, with high cliffs cascading into deep azure-blue seas. "But as we drove from the airport," she recalls, "the scenes of man's destructiveness obliterated the beauty: we saw blackened villages, ruined homes, and burnt-out churches and mosques that testified to bitter intercommunal fighting."

Lela Gilbert in *Baroness Cox*.

“Because of the immense value of spices, no holds were barred in the war to control the trade. One famous governor-general of the VOC, Jan Pieterszoon Coen, enlisted an army of Japanese mercenaries to torture, disembowel and decapitate all the males of the Banda archipelago in the Moluccas. The archipelago, considered the nutmeg capital of the world, was governed by fierce Muslims who had always managed to resist attacks by the Spanish and Portuguese. Before the VOC arrived the population of the Banda Islands was fifteen thousand. Fifteen years later it had shrunk to six hundred.

Throughout the Spice Islands (now part of the territory of Indonesia and Malaysia) the Dutch imposed the death penalty for anyone found growing, selling, buying, stealing or in unauthorized possession of nutmegs, cinnamon or cloves. When the English recaptured Run, the principal island of Banda, covered with magnificent forests of nutmeg trees, the VOC sent in a fleet of twenty-five ships. The English retaliated by occupying a Dutch possession in the Americas called New Amsterdam.”

Ricardo Orizio in *Lost White Tribes*.

“The Portuguese quickly became the super-power of the Indian Ocean and in 1511 they captured the emporium of Malacca, which gave them control of the narrow straits between Sumatra and the Malayan mainland. But although they established a monopoly the effect on the local trade was not as damaging as it might have been. It was the arrival of the Dutch in 1600 that finally brought devastation: ‘The Dutch were not only powerful at sea, they were also hard-headed business men and the monopoly they fastened on the archipelago was one of iron efficiency. It really wrecked the trading pattern of the South China Sea. Native trade wasted away and by the time the British came on the scene the great ports that had been frequented by merchants from all over the east had sunk into decay and had become the nest of pirates.’

“Groups of these ‘pirates’ helped to build up Malaya’s still sparse population so that what was later to become the State of Selangor was ‘largely peopled by Bugis immigrants, originally pirates, who came from the islands grouped to the south of Singapore. They settled mainly in kampongs along the coast and then penetrated gradually up the rivers. Similarly, the Negri Sembilan Malays came from Menangkabau in Sumatra, and they again were a sea-borne people who came in from outside and settled along the coast and gradually infiltrated up the rivers.’ ”

Charles Allen in *Tales from the South China Seas*.

“We land on the island’s northern shoreline – the point at which Nathaniel Courthope landed 381 years previously – which is sheltered from the monsoon by the island’s precipitous cliffs. A couple of fishermen glance at this newly arrived stranger while their womenfolk wander off to fetch us some coconut milk, but otherwise nothing stirs. The island’s small wooden settlement is a soporific place; a village of swept alleys, tidy gardens and shaded verandas lined with flowerpots.

No one here knows anything of the extraordinary history of their island, even though they are forever turning up coins and musket-shot in their vegetable plots. Nor are they aware that their home – just two miles long and half a mile wide – was once considered a fair exchange for a very different island – Manhattan – on the far side of the globe.

Yet they are unmoved when told of the cruel blow that fortune has dealt them, happy to see out their days on this unknown and unspoiled atoll. For although their flickering televisions allow them a glimpse of America through reruns of Cagney and Lacey and Starsky and Hutch, they will tell you that the view from their windows is infinitely more magnificent than Manhattan’s glittering skyline.

For there on the cliffs, high above the translucent sea, the willowy nutmeg tree is once again setting its roots, bursting into flower each spring and filling the air with a heady languorous scent.”

Giles Milton in *Nathaniel’s Nutmeg*.

“In 1608 William Hawkins was in Surat trying to negotiate a deal which would break the

Portuguese trade monopoly with India. Having no success with officials he finally took the drastic step of going to try and get an interview with the Moghul Emperor in Agra. This involved more frustrations. The Emperor seemed to like him and find him curious but all the promises seemed to slide away into nothing. In the meantime he discovered that the Emperor was a drunkard and liked nothing better than to watch horrifying gladiatorial contests. But one of the Emperor's whims was to find him a wife. Hawkins said he could not marry a Muslim girl, believing it would be impossible for the Emperor to find him a Christian. But the Emperor was nothing if not persistent and found him an Armenian Christian who had lost her father and had no other family there. From such an unpromising start it became a lifelong love affair. But when Mr and Mrs Hawkins finally set out on the return voyage to London, Hawkins reluctantly accepting that his mission had been a failure, he died on the voyage. His wife not wanting to live in a country where she would be a stranger married another East India merchant Gabriel Towerson and returned to the Orient." I copied this down many years ago with the thought that it would be interesting to know more about William Hawkins but unfortunately I didn't record where I'd found it. William Hawkins had a long and interesting career in India and South-East Asia. There is some confusion over his family and background but he was energetic in pushing the interests of the fledgling East India Company. There was an earlier William Hawkins who visited Brazil and West Africa and his son William helped repulse the Spanish Armada but it isn't certain if the William who went east was a grandson, a nephew, or more distantly related. The DNB says of him, "This William Hawkyns, on arriving at Surat, proceeded accordingly to Agra and the court of the Great Mogul, which he reached in April 1609, and where he remained for nearly three years. According to the accounts given in his 'Journal' the emperor took much pleasure in his conversation, and detained him, assigning him a handsome maintenance, estimated at upwards of 3,000*l.* a year, his serious occupation being to combat the intrigues of the Portuguese and to endeavour to obtain a formal permission for the establishment of an English factory at Surat. His favour with the emperor enabled him to overcome all difficulties, and the required licence was given; it was the first distinct recognition of English commerce in the East." From India he sailed on to Java and Bantam again with trade opportunities in mind ... And yes, the town of Bantam did give its name to those colourful little chooks which appeal to kids but don't keep the household in eggs ...

There is a romance in the very words, Spice Islands, but the recent history of the Moluccas has not been one to entice tourists. The Moluccans were reluctant to become part of the Republic of Indonesia and only ended up in that conglomerate through a combination of persuasion, force, and, I suspect, a degree of confusion over what they really wanted. The right to self-determination was not seen as applying to them simply because they had been conquered by the Dutch and bundled into the conglomeration that was the Netherlands East Indies. Would their future have been happier if they could quietly have gone their own way?

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January 16: Dian Fossey

January 17: Anton Chekhov

Alfred Radcliffe-Brown

January 18: A. A. Milne

Rudyard Kipling (d)

* * * * *

"By and by, when that was finished, he came upon Kolokolo Bird sitting in the middle of a wait-a-bit thorn bush, and he said, "My father has spanked me, and my mother has spanked me; all my aunts and uncles have spanked me for my 'satiabable curiosity; and *still* I want to know what the Crocodile has for dinner!"

Then Kolokolo Bird said, with a mournful cry, "Go to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all set about with fever trees, and find out."

Rudyard Kilping's 'The Elephant's Child' in his *Just So Stories*.

Those names: Zamboanga, the Golden Mares of Samarkand, the Coramandel Coast, the Road to Mandalay, Casablanca, Tristan da Cunha, Tierra del Fuego, the Empty Quarter, Trinidad and Tobago, the Kamchatka Peninsula, the Bay of Fires, The Friendly Isles, Timbuktu, and many others are surrounded by romance. I remember a character in *The Ugly American* who had come to Asia because of this secret thrill provided by NAMES. The only one I can remember off-hand was Zamboanga. But I have sometimes felt that same sense of excitement that a name can conjure up. The one I loved in my childhood was The Macgillicuddy Reeks. I strongly suspected the teacher of having us on. No place, surely, could have such a name! But yes. You will find them in the south-west of Ireland. Another that fascinated me in those days was Kipling's "great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River" and I was under the impression that there was a country in Africa called Limpopo ...

The "great grey-green, greasy Limpopo" forms part of the border between South Africa and Zimbabwe then runs down through Gaza Province in Mozambique to enter the Indian Ocean at a place called Xai-Xai. *Mozambique The Bradt Travel Guide* tells readers, "For birders, a stroll along the lush, marshy fringes of the Limpopo might prove rewarding." Here you may see the "beautiful green and red Livingstone's lourie"; and you can also find a tide-pool "linked to the sea by an underwater tunnel blow-hole, which you should not even think about trying to swim through." Well no, I wouldn't.

Mozambique is now very short of elephants but it does still have quite a few crocodiles. Xai-Xai town "straddles the EN1 roughly 215km north of Maputo – your arrival is heralded by the crossing of a large bridge over the impressive Limpopo River." All very nice and useful for the traveler to know. But is there such a thing as a Kolokolo Bird ... and is the river grey-green or greasy?

The answer to both questions seems to be a firm no. The river, unsurprisingly, is brown. And Kipling invented his Kolokolo Bird. But Livingstone's lourie is worth looking out for. It is a very attractive bird of green with a crest, red and white around the eyes, and blue on its tail.

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January 19: Edgar Allan Poe

January 20: Eugene Sue

January 21: John Cheney

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1968, 21st January – Greenland: A B-52 from Pittsburgh Air Force Base, New York, crashed and burned some seven miles south-west of the runway at Thule Air Force Base, Greenland. "The Bomber carried four nuclear weapons, all of which were destroyed by fire... Some 237,000 cubic feet of contaminated ice, snow and water, with crash debris, were removed to an approved storage site in the United States over the course of a four-month operation."

("The National Times" – 15th March 1981.) Quoted in *Nuclear Power* by Senator Ruth Coleman.

You had just been thinking of a trip to Greenland, to keep cool, with a stopover in Thule and along I come to spoil it?

"It is of this place, the northernmost inhabited place in the world, that I wish to tell, of its truly remarkable inhabitants, the Polar Eskimos, a primitive people, who are nevertheless, in the finest sense of the word, highly civilised, and finally of my experiences as the furthest north of all the world's doctors. With the help of my pictures and descriptions I hope to stir my readers to greater enthusiasm and affection for Denmark's only colony, Greenland. In particular, I wish to show them Thule as it is to-day, and to paint a living picture of a community which has achieved a noble, I might even say ideal, way of life, cut off though it is from almost everything which we have come to regard as absolutely necessary."

From *Eskimo Doctor* by Aage Gilberg who was there in the late 1930s.

I have just been reading *Arctic Diary*, the account by Sam and Richard Branson of time spent on Baffin Island nearby in the Canadian Arctic. Sam Branson writes, “We’re now skirting around the Barnes Ice Cap, fifteen miles away. Even at that distance, it’s a huge, awesome chunk of ice, 75 miles long and 30 miles wide. Just a huge block of ice – a remnant of the last great Ice Age that covered all of Canada and ran far down into what is now the USA. It rises up to 3,000 feet. Will looked keenly ahead, excited. He said, ‘I have always wanted to see the Barnes Ice Cap ever since I was kid.’

“I felt really lucky to have stumbled across it at such a young age. It’s like looking at history – and I wonder how much longer it will still be there.”

Many things won’t be there. Glaciers are disappearing, lemmings are disappearing, caribou fall through thin ice, local wildlife is under threat from species moving northwards, the permafrost is melting sending buildings into the mush below, weather patterns are changing ... “The Inuit have been adapting to their surroundings for centuries. For anyone to be able to live in this sort of environment you have to know it well. Whatever changes the Inuit face, they will survive because they know and understand the land.”

“In its two seasons – winter and summer – Baffin Island is extraordinarily beautiful. In the months when the days never end, or the sun hangs low on the horizon, the ice has majestic power; at times blue, at times glowing red and gold. In late June there is a brief summer of some six weeks, when wild flowers bloom, from the hot pink of broad-leaved willow herb, to purple saxifrage that drifts over rocks like fat cushions of glowing colour, the yellow of the Arctic poppy and Arnica, to the shy white bloom of avens. As the summer fades, berries appear that are quickly picked by Inuit women and children to be dried and stored against the long winters – in competition with the summer birds, such as snow buntings, plovers, the snow goose and ptarmigan.”

Eirik the Red took a group of Vikings to Greenland and they stayed there some centuries and then they (apparently) disappeared. A number of novelists have taken this disappearance as their subject. The country getting colder, their little farms no longer producing, their crops not ripening, this is seen as the reason behind the demise of their community. But this doesn’t really grip me as an adequate explanation. These were Vikings. They had sailed the Atlantic in small ships. They had settled down not far from indigenous people who did not depend on agriculture to survive. Failing crops might have sent them to sea again. Turning to hunting might either have drawn them into conflict or gradually merged the two communities. But the slow merging of Scandinavians into Inuit or Native American tribes does not have the same dramatic impact as flaxen-haired women looking out sadly on their rotting crops and starving cows ...

Equally intriguing, and better documented, is their arrival in Greenland. Jean Johnston in *Wilderness Women* also looks at the question of women accompanying the men from Iceland to Greenland and particularly Gudrid, daughter of Thorbjorn, a friend of Eirik. She and her first husband Thorer reached Greenland where he died; she married Thorstein who also died. With her third husband Thorfinn Karlsefni she was one of the group which made a settlement, Vinland, on the northern coast of Newfoundland where her son Snorri was born in 1007. This is believed to be the first European birth in North America. For many years it was treated as story not history. But excavations in Newfoundland have turned up the remains of stone buildings, fire-pits, metal objects, virtually identical to those found in Greenland. There is no doubt that there was a settlement there. Equally there is no reason to doubt that there was conflict with the Inuit fur traders. But the Greenlanders never resolved a more fundamental problem: men vastly outnumbered women. It seems natural that over the years the Norsemen stopped seeing the Inuit communities as strangers and enemies and began to look to their neighbours for wives ... Gudrid returned eventually to Iceland and had another son there Thorbjorn. And Snorri’s grandson became a bishop. As an educated man he may also be the person who wrote down his family’s story which became part of Iceland’s sagas ...

Stephen R. Brown wrote a biography of Danish explorer and author of *The People of the Polar North* Knud Rasmussen which he called *White Eskimo*. “When Rasmussen and Freuchen arrived at North Star Bay, barely two hundred people lived in the entire region. There were only about four families present when Rasmussen and Freuchen began to assemble their small prefabricated house on the north-east shore of the bay, at the base of Mount Dundas. Freuchen recalled that “it was not very big nor very comfortable, so we spent as little time in it as possible.” Rasmussen wanted to name the place Knudshope. But fortunately Freuchen had a better idea: Thule Station, from Ultima Thule, the term ancient geographers placed on their charts to signify the farthest north territory inhabited by people. The settlement is now a US Air Force base, but for Rasmussen and Freuchen it was to be home for many years, the base from which they launched numerous remarkable expeditions, and a social and trading center for Greenland’s Polar Inuit.”

“Tuberculosis had become common in southern Greenland, and Rasmussen feared it would spread like the Spanish flu. He saw that a hospital with a doctor was needed for the northern region of Greenland. It was constructed in 1928 and offered free medicine for all, paid for by Thule Station. In 1929, he arranged for the construction of a school, and the hiring of a teacher, for the northern region as well. Rasmussen also wanted to assess the possibility of importing reindeer to replace the diminishing caribou populations, and he devoted his charisma and influence to establishing the Council of Hunters in northern Greenland. He called the hunters of various tribes together, said that he had spoken with the old people about the problems they faced, and proposed enacting some laws for the entire region. ... The resulting Thule Law was proclaimed on June 7, 1929, Rasmussen’s fiftieth birthday, the same year he was nominated for, but didn’t win, a Nobel Prize for Literature.”

This law became official in 1931 when the Danish government “took over the administration of the Thule District of northern Greenland and Rasmussen was recognized as the Danish government’s representative in northern Greenland. The northerners accepted Danish colonization because Rasmussen, the respected authority, backed it.”

“Such was Rasmussen’s international stature that his speech at the International Court of Justice in The Hague in 1932 helped secure Greenland for Denmark rather than Norway.”

Would other options have been better for Greenland? Would other options have said No to the US when it came brandishing its chequebook? And how will Denmark respond to the new Greenland that climate change will bring?

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January 22: Lord Byron

August Strindberg

January 23: Derek Walcott

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I came upon a little snippet which suggested Saint-John Perse as a Caribbean writer. This is a bit misleading. He was born Alexis Leger on the island of Gaudeloupe but he spent most of his life in France, China and the US, not the Caribbean. So did the Caribbean influence his writing in any way? I had a gr-gr-gr-grandmother born on Guadeloupe but this wasn’t the most healthful of places for its French residents, not least because they hadn’t exactly made it paradise for their slaves; as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, “In 1794 it was again occupied by British troops, allied with French Royalists but the island was recaptured by Victor Hugues, an official of the French Revolutionary government, who proclaimed the abolition of slavery and had several hundred white planters executed. Slavery was reestablished on the island by Napoleon’s government in 1802. The island was again captured by the British in 1810. After Napoleonic France’s final defeat in 1815, the island was returned to France.” Saint-John’s family came later but my family appear to have hurriedly packed up and gone to the island of Saint Martin, which was half-Dutch and half-French. Her father had come from Marseilles, her mother from Dominica, and she ended up in St Eustatius, then in Guyana, and finally in London. What a pity she did not write the story of her life. So what did Saint-John actually write?

The Caribbean has produced Nobel laureates in Derek Walcott (St Lucia) Saint John Perse (Guadeloupe) and V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad) and the recent Man Booker prize winner Marlon James (Jamaica). It has other claims which might draw visitors, apart from sandy beaches and brightly-coloured sea life, perhaps those looking for plots for exciting novels. After all Ian Fleming wrote some of his James Bonds there. And might it become a 'literary trail'? *Nobel Lectures* says of St Lucia, "His birthplace, an isolated, volcanic island and an ex-British colony, resonates throughout his work. ... Walcott has traveled widely, but has always strongly identified with Caribbean Society and its fusion of African, Asiatic and European cultures." The Nobel committee granted him the prize for "a poetic oeuvre of great luminosity, sustained by a historical vision, the outcome of a multicultural commitment." Would that be enough to draw you to St Lucia?

"The governments of some nations have done little or nothing to protect artifacts and treasure, which were salvaged and turned over to them. In the 1960s I spent three years in Jamaica working from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, year around, excavating part of the sunken city of Port Royal which was submerged in an earthquake and tidal wave in 1692. This is without doubt one of the most important archeological sites in the Western Hemisphere. Working feverishly and chiefly using my own money, we recovered over two million artifacts, which provided wonderful historical information about this notorious pirate port.

"In July, 1998 my wife, Jenifer who has written about piracy in the Caribbean, and I were invited by the A&E Television Network to return to Port Royal for a documentary on the pirate port and my work there. It was aired on television some months later titled, *Sin City, Jamaica*. To our total astonishment we found that more than 75 percent of the most important artifacts we recovered had disappeared. Of the thousands of gold and silver coins all they had left to show the film crew was one replica coin. According to the people living in Port Royal the so-called archeologists running the Port Royal Laboratory, where everything was supposed to be in storage had been selling the objects to tourists. This was profoundly depressing. In 1968, when I left Jamaica I had asked the Minister of Culture to give me just one clay smoking pipe and one rum bottle as we had recovered thousands of each. He told me the entire collection had to be kept intact, so I ended up with memories of my years of work and one treasure—Jenifer whom I met at Port Royal during the excavation."

Robert Marx in *In the Wake of Galleons*.

So does the Caribbean cherish its writers more than it cherishes its archeological heritage? And what will you find if you visit Port Royal now? The Lonely Planet Guide to Jamaica says, "The English settled the cay in 1655 and built five forts here to defend Kingston Harbour. Buccaneers – organized as the Confederacy of the Brethren of the Coast – established their base at Port Royal, using it for government-sponsored raids against the Spanish.

"The lawless buccaneers were big spenders. The wealth flowing into Port Royal attracted merchants, rum traders, prostitutes and others seeking a share of the profits. Townsfolk invested in the expeditions in exchange for a share of the booty and by 1682 Port Royal was a prosperous town of 8000 people.

"At midday on June 7 1692 a great earthquake shook the island, followed by a huge tsunami, and two-thirds of the town disappeared underwater. Around 2000 people died instantly, and numerous survivors were claimed by the pestilence that followed. Many claimed the destruction was God's vengeance for the town's lax morals." Though as Joan Tapper in *Caribbean Island Dreams* points out the most famous pirate, Henry Morgan, who "had ruled his pirates from the bawdy houses and grog shops of Port Royal" was later made Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica "and died in his bed before the earthquake of 1692". A small town is still there and you can visit the Maritime Museum "containing a miscellany of objects – from glassware and pottery to weaponry – retrieved from the sunken city." Just don't expect to see the kind of treasure which brought people flocking to Port Royal when it was the

pirate capital of the Caribbean.

Poet and diplomat Saint-John Perse won the 1960 Nobel Prize for Literature with the citation “for the soaring flight and the evocative imagery of his poetry which in a visionary fashion reflects the conditions of our time”. But he was not seen as a Caribbean poet writing about Caribbean experiences and Caribbean landscapes and Caribbean themes. He did, though, return to his early memories in poems like ‘Pour Fêter une Enfance’ (‘To Celebrate a Childhood’) which begins:

Palms ... !

In those days they bathed you in water-of-green leaves; and the water was of green sun too; and your mother’s maids, tall glistening girls, moved their warm legs near you who trembled ...

(I speak of a high condition, in those days, among the dresses, in the dominion of revolving lights.)

Palms! and the sweetness
of an aging of roots ... ! The earth
in those days longed to be deeper, and deeper the sky where trees too tall, weary of an obscure design, knotted an inextricable pact ...

(I dreamed this dream, in esteem: a safe sojourn among the enthusiastic linens.)

And the high
curved roots celebrated
the departure of prodigious roads, the invention of vaultings and naves
and the light in those days, fecund in purer feats, inaugurated the white kingdom where I led, perhaps, a body without a shadow ...

(I speak of a high condition of old, among men and their daughters, who chewed a certain leaf.)

In those days, men’s mouths
were more grave, women’s arms moved more slowly;
in those days, feeding like us on roots, great silent beasts were ennobled;

and longer over darker shadow eyelids were lifted ...

(I dreamed this dream, it has consumed us without relics.)

It is a long poem and he goes on to speak of coco plums, flies, servants, rain, ebony, “My nurse was a mestizo and smelled of the castor-bean” but the poem left me with the feeling he didn’t know how he wanted to remember that distant and perhaps exotic childhood and was instead picking out the chance memories which remained vivid ...

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January 24: Edith Wharton

January 25: Robert Burns

Virginia Woolf

January 26: Australia Day/Invasion Day

Seán MacBride

Jules Feiffer

January 27: Lewis Carroll

January 28: Colette

Sabine Baring-Gould

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“Sabine Baring-Gould wrote a book entitled *Devonshire Characters and Strange Events*. He was the right man to put together such a volume, for he became a legend in his own lifetime. An enigma, he was a man of several parts: squire and parson, the author of books and hymns, including *Onward Christian Soldiers*, he was an enthusiastic explorer of Dartmoor and one of the pioneers in recording the vanishing folk-songs of the Westcountry. Baring-Gould was a larger than life figure: a builder and a landlord, an antiquarian and story-teller, he packed a great deal into his ninety years. He was born in 1834 and died in 1924, but he lives on in his books and hymns.

Some people and some places are inseparable – and here is such a case: you cannot come to Lew Trenchard, either the house or the church, and not be aware of Baring-Gould. You cannot read or refer to the great man and ignore the house and the church. All three are linked in some Holy, human, housing Trinity.

There is a particular magic about Lew Trenchard and here is Baring-Gould describing the house and the grounds as if he were talking to us – or writing a letter.

‘From the east wall of the library, a wall extended, ending in what looked like an exceptionally large dovecote. It had one room, approached by steps, furnished as a bedroom and called “The Prophet’s Chamber”. The wall is pierced by a Gothic Arch and beyond is seen a long avenue of trees, known as “Madam’s Walk”. Add to this setting the herbaceous borders full of flowers, a granite fountain, always playing, with the figure of an Alsatian gooseherd, imagine it on a sunlit evening.’ Describing his library window where he stood at his tall writing desk, he called it ‘the glory of the place. Only one who, like myself, has the happiness to occupy a room with a six-light window, 12 feet wide and 5 feet high, through which the sun pours in and floods the whole room, while without, the keen March wind is cutting, can tell the exhilarating effect it has on the spirit, how it lets the sun in not only through the room, and on one’s book or paper, but into the very heart and soul as well.’ ”

Strange Stories From Devon by Rosemary Anne Lauder and Michael Williams.

I am not a fan of ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ but I was curious to learn that he married Grace Taylor, a Yorkshire girl who had started work when she was only ten and therefore was barely literate. The huge gap in age, social position, and experience of life undoubtedly shocked both families (and none of them came to the wedding). He arranged for Grace to go for lessons in reading and writing; something which would not endear many women to a patronizing new husband. Yet they seem to have been happy. Certainly they had a large family together though that is not always proof of happiness ...

* * * * *

‘Some people and some places are inseparable’. This is true. James Joyce and Dublin. L. M. Montgomery and Prince Edward Island. But I think Baring-Gould and Lew Trenchard were something much more intimately entwined. No matter how often he went away he always returned. Joyce and Montgomery are partly writing out of nostalgia for a remembered place. Baring-Gould lived in and was intimately involved in the one place for much of his life.

I looked in four guides to England and none of them even mentioned Lew Trenchard, being more interested, perhaps, in sending visitors to Devon either to Dartmoor or to Torquay. Or had Lew Trenchard, I wondered, changed its name? Or was it seen by travel writers as being so dull no one would ever want to stop there? It is certainly in *Cassells’ Gazetteer of Great Britain and Ireland*, a parish on Lew Water, nine miles north of Tavistock. “The Perp. Church of St. Peter, noted for its ancient carved bench-ends, contains memorials of the Goulds of Lew House, the family to which belong the Rev. Sabine Gould, the author, who became rector in 1881.” And, “Lew House was once the property of the Trenchards, who gave their name to the parish, but in 1620 it became the property of the Goulds; it has interesting chimneypieces of carved oak. The avenue is traditionally said to be haunted by the ghost of a Madame Gould.”

And the DNB gives some of his travel books: *In Troubadour Land*, *The Deserts of Southern France*, *A Book of the Cevennes* and *A Book of the Pyrenees*. “Baring-Gould’s numerous works on the

West of England emphasized the natural beauty of the region and popularized its folk-lore and history. His most important books on this subject are *A Book of the West* (1899), *A Book of Dartmoor* (1900), *Devonshire Characters and Strange Events* (1908), and *Cornish Characters and Strange Events*. He performed a valuable service to collecting from published sources and oral tradition the folk-songs of Devon and Cornwall. His *Songs and Ballads of Devon and Cornwall* (1890) and his *Songs of the West* (1905) are the fruit of much research.” In this day of tourists being spoilt for choice I don’t suppose a few carved bench-ends or the small chance of seeing a ghostly white figure are enough to attract tour buses. But his long years of work to help preserve Dartmoor are worth a moment of remembering as you set out in your hiking boots.

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January 29: Germaine Greer
January 30: Shirley Hazzard
January 31: Kenzaburo Oe
February 1: Muriel Spark
February 2: James Joyce
 Havelock Ellis
February 3: Paul Auster
 Simone Weil

* * * * *

Lars Stahle in *It all began with Indigo* wrote “Far, far away from the desert city of Timbuctoo, protestant England fought for its existence against Spain, the greatest power of the 16th century. Canons and hand weapons came more and more into use and they needed gunpowder — and gunpowder is mostly saltpetre. The only saltpetre which Elisabeth’s England could buy was to be found in the Moorish mountains of southern Morocco. Fate would have it that there was at that time in Morocco a man with great plans. El Mansur.

Elisabeth was the only Christian monarch who dared to defy the Pope’s threat of excommunication for all who started to trade with the Moors. The result of Elisabeth’s correspondence with El Mansur was that England got the saltpetre it needed for the war and El Mansur got weapons.

El Mansur’s great plan was to make himself emperor over the mysterious Wangara, whence the gold came, and which he believed must lie in western Mali. First he wanted control over the salt in Tegahza, salt being the most coveted item of trade. In 1591, twenty thousand Moroccans marched south and the salt people of Tegahza fled and were dispersed. But the Moroccans did not reach Timbuctoo. Almost the whole army was lost somewhere in the desert and only a few survivors seem to have returned. Without the hardened salt miners of Tegahza no salt supplies were forthcoming and the situation became desperate for the peoples of the Senegal and Niger rivers. The search for salt led to the discovery of the salt fields at Taoudenni in what is now Mali, just a hundred kilometers from the Algerian border. This source is still being exploited today.

But El Mansur did not give up. He sent out four thousand warriors on camels and they reached Timbuctoo. The conquest was a disappointment. The populace had removed the gold and the king was safely on the other side of the Niger River. And Wangara remained a secret.

For want of gold, the Moroccans gathered all the learned men and their families, their books and manuscripts, and drove them north towards Morocco. A few survived the march through the desert but most of their irreplaceable books were lost. And Timbuctoo never recovered from this spiritual and material ravaging.”

“Timbuctoo, Tumbuto, Tombouctou, Tumblyktu, Tumbuktu or Tembuch? It doesn’t matter how you spell it. The word is a slogan, a ritual formula, once heard never forgotten. At eleven I knew of Timbuctoo as a mysterious city in the heart of Africa where they ate mice — and served them to visitors. A blurred photograph, in a traveller’s account of Timbuctoo, of a bowl of muddy broth with

little pink feet rising to the surface excited me greatly. Naturally, I wrote an unprintable limerick about it. The words ‘mice in the stew’ rhymed with Timbuctoo and for me both are still inextricably associated.

There are two Timbuctoos. One is the administrative centre of the Sixth Region of the Republic of Mali, once French Sudan — the tired caravan city where the Niger bends into the Sahara, ‘the meeting place of all who travel by camel or canoe’, though the meeting was rarely amicable; the shadeless Timbuctoo that blisters in the sun, cut off by grey-green waterways for much of the year, and accessible by river, desert caravan or the Russian airplane that comes three times a week from Bamako. And then there is the Timbuctoo of the mind — a mythical city in a Never-Never Land, an antipodean mirage, a symbol for the back of beyond or a flat joke. ‘He has gone to Timbuctoo,’ they say, meaning ‘He is out of his mind’ (or drugged); ‘He has left his wife’ (or his creditors); ‘He has gone away indefinitely and will probably not return’; or ‘He can’t think of anywhere better to go than Timbuctoo. I thought only American tourists went there.’

‘Was it lovely?’ asked a friend on my return. No. It is far from lovely; unless you find mud walls crumbling to dust lovely — walls of a spectral grey, as if all the colour has been sucked out by the sun. To the passing visitor there are only two questions. ‘Where is my next drink coming from?’ and ‘Why am I here at all?’ And yet, as I write, I remember the desert wind whipping up the green waters; the thin hard blue of the sky; enormous women rolling round the town in pale indigo cotton boubous; the shutters on the houses the same hard blue against mud-grey walls; orange bower-birds that weave their basket nests in feathery acacias; gleaming black gardeners sluicing water from leather skins, lovingly, on rows of blue-green onions; lean aristocratic Touaregs, of supernatural appearance, with coloured leather shields and shining spears, their faces encased in indigo veils, which, like carbon paper, dye their skin a thunder-cloud blue; wild Moors with corkscrew curls; firm-breasted Bela girls of the old slave caste, stripped to the waist, pounding at their mortars and keeping time with monotonous tunes; and monumental Songhai ladies with great basket-shaped earrings like those worn by the Queen of Ur over four thousand years ago.

And at night the half-calabash moon reflected in the river of oxidised silver, rippled with the activity of insects; white egrets roosting in the acacias; the thumping of the tam-tam in town; the sound of spontaneous laughter welling up like clear water; the bull frogs, whining mosquitoes that prevented sleep, and on the desert side the far-off howls of jackals or the guard-dogs of nomad camps. Perhaps the Timbuctoo of the mind is more potent than one suspects.”

‘Gone to Timbuctoo’ in Bruce Chatwin’s *Anatomy of Restlessness: Uncollected Writings*.

Jephson Huband Smith in *Notes and Marginalia Illustrative of the Public Life and Works of Alfred Tennyson, Poet Laureate*, wrote, “Tennyson having received his early education at Somersby where his father was rector, entered Trinity College, Cambridge. It was here as undergraduate in 1829 that he won his first public distinction, for a poem on a subject that it would almost be imagined was purposely selected for its uninspiring nature. The theme was Timbuctoo—one that would leave some grave doubts upon our minds whether the Cambridge dons have not some similar ideas about poetry to those dog-fanciers who in their calling select sky-terriers and bull-dogs for their extreme ugliness—at least it is difficult otherwise to explain these matters. Happily the poem was to be in blank verse, or the competitors might have been sorely pressed to discover the rhyme that has been suggested for Timbuctoo, which is brought into use by alluding to the carnivorous propensities of the inhabitants who swallowed the missionary and his hymn-book too! Sydney Smith I think it was who, being challenged to produce a rhyme for Timbuctoo, scribbled down the lines:—

In the vale of Cassawarrie,

By the plain of Timbuctoo,

There I ate a missionary—

Body and bones and hymn-book, too.”

The cannibals of Timbuctoo no matter how widespread a belief in 19th century England were a fiction. I have never thought of skye terriers as being ugly, just cheerfully scruffy-looking, and although those undergraduates undoubtedly produced a number of very dull poems Timbuctoo in itself is certainly not a dull subject.

* * * * *

“I trudged north from the centre of Timbuktu through the dun-coloured streets, passed by the old mud-built university that had made the city a centre of Islamic learning when it was grounded in 1340, skirted a couple of shabby mosques with their distinctive prickling of structural poles protruding into the air, and eventually came to a great depression in the desert floor, maybe 50 metres deep. It was early in the morning. I had left the Prefecture of Police, where I had collected one of the obligatory passport stamps. The area was peaceful, again, though Tuareg bands were still said to be harassing travellers in the northern oases, and the police were watchful and suspicious. A block further I found a police van stuck in the sand, its wheels spinning impotently. Crowds went by, paying it no mind and never offering to help — Fulani women in startling scarlet and gold robes; Tuareg men, veiled and hidden, in their distinctive indigo. The desert sand was 20 centimetres deep, much thicker in places, and it was like walking across a beach; the houses were nearly half a metre below street level. Soon, I guessed, they would be overtaken and buried as the Sahara continued its relentless march. The previous day I’d had a gloomy conversation with the chef de mission culturelle of Timbuktu, whose losing job it was to protect the decaying but historic city from poverty, neglect, rapaciousness, and the Sahara.

“Money,” he said, “money’s the real problem. Without money, you can do nothing. You cannot sweep back the Sahara with a broom.”

UNESCO had declared Timbuktu a World Heritage Site, a part of the cultural patrimony of the human species and therefore worth protecting. But it had provided no money.

“Are things getting worse?”

“Oh yes, of course,” he said. “In the old days the traders came up the Niger River and stayed here before attempting the crossing to Cairo or Marrakech. They had gold with them, and ivory, and they bought salt. The town was full of rich things —”

“No,” I said, “I meant the desert.”

“Oh, of course. Once there were gardens to the south, to the banks of the Niger, when canals brought the river water here. Now, there is only sand.”

“The Niger is at least ten kilometres away from here, isn’t it?”

“Yes. It used to be much nearer. But the desert is closing in.”

The poor people were cutting down the few scraggly trees for firewood. They had no other source of fuel and no option; you can’t eat goat meat raw.

In the old days, he said, the Tuareg would never cut down trees. They needed the shade when they grazed their stock, and in the wadis the trees grew unmolested. But life was changing. Even the Tuareg needed money, and the only way they could get money was to come to town. There, they settled down, and instead of maintaining their lives as poor but healthy nomads they became slum dwellers. It is a planetwide problem, and the chef de mission knew he had no answers. Once, Timbuktu had been a prosperous city of 100,000 inhabitants. It slowly shrank, until barely 20,000 were left. Now, the nomads are swelling it again, but it’s no longer prosperous. All these new citizens need water.”

Marq de Villiers in *Water Wars*

I had the touching idea that Paul Auster and his son went on a sort of bonding holiday to Timbuktu and later wrote about it. I don’t know where I got that idea from, I obviously had mixed him up with someone else, because his novel *Timbuktu* is a novel about a dog in the US city of Baltimore. Mr Bones is a likeable character and has the reader’s sympathy when his owner, the vagabond Willy, is dying, when he is on the threshold of the next world, and he is going to be left to fend for himself.

“That was where people went after they died. Once your soul had been separated from your body,

your body was buried in the ground and your soul lit out for the next world. Willy had been harping on this subject for the past several weeks, and by now there was no doubt in the dog's mind that the next world was a real place. It was called Timbuktu, and from everything Mr. Bones could gather, it was located in the middle of a desert somewhere, far from New York or Baltimore, far from Poland or any other city they had visited in the course of their travels. At one point, Willy described it as "an oasis of spirits." At another point he said: "Where the map of this world ends, that's where the map of Timbuktu begins." In order to get there, you apparently had to walk across an immense kingdom of sand and heat, a realm of eternal nothingness. It struck Mr. Bones as a most difficult and unpleasant journey, but Willy assured him that it wasn't, that it took no more than a blink of an eye to cover the whole distance. And once you were there, he said, once you had crossed the boundaries of that refuge, you no longer had to worry about eating food or sleeping at night or emptying your bladder. You were at one with the universe, a speck of anti-matter lodged in the brain of God. Mr. Bones had trouble imagining what life would be like in such a place, but Willy talked about it with such longing, with such pangs of tenderness reverberating in his voice, that the dog eventually gave up his qualms. Timbuk-tu. By now, even the sound of the word was enough to make him happy. The blunt combination of vowels and consonants rarely failed to stir him in the deepest parts of his soul, and whenever those three syllables came rolling off his master's tongue, a wave of blissful well-being would wash through the entire length of his body – as if the word alone were a promise, a guarantee of better days ahead."

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February 4: François Rabelais
Waratah Rosemarie Gillespie
February 5: Susan Hill
February 6: Dermot Bolger
February 7: Sinclair Lewis
Charles Dickens
February 8: Jules Verne
Colin Simpson (d)

* * * * *

Colin Simpson in *The New Australia* wrote, "This is an odd place to begin a book," I thought as I scrambled overside from the big fiberglass launch and into the dinghy. "Nobody comes to Possession Island."

'As the Torres Strait Islander rowed for the shore I reminded myself that the book would not be only for travellers in Australia, and that I had what I thought was a good reason for starting it at this island.

'It is the island where Cook took possession of the whole of the eastern part of Australia, which he was to call New South Wales, in the name of His Majesty King George III on 22nd August 1770. Possession Island, as he called it, lies off the tip top of the continent. Close to Cape York and south-east of Thursday Island, where I had come to a ten-dollar agreement with Pop Thorpe, who was white-haired and wind-bitten and seventy-four. Pop, who ran the mailboat to the mainland, would veer from his weekly course in the Mary Elton and drop me off on uninhabited Possession.

' "How long do you want to stay there? Half an hour do you? There's nothing to see except the monument."

'In fact, there was something else. The mine I had read about should be close to the monument. I told Pop Thorpe half an hour would do.

'And here we were, making for the rocky little point where the obelisk stood. Cook would, surely, have landed on the adjacent beach. But an eminence is a better place for a monument, and it had been placed up above the corralled rocks we landed on, in a calm sea as blue as the eye of heaven.

'We scrambled up—a young entomologist named Geoff Monteith who had come aboard at Bamaga and Dick the Torres Strait Islander. Sunburnt grass grew tall and wild round the base of an

obelisk that was painfully plain, with just a square bronze plate of lettering that began: LIEUTENANT JAMES COOK, R.N., OF THE ENDEAVOUR.... He is written of, even by some historians, as CAPTAIN Cook, but he wasn't, then, in rank, though he captained the Endeavour. You could almost hear them gruffing happily at the Admiralty on his return: "Demmed capable feller, Cook. Farm labourer's son, wasn't he? Used to be in colliers. Have to give him a captaincy after this voyage."

'I looked down on the empty beach that made a scallop of white sand near the north end of a bigger island than I had imagined Possession would be, and tried to see Cook—with the Endeavour standing off where Pop Thorpe was hove to and the Redcoats with their muskets for the volley when the flag was raised—landing. The clothes I had seen Cook pictured wearing were much too hot. Knee-breeches and shirtsleeves for the Great Navigator? Great he was. Torres Strait is a labyrinth of reefs, as I knew from sailing it on the old missionary lugger Herald, and coral on a fang of rock scraping across the hull makes an ugly sound: and to reach the Strait that bore the name of the Spanish navigator Torres, who sailed through it in July 1606, Cook had to navigate the most treacherous unknown sea in the world, between the Queensland coast and a thousand miles of Great Barrier Reef.

'About fifty yards from the monument was a big hole. In the side of this shaft was a drive, a tunnel into the hillside. It did not go in far, but farther than we did. The old mine began to squeak and smell, until it was full of the squeaking and the stench of nested bats.

'A surveyor-explorer named Embley had landed on Possession Island more than a hundred years after Cook did, in 1895. Embley had "... observed a quartz reef, containing visible gold, standing out boldly from the coral. He traced this reef to the highest point on the island [it is by no means the highest point], the point on which Captain Cook had set up his flagstaff.... Mr Embley and others worked the reef for some years. The first shaft was sunk where Captain Cook's flagstaff had been planted." Nobody knows exactly where it was planted.'

The mine produced no less than 2,480 ounces of gold before being abandoned around 1901 and Simpson speculates on what Australia's history might have been if Cook had glimpsed that gold seam. It seems very unlikely that Australia would have been chosen as a dumping-ground for convicts if it had been seen as the new El Dorado ...

"Sighting an island near the north end of Australia, Cook planted a British flag, and called it 'Possession Island'. According to Aboriginal oral history, the people on the island fled when they saw the ship approaching.

"Standing on this island, Cook claimed to take possession of the whole eastern coast of the continent in the name of the King of England, naming it 'New South Wales'. This action, by which he claimed sovereignty over the area for the King, was an invalid application of the doctrine of discovery. 'Discovery' is an act of finding an unknown territory. The doctrine of discovery permits a nation which discovers an uninhabited territory that belongs to no one to take possession of it and thus acquire sovereignty and ownership of that territory. When Cook claimed possession of 'New South Wales' for the Crown, he had no grounds for believing that the country was uninhabited, since he had encountered Aboriginal people on a number of occasions. He also broke the terms of his instructions, which included: to exercise the utmost patience and forbearance with respect to the native inhabitants; to restrain the wanton use of firearms; and to consult the inhabitants on their views before taking possession of parts of the country."

Waratah Rose Gillespie in *About Aboriginal Sovereignty*.

At school we learnt of Cook's discovery of Australia with a little side step to look at those pathetic Dutch sailors who always seemed to keep running into Western Australia. But it was only much later when I came upon Kenneth Gordon Macintyre's researches into the possibility that Cristovão Mendonça may have sighted the Australian mainland as early as the 1520s that the story became more complex. Simpson in his book *Islands of Men* looks at another possibility. Writing of the

Torres Strait islanders he says, “And there may be a dash of European blood in their make-up, a dash of Spanish according to those who hold that Spanish galleons were wrecked on the reefs of the Great Barrier’s head and that castaways from such wrecks left their mark. One favourite conjecture is that the ships under Lope de Vega that parted from Mendana’s expedition to the Solomon Islands at Santa Cruz in 1595, and were never heard of again, were wrecked in Torres Strait.

“The Mer people of the village of Las on the eastern side of the island are markedly light-skinned. Also, there are names that could be Spanish in derivation, such as Iose. And a former protector of the islands, Percy Jensen, said to me, “How do you account for this? In the Miriam language of Mer, ‘It happened today’ is ‘Ablay ocki den diem’, almost pure Latin!”

“Spanish coins have been found on these islands. Jack McNulty who kept the Federal Hotel at Thursday Island had some I took rubbings of: the date on one was 1780 and on another 1818. A skeleton with a long rusted sword said to be Spanish was found in a cave on Murrulug (Prince of Wales) Island. Rubies and a gold ring were dug up on Ugar (Stephens) Island by a trochus-sheller named Bruce. An old man of Ugar remembered, he said, that when he was a boy there was a wreck and people came ashore from it, including a white woman, and they were killed at the spot where the rubies and ring were found. This could not have happened earlier than 1840. In about that year, according to an old native of Erub (Darnley) a party of castaways who were “not the same as Englishmen” landed from rafts on Douar. They too were killed, he said, and eaten.”

Had the Aboriginal tribes of Port Jackson had the same tastes the history of Australia may have been very different.

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‘From Cairns we flew in thirty-five minutes to where, in E. J. Banfield’s words, “Two and a half miles off the north-eastern coast ... is an island bearing the old English name of Dunk.”

‘Banfield, largely because of his appreciation of the great navigator, joined with officialdom in retaining the Cook-given name of Dunk rather than the native name of Coonanglebah. So says Alec H. Chisholm in his introduction to a new edition of *The Confessions of a Beachcomber*.

‘Edmund James Banfield, who was born in Liverpool, came in infancy to Australia where his father founded a newspaper in Maryborough, Victoria, on which the son worked. He subsequently over-worked, to a state of nervous exhaustion, as a journalist on the Townsville Daily Bulletin. After looking at a number of islands, he selected Dunk to withdraw to, with his wife (they were childless) in 1897, when he was forty-five. As he puts it, “...a weak mortal sought an unprofaned sanctuary—an island removed from the haunts of men—and there dwelt in tranquillity, happiness and security” for twenty-five years. His Beachcomber book (1908) was acclaimed overseas as well as in Australia, and he followed it with *My Tropic Isle*, *Tropic Days* and the posthumously published *Last Leaves from Dunk Island*.

‘Banfield died on the island, aged seventy-one, in 1923, and his wife Bertha was alone for three days before a passing ship saw her distress signal. They are buried together on Dunk, and their rustic grave has the simple dignity of lichened stone that blends with the lichened rain-forest. The epitaph of the Beachcomber who went aside from the world to live is from Thoreau: If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears.

‘Alec Chisholm, the author and ornithologist who had spent some time on Dunk with Banfield, returned in 1967 to unveil a portrait of him and was “disturbed by the thought that ‘development’ may have grievously affected the once-tranquil island.” He found that the Avis Air Charter Company, the lessees of 360 acres, had developed the tourist portion in a way that merged with the 6,000 other acres of National Park.’

Banfield’s *Confessions of a Beachcomber* is now seen as a classic and reprinted every so often. It has some attractive writing about the landscape, he and his wife seem to have reveled in their solitude, yet the title is misleading. Beachcombers are poor. Beachcombers do not get waited upon. But Mr and

Mrs Banfield took two Aboriginal servants with them. And he has the prejudices and the lack of empathy and understanding of his time.

Banfield begins his book, “Two and a half miles off the north-eastern coast of Australia—midway, roughly speaking, between the southern and the northern limits of the Great Barrier Reef, that low rampart of coral which is one of the wonders of the world—is an island bearing the old English name of Dunk.

‘Other islands and islets are in close proximity, a dozen or so within a radius of as many miles, but this Dunk Island is the chief of its group, the largest in area, the highest in altitude, the nearest the mainland, the fairest, the best. It possesses a well-sheltered haven (herein to be known as Brammo Bay), and three perennially running creeks mark a further splendid distinction. It has a superficial area of over three square miles. Its topography is diversified—hill and valley, forest and jungle, grassy combs and bare rocky shoulders, gloomy pockets and hollows, cliffs and precipices, bold promontories and bluffs, sandy beaches, quiet coves and mangrove flats. A long V-shaped valley opens to the south-east between steep spurs of a double-peaked range. Four satellites stand in attendance, enhancing charms superior to their own.

‘This island is our home. He who would see the most picturesque portions of the whole of the two thousand miles of the east coast of Australia must pass within a few yards of our domain.

‘In years gone by, Dunk Island, “Coonanglebah” of the blacks, had an evil repute. Fertile and fruitful, set in the shining sea abounding with dugong, turtle and all manner of fish; girt with rocks rough-cast with oysters; teeming with bird-life, and but little more than half an hour’s canoe trip from the mainland, it carried dusky denizens who were fat, proud, high-spirited, resentful, treacherous, and far from friendly or polite to strangers. One sea-captain was maimed for life in our quiet little bay during a misunderstanding with a hasty black possessed of a bright new tomahawk, a rare prize in those days. This was the most trivial of the many incidents by which the natives expressed their character. Inhospitable acts were common when the white folks first began to pay the island visits, for they found the blacks hostile and daring. Why invoke those long-silent spectres, white as well as black, when all active boorishness is of the past? Civilization has almost fulfilled its inexorable law; only four out of a considerable population remain, and they remember naught of the bad old times when the humanizing process, or rather the results of them, began to be felt. They must have been a fine race—fine for Australian aboriginals at least—judging by the stamp of two of those who survive; and perhaps that is why they resented interference, and consequently soon began to give way before the irresistible pressure of the whites. Possibly, had they been more docile and placid, the remnants would have been more numerous though less flattering representatives of the race.’

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“How wonderful are islands! Islands in space, like this one I have come to, ringed about by miles of water, linked by no bridges, no cables, no telephones. An island from the world and the world’s life. Islands in time, like this short vacation of mine. The past and the future are cut off, only the present remains. Existence in the present gives island living an extreme vividness and purity. One lives like a child or a saint in the immediacy of here and now. Every day, every act, is an island, washed by time and space, and has an island’s completion. People too become like islands in such an atmosphere, self-contained, whole and serene; respecting other people’s solitude, not intruding on their shores, standing back in reverence before the miracle of another individual. “No man is an island,” said John Donne. I feel we are all islands—in a common sea.”

Anne Morrow Lindbergh in *Gift from the Sea*.

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Michael Connor in *The Invention of Terra Nullius* says, “it means a territory without sovereignty”. This was interesting so I went and looked in a number of Latin dictionaries and found: Terra: earth, land, ground, soil, a particular country, land or region “The earth as a goddess” in Cassells; and Nullus/Nullius: no, none, not any, not at all, non-existent. While the Oxford Latin

Dictionary says: Terra: earth, land, ground, soil, country, region, and Nullus: not any, no.

In other words the widely accepted definition of no people and this definition of no sovereignty are both drawing a long bow. In effect it would literally mean Nowhere, Nothing, A Place with No Existence, perhaps an imagined place. So I was curious. Of course we take Latin phrases and make them mean what we want. I'm not sure that phrases like De Facto and Decree Nisi were originally intended to deal with divorce or unmarried partners. A phrase can change, expand, alter, drop its meaning. That is language. Some remain specific. Nullus arbor, meaning no tree, easily became Nullarbor. But others have lived far more complex lives.

The difficulty for Cook was that he had been given quite specific instructions: he was to claim uninhabited territory but where land was inhabited he was to negotiate with the people with the view to persuading them to become subjects of George III. Of course he didn't do that. It was an impossible ask if he had taken that instruction seriously. So his landing on Possession Island was his simple and effective way of circumventing his instructions without seeming to do so. It could be argued that he briefly possessed Possession Island. He and his men went ashore. They walked around. No doubt they collected some water, possibly shot a couple of wallabies, probably urinated here and there, sketched in something of the geography, planted a flag, then went back to their ship.

He had claimed all of eastern Australia but he hadn't possessed it. I can stand out on my balcony of a morning and yell at the top of my voice 'I claim all of Hobart for Her Majesty Elizabeth II' but it would be a waste of breath because I cannot possess all of Hobart without running into serious conflict with the people who own the various parts of the city. When Cook got home and made his reply it was then up to the government and the king to decide if they wanted to take it any further and try to turn a claim into a possession. If a serious French/Spanish coalition had decided to invade England at that moment the claim would have languished as an historical curiosity little different to the ephemeral claims made by Dutch explorers. But they set out to possess and all that that involved.

Possession Island, a lonely half-forgotten little place, was the beginning of that process.

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February 9: Brendan Behan

February 10: Boris Pasternak

February 11: Maryse Condé

February 12: Charles Darwin

February 13: Georges Simenon

February 14: Bruce Beaver

February 15: Bruce Dawe

February 16: Peter Porter

February 17: A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson

February 18: William Howell

Toni Morrison

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"At 4 a.m. I took over the watch and waited anxiously for the day. At daybreak on 18 February (my birthday) I was delighted to find that all that work and all those calculations had not been for nothing. A momentary lifting of the horizon haze revealed land, the island of Alegrana, far to the east. I could not have wished for a better birthday present. Then, as dawn spread high into the sky, I observed one of nature's rarest and strangest phenomena. There above me, painted on the vault of the heavens, was the outline of the various islands of the Canary group. I saw there, projected by some atmospheric freak of inversion, a gigantic facsimile of the large Admiralty chart that lay spread on my knees.

"This unexplained trick of nature appears to be confined to the Canary Islands. Bill Greer later told me that he also had observed it as he passed through the islands in Kalkara, like myself at dawn. To the best of his knowledge and mine it has not been reported elsewhere in the world. Its closest parallel is the unique and rare Spectre of the Brocken, which I observed in the extinct volcanic crater of

Haleakala on the island of Maui in the Hawaiian group. However, this is explained as simply a shadow figure on a cloud bank within the crater, and it is invariably encircled by rainbows. It is the shadow of the spectator, and it was once reported that three complete rainbows surrounded it. I believe that this phenomenon was first observed in the Harz mountains of Germany in 1780. The Canaries' phenomenon was on a much grander scale, and there was no sign of the usual rainbows. It lasted for about two minutes, until the sun had climbed well out of the sea, when the silhouetted figures gradually faded into the orange of a vivid sunrise."

What a deliciously spooky name—the Spectre of Brocken! William Howell in *White Cliffs to Coral Reef* also noted that the island of Lanzarote is regularly denuded by plagues of locusts blown from Africa but it seems to act as a barrier, saving the other islands. He also says, "They're not called the Canary Islands after the yellow canary bird that you have chirping in that cage of yours.

"They're called the Canary Islands because the old Spanish word for "dog" was "can". You see, the Guanches, as the long-dead aborigines of these islands were called, trained fierce dogs which they set upon the early Spanish and Portuguese navigators who landed on these shores." There is a wild bird, greenish-coloured, which gets called a canary as well as caged yellow canaries.

And he says of the Guanches, "The Canarios, men and women, are magnificent physical specimens, unlike the undernourished Spaniards. People say that Grand Canary and Teneriffe are the healthiest places in the world, and I can well believe it after seeing the natives. Very tall and strong Canarios are nicknamed "Guanches", after the original inhabitants of the islands whom I mentioned earlier. They were a tall, blond, blue-eyed people, of Phoenician descent, though some romanticists would have you believe that they were the remnants of the lost tribes of Atlantis. The Guanches were enormously big and strong. They embalmed their dead, and in the Canary Museum at Las Palmas there are Guanche mummies more than eight feet tall.

"But they were still living in the Stone Age when the Spanish conquistados came to the islands. Every man was massacred by the well-armed Spaniards, though a few women and children were spared. At the Perez Galdos Theatre, in Las Palmas, you can see murals by the Canary artist Nestor showing the tall, bearded Guanches defending their caves by rolling boulders down upon the Spanish knights. The Canarios hate the Spaniards. They complain that all the best government positions in the islands are filled by these outsiders. They also remember when Franco's troops occupied Las Palmas at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, and took 3,000 Canarios into the fields to be shot, many for no greater offence than having voted Republican in the previous elections."

And now the islands have been over-run by sun-seekers from northern Europe.

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Adam Jacot de Boinod wrote in *The Meaning of Tingo*, "On the tiny mountainous Canary Island of La Gomera there is a language called Silbo Gomero that uses a variety of whistles instead of words (in Spanish silbar means to whistle). There are four 'vowels' and four 'consonants', which can be strung together to form more than four thousand 'words'. This birdlike means of communication is thought to have come over with early African settlers over 2500 years ago. Able to be heard at distances of up to two miles, the silbador was until recently a dying breed. Since 1888, however, Silbo has been a required language in La Gomera schools.

"The Mazateco Indians of Oaxaca, Mexico, are frequently seen whistling back and forth, exchanging greetings or buying and selling goods with no risk of misunderstanding. The whistling is not really a language or even a code; it simply uses the rhythms and pitch of ordinary speech without the words. Similar whistling languages have been found in Greece, Turkey and China, whilst other forms of wordless communication include the talking drums (ntumpane) of the Kele in the Congo, the xylophones used by the Northern Chin of Burma, the banging on the roots of trees practiced by the Melanesians, the yodeling of the Swiss, the humming of the Chekiang Chinese and the smoke signals of the American Indians."

He also wrote: "I looked at languages from all corners of the world, from the Fuegian of

southernmost Chile to the Inuit of northernmost Alaska, and from the Maori of the remote Cook Islands to Siberian Yakut. Some of them describe, of course, strictly local concepts and sensations, such as the Hawaiian kapau'u, 'to drive fish into the waiting net by striking the water with a leafy branch'; or pukajaw, Inuit for 'firm snow that is easy to cut and provides a warm shelter'. But others reinforce the commonality of human experience. Haven't we all felt termangu-mangu, Indonesian for 'sad and not sure what to do' or mukamuka, Japanese for 'so angry one feels like throwing up'? Most reassuring is to find the thoughts that lie on the tip of an English tongue, here crystallized into vocabulary: from the Zambian language of Bemba sekaseka, 'to laugh without reason', through the Czech nedovtipa, 'one who finds it difficult to take a hint', to the Japanese bakku-shan, 'a woman who appears pretty when seen from behind but not from the front'.

"The English language has a long-established and voracious tendency to naturalize the best foreign words: ad hoc, feng shui, croissant, kindergarten. We've been pinching words from other cultures for centuries." But we have confined our whistling to little tunes and calling dogs ...

* * * * *

"Grand Canary itself is an arid island of brown mountains with little pockets of fertility tucked away in volcanic crevasses, and geraniums, growing with unexpected profusion in a handful of dust, line the roadsides as they might a private driveway. Bougainvillea, hibiscus, and poinsettia decorate Las Palmas and outlying villages, splashing white walls and buildings with bold brave colours as the pools of paint blaze on an artist's palette. The architecture is generally Spanish-Moorish and the buildings are interspersed with naked areas like the bombed sites in London. There are modern hotels of a quality unsurpassed anywhere, yet if you get up early enough in the morning you will see herds of goats being driven from door to door delivering the day's supply of milk, which no one can deny is fresh.

"Old and new. From the old to the new. The sojourn in Las Palmas had been so vivid and real, and a springboard, I hoped, from an old life into a new one. We left the island enveloped in cloud thicker than the mists of memory, the day we set off in search of the Trade Winds, the New World, and a new life ... "

Ann Davison in *My Ship Is So Small*, 1958.

* * * * *

"Eleven days' sailing had brought me again on terra firma. The little village of Castillo del Romeral, about ten miles south of Las Palmas, gave me a princely reception. When the dinghy was sighted, the inhabitants came flocking to the beach, convinced that I was a real castaway. I was therefore greeted by a sort of general assembly from the village and surrounding farms, simple, welcoming people, colourfully dressed, all waiting for me on the beach.

The coasts of the Grand Canary are extremely rocky, and although I had succeeded in landing on a small section where sand predominated, there were plenty of sharp outcrops menacing the inflatable dinghy. It only had to move a few feet to the left or right to be punctured. The bystanders soon solved that problem. With its little tricolour flag flying proudly, L'Hérétique, still fully loaded, was lifted on to the shoulders of twenty strong men and carried further inshore."

Dr Alain Bombard in *The Bombard Story*.

"The voyage was turning out more difficult and certainly more tedious than I had expected. However, at the end of twelve days I expected to change the chart and start using that for the Caribbean approaches. That would mean I had eight hundred miles to go. The voyage from Casablanca to Las Palmas began to seem like child's play. I had finally given up any idea of showing a light at night. I may have missed thereby an occasion of sending news by a passing ship, and I began to brood about this during hours when I might have been reading. Somehow I had lost my taste for books and I felt I should have paid more attention, before leaving, to the old problem of what books to take on a desert island. (In order to have a little of everything, I had brought with me some Molière and a complete Rabelais, a Cervantes, a Nietzsche, Aeschylus in the two languages, Spinoza, a selection from Montaigne and, as musical scores, the two Passions of Bach and the Quartets of Beethoven.)"

Bombard was not just another adventurer sailing to or past the Canaries. He was a French doctor on a mission. He was sailing an inflatable dinghy across the Atlantic to prove that sailors wrecked without food and water could still survive. He lived almost solely on raw flying fish. He took small sips of sea water regularly. He lost weight. He got bored and lonely on the long trip. But he survived. Should you too be unlucky enough to be shipwrecked and cast adrift in a small inflatable you can survive. Take Dr Bombard as your beacon and don't despair.

And now a man called Bowie Keefer has invented a small gadget which can turn sea water back into fresh water. Marq de Villiers says, "In the 1980s he was experimenting with variants of filtration techniques, working with the process called "reverse osmosis." He came up with a way to recover some of the energy stored in the residual brine from a first filtration, to further clarify water. His smallest device — small enough to fit in a pocket — uses human energy to produce about a litre of fresh water per hour, more than enough to fend off the Ancient Mariner's gloom."

Just don't forget to pack it when you set sail.

* * * * *

"Tenerife, in the Canary Islands, was a picturesque place full of sunshine and good humour — until British holidaymakers started turning up in droves more than 20 years ago. They bring much of the money to the island but they also bring much of the trouble.

"Many reckon that the area round Playa de las Americas is fast on its way to displacing the Costa del Sol as Spain's pre-eminent 'Costa del Crime'. Almost 20,000 Brits live permanently in the south of Tenerife and a large number of them are criminals who have a strong grip on the island's underworld, controlling the flow of drugs into Tenerife and dominating the shady world of timeshare. It's said that if you cross any of the criminal element you're likely to get a visit from men with baseball bats. Or you just disappear."

From *Hitmen* by Wensley Clarkson. Fortunately there is more to the Canaries than Tenerife. Just be careful if a timeshare offer sounds 'too good to be true' ...

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- February 19: Carson McCullers
- February 20: Voltaire
- February 21: W. H. Auden
- February 22: Sean O'Faoláin
- February 23: Samuel Pepys
- February 24: David Williamson
- Steve Jobs

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"At the south end of San Francisco Bay, some 50 miles from downtown San Francisco, lie the fertile flatlands of Santa Clara County, sandwiched between two ranges of low hills. The area was known as recently as 1950 as the "prune capital of America." Today the fruit orchards are mostly gone, replaced by a gridiron of futuristic factory units, new freeways, and rows of new apartment buildings which march toward the shimmering horizon. This is "Silicon Valley," home of the microchip — and a lot more besides: according to a recent publicity handout from the "capital" of Silicon Valley, the City of San Jose, the Valley is also the home of the vacuum tube, the transistor, the personal computer, the VTR, the video game, the hard disk drive, the workstation, the mouse, the laptop, the music synthesizer, nuclear body imaging, contact lenses, gene splicing, and the Koosh ball.

"Silicon Valley," as it was first dubbed by local news-sheet editor Don C. Hoefler in 1971, rapidly rose to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s. By 1985, more than 600 of the companies in the American Electronics Association were located in Silicon Valley. Massachusetts trailed in second place with just 112 firms. By 1990, some 1,500 of the 2,500 electronics companies in the US with more than 500 employees could be found within a 30-mile radius of San Jose airport. A total of 2,600 high-tech firms directly employing in excess of 250,000 people were located in the Valley — and

on average, 18 new companies were still being formed each week. Not surprisingly, Silicon Valley has been described as a twentieth-century California “gold rush.”

As the prune farmers moved out, the suburbs spread. San Jose, at the southern end of the valley, became America’s fastest growing city. A small country town in 1950, it jumped from twenty-ninth place in the big-city league in 1970 to eighteenth in 1980 and eleventh in 1990. By then, San Jose had overhauled San Francisco itself to become the third largest city in California, behind Los Angeles and San Diego. With the highest median household income in the US, the second-highest level of educational attainment, 200,000 college students, over 6,000 PhDs, and more than 15,000 resident millionaires, Silicon Valley today would still appear to be the greatest concentration of scientific brainpower and new wealth in the US, if not the world.

Most people trace the origins of this remarkable phenomenon to the decision of William Shockley, co-inventor of the transistor, to move west in 1955. In that year, Shockley returned to his home town of Palo Alto (so named by explorer Gaspar de Portolá after a scraggly pine tree, or “tall stick”) at the north end of the Valley to found Shockley Semiconductor Laboratories, the first such company in the San Francisco area. Prior to that, the infant semiconductor industry had been centred around Boston, Massachusetts, and Long Island, New York. But in fact, the seeds of Silicon Valley had been sown much earlier – by the founders, and key figures in the development of, Stanford University.”

So wrote Tom Forester in *Silicon Samurai*. The area seemed to have a lot going for it: Stanford University turned out students like William Hewlett and David Packard. The climate was mild and dry. There were military installations in California and the military had money for innovation. California attracted skilled mobile non-unionised people with ideas. It attracted venture capital. It was attractive to young entrepreneurs fleeing the hidebound hierarchies in the east. It had access to Mexican migrants for the lower-paid processing jobs.

So why did things go downhill? Forester provides some insights.

“A high degree of labor mobility and the cross-fertilization of ideas may have been good for new or expanding firms and for the Valley as a whole, but it was bad news for established employers who had to go to great lengths to hold on to the employees they’d got. So high pay, help with housing costs, sabbaticals, company gyms, swimming pools, saunas and hot tubs, free Friday-afternoon drinks, and frequent parties tended to become the norm in fast-growing Valley firms in the 1970s and early 1980s. Profit-sharing schemes and stock options also became widespread devices to entrap valued employees.” Companies steadily became less competitive than those in Japan and Korea.

The Valley “happened”; it wasn’t planned. As it took off land became scarce and prices went up. Manual workers could not afford to live close to their workplaces and there was no public transport. When the release of CFCs and other gases from the factories were added in the Valley became home to increasingly toxic smogs. “By far the most serious pollution problem in the Valley involved the contamination of groundwater by leaking underground chemical-storage tanks. In 1981, workers excavating near the Fairchild chip plant at South San Jose discovered chemicals in the soil. A subsequent check revealed that no less than 58,000 gallons of solvent had leaked out of a flimsy fiberglass underground tank. Some 13,000 of the missing gallons were the toxic solvent trichloroethane (TCA). Less than 2,000 feet away was Well 13, an aquifer belonging to the Great Oaks Water Company, which had been supplying contaminated water to thousands of local residents in the Los Paseos area. About 400 plaintiffs began proceedings against Fairchild, alleging the company had caused miscarriages, the premature deaths of babies, birth defects, cancer, skin disorders, and blood diseases. The plant was closed down, and Fairchild spent \$12 million on monitoring wells and soil replacement.” This proved to be just the tip of the iceberg. The majority of wells were found to be contaminated. “In 1988, it was revealed that IBM was spending the staggering sum of \$82 million to clean up a massive toxic chemical spill at one of their plants in the Valley.” Inside the plants was more pollution, often unnoticed, from gases and solvents ... And the water itself may eventually run out.

“The human and social costs of the Silicon Valley “gold rush” are most evident at home in the

family. Workaholic electronics engineers see little of their wives and even less of their children. Husbands find it hard to explain to their families what they are working on, and wives are sometimes barred for security reasons from even visiting their husbands' workplaces. Partly in consequence, the divorce rate in Santa Clara County is the highest in California, which itself has a divorce rate 20 per cent above the nation's average." It is hard to be at work long hours; it is even harder to be innovative almost round-the-clock. And the small "two-men-in-a-garage" type of business which could bring ideas forward was poorly placed to ride out the slumps and often had no time or wish to support employees in times of 'burn-out' or when they were tired, depressed, alcoholic, or barren of ideas.

And then there is the problem of spying, industrial espionage, and simple theft. Microchips are very easy to steal and to hide ... "Their origins can be disguised, and they can be copied. The result is that millions of stolen, counterfeit, and even defective chips find their way on to the "gray market" every year and into the hands of competitors, unsuspecting customers, and foreign governments. Since many crimes go unreported, nobody knows the true extent of the problem. But it is a problem that can be deadly serious, as became clear in 1984, when it was revealed that thousands of potentially defective Texas Instruments chips had been used in advanced US nuclear weapons systems."

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Mark Coggins in *Vulture Capital* set a mystery in Silicon Valley and, curiously, illustrated it with local snapshots. They certainly would not entice visitors but Jeff Goodell in his memoir *Sunnyvale: The Rise and Fall of a Silicon Valley Family* begins with an attractive image, "I loved the word Sunnyvale. It was different from the names of towns around us—like San Jose and Palo Alto and San Francisco, which had a dreamy, old Spanish romance about them. And it was not a name like Silicon Valley, which Sunnyvale was right in the middle of, but which always made me think of breasts and robots. The word Sunnyvale had utopian flair. It suggested to me that I lived in a special place—a world of sunshine and progress, of new gizmos and old fruit trees, where life promised to be a rocket ride across friendly skies. Streets were named after birds and flowers, and I could walk all the way to school on beautifully curving sidewalks, and my fourth-grade class took field trips to buildings where people smashed atoms and built satellites. How could I not feel lucky? I lived in a place where, as my mother often counseled me after a hard day, "Everything will work out okay." "

And then the family took the classic American route and imploded in a welter of divorce and addiction.

"After lunch, I continue my tour of the Valley. Everywhere I go, I feel like I've slipped through to some parallel dimension that is very much like the world I was familiar with but not exactly. The roads curve in the same places, and the limbs of the live oak trees sway in the wind with the same lovely grace, but everything else is different. The people move fast, have clean hands, and are young and rich and multicolored. There's a throb of energy in the background, a faint vibration in the distance that has no source and seems to come from everywhere at once.

Parked at a pull-out on Skyline Boulevard above Palo Alto, I notice that new houses are rising higher and higher on the hillsides of the Valley, and the buildings in downtown San Jose are growing taller and taller. The entire Valley seems to tremble with energy. You can almost hear voices crackling along telephone wires and the hum of the transformers as they feed electricity to the millions of tiny silicon brains that are parsing lines of code, shooting electrons through miles of tiny wires, opening this file, closing that one, performing the thousands of discrete operations that go into something as simple as typing the letter m on a keyboard and making an m appear on the screen. It's a miracle of engineering so profound that you would not know how to describe it to a person who lived a hundred years ago, and yet now no one gives it a second thought.

I feel like I'm looking down into the heart of a vast electronic hive, where the honey is time: faster chips, faster software, faster wires. It's not about efficiency—it is about cheating death. Dreaming of speed is the way engineers dream of immortality."

He goes on: "Architecture aside, the neighborhood is unrecognizable. The pale-faced aerospace

engineers are long gone, replaced by recent immigrants from Iran, Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, Russia, Israel, and who knows where else, all drawn here by the smell of money and the promise of a bright future. There are iron grates over windows and doors, just as on apartments in New York City, and a welcome disinterest in what had been the holiest of holy objects when this was our neighborhood: the lawn. In front of my father's house, the grass is weedy and unkempt; other lawns on the block have been replaced by rock gardens or paved over entirely.

There are other, less visible changes. A hundred feet below ground, a plume of toxic chemicals—TCE, TCH, arsenic, toluene—floats in the aquifer. Our old house, I recently learned, sits on the edge of a National Superfund site. There are twenty-two of these in Santa Clara County, four in Sunnyvale alone. The toxins here came from a company that was located a few blocks away in a tree-lined industrial park that made chips for digital watches during the late 1970s. The company popped up overnight and grew like crazy for a few years. There was no time or inclination to consider details such as the safe disposal of the highly toxic chemicals used to clean and etch the chips—they were all just dumped in a rusty storage bin out back. Then the fad for digital watches collapsed, and the company vanished.

Now, a pump runs twenty-four hours a day, sucking water out of the aquifer, scrubbing out the most dangerous chemicals, then piping the almost-clean water into the bay. The toxins are then aerated and forced up an innocent-looking silver pipe and released into the sky, where, according to the not-altogether-reassuring logic of the Environmental Protection Agency, they pose less risk to human beings. About a half pound of toxins are spewed out in an invisible cloud over my old neighborhood each day. This process will continue for the next hundred years or so.

I sit in my rent-a-car, thinking about what the Valley will look like in a hundred years. Like midtown Manhattan, probably. I imagine a geodesic dome, flying cars, neural implants. Who knows what's coming? The future is inexorable, the light at the end of the tunnel toward which everything speeds. The past is the darkness behind, useless and scary. In this world, memory is relevant only if it's expressed in megabytes. Human memory is too slow and burdensome, a relic of an earlier time, a vestigial tail. I feel it myself. Go, go, go, a voice tells me. Move on. I fight the urge. For ten minutes, I just sit in the middle of the street and look. I notice how the trees my father planted are thriving, despite the foul air and water: the olive and a liquidambar out front, the mulberry and the coastal redwood in back. Their trunks are thickening, their branches spreading higher. They are living hourglasses, marking the passage of decades for a world that runs on nanoseconds.”

* * * * *

Cynthia Gomez begins her 'San José: a poem' with:

There's a land with a heart of silicon

A land of computer chips and movie theaters

A hole in a valley sprawling out of control

A land of quinceañeras and taquerias and Our Lady of Sorrows church

Swarmed over with dirty buses, coughing exhaust, teeming with brown skins

Pimpled with painted storefronts in stripmalls screaming foreign tongues

Stomped by shiny boots and shiny suits on their way to the glittering Silicon City

Where chips that aren't made for eating feed colonies of engineers in neat condos

And ends it with:

Dreams float like bumping balloons here, out of little brown and black and yellow heads

Over miles of little tacky-tacky boxes,

Over the glittering lights and polished porticos of Willow Glen,

Over the leaf-clogged creek and over the garbage dumps,

To where they settle, heavy, weighed down by smog,

To rot, preserved in cement and chrome

As a proud sign proclaims a new San José.

* * * * *

“And now, well into the atomic age, the increasing mathematizations that have come about through the computer, bringing with them a mixed blessing of another variety, have crystallized out of the spirit of logical inquiry. Here is another University product, and its spirit can be traced in a path from the Egyptian scribes of four thousand years ago, through Pythagoras and Euclid, through Archimedes and Ptolemy. There is a straight line that passes from the cells of the mediaeval grammarians and logicians to the sweatshops of software and the ateliers of Silicon Valley.”

Thomas Gray Philosopher Cat by Phillip Davis

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Alongside the Silicon Valley of hi-tech, high wages, high powered corporations is the image of people tinkering in sheds. Such as the young Steve Jobs. Walter Isaacson in *Steve Jobs* writes, “The childhood that Paul and Clara Jobs created for their new son was, in many ways, a stereotype of the late 1950s. When Steve was two they adopted a girl they named Patty, and three years later they moved to a tract house in the suburbs. The finance company where Paul worked as a repo man, CIT, had transferred him down to its Palo Alto office, but he could not afford to live there, so they landed in a subdivision in Mountain View, a less expensive town just to the south.

“There Paul tried to pass along his love of mechanics and cars. “Steve, this is your workbench now,” he said as he marked off a section of the table in their garage. Jobs remembered being impressed by his father’s focus on craftsmanship. “I thought my dad’s sense of design was pretty good,” he said, “because he knew how to build anything. If we needed a cabinet, he would build it. When he built our fence, he gave me a hammer so I could work with him.

“Fifty years later the fence still surrounds the back and side yards of the house in Mountain View. As Jobs showed it off to me, he caressed the stockade panels and recalled a lesson that his father implanted deeply in him. It was important, his father said, to craft the backs of cabinets and fences properly, even though they were hidden. “He loved doing things right. He even cared about the look of the parts you couldn’t see.”

Although the young Steve wasn’t very interested in fixing cars he was interested in the rudimentary electronics his father could show him.

“The Jobses’ house and the others in their neighborhood were built by the real estate developer Joseph Eichler, whose company spawned more than eleven thousand homes in various California subdivisions between 1950 and 1974. Inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright’s vision of simple modern homes for the American “everyman,” Eichler built inexpensive houses that featured floor-to-ceiling glass walls, open floor plans, exposed post-and-beam construction, concrete slab floors, and lots of sliding glass doors. “Eichler did a great thing,” Jobs said on one of our walks around the neighborhood. “His houses were smart and cheap and good. They brought clean design and simple taste to lower-income people. They had awesome little features, like radiant heating in the floors. You put carpets on them, and we had nice toasty floors when we were kids.”

“Jobs said that his appreciation for Eichler homes instilled in him a passion for making nicely designed products for the mass market. “I love it when you can bring really great design and simple capability to something that doesn’t cost much,” he said as he pointed out the clean elegance of the houses. “It was the original vision for Apple. That’s what we tried to do with the first Mac. That’s what we did with the iPod.”

But it was the military which began the change. “When we moved here, there were apricot and plum orchards on all of these corners,” Jobs recalled. “But it was beginning to boom because of military investment.” This included Polaroid creating the cameras to go in the U-2 spy plane. Lockheed began to produce ballistic missiles. Westinghouse built tubes and transformers to go in those missiles. “In the wake of the defense industries there arose a booming economy based on technology. Its roots stretched back to 1938, when David Packard and his new wife moved into a house in Palo Alto that had a shed where his friend Bill Hewlett was soon ensconced. The house had a garage — an appendage that

would prove both useful and iconic in the valley — in which they tinkered around until they had their first product, an audio oscillator. By the 1950s, Hewlett-Packard was a fast-growing company making technical instruments.”

And “there was a place nearby for entrepreneurs who had outgrown their garages.” Stanford University’s Dean of Engineering set up a 700 acre industrial park on university land “for private companies that could commercialize the ideas of his students.” But Steve Jobs instead met another youngster with a garage: Stephen Wozniak. And together they created Apple. I wonder if those garages have little plaques on them to guide tourists around the town?

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February 25: Anthony Burgess

Sylvia Brooke

February 26: Gabrielle Lord

Victor Hugo

Michel Houellebecq

February 27: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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I once read, somewhere, that there is a statue of ‘Evangeline’ at Grand Pré in Canada. But exactly where this is and why they had chosen to put up a statue to a character in a poem I didn’t know. The Eyewitness Travel Guide to Canada says, “The home of the acclaimed Acadia University, Wolfville and the surrounding countryside radiate a truly gracious charm. Here the green and fertile Annapolis Valley meets the shore of the Minas Basin, and keen visitors can follow country roads past lush farmlands, sun-warmed orchards and gentle tidal flats.

“Much of the valley’s rich farmland was created by dikes built by the Acadians in the 1600s. After the Great Expulsion of 1755, the British offered the land to struggling New England villagers on the condition that the entire village would relocate. These hardworking settlers, known as Planters, proved so successful that the towns of the Annapolis Valley flourished.

“Wolfville is a pretty town of tree-lined streets and inviting shops and restaurants. Nearby, the town’s Visitor Information Center marks the start of a 5-km (3-mile) trail along the Acadian dikes to the graceful church at the Grand Pré National Historic Site. When the British marched into the Acadian village of Grand Pré in August 1755, it marked the beginning of the Great Uprooting, *Le Grand Dérangement*, which eventually forced thousands of Acadians from Nova Scotia. In 1921 a stone church modeled after French country churches was built on the site of the old village of Grand Pré as a memorial to this tragedy. The French Cross marks the spot where the Acadians boarded the ships. Visitors can also stroll around the garden grounds, where a statue of Evangeline, the heroine of Longfellow’s epic poem about the Acadians, stands waiting for her lover Gabriel. The site’s information center features exhibits on the Acadians and their history. After the Great Uprooting, many families hid locally, while some returned in later years.”

It would seem ungracious, wouldn’t it, to ask about the fate of the people who were living happily there when the Acadians arrived from France. But I hope they have found a place somewhere amidst those “lush farmlands, sun-warmed orchards and gentle tidal flats.”

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John Ormerod Greenwood writing about relief efforts in *Quaker Encounters* mentions the Acadians in connection with French Friend Anthony Benezet: “Acadie, as the French called it, had been ceded to the British and renamed Nova Scotia in 1713. When war between the British and French was renewed in the mid-century, the successes of Montcalm in 1755 brought trouble to the Acadian settlers, who were alleged to have given aid and comfort to their compatriots. The men were rounded up, put under guard, and their homesteads burnt. This persecution which to Longfellow was ‘without an example in story’ was followed by deportation, with families and destinations unprepared. Longfellow describes it in *Evangeline*:

Soon o'er the yellow fields, in silent and mournful procession
Came from the neighbouring hamlets and farms the Acadian women.
Driving in ponderous wains their household goods to the seashore,
Pausing and looking back to gaze once more on their dwellings
Ere they were shut from sight by the winding road and the woodland.

* * * * *

Scattered were they, like flakes of snow, when the wind from the north-east
Strikes aslant through the fogs that darken the banks of Newfoundland.
Friendless, homeless, helpless, they wandered from city to city,
From the cold lakes of the North to sultry Southern savannahs —
From the bleak shores of the sea to the lands where the Father of Waters
Seizes the hills in his hands....

Three shiploads with about 500 people on board reached Philadelphia where Benezet took the initiative in caring for these fellow-countrymen with whom his own history gave him so deep a sympathy. With the aid of government grants he had cabins built for them on Pine Street, on ground presented by his fellow Quaker, Samuel Emlen. The outcome was prophetic of many future incidents: the refugees became tiresome. Some suspected Benezet's motives: obviously he could not be purely disinterested; he intended, perhaps, to sell them into slavery? The government sought to disperse them through the colony, and voted a grant to 'settle them in husbandry'; when they refused to go, the Overseers of the Poor refused to receive them on the ground that they might become chargeable. The government then decided to take their children and have them apprenticed. The Acadians, with Quaker support, appealed to George II in 1760; so in 1762 the Pennsylvania government stopped public assistance. In the end the Philadelphia Quakers lost enthusiasm for their guests, and began to look on Anthony Benezet as an 'importunate solicitor'; nevertheless he continued for a decade with great patience to help individual families in hardship, to educate their children and to settle them in trades."

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So what did Longfellow actually have to say about Acadia as a place rather than the Acadians as a people? He begins 'Evangeline' with—

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic,
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.
Loud from its rocky caverns the deep-voiced neighboring ocean
Speaks, and in accents disconsolate answers the wail of the forest.

This is the forest primeval, but where are the hearts that beneath it
Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of the huntsman?
Where is the thatch-roofed village, the home of Acadian farmers,—
Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands,
Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of heaven?
Waste are those pleasant farms, and the farmers forever departed!
Scattered like dust and leaves, when the mighty blasts of October
Seize them, and whirl them aloft, and sprinkle them far o'er the ocean.
Naught but tradition remains of the beautiful village of Grand-Pré.

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February 28: Robin Klein
Stephen Spender
André Migot

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My mother had a great curiosity about a plant called the Kerguelen cabbage. I don't know why. Perhaps an unresolved and unspoken-of deep wish to go and see remote places. She had never seen one and certainly never tasted one but she passed her curiosity on to me.

So whenever I came upon anything about Kerguelen I passed it on to her, such as H. W. Tilman's stories of sailing in the *Mischief*, and I remember my joy when I came upon a coloured photograph of the mysterious plant.

André Migot's book *This Way South* also has a photograph but I didn't come upon it in time to pass it on. He writes that "on 12 February 1772 two vessels of the Royal French Fleet, the *Fortune* and the *Gros-Ventre*, commanded by Captain de Kerguelen, sighted an unknown island. They had put out from the *Île de France* (now known as Mauritius) on January 16, heading for the south. After crossing latitude 40° S. and sailing for several days through thick sea-mists and storms of snow and sleet they anchored before this unknown coast. The next morning the fog had lifted and they were astonished to find a great expanse of land before their eyes."

Migot went, as a doctor, to the French research station there in the 1950s. As most of us, unless we can afford to take tours on cruise ships which specialise in remote places, will never actually see Kerguelen I thought I would add some of Migot's scene-painting. "Kerguelen is volcanic, and Mount Ross, its highest peak (6,450 feet high), is an extinct volcano now covered with eternal snow. Kerguelen is not a single small island, but a large group covering more than 2,500 square miles—about as big as Corsica. The main island is 85 miles by 75. The coast is deeply indented, like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, with long and narrow peninsulas linked to the land by narrow necks and fjords piercing far inland. Our base at Port-aux-Français lies at the head of the deepest fjord, Morbihan Bay. This considerable area is surrounded by a necklace of three hundred islands and islets as well as innumerable rocks, which make coastal navigation very dangerous.

"The Courbet Peninsula is the best-known part of Kerguelen, because our base at Port-aux-Français lies on its southern coast. To the west it is most mountainous, with a number of peaks more than 3,000 feet high. On its eastern side the peninsula slopes down rather steeply to a low, marshy plain—the only flat part of Kerguelen—which reaches to the shore and is so low that it is hardly visible from the sea.

"This is the richest part of the island in wild life. Since it faces east and is therefore fairly sheltered from the westerly gales, the sea-elephants find it easy to land on its immense sandy beaches, where there is plenty of room for them to settle their seraglios and bring up their young. At some seasons the beaches teem with them. On the same beaches there are penguin rookeries, sometimes consisting of hundreds of thousands of birds, and often with colonies of cormorants next door. In the grasslands next to the shore albatrosses and giant petrels come to nest, lay their eggs and brood. And in this nursery the fledglings grow up until they learn to fly."

(Kerguelen has four varieties of penguins: kings, rockhoppers, gentoos, and macaronis.)

"This marshy land next the shore, which seethes with animal life of every sort, is a world apart, active and alive, a strange contrast to the lonely wastes further inland. Moreover, it grows the chief and almost the only species of plant on the island, acaena grass, which fringes the sea with low-lying meadows. In summer this greenery is the only cheerful sight in this bleak land. In winter, frost-bitten by the bitter wind and the snow, it turns yellow and dry until it is indistinguishable from the yellow soil and surrounding fields of gravel.

"Leaving this coastal strip one comes to the stony heart of the island—sad, grim country, quite colourless and dead. This is the domain of the mountains, but they are utterly unlike our Alps or green-skirted Pyrenees, wooded, living and adorned with the delicate beauty of their plants and flowers.

These mountains are cold and lusterless, as dreary as the black basalt rocks of which they are built, without flowers, green pastures or flocks. It is a world of stone, vast bare wastes of rock which help to make the island look so desolate. In the rainy season the streams, which are usually clear, break into waterfalls and rapids and sometimes swell into spate so suddenly as they approach the coast that they become quite dangerous and make it difficult if not impossible to find a way along the shore. There are chains of innumerable small lakes along the glacial valleys, and set in the moraines these clear and shining patches have an unexpected romantic charm in the heart of this despairing landscape.

“Unlike the coast, which teems with life, the interior is almost dead. Here and there a strange umbelliferous plant, the azorella, covers the ground with its large spongy cushions. The botanist might also notice some lichens and mosses and a few species of grass, but they do nothing to improve the landscape. There is nor a tree, not a bush, not a shrub on the whole surface of the island. The wind has seen to that. The only plant fit to eat is the famous Kerguelen cabbage, which is often mentioned by the old navigators, who found it a good tonic against scurvy. But now it is almost extinct, and is found only in the small deserted islands where there are no rabbits. On the main island these insatiable rodents have set about destroying it, and one finds only rare specimens lodged on steep rock faces out of their reach. On the way down to the coast the valleys open into treacherous morasses through which it is difficult and sometimes dangerous to walk. The gentle grasslands, so green and attractive, which are so pleasant to walk on after the hard jagged rock, now turn out to be bogs in which one sinks up to one’s knees and where even the weasels’ broad tracks get stuck.

“Nevertheless, in spite of its austerity, the natural scenery of Kerguelen lacks neither character nor grandeur. I love its severe and savage beauty, which satisfies my taste for desert spaces. ... Mount Ross is an admirable mountain. I could look at it all day. It is often veiled in cloud, but in fine weather it shakes off its shroud and stands up like a pure crystal cone against the blue of heaven.” He goes on to say, “The light effects are often very beautiful, never crude, but always tempered with delicate pastel tones.” But is that enough to wet the intrepid traveler’s appetite?

* * * * *

Directly north from Kerguelen lies another French possession, the small island of Amsterdam. Alfred van Cleef in *The Lost Island* writes of spinning a globe and “out of all these isolated places, I was seeking the most extreme.

“My eyes first fell on Bouvet Island, southwest of the Cape of Good Hope, and just past the northern limit of the Antarctic drift-ice. It had been discovered in the early eighteenth century by the French explorer Jean-Baptiste Charles Bouvet de Lozier, who struggled for ten days to come ashore before finally giving up. Peering through the fog, Bouvet was just able to discern a group of snow-covered rocks—and was immediately convinced he had discovered no mere island, but a promontory of the long-sought Terra Australia Incognita, the fabled last continent, a new land where “the torch of the gospel” could be spread to the greater honor and glory of the king of France. This dream dissolved some fifty years later, when James Cook proved that Terra Australia was nothing more than a cartographic fantasy, and the tiny island was lost for another two centuries before anyone rediscovered what was arguably the most inhospitable, foggy, icy, and infertile spot on Earth. A patch of rock so forlorn that not even the British protested when one day a group of whalers finally planted the Norwegian flag on it.

“Extreme as Bouvet was, it wasn’t quite extreme enough. Although *The Guinness Book of World Records* called the place “the remotest island on Earth,” I considered that a fraud since it was too close to the nearest landmass. So in the end I decided against Bouvet.” He considered St Helena and Tristan da Cunha, the Marquesas and other Pacific islands. “I eventually discovered what I was looking for in the southern Indian Ocean. Nowhere else was the sea more bare, nowhere were the waves higher or the winds more fierce. And perched in the middle of this wild mass of water, equally far from Sri Lanka and South Africa, Australia and Antarctica, nearly two thousand miles from the closest continent, was a miniscule volcanic peak. There was no longer any doubt. I had fallen under the spell of a place

surrounded by endlessness, the most far-flung island on the planet, where even the name seemed linked to my fate: Amsterdam.”

It took him a long bureaucratic struggle to get the French to allow him to visit. And it is debatable if anyone else would wish to follow along the trail he had with great difficulty ‘blazed’. “As small and remote as the settlement was, it had the air of a genuine capital. Civic institutions included a volunteer fire company, garbage collection service, hospital, department of “public works,” power plant, workshop, water purification station, mechanical garage, weather station, open-air slaughterhouse, communications center, and various laboratories. There were vegetable gardens, a narrow lane lined with flower boxes (the boulevard Martin-de-Viviès—the only street with an official name), a few side streets, a small square with two trees, and a little spinney called AmsParc.” And the thing it didn’t have? “Amsterdam had no history, at least not in the sense of stories, ideas, or illusions that had been passed down from father to son, aunt to niece, or neighbor to neighbor. In this sense the island had no tangible past. Nevertheless, this obvious lack of permanence was counterbalanced by an unconscious, imperceptible progression as the veterans passed on customs to the new arrivals.” I wonder. A story doesn’t have to be ‘passed down’ to be a story. But without a library there is no obvious place to go to read, no obvious collection point. And customs and stories inter-twine ...

He had written nothing to do more than wet my curiosity, certainly no particular desire to actually go there—until I came to his brief description of the vegetation. “The Great Wood was located high atop Cape Rubble, at the foot of the False Peak. The moss- and rush-covered path led through the hills. ... At the edge of the wood were cypresses, with the occasional eucalyptus—both planted to protect the last remnants of the primeval forest, still untouched but now smaller than a city park, from the storms. The remaining phylica had silvery trunks with the luster of an olive tree and the squat, bent habit of a mimosa. The species came from Tristan da Cunha, the only other place it was found. There, seeds had found their way into the stomachs of petrels and albatrosses, which vomited them up on Amsterdam. ... The thick carpet of yellowish and red-brown mosses had a sponge-like springiness. The phyllicas stood clumped together in copses surrounded by rushes and ferns. Their black seed buds had a honey-like fragrance.” Their decline “had begun with the moorland fires caused by fishermen and trappers, which sometimes raged for years, wiping out many of the man-sized ferns and rushes in the process. With that, the phylica lost their greatest protectors. All at once they were exposed to the full force of the winds that snapped their branches and snatched their fruit before it was ripe.” Introduced creatures ate the seeds. The phylica trees live on borrowed time. A story. A sad story. A story told many times over.

* * * * *

Kerguelen’s other and nearer neighbour, only 300 miles away to the south-east, is the Australian territory of Heard Island, equally fascinating and equally inhospitable. I came across a booklet called *Heard Island Papers* put out by the Royal Society of Tasmania and bought it. So you might like to know that Heard Island about 466 kms from Kerguelen hosts Australia’s highest mountain, Big Ben, at 2,759 metres high, which is our only active volcano. “It is uncertain who first saw Heard Island. It was seen and recorded by Peter Kemp from *Magnet* in November 1833 and by the whaler Thomas Long in 1849. John Heard and his wife Fidelia, sighted the island in November 1853. Captain McDonald, early in 1854, discovered the islands now bearing his name. There were other sightings in 1854 and 1855. Erasmus Darwin Rogers of *Corinthian* made the first landing in March 1855. He returned soon after and began sealing operations which flourished until 1888.

“The British did not name the island for Heard but the name was popular (under various spellings) with the sealing community and it became respectable by usage. Although originally claimed for Britain, it was transferred to Australia by “exchange of notes” on 19 December 1950 and Australia formally assumed responsibility in 1953.”

The stories of whaling, sealing, boiling down penguins for their oil, are horrible stories—and yet I am in awe of the toughness displayed by the men set down on those shores and left to work alone through isolation, blizzard, and misery at their grim trade ... Curiously, the *Papers* say, “Most sealing

enterprises on Heard Island were American. They operated out of New London, Mystic and other New England ports, and were based primarily at the Kerguelen Islands. During these expeditions, captains would cross to Heard Island where they would drop off one or more gangs of sealers for the summer. In many cases the gangs stayed a full year, so that they could continue sealing while their ship took home a cargo of oil ... The ships rarely stayed long, due to the difficulty of finding a safe anchorage. The weather at Heard Island is extremely unpredictable and changeable. Access to the sealing beaches around Heard was difficult – a dangerous trip through the surf or a traverse across a crevasse-ridden glacier. Mostly the gangs stayed where they landed – they were on their own.”

It isn't hard to see why they wiped out elephant seal populations rather than conserving them (and Heard has been repopulated by seals from as far away as South Georgia in the South Atlantic). But I discovered that my Moby Dick image of hardy New Englanders wasn't quite correct. For instance, “we know from documentary sources that the sealing gangs on Heard Island contained some discrete ethnic groups who were said to be living separately. These groups included Americans and Africans, who were known generically as Cape Verde Islanders (because this was where they joined ships' crews as a means of gaining passage to America). Race was fundamental to their social relations, and different ethnic groups occupied separate quarters, at times racial tensions flaring ... The intra- and intersite distribution of American or African/Cape Verde/Portuguese artifacts may provide information about the relationships between different ethnic groups, enabling the degree of social separation inferred from historic sources to be tested and/or demonstrated.”

The problem, now that Heard Island is a World Heritage site, is how to preserve everything in such a remote place. Hard enough to find the money, the expertise, the political will here. Ten times harder there. Some items have been brought to museums in Australia. But when it comes to preserving wood and metal in situ there is little that can be done other than to record and photograph. The detritus of sealing, trypots, barrels, huts, platforms, windbreaks, will inevitably disappear. Perhaps that is as it should be.

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“One of our companions was a physiologist who was carrying out a series of researches in Antarctica, and he needed blood samples from the albatross. To the ANARE biologist helping him, nimble of foot after a year on the Island, it was child's play to walk along the narrow ledge and carefully collect the great bird from its nest, holding it so that it neither struggled nor bit him. Unfortunately, his hands were so full he was unable to save the unprotected egg on which an eagle-eyed skua promptly swooped. Most of the birds in this colony appeared to have been banded and all the other brooding birds remained calmly on their nests, more trustful of man than of the marauding skuas.”

Shores of Macquarie Island by Isobel Bennett

Macquarie Island has been in the news, not for its fascination as a sub-Antarctic island, but because of the damage human beings have done to it. The introduction of rats, mice, cats and rabbits, nearly managed to wreck it. I hope things are genuinely improving now that an expensive eradication program has been carried out. But the Isobel Bennett book is a reminder that even when we claim to be saving wildlife we can carry out programs of great intrusion and cruelty. Horror was expressed when it was discovered that scientists were branding elephant seals on Macquarie Island with hot irons, sometimes leaving them with suppurating sores. I often wonder about the creatures who get tagged, banded, have radio transmitters glued or pinned to them. Do the unfortunate creatures spend the next few months desperately trying to get rid of this itching, scratching, awkward, weighty foreign body? Does it affect their feeding, their swimming, their mating? Sometimes scientists claim that the damage and death they cause is all in the good cause of 'saving' wild life. The Japanese may be more blatant but they are not alone. So long as we are not prepared to leave their habitats alone, clean up our pollution, remove litter, stop intruding on every aspect of their lives, then no amount of radio transmissions and tags will genuinely 'save' the wild creatures from us.

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Macquarie Island, though not particularly easy to reach, (and one ranger there Darryel Binns said of it “You haven’t got the hassles of city living, you’re not going to get mugged, and you’re not going to be hit by a bus when you walk out your front door”) is a picnic compared to some sub-Antarctic islands. Even smaller, even remoter, even harder to reach is the tiny island of Bouvet. Leslie Thomas in *My World of Islands* writes, “Bouvet, in the South Atlantic, is the world’s most isolated island. Beset by gales, ice and fogs, it is 1,500 miles from the nearest point of land. Few men have ever seen it and far fewer have set foot there. For years it was lost from the charts of mariners. There once was a story that it did not exist at all: that it was a legend, a dream, a mirage. Ross, the great explorer, reported that he could not locate Bouvet, ‘that child of the mist’.”

Bouvet was discovered by Jean-Baptiste-Charles Bouvet de Lozier in 1739 2,400 kilometres south-west of the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. But it had no safe anchorages or safe landing places so sealers and whalers, even if they knew of its existence, left it firmly alone. I remember coming on the story of an intrepid lone yachtsman who reached the small island and found a mysterious yacht beached on the rocky shore well inland. How it had got so far from the sea, who had sailed it there—he had no answer to the mystery of its presence. The island rises up to a peak of 935 metres, mostly hidden in snow and mist, and surrounded by a rocky plain and covering 59 square kilometres. In 1930 its isolation and unknowability ended when Norway formally annexed it. But it has remained an island without stories. I like this. Because stories are bad for animals and birds, clear pools and lichened rocks ...

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February 29: Howard Nemerov

March 1: Robert Lowell

March 2: Sholom Aleichim

Eduard Douwes Dekker

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“The Dutch, I think, can teach most of us a lesson in imperial responsibility. ... Although they ruled the East Indies for three centuries they got on well with the people there.”

John Hillaby in *Journey through Europe*.

I have come upon this sentiment in several other books and it suggests either that the Dutch are very good when it comes to spin or that writers like John Hillaby haven’t done their homework—or that he had a Dutchman with a large stick looming over him as he typed his chapter on Holland.

Several years ago I found some Dutch ancestors on the island of St Eustatius in the Caribbean, part of the Netherlands Antilles. Rijkswaerts, Salomons, Raapzaats, Heyligers. My first thought was ‘How interesting!’ but then I made the disconcerting discovery that they were slave-owners. And far from being in the forefront of the anti-slavery movement Holland did not outlaw slavery in its colonies until 1863 making it one of the last of the colonial powers to do so. Though I am sure John Hillaby and his cohorts would protest that Dutch slaves were particularly well treated ...

The touching idea that the people of the East Indies invited the Dutch in, said they would love to hand over their land and their trade and couldn’t wait to learn Dutch and be treated as second-class citizens, is not borne out by the record. Take for instance Brian May’s brief summation of a couple of Dutch adventures in ‘imperial responsibility’ in his book *The Indonesian Tragedy*.

“The founder of the Dutch empire in the Indies was Jan Pieterszoon Coen, a ruthless, imaginative man, who was twice the company’s Governor-General. ... After an inconclusive naval battle with a superior English force, he sailed to the Moluccas for reinforcements. English and Javanese from the port of Bantam besieged the Dutch fortress in 1619, but withdrew in confusion after quarrelling about who was to occupy it. Coen returned, burned the town of Jakarta, and founded a new town, Batavia, with Dutch-style canals and bridges, which was to become the capital of the Netherlands

East Indies. At the same time he blockaded Bantam and drove the English from the Java Sea, capturing seven ships. He then secured the nutmeg monopoly by killing almost the entire population of the Banda Islands” and it was not until the 19th century that the Dutch faced a real threat to their hegemony, the rebellion led by Prince Diponegoro, which led to a Dutch victory with an estimated 15,000 dead on the Dutch side and around 200,000 Javanese dead. The Dutch developed a very successful plantation culture using a form of land bondage which eventually provided around 30% of the annual budget in the Netherlands. An unremarkable sequence of events in terms of colonialism, regardless of who is doing the colonizing, but not really something to be praised ...

You may feel that other people were just being nasty about Dutch colonialism, perhaps to draw attention away from their own failures, but Dutch writers were also scathing. In *Max Havelaar* the novel by Eduard Douwes Dekker he was, if anything, more scathing. J. M. Coetzee in *Stranger Shores, Essays 1986 – 1999* wrote, “The Netherlands of the mid-nineteenth century was one of the cultural backwaters of Europe. The great current of the Romantic movement had barely stirred its complacent materialism. It had produced only a single literary work of stature, Eduard Douwes Dekker’s novel *Max Havelaar* (1860), an attack on abuses in the colonial East Indies.”

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“On a couple of the islands, potential Dutch colonists found that itinerant pirates had already built crude fortresses, like that at Bushiribana on Aruba, one of the New World’s oldest European structures outside Hispaniola. The Dutch immediately set about building their own defensive trading posts, centred around large forts. The first structure to be built by the Dutch in the Caribbean was that at Fort Kyk-over-al, in the Essequibo region of Guyana in 1621. This fort was used as a slave trading post, dealing not only in imported slaves from Africa, but also local slaves, whom the Dutch supplied to the Spanish.”

Architectural Heritage of the Caribbean: An A—Z of Historic Buildings by Andrew Gravette.

The Dutch struggled to capture and hold on to territory in the Caribbean. The islands of the Netherlands Antilles, Surinam, and other bits they lost to the English and the French. But even if they lost control they often left their names and their people scattered through other colonies. And they themselves fled their colonies at times—and took their slaves with them. I found a Peter Heyliger from St Eustatius turning up in the Danish Virgin Islands with sixty slaves ... St Eustatius had been the wealthiest of Caribbean islands, trading with the American rebels and everyone else (so its slaves were predominantly warehouse rather than plantation slaves). And then British Admiral, Rodney, fell upon the island, looting, pillaging, deporting its Jewish population, on the absurd grounds that its people had been aiding the enemy, i.e. the American colonists, even though this was a Dutch not a British colony, and Britain was ostensibly committed to free trade. It is a reminder that free trade is only what the powerful say it is. If you would like to know more try Barbara Tuchman’s *The First Salute*. Because St Eustatius was the first place to acknowledge the newly liberated American colonies ... and you might like to ponder on the curious fact that liberation is an equally subjective right ...

And, curiously, the only colony Holland now retains is that tiny island of St Eustatius. All its other colonies have opted for independence but St Eustatius (Statia) voted to remain with the Netherlands.

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Of all its colonies undoubtedly South Africa was the most contentious. Territory was acquired piecemeal, sometimes fairly peacefully, sometimes after a struggle. At one stage of my life I had the idea it would be a nice idea to travel up the west coast of South Africa from Capetown, walking, strolling perhaps, and seeing some of the less-publicised places, until I reached Namibia ... or if I was very energetic, Angola. Then I came upon a book called *The Garden Route and Little Karoo* by Leon Nell in which he writes of Mossel Bay. “The Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias set foot on the shores of Mossel Bay on 3 February 1488, the feast day of St Blaise. Dias decided to name the protected cove Aguada de São Bras (Watering place of St Blaise) in honour of the saint and the

freshwater spring discovered nearby. The lighthouse point at Mossel Bay is still known as Cape St Blaise. Dias's visit was the first contact between Europeans and the indigenous people of southern Africa.

Portuguese seafarers used São Bras for many years to replenish their stores of meat and fresh water. Their knowledge of the oceans improved to such an extent that when the famous Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama was looking for a sea route to the east in 1497 he did not have to travel along the west coast of Africa but sailed out into the south Atlantic, landing in St Helena Bay. He and his mariners passed the southern tip of Africa before heading east. They landed at São Bras and spent 13 days there, resting after their long journey and stocking up with fresh water and whatever supplies they could obtain. They wooed the local inhabitants with gifts of red caps and bells, the friendly relationship fostered by bartering, music and dancing."

He mentions Stone Age tools, a petrified forest, cape fur seals, a balmy climate ... I was immediately enamoured of the Garden Route. What I hadn't taken on board was that it is *east* rather than *west* of Cape Town so not on my proposed route. This didn't matter. Armchair travelers can change their plans in the blink of an eye.

And just by Mossel Bay is Plettenberg Bay. I came across a book called *Portrait of Plettenberg Bay* by Patricia Storrar. She says that 1978 marked the "bicentenary of Governor Joachim Ammema van Plettenberg's arriving here to gauge the potential of the bay as a harbour, erecting a possessional stone of the Dutch East India Company and naming the bay complacently after himself." The bay had already had various other names: Bahia das Alagoas, d'Alaguoa, Algoa (Bay of Lagoons), Bahia Formosa (the Bay Beautiful), the Bay of Content, Keurbooms River Bay, Piesang River Bay, and no doubt the indigenous people, described as small and brown, had their own names.

"It is not difficult to roll back the centuries and imagine Plettenberg Bay as the first callers from Europe – Bartholomew Dias and his men – must have seen it almost 500 years ago. Be on the rocks before dawn when the first spectral thinning of the darkness reveals a darker shape to the south where one knows Robberg to be and a jagged-topped strip of deep charcoal where the Tzitzikama mountains will presently emerge from the mist to the north, and in that magic moment the mind's eye will pick out with ease the two gallant little caravals of Dias' squadron, anchored in the Bay, their masts moving rhythmically against the dark gleam of the water as the ships roll on a slow swell." He had two caravals of 50 tons each and a smaller store-ship sailed by his brother Perio Dias, as he set sail in 1487, and a chief pilot Pero d'Alemquer. But his log book was lost overboard in a storm. "Fortunately a 16th century chronicler, João de Lisboa, learned enough of the story from Dias and the seamen who had sailed with him to write a surprisingly detailed account of this voyage in his *Livro de Marinharia*. It is from this *Book on Marine Matters*, plus the names given to features on this coast on early 16th century maps, such as Cantino's chart of 1502, that it has been possible to reconstruct the course of Dias' voyage and deduce with reasonable certainty the names which this master seaman bestowed on the bays, islands, mountains, inlets and other features of the south-east African coast." And Duarte Pacheco Pereira in *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, wrote '15 leagues beyond the *Auguoad* (Watering Place) *de San Bras* (Mossel Bay) is the small bay called *Angra* (Bay) *d'Alaguoa*, so-called because it has a marshy lake ... and this small bay contains an islet (today's Beacon Island) where many sea-wolves and many birds live'. And 'All this land is thinly wooded and moderately populated, but there is no trade'. The ships to and from India with their cargoes of spices called regularly in this area, with varying degrees of contact and some of their names survive along this coast, San Gonzales, Formosa, Estrello, Perestrello, and Delgado. "Appropriately, the name Formosa appears most frequently. The highest peak in the Tzitzikama range, to which the old-timers here lift their eyes almost every day, is Peak Formosa; the original township and post office bore the name Formosa; this is still the Parish of Formosa; a school and a block of flats bear the name Formosa and the exquisite little white heath which blooms freely here in the winter and spring months, is the *Erica formosa*."

And back behind the recorded information in books, logs, and maps, is the information pressed

into the landscape itself; the people who came down to the bays and inlets to fish, to take birds' eggs, for thousands of years before Dias. But this is an ongoing revelation, not a settled fact ...

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March 3: Edward Thomas
March 4: Dr Seuss
March 5: Mem Fox
March 6: Gabriel Garcia Márquez
Elizabeth Barrett Browning
March 7: Thomas Masaryk
March 8: Kenneth Grahame
March 9: Mickey Spillane
March 10: Henry Watson Fowler
March 11: Rupert Murdoch
March 12: Jack Kerouac
March 13: Hugh Walpole
March 14: Maxim Gorki
March 15: John Barbeyrac
March 16: Sully Prudhomme
March 17: Roderic Quinn
March 18: Wilfred Owen
March 19: Tobias Smollett
March 20: David Malouf
March 21: Thomas Shapcott
March 22: Rosie Scott
March 23: Joseph Quincy Adams
March 24: Olive Schreiner
Richard Wurmbrand
March 25: Anne Bronte
A. J. P. Taylor

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While I was browsing in a biography of the historian A. J. P. Taylor, by Kathleen Burk, I came upon this about his childhood reading, "His favourite historical novelist ... was G.A. Henty, and Taylor went so far as to collect these novels himself so that he could reread them at his pleasure. Henty had been a soldier in the Crimea and then a war correspondent in Italy, Abyssinia, Ashanti, Spain and India, and in Paris during the revolutionary uprising of the Commune. An unsuccessful adult novelist, he wrote thirty-six novels for boys, sometimes three or four a year, mainly based on military history, especially that of the Thirty Years War, the Peninsular War and the various wars of the British Empire. ... Taylor's favourite was *A Roving Commission*, which is about a slave rebellion. One authority refers to Henty's 'didactic influence, conveyed largely through the manly characters of the heroes', which is 'supported by strong narrative and an appearance of historical fidelity.' It is questionable whether Taylor absorbed a sense of manly character in the way Henty presumably intended, but he certainly took note of the driving narrative and the historical detail. As he wrote many years later, 'long, long ago I read the works of Henty with more eagerness, more enjoyment and more appreciation than I did those of any other history writer, perhaps even with more profit.'

"Henty's books are certainly full of historical detail. Take *The Young Carthaginian*, the eponymous hero of which is a young nobleman turned soldier called Malchus. The first few chapters focus on the political state of Carthage, after which the reader follows Malchus around the ever-decreasing empire as Hannibal tries to defend it from the Romans. The reader shares with Malchus the last great Carthaginian victories, but the book then takes a personal turn as Malchus is captured, and

ends with his marriage to a Gaulish wife and his departure to live in the Alps as a ‘barbarian’.”

Whether we can really remark on his ‘historical fidelity’ given the failure of historians to agree on very much about ancient Carthage I’m not sure but schoolchildren certainly learnt something about Hannibal and his elephants advancing on Imperial Rome in Taylor’s day.

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“Once there was an ancient town called Carthage, inhabited by emigrants from Tyre, and confronting Italy, opposite to the mouth of the Tiber but far away. Carthage had wealth and power; and it had skill and ferocity in war. Now Juno is said to have loved Carthage best of all cities in the world, giving even Samos the second place. She kept her weapons and her chariot there; and she had already set her heart on making it a capital city governing all the earth, and spared no effort of fostering care, hoping that Destiny might consent to her desire. She had, however, heard of another breed of men, tracing descent from the blood of Troy, who were one day to overthrow this Tyrian stronghold: for they would breed a warrior nation, haughty, and sovereign over wide realms; and their onset would bring destruction to Africa.”

This is Virgil writing ‘Of Gods and Angry Seas’ in the *Aenid*. My first thought was ‘why Juno?’ Tyre was a Phoenician city, now in Lebanon, and the Phoenicians had their own pantheon of gods. The founder of Carthage was said to be Queen Dido. “Dido was married to Sychaeus, who was the greatest landowner of all the Phoenicians; and to her sorrow she loved him ardently. She had been a maid when her father gave her to him; her union with him was her first marriage. But she had a brother Pygmalion, who then occupied the throne at Tyre; and he was a monster of unmatched wickedness. A murderous quarrel broke out between the princes. Pygmalion was so blind with lust for gold that he lay in wait for Sychaeus at a holy rite, caught him off his guard, and sacrilegiously struck him down with a dagger-thrust. But he forgot to fear the power of his sister’s love. For long Pygmalion concealed his deed, giving Dido false reasons for hope, and with many cruel pretences deluding her heart-sick anxiety. Then, while she slept, the actual spectre of Sychaeus, who was yet unburied, raised before her eyes a face weirdly pale. The wraith revealed the brutal deed at the sacrifice, showing the dagger-wounds in his breast, and disclosed the whole wicked secret of the palace. And he pressed her to leave her homeland and flee in haste. To help her on her journey he told her where there lay in the earth a long-buried and forgotten treasure of gold and silver in great weight. Shocked by the vision, Dido began to prepare for flight, and to gather for her company any who savagely hated or sharply feared the evil king. They assembled, hastily seized some ships which happened to be ready for sailing, and loaded them with gold.”

Historians do not doubt that Carthage was a Phoenician city but doubts have been raised about the historic truth of Dido and about the historic truth of her eventual husband, the Trojan, Aeneas. Virgil, giving a vital role to Juno, may not be the best ‘guide’ to the founding of Carthage yet it isn’t impossible to believe that it was ructions in the royal household in Tyre which sent this group of Phoenicians into ‘exile’.

Eve MacDonald in *Hannibal* writes, “The Tyrians called their city Qart Hadasht, which means the ‘new city’ and implied a New Tyre. The best-known episode of the foundation myth weaves the story of Dido with the Trojan Aeneas and the foundation of Rome. Aeneas’ flight from burning Troy brings him to Carthage where the charms of the lovely Dido distract him from his greater mission - to go to Italy and help found the Roman people. After a tryst, Aeneas reluctantly leaves his new love and duty bound continues on his journey and destiny to Italy. In his wake he leaves a heartbroken and humiliated Dido, who is driven to commit suicide. Virgil’s enduring version of the myth famously articulates the curse that the rejected Dido, on her deathbed, hurled at the descendants of Aeneas. ... This legend came to define Carthage for the modern world. John Dryden’s stunning translation of the *Aeneid* in 1697 brought Carthage and her myth into the popular imagination in the English language. From around the same period numerous plays and operas focused on the tragic story of the exotic queen who, her virtue corrupted by the Trojan prince, ended her life by her own hand. From

Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, to Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and the nineteenth-century opera *Les Troyens* by Berlioz, the story was kept alive throughout the early modern period. The timeless popularity of the epic of Virgil meant that Dido was and is one of the most celebrated Carthaginians, outshone only by Hannibal himself."

We know Hannibal was in Spain by the 220s BC where the city of New Carthage was founded, now the Spanish city of Cartagena, and we know he had reached Italy with his elephants by 216. We heard about Hannibal in school and I felt very sorry for the elephants as I felt sure they didn't like mountains or snow. But what I had never asked was where Hannibal got his elephants from. Large elephants in Africa are more likely to charge cars in game parks than meekly carry supplies over mountain trails. And Hannibal had no connection to India and its elephants. The answer is that he used African forest elephants which once abounded in North Africa before it was turned into desert. He took them across rivers on pontoons, across what is now France, and down the length of Italy. At first he was successful with his unorthodox methods but gradually the tide turned. Everywhere the Carthaginians were pushed back; in Italy, in Sicily, in Spain, and the Roman general Scipio attacked Carthage itself.

Hannibal escaped and his death at around 65 years of age is shrouded in mystery. But the Romans had no mercy on Carthage, eventually leveling it to the ground. So what of Carthage? MacDonald writes, "The physical city of Carthage in Hannibal's time was 'surrounded with harbours and fortified with walls, it appeared to project out of Africa' much like a ship anchored off the coast ... The city sat out on a peninsula and travelers who approached Carthage from the sea would have seen the urban landscape rising up behind massive sea walls. A monumental sea gate, facing east, comprised of two arches flanked by two towers would have been the visitor's first impressive glimpse into the city. Behind the sea walls the grand acropolis rose at the centre of the city. This was the Byrsa hill, crowned by a temple built to the Phoenician-Punic god Eshmun. The temple was most likely to have been in the Near Eastern style, which means it would have been surrounded by walls that enclosed the precinct of the god. Within the walled precinct would have been a flat-roofed temple."

On the hillside were houses up to six-storeys high and narrow stepped streets. At the base of the hill was the main market and a large civic square. There were two ports, one for trade and one for the military, and their entrances could be closed with heavy iron chains. And there were yards containing 300 elephants, as well as stables and barracks. It was a rich multicultural multilingual city which the Greeks described as an oligarchy but a successful one because of the habit of sending people out to colonise further.

You might not want to visit Tunisia in the wake of the attack on visitors but you may feel it would take more than a lone gunman to put you off. So what of Carthage now? The Lonely Planet Guide to Tunisia says, "One name looms above all in Tunisia history: Carthage. Now a well-heeled northern suburb of Tunis, this great trading city emerged to dominate the western Mediterranean in the 6th century BC."

The Romans destroyed it in 146 BC but then Julius Caesar set about its re-building in 44 BC. Vandals later razed it then Arabs swept in from the east; they encountered 'spirited resistance' from the Berbers under their 'legendary princess Al-Kahina' but it gradually became another Arab and Muslim territory and has remained so. "When the Romans finally defeated the Carthaginians, they razed the city, and the Vandals did the same to the Roman replacement some centuries later; not much of either is left and many visitors are disappointed by what they find. However, for those with an active historical imagination, the fragments that remain can evoke an epic past. The World Heritage-listed sites also preserve something of the area's physical splendour, with lush vegetation and heart-stoppingly lovely views.

"Today Carthage is Tunis' most exclusive suburb and retains a sense of significance – the president's palace is here, in a location chosen for its symbolic as well as natural advantages. Grand,

sweeping history aside, it's also an interesting destination for eating out or a gawk at its splendid contemporary villas."

I am not in the habit of gawking at 'splendid contemporary villas' but it would be interesting to look out on the sea and the sweep of coast that Hannibal looked out on more than two thousand years ago ...

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March 26: Robert Frost

A.E. Housman

Paul Erdos

March 27: Kenneth Slessor

March 28: Mario Vargas Llosa

March 29: Sigurd Magnusson

March 30: Sean O'Casey

March 31: Octavio Paz

April 1: Thomas Fowell Buxton

April 2: Hans Christian Andersen

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Salman Rushdie wrote in 'Dynasty', "Any mythological tale can bear a thousand and one interpretations, because the people who have lived with and used the story have, over time, poured all those meanings into it. This wealth of meaning is the secret of the power of any myth."

We might quibble and say a fairy tale is not a myth nor is it a legend, a parable, or a founding narrative. Yet it overlaps with many other categories. Nor would we use it as a guide to place. But Andersen's story 'The Little Match Girl' can be read as many things. Including a glimpse of what we might now call the 'underbelly' of Copenhagen ...

But after writing that I wondered why I thought that 'The Little Match Girl' was set in Copenhagen. It might have been something he'd seen or heard about when he was a child in Odense. It might have been a general swipe at a society in which the king lives comfortably in his palace on the hill and little children die of cold and hunger in the back alleys. It might have been a moral tale divorced from time and place.

Denmark certainly pays homage to Andersen now. In Copenhagen you can see the statue of the Little Mermaid, you can walk along Hans Christian Andersens Boulevard, you can see where he lived in Nyhavn, some of his manuscripts are in the Royal Library, his last resting place is the Assistens Kirkegaard. And in Odense you can visit Hans Christian Andersen Hus "which sits amid half-timber houses and cobbled streets. Inside, the storyteller's life is chronicled through his photographs, drawings, letters, and personal belongings. The library has Andersen's works in more than 100 languages, and you can listen to fairy tales on tape." Added to that, according to Fodor's Guide to Denmark, you can visit his childhood home, "In the diminutive Hans Christian Andersens Barndomshjem, the young boy and his parents lived in three tiny rooms. The rooms are outfitted with rustic, period furnishings (chairs, lamps, a table) and little else, befitting a humble abode of the early 1800s."

All very enticing. And I had made myself curious. *Was* there anything in the story to support my idea that the story is set in Copenhagen? Well no. Other than that it is obviously set in a town or city. Its cold alleyways and uncaring buildings and people hurrying by without taking any notice of the little girl do not belong in a village. But it did intrigue me with the suggestion that the Danes in Andersen's day did their celebrating on New Year's Eve, putting up their 'Christmas' trees for the New Year rather than for Christmas. In a way this makes this little story so much sadder and more poignant with the juxtaposition of comfort and plenty and a Happy New Year set against poverty, cold, and child abuse. And I think it is part of the enduring appeal of Andersen's fairy tales: they have their magical and mythical elements, talking beasts, sudden riches, people flying through the air, but they also have

this sense of someone who genuinely *saw* the ragged children on street corners. When it was proposed that a statue be made in his honour he asked that they not put children around him (as had been suggested) because he had no children of his own and knew little about children. Now we might say, ‘yes, but he was more attuned to ‘the child within’ than most writers of his time and since’ ...

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April 3: Reginald Hill
April 4: Maya Angelou
April 5: Algernon Charles Swinburne
April 6: Furnley Maurice
April 7: Gabriela Mistral
William Wordsworth
April 8: Ursula Curtiss
April 9: Charles Baudelaire
April 10: A. E.
April 11: Bernard O’Dowd
April 12: Jack Hibberd
April 13: Seamus Heaney
Amanda Lohrey
Samuel Beckett
April 14: Arnold Toynbee
April 15: Jeffrey Archer
Henry James
April 16: J. M. Synge
Anatole France
April 17: Isak Dinesen

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“Nairobi was our town, twelve miles away, down on a flat bit of land amongst hills. Here was the Government House and the big central offices; from here the country was ruled.

It is impossible that a town will not play a part in your life; it does not even make much difference whether you have more good or bad things to say of it, it draws your mind to it, by a mental law of gravitation. The luminous haze on the sky above the town at night, which I could see from some places on my farm, set my thoughts going, and recalled the big cities of Europe.

When I first came to Africa, there were no cars in the country, and we rode in to Nairobi, or drove a cart with six mules to it, and stabled our animals in the stables of The Highland Transport. During all my time, Nairobi was a medley place, with some fine new stone buildings, and whole quarters of old corrugated iron shops, offices, and bungalows, laid out with long rows of eucalyptus trees along the bare dusty streets. The offices of the High Court, The Native Affairs Department, and the Veterinary Department were lousily housed, and I had a great respect for those government officials who could get any work at all done in the little burning hot, inky rooms in which they were set.

All the same Nairobi was a town; here you could buy things, hear news, lunch or dine at the hotels and dance at the Club. And it was a live place, in movement like running water, and in growth like a young thing, it changed from year to year, and while you were away on a shooting safari. The new Government House was built, a stately cool house with a fine ballroom and a pretty garden, big hotels grew up, great impressive agricultural shows and fine flower shows were held, our Quasi Smart Set of the Colony from time to time enlivened the town with rows of quick melodrama. Nairobi said to you: ‘Make the most of me and of time. Wir kommen nie wieder so jung – so undisciplined and rapacious – zusammen.’ Generally I and Nairobi were in very good understanding, and at one time I drove through the town and thought: There is no world without Nairobi’s streets.

The quarters of the Natives and of the coloured immigrants were very extensive compared to the

European town.

The Swaheli town, on the road to the Muthaiga Club, had not a good name in any way, but was a lively, dirty and gaudy place, with, at any hour, a number of things going on in it. It was built mostly out of old paraffin tins hammered flat, in various states of rust, like the coral rock, the fossilized structure, from which the spirit of the advancing civilization was steadily fleeing.

The Somali town was farther away from Nairobi, on account, I think, of the Somali's system of seclusion of their women. There were in my day a few beautiful young Somali women, of whom all the town knew the names, who went and lived in the Bazaar and led the Nairobi police a great dance, they were intelligent and bewitching people. But the honest Somali women were not seen in the town. The Somali town lay exposed to all winds and was shadeless and dusty, it must have recalled to the Somali their native deserts."

Isak Dinesen in *Out of Africa*.

"Nairobi was a beautiful little city of 250,000, with a dual carriageway through it, sealed of course, with bougainvillea down the centre of the roads. We stayed at the rather old fashioned New Norfolk hotel. It was comfortable and they supplied a simple meal for Helen in the room at any time. It was almost full as many of the up country farmers were in town for the Show. We chatted to quite a few and they gave us advice on what to visit at the show.

The showground was huge and magnificent. Each organisation had a permanent building for its headquarters, often built out of stone. Helen soon found that the best drink of milk she could get was at the Jersey Society. There were a number of arenas all kept immaculately and any spare ground was full of trees and flowering shrubs like bougainvillea, hibiscus, poinsettia and frangipani. In the arenas were shows ranging from parades of stock to African music and dancing. One of the demonstrations was put on by the Tea Growers. We talked to some of them and got the impression that it was a profitable industry in a delightful area with a particularly good climate."

Maurice and Noreen Clarke in *Bwana Dakatari*.

"If you live in a place you hardly notice the changes. You have to return after a long absence, as I did in 1989. In the gap since my boyhood, Nairobi had been transformed into a dirty, crime-ridden place, surrounded by slums. I heard that when it rained in the shantytowns, the poor people's shacks slid down the muddy hillsides. Nobody knew what the population was except that it was rising. The hacks nicknamed it 'Nairobbery' (derelict Dar es Salaam was Dar-Is-the-Slum' and Uganda's war-devastated capital Kampala was known as 'Kampothole'). But with the crowding and danger came a vibrant urban atmosphere as fizzy as a chilled Tusker with its cap popped off.

"I remember walking into the Chester House press centre on Koinange Street for the first time. Downtown was still defined by the little grid of streets from the colonial era. Concrete structures rose around me, nosing up through the slum smog: ministries, multinationals, agencies of the United Nations. From a street corner, I watched the teeming scene: office workers in their frayed shirt collars and cheap suits stepping over beggars, shoeshine boys, vendors selling spreads of newspapers. *Drum* magazine splashing the headline 'Luo Girls are Best in Bed.' The white plutocrats in their short sleeves, the youngish European females we called leatherettes because the tropical sun had ravaged their white skin, the hippies, the Kenya Cowboys, the Somali café crowd, Asians in their banks and trading houses, the young black middle-class kids in their baggy trousers and wet-look coifs, the Big Shiny Men in their air-conditioned BMWs, or the procession of tourists in khaki safari hats, window-shopping for *taka taka* souvenirs from Eden. Rising above the chaos of downtown's Uhuru Highway was a string of giant advertising billboards. 'Tusker', they read. 'My Country, My Beer.' "

Aidan Hartley in *The Zanzibar Chest*.

"Huge brash advertisement hoardings infest the road into Nairobi and I winced on passing an

“interpretative centre” offering The African Experience. My immediate destination was a Christian guest-house on Bishop’s Road where a room plus three palatable buffet meals cost only £8.50. Having locked Lear (her bicycle) to my bed, the day could be spent ambling around Nairobi; after an intercontinental flight one needs to take it easy.

Where I had turned off the Uhuru Highway towards Bishop’s Road, a thousand or so men and women were singing in perfect harmony near the corner of Central Park, one of Nairobi’s many wide green spaces. Evidently something was being celebrated and I soon returned to that junction, known as Freedom Corner. The crowd, which had been standing, was now sitting or kneeling and at once several people urgently requested me not to stand.

This was no celebration but a movingly civilised demo, supported by all classes and age groups. On a dais under a canvas awning five elderly women — the mothers of sons “wrongfully imprisoned” for the past six years — were into the fourth day of a hunger-strike protest. At intervals they spoke to the crowd, vehemently and pleadingly, arguing for their sons’ release. Yet the atmosphere was entirely free of aggression; this gathering was resolved to provoke no violence from any source, hence the directive to sit or kneel, to seem physically passive though spiritually assertive. One could not imagine a more orderly crowd, listening attentively to the mothers and their supporters — members of the opposition party, or coalition of parties, known as FORD (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy) — then rhythmically clapping while singing plaintive hymns. Three Whites were openly filming the scene under the impassive gaze of thirty-two heavily armed policemen, standing some fifty yards behind the dais in the shade of a blue-gum coppice. Emboldened by this free-ranging media activity, I gradually moved, on my knees, from the edge of the crowd to the front of the dais.

That was unwise. Half an hour later two lorry-loads of the dreaded paramilitary GSU (General Service Unit) troopers arrived to reinforce the police and we were savagely dispersed. The troopers were armed with rifles and sub-machine-guns, the police with rifles and three-foot-long wooden clubs, crudely hewn out of thick branches; all wore tin helmets and carried flimsy-looking plastic riot-shields. Without warning the sitting crowd was charged and as I scrambled to my feet I could hear all around me the sickening thud of wooden staves on innocent backs. Twice I was struck hard across the shoulders as we all fled in panic, leaving the mothers to be tear-gassed and beaten (one into unconsciousness) until in desperation they stripped naked — completely naked. This culturally symbolic gesture got massive media coverage and shattered Kenya; no amount of speechifying or hymn-singing could have drawn so much attention to their sons’ cause. To be seen stripping naked is a woman’s ultimate protest against injustice and it incorporates a powerful curse against those inflicting the injustice.

That barbarous attack gave the green light to hundreds of young males — cheered on by an interesting number of young females — who now felt justified in retaliating not only against the security forces but also against the affluent layer of society those were defending. In the city centre many shops were looted and I saw several vans, belonging to firms suspected of donating large amounts to the Kenya Africa National Union (KANU), being stoned or petrol-bombed. Yet to me, comparing the vibes with Northern Ireland’s, there was an element of pretence, of fun and games, about that afternoon’s lawlessness. For hours open-backed, orange-painted police lorries patrolled the streets, pursued by gangs throwing sticks and bricks and bottles and verbal abuse. Occasionally a lorry stopped and policemen swarmed over the sides to chase the youths, who fled at Olympic speeds wearing broad grins. Meanwhile Nairobi’s elite were out on their skyscraper balconies, cups of coffee or glasses of something stronger in hand, observing the fray as an entertainment. I decided then that I do not, and never will, understand the role of violence in modern Africa.”

Dervla Murphy in *The Ukimwi Road; From Kenya to Zimbabwe*.

Nairobi has an image problem at the moment. Nevertheless ‘the show goes on’ ...

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April 18: Henry Clarence Kendall
April 19: Richard Hughes
April 20: Dinah Craik
Mary Devine

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“When the Spanish priests sought to redirect the worship and devotion given to the ancient Aztec Goddess Tonantzín by identifying Her as Our Lady of Guadalupe, they instead helped preserve the Old Religion of Mexico and the power of the village wise women, the brujas.

“Always, when given the opportunity, the folk-religion adapts to changing times and the needs of its peoples. Brujería adapted—finding the Goddess just as powerful in Her new robes as in the old ones!

“And the brujas continue to adapt to new needs and new influences—whatever works is incorporated into their folk-magick, and blended with that retained from the older religio-magical system that is rooted in the very Earth of the Americas. Today, Brujería reveals not only its ancient Aztec heritage (and the even older folk-magic of La Raza) and the Spanish Catholic overlay, but still newer adaptations from Americanized versions of Celtic Wicca, African-Haitian Voudoun, Puerto Rican Santería, and a revived reverence for its Aztec roots.

Mary Devine in *Magic from Mexico*.

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Carlos Castaneda in *A Separate Reality* wrote, “In 1961, a year after our first meeting, don Juan disclosed to me that he had a secret knowledge of medicinal plants. He told me he was a ‘brujo’. The Spanish word brujo can be rendered in English as sorcerer, medicine man, curer. From that point on the relation between us changed; I became his apprentice and for the next four years he endeavoured to teach me the mysteries of sorcery. I have written about that apprenticeship in *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*.”

The Teachings became a cult book in around 1970. Although Don Juan lived in New Mexico he was seen as a conduit to the mysteries of old Mexico and in the Flower Power era it is not hard to see why. Castaneda writes, “In order to teach and corroborate his knowledge don Juan used three well-known psychotropic plants: peyote, *Lophophora williamsii*; jimson weed, *Datura innoxia*; and a species of mushroom which belongs to the genus *Psylocebe*. Through the separate ingestion of each of these hallucinogens he produced in me, as his apprentice, some peculiar states of distorted perception, or altered consciousness, which I have called ‘states of non-ordinary reality’. I have used the word ‘reality’ because it was a major premise in don Juan’s system of beliefs that the states of consciousness produced by the ingestion of any of these three plants were not hallucinations, but concrete, although unordinary, aspects of the reality of everyday life. Don Juan behaved towards these states of non-ordinary reality not ‘as if’ they were real but ‘as’ real. ... Don Juan understood and explained the plants as being vehicles that would conduct or lead a man to certain impersonal forces or ‘powers’ and the states they produced as being the ‘meetings’ that a sorcerer had to have with those powers in order to gain control over them.”

Don Juan said peyote would teach the ‘right way to live’ while jimson weed and mushrooms (which were dried up and ground before being put in a pipe to smoke) were ‘allies’; ‘a sorcerer, in fact, drew his strength from manipulating an ally’. “Don Juan explained the profound effects that the mushrooms had on one’s perceptual capacities as the ‘ally removing one’s body’.” He says he withdrew from his apprenticeship with Don Juan because his “teachings had begun to pose a serious threat to my ‘idea of the world’. I had begun to lose the certainty, which all of us have, that the reality of everyday life is something we can take for granted.”

This isn’t really surprising. Another name for jimson weed is loco weed. But all this is a reminder that many people experimented with hallucinogenic substances in the 60s and 70s in search of altered states of reality. I have the feeling now that most drug-taking is for fun or curiosity or to escape

miserable lives ... which might explain why major drug-takers are unemployed young people, prostitutes, people who believe life holds nothing for them. Sixties drugs were meant to add to the excitement and mystery of life rather than provide an escape from depression and hopelessness ...

The older shamanistic ideas still exist in Mexico but when we look there we see the imprint of the Catholic Church everywhere, not least in a population which far exceeds the natural carrying capacity of the nation and which has created a capital city which may well implode eventually. It does not surprise me that one of the largest businesses in Mexico is drug-dealing. Nor does it surprise me that millions of Mexicans head north. The USA is both promised land and bete-noir—and yet Mexico must ultimately make the hard decisions itself to rein in population growth.

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I had vaguely connected Our Lady of Guadeloupe with the island of the same name in the Caribbean but in fact there are Guadeloupes all over the map. I picked up a book called *Coronado's Children* by J. Frank Dobie solely because my mother-in-law was born a Coronado. But in Dobie's book Coronado's Children are the treasure seekers who never give up, the ones who go on believing in lost mines, fabulous lodes, treasure sunk to the bottom of the sea, something amazing they will find if they never give up. I like it that Dobie once wrote "Great literature transcends its native land, but none that I know of ignores its soil." And he had this to say about a different Guadalupe: "The tradition of gold in the Guadelupes runs back a long, long way. While governor of New Mexico, General Lew Wallace—at least so he claimed in a written article—dug out of the basement of the Palace at Santa Fe an ancient document reciting how a converted Indian of Tabira conducted Captain de Gavilán and thirty other Spaniards to a wonderfully rich gold deposit on the eastern spurs of the Guadalupe Mountains. The Spaniards named the place, on account of volcanic evidence, Sierra de Cenizas—Ashes Mountain—and left loaded down with nuggets and ore in the form of both "wires" and "masses." Then came the great uprising of 1680, in which the Pueblos killed every Spaniard who did not flee from New Mexico. About the same time Tabira, the home of the guide to Sierra de Cenizas, was wiped out. Sierra de Cenizas has for centuries been a lost spot in geography as well as a lost mine.

"Since the advent of English-speaking prospectors it has been the Apaches who knew the whereabouts of gold in the Guadelupes. Indians have "the best eyes in the world." The wilder they are, the better they can see. Excepting the Yaquis, who still have most of the gold of Sonora under surveillance, the Apaches were the wildest Indians on the North American continent. Their most famous leader, hard, untamable old Geronimo, used to say that the richest gold mines in the western world lay hidden in the Guadelupes.

"The setting is worthy of its traditions. Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in Texas, rises 8751 feet above sea level. Just below the New Mexico line. It is a beacon from all sides. The long, narrow chain of mountains above which it towers, extends, with gaps, southward clear to the Rio Grande and northward for nearly a hundred miles. Here in the Guadelupes the only mountain sheep left in Texas and a majority of those left in New Mexico are, under the protection of the law, making their last stand, eagles and panthers molesting them more than man, their haunts so wild, rough, and waterless that only occasionally does a human being intrude thither. Here the Apaches made final retreat, and on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation hardly a day's horseback ride from the northwestern spurs of the Guadalupe chain, remnants of that fierce, secretive, and outraged people yet live, their tribal name an inseparable element in the traditions of the whole Southwestern world."

The Eyewitness Travel Guide to Mexico says, "The appearance of Mexico's patron saint in 1531 on the Cerro del Tepeyac hill is remembered in every town and village. Thousands of pilgrims flock to her shrine in Mexico City to view her from a crowded moving walkway. In the rest of the country *las mañanitas* (an early-morning birthday song) is sung at dawn, and special church services are attended. Boys dress up as Juan Diego, the Indian who encountered the Virgin's apparition." And, "The richest and most visited Catholic shrine in the Americas is a complex of buildings at the foot of a hill, the

Cerro del Tepeyac. Legend says it was here that a brown-skinned Virgin Mary miraculously appeared to the Indian Juan Diego in 1531. She is named after the Virgin of Guadalupe in Extramadura, Spain.

The Antigua Basílica was built in the early 1700s. Twin towers flank its Baroque façade, which features relief carvings of the Virgin. It is overshadowed by the circular modern church that now stands beside it, which can hold up to 10,000 worshipers. An object of veneration inside it is Diego's tunic on which the image of the Virgin was supposedly imprinted as proof of the miracle he witnessed.

The impressive Capilla del Pocito is a late 18th-century chapel regarded as one of the finest achievements of Mexican Baroque architecture. The Virgin is supposed to have appeared four times in all. This chapel was constructed on the site of her fourth appearance. It is roughly elliptical in shape and its domed roof is faced with dazzling blue and white Talavera tiles.

Next door is another chapel, the Capilla de Indios, is a house in which Juan Diego is said to have lived after the Virgin's first appearance until his death in 1548.

Each year on December 12 hundreds of thousands of people assemble at the shrine to celebrate the anniversary of the appearance of the Virgin."

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April 21: Charlotte Bronte

April 22: Henry Fielding

April 23: Halldor Laxness

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I recently came across a book called *Lost Classics* in which writers like Michael Ondaatje and Helen Garner and Margaret Atwood remember unexpected books from their childhood, out-of-print books, books found in unexpected places, books which left a lasting impact, books out of the ordinary. I found some of the segments interesting and intriguing. Murray Bail, for instance, has this to say about Halldor Laxness: "Any novel which has as its first sentence "A wise man once said that next to losing its mother, there is nothing more healthy for a child than to lose its father" immediately stamps the author as one above the ordinary. From those words, enough to make all good people blink, or at least sit up and think, Halldor Laxness's *The Fish Can Sing* (Methuen, 1966) grows, and turns deeper and deeper, leading the reader into a new, entirely convincing world—a small world, mostly on the outskirts of Reykjavik, as if that matters, where memorable events unfold, concentrating on a small group of indelible characters. It is a novel (a world) that transmits something of the wonder of life, its strangeness, its goodness, occasions for stubbornness, and the stoicism of people—of people everywhere—at times very funny, which further deepens the "human-ness." It is written in a calm manner, to just the right length. *The Fish Can Sing* has been out of print for about thirty years. Perhaps the title is the trouble—a publisher's stumbling block? Is there a slightly frosty condescension towards anything written in a place as small and sparse as Iceland, better known for producing cod? Inevitably though, such a work of wonder will, as this small recommendation shows, attract readers, and give this work of art its "second life."

I have always meant to go looking for something by Laxness. And Iceland is on my short list of places I would like to see. Of course to go looking for a book by Laxness would be a lot cheaper and easier than booking a ticket to Iceland. So with this in mind ...

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"The Strand Magazine in search of amusing anecdotes for its August edition of 1906 could not resist a paragraph or two on the relative stature of some of the great lights in fiction-writing over the previous quarter of a century. There, as expected, were Dickens and Thackeray, not quite as popular as in previous years but still pre-eminent. Behind them, however, was Thomas Hall Caine, a writer whose popularity between the 1890s and 1920 made him fabulously rich and gained him a knighthood. Looking back over their friendship, Bram Stoker, himself the author of *Dracula* (1897), recalled of Caine,

The man exhausts himself in narrative as I have never seen with anyone else. Indeed when he had finished a novel he used to seem as exhausted as a woman after childbirth. At such times he would be in a terrible state of nerves – trembling and sleepless. At that very time he had not quite got through the nervous crisis after completion of *The Bondman*. At such times everything seemed to worry him; things that he would shortly laugh at.

Caine's *The Bondman*, issued in three volumes (from January 1990) and circulated through the subscription lending libraries, ensured his fame and fortune for thirty years and made him Heinemann's best-selling author with sales of over a million. Yet, bestsellerdom was also a curse and in less than a decade of his death his books were dust, along with his reputation."

From *Bestsellers* by Clive Bloom

The Tasmanian connection to Iceland is the arrival of Jorgen Jorgenson here in 1826 to settle. This seems to have sparked the interest of a variety of local writers and historians. Frank Clune and P. R. Stephenson in *The Viking of Van Dieman's Land* gave this snapshot of Reyjavik in the early 19th century: "Reyjavik was a straggling town of sixty houses, built like barns, with steep gables, their walls and roofs of sawn planks imported from Norway. The warehouses and homes of the merchants, fronting the black-sand beach, were of the same design, some with glass windows. The Governor's residence and the State prison were larger than most of the other buildings. The most substantial edifice was the cathedral, built of stone and roofed with tiles, topped by a small wooden bell-tower. On the fringe of the town were fisherman's huts, built of soft volcanic rocks, heaped with earth, and overgrown with grass. Near them were sheds, filled with racks on which split cod were sun-dried." And the Dan Sprod book *The Usurper* probably covers Jorgenson's life in all the detail you could ever want. But I was in the Red Cross op-shop one day and I came upon a copy of *The Bondman*. So perhaps 'dust' was not quite the word to use ...

I knew Caine had been immensely popular in the early twentieth century. I knew characters in books of that era quite often can be seen reading or quoting him, I knew that Bram Stoker dedicated *Dracula* to him. But I had never actually read anything of his.

J. B. Booth in *Old Pink 'Un Days* writing about some of the journalists on that paper: "What am I to do with old Swears about this?" he asked. "He drove up last Sunday to tell me he'd met Hall Caine at supper, had been asked his opinion of 'The Bondman,' and had replied that it was all very well from a literary standpoint, of course, but didn't quite stay home as a play, but that if he (Caine) would make room for us in the next commission, he thought it was any odds on Drury Lane getting a play that would 'connect.'

"I told him,' added Swears, 'that he could be 'Camille'—I mean, he could be the one that was 'featured'—with his name first on the bills and advertisements: 'By Hall Caine, Pitcher and Swears'—like that; because it didn't matter a damn to us; our public would recognise our stuff, even if his didn't register one in ten.' "

'Strange to say, the collaboration never matured, and so the play was never written!'

In there is perhaps a clue to Hall Caine's eclipse. Unlike those racing journalists with their idiosyncratic style Hall Caine is the model of a straight-forward storyteller. But good solid journeyman prose doesn't last in the way that the quirky, the unusual, or the brilliant, finds readers generation after generation.

The Bondsman is set partly in Iceland and deals with the daughter of Jorgen Jorgenson. Rachel. He wants her to marry a wealthy Danish court official. She falls in love with an Icelandic peasant and her father disowns her. Tasmanian images of Jorgenson are sympathetic, even laudatory, but Hall Caine has no words of praise for Jorgenson. To what extent he had studied, and indeed fictionalized Jorgenson's life, I do not know. He begins the book, "H. Jorgen Jorgenson was Governor-General of Iceland. He was a Dane, born in Copenhagen, apprenticed to the sea on board an English trader,

afterwards employed as a petty officer in the British navy, and some time in command of a Danish privateer during an alliance of Denmark and France against England. A rover, a schemer, a shrewd man of affairs, who was honest by way of interest, just by policy, generous by strategy, and who never suffered his conscience, which was not a good one, to get the better of him.” He was a promoter of Danish interests over Icelandic interests and this included his plan to marry his daughter to Count Trollop, the Danish Minister for Iceland, described as “five-and-forty, tall, wrinkled, oiled, and devoted to gallantry”; not surprisingly Rachel Jorgenson had no wish to marry this much older roué and marries, instead, a local peasant, Stephen Orry.

The book follows, after Rachel’s death, Stephen’s two sons, Rachel’s son born in Iceland, Jason Orryson, and his son born to another woman in the Isle of Man, Michael Sunlocks. The book is a Victorian melodrama, sentimental, convoluted, slightly misogynistic, but it provides some interesting and sometimes attractive descriptions of both Iceland and the Isle of Man.

Manxman Hall Caine introduces his homeland in these words: “The little island in the middle of the Irish Sea has through many centuries had its own language and laws, and its own judges and governors. Very, very long ago, it had also its own kings; and one of the greatest of them was the Icelandic sea-dog who bought it with blood in 1077. More recently it has had its own reigning lords, and one of the least of them was the Scottish nobleman who sold it for gold in 1765. After that the English crown held the right of appointing the Governor-general. It chose the son of the Scottish nobleman. This was John, fourth Duke of Athol, and he held his office fifty-five bad years. In his day the island was not a scene of over-much gaiety. If the memory of old men can be trusted, he contrived to keep a swashbuckler court there, but its festivities, like his own dignities, must have been maimed and lame. He did not care to see too much of it, and that he might be free to go where he would, he appointed a deputy-governor.”

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“I had met Thingvellir dozens of times in the sagas, but couldn’t remember ever having gone there. It was the site of the first parliament, established in 930. It was also where the country adopted Christianity in 1000. And, in the thirteenth century, during the crisis years leading to Iceland’s loss of independence, it was the place where it became obvious that the idea of an Icelandic nation was in disarray—the victim of a century of internal fights between the most powerful families. Thingvellir wouldn’t fully re-emerge as a national ideal until the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, when sovereignty began to be reclaimed.

“It was an impressive and deeply symbolic history, but Thingvellir existed within a geology that spoke to you more profoundly than even human history could. In a series of deep rifts, Thingvellir revealed the meeting of the American and European continental plates, and the park surrounded a lake that had sunk during the area’s seismic shifts. In a way, you could say that geology and history were at odds here—a breach in the earth’s crust had become the symbol of national unity—yet, the result seemed inspiring rather than confusing.”

Kári Gíslason in *The Promise of Iceland*.

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April 24: Sue Grafton

April 25: Walter de la Mare

April 26: Morris West

April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft

April 28: Anna Clarke

April 29: William Randolph Hearst

April 30: Paul Jennings

May 1: Giovanni Guareschi

James Clarence Mangan

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Irish writer James Mangan wrote this poem:

In Siberia's wastes
The Ice-wind's breath
Woundeth like the toothèd steel;
Lost Siberia doth reveal
Only blight and death.

Blight and death alone.
No summer shines.
Night is interblent with Day.
In Siberia's wastes alway
The blood blackens, the heart pines.

In Siberia's wastes
No tears are shed,
For they freeze within the brain.
Nought is felt but dullest pain,
Pain acute, yet dead;

Pain as in a dream,
When years go by
Funeral-paced, yet fugitive,
When man lives, and doth not live,
Doth not live – nor die.

In Siberia's wastes
Are sands and rocks.
Nothing blooms of green or soft,
But the snow-peaks rise aloft
And the gaunt ice-blocks.

And the exile there
Is one with those;
They are part, and he is part,
For the sands are in his heart,
And the killing snows.

Therefore, in those wastes
None curse the Czar.
Each man's tongue is cloven by
The North Blast, that heweth nigh
With sharp scymitar.

And such doom each drees,
Till, hunger-gnawn,
And cold-slain, he at length sinks there,
Yet scarce more a corpse than ere
His last breath was drawn.

'Siberia' by James Clarence Mangan.

Mangan, born in Dublin in 1803 had created an imagined Siberia. Even though aspects of Siberia turn up regularly in books, articles, documentaries, news items—Siberian tigers, meteors, labour camps, melting permafrost, the Trans-Siberian railway, motorcycle rallies, the struggle of indigenous people to retain their lands, oil drilling—it is still to a considerable extent an imagined place. It is too large for anyone to truly know it all.

Brian Moore in his novel *The Mangan Inheritance* provides an imagined Mangan. James loses his estranged American film star wife Beatrice Abbot and inherits her estate. He decides to come to Ireland to see if the family really does descend from James Clarence Mangan. It could be read as a search for identity. James is a curiously negative person, weak, self-indulgent, hypocritical, dull, and the association with the poet has the potential to make him more interesting. The poet is described, ‘The dress of this spectral-looking man was singularly remarkable, taken down at hazard from some old clothes shop, a baggy pantaloons, a short coat, closely buttoned, a blue cloth cloak still shorter. The hat was in keeping with this habiliment, broad-leaved and steeple-shaped’ and a supposed descendant says, “His poems are remembered.” His double poured two more drinks. “Of course the life was colorful. He was a dooper and a drunkard and died a pauper, alone in a charity ward. He went to an early grave. But that’s all part of the mold, isn’t it? Remember Joyce said that Mangan’s was an exemplary life for a certain type of artist.”

“The poète maudit,” Mangan said. “And he was the prototype of that sort of poet. Before Baudelaire or Rimbaud. Before the term itself was invented. Yet he wasn’t a great poet like Rimbaud or Baudelaire.”

“But he is remembered,” his double said. “His statue stands to this day in Saint Stephen’s Green in Dublin. There are books written about him, as you know. And his poems are still read. Children learn them in National School. In the long run, what else matters? Whether he was a saint or a wastrel is secondary.”

The book might be better read as a chronicle of the dangers of hunting for relatives. You may not be comfortable with what you find. James Mangan certainly isn’t. You can almost feel the relief when he hears his father is in a Montreal hospital and he has a good excuse to flee Ireland. But coming back to Mangan’s poem it now gives the feeling that the poet’s Siberia was right there in Dublin, cold, hungry, miserable, on a Dublin street.

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“Mr Frost told me I was wasting my time in school. He said I should go to Kamchatka. Or Brazil. Kamchatka? Why Kamchatka? Why Brazil?

He didn’t explain. He was going to, but then he had to leave.

Jesus. Kamchatka. Kamchatka.

Later that night I went to the library and looked it up. A peninsula in the remote far east of the Soviet Union, on the Bering Sea. Very few people lived there. It was dark half the year. They lived on the salted meat of salmon and also of bears, which greatly outnumbered the people and proved a sorrow to the unwary. When the taiga wasn’t frozen over, it swarmed with biting insects. There were many volcanos and they were still active. The only picture in the Kamchatka entry showed two figures in parkas watching the top of a mountain being carried skyward on a fist of flame.”

Tobias Wolff in *Old School*.

But is Kamchatka part of Siberia? Does Siberia have definite boundaries or is it a sort of amorphous blob? I went to look. The *Enclopaedia Britannica* has something odd to say about Siberia—because there are two Siberias. There is the generally accepted one: “Siberia extends from the Ural Mountains on the west to the Pacific Ocean on the east and southward from the Arctic Ocean to the hills of north-central Kazakhstan and the borders of Mongolia and China” and then there is the Russian one: “In Russian usage the administrative areas on the eastern flank of the Urals, along the Pacific seaboard, and within Kazakhstan are excluded from Siberia.” The first Siberia is around 13,488,500 sq kms. The second one around 6,550,000 sq kms. As Siberia is Russian territory, from a Tatar word

meaning ‘Sleeping Land’, I suppose we should go with their definition. In which case the mysterious Kamchatka Peninsula is separate. In a way I liked that. It meant that Kamchatka could stand aside from all the baggage that the word Siberia seems to carry around and just be itself.

And it seems that Russia has never particularly valued Kamchatka. The Lonely Planet Guide to Russia says, “When Alaska was sold off in 1867, Kamchatka might also have been up for grabs if the Americans had shown enough interest.” I suppose the Russians are kicking themselves that they sold Alaska but are the Americans kicking themselves that they didn’t offer for Kamchatka? An American territory there would have changed the history of East Asia but it is debatable whether Kamchatka would have been better off.

The Guide says, “The 1000km-long Kamchatka Peninsula – home to a few hundred volcanoes and many more bears, reindeer, moose and mosquitoes – is a stunning paradise of raw outdoor adventure. Dangling across from Alaska between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Sea, Kamchatka sees a growing number of (deep-pocketed) visitors who climb into fuming volcanic craters, heli-ski down glaciers or kayak past bears feeding on salmon. Sometimes called the ‘land of fire and ice,’ volcanic activity remains a daily occurrence, many still spurting, spewing and bubbling in such a manner that suggests Creation hasn’t quite finished with Kamchatka.”

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Paul Kourennoff and George St George put together an interesting little book they called *Russian Folk Medicine* and St George introduces it with, “During my recent travels in Siberia I was impressed by the way native folk medicine is being studied there by some medical institutions. Scores of scientific expeditions are sent every year into the remotest corners of that huge country in quest of medicinal herbs and plants which have been used for centuries by folk medicine practitioners, both the Russian znakhari, and native shamans, often inaccurately described as ‘witch doctors’. Even though some of them, practicing among obscure Siberian tribes, often relied on the superstitions of their patients and included mystical rites in their practice, most of them were talented healers. They had to be to survive; they could expect no recompense for their services unless they produced positive results.”

Traditionally the knowledge was handed down from parents to children but fewer and fewer children are now interested. Yet the scientific expeditions have already catalogued over 10,000 plant species in Southern Siberia alone. It would be astonishing if there were no simple and helpful medicinal plants in that cornucopia. I dwelt on that number because my image of Siberia was one of endless grasslands or endless birch forests. This suggested a plant world of great richness and fascination ...

And many of the remedies used plants now incorporated into mainstream medicine: Aloe, castor oil, bilberries, lemons, rosehips, foxglove, peppermint, bee stings, sunflowers, violets, beet juice, cornsilk, walnuts, nettle leaves, parsley, celery, ginger, horseradish, pine needles, willow bark, honey, sage, mare’s milk, garlic, flax seeds, potato juice and ginseng. They had a habit of steeping things in vodka which might’ve frightened off the germs but would get a bit expensive unless you could distill your own vodka.

And it was hard to know how seriously to take some of the ‘superstitions’. For instance, “Potato amulet. Purely a sympathetic remedy, it was and still is widely used by East Siberians. They claim that carrying a small raw potato on one’s person is an absolute insurance against contracting winter colds. The same potato should be carried throughout the winter – from late September to May, even when the potato becomes shriveled-up, black and hard as a stone. It is interesting to note that many medical doctors practicing in the Far East recommended this to their cold-prone patients. ‘It is silly,’ one doctor told G. St George in Khabarovsk, ‘and the silliest thing about it is that it works.’

Since this requires no investment or trouble, it is worth trying.”

If you happen to notice an odd little lump under my jumper next time you run into me you will know it is a raw potato ...

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May 2: Catherine the Great of Russia

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From *The Restless Sleep: Inside New York City's Cold Case Squad* by Stacy Horn: "Sometimes, though, they paused before they destroyed. In 1982, Property Clerk personnel took a look at two guns that were seized in a raid in the South Bronx in 1971. The weapons weren't like anything they'd recovered before, so they took them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art to see what they could find out about them. The Museum had seen the pistols before, in 1933, when they were loaned to the museum by their then owner, Gustave Diderrich, and displayed that summer. They turned out to be hand-made flintlock hunting pistols that once belonged to Empress Catherine the Great and were designed by master armorer Johan Adolph Grecke in St. Petersburg in 1786.

"The police department didn't smelt them, they didn't throw them into the Hudson River, and they didn't sell them at a police auction. They loaned them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art who put them on display for the second time in fifty years. The New York Times ran a piece about the pistols, which were then recognized by the family of John M. Schiff, which was able to document their purchase in 1939 and their theft in 1970. In 1986, John Schiff donated the pistols to the museum in memory of his wife, Edith Baker Schiff. After strongly expressing the difficulty in placing a value on items of such artistic and historic importance, Peter Finer, an English arms and armor dealer, estimated that the ivory, gold, steel, and brass pistols were worth a million dollars."

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Catherine the Great, like her 'master armorer' was German, born Princess Sophia of Anhalt-Zerbst in Stettin in 1729; her father one of many unremarkable German princelings of that era, and she was married off at fifteen-years-old to the sickly boy who became Tsar Peter the Great. It was a modest background so does she really deserve the epithet 'Great'? It is not clear who made the decision to kill her husband or how much she knew in advance but she became ruler in his stead under the name of Catherine.

She brought a degree of German proficiency to reforming the chaotic Russian bureaucracy and administration, she confiscated Church property, she expanded Russia's borders, she put down the Cossack rising under Emelyan Pugachev, she encouraged the arts, she was an indefatigable builder; not just large public buildings but whole villages (sometimes called Potemkin villages after her chief minister), even towns. But Zoé Oldenbourg in her biography says, "the woman who was to become Catherine the Great was herself a product of the extremely specialized and supranational society formed by the court nobility, and she had been trained from childhood to play her part in the great game." The misfortune of this was that she was incapable of looking beyond the privileged ranks which surrounded her to the miserable masses beyond; nor did she have any understanding that the obscene wealth of the ruling elite was squeezed out of the misery and despair of those at the bottom.

Oldenbourg writes, "The Ukraine, which had only been annexed to Russia for a century or so, enjoyed a special regime of its own. There the peasants were free and not subject to taxation. Very early in her reign (in 1764) Catherine took advantage of Kyril Razumovsky's move to gain independence when as hetman of the Ukraine he claimed to be protecting the rights of landowners in that district. She refused point-blank to give way to her former ally's demands and drove him to resignation. With Razumovsky out of the way, Catherine then decreed the introduction of serfdom in the Ukraine, and several million peasants who had been rich and free and owned their own land became serfs overnight as a result of a stroke of the pen by a so-called enlightened empress."

Oldenbourg goes on to say, "Thus Catherine governed through the support of the nobility, the only social class she really knew. Nothing could have been more natural. But then, why did she proclaim across the length and breadth of Europe, with such insistence, so much false modesty and real self-satisfaction, her love of progress and freedom and her hatred of oppression, and a great deal more besides? Why should the most slave-driving ruler that Russia had ever known want at all costs to gain a reputation as a friend of enlightenment? It almost reads as though there has been some

misunderstanding, as though in her mind the words light, progress and freedom were never to be applied to any but the nobility and that it was to them that she meant to give these benefits. But no, she does not forget that the rest of the people also exist, and she claims to bring happiness to everyone. All the same, the fact remains that both directly, by reducing the Ukraine to slavery and by giving away state lands, and indirectly, by indulging in unheard-of expenditure and encouraging the nobility to an excess of luxury and prodigality, she was responsible for carrying the system of serfdom to the extreme limits of injustice and absurdity.”

Arthur Calder-Marshall takes it further. “She failed to build the machinery of government which would allow for growth without assassination and revolution. A furious opponent of the French Revolution, she was by her combination of Western Enlightenment and “Scythian” tyranny the architect of the revolution of 1917.”

Catherine was followed by her son Paul I, then his sons, first Alexander I then Nicholas I; then Nicholas’s son Alexander II and grandson Alexander III whose son Nicholas II was killed by the Bolsheviks in 1917. In other words these men had 120 years in which to ‘build the machinery of government’. Some very important negatives can be attributed to Catherine but I think it is drawing a long bow to make her sole architect of Russia’s twentieth century upheavals.

And did she ever use her pistols? It seems unlikely. Many cruelties were perpetrated in her reign. But in person she was calm and mild, non-confrontational, more interested in the power of the pen than the power of the musket and pistol and sword and with little passion for the hunting of wild animals. She was a woman of the desk, the dining table, the boudoir.

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So what of the St Petersburg of Johan Brucke and Catherine? Donald James in *Vadim* says, “To a man born in the far north, the real Arctic north, the north of pollution clouds and waste mountains, St Petersburg truly is an enchanted city. It shows well by day, colourful, well proportioned, studded with great museums and statuary. And what a history! Built by a six-foot-six czar determined to wrench Russia’s head round from Moscow to face the west, for two centuries St Petersburg was the nation’s capital, the home of commerce with Western Europe, and the final resting place of men like Dostoevsky, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninov.

“But there’s no forgetting, either, that Petersburg has another history. It was here at the Winter Palace in 1917 that Lenin’s Revolution was born; in this city, renamed Leningrad, a million people went to their deaths from shelling or starvation in the nine-hundred-day siege in World War Two. During much of that terrible time, Shostakovich continued to compose, and the Conservatoire continued to play great music; there was a defiant heroism to be seen on every street corner – and cannibalism along the blacked-out quays at night.

“But that’s the Russian enigma for you, brothers. We are a huge and restless tribe, roaming history, still looking for our place in the world. Perhaps what happened here could even stand as a metaphor for the relentless energy of the Russian personality. We might enchant with our arts, or inspire with our courage. But we have never lost the need to feed upon each other.”

And what of St Petersburg since then?

“From Rome to Petersburg is a far cry, especially in winter. You probably know Cubat’s, that big, glaring restaurant in the Morskaya.

Everyone who has been in the Russian capital knows it, and many have, no doubt, regaled themselves with a dish of exquisite starlet direct from the Volga, for there are only two places in the world where that delicacy can be obtained in perfection, at the Ermitage at Moscow and at Cubat’s.

On the night of the 5th of March I was seated alone at one of the many small tables of the restaurant, and having dined well was sipping my ummel smoking an excellent Babadagly—that brand of cigarette that one cannot obtain outside the Russian Empire—and pretending to be interested in the “latest informations” in the *Novoe Vremya*. I say pretending, for all my attention was really

concentrated upon the movements of two persons, an elderly grey-bearded man and a young and rather pretty woman who, seated opposite me, were also dining. The place was crowded, but the pair, entering after me, managed to find a seat almost opposite. Both were well dressed, the woman wearing rich heavy furs of Zinovieff's cut, which became her well, and when on seating herself she allowed them to slip off she displayed a neat figure and a smart evening gown of some soft turquoise stuff cut slightly low, while about the throat was a thin gold chain to which, uncut and set as a pendant, was attached one of those dark green Siberian stones that are so often worn by Russian women.

She was decidedly pretty, with dark hair, regular features, well-defined brows, and a pair of sparkling eyes that danced mischievously whenever they glanced at me. Her companion, however, was a rather evil-looking, square-jawed fellow who apparently treated her without consideration, for he ordered from the menu without consulting her.

They had been sitting there for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and I had become quite fascinated by the pale, wistful face of the pretty woman before me, when a newspaper hawker, well muffled up in his ragged shuba, entered from the street, and passing from one table to another came at last to mine.

"This is for you," he said quickly in Russian. "Give me five copeks and attract no attention. Look in the margin." And taking a paper from his bundle he laid it upon the table.

In surprise I flung a coin upon the table, and taking up the newspaper saw some faint writing in pencil on the margin close to the heavily-printed heading. The words were in French, and written in a strange hand, evidently that of a Russian. They read:

"Beware of Nicholas Levitski and Pauline Ozeroff who are sitting opposite you. They are agents of Secret Police." "

(from *Secrets of the Foreign Office* (1903) by William Le Queux)

And there is the city which had its landscape changed when the marshes were drained in the nineteenth century. In an 1842 book called *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of the late Daniel Wheeler* which is a compilation of letters, journals, memoir written in the third person, logs and reports, Englishman Daniel Wheeler writes, "Early in the year 1817, enquiry having been made, by order of the late Emperor of Russia, for a person to undertake the management of an agricultural establishment in his dominions, Daniel Wheeler believed it his duty to offer himself for this service. The Emperor, as the reader may recollect, visited this country, in the year 1814, and was much struck with the perfection of the English system of farming. His attention had been drawn in several ways to the Society of Friends, and a casual visit made to the farm of a Friend, on the Brighton road, had given him a favourable impression of their character as agriculturalists. This impression, as the event proved, was not soon effaced; for having three years afterwards concluded on the drainage and cultivation of certain marshes and waste lands, in the immediate neighbourhood of Petersburg, and enquiry being made in England for a suitable manager for this work, the Emperor particularly specified his wish, that a member of the Society of Friends should be selected." Although Wheeler had no formal qualifications for the work he was selected as a practical hardworking man with a good knowledge of farming and trades and in 1817 he set off to have a look at St Petersburg's marshes. But the peculiar thing about the book is that although he mentions in passing flood, fire, and a cholera epidemic there he never writes about his work, his impressions of the city, his thoughts on culture and religion there, or how he related to the men working with him. I cannot help wondering what his friends and family back in England thought about this extraordinary omission. Or did he believe that English people of his acquaintance and of that era genuinely had no interest in the exotic world where he spent more than ten years?

And then there is the St Petersburg which became Leningrad.

But if I went to St Petersburg the thing I would most want to see is the Amber Room. A character in Linda Fairstein's novel *Cold Hit* asks "Have you ever heard of the Amber Room?" The story of it is

told: “In seventeen seventeen, King Wilhelm I of Prussia gave the tsar—Peter the Great—a unique gift. It was a set of gilded oak panels that were decorated with more than six tons of amber, elaborately carved and inset with Florentine mosaics and Venetian glass mirrors. The walls were installed in the Catherine Palace in Tsarskoye Selo, and had actually been dubbed the ‘eighth wonder of the world’ by the British ambassador. So far as I’m aware, only a single photograph of this breathtaking creation was ever known to have been taken in its two-hundred-year history.

“When Nazi troops invaded Russia in nineteen forty-one, they brought their own art experts along to aid in the plundering of the Soviet bounty. The priceless Amber Room was taken apart and shipped off to a town called Königsberg, which is on the Baltic coast. But by the end of the war, as some of the treasure began to appear, there was not a sign of this enormous chamber.”

A character asks what people believe happened to it:

“Some professional treasure hunter showed up a few years ago with Xeroxes of documents signed by Himmler, claiming he could prove that the room had been redirected to Quedlinburg but that the general transporting it had made an independent decision to change the route in the face of the Allied advance.”

“Quedlinburg,” Mike said, “That was a major Nazi stash, wasn’t it?”

He reminded us that in 1996 the Feds tried to prosecute two Texans for the return of several hundred million dollars’ worth of medieval reliquaries, stolen by their brother—an American soldier—at the end of World War II. German troops had looted the religious treasure—everything from ninth-century prayer books and lavishly painted manuscripts to gem-encrusted vases and figures. And in the process of the American liberation of Europe, lowlifes in our own army had made off with the already stolen cache of goods.

“So, one school has the amber buried in the quarry beside a seventh-century castle, while the latest claim is that the son of a German military intelligence officer who helped with the actual logistics of the move has used his father’s papers to establish that the stuff never even got to Germany, but is still buried in the Russian system of underground tunnels and mine shafts.”

Steve Berry calls his thriller *The Amber Room* and has a character describe it as, “Like stepping into fairy tale. The amber was hard and shiny like stone, but not cold like marble. More like wood. Lemon, whiskey brown, cherry. Warm colors. Like being in the sun. Amazing what ancient masters could do. Carved figurines, flowers, seashells. The scrollwork so intricate. Tons of amber, all handcrafted. No one ever do that before.” Berry says that Frederick I of Prussia “charged his court architect, Andreas Schülter, with the task of creating such a marvel.

“The original commission was granted to Gottfried Wolfram, but in 1707, Ernst Schact and Gottfried Turau replaced the Dane. Over four years Schact and Turau labored, meticulously searching the Baltic coast for jewel-grade amber.” Frederick’s son however did not like the panels and gave them to Peter the Great of Russia and they were transported to St Petersburg in 1717. Peter reciprocated with, “248 soldiers, a lathe, and a wine cup he crafted himself. Included among the soldiers were fifty-five of his tallest guardsmen, this in recognition of the Prussian king’s passion for tall warriors.” But it was Elizabeth in 1755 who took the panels out of storage, had a room prepared for them, added more panels, added Florentine mosaics, as well as free-standing amber items and “an intricate parquet floor of inlaid oak, maple, sandalwood, rosewood, walnut, and mahogany, itself as magnificent as the surrounding walls.”

Berry goes on to say, “Incredibly, the panels survived 170 years and the Bolshevik Revolution intact.” This *is* incredible, given the turmoil in the city. Roland Chambers in *The Last Englishman*, writes, “There had been disturbances in St Petersburg over the summer, and in July a general strike culminated in street fighting and barricades. Russian factory workers, tired of empty promises, wanted immediate concessions, and the militant leaders of the extreme Left were once again speaking openly against the Tsar. But war performed its age-old alchemy. With the mobilization of the army, anger against the state gave way to anger at Russia’s enemies. German and Austrian nationals who had lived

in the capital for generations were beaten up in the street. German shops were looted and torched, or else hastily changed their names. The German legation was sacked, and from the top storey of St Petersburg's premier department store came a sinister rain of German-made pianos."

Berry says, "Restorations were done in 1760, 1810, 1830, 1870, 1918, 1935, and 1938. An extensive restoration was planned in the 1940s, but on June 22, 1941, German troops invaded the Soviet Union." By September 17 they had reached the palace. "In the days before its capture, museum officials hastily shipped all the small objects in the Amber Room to eastern Russia. But the panels themselves had proved impossible to remove. In an effort to conceal them, a layer of wallpaper was slapped over, but the disguise fooled no one."

The panels were stripped off, cut up, and sent to Germany where they disappeared in 1945. Berry provides the excitement of his novel by predicating that someone has indeed found those panels and is willing to kill to keep that information secret. But in his notes at the end he says, "The Amber Room's disappearance in 1945 was a tremendous loss. At present, the room is being restored at the Catherine Palace by modern-day artisans who are laboring to re-create, panel by panel, magnificent walls crafted entirely of amber. I was fortunate to spend a few hours with the chief restorer, who showed me the difficulty of the endeavor. Luckily, the Soviets photographed the room in the late 1930s, planning on a restoration in the 1940s—but of course, war interfered. Those black-and-white images now act as a map for the re-creation of what was first fashioned more than 250 years ago.

"The chief restorer also provided me with his insight into what may have happened to the original panels. He believed, as many others do, that the amber was either totally destroyed in the war or, like gold and other precious metals and jewels, the amber itself commanded the greatest market worth. It was simply found and sold off piece by piece, the sum of its parts far greater in value than the whole. Like gold, amber can be reshaped, leaving no trace of its former configuration, so it is possible that jewelry and other amber objects sold throughout the world today may contain amber from that original room.

"But who knows?"

Berry then says: "As Robert Browning was quoted saying in the narrative: Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

How true.

And how sad."

* * * * *

May 3: Niccolo Machiavelli

May 4: Marele Day

May 5: Karl Marx

May 6: Sigmund Freud

May 7: Robert Browning

* * * * *

Robert Browning wrote a famous poem he titled 'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix' which begins:

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall at us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

Not a word to each other, we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight;

Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

It almost seems to invite parody and Yeatman and Sellar did just that in their ‘How We Brought the Good News from Aix to Ghent’—which begins:

I sprang to the rollocks and Jorrocks and me,
And I galloped, you galloped, we galloped all three.
Not a word to each other: we kept changing place,
Neck to neck, back to front, ear to ear, face to face.
And we yelled once or twice, when we heard a clock chime,
“Would you kindly oblige us, is that the right time?”
As I galloped, you galloped, he galloped, we galloped, ye
galloped, they two shall have galloped: let us trot.

I unsaddled the saddle, unbuckled the bit,
Unshackled the bridle (the thing didn’t fit)
And ungalloped, ungalloped, ungalloped, ungalloped a bit.
Then I cast off my buff coat, let my bowler hat fall,
Took off both boots and my trousers and all—
Drank off my stirrup-cup, felt a bit tight,
And unbridled the saddle: it still wasn’t right.

But neither poem nor parody told me just why they were galloping from Ghent to Aix or vice versa. And when I thought of Ghent in Belgium and Aix in Provence in the south of France I thought ‘that can’t be a realistic, they couldn’t gallop all that way in one night’ ... But Donald Smalley in his notes to the *Poems of Robert Browning* points out that it is a different Aix. “Asked if this poem represented an historical event, Browning wrote in reply: “There is no sort of historical foundation about ‘Good News from Ghent.’ I wrote it under the bulwark of a vessel, off the African Coast, after I had been at sea long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop on a certain good horse, ‘York,’ then in my stable at home. It was written in pencil on the fly-leaf of Bartoli’s *Simboli*, I remember.”

“Later he stated in another letter that as he wrote the poem he had in mind “a merely general impression of the characteristic warfare and besieging which abound in the Annals of Flanders. This accounts for some difficulties in the time and space occupied by the ride in one night.” The distance between Ghent in Flanders and Aix-la-Chapelle in West Prussia is about one hundred miles in a direct route which includes all cities Browning mentions with the exception of Looz and Tongres. Including these would add about twenty miles.

“Browning had been in Flanders in 1834 on his way to St. Petersburg in Russia and again in 1838. The poem was probably written during his second voyage to Italy, in 1844.”

They gallop through Lokeren, Boom, Düffeld, Mecheln, Aershot, Hasselt, “past Looz and past Tongres”, then Dalhem, two of the horses dying on the way. Though why they needed to gallop their horses into the ground to bring good news isn’t explained. Could they not have traveled a little slower and saved their poor horses? And why does Browning talk of “the news which alone could save Aix from her fate” when he is bringing a cheerful message from Ghent? And what of their journey in modern terms?

I have been browsing in guide books for quick thumbnail sketches of Ghent and Aix-la-Chapelle ... And Ghent, the ancient cloth town now Belgium’s third biggest city, has one claim to fame which intrigued me. This is the famous painting ‘The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb’. And it really is a lamb not an allegory or a symbol standing on the altar. But its history is much less definite. The Rough

Guide to Belgium & Luxembourg calls it “a seminal work of the early 1430s, though of dubious provenance.” This is because of a Latin verse found on its frame. “The inscription reads that Hubert van Eyck “than whom none was greater” began, and Jan van Eyck, “second in art”, completed the work, but as nothing else is known of Hubert, some art historians doubt his existence. They argue that Jan, who lived and worked in several cities (including Ghent), was entirely responsible for the painting and that only later, after Jan had firmly rooted himself in the rival city of Bruges, did the citizens of Ghent invent “Hubert” to counter his fame. No one knows the altarpiece’s authorship for sure, but what is certain is that in his manipulation of the technique of oil painting the artist – or artists – was able to capture a needle-sharp, luminous realism that must have stunned his contemporaries.”

And who the artist was is only part of the painting’s intrigue. “Despite appearances, the Just Judges panel is not authentic. It was added during the 1950s to replace the original which was stolen in 1934 and never recovered. The lost panel features in Albert Camus’s novel *The Fall*, whose protagonist keeps it in a cupboard, declining to return it for a complex of reasons, one of which is “because those judges are on their way to meet the Lamb ...[but]...there is no lamb or innocence any longer.” Naturally enough, there has been endless speculation as to who stole the panel and why, with suspicion ultimately resting on a certain Arsène Goedertier, a stockbroker and conservative politician from just outside of Ghent, who made a deathbed confession in 1934. Whether he was acting alone or as an agent for others is still hotly contested – some argue that the Knights Templar orchestrated the theft, others accuse the Nazis, but no one really knows.

The theft was just one of the many dramatic events to befall the painting – indeed it’s remarkable that the altarpiece has survived at all. The Calvinists wanted to destroy it; Philip II of Spain tried to acquire it; the Emperor Joseph II disapproved of the painting so violently that he replaced the nude Adam and Eve with a clothed version of 1784 (exhibited today on a column at the start of the nave just inside the church’s entrance); and, near the end of World War II, the Germans hid it in an Austrian salt mine, where it remained until American soldiers rescued it in 1945.”

* * * * *

Robert Yeatman, a journalist, and Walter Sellar who taught at Charterhouse School in England were best known for their spoof *1066 & All That*. I had a great-aunt who used her copy to amuse small visiting relatives; the trouble being that at ten or so I didn’t know enough English history to pick up the allusions and therefore the humour. Take for example: “Walpole ought never to be confused with Walpole, who was quite different; it was Walpole who lived in a house with the unusual name of Strawberry Jam and spent his time writing letters to famous men (such as the Prime Minister, Walpole, etc). Walpole is memorable for inventing the new policy of letting dogs go to sleep.

“This was a Good Thing really, but it so enraged the people (who thought that a dog’s life should be more uncomfortable) that they rang all the bells in London. At first Walpole merely muttered his policy, but eventually he was compelled to rouse himself and become actively memorable by remarking: ‘They are ringing the bells now; I shall be wringing their necks soon.’” This may have had the small boys of Charterhouse in stitches but was merely mysterious to me. And at the end of each chapter is a mock test with questions like:

9. Comment Quietly on

- (a) Tariff Reform.
- (b) Mafeking Night,
- (c) The Western Front

10. Refrain from commenting on The Albert Memorial, The September Massacres, The Dardanelles, The O.B.E., or any other subjects that you consider too numerous to mention. (The better the fewer.)

Yet when I came upon their parody, even though I knew nothing of Browning’s poem, I immediately enjoyed it simply because it was about horses; in fact, I thought they should’ve ignored

history and written more funny poems about horses.

So what of Ghent and Aix?

Ghent was the medieval centre of the cloth trade and probably retains Belgium's best collection of medieval buildings and artworks. I can imagine that it would have appealed to Browning, perhaps for the same reasons that Italy appealed to him, but why did he choose Ghent as the place from which the good news was to be taken. And why did he choose Aix as the end of the journey?

Aix-la-Chapelle is the modern German city of Aachen, just across the border from Holland and Belgium, but in the past centuries when it was known as Aix, before Germany became a unified nation, it gave its name to The Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748 which ended The War of the Austrian Succession. This was more of a truce than a peace and I must admit I haven't got my head around the complexities of this war. I am not sure I really want to. Aachen is now a bustling modern city which has managed to retain, despite WW2 and the passions of developers, some of its medieval buildings. The Lonely Planet Guide to Central Europe says of its City Hall, "The 14th-century Rathaus ... overlooks the Markt, while a fountain statue of Charlemagne is in the middle."

And, "While Cologne's cathedral wows you with its size and atmosphere, Aachen's similarly Unesco-listed Dom impresses with its shiny neatness. The small, Byzantine-inspired octagon at the building's heart dates from 805 but its ceiling mosaics still glitter and its marble columns still gleam.

"The building's historical significance is twofold: not only did Charlemagne order it built, but 30 Holy Roman emperors were crowned here from 936 to 1531.

"The brass chandelier hanging in the centre was donated by Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa in 1165. Standing at the main altar and looking back towards the door, it's just possible to glimpse Charlemagne's simple marble throne. The man himself lies in the golden shrine behind the altar. The cathedral became a site of pilgrimage after his death."

So was this treaty the event, that peace had been or was about to be signed, which influenced Browning's choice of start and finish? Or did he simply happen to have a great fondness for the two cities?

* * * * *

May 8: Thomas Pynchon

May 9: Patricia Cornwell

May 10: Olaf Stapledon

May 11: Sheila Burnford

May 12: Edward Lear (his birth certificate says the 13th but he kept to the 12th believing he had been born before midnight that night)

* * * * *

Vivien Noakes in *Edward Lear* wrote: "They (travelled) for five days and on the morning of the sixth they came to Petra, the ancient centre of caravan trade between Arabia and the countries west and north. 'About 9 we reached the highest part of the mountain ascent, and passing the ridge immediately below the rocks of Gebel Haroun (Aaron's mountain), now upon our left, entered the first or upper part of Wady Mousa on its western side. But it was nearly another hour before, still descending by winding tracks, we reached the first cavern tombs and the first coloured rocks. The slow advance chills with a feeling of strange solitude the intruder into the loneliness of this bygone world, where on every side are tokens of older greatness, and where between then and now is no link. As the path wandered among huge crags and over broad slabs of rock, ever becoming more striped and glowing in colour, I was more and more excited with curiosity and expectation. And after passing the solitary column which stands sentinel-like over the heaps of ruin around, and reaching the open space whence the whole area of the old city and the vast eastern cliff are fully seen, I own to having been more delighted and astonished than I had ever been by any spectacle ... The attraction arising from the singular mixture of architectural labour with the wildest extravagances of nature – the excessive and almost terrible feeling of loneliness in the very midst of scenes so plainly telling of a past glory and a race of days long gone –

the vivid contrast of the countless fragments of ruin, basement, foundation, wall, and scattered stone, with the bright green of the vegetation, and the rainbow hues of rock and cliff – the dark openings of the hollow tombs on every side – the white river-bed and its clear stream, edged with superb scarlet-tufted blossoms of oleander alternating with groups of white-flowered broom – all these combine to form a magical condensation of beauty and wonder which the ablest pen or pencil has no chance of conveying to the eye or mind ...’ ”

Although Lear asked ‘What art could give the star-bright flitting of the wild dove and rock-partridge through the oleander-gloom, or the sound of the clear river rushing among the ruins of the fallen city’ he set to work to draw the ancient city and its surroundings. Lesley Blanch describes his work there as “the meticulous and lovely water-colours so long neglected beside his Nonsense Rhymes”. But as more and more Arabs turned up demanding money in the end Lear and his companions grew frightened, packed up, and left Petra behind. So Lear’s vision to record the place as he saw it in 1858 never went beyond those few sketches. A pity.

* * * * *

Sogyal Rinpoche in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* writes, “Of the hundreds of stories about reincarnation that could be told here, there is one that particularly fascinates me. It is the story of an elderly man from Norfolk in England called Arthur Flowerdew, who from the age of twelve experienced inexplicable but vivid mental pictures of what seemed like some great city surrounded by desert. One of the images that came most frequently to his mind was of a temple apparently carved out of a cliff. These strange images kept coming back to him, especially when he played with the pink and orange pebbles on the seashore near his home. As he grew older, the details of the city in his vision grew clearer, and he saw more buildings, the layout of the streets, soldiers, and the approach to the city itself through a narrow canyon.

“Arthur Flowerdew much later in his life, quite by chance, saw a television documentary film on the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. He was astounded to see, for the very first time, the place he had carried around for so many years in those pictures in his mind. He claimed afterward that he had never even seen a book about Petra. However, his visions became well known, and an appearance in a BBC television program brought him to the attention of the Jordanian government, who proposed to fly him to Jordan along with a BBC producer to film his reactions to Petra. His only previous trip abroad had been a brief visit to the French coast.

“Before the expedition left, Arthur Flowerdew was introduced to a world authority on Petra and author of a book on the ancient city, who questioned him in detail, but was baffled by the precision of his knowledge, some of which he said could only have been known to an archaeologist specializing in this area. The BBC recorded Arthur Flowerdew’s pre-visit description of Petra, so as to compare it with what would be seen in Jordan. Flowerdew singled out three places in his vision of Petra: a curious volcano-shaped rock on the outskirts of the city, a small temple where he believed he had been killed in the first century B.C., and an unusual structure in the city that was well-known to archaeologists, but for which they could find no function. The Petra expert could recall no such rock and doubted that it was there. When he showed Arthur Flowerdew a photograph of the part of the city where the temple had stood, he astounded him by pointing to almost the exact site. Then the elderly man calmly explained the purpose of the structure, one that had not been considered before, as the guard room in which he had served as a soldier two thousand years before.

“A significant number of his predictions proved accurate. On the expedition’s approach to Petra, Arthur Flowerdew pointed out the mysterious rock; and once in the city he went straight to the guard room, without a glance at the map, and demonstrated how its peculiar check-in system for guards was used. Finally he went to the spot where he said he had been killed by an enemy spear in the first century B.C. He also indicated the location and purpose of other unexcavated structures on the site.

“The expert and archaeologist of Petra who accompanied Arthur Flowerdew could not explain this very ordinary English man’s uncanny knowledge of the city. He said:

He's filled in details and a lot of it is very consistent with known archaeological and historical facts and it would require a mind very different from his to be able to sustain a fabric of deception on the scale of his memories—at least those which he's reported to me. I don't think he's a fraud. I don't think he has the capacity to be a fraud on this scale.

What else could explain Arthur Flowerdew's extraordinary knowledge except rebirth? You could say that he might have read books about Petra, or that he might have even received his knowledge by telepathy; yet the fact remains that some of the information he was able to give was unknown even to the experts."

*

New Zealander Marguerite van Geldermalsen wrote in *Married to a Bedouin* of her arrival in Petra with a friend back in the late 70s: "The hotel, called Nazzal's Camp, was secreted behind the tall-walled ruins of the roofless temple, veiled in the shade of the towering gum trees. It had been a tent camp run by Thomas Cook and Sons when Agatha Christie set *Appointment with Death* in it in 1938, but now it was a building of stone and cement with a double staircase leading up to the front door. There was a dining room and a well-stocked bar on the first floor, bedrooms on the second floor, and more bedrooms, one of which we were shown to, set in two-thousand-year-old caves carved into the mountainside behind. Square concrete patches under the trees were the only sign that tents had had to be set up to accommodate the crowds during the hotel's heyday, but it was past that now. In fact, it was to close down later that year; a new hotel already operated outside the site, and we were the only guests at Nazzal's Camp.

"In the morning we asked the young men running the hotel what there was to do in Petra. There were no brochures or guidebooks. They told us we could go up to the High Place or the Monastery, but the sun was already beating down and neither name roused enough interest to entice us to climb so we wandered back the way we had come the day before.

"Back at the Treasury we were almost alone. I could easily have taken a photo without any other tourists in it but my camera was so basic it wouldn't get half the façade and Elizabeth didn't carry a camera at all. On either side of the main entrance worn horsemen stood beside headless rock horses. Neck-bendingly above us the friezes of flowers looked as fresh as the day they were carved. I discovered later that the Nabataeans had early beginnings as wandering Bedouin. They became important to the incense trade across Arabia from Yemen, initially attacking and later encouraging the safe passage of the camel caravans. From as early as the third century BC they were putting up their tents in Petra, a natural stronghold with many springs and easily guarded approaches. Over the following centuries they built up a thriving kingdom which by the end of the first century AD covered an area from southern Syria to the Negev desert in Palestine and down into Arabia, with Petra as the capital. Traders and craftsmen travelled around the known world and came back with new ideas. Their city spread across the hills, they developed fine pottery, minted their own coins (some with the heads of both the king and the queen), carved great and fantastic monuments in the cliffs that enclosed the basin and harvested every drop of rain the heavens sent them. Petra was a thriving city well into the sixth century but changing trade routes, occasional earthquakes and possibly a drying climate led to its abandonment.

"We climbed the steps and looked inside the chambers. The chisel marks made all those years before were still clear and the corners were precise but the floor and the steps were worn. It was as we sat there on the steps, opposite the mouth of the Siq, leaning our backs against the towering columns, that Mohammad Abdallah came over and invited us to stay."

* * * * *

Udi Levy wrote in *The Lost Civilization of Petra*: "The first Nabatean tribes probably moved into this area, the Negev, in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. They were nomads whose exact geographical origin has still not been determined with any certainty. This marked the beginning of the history of a people and civilization which occupied a special place in classical antiquity. The Nabateans lived in the

Negev for over a millennium into the seventh and eight(h) centuries AD. That alone shows the outstanding importance of this civilization: it is a unique example of the cultivation of the desert over an extended period. There were, of course, civilizations in other arid areas in the East which lived in the desert, but such settlements were abandoned after a brief period if there was no agricultural land available, and their cultures never flowered to the extent that the civilization of the Nabateans did. No other people managed to use the few life-supporting resources which the desert reluctantly releases as effectively as the Nabateans did.”

They are thought to have migrated north from the kingdom of Saba, now Yemen, and gradually developed round the caravan routes. It remained a nomadic lifestyle for centuries but gradually developed round a few key areas. Its capital Petra is in modern day Jordan but the kingdom as a whole reached into Israel, down into Saudi Arabia and up towards Syria. Its people are believed to have been sun worshippers, though given the damage the sun did, it might be equally correct to say sun placaters. They saw the sun as female, the moon as male, and Venus as male. They used a plain black block of stone to represent their main deity. Though some of the carvings on their buildings suggest a Greek influence.

A guide book *Petra The Rose-Red City* by Christian Augé and Jean-Marie Dentzer says, “Petra itself was also a sacred space.” The plethora of places with obvious religious significance include major temples, High Places on the surrounding hills, down to “Small, basic shrines, consisting of a niche bearing a Nabataean bacyl or Greco-Roman icon, were located both near residences and in deserted spots, as were simple inscriptions naming the gods and their worshipers. These little shrines were dedicated to various divinities, among whom Egyptian Isis occupied a position of importance.”

But then Christianity traveled along the trade routes and the kingdom became largely Christian. This was a peaceful penetration and led to the widespread building of churches including the one recently excavated by American archeologist Kenneth W. Russell: “When he returned in April 1990 to do a formal recording of the site, he concluded that the ruins were of a large Byzantine church which, from the considerable quantities of small glass tesserae that lay scattered on the surface, must have been richly decorated with mosaics on its walls and ceilings. Any church that had wall and ceiling mosaics would also have had the more common floor mosaics, executed with larger stone tesserae.

“Excavations of the site ... revealed a triple-apsed church, of the 6th century or possibly earlier, with an atrium to the west. It had been badly damaged by fire, apparently quite soon after it was built, and its destruction may have been completed by the earthquake of 551.”

The Roman occupation was less peaceful but the Nabataeans accepted that the Romans had overwhelming force and that Roman interest and influence was minimal so there were no uprisings. Or none that we know of. Given that the Nabataeans probably only numbered 10,000 to 20,000 people this makes sense. When Paul set out for Damascus in 43 AD it was to persecute the Christians already there. Damascus was a mixed population but is thought to have come under the rule of the Nabataeans for some of its existence. Paul is also thought to have spent around three years in the Nabataean kingdom, though not necessarily at Petra. The Nabataeans were certainly literate, many inscriptions have been found, but so far nothing like the Dead Sea Scrolls has been turned up to throw illumination on the Nabataean lifestyle and history and beliefs. Perhaps that will happen. Because of the kingdom’s split between Israel and Jordan there have been many problems in the way of study and excavation.

It is unclear why the kingdom declined but it is thought that several earthquakes and then the arrival of Islam not only as an idea but in the person of militant horsemen led to the gradual abandoning of the settled centres of the kingdom and the gradual reversion to a nomadic way of life, leaving Petra as the sleeping beauty that would amaze travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But I had a different question. That pink and red rock that makes Petra so startling and beautiful—what is it? The answer is both surprising and simple. Sandstone. And the image of Petra as

rose-red is now so firmly entrenched that it almost seems like heresy to note that the sandstone comes in various colours including dramatic striped façades. The image comes from John William Burgon's poem:

It seems no work of Man's creative hand,
By labour wrought as wavering fancy planned;
But from the rock as if by magic grown,
Eternal, silent, beautiful, alone!
Not virgin-white like that old Doric shrine,
Where erst Athena held her rites divine;
Not saintly-grey, like many a minster fane,
That crowns the hill and consecrates the plane;
But rose-red as if the blush of dawn
That first beheld them were not yet withdrawn;
The hues of youth upon a brown of woe,
Which Man deemed old two thousand years ago,
Match me such a marvel save in Eastern clime,
A rose-red city half as old as Time.

But Petra's time may be running out. "Petra, the "rose-red" city which is the pride of Jordan, is at risk. Rainwater is attacking its 2,000-year-old classical facades—as is sand, some of it blown by the hoofs of the hundreds of horses on which visitors ride into the city through the Siq—the narrow gorge which forms Petra's main entrance ... Today the city is a World Heritage Site, but that designation is scant protection as natural weathering and increasing visitor numbers take their toll."

(Ann Hills in *History Today* 1993)

Levi writes of the scholar Avraham Negev, seen as the expert on the Nabataeans: "In his book *Temple, Kirchen und Zisternen* (Temples, Churches and Cisterns) Avraham Negev describes the following experience:

During one of my first visits to Sobota in 1944, I approached the cobbled square in front of the church. It was a very hot Chamsin day (Chamsin = hot desert wind) but now the pitiless sun was about to sink. A light Mediterranean breeze made it easier to breathe. There was a profound silence and the only sound was the faint chirping of the crickets. In the shadow of the high wall I saw some scribbles on the cobbles, faint lines of a game which children have played from time immemorial. It was as if I could still hear the sound of the game counters. Suddenly I became aware of the quiet shuffling of bare feet on the cobbles and the sound of little bells, and I could smell the scent of incense. It was so real that I did not dare to raise my eyes to see the slow procession of white-robed priests into the basilica.—If there were ever a kind of 'ordination' for archeologists, that was the moment when it would have happened for me."

But the 'strange solitude' felt by both Edward Lear and Avraham Negev is a thing of the past. Now Petra, a three and a half hour bus ride from Jordan's capital Amman, receives over a thousand visitors per day. It is perhaps time to create virtual reality tours of Petra and encourage visitors to go to other Nabataean sites such as Umm al-Jimal which they created out of black basalt ... and while I was browsing in a Lonely Planet Guide to Jordan I discovered that the ancient town of Gadara, home to the Gadarene swine, which I had once mentioned as being in Syria is no longer there. Certainly it was in Biblical times but it is now in Jordan and is known as Umm Qais, a name which seems to preclude the keeping of pigs ...

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May 13: Daphne du Maurier
R. K. Narayan (d)

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“Forty to fifty years ago, when Indian writers were not so well considered, the writer R. K. Narayan was a comfort and example to those of us (I include my father and myself) who wished to write. Narayan wrote in English about Indian life. This is actually a difficult thing to do, and Narayan solved the problems by appearing to ignore them. He wrote lightly, directly, with little social explanation. His English was so personal and easy, so without English social associations, that there was no feeling of oddity; he always appeared to be writing from within his culture.

“He wrote about people in a small town in South India: small people, big talk, small doings. That was where he began; that was where he was fifty years later. To some extent that reflected Narayan’s own life. He never moved far from his origins. When I met him in London in 1961—he had been travelling, and was about to go back to India—he told me he needed to be back home, to do his walks (with an umbrella for the sun) and to be among his characters.

“He truly possessed his world. It was complete and always there, waiting for him; and it was far enough away from the centre of things for outside disturbances to die down before they could get to it. Even the independence movement, in the heated 1930s and 1940s, was far away, and the British presence was marked mainly by the names of buildings and places. This was an India that appeared to mock the vainglorious and went on in its own way.”

V. S. Naipaul in *Literary Occasions*.

Narayan was born and died in Chennai. But did he write about his home town, did he write about smaller places, did he imagine a kind of universal Indian village, a village typical of thousands of villages? The other day I came upon his book called *The Guide* and was curious enough to get it.

“We noticed much activity in the field in front of our house. A set of men arrived from the town every morning and were busy in the field all day. We learned that they were building a railway track. They came to my father’s shop for refreshments. My father inquired anxiously, “When shall we have the trains coming in here?”

If they were in a good mood, they answered, “About six or eight months, who can say?” Or if they were in a black mood, “Don’t ask us. Next you will tell us to drive a locomotive to your shop!” and they laughed grimly.

Work was going on briskly. I lost to some extent my freedom under the tamarind tree, because trucks were parked there. I climbed into them and played. No one minded me. All day I was climbing in and out of the trucks, and my clothes became red with mud. Most of the trucks brought red earth, which was banked up on the field. In a short while a small mountain was raised in front of our house. It was enchanting. When I stood on the top of the mound I could see far-off places, the hazy outlines of Mempi Hills. I became as busy as the men. I spent all my time in the company of those working on the track, listening to their talk and sharing their jokes. More trucks came, bringing timber and iron. A variety of goods was piling up on every side. Presently I began to collect sawn-off metal bits, nuts, and bolts, and I treasured them in my mother’s big trunk, where a space was allotted to me amidst her ancient silk saris, which she never wore.”

R. K. Narayan in *The Guide*.

“Four hundred years ago the village of Maliwada, India, was a thriving agricultural center, producing fruits, vegetables, and wines. In 1975, it had little water, no sanitation, and few crops. Over 2,000 villagers barely eked out a subsistence living. Muslims and Hindus of many different castes lived with centuries of mutual distrust. The villagers knew about their prosperous past, but it seemed long gone and hopeless to recreate.

“Discussions began based on two questions: “What would it take to have prosperity exist again in this village? What can you do to make that happen?” Gradually, as ideas began to pour forth, perspectives changed. Hindus and Muslims talked together excitedly about how to clean out the ancient well. Brahmins and Untouchables discovered in a joint meeting that all despaired at the lack of medical care for their sick children. They all wanted to create a health clinic in the village. Hope began

to creep into their voices and eyes. What had seemed totally impossible suddenly became doable. People organized and tapped resources they had forgotten they had.

“They acquired loans from a bank and received government grants. They built a dam, a brick factory, and the clinic. The shared vision of what they wanted for themselves and their community allowed them to go beyond their personal and cultural differences and continued to motivate them. Each success made them stronger, more confident, more self-assured. Today, Maliwada is a prospering village.

“When transformation like this takes place, the news travels. Nearby villagers wanted to know how they could do this...”

Marvin R. Weisbord *Discovering Common Ground* quoted in Tom Atlee’s *The Tao of Democracy*.

Chennai is far bigger than a village. Formerly known as Madras, it has more than six million people. Yet like all Indian cities it started from a small village and gradually grew, incorporating villages in its ever-spreading sprawl. I can well imagine what would have taken Narayan away from Chennai but what would take people *to* Chennai now?

It has the things you expect in Indian cities: temples, bazaars, noise, smog, bustle, cricket ... but among its other draws might be the curious claim that it is the burial place of St Thomas. The Rough Guide to South India says, “St Thomas is credited as the first to bring Christianity to the Subcontinent, in the first century AD. Although the present neo-Gothic structure dates from 1896, San Thome stands on the site of two earlier churches (the first possibly erected by Nestorian Christians from Persia during the tenth century), built over the tomb of St Thomas. His relics are kept in a casket under the nave and are the object of great reverence and worship. They can be accessed via an underground passage that descends from the small museum ... behind the cathedral. The museum itself houses stones inscribed in Tamil, Sanskrit (twelfth-century Chola) and early Portuguese, and a map of India, dated 1519.” And “St Thomas is said to have sought refuge from persecution in the Little Mount Caves.” Here you will find the church of Our Lady of Good Health and behind it “is a natural spring, said to have been created when Thomas struck the rock so that the crowds that came to hear him preach could quench their thirst. Even today, when Chennai is hit by drought the water level of the well remains unaffected. Samples of its holy water are on sale.”

Clearly Thomas was not drawn to visit Madras as it did not exist in the 1st century and the small fishing village there was not a focal point for travelers; but the districts of South India patterned by small prosperous villages were not so different from the villages and farms scattered across Galilee. It probably had attractions for Thomas just as it had attractions for Narayan. But *did* he reach India? The Portuguese certainly found Christian communities in India when they reached there in the 1490s and it seems odd to create stories around Thomas for no reason. I don’t know if it can be proved or disproved but people 2,000 years ago *did* travel immense distances. Our image of people rarely leaving the one small village is a limited and often misleading picture.

And if you go to Chennai you have the chance to get work in films. Chennai is the centre of the huge Tamil film industry. The Rough Guide says, “If you’ve a fervent interest in the Chennai movie industry, you can rub shoulders with today’s Tamil movie stars by appearing as an extra in a film at MGR or one of the other major studios on the outskirts of Chennai. Scouts regularly trawl the tourist spots downtown ... for foreigners to spice up crowd and party scenes. People with long blond hair stand a better chance of getting picked, but being in the right place at the right time is more important.” Or you can go round the studios yourself. I think I’ve left it too late to catch that one minute of fame but good luck to you ...

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May 14: Maria Irene Fornés

May 15: Xavier Herbert

Mary 16: Honoré de Balzac
 May 17: Robert Smith Surtees
 May 18: Bertrand Russell
 May 19: Edward de Bono
 May 20: Kate Jennings
 May 21: Dorothy Hewett
 May 22: Arthur Conan Doyle
 May 23: Carl Linnaeus
 May 24: Mary Grant Bruce
 Brian Mayfield-Smith
 May 25: Jamaica Kincaid
 May 26: Denis Florence Macarthy
 May 27: Julia Ward Howe
 May 28: Patrick White
 May 29: André Brink
 May 30: Mikhail Bakunin
 May 31: Judith Wright
 Walt Whitman
 June 1: John Masefield
 June 2: Thomas Hardy
 June 3: Larry McMurtry

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“The dominant East Bay bookshop in those years was the Holmes Book Company in Oakland, a wonderful large bookshop with a big wraparound balcony devoted to fiction. That balcony, not to mention the Holmes Book Company in general, could always reward as much time as I could give it. I visited when I could; the one book I bought from them that I still have is Lady Anne Blunt’s account of her travels in the Nejd, the cornerstone of what, many years later, became a two-thousand-volume collection of travel narratives by women.”

From *Books* by Larry McMurtry.

He also says, “The core collection of my lady travelers had been formed by a man named Stacey Lloyd, who happened to be Paul Mellon’s stepson. It contained most of the desirable eighteenth- and nineteenth-century books, and they were in the right condition.

Later, from the London dealer Bernard Shapero, came the only seventeenth-century book in my collection—two Englishwomen make their way to Malta.”

“When I began to read the lady travelers I soon developed favorites: Emily Eden, Amelia Edwards, Ella Maillart, Kate Marsden (On Sledge and Dogsled to Outcast Siberian Lepers), Lady Brassey (and her yacht, Sunbeam), Mary Kingsley, Susana Moodie, the two Dianas (Agnes Herbert and her cousin Cecily), and more recently, Dervla Murphy, Christina Dodwell, Bettina Selby, and others.”

There are a number of interesting books about nineteenth-century travelers such as *Victorian Lady Travellers* by Dorothy Middleton and *Unsuitable for Ladies: An Anthology of Women Travellers* selected by Jane Robinson. Of course many more women traveled, including the female convicts sent to Australia, but they rarely wrote about it. And then there were the books women wrote about those travels. For instance Isabella Bird wrote *The Englishwoman in America* (1856), *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains* (1879), *Unbeaten Tracks to Japan* (1880), *Korea and Her Neighbours* and more. She discovered that travel improved her health so she became an indefatigable traveler and best-selling travel writer. When the Royal Geographical Society in London invited her to speak in 1892 she declined as they didn’t permit women to become members. The Society, and I can just imagine all

those diehards grumbling, finally accepted that it was time for change and she became their first official female member.

And her books, I am just reading her *The Golden Chersonese: Travels in Malaya in 1879* about her visit to the Malay States, have lasted well. Her eye, like many of her fellow ‘lady travelers’, was Eurocentric. I doubt if many people would now agree with her description of the Malay people: “They vary little in their height which is below that of the average European. Their frames are lithe and robust, their chests are broad, their hands are small and refined, and their feet are thick and short. The men are not handsome, and the women are decidedly ugly. Both sexes look old very early.” But like her traveling compatriots everything was worth mentioning: landscapes, climate, buildings, customs, governance, birds, animals, produce, religion, children, methods of transport ...

“There have been many women, particularly Englishwomen, who have been enthralled by the Oriental legend; who have followed the beckoning Eastern star wherever it led. On great voyages or little trips as travellers or tourists; as eccentrics such as Lady Hester Stanhope, or Orientalists such as Gertrude Bell or Freya Stark.”

From *The Wilder Shores of Love* by Lesley Blanch.

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There is a vague sense that Englishwomen were the great travelers. As *Punch* once quipped “We have had *The Englishwoman in Russia*, *The Englishwoman in Thibet*, *The Englishwoman in America*, and the Englishwoman in almost every hole and corner of the globe. If our beautiful country-women carry out this mania for travelling much further, the greatest novelty our publishers could give us will be,—*The Englishwoman in England*.” But as I was browsing in Barbara Hodgson’s *No Place for a Lady* I came upon a mention of a traveler I had come across many years ago traveling in Iceland: Ida Pfeiffer. And I was interested to learn both that she was an Austrian and that she in fact circumnavigated the globe in the mid-nineteenth century and wrote about almost everywhere—from Brazil to Egypt to Tahiti.

It is a large and interesting field to dip into but I thought I would just mention Palmyra in Syria as it has been in the news for the very worst of reasons. Various women went there, the titled and the more modest, Lady Hester Stanhope, Isabel Burton, Jane Digby the former Lady Ellenborough, and Larry McMurtry’s Lady Anne Blunt. Hodgson writes of Stanhope, “They departed for Palestine in May 1812, well equipped with servants and bodyguards. Stanhope immediately established her daring by riding unveiled into Damascus. There she met with a sheikh of the Anazeh, the tribe controlling the desert routes, to plan her expedition to Palmyra, the site of the ruined empire of Queen Zenobia, where no European woman had been since Roman times. In March 1813, Stanhope and Fry, dressed as Bedouin men, began the arduous trip. Word sped along the desert grapevine; everyone wanted to see this wealthy, defiant Englishwoman, and her arrival was greeted with great celebration. To Stanhope it was as though she had been accorded a queen’s welcome.”

Englishwomen may not be what they once were but you could also say the same of desert sheikhs. And what of Queen Zenobia? Alain Chenevière in *Syria Cradle of Civilisations* says of Palmyra and Queen Zenobia that Palmyra, ‘City of Palms’, or Tadmoor in Arabic, grew up in ancient times, like Petra, as a way-station for the caravans which criss-crossed the ancient world. “Its political autonomy came to an abrupt end in the 2nd century BC when Roman legions advanced towards the east and confronted the Persians.” It survived but its ruler Odenathus II was assassinated and his widow Zenobia tried very hard to assert both Palmyra’s independence and to increase the size of the kingdom her son Vaballathus would inherit. She had some early success but war with Rome was foolhardy for such a small kingdom and when the Romans besieged Palmyra she fled. She was captured and taken as a prisoner to Rome in 271. “In 273, the proud city revolted once again, forcing Emperor Aurelian to raze it.” It wasn’t completely destroyed but the city declined to complete unimportance and an earthquake eventually left it uninhabited except by wandering shepherds. English merchants in the 17th

century came upon the remains and, perhaps because this came at a time of increasing interest in Greek and Roman ruins, it sparked great interest.

“The ruins, partially rebuilt, are superb. They cover almost fifty hectares. There are many monuments, palaces, columns and tombs. The most famous are the temples of Baal, of Baalshmin and of Nebo, the *hypogeum* of the Three Brothers, the great 1.1 kilometre-long colonnade, the *tetrapylum*, Diocletian’s baths, the theatre, the agora, the senate, the banqueting hall, the funerary towers and the southern *hypogea*. There is a superb view of the city from the small 17th century Arab castle of Qalaat ibn Maan.”

So why did Islamic State believe it, and the tourist dollars it brought in, must be blown to smithereens? Because it was a pagan city? But then did anyone look upon it and immediately fall down and worship Baal? I am inclined to think that the real desire to destroy was sparked not by religion but by a sense of inferiority.

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June 4: Elizabeth Jolley

June 5: Christy Brown

June 6: Alexander Pushkin

Theodor Strehlow

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David Attenborough in *Zoo Quest for a Dragon* wrote, “For many years before the existence of this monster was scientifically confirmed, there had been rumours of an awesome dragon-like creature living on Komodo. It was said that it had enormous claws, fearsome teeth, a heavily armoured body and a fiery yellow tongue. These stories had been brought back by native fishermen and pearl-divers who were the only people to sail among the dangerous reefs which surrounded the then uninhabited island and which made it one of the least accessible islands in the whole area. In 1910, an officer of the Dutch Colonial Infantry took an expedition to Komodo. He found that the stories were correct and to prove them he shot two of the giant lizards, brought their skins back to Java and presented them to a Dutch zoologist named Ouwens. It was Ouwens who first published a description of this astonishing creature and named it *Varanus Komodoensis*. The world at large promptly christened it the Komodo Dragon.

“Subsequent expeditions discovered that the creature was carnivorous, living on the flesh of the wild pig and deer which abounded on the island. It undoubtedly fed on rotting carrion, but it also seemed likely that it actively hunted its prey, killing it with a swing of its huge muscular tail. Specimens were found not only on Komodo but also on the neighbouring islet of Rintja and on the western tip of Flores, a nearby island. But the dragon occurs nowhere else in the world. This restricted distribution is a puzzle. The giant lizards are almost certainly descendants of the even larger prehistoric lizards whose fossil remains have been found in Australia. The most ancient of these are estimated to be about sixty million years old. Yet strangely, Komodo is a volcanic island of comparatively recent origin. Why the dragon should exist only here and how they reached the island are unanswerable problems.”

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Julie Miller and Grant Osborn in *Something is Out There* devote a chapter to dragons. “Once upon a time, dragons stalked Australia. Enormous, slavering lizards called megalania. Measuring more than 5 metres long and weighing at least 500 kilograms, they were the ultimate predators of the late Pleistocene era, savage reptilian killing machines with razor-like claws and jaws armed with serrated blade-like teeth. ... Modern day sightings of the lizard king are exceedingly sparse, so before commencing our investigation into megalania, or *Varanus priscis*, we decide to conduct some face-to-face research with what scientists suggest is its closest living relative, the currently proven largest lizard in the world – the komodo dragon, or *Varanus komodoensis*.

“And so we find ourselves aboard a Buginese schooner, three days journey from Benoa Harbour

in Bali. Our destination is Komodo Island, a tiny island in the Lesser Sundas archipelago in Indonesia. After dropping anchor, we wake at dawn to gather on the teakwood decks to view an unforgettable crimson sunrise illuminating the Flores Sea. With no time for second thoughts, we are bundled into a Zodiac and hurtled towards Komodo Island, looming in front of us like a real life Jurassic Park: craggy, primeval, and menacing. We are about to enter the dragon's lair ...

“At the Komodo National Park headquarters, we are met by a park ranger who will act as our tour guide and safety officer. He is armed with a large forked branch, but claims his main protection against these carnivorous killers is his ability to read their behaviour. As we depart the headquarters we pass a warning sign: ‘Dangerous area. Watch out. Komodo crossing. Be silent.’ ... In Komodo National Park – an 1800-square kilometre World Heritage Site spanning several islands between Flores and Sumbawa – there are as many komodo dragons as human beings, around 3000 of each. ... The discovery of komodo dragons in 1912 was one of the most surprising scientific finds of the 20th century, a cryptozoological victory over skeptics who considered monster lizards to be the stuff of legend. The beasts first came to Western attention after a party of pearl fishermen returned from Komodo Island with tales of an enormous prehistoric predator roaming the forests.”

Even more surprising ... “While it was generally assumed that komodo dragons were native to the Indonesian islands they call home, the discovery of fossilized bones in Queensland recently turned that theory on its head. Dating around 300,000 years old, the fossils show the komodo dragon had its origins in Australia about four million years ago, possibly persisting on the continent until the arrival of humans around 40,000 years ago.”

Apart from the fact that indigenous people had reached southern Tasmania more than 40,000 years ago so that time frame needs to be pushed back that raises a curious question. The komodo dragon seems particularly well adapted for survival. It can run fast, it can swim, it is fierce, its bite is venomous, its liking for carrion cannot have made it the most delicious feast around—and other lizards, from goannas to bluetongues, from Gila Monsters to crocodiles all survived. So why should the komodo not survive? I wondered if it in fact had gradually metamorphosised into a goanna or something similar over those four million years.

When I was reading Ward McNally's biography of Professor Ted Strehlow, *Aborigines Artefacts and Anguish*, I came upon this curious hint. “But we do know that Simpson's Gap, whose Aranda name is Rungutjirpa, was once the mythological home of a group of giant goanna ancestors, and that these personages received a visit from another large party of giant goanna ancestors who had come from the important centre of Arkeranga, in the middle of the Hale River region. In addition, Rungutjirpa was visited by a giant goanna ancestor from Lankara, a waterhole east of Ryan's Well ...

“Mythology has it that the track of the goannas approaching Arkeranga is marked by low hills” and that the goannas were as high as the crown of gum trees ... Well, why not? We know Australia had giant wombats. Why not giant goannas?

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June 7: Elizabeth Bowen
Edward Field
Knud Rasmussen

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‘A Journey’ by Edward Field

When he got up that morning everything was different:
He enjoyed the bright spring day
But he did not realize it exactly, he just enjoyed it.

And walking down the street to the railroad station
Past magnolia trees with dying flowers like old socks
It was a long time since he had breathed so simply.

Tears filled his eyes and it felt good
But he held them back
Because men didn't walk around crying in that town.

Waiting on the platform at the station
The fear came over him of something terrible about to happen:
The train was late and he recited the alphabet to keep hold.

And in its time it came screeching in
And as it went on making its usual stops,
People coming and going, telephone poles passing,

He hid his head behind a newspaper
No longer able to hold back the sobs, and willed his eyes
To follow the rational weavings of the seat fabric.

He didn't do anything violent as he had imagined.
He cried for a long time, but when he finally quieted down
A place in him that had been closed like a fist was open,

And at the end of that ride he stood up and got off that train:
And through the streets and in all the places he lived in later on
He walked, himself at last, a man among men,
With such radiance that everyone looked up and wondered.

Robin Rowland offered us this poem in her seminar on writing about journeys.

A publisher's blurb for *Notes from Overground* by 'Tiresias' says, 'Man is born free, and is everywhere in trains. More than a commuter's lament, *Notes from Overground* is a witty, wide-ranging meditation on a horribly familiar form of travel.' (Tiresias was the pen name of Roger Green.)

Bill Bryson in *Notes from a Small Island* writes, "As I stood on the platform beneath another, fairly recent London civility – namely an electronic board announcing that the next train to Hainault would be arriving in 4 mins – I turned my attention to the greatest of all civilities: the London Underground Map. What a piece of perfection it is, created in 1931 by a forgotten hero named Harry Beck, an out-of-work draughtsman who realized that when you are under ground it doesn't matter where you are. Beck saw – and what an intuitive stroke this was – that as long as the stations were presented in their right sequence with their inter-changes clearly delineated, he could freely distort scale, indeed abandon it altogether. He gave his map the orderly precision of an electrical wiring system, and in so doing created an entirely new, *imaginary* London that has very little to do with the disorderly geography of the city above."

However, much of the writing about travelling in trains is about Great Train Journeys or Journeys in Great Trains. The Trans-Siberian. The old Orient Express. The Ghan. Take your pick. I have just been reading Tom Savio's collection *Top Railway Journeys of the World* and the one which attracted me most was a very short and unfamous journey. Colin Boocock's journey from Myrdal to Flåm in Norway. "Norway's steepest and most spectacular railway is scarcely visible from the main line train that cuts its long way from Oslo to Bergen. Passengers on the big red *Bergen Express* will cast no more than a cursory glance at the short, dark-green train standing by the curved branch line platform at Myrdal station. Only the adventurous or those 'in the know' alight here, but they are amply rewarded

for doing so.

“The Flåmsbanen journey, from Myrdal to Flåm, consists of a 20-kilometre (12-mile) single-track railway that descends into a deep ravine, dropping from a height of 866 metres (2840 feet) above sea level to just 2 metres (6 feet) above sea level, where it reaches the blunt end of the Aurlandsfjord. The modern train has an electric locomotive at each end of a short chain of bogie carriages, which provide the extra power needed for the steep climb. The line has a ruling gradient of 5.5 per cent, an incline that is not far from the limit of adhesion of steel wheels on steel rails, particularly in the damp weather that is common to these parts. The railway passes through a score of tunnels that total 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) in length, and near the line’s upper end the train climbs through 21 sharp bends and loops to gain height over a short linear distance.”

“Leaving Myrdal, the Flåm train stops a short distance away at Nåli. Here, passengers are invited to disembark and take in the thundering waterfall fed by the Flåm River. Flowing down from Lake Reinunga, the river tumbles over the rocks at this point, plunging down into a gorge. Nearby, the view along and into the valley is superb. The railway itself can be glimpsed below, hugging the side of the ravine at several levels as it weaves its way in and out of tunnels built along the sharply curved track. These loops are necessary, as the train must change direction frequently in order to gain or lose height quickly. On two occasions, the Flåm River disappears into the rock and reappears a little further on, having crossed under the railway through natural tunnels.”

“One is always conscious of the presence of the river, whose course has eroded the rock over the ages to form this fantastic ravine. Mountains on each side rise to more than 1000 metres (3280 feet) and at certain angles of the sun, an eerie twilight settles over the valley. As the railway wends its way ever downward, nearer to the valley floor, the Aurlandsfjord comes into view in the distance.

“Approaching the village of Flåm the train crosses the flat, grassy floor of the valley mouth, which remains surrounded by sheer rock faces. The final stop is the small railway station neatly arranged next to the ferry terminal at the head of the Aurlandsfjord.”

“Flåm station offers many modern tourist amenities including restaurants. An old electric locomotive stands on a plinth near the station and for railway enthusiasts and those with a taste for heritage vehicles there is a small railway museum.” Perhaps for the pensioned-off trains which couldn’t face another uphill struggle ...

And it will only take you a fraction of the time you planned to spend on the Trans-Siberian.

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June 8: Jocelyne Scutt

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Jocelyne Scutt wrote a hard-hitting introduction to the law in Australia, particularly the way that the law has treated aspiring women lawyers. And although a court is just a building with rooms and corridors and, often, cells inside, it has almost invariably a peculiar atmosphere. Perhaps the people who work there every day do not feel this but for most people it provides a sharp distinction between everyday life and being ‘in court’. The birds may be singing outside, there may be cars, pedestrians, people eating lunch, but inside gives no sense of the everyday. Different rules of behaviour apply. A different attitude to life permeates the place.

Of course there are famous courts, the Old Bailey springs to mind, and little country town court houses, but each of them separates people from the everyday. Perhaps it is the knowledge that once you walk in you may not walk out. And prison takes you one step further from the every day. Writers have written in jail, from John Bunyan to Oscar Wilde to inmates of San Quentin. But it is not a place to invite whimsy and imagination. Even if you are the Bird Man of Alcatraz.

While I was wondering if I wanted to write about a specific court or prison I came upon a little guide written for law students in the 1970s hoping to be accepted by the Inner Temple in London. There are four Inns of Court, Inner Temple, Lincoln’s Inn, Middle Temple and Gray’s Inn. How do young hopefuls feel when they are accepted into these august premises—though perhaps not as ancient

as they might be as Wat Tyler's followers in 1381 "destroyed their lodgings and burnt their records"? And interestingly, they give the 1979 costs of being called to the Bar:

Joining the Inner Temple cost £85. Deposit on joining £100, Tuition £660, Fee for Part II exam £30, Call to the Bar £75, Wig and Gown £160, Cost of Keeping 8 Terms £48. Not cheap at a little over a £1,000 though your wig and gown, with luck, will last a lifetime. But not impossible if you had known for years you had a passion for the law. And if you have a passion for the law then practicing like Atticus Finch in a hot little court room will not trouble you. You will make that space your own.

The Rough Guide to England makes the place sound attractive: "Temple is the largest and most complex of the Inns of Court, where every barrister in England must study before being called to the Bar. A few very old buildings survive here and the maze of courtyards and passageways is fun to explore. Medieval students ate, attended lectures and slept in the Middle Temple Hall ... across the courtyard, still the Inn's main dining room. The present building was constructed in the 1560s and provided the setting for many great Elizabethan masques and plays – probably including Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which is believed to have been premiered here in 1602. The hall is worth a visit for its fine hammerbeam roof, wooden panelling and decorative Elizabethan screen.

The two Temple Inns share use of the complex's oldest building, Temple Church ... built in 1185 by the Knights Templar. An oblong chancel was added in the thirteenth century, and the whole building was damaged in the Blitz, but the original round church – modelled on the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem – still stands, with its striking Purbeck marble piers, recumbent marble effigies of knights, and tortured grotesques grimacing in the spandrels of the blind arcading."

Even so I still dislike courts, prisons, the whole edifice of 'justice'. And no amount of history, fine architecture, mellow beauty, grave tradition, is going to change my feelings ... And yet, *justice matters*. So are there other better ways in which we might make its public face not only fair and just but also more human so that ordinary people called there, for all sorts of reasons, as victims and witnesses, as parents, as friends and support, as law students and police cadets, as the 'innocent until proven guilty', need not feel they have entered into an alien place?

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June 9: George Axelrod

June 10: Saul Bellow

June 11: Anna Akhmatova

June 12: Johanna Spyri

June 13: W. B. Yeats

Dorothy L. Sayers

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Janet Hitchman began her introduction to Dorothy L. Sayers, *Such a Strange Lady*, with a guide taking a middle-aged South African couple round Oxford. "Oxford, in the height of the tourist season, puts a great strain, not only on the City Fathers, but also on the wives of the young dons. It is upon them, with their health unimpaired, and their enthusiasm not, as yet, dimmed, that the job of entertaining many of the overseas visitors falls. They can be seen on most summer afternoons shepherding small groups of Japanese professors, American psychiatrists, African economists or Indian medical men, in and out of the Bodleian, up and down the High. Giving intelligent answers to intelligent questions; expertly steering their charges away from the larger groups, associations of everything it is possible to associate, with their fast-talking professional guides."

The South Africans are bored. Their responses are unenthusiastic. "The hot afternoon was a dreary failure, and it was still too early to suggest tea. Seeking some shade and relief from the traffic noise she led them off Cattle Street into New College Lane thinking she would show them Magdalen and the river. As they passed under the bridge she said casually, "This is where Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane became engaged". It was as if an electrical charge had entered the couple. Enthusiasm so

lacking about reality bubbled over when the fictional pair was mentioned.”

This interested me because I took my first real sense of Oxford from Sayers’ *Gaudy Night*. A better view might now be the Inspector Morse novels which don’t make you immediately say ‘Oh yes, I must see Oxford before I die’ but it was after reading Bill Bryson’s rant in *Notes from a Small Island* that you, too, might rethink your plan to spend happy days in the city of ‘dreaming spires’: “My gripe with Oxford has nothing to do with fund-raising or how it educates its scholars. My gripe with Oxford is that so much of it is so ugly. Come with me down Merton Street and I will show you what I mean. Note, as we stroll past the backs of Christ Church, the studied calm of Corpus Christi, the soft golden glow of Merton, that we are immersed in an architectural treasure house, one of the densest assemblages of historic buildings in the world, and that Merton Street presents us with an unquestionably becoming prospect of gabled buildings, elaborate wrought-iron gates and fine seventeenth- and eighteenth-century townhouses. Several of the houses have been mildly disfigured by the careless addition of electrical wires to their facades (something that other less intellectually distracted nations would put inside) but never mind. They are easily overlooked. But what is this inescapable intrusion at the bottom? Is it an electrical substation? A halfway house designed by the inmates? No, it is the Merton College Warden’s Quarters, a little dash of mindless sixties excrescence foisted on an otherwise largely flawless street.”

But that is only the beginning. “At its eastern extremity Kybald Street ends in a pocket-sized square that positively cries out for a small fountain and maybe some benches. But what we find instead is a messy jumble of double- and triple-parked cars. Now on to Oriel Square: an even messier jumble of abandoned vehicles. Then on up Cornmarket (avert your gaze; this is *truly* hideous), past Broad Street and St Giles (still more automotive messiness) and finally let us stop, exhausted and dispirited, outside the unconscionable concrete eyesore that is the University Offices on the absurdly named Wellington Square. No, let’s not. Let’s pass back down Cornmarket, through the horrible, low-ceilinged, ill-lit drabness of the Clarendon Shopping Centre, out on to Queen Street, past the equally unadorable Westgate Shopping Centre and central library with its heartless, staring windows and come to rest at the outsized pustule that is the head office of Oxfordshire County Council. We could go on through St Ebbes, past the brutalist compound of the magistrates’ courts, along the bleak sweep of Oxpens Road, with its tyre and exhaust centres and pathetically under-landscaped ice rink and car parks, and out onto the busy squalor of Park End Street, but I think we can safely stop here at the County Council, and save our weary legs.”

He points to still beautiful places “Christ Church Meadow, Radcliffe Square, the college quads, Catte Street and Turl Street, Queens Lane and much of the High Street, the botanic garden, Port Meadow, University Parks, Clarendon House, the whole of north Oxford” but he also asks what went so horribly wrong? Why didn’t people appreciate the unique place they had? It may be funny when he writes that “a committee of finely educated minds at Merton had to show the most extraordinary indifference to their responsibilities to posterity and say to themselves, ‘You know, we’ve been putting up handsome buildings since 1264; let’s have an ugly one for a change.’ Then the planning authorities had to say, ‘Well, why not? Plenty worse in Basildon.’” But I don’t think an educated mind is necessarily an aesthetic mind. And in a way ugliness seems worse in a beautiful place. Yet another ugly building in a wilderness of ugly buildings can go almost unnoticed.

I won’t be booking a tour to Oxford in the near future but there *is* the consolation: modern buildings are not built to last.

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“I drove on to Oxford, home of the University of Mississippi, or Ole Miss as it’s known. The people named the town after Oxford in England in the hope that this would persuade the state to build the university there, and the state did. This tells you most of what you need to know about the workings of the Southern mind. Oxford appeared to be an agreeable town. It was built around a square, in the

middle of which stood the Lafayette County Courthouse, with a tall clock tower and Doric columns, basking grandly in the Indian-summer sunshine. Around the perimeter of the square were attractive stores and a tourist information office. I went into the tourist information office to get directions to Rowan Oak, William Faulkner's home. Faulkner lived in Oxford for the whole of his life, and his home is now a museum, preserved as it was on the day he died in 1962. It must be unnerving to be so famous that you know they are going to come in the moment you croak and hang velvet cords across all the doorways and treat everything with reverence. Think of the embarrassment if you left a copy of Reader's Digest Condensed Books on the bedside table."

From *The Lost Continent* by Bill Bryson.

It wasn't quite correct to say that William Faulkner lived his whole life in Oxford, Mississippi. David Minter in his biography of Faulkner writes, "Shortly after his first birthday, he and his parents moved to Ripley. A few days before he turned five, they moved to Oxford, where he spent the rest of his childhood, all of his youth, and most of his adult life. Near Oxford, in a sanatorium on a hill outside Byhalia, another small Mississippi town, he died in 1962, on July 6, the birthday of the first of the Mississippi Falkners—his great-grandfather, the Old Colonel, William Clark Falkner.

"In addition to possessing a suggestive symmetry, these simple facts hold several pertinences. More than any other major American writer of our time, including Robert Frost, Faulkner is associated with a region. He is our great provincial. And although his life was considerably more expansive than the facts of its beginning and ending suggest—although he lived in Canada, New Orleans, Hollywood, and Virginia; although he lived briefly and visited frequently in New York; although he traveled through Europe in the twenties and around the world in the fifties—it was with a sense of place he began."

Dorothy Sayers only spent a few years in Oxford but I do associate her with the place. Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County was a more fully-realised fictional place than Sayers' Shrewsbury College but they were both doing what writers do: taking a real place, in this case towns called Oxford, and letting the imagination go on from there.

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June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe

June 15: Thomas Randolph

June 16: Joyce Carol Oates

June 17: Henry Lawson

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In his short story collection *While the Billy Boils* Lawson has a drily amusing piece called 'Hungerford'.

"One of the hungriest cleared roads in New South Wales runs to within a couple of miles of Hungerford, and stops there; then you strike through the scrub to the town. There is no distant prospect of Hungerford—you don't see the town till you are quite close to it, and then two or three whitewashed galvanized-iron roofs start out of the mulga.

They say that a past Ministry commenced to clear the road from Bourke, under the impression that Hungerford was an important place, and went on, with the blindness peculiar to governments, till they got to within two miles of the town. Then they ran short of rum and rations, and sent a man on to get them, and make inquiries. The member never came back, and two more were sent to find him—or Hungerford. Three days later the two returned in an exhausted condition, and submitted a motion of want-of-confidence, which was lost. Then the whole House went on and was lost also. Strange to relate, that Government was never missed.

However, we found Hungerford and camped there for a day. The town is right on the Queensland border, and an interprovincial rabbit-proof fence—with rabbits on both sides of it—runs across the main street.

This fence is a standing joke with Australian rabbits—about the only joke they have out there,

except the memory of Pasteur and poison and inoculation. It is amusing to go a little way out of town, about sunset, and watch them crack Noah's Ark rabbit jokes about that fence, and burrow under and play leap-frog over it till they get tired. One old buck rabbit sat up and nearly laughed his ears off at a joke of his own about that fence. He laughed so much that he couldn't get away when I reached for him. I could hardly eat him for laughing. I never saw a rabbit laugh before; but I've seen a possum do it.

Hungerford consists of two houses and a humpy in New South Wales, and five houses in Queensland. Characteristically enough, both the pubs are in Queensland. We got a glass of sour yeast at one and paid sixpence for it—we had asked for English ale.

The post office is in New South Wales, and the police barracks in Bananaland. The police cannot do anything if there's a row going on across the street in New South Wales, except to send to Brisbane and have an extradition warrant applied for; and they don't do much if there's a row in Queensland. Most of the rows are across the border, where the pubs are.

At least, I believe that's how it is, though the man who told me might have been a liar. Another man said he was a liar, but then he might have been a liar himself—a third person said he was one. I heard that there was a fight over it, but the man who told me about the fight might not have been telling the truth.

One part of the town swears at Brisbane when things go wrong, and the other curses Sydney.

The country looks as though a great ash-heap had been spread out there, and mulga scrub and firewood planted—and neglected. The country looks just as bad for a hundred miles round Hungerford, and beyond that it gets worse—a blasted, barren wilderness that doesn't even howl. If it howled it would be a relief.

I believe Burke and Wills found Hungerford and it's a pity they did; but if I ever stand by the graves of the men who first traveled through this country, when there were neither roads nor stations, nor tanks, nor bores, nor pubs, I'll take my hat off. There were brave men in the land in those days.

It is said the explorers gave the district its name chiefly because of the hunger found there, which has remained there ever since. I don't know where the ford comes in—there's nothing to ford, except in flood-time. Hungerthirst would have been better. The town is supposed to be situated on the banks of a river called the Paroo, but we saw no water there, except what passed for it in a tank. The goats and sheep and dogs and the rest of the population drink there. It is dangerous to take too much of that water in a raw state."

I will leave you now to finish the story while I go away and look for the modern Hungerford and hope that it hasn't failed under the burden of pessimism and bureaucratic bungling ...

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Any number of small country towns have liked to claim their pub was the one Slim Dusty had in mind. Though I don't think Hungerford has ever put up its hand. Less attractive is this little piece from Henry Lawson writing about the Boer War. "If you come across any niggers, learn to sleep calmly notwithstanding the fact that a big, greasy buck nigger (a perfect stranger to you) is more than likely to crawl in, without knocking, through a slit in the tent, any minute during the small hours, rip out your innards with a nasty knife, and leave without explaining." 28 October 1899. Racism was as ubiquitous as grog in nineteenth century and early twentieth century Australia. Rather than making excuses for individuals it seems to be more sensible to accept that it was a fact of life and it was only the very rare person who could rise above the generally-prevailing attitudes. And it seems equally sensible to accept that most of us, if we had lived then, would simply have accepted and expressed the attitudes of most of the community.

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I came unexpectedly on a condensation of a book called *Hungerford One Man's Massacre* by Jeremy Josephs—and immediately thought of our Hungerford and wondered why I hadn't heard of anything dreadful happening there. 'Perhaps I was away' I thought 'or in a dream.' But no, the

Hungerford it refers to is in England.

Ursula Le Guin in her collection of essays *Dancing at the Edge of the World* writes, “Now off the artery onto the quieter Hungerford road; and through poor Hungerford haunted by the specters of the mass murder here last summer—the honest, familiar, curving street of shops where people want to buy cheese and letter paper and shoelaces, not to be slaughtered.”

Josephs writes, “For Ron Tarry, the then mayor of Hungerford, Wednesday, August 19, 1987, was a typical working day. He was out and about in his maroon Ford Escort estate, working for his employer, an agricultural cooperative. Ron’s task was to sell stock feed, seed, fertiliser and other agricultural products to the farmers of Berkshire.”

“‘I remember that day well,’ says Ron. ‘The sun was shining. The windows were down. I was driving around the Lambourne downs, listening to the radio. I was just north of Lambourne at a place called Seven Barrows, preparing for my next call. Then the BBC announced on one of its early-afternoon news bulletins that reports were coming in of a series of shootings in Hungerford. It said that someone had gone berserk in the High Street. I thought that this couldn’t be our place. Not that I knew of another Hungerford, mind you. And then it said that it was Hungerford in Berkshire. So it had to be our town. My daughter was at our house with her friend and their children. I thought that they might well have gone down to the High Street. I immediately decided to go back home to make sure that they were all right.’ ”

The report was correct. A young man called Michael Ryan, a loner, a lover of guns including a Kalashnikov, had gone berserk. By the time his rampage ended fifteen people in and around the quiet little market town were dead, including his own mother. He then turned a gun on himself. So the questions about motive have never been answered. Many people saw in it a close parallel to the Rambo movie *First Blood* though no one knows whether he ever actually saw the movie. And it is possible to see in his actions the precursor for more recent massacres ... But don’t be afraid to stop in Hungerford as you motor around Britain, nor in Dunblane, because lone gun-men are a very different problem to simmering communal violence ... Because they in effect come from nowhere and disappear into nowhere ...

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Early aviators did barn-storming tours around the countryside, landing in a paddock outside a country show and offering to take people up for a joy-ride. One of these early barnstormers was Nancy Bird Walton who begins her autobiography *My God! It’s a Woman* with a bit of history: “In 1909, Raymonde de Laroche of France became the first woman to fly. She gained her licence in 1910, the same year as Lindia Zuereva of Russia, Hilda Hewlett of England and Belgium’s Helene Dutrieu. In 1911, Melli Breese started a flying school in Berlin. America’s Harriet Quimby flew the English Channel in 1912. Katherine Stinson demonstrated aerobatics in Tokyo in 1915, before returning to North America to train pilots for the Royal Flying Corp in World War I. This all took place long before Amy Johnson flew to Australia in 1930 and Amelia Earhart became a star in the American skies.”

And before Nancy Bird was born in NSW in 1915. But she visited Hungerford not to barnstorm but as a pilot with the Far West Children’s Health Scheme. “After we completed our round trip by car, we flew from Urisino to Hungerford, a township that straddles the border between New South Wales and Queensland. Here I realised the difficulty the sisters had in counteracting the prejudices of the older people in the outback, who had brought their children up on bread and salt meat and were proud of it. They could not see much sense in the new ideas the clinic sisters were trying to introduce. ‘I never had nothing of those things,’ they would say, ‘but look at my Johnny and my Sam—they’re fine men.’ And they were fine men—tough, resilient and hard-working, but their stamina may have been greater and they might have had some of their own teeth beyond their twentieth birthday if they had had good fruit, vegetables and regular medical and dental attention. All that the clinic sisters could do was to try to influence the younger people. By encouragement and understanding over the years, the health of these isolated children gradually improved.

“At Hungerford I made the mistake many pilots make once in a lifetime—I left the throttle of the machine open when I went round to swing the propeller. I do not know why I was not chopped down before I could get out of the way; but I know I must have done a fast sprint as I raced after the aircraft, jumped in and closed that throttle. The Moth would not have been worth salvaging if she had crashed into the trees beside the landing ground, 135 miles (220 kilometres) beyond Bourke. To have taken her rattling back to civilisation on a truck would have finished what remained of her.

From Hungerford we flew south-east to Yantabulla, my first experience of trying to follow a disappearing road. Prevailing winds cover much of the country with drifts of sand and, from the air, it is impossible to see some of the roads” ... And I expect Nancy and her runaway aeroplane was a talking-point in Hungerford for many years. Because, as Ian McKechnie in Bill ‘Swampy’ Marsh’s *Outback Towns and Pubs* says, “there’s not much here apart from a few houses, the pub, a small police station and the Dog Fence. Only about seven people live here, then a couple come up each winter because they don’t like the cold down south. So that’s nine. There’s never been many more than that, really. Oh, one time, there used to be a chap working here on the Dog Fence, a boundary rider. People by the name of Bevis and he had eleven kids. That really jumped the population up. Their kids did School of the Air. Actually, the Dog Fence’s supposed to be the longest man-made thing in the world. Longer than the Great Wall of China, even. It was first done to keep the rabbits in check but these days it’s more to keep the dingoes away from the stock. So, she’s a pretty long fence to keep an eye on. But the feller Bevis and other boundary riders, they only look after a couple of hundred miles of fence, either way.

“But being right on the Queensland-New South Wales border, Hungerford first came about because of all the drovers and shearers and all that coming through. The old Cobb & Co. had a depot here and even Henry Lawson; the poet feller walked the 150 mile, all the way up from Bourke, just to prove himself as the poet of the outback. That was back in January 1893. But he didn’t like the place. He reckoned it was even a pity Burke and Wills found Hungerford in the first place. He thought it was the arse-end of the earth. They say he didn’t even like the beer, and he was an alcoholic and there were two pubs to choose from back then. But, I mean, he must’ve been bloody mad to come up here in the middle of summer, ay?” And the pub now? “There’s only the Royal Mail Hotel here now. It’s just a normal old-fashioned sort of pub; thick walls, low ceilings, corrugated iron, and out the back is where the stables were. Of course, there was no power in them early days so they had a compressor-engine driving an old brine, tank-operated, cold room. And, over the years, there’s been quite a few publicans come and go.” In fact, things have tended to go rather than come. But Hungerford hangs on.

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June 18: Robyn Archer

June 19: Ethel Pedley

Salman Rushdie

Aung San Suu Kyi

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“Show me what you read, and I’ll tell you who you are. The book was called *Pagan: The Glass Palace Chronicles of the Kings of Burma*.”

The Glass Palace Chronicle by Patricia le Roy, dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi.

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One of the puzzles, both for the media and for ordinary mortals, is the question of a name. Should we say Burma or should we say Myanmar? Jesper Bengtsson in *Struggle for Freedom* writes, “In the midst of this chaos, general Saw Maung decreed that the country was to change its name from Burma to Myanmar. Burma was a colonial name, which apart from anything else had not incorporated the country’s ethnic minorities, he asserted. The problem was that the ethnic minorities considered that just the opposite was true. Myanmar is the name of the ancient Bamar kingdom and the change of name was understood by most of the ethnic minorities to be an expression of the junta’s ambitions to be the

supreme rulers. Although 'Burma' was the name given by the British, it also signified a state that the minorities could see themselves having a part in. The democratic movement in its turn saw the name change as a cheap attempt on the part of the junta to launder its dirty reputation. This is why the democratic movement in exile, like most of the world's media, calls the country Burma nowadays, whereas diplomats of the United Nations and other more formal institutions use the name Myanmar."

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In *The Ugly American* there is a character who comes to Asia because of his fascination with exotic-sounding names. The only one I can remember offhand is Zamboanga in the Philippines. But I understand the 'pull'. The Golden Mares of Samarkand, the Coromandel Coast, the Old Man of Hoy, the Macgillicuddy Reeks, the Great Grey Green Greasy Limpopo, and, of course, the Road to Mandalay. They, and many other romantic or curious names and descriptions, leave an unspoken desire to actually go and see ... And two others which attracted me are Medicine Hat and Baking Board. The first you will find in Canada. The other is more difficult. It was a tiny siding on the railway line to Charleville.

But if I were actually to take the Road to Mandalay what would I find?

Rudyard Kipling wrote of Rangoon "Then, a golden mystery upheaved itself on the horizon, a beautiful winking wonder that blazed in the sun, of a shape that was neither Moslem dome nor Hindu temple-spire." This was of course a Buddhist temple but the young Kipling seemed to be more interested in the Burmese girls than the Burmese buildings.

His most famous poem of Burma begins:

By the old Moulmein Pagoda, lookin' eastward to the sea,
There's a Burma girl a-settin', and I know she thinks o' me;
For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple-bells they say:
'Come you back, you British soldier; come you back to Mandalay!'
and ends,

Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,
Where there aren't no Ten Commandants an' a man can raise a thirst;
For the temple-bells are callin', an' it's there that I would be —
By the old Moulmein Pagoda, looking lazy at the sea;
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the old Flotilla lay,
With our sick beneath the awnings when we went to Mandalay!
On the road to Mandalay,
Where the flyin'-fishes play,

An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'cross the Bay!

So it is something of an irony that Kipling never went to Mandalay—but he was very knowledgeable about a product which was once a major product of British India but is now associated with Burma.

Andrew Lycett gathered up some of Kipling's travelogues in *Kipling Abroad* including this one about Ghazipur, "On the banks of the Ganges, forty miles below Benares as the crow flies, stands the Ghazipur Factory, an opium mint as it were, whence issue the precious cakes that are to replenish the coffers of the Indian Government. The busy season is setting in, for with April the opium comes up from the districts after having run the gauntlet of the district officers of the Opium Department, who will pass it as fit for use. Then the really serious work opens, under a roasting sun. The opium arrives by challans, regiments of one hundred jars, each holding one maund, and each packed in a basket and sealed atop."

He takes the reader through weighing, sampling, testing, treating, packing and dispatch. "At the beginning of the cold weather Ghazipur holds, locked up, a trifle, say, of three and a half millions sterling in opium."

It makes the righteous indignation of governments now ring a little hollow. But the opium trade has long since moved away from India to settle in Burma's Golden Triangle.

But another English writer George Orwell *did* work in Burma as a colonial official. D. J. Taylor in *Orwell The Life* says, "The Burma of the early 1920s was a recent annexation to the British Empire. Modern Burmese history had begun barely four decades before when on the intervention of the Secretary of State, Lord Randolph Churchill, a British Expeditionary Force led by General Sir Harry Prendergast had entered Mandalay and ordered the Burmese King Thibaw's immediate and unconditional surrender. There was some faint precedent for this invasion. Britain had fought two previous wars against the Burmese, in 1824-6 and 1852-3, but until the late nineteenth century Upper Burma at least had retained its territorial integrity. Though the country's internal troubles had been used as a justification, the real reasons for the Churchill fiat were commercial. Keen on the idea of cheap rice, oil and timber, businessmen in London and Calcutta had been pressing for government action since the 1860s. When it came, it did so with a vengeance. Rather than imposing direct rule, or governing by way of a protectorate – the usual means by which the Empire administered newly acquired territory – the British simply wiped out Burma's existing institutions on the spot. The monarchy (Thibaw spent the remaining thirty years of his life in exile on the Indian coast); nobility; army; royal agencies – all these went down practically overnight before the advancing colonial tide. British and Indian troops poured over the frontier – the Burmese garrison was 40,000 strong in the early years of the twentieth century – closely followed by railway contractors and Calcutta timber merchants. By 1913 the Burmah Oil Company was extracting 200 million gallons annually, three-quarters of the country's total output, while a handful of British firms accounted for the same percentage of teak production."

Did Rudyard Kipling coin the term 'globe-trotter' in the 1890s? Certainly his globe-trotter is not an admirable or even a lively adventurous person. "But there is no reverence in the Globe-trotter: he is brazen." His Globe-trotter is often complacent, smug that he has come prepared for every eventually, a bit pushy. He, and a Globe-trotter was normally he, fills the foreground. He is not a quiet studious person to blend in. He is very obviously 'doing the sights'.

So what will the modern Globe-trotter find in Mandalay? The Rough Guide to Myanmar (Burma) says, "Rudyard Kipling has a lot to answer for. Thanks to his evocative poem, the name of MANDALAY, Myanmar's second city, suggests – for many Western travellers, at least – images of a bygone Asia. Arriving in the city itself tends quickly to dispel such thoughts, however, as visitors find themselves confronted by an initially faceless grid of congested streets. These centre around the walls of the old palace compound – though even this potentially redeeming feature is largely taken up by a huge military base. There is, however, a great big "but". As with many other places of regal pedigree, Mandalay still exudes a relaxed, traditional feel quite at odds with, say, Yangon. Kipling never actually visited Mandalay, but those who *do* spend a bit of time here often end up loving the place."

There are pagodas and palaces and the thing which interested me, a 'glass palace'. This isn't precisely glass nor a palace in its own right but a place inside Mandalay Palace; "There's also a small museum at the western end, housed in what was known as the "Glass Palace"; this was named after a glass bed brought from France by King Thibaw. The bed is still here, and rather impressive, as is a series of traditional costumes which seemed designed to make pagodas of those who wore them."

And you don't have to arrive by road. You can come by train, by air, or by boat.

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June 20: Vikram Seth

Lillian Hellman

June 21: Jean-Paul Sartre

June 22: Erich Maria Remarque

June 23: Frank Dalby Davidson

June 24: Ambrose Bierce

June 25: George Orwell

John Horne Tooke

June 26: Pearl Buck

Colin Wilson

June 27: Lafcadio Hearn

June 28: Luigi Pirandello

June 29: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

June 30: Czeslaw Milosz

Joseph Dalton Hooker

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In his *Himalayan Journals* Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker writes of his time in Sikkim and in particular its flora and fauna. “The hill-station or Sanatarium of Darjeeling owes its origin (like Simla, Mussooree, &c.) to the necessity that exists in India of providing places where the health of Europeans may be recruited by a more temperate climate. Sikkim proved an eligible position for such an establishment, owing to its proximity to Calcutta, which lies but 370 miles to the southward; whereas the north-west stations mentioned above are upwards of a thousand miles from that city. Darjeeling ridge varies in height from 6,500 to 7,500 feet above the level of the sea; 8,000 feet being the elevation at which the mean temperature most nearly coincides with that of London, viz., 50 degrees.

Sikkim was, further, the only available spot for a Sanatarium throughout the whole range of the Himalaya, east of the extreme western frontier of Nepal; being a protected state, and owing no allegiance, except to the British Government; which, after the Rajah had been driven from the country by the Ghorikas, in 1817, replaced him on his throne, and guaranteed him the sovereignty. Our main object in doing this was to retain Sikkim as a fender between Nepal and Bhotan; and but for this policy the aggressive Nepalese would, long ere this, have possessed themselves of Sikkim, Bhotan, and the whole Himalaya, eastwards to the borders of Burmah.”

(“Of such being their wish the Nepalese have never made any secret, and they are said to have asked permission from the British to march an army across Sikkim for the purpose of conquering Bhotan, offering to become more peaceable neighbours to us than the Bhotanese are. Such they would doubtless have proved, but the Nepal frontier is considered broad enough already.”)

“From 1817 to 1828 no notice was taken of Sikkim, till a frontier dispute occurred between the Lepchas and Nepalese, which was referred (according to the terms of the treaty) to the British Government. During the arrangement of this, Darjeeling was visited by a gentleman of high scientific attainments, Mr. J. W. Grant, who pointed out its eligibility as a site for a sanatarium to Lord William Bentinck, then Governor-General; dwelling especially upon its climate, proximity to Calcutta, and accessibility; on its central position between Tibet, Bhotan, Nepal, and British India; and on the good example a peaceably-conducted and well-governed station would be to our turbulent neighbours in that quarter. The suggestion was cordially received, and Major Herbert (the late eminent Surveyor-General of India) and Mr. Grant were employed to report further on the subject.

“The next step taken was that of requesting the Rajah to cede a tract of country which should include Darjeeling, for an equivalent in money or land. His first demand was unreasonable; but on further consideration he surrendered Darjeeling unconditionally, and a sum of £300 per annum was granted to him as an equivalent for what was then a worthless uninhabited mountain. In 1840 Dr. Campbell was removed from Nepal as superintendent of the new station, and was entrusted with the charge of the political relations between the British and Sikkim Government.

“Once established, Darjeeling rapidly increased. Allotments of land were purchased by Europeans for building dwelling-houses; barracks and a bazaar were formed, with accommodation for invalid European soldiers; a few official residents, civil and military, formed the nucleus of a

community, which was increased by retired officers and their families, and by temporary visitors in search of health, or the luxury of a cool climate and active exercise.”

“The Tassiding temples and convents were founded upwards of 300 years ago, by the Lamas who accompanied the first Rajah to Sikkim; and they have been continuously served by Lamas of great sanctity, many of whom have been educated at Lhasa. They were formerly very wealthy; but during the Nepal war they were plundered of all their treasures, their silver gongs and bells, their best idols, dorjes, and manis, and stripped of their ornaments; since which time Pemiongchi has been more popular. In proof of their antiquity, it was pointed out that most of the symbols and decorations were those of pure Lama Boodhism, as practiced in Tibet.”

“Pemiongchi was once the capital of Sikkim, and called the Sikkim Durbar: the Rajah’s residence was on a curious flat to the south of the temple, and a few hundred feet below it, where are the remains of (for this country) extensive walls and buildings. During the Nepal war, the Rajah was driven west across the Teesta, whilst the Ghorkas plundered Tassiding, Pemiongchi, Changachelling, and all the temples and convents to the east of that river. It was then that the famous history of Sikkim, compiled by the Lamas of Pemiongchi, and kept at this temple, was destroyed, with the exception of a few sheets, with one of which Dr. Campbell and myself were each presented. We were told that the monks of Changachelling and those of this establishment had copied what remained, and were busy compiling from oral information, &c. : whatever value the original may have possessed, however, is irretrievably lost. A magnificent copy of the Boodhist Scriptures was destroyed at the same time; it consisted of 400 volumes, each containing several hundred sheets of Daphne paper.”

“Sikkim ... consists of a mass of mountainous spurs, forest-clad up to 12,000 feet”

“Yoksun was the earliest civilised corner of Sikkim, and derived its name (which signifies in Lepcha “three chiefs”) from having been the residence of three Lamas of great influence, who were the means of introducing the first Tibetan sovereign into the country. At present it boasts of but little cultivation, and a scattered population, inhabiting a few hamlets, 5,500 feet above the sea: beautiful lanes and paths wind everywhere over the gentle slopes, and through the copsewood that has replaced the timber-trees of a former period. Mendongs and chaits are very numerous, some of great size; and there are also the ruins of two very large temples, near which are some magnificent weeping cypresses, eighty feet high. These fine trees are landmarks from all parts of the flat; they form irregular cones of pale bright green, with naked gnarled tops, the branches weep gracefully, but not like the picture in Macartney’s Embassy to China, whence originated the famous willow-pattern of our crockery.”

Sikkim ceased to be an independent kingdom in 1975 when India incorporated it. Its most famous export till then was cardamon. But it is not hard to understand why it enticed India. Its untapped mineral wealth and its still largely intact forests must have made people in New Delhi rub their hands ... so I can only hope those forests have not gone the way of most of India’s forests ...

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July 1: Dorothea MacKellar

Major G. E. Bruce (married)

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Stephen Muecke in *Joe in the Andamans* says he came across an old 1930s children’s book called *Tom in the Andamans* and decided to go for a visit himself taking his son Joe. “I kept thinking about this place. The foundation professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, Radcliffe-Brown, had written a study of the Negrito peoples there. Little was known about the origins of these pygmy-like people, except there were other indigenous groups of similar physique in the Philippines and on the

Indonesian archipelago. I found out that the Andamans had some things in common with Australia. Both were part of the British policy of the transportation convicts as raw material to build up colonies and secure them as strategic locations. In 1789, the year after Port Jackson, the first British settlement was set up in the Andamans. Both invasions displaced indigenous peoples in the process—the various Negrito tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the various Aboriginal and Islander tribes in Australia. One difference with India was that the convicts were not the British transported to India, but Indians transported, during the Raj, to other nearby locations, such as the Andamans. So on leaving the Andamans to the Indians at independence 50 years ago, the British created a legacy of a small overseas Indian empire.”

But as it rains every day Joe doesn't come away very much the wiser about the lives and people of the Andamans. Though there is the consolation that prices go down in the monsoon season ...

Tom in the Andamans was written by Major George Evans Bruce and came out in 1949. The name might not immediately strike a chord but apart from being the husband of Mary Grant Bruce of 'Billabong' fame he was a modestly successful writer in his own right. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* only includes him under his wife's entry as he wasn't an Aussie except by adoption. "In 1914 she met a distant cousin, Major George Evans Bruce of the Norfolk Regiment, ten years her senior, who had served in the British Army in India and South Africa; he was also a writer of exotic melodramas and expert articles on fish and crustacea. They came back to Australia and were married at Holy Trinity Church, East Melbourne, on 1 July 1914, but their stay at the seaside, described by her in *The peculiar homeymoon*, was cut short by the outbreak of war. Bruce was soon called to duty by the War Office. They sailed in the troop-ship *Nestor* to Cork, where Bruce, proscribed from action by a strained heart, was to be second-in-command of the Dublin Fusiliers, training recruits. In the next three years Mary 'produced two babies and four books', after the war, the family returned to Australia to settle at Traralgon, Gippsland.”

The Rough Guide to South India says of the indigenous people of the Andamans: "Quite where the indigenous population of the Andaman and Nicobar islands originally came from is a puzzle that has preoccupied anthropologists since Alfred Radcliffe-Brown conducted his famous field work among the Andamanese at the beginning of the twentieth century. Asian-looking groups such as the Shompen may have migrated here from the east and north when the islands were connected to Burma, or the sea was sufficiently shallow to allow transport by canoe, but this doesn't explain the origins of the black populations, whose appearance suggests African roots. Wherever they came from, the survival of the islands' first inhabitants has been threatened by traders and colonizers, who introduced disease and destroyed their territories through widespread felling. Thousands also died from addiction to alcohol and opium, which the Chinese, Japanese and British exchanged for valuable shells. Many have had their populations decimated, while others like the Nicobarese have assimilated to modern culture, often adopting Christianity. The indigenous inhabitants of the Andamans, divided into *eramtaga* (those living in the jungle) and *ar-yuato* (those living on the coast), traditionally subsisted as hunter-gatherers, living on fish, turtle eggs, pigs, fruit, honey and roots.”

“Only very limited contact is ever had with the isolated Shompen tribe of Great Nicobar, whose population of around 380 manage to lead a traditional hunting-and-gathering existence. The most elusive tribe of all, the Sentinelese, live on North Sentinel Island west of South Andaman. After the first encounter in 1967, some contact was made with them in 1990, after a team put together by the local administration left gifts on the beaches every month for two years, but subsequent visits have invariably ended in a hail of arrows. Since the early 1990s, the AAJVS, the government department charged with tribal welfare, has effectively given up trying to contact the Sentinelese, who are estimated to number anywhere between fifty and two hundred. Flying in or out of Port Blair, you pass above their island, ringed by a spectacular coral reef. It's reassuring to think that the people sitting at the bottom of

the plumes of smoke drifting up from the forest canopy have for so long resisted contact with the outside world.”

Outsiders, whether Malay or British, Indian or Japanese, have almost inevitably been bad news for the tribespeople. So gifts on beaches have a Trojan Horse aspect ...

Major Bruce probably visited the Andamans while he was stationed in India but I thought I would rather visit the islands in my imagination.

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July 2: Hermann Hesse

July 3: Franz Kafka

July 4: Fay Zwicky

July 5: George Borrow

July 6: Bessie Head

July 7: Robert Heinlein

July 8: Fergus Hume

Sir Arthur Evans

July 9: Barbara Cartland

July 10: Marcel Proust

July 11: Harold Bloom

July 12: Pablo Neruda

Michael Ventris

Malala Yousafzai

* * * * *

Andrew Robinson wrote *The Man Who Deciphered Linear B: The Story of Michael Ventris*. The name probably doesn't mean a great deal to you unless you are interested in archeology. It didn't mean a great deal to me. Ventris was born in England in 1922 and as a fourteen-year-old he heard Sir Arthur Evans talk about his excavations of the ancient Minoan civilisation on Crete. Ventris went on to train as an architect but Evans had caught his curiosity in a way that was to change his life.

Margalit Fox wrote in *The Riddle of the Labyrinth*, “On March 23, 1900, Evans, a few carefully chosen assistants, and thirty local workmen had broken ground at Knossos, in the wild countryside of northern Crete near present-day Heraklion. There, not far from the sea, on a knoll bright with anemones and iris, Evans had vowed years earlier that he would dig.

“He was rewarded almost immediately. Even before the first week was out, his workmen's spades turned up fragments of painted plaster frescoes in still-vivid hues, depicting scenes of people, plants, and animals. Digging deeper, they found pieces of enormous clay storage jars that reassembled would stand tall as a man. Still farther down, they encountered rows of huge gypsum blocks, the walls of a vast prehistoric building.”

Evans found three different scripts. Linear A, Linear B, and hieroglyphics. And no one had been able to decipher Linear B, not least because they didn't know what language it represented. Evans saw the symbols as pictograms. Others thought each symbol represented a letter. In the end the breakthrough came when it was realised each symbol represented a syllable. Ventris as a young and amateur scholar, though a talented linguist, thought the language represented might be Etruscan. Others had looked to mainland Greece or the languages of Asia Minor.

Robinson writes “If there is one word that sums up Ventris it is ‘unconventional’.” And this unconventionality probably helped him to think outside of ‘the square’. His ability to interpret the ancient symbols date from his changed belief. Not Etruscan but an ancient form of Greek in use a thousand years before Plato. With John Chadwick he wrote “Documents in Mycenaean Greek, as the book was finally titled, and the book is something of a bible of Linear B studies, consisting of five introductory chapters on the decipherment itself and what it has revealed about the Mycenaean writing system, language, personal names and society, followed by the detailed interpretation of 300 Linear B

tablets grouped into chapters such as ‘Livestock and agricultural produce’ and ‘Textiles, vessels and furniture’ and an extensive glossary of Mycenaean words. There is also a long foreword by Wace, the excavator of Mycenae and professor of classical archaeology at Cambridge who had been the chief victim in the 1920s of Sir Arthur Evans’s Minoan ‘imperialism’ and was therefore delighted by the evidence of the tablets.”

In 1956 Ventris died when he drove into a stationary lorry. Mystery still surrounds it. Did he lose concentration? Did he have a blackout? Was it deliberate? It has been suggested that the failure of his marriage or his sense that he had done his life’s work and did not know where else to turn might have made him depressed. The mystery remains ...

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On the other hand I had heard of Heinrich Schliemann, who claimed he had been fascinated by Homer’s Troy since his childhood, and I had always believed this claim without question—until I read David Traill’s *Schliemann of Troy*. Traill shows a hyperactive, successful, intelligent man, a skilled linguist—and a pathological liar. I had thought that Troy would not have been found if it hadn’t been for Schliemann but that isn’t so. Traill wrote, “Schliemann went to the Troad convinced that Bunarbashi was the site of Troy. When his excavations there proved negative, he left disappointed. It was not until he met Frank Calvert at the Dardanelles on 15 August that he learned that Hisarlik was a good contender for the site of Homeric Troy. He had visited the mound cursorily before excavating at Bunarbashi without, apparently, according it serious consideration. The interview with Calvert focused his attention on Hisarlik and changed his life.”

Calvert was an Englishman with a farm in Turkey and he had already dug a couple of small trenches at Hisarlik. But Schliemann brought that formidable energy, money, and a kind of tunnel vision to his excavations. Shards of pottery were tossed aside. He wanted gold, silver, and bronze. Walls were casually knocked down because their period was obviously too late for Homer’s Troy. Finds were casually dispersed, smuggled out, destroyed. He made little attempt to record which strata and exactly where he found things. There are claims that he salted sites, either with items found elsewhere or with forgeries; anything to keep the name of Schliemann in the news. The only treasure that mattered was ‘Priam’s treasure’ and the only building that mattered was ‘Priam’s palace’. And when Hisarlik disappointed him with the slow pace of revelation he hurried off to excavate in Crete, in Egypt, in Greece, constantly searching for the ‘big find’, the horde of gold and silver which would grab the world’s media again ...

Traill writes, “On 28 January 1874 there appeared in the *Levant Herald* a remarkable news item. A considerable cache of gold jewellery had apparently been found in March 1873 by two of Schliemann’s workmen, who had secretly removed the treasure from the site. Some of the pieces had been melted down and converted into modern jewellery for the fiancée of one of the workers. Someone informed the Turkish authorities in December 1873. The workers were arrested and part of the cache was recovered and taken to the museum in Constantinople.”

The Turkish authorities in the beginning did not appear to take much interest in the site, possibly because archeology was in its infancy, possibly because Troy was a story in Greek rather than Turkish history and mythology, but as they tightened control Schliemann used various strategies to get his finds out of Turkey to Berlin; he bought, secreted, smuggled, diverted, evaded, pretended nothing worthwhile had been found, opened up new trenches beyond the capacity of the government to supervise ... and the finds bundled together to make up the dramatic exhibition of ‘Priam’s treasure’ were taken from Berlin in WW2 to Moscow, partly as loot, partly in revenge for Nazi looting of Russian treasures, and remain there to this day.

I found myself re-thinking that whole romantic story of Schliemann looking where the scholars had claimed there was nothing and confounding the establishment with his brilliant intuition ... and finally coming to the belief that it would have been better for archeology in western Turkey if there had been no Schliemann, if Hisarlik had been left in peace for another fifty years. Turkey would have been

the main beneficiary but archeology and Homeric studies would have been able to work unimpeded by the chaos and the confusion and the doubts that Schliemann, deliberately or accidentally, left in his wake ...

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“In Crete, Sir Arthur Evans, a formidable scholar-explorer from the nineteenth century who still commanded awe in the twentieth, had not merely uncovered the palace of Knossos, lair of the Minotaur, but had reconstructed a good deal of it to a height of two storeys, leaving it in the earthquake-haunted island, a British liability in more ways than one.”

Dilys Powell in *An Affair of the Heart*.

I had thought that rebuilding was an archeological no-no but then Arthur Evans was a law unto himself; he was also the colossus of archeological exploration in Crete. Fox writes, “Evans spent decades clearing rubble, shoring up collapsing landings, restoring shattered murals, and rebuilding crumbling walls. Where the Minoans had used wood and stone, much of the restoration used newer materials like reinforced concrete. The work was controversial: As Evans rebuilt rooms and repainted murals, he imposed his vision—by definition speculative—of what the palace must have looked like thirty centuries earlier. Today, Knossos is a bustling tourist attraction, but whether it reflects the genuine Minoan aesthetic or an ardent twentieth-century fantasy is an open question.”

Though David Sweetman in his biography of Mary Renault who set a number of her novels in ancient Greece writes of her brief visit there in middle age, “To step into Sir Arthur Evans’s dramatic reconstruction of the House of the Axe was bound to be an important moment, though she could not have foretold just how deeply moving it would turn out to be. Evans’s brightly coloured restoration has many critics, but Mary Renault was not among them. While Evans may have leant towards the Art Deco taste of his day, there was nothing in her experience to match the sensation she felt as she wandered through the top-lit inner chambers, down the painted stairwells, through the Queen’s Megaron, the King’s Megaron, the Halls of the Double Axes, and the Colonnades to that dark chamber where Minos’s scallop-backed throne waits, guarded by its gryphon frescoes.”

Many people believed the story of Theseus sailing to Crete and destroying the Minotaur at the heart of the Labyrinth was pure myth. A Theseus existed. He became king. But the voyage to King Minos and his use of the King’s daughter Ariadne who helped him survive—no, that was merely an attractive if rather sad folk story. But Evans believed in the basic truth of the story, if not its embellishments, and went searching. A talented amateur, son of a talented amateur, he was not constrained by later rules and restrictions. And he had his own money.

J. Alexander MacGillivray in his biography of Evans, *Minotaur*, paints a picture of a tough single-minded little bantamcock of a man, careless of ownership (while he was castigating the Turks for removing Cretan artifacts to Istanbul he was casually removing Cretan artifacts to England) and convinced his ideas and methods were right. It was Heinrich Schliemann’s finding of what he believed to be Troy in Asia Minor which convinced Evans that the old myth of the Minotaur might also be rooted in reality. He managed to purchase part of the land in Knossos in Crete and begin excavating. He wrote “I first explored the site of the palace of Minos in 1894, the first time I visited Crete” and went on to say, incorrectly, “As soon as I cast my eyes on it I felt that it was all important because it was the centre of all the legends of ancient Greece. When I discovered the site there was a little old wall at one end. That was all. I explored the surface very carefully, and picked up little bits of painted stuccos and scraps of pottery—enough to convince me of the wonder of it. I saw in the hands of the natives some pieces of clay tablets bearing signs of writing in an unknown language.”

In fact a number of other men, Joseph Hazzidakis, W. J. Stillman, Federico Halbherr, J. L. Myres, had also done some exploration around Knossos. But Evans was able to buy part of the land he wanted to excavate—and, perhaps, he was far more driven than anyone else in his determination to prove his ideas right.

Crete had been a Roman colony. It was taken over by the Saracens, it was acquired by Venice as

a colony; it was captured by the Turks, and in the nineteenth century when the Christian majority wanted to become part of Greece, Britain, France, Italy and Russia all stepped in to keep the Turks in control, albeit with less power. But the majority of Cretans remained determined and in 1913 Crete formally became a part of Greece. Its troubles were not ended. It became a fierce battleground in WW2. These internal convulsions added to the difficulties of Evans and those who wanted to peacefully excavate ancient sites in the hope of proving or disproving their theories about Crete's pre-Roman history.

Evans never gave up his belief in King Minos or his Minotaur—and certainly not when other suggestions were made such as that this may have been a matriarchal society. He also refused to consider the idea that Crete may have belonged to the Mycenaean Greek world, clinging rather to his belief in a distinct Minoan civilisation. But modern archeology does not criticise Evans for his theories, all archeologists formulate theories; rather they point to his reconstructions in concrete, his carelessness in recording and keeping everything together so that not only the history of each object but its context can be understood, his deliberate reproductions of artifacts so that now it is hard to determine which are ancient and genuine, which are reproductions, and which are fakes for the tourist trade and the unwary academic ...

MacGillivray ends his account: "In the end, only Knossos itself and the artifacts unearthed there during controlled excavations remain as solid proof of Evans' Minoans, but these, too, have become problematic. The Palace and surrounding buildings are crumbling as fast as Evans' intellectual reconstruction of his ancient Minoan society. The building techniques of this century have not withstood the rigors of the Cretan climate or of the relentless passage of the more than one million visitors who flock to Knossos each year in search of a part of their history. This influx has necessitated a major new campaign of restorations, and these value the modern architecture as much as the ancient vestiges. Perhaps the time has come to accept that Knossos is no longer ancient, no longer either Minoan or Mycenaean, but timeless—as important to us now as it was to those who built it four thousand years ago.

"In restoring the Palace at Knossos, we are now not trying to re-create some past golden age but preserving a building that has taken on a series of new meanings in this century. The Labyrinth-Palace-Temple at Knossos has become the symbol of our greatest aspiration, a site where we understand the transformation of ideas and the relative nature of history and archaeology. And where better to realize our purpose in that fluid interplay of the past with the future than in the Minoan maze at Knossos, revealed and crafted by Evans."

Dilys Powell in her book *The Villa Ariadne*, which was the house built by Evans in Crete, gives a much more personal account of Evans and makes him come alive as a man in a way that careful scholarly accounts do not. She returned to Crete after World War II and after Evans's death but found that he still loomed large over the ancient site and indeed over wider Crete like an ever-present ghost. "From Herakleion the road, leaving the ramparts, ran southeast beside a ravine, past a straggle of shops and little houses with gardens, between vineyards and fringes of eucalyptus towards dry gradual hills. I took a ticket to Knossos, and in a quarter of an hour the bus was pulling up by a café opposite the entrance to the Palace of Minos. Then I realised that I should have got out fifty yards or so further back. I had not seen the place since 1935, and this was 1958; you forget, in twenty-three years, the exact position of a gate.

'Where,' I said—I knew, but I asked all the same—'where is the Villa Ariadne?' The conductor was blank. 'The Villa Ariadne,' I said again, 'where the archaeologists stay, the English archaeologists?' Blank again and a shrug. As I moved to get out I tried once more. 'The Villa Ariadne, Sir Arthur Evans's house?' 'Ah, Evans's house! Wait!' He shouted down the bus. 'The lady wants Evans's house!' 'Evans's house!' the driver repeated. 'Wait!' He leaned out of the window and backed. 'There,' said the conductor, 'there is the entrance.'

I pushed open the door in the wall and went into the courtyard. A woman whom I did not know

answered when I knocked at the door of the lodge. The Director, she said, had gone to Rethymnon, and since it was a Sunday the students too would probably be out for the day but I could go up to the Villa and look for myself. Morning glory swarmed over the wall by the road; it was cool in the courtyard. But at the top of the few steps which skirted the little white-washed building everything was thin, everything thirsty. Wire netting enclosed the lodge garden. Inside its irregular triangle long grass wove a mat over the soil; a few exhausted hollyhocks struggled out of the weeds. I went through the gate in the fence and up the path towards the Villa. Pines, reeds, desiccated palms, oleanders, bougainvillea, dusty olives; long ago, fond preserving hands had set fragments of antique statuary here and there among the trees—an empty shrine, a plinth, a broken capital. Headless but majestic, a marble Hadrian posed in the shade; a turkey with her brood scratched round the base at his sandalled feet. Emaciated, the shrubbery dangled spiky branches. A pomegranate had put out a few parched flowers, but there was no sign of the hibiscus whose blossoms we used to pick on breathless July afternoons, nothing was growing in the urns on the terrace where amidst the jasmine we used to dine.”

“But one need not be a student to see what it meant if the Knossos Linear B tablets really were written in a form of Greek. Artistic and archaeological evidence had shown that in its great creative period Knossos was closely linked with Mycenae. Evans maintained that Mycenae was a colony, ‘a Minoan plantation’; and in *The Archaeology of Crete* John Pendlebury, describing Crete as ‘a world power’, wrote of ‘the extension of her empire to the North, over the Mainland and islands’ and of ‘the Minoanization of the Mainland’. But if Linear B was Greek then at the time the script was being written on those famous clay tablets the language of the educated, the ruling class in Knossos would have been Greek. And then the situation is reversed: Mycenae, Greek Mycenae would, as some archaeologists had for years been arguing, have been the dominant power; a Mycenaean, a Greek Mycenaean could have held the throne of Minos. Evans believed that Knossos was wrecked by an earthquake. Pendlebury suggested that the disaster came with invasion from the mainland, ‘a deliberate sacking’ by rebellious dominions of the Cretan empire. The deciphering by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick of the Linear B script strengthened a third theory: that on the spring day, evoked by Pendlebury in a dramatic phrase, ‘when a strong South wind was blowing which carried the flames of the burning beams almost horizontally northwards’, it might have been the Minoans themselves, the subject people, who rebelled against their Greek overlords and set fire to the Palace.”

* * * * *

Margalit Fox wrote her book to put another important character in the decipherment of Linear B back into its history. Alice Kober was the daughter of poor Hungarian immigrants who settled in New York. She had a modest education but was intrigued by ancient languages and became a teacher of classical studies at Brooklyn High. She cared for her mother but all her spare moments were spent on studying Linear B. Unlike others who speculated on what language it might represent she concentrated on the script itself.

Although she needed the money from a full teaching load, she only had access to about 200 inscriptions (Evans not wanting to share them with other scholars), although she was a woman in the man’s world of archeology, and although she never saw Knossos, she worked doggedly away at the script and had some very important breakthroughs. She was modest, polite, careful, precise, she only published when she was certain of anything.

She established the gender markers. She discovered that it represented an inflected language, one that used suffixes to change meaning. And “With a foot in one syllable and another in the next, bridging characters were the linchpins of Minoan words. By identifying and describing them, Kober had found a way of establishing the relative relationships among the characters of the script without having to know any of their actual sound-values. And on this linchpin the decipherment would turn, although she would not live to see it.”

She became ill with what was probably stomach cancer in 1949 and died in 1950. Ventris used

her insights and he had an important one of his own. After clinging to the idea that the language was Etruscan for so long he tried a comparison with some other old Greek script from Cyprus and found similarities. He gave up his long-held view and accepted that the Minoans used an early form of Greek—and the script began to give up its remaining secrets. In 1952 he could announce that the tablets could now be read.

The other fascination in Fox's book is following the way an unknown script for an unknown language was gradually brought out into the light. It is a story as thrilling as any story of code-breaking.

* * * * *

The trellis of grapevine is shady with green,
hiding the ripe fruit's purple sheen,
and the sun is hot on the rubbed stone,
on Palace, and labyrinth, and throne.

The clear air whispers of long ago days,
as footsteps echo the winding maze,
where with sword held ready, Theseus crept
and slayed the Minotaur where it slept.

Here Adriane waited, bereft and alone,
and her sad tears fell on this yellowed stone,
in an almond tree a blackbird sings
where Icarus stood, and spread his wings.

To this island fortress, small in the sun,
came smoke and thunder of bomb and gun,
young strangers trod this ancient shore,
and olive groves eddied the sound of war.

They died, these men from another land,
by battered walls, and blood-stained sand;
now the grass is clean, and Australians sleep
nearby where Kings are buried deep.

Centuries have crumbled like the walls,
and age and sorrow scar these halls;
but calm has come, and ghosts are still
where gum trees scent the Cretan hill.

'At Knossos, Crete' by Mary K. Brice

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So what will you find if you take a trip to Crete now and a day trip to Knossos? *The Lonely Planet Guide to Mediterranean Europe* says it is "now the island's major tourist attraction" and the fabled home of the Minotaur. "According to legend, King Minos of Knossos was given a magnificent white bull to sacrifice to the god Poseidon, but decided to keep it. This enraged Poseidon, who punished the king by causing his wife Pasiphae to fall in love with the animal. The result of this odd union was the Minotaur – half-man and half-bull – who lived in the labyrinth beneath the king's palace, munching on youths and maidens."

Arthur Evans started uncovering the ruins in 1900 and they say of him, "Although archeologists tend to disparage Evans' reconstruction, the buildings – incorporating an immense palace, courtyards, private apartments, baths, lively frescoes and more – give a fine idea of what a Minoan palace might

have looked like.”

The palace is five kilometres south of Iraklio (Heraklion) with three buses per hour. The interesting thing, apart from that vision of ruins more than 3,000 years old and modern buses roaring in, is that Crete also has other Minoan ruins. There is Phaestos with its “stunning views of the surrounding Mesara plain and Mt Psiloritis (also known as Mt Ida).” Then there is Malia with another palace and Zakros which was only unearthed in 1962. With luck they haven’t been given the ‘concrete treatment’. It is a toss-up though, isn’t it? Which would you rather see? Ruins or reconstructions? I think I would see Knossos first then go on to the other sites ...

* * * * *

July 13: John Clare

J. L. Herrera
Douglas Hyde (d)
Archie Weller
Isaac Babel

* * * * *

I was going to write about Castlerea, home of Ireland’s first president, and the birthplace of my grandfather—but then I came upon this little piece about Jogjakarta ‘The City of Bicycles’ in Indonesia which I had written for the English language magazine in Bhutan, Druk Losel, in August 1983. I don’t know if it helped people with their English. I did several other pieces but then they said they would prefer pieces with a Buddhist background which I wasn’t qualified to supply ...

“It has been called the Cradle of Javanese Culture, the Batik Town, and other things, but I shall always remember it as the City of Bicycles—Jogjakarta.

The town is situated on the plains of Central Java, and thus lies amidst lush green rice fields. Its climate is warm to hot, all year round, and the best time to visit is, probably, July to September. It is a sprawling city of somewhere between three-quarters and one million people—no one seems to have counted. It is easily reached by bus, train or plane from Surabaya or Jakarta, and it is worth a visit, if only because it is a particularly Indonesian city—as opposed to the modernization of Jakarta, or the more Dutch influenced Bogor.

Upon arrival you will want somewhere to stay, and you will find hotels in all sizes—from the international standard Ambarrukmo Palace Hotel, down to the Hotel Indonesia charging 100 rupiahs (25 cents) a night (and thus a haven for poorer travellers).

A walk along Malioboro, the main street, will bring you to the market, where you can buy just about everything (from bags of Australian flour to children’s clothes, or plates of ‘gado gado’) if you look hard enough.

You can buy a Batik sarong here, but it is worthwhile to look around first (though they are not expensive). There is a Batik print factory just outside of Jogja, as well as a Batik Research Centre, where you can watch the process from beginning to end. There are also several well known Batik painters (and many minor ones) who are well worth visiting, such as Bambang Oero, who has held overseas exhibitions, and Bagong, who has several Australian students—in fact, there are usually about 10 or more foreigners studying the craft. I met 2 young Swiss men there, who were busily working on T-shirts etc, to take back to Europe with them. I even tried it myself, with very modest results, but it remains a souvenir I cherish.

Jogja is also known for its silver craftsmen, so that anyone looking for a gift or a souvenir can be assured of finding something of excellent workmanship.

For the keen tourist, a guided tour of the Sultan’s Palace is interesting. Here you will find a small Museum with beautiful Chinese and European glassware, and crockery; an Art Gallery of portraits of bygone Sultans, painted by Indonesian artists, who had been sent to the Netherlands to study; also an excellent ‘gamelan’ orchestra, to which you can sit in the shade and listen for hours, if you wish—whilst above you hangs 17th century Italian chandeliers (which I do not think have been cleaned for

centuries!) Large parties of tourists flock through every week, which cannot make life for the present Sultan very easy.

Jogja has several Art Galleries—the Jogja Art Gallery and the Seno Suno—and one of the Art students I had met came to tell me excitedly that there was an exhibition of Australian emplants at the Seno Suno, and could I tell her what ‘emplants’ were? I went down later and read the poster—‘Australian imprints’!

There is also a Museum, and the world-famous temples of Prambanan (Hindu) and Borobudur (Buddhist). I was lucky enough to visit Borobudur, a magnificent stone sanctuary, dating from the 8th century A. D. and partly fallen into disrepair, though many of the stone carvings and stupas were still in good condition. Workmen were busy on the restoration work, but it is obviously a long and painstaking process.

If you just want to relax, you can swim in the Ambarrukmo pool, or play golf on the flat and usually deserted, or almost deserted golf course. Here you are surrounded by small boys offering their services as caddies—and whichever one you choose, you will get good cheerful service. Or you might like a trip up to Kaliurang, a hill station, about 25 kilometres from Jogja, where you can hire a villa, and escape the heat of Jogja.

The shadow puppet (Wyang Orang) plays are fascinating, even if you don’t speak Indonesian. The Ramayana dances (based on the Indian epic) now draws visitors from all over the world—a wonderful experience.

If you are looking for some way to entertain your children then there is the Zoo (where the chief unadvertised attraction is monkey fights!) You can see the fabled Komodo ‘dragon’, the large lizard from the island of Komodo (which, I have heard, can kill a cow, and terrifies the people of its native home). Unfortunately, like many zoos, its treatment of many of its animals is of a regrettably low standard.

Indeed this is one of the less attractive sides to life here, and in other parts of Asia—the poor treatment of animals. The plucky little ponies you see pulling carts (‘andong’) in the streets are imported from the island of Sumbawa, and they are usually badly harnessed, badly fed, and quite often lame. Dogs and cats too lead what is known as a ‘dog’s life’.

Jogja is very much a young people’s city (which explains the thousands of bicycles) and there are many schools. Gadjah Mada University (the largest in Indonesia, and named after a Sultan—and which draws students from many of the islands), the Akademi of Foreign Languages (where you can study English, French, Dutch and Japanese—English being the most popular), an Akademi of Music (I attended a concert there, and enjoyed it thoroughly, though to find a tiny Indonesian girl, standing up on a bare platform, singing arias from “Rigoletto” took some adjusting to), and the Akademi of Fine Arts, presided over by Abas Alibasjah, one of Indonesia’s best known artists.

There is poverty here, with some beggars, but it is less obvious than in Jakarta, and the majority of people seem to have enough to eat, and usually a house of their own. There are wealthy people, who will tell you they are very poor; who sometimes have several cars, but then surprisingly take a ‘betjak’ (trishaw) when they want to go shopping or visiting. They are mostly very cautious people, storing their money away, afraid to invest it even in the bank—where the rates of interest can be as high as 24% in an effort to attract savings. But it has been the wealthy Chinese rather than the wealthy Indonesians who have suffered in a number of riots.

Jogja is predominantly Muslim, but you will find Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Hindus (some of the shopkeepers are Indian) and other religions.

The range of food is quite good, though many tourists suffer at first from stomach troubles. Satay (small pieces of barbecued meat on sticks and dipped in a tasty peanut sauce), Nasi Goreng (fried rice) or Gado Gado (cabbage and gravy and odds and ends) are very popular. Good quality fruit—pineapples, bananas, durian, jackfruit, mangoes, lychees, rose apples etc—are available in season, and can be bought very cheaply in the market or on the street.

If you ask for tea, it will automatically be black, with sugar, which makes life hard if you prefer it a different way. Coffee also will be strong, black and sweet. Indonesian beer is rather insipid but there is a wide range of refreshing fruit drinks, coconut juices, and drinks made from ginger or other spices, readily available.

And if you leave Jogja on a clear day, you can take away a final impression of the volcano, an ethereal blue cone with white smoke drifting lazily from the crater, seemingly standing guard over the city. That is the way, I think, I shall always remember Jogjakarta.”

Of course that is not a good guide to Jogjakarta as it is now. I was there in 1971.

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I looked in *Cassell's Gazetteer* of 1894 for the place as it was when my granddad was a little boy; it was spelt Castlereagh then and described as a market town on the Suck in the west of Co Roscommon with a couple of bridges spanning the river, a single street with churches, schools, “court-house, bridewell, and poorhouse.” Add corn mills and quarterly fairs. “The old castle now presents but a few fragments of crumbling, ivy-covered walls.” Take away the bridewell and poorhouse and add a few more people and modern Castlereagh is not so different. My granddad's family came to Roscommon as weavers when the linen industry was established in the 1720s. My gran came from Inverin in the neighbouring Co Galway which gets short shrift in the Gazetteer merely described as being in the parish of Kilcummin and seven-and-a-half miles from Spiddal. I had always assumed that her father, a clergyman, had gone there as it was then an Irish-speaking community but as soon as I read the description of Kilcummin I thought there was a different draw. “The parish consists of the northern moiety of the district of Iar Connaught, and presents a vast expanse of bog and mountain, stretching from the western shores of Lough Corrib to the Atlantic Ocean, and includes 2,000 acres in islands in the latter. The surface is varied by some poor arable land on the sea-coast, and by a fertile belt, overlying limestone, along the shores of Lough Corrib. The parish contains the town of Oughterard.” I strongly suspect that he was a better botanist than he was a clergyman and even if his wife wasn't wild about “a vast expanse of bog and mountain” he was probably a happy man ...

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July 14: Gertrude Bell

July 15: Hammond Innes

Iris Murdoch

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If you put a Hammond Innes on a stall and it finds a buyer that buyer will almost certainly be an elderly gentleman. I remember my father having a fondness for Hammond Innes. It isn't hard to see why. Innes wrote lively adventure stories, often set in exotic places. And not filled with end-to-end expletives. Although they are men's books, the love interest is slipped in almost as an afterthought in the ones I have read, and though the characters aren't particularly deeply drawn, I enjoy them for the sense of seeing the world they provide.

I've just been reading *The Strode Venturer* which goes to the Maldives and before that *The Angry Mountain* which has Vesuvius erupting, and *Golden Soak* which is set in the Kimberleys. Yet, oddly, I think the best one of his I've read was *The Wreck of the Mary Deare* in which the action revolves around a wrecked ship in the English Channel. What it lost as a travelogue it made up for as a piece of powerfully atmospheric story-telling. And I think in that is a clue to what makes a novel set in exotic places reach above the pack. With care in research and writing anyone can make an unusual place come over vividly. But it is that extra quality, and calling it atmosphere doesn't quite do it justice, which can make a 'good read' memorable.

Innes himself had an interesting roving life. Although I always thought of him as writing action and adventure I found him in Bruce Murphy's *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery*; where he says of him, “The English author Hammond Innes is known for stories of suspense rather than for crime or mystery, though his books often involve both.” He goes on to say “Many of Innes's novels are

about the sea”, something which I had never noticed, perhaps because it is his ones about Australia that are most likely to turn up here. Murphy goes on to say, “Probably Innes’s best book is *The Wreck of the Mary Deare* (1956), a version of the ghost ship theme but without supernatural elements.” Just after coming upon that I came upon Innes in a book *Cornish Ghost Stories* (edited by Denys Val Baker) which has his story ‘Down the mine’; not one of the world’s greater ghost stories but it too manages to be quite atmospheric.

But it is true that many of his books do have something to do with the sea even though they almost invariably take you to places on land as well. For instance *The Black Tide* deals with the vexed question of super-tankers and oil spills and displays his knowledge of the trade and its ramifications. And I suspect that this is partly what attracted readers like my father; it was armchair travel, yes, but the reader came away from the book with the sense of inside knowledge. He had been vouchsafed a dramatic glimpse into a world which otherwise would not touch on the life of a small-time dairy farmer.

“The Strait of Malacca is a narrow, perilous five-hundred mile-long waterway that forms the main passage between the Pacific and the Indian oceans. It borders Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore. The thousands of oil tankers, freighters, and tugs that ply its waters carry more than one quarter of the world’s trade, and they are constantly on the lookout for pirates who hide among the thousands of tiny islands and inlets. At first light one day in late August 2003, five forty-foot-long wooden crates were loaded onto one of the anonymous ships that work off the coast of Malaysia. The crates had come from Scomi Precision Engineering and were marked “agricultural machinery,” with a shipping invoice that said the cargo was bound for Aryash Trading Company in Dubai. Two men discreetly watching the loading process from across the dock knew what the real contents were and where they were headed—roughly twenty-five thousand casings, pumps, tubes, flanges, and other parts, all manufactured to precise tolerances from high-strength aluminum, bound for warehouses in Libya.”

So wrote Douglas Frantz and Catherine Collins in *The Nuclear Jihadist*. Libya gave up its nuclear ambitions and dismantled its program. But the thing which struck me is how blasé the world is about the way we depend on a handful of crowded channels and waterways to carry so many ships carrying so many dangerous goods. The Straits of Malacca, the Straits of Hormuz, the Panama Canal ... the English Channel ...

The English Channel, that place swimmers are always bravely tackling, is one of the world’s busier sea routes. Of course the French regard it as the French Channel and a Frenchman was the first to fly over it. But I found myself wondering exactly where the Channel runs. I have a picture of the ‘White Cliffs of Dover’ as seen from the French side and the haze of Calais from the English side but is this a realistic picture? A rule-of thumb has it as a boundary line between the Isle of Ushant, off France, and the Scilly Isles, off Cornwall, so it lies south and west of Dover and Calais and encompasses the Channel Islands. After passing through the narrow stretch which people regularly swim it widens out and becomes the North Sea. The French call it La Manche, The Sleeve, not The Channel. But Ernle Bradford in *Wall of England: The Channel’s 2,000 Years of History* says, “The English had established their dominance over the Channel, and, even if the French still prefer to call it La Manche, it has been designated the English Channel on nearly all the charts of the world ever since.” This is understandable. It does not have the same importance, practically or psychologically, to the French as it does to the English. Bradford gives it a length of 350 miles and only 20 miles at its narrowest, between Dover and Calais, the part people are always tackling in their togs.

Bradford says, “Britain and the Channel first emerge into the light of history in the 4th century B.C. in the account of the Greek navigator and geographer, Pytheas of Massilia (Marseilles).” The Channel is a relatively recent geographical formation. Ten thousand years ago people could walk across a land bridge but the sea cut through those chalk cliffs and turned Britain into an island. How different European history might have been if that isthmus had stayed firm. Some invaders managed

the crossing with relative ease. Julius Caesar landed, it is thought, where modern Deal now stands just north of Dover. William the Conqueror landed to the south-west of Dover at Hastings. The Spanish Armada aimed to come ashore further west. Hitler and Napoleon put elaborate plans on to paper ... Now the Tunnel enables quick travel and no concerns about the notorious fogs. Now look-outs and beacons and wartime airfields are being replaced by endless holiday flats, caravan parks, and all the supposed needs of a people at play ...

Bradford ends his book, "Night falls on the Channel, and the great lights begin to stammer out their warnings from headlands and rocks and shoals. From the English and French coasts the lights of fishing-boats string out, red, green and white, as the muttering diesel engines draw out the trawlers, the drifters, the line-fishermen and the lobster-pot men. Up and down the thickly thronged shipping routes, the steaming-lights of merchant-vessels proclaim where the urgent business of the world still moves—as it has done for centuries. It is here, upon the waters where the exports of their industry and their craft are carried, that the islanders must still fight their battle. The Channel—stirring slightly as the south-west wind begins to blow against an ebbing tide—is indifferent."

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July 16: Christopher Koch

July 17: Christina Stead

July 18: George 'Kootenai' Brown (d)

William Thackeray

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William Rodney in *Kootenai Brown, The Unknown Frontiersman* introduces him thus, "Since his death on July 18, 1916, stories about John George "Kootenai" Brown have multiplied enormously. With the advent of radio, television, and films, and discovery by governments that tourism is a major source of revenue, accounts of Brown's life and adventures have achieved a currency that is constantly increasing. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the Lieutenant Governor of Kootenai's own province, Alberta, speaking to a convention of United States businessmen, puts Brown at the top of his list of ten Canadian heroes. The criterion, apparently, was that all choices had to have a touch of mischievousness and a courageous personality. These are qualities that Kootenai certainly possessed. Again, in the wider context of the cinema, Kootenai is mentioned in that brilliant National Film Board production *Helicopter Canada*. As the camera threads its way among Alberta's oil wells the audience is reminded that "the search for oil has come a long way since 'Kootenai' Brown mixed molasses with kerosene, served it as a cocktail to the Stoney Indians, and told them if they ever tasted anything like it, to be sure to let him know."

"With the passage of time, such tales about Brown — most of them apocryphal — have taken on the patina of authenticity. With each projection on the screen, in print, or by recorded word they become more permanent and, in some respects, more plausible. For example, it is widely believed that " 'Kootenai' Brown was an Eton and Oxford man, who had been a member of the Guards." An even more romantic story appeared in the *Lethbridge Herald*, July 9, 1936:

In Queen Victoria's garden on any sunny day in the late 1840's, a middle-aged man could be seen leading an amiable donkey laden with two heavy wicker baskets, and in each baskets a happy child uttered shrieks of delight over the morning's fun. One of the children later became Edward VII of England, the other Louise Duchess of Argyll. [sic].

A third party in the morning's activities could often be seen peering through the tall bars of the gateway watching his father, John George Brown, gentleman, as he performed his duties as Queen's Overseer, and companion to the Royal children.

The boy who was born in the shadow of Balmoral Castle, whose life was destined to reach both the heights and depths beyond a wanderer's wildest fancies, never dreamed that he would become a trusted member of the Royal Household, and a wandering squaw-man on the lonely reaches of Western

Canada.

This improbable account is just the sort of story that Kootenai would have relished for it contained enough of the might-have-been to make it credible to those who are less than critical. Certainly Kootenai's name was the same as that of Queen Victoria's famous ghillie, and he indeed may have visited Scotland briefly at one time in his life. But depots of the 93rd Highland Regiment at Paisley, Stirling, or Fort George are not Balmoral, and Victoria's John Brown, born in 1826, and never married, certainly would have created a legend if, at the ripe age of 13, he had sired Kootenai.

Stories such as these have become commonplace, and it is not to denigrate their authors that attention here is momentarily focussed upon them. Both have their place in the warp and woof of society and of every personality. The point rather is that such accounts about Brown have tended to obscure the real man, an unusual person in his own right. In turn, the real stories about Brown begin with the basic questions: Who was Kootenai Brown? Did he have an interesting life, one worth noting? Was he English, a public school graduate, a squaw man, the last of the old frontier scouts?"

In fact Brown was born in Ireland, joined the British Army and went to India, but finding that lesser men were promoted over him by purchase he left and went to North America where he lived a roving frontier life, gold miner, hunter of wolves and bison, pony express rider, he married a Métis woman and had a family and after her death he married a Cree woman; he was called Kootenai from his time with the Kootenai tribe. He eventually settled near the Waterton Lakes in southern Alberta and guided people interested in hunting and fishing and played a major role in getting the Canadian government to protect it as a forest reserve.

He described himself as a "licensed guide, game guardian, and overseer of fisheries...prepared to conduct tourists, hunters or prospectors in any part of the Rocky Mountains in this district" but he gradually came to understand that both hunting and prospecting could not co-exist with guiding and guarding. "At the beginning of the oil boom, well before Ferguson and the Western Oil and Coal Company began operations within the Kootenay Forest Reserve, Brown and other local residents became seriously concerned about the impact of such enterprises upon the area. Discussion went hand in hand with observation as the venture of John Lineham and his associates gave way to that of the Western Oil and Coal Company. Once again it was F.W. Godsall who drew Ottawa's attention to the impact of such developments upon the area, and whose words to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior began the long drawn out process of review which ultimately brought about the transformation of the Kootenay Forest Reserve into Waterton Lakes National Park" and "The increase in size authorized by Ottawa was far greater than either Brown or his keenest supporter, Howard Douglas, ever expected, and the modification extended the Park bounds south to the 49th parallel. As a result, Waterton Lakes, in conjunction with Glacier National Park on the United States side, came into being as one of North America's great game preserves, and certainly one of the world's most beautiful natural playgrounds"; Brown became the first ranger of this beautiful National Park.

So what would Kootenai think if he could see Alberta now? The massive tar sands mining operation has changed the face of the province. I came upon a copy of the New Internationalist magazine (April 2010) devoted to the issue. Among the sweeping forests and moors ... "The spectacle has not been pretty. Open pit mines the size of cities excavate shallow bitumen deposits in the forest, while steam plants inject deeper formations with as many as 12 barrels of steam to melt just 1 barrel of bitumen. Both recovery methods create dramatic environmental messes.

The mines generate volumes of toxic waste, which companies store in massive unlined dykes. These geologically unstable 'tailings ponds' occupy 140 square kilometers of forest along the Athabasca River and contain a variety of fish-killers and cancer-makers including arsenic, cyanide, naphthenic acids and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons. Any breach of the impoundments would be catastrophic for the world's third-largest watershed, the Mackenzie River Basin.

Federal and provincial standards for reporting the volume of pollutants in these waste sites, and

for reducing mining waste, didn't materialize until 2009. Even Boston-based Cambridge Energy Research Associates has decried the total lack of transparency on the reporting of tar ponds seepage into groundwater or surface water.

The steam plants have equally impressive footprints. These heavily subsidized enterprises are fragmenting a forest the size of England with wells and pipelines. A fifth of Canada's natural gas demand goes into boiling the water to melt out the bitumen. This makes the energy intensity of steam plants so high that, at one joule of energy to make 1.4 joules of bitumen, there is little net gain in energy from the process.

The amount of groundwater pumped through these steam plants keeps growing, and threatens the hydrology of the entire region. Opri-Nexen, a large steam plant operator, initially calculated that it would take two barrels of steam to make one barrel of bitumen. Now the company boils up to six.

Due to its energy and water intensity the tar sands has become its own carbon-making nation within Canada. It now accounts for 5 per cent of the nation's emissions and pollutes the global atmosphere with 40 megatonnes of greenhouse gases a year. That's nearly double the annual emissions of Estonia or Lithuania. By 2020, the project will likely exceed the emissions of Belgium, a nation of 10 million people. These industry calculations do not include the burning of the oil in cars or the destruction of peat lands, forests and grasslands by the mines and natural gas drillers." (Andrew Nikiforuk)

"The Alberta tar sands are Canada's Mordor. Like the fictional barren land, home to the evil Sauron in JRR Tolkien's Middle Earth, the tar sands are vast, destructive and represent the real-life death of nature. The air is foul; water is being poisoned and drained. Large tracts of forest and wetlands are being torn from the earth, and in the gaping holes where life once thrived sit giant ponds of toxic waste." (Maude Barlow)

"It seems painfully obvious that the tar sands are causing cancers in Fort Chipewyan. Upstream from this small community sits one of the largest industrial zones in the world. What are perhaps the biggest structures ever created – the vast tailings ponds – hold back waste water from the extraction process that is deemed too toxic to release back into the river system.

But this heavy-metal soup of arsenic, mercury and cadmium, mixed with carcinogenic polycyclic aromatic compounds, isn't fully contained by the sandy bottom of the so-called 'ponds'. Industry and government long contended that leaks were marginal and actively managed – but we now know that at least 11 million litres of toxins flow into the Athabasca River every day.

Communities all over the Athabasca rivershed are exposed to whatever flows downstream – and none more so than Fort Chipewyan. This isolated town is made up of just over 1,200 members of the Mikisew Cree, Métis and Athabasca Cjipewyan First Nations, who live on the shores of Lake Athabasca, the tail end of every leaky tailings pond." (Zoe Cormier)

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In the serendipitous way of things I recently received some boxes of books to see if they would be suitable for Quaker Service stalls. Among them were *The Canadian Rockies Trail Guide* by Brian Patton and Bart Robinson and a guide to *The Waterton Lakes National Park* by Michael Yandell and others. Patton and Robinson say "Waterton Lakes National Park is a 518 square kilometres reserve located in the southwestern corner of Alberta, bounded on the west by the crest of the Great Divide, on the south of the Canada – U.S. border, and on the north and east by the rolling prairies of southern Alberta." (The original Forest Reserve was 13.5 square miles.) And amongst the "white spruce, Douglas fir and lodgepole pine" "Crypt Lake is unique among all trails in the Canadian Rockies. To reach it the hiker must cross windy Waterton Lake by boat, climb a narrow valley past a series of waterfalls, crawl through a 20 metre long tunnel, and pass by a stream that suddenly materializes from beneath the ground. And if that doesn't satisfy a desire for the bizarre, one may stroll down along the lake's emerald waters and visit another country" (i.e. the USA).

The other book says, "Glacier and its Canadian counterpart, Waterton Lakes National Park, were

designated the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park in 1932, upon instigation of Rotary International. This vast area of over 1,400,000 acres has a wilderness character unique to North America. Here lies an area of geologic splendor, uplifted in ages past and eroded, first by water and wind, and most recently by the great glaciers of the Pleistocene. Within these boundaries abide over 1,200 species of flowering plants, which nurture and protect over 60 species of mammals, many kinds of fish and reptiles, and over 200 species of birds.”

Grizzly bears, moose, elk, bighorn sheep, squirrels, mountain goats; gentians, monkeyflowers, beargrass, glacier lilies, buttercups, Indian paintbrush, even fossilized algae; grebes, coots, ducks, wrens, hummingbirds, jays, eagles and ospreys ... it all exerts its fascination. The real problem is the one million visitors a year. I might get lost in their midst between the car park and the nearest trail.

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The tragedy of Lake Athabasca is at the other end of Alberta where the streams flow north rather than south. Here there are no chalets, no lines of tour buses, no happy hikers.

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July 19: Gottfried Keller

A. J. Cronin

July 20: Francis Petrarch

July 21: Ernest Hemingway

July 22: Tom Robbins

July 23: Alex Buzo

July 24: Alexander Dumas

July 25: Elias Canetti

July 26: Aldous Huxley

George Bernard Shaw

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There are the outward journeys we make—from a walk to the shop to a round-the-world flight—and there are the inward journeys we make. The dreams of a night, the daydreams, the vivid imaginings, the trance states and hallucinations, the experiments with mind-altering substances, the unexpected moments when we feel we’ve been taken out of our bodies, out of our everyday sense of time and place ... Aldous Huxley used the phrase “antipodes of the mind” for such inward journeys where we briefly sever our connection with the real and the concrete ...

Robert Masters wrote in *Swimming Where Madmen Drown* of Aldous Huxley’s experiences with mescaline, “If Satre’s experience was of Hell, Huxley’s was of Heaven. He described it in two books, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, the first book published in 1954. It may be said to have ushered in the psychedelic era of the ’60s and ’70s.” Huxley comes up with places glittering with gems, mythic beasts “such as unicorns and dragons” and “superhuman figures of extraordinary beauty”; to this he adds colours and light beyond imagining. He believed “the veil was lifted that I might see” and that these were real worlds stored in his subconscious. “Huxley went on to describe a great many wondrous experiences made accessible to him by mescaline, and concluded that they are of inestimable value. Psychology, philosophy, and many other fields of knowledge are woefully incomplete without the knowledge psychedelic exploration makes possible.”

Masters read Huxley in 1954 and immediately sent away to a nursery for boxes of peyote buttons. This is before it was illegal to sell them. And out of his own experiences, as well as his researches, he wrote *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. He was curious to find that his experiences often seemed to mirror those of Huxley.

I read one of Huxley’s books and found it rather dull and self-indulgent, I think because it had that feeling I get when someone tells me at great length about their dreams or a movie they have seen, but I can see the curious question in there: if psychedelic drugs help people conjure up a world already existing in their subconscious—then shouldn’t everyone’s world be completely different? I can’t

believe that lots of middle-aged men go round with images of unicorns tucked away in their subconscious—and that it only takes a magic mushroom to release the beasts. So how might the similarity of such visions be explained? And why should it need a chemical substance to reveal the worlds apparently already existing in our subconscious?

Robert Masters was undoubtedly influenced by a much earlier landmark study, William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* ...

“The method of psychoanalysis is to bring the patient back to the idea which he is repressing: a long journey backwards without maps, catching a clue here and a clue there, as I caught the names of villages from this man and that, until one has to face the general idea, the pain or the memory. This is what you have feared, Africa may be imagined as saying, you can't avoid it, there it is creeping round the wall, flying in at the door, rustling the grass, you can't turn your back, you can't forget it, so you may as well take a long look.”

Graham Greene in *Journey Without Maps*.

“Singular in its ability to unnerve even seasoned professionals, the concept of sociopathy comes perilously close to our notions of the soul, of evil versus good, and this association makes the topic difficult to think about clearly. And the unavoidable them-versus-us nature of the problem raises scientific, moral, and political issues that boggle the mind. How does one scientifically study a phenomenon that appears to be, in part, a moral one? Who should receive our professional help and support, the “patients” or the people who must endure them? Since psychological research is generating ways to “diagnose” sociopathy, whom shall we test? Should anyone be tested for such a thing in a free society? And if someone has been clearly identified as a sociopath, what, if anything, can society do with that information? No other diagnosis raises such politically and professionally incorrect questions, and sociopathy, with its known relationship to behaviours ranging from spouse battering and rape to serial murder and warmongering, is in some sense the last and most frightening psychological frontier.”

(Martha Stout in *The Sociopath Next Door*)

Margaret Wertheim in *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace* writes, “in our time of social and environmental decay—a time when our empire also appears to be disintegrating—today's proselytizers of cyberspace proffer their domain as an idealized realm “above” and “beyond” the problems of a troubled material world. Just like the early Christians, they promise a transcendent haven—a utopian arena of equality, friendship, and power. Cyberspace is not a religious construct per se, but as I argue in this book, one way of understanding this new digital domain is as an attempt to construct a technological substitute for the Christian space of Heaven.

“Where early Christians conceived of Heaven as a realm in which their souls would be freed from the failings of the flesh, so today's champions of cyberspace promote their realm as a place where we will be liberated from what cybernetic pioneer Marvin Minsky has derisively called “the bloody mess of organic matter.” In short, like Heaven, cyberspace is being billed as a disembodied paradise for souls. “I have experienced soul-data through silicon,” declared Kevin Kelly, executive editor of *Wired*, in a 1995 forum in *Harper's Magazine*. “You'll be surprised at the amount of soul-data we'll have in this new space.” “Our fascination with computers is ... more deeply spiritual than utilitarian,” writes cyberspace philosopher Michael Heim. “In our love affair” with these machines, he says, “we are searching for a home for the mind and heart.” ”

Of course many of us do not need either mind-altering drugs or cyberspace to travel in the realms of the mind; though it might be asked if mental illness can sometimes offset the damage it does by dreams and visions worth having. “George Bernard Shaw travelled to the Skelligs in September 1910 in a clinker-built rowboat. The journey out took two and a half hours in calm weather; the way back

was longer and more unnerving. Rowing in thick mist and darkness, compassless and moonless, over tide races and currents, Shaw's guides steered by instinct and knowledge alone. The following evening sitting by the fire in the Parknasilla Hotel in Sneem, Shaw wrote a letter to his friend Barry Jackson about his experience on Skellig Michael. 'I tell you the thing does not belong to any world that you and I have lived and worked in: it is part of our dream world ... I hardly feel real again yet!' For Shaw, as for the monks who once lived there, on the Skellig you were brought to think in ways that would be possible nowhere else. It was a place for deep dreaming."

Robert Macfarlane in *The Wild Places*. The Skelligs are the little group of islands 10 kms off the west coast of Ireland which were once home to hardy monks. Now the islands have no permanent residents, just the fairly hardy visitors who come by boat in fine weather. The Rough Guide to Ireland says a voyage to "these two inhospitable, shark's tooth islands" is "one of the most exciting and inspiring trips you can make in Ireland"; if, of course, you can manage the often rough boat ride out. Here are rookeries of gannets, puffins, shearwaters, but it is the ancient monastery on Skellig Michael which draws visitors as "a miracle of ingenuity and devotion". "It was built entirely on artificial terraces, facing south-southeast for maximum sunlight, with sturdy outer walls to deflect the winds and to protect the vegetable patch made of bird droppings; channels crisscross the settlement to funnel rainwater into cisterns. You can walk into the dry-stone, beehive huts, chapels and refectory, which would have sheltered a total of twelve to fifteen monks at any one time and have withstood the worst the Atlantic can throw at them for 1300 years." In the 12th century the monks moved to Ballinskelligs on the nearby mainland. But you can still take a boat trip out to see the birds, the buildings, the view, and perhaps to understand the deep call of such places ...

And Aldous Huxley also wrote of travel to real as well as to imagined or hallucinatory places. In an essay on 'Guatemala City' he sidetracks with this, "A Sikh regiment would hardly have fired on the crowd in the Jalian-walabagh at Amritsar; but when General Dyer gave his order, the Gurkhas blazed away in perfect equanimity." So what were General Dyer and his Gurkhas doing in Amritsar?

The Time Out Guide to India says, "Amritsar's raison d'être is the Golden Temple. In fact, the city gets its name from the Golden Temple's Amrit Sarovar or Pool of Nectar, the man-made lake surrounding the temple. This temple is a place so magical, peaceful and spiritually moving that it's worth the schlep to this far-flung north-western border of India, in the state of Punjab, just to see it. Since its construction, the Golden Temple has been sacked, desecrated and destroyed repeatedly, but each time it has been rebuilt and restored, with the sacred tenet at its core – a belief in the oneness of humanity – retained. Every local devotee at the temple has a story to tell: for some it's a place where wishes come true, for others it's where they come to connect their soul to God."

"During the 15th century, the basin of fertile plains lying between the arid Sindh in the south-east and the Himalayas in the north, the region now called Punjab, was a favourite entry point for invaders drawn by reports of India's wealth and riches. Guru Nanak, later to become the first Sikh guru, was born here in 1469. He studied Muslim and Hindu scriptures, travelled far and wide, including to Mecca and the deep Himalayas, and experienced teachings of Sufi and Bhakti saints. Guru Nanak then began preaching with a simple statement: 'there is no Hindu, there is no Mussulman.' His simple teachings appealed to many who felt badgered by iconoclastic Islam on one side and ritualistic Hinduism on the other. His disciples were called *shish* (Sanskrit for disciple), which later became Sikh."

And ... "On 13 April 1919, around 10,000 men, women and children congregated at the Jallianwala Bagh (garden) for a peaceful protest against the imposition of the draconian Rowlatt Act, a law that allowed their leaders to be imprisoned by the British government, without trial. Since it was also the day of Baisakhi (the first day of spring) and a Sunday, several hundred visitors had come to Amritsar from surrounding villages to visit the Golden Temple. Many of them then moved to the Jallianwala Bagh for the nationalist meeting. British brigadier general Reginald Dyer, in charge of law

and order, arrived later when the park was full and positioned his troops to block the sole narrow passageway into it. The park boundary, formed by the brick walls of the surrounding buildings, offered no other exit. Without warning, Dyer ordered his troops to open indiscriminate fire. Around 1,650 rounds were fired on an unarmed crowd that panicked; many jumped into a deep well in the park to escape the hail of bullets, only to drown or be crushed by others who jumped in after them. Others were trampled in the stampede. The 15 minutes of continuous firing resulted in the death of at least 379 people and another 1,200 were wounded (these were official figures; no one knows how many really died). An unrepentant Dyer was quoted as saying that he would have ordered his men to continue firing had they not run out of ammunition. The Jallianwala Bagh massacre proved to be a turning point in the Indian struggle for independence. Many moderate leaders, shocked at the cruel act, turned nationalist, giving a fillip to the efforts of other freedom fighters. Today, a memorial marks the spot where the innocent were gunned down. Plaques and bullet marks around the well (now barricaded with mesh) are a poignant reminder of those who were butchered simply for being there.”

Most parts of the Golden Temple, with its marble floors and silver doors, are open to visitors of any faith and “Look up when inside – the Hari Mandir’s ceiling is inlaid with semi-precious stones, mirror-work and gold leaf.”

* * * * *

July 27: Hilaire Belloc

July 28: Beatrix Potter

July 29: Booth Tarkington

July 30: Emily Bronte

William Howard Gass

July 31: Primo Levi

August 1: Richard Henry Dana

* * * * *

“We continued sailing along with a fair wind and fine weather until—

Tuesday, November 25th, when at daylight we saw the Island of Juan Fernandez directly ahead, rising like a deep blue cloud out of the sea. We were then probably nearly seventy miles from it; and so high and so blue did it appear, that I mistook it for a cloud, resting over the island, and looked for the island under it until it gradually turned to a deader and greener color, and I could mark the inequalities upon its surface. At length we could distinguish trees and rocks; and by the afternoon this beautiful island lay fairly before us, and we directed our course to the only harbor. Arriving at the entrance, soon after sundown, we found a Chilian man-of-war brig, the only vessel, coming out. She hailed us, and an officer on board ... advised us to run in before night, and said that they were bound to Valparaiso. We ran immediately for the anchorage, but owing to the winds which drew about the mountains and came to us in flaws from every point of the compass, we did not come to an anchor until nearly midnight. ...

I was called on deck to stand my watch at about three in the morning, and I shall never forget the peculiar sensation which I experienced on finding myself once more surrounded by land, feeling the night-breeze coming from off shore and hearing the frogs and crickets. ...

When all hands were called it was nearly sunrise, and between that time and breakfast ... I had a good view of the objects about me. The harbor was nearly land-locked, and at the head of it was a landing-place, protected by a small breakwater of stones, upon which two large boats were hauled up, with a sentry standing over them. Near this was a variety of huts or cottages, nearly a hundred in number, the best of them built of mud and white-washed, but the greater part only—Robinson Crusoe like—of posts and branches of trees. The governor’s house was the most conspicuous, being large, with grated windows, plastered walls, and roof of red tiles; yet, like all the rest, only of one story. Near it was a small chapel, distinguished by a cross, and a long, low, brown-looking building surrounded by something like a palisade, from which an old and dingy-looking Chilian flag was flying. This was the Presidio. A sentinel was stationed at the chapel, another at the governor’s house, and a few soldiers,

armed with bayonets, looking rather ragged, with shoes out at the toes, were strolling about among the houses, or waiting at the landing-place for our boat to come ashore.

The mountains were high, but not so overhanging as they appeared to be by starlight. They seemed to bear off towards the centre of the island, and were green and well-wooded, with some large, and I am told, exceedingly fertile valleys, with mule-tracks leading to different parts of the island. ...

After breakfast, the second mate was ordered ashore with five hands to fill the water-casks, and, to my joy, I was among the number. We pulled ashore with the empty casks; and here again fortune favored me, for the water was too thick and muddy to be put into the casks, and the governor had sent men up to the head of the stream to clear it out for us, which gave us nearly two hours of leisure. This leisure we employed in wandering about among the houses and eating a little fruit which was offered to us. Ground apples, melons, grapes, strawberries of an enormous size, and cherries abound here. ... The island ... belongs to Chili, and had been used by the government as a sort of Botany Bay for nearly two years; and the governor—an Englishman who had entered the Chilian navy—with a priest, half-a-dozen task-masters, and a body of soldiers, were stationed there to keep the convicts in order. ... The worst part of them, I found, were locked up under sentry, in caves dug into the side of the mountain, nearly half-way up, with mule tracks leading to them, whence they were taken by day and set to work under task-masters upon building an aqueduct, a wharf, and other public works; while the rest lived in the houses which they put up for themselves, had their families with them, and seemed to me to be the laziest people on the face of the earth. ...

Having filled our casks we returned on board, and soon after, the governor, dressed in a uniform like that of an American militia officer, the Padre, in the dress of the grey friars, with hood and all complete, and the Capitan, with big whiskers and dirty regimentals, came on board to dine. ...

A small boat which came from the shore to take away the governor and suite—as they styled themselves—brought, as a present to the crew, a large pail of milk, a few shells, and a block of sandal wood. The milk, which was the first we had tasted since leaving Boston, we soon despatched; a piece of the sandal wood I obtained, and learned that it grew on the hills in the centre of the island. ...

About an hour before sundown, having stowed our water-casks, we commenced getting under weigh, and were not a little while about it; for we were in thirty fathoms water, and in one of the gusts which came from off shore had let go our other bow anchor; and as the southerly wind draws round the mountains and comes off in uncertain flaws, we were continually swinging round, and had thus got a very foul hawse. We hove in upon our chain, and after stoppering and unshackling it again and again, and hoisting and hauling down sail, we at length tipped our anchor and stood out to sea. It was bright starlight when we were clear of the bay, and the lofty island lay behind us in its still beauty, and I gave a parting look and bid farewell to the most romantic spot of earth that my eyes had ever seen. I did then, and have ever since, felt an attachment for that island, altogether peculiar. It was partly, no doubt, from its having been the first land that I had seen since leaving home, and still more from the associations which every one has connected with it in their childhood from reading “Robinson Crusoe.”

...

It is situated in about 33° 30' S., and is distant a little more than three hundred miles from Valparaiso, on the coast of Chili, which is in the same latitude. It is about fifteen miles in length and five in breadth. The harbor in which we anchored (called by Lord Anson Cumberland Bay) is the only one in the island. ... The best anchorage is at the western side, where we lay at about three cables' length from the shore, in a little more than thirty fathoms water.

There is an abundance of the best water upon the island, small streams running through every valley, and leaping down from the sides of the hills. One stream of considerable size flows through the centre of the lawn upon which the houses are built, and furnishes an easy and abundant supply to the inhabitants. This, by means of a short wooden aqueduct, was brought quite down to our boats. ... the island in the month of November, when we were there being in all the freshness and beauty of spring, appeared covered with trees. These were chiefly aromatic, and the largest was the myrtle. The soil is

very loose and rich, and wherever it is broken up, there spring up immediately radishes, turnips, ground apples, and other garden fruits. Goats, we were told, were not abundant, and we saw none, though it was said we might if we had gone into the interior. ...

It is perhaps needless to say that we saw nothing of the interior; but all who have seen it give very glowing accounts of it.'

R. H. Dana in *Two Years before the Mast*. (There are slight variations between the various accounts; according to how editors and publishers treat the original text, and Dana himself made changes.)

And Joshua Slocum in his 1896 voyage *Sailing Alone Around the World* is, if anything, even more fulsome. "Juan Fernandez, as a place of call, is a lovely spot. The hills are well wooded, the valleys fertile, and pouring down through many ravines are streams of pure water. There are no serpents on the island, and no wild beasts other than pigs and goats, of which I saw a number, with possibly a dog or two. The people lived without the use of rum or beer of any sort. There was not a police officer or a lawyer among them. The domestic economy of the island was simplicity itself. The fashions of Paris did not affect the inhabitants; each dressed according to his taste. Although there was no doctor, the people were all healthy, and the children were all beautiful. There were about forty-five souls on the island all told. The adults were mostly from the mainland of South America. One lady there, from Chile, who made a flying-jib for the *Spray*, taking her pay in tallow, would be called a belle at Newport. Blessed island of Juan Fernandez! Why Alexander Selkirk ever left you was more than I could make out."

It might therefore be asked why Slocum did not stay on ...

* * * * *

Robert Gibbings wrote in *Sweet Cork of Thee*: "Fuchsia hedges are among the most distinctive features of the countryside in the south and west of Ireland. Mile after mile of roads is lined with their profusion of blossom: crimson, scarlet, or purple, according to the light. And even the verges of the roads and lanes have their lustre of the same colour, for, as with roses, after pollination the petals of the fuschia fall before they wither.

Like the magnolia, called after Pierre Magnol the botanist, and the dahlia whose name honours the Swedish scientist, Andrew Dahl, so the fuchsia was named after Leonard Fuchs, one of the sixteenth-century fathers of botany in Germany. It was not he, however, who introduced the plant to Europe, but one Captain Firth who brought it to England from South America in 1788.

Ireland should be grateful to Chile for this embellishment of her roads, though Chile would probably look on the gift as but a small return for Ireland's benefaction to her. It was none other than an O'Higgins who, for his services to Chile in their War of Independence against Spain, was elected first president of the new republic in 1818. That first president, Don Bernardo O'Higgins, was the son of Don Ambrosio, viceroy of Peru. Don Ambrosio was born in County Sligo, and as Ambrose O'Higgins, a barefoot boy, he was glad to earn an odd copper when and how he could. Like many another lad at that time, he contrived to leave Ireland and reach Cadiz, there to join the Spanish Army. Later he went to Lima in Peru where, after keeping a small shop for a while, he took to engineering and eventually prospered in Santiago. At the time of his death he was not only viceroy of Peru but a marquis in the Spanish peerage. It was his son Bernard who is regarded in Chile as one of the country's greatest heroes. His name is written large as that of a province on the map; there is a statue of him in Valparaiso and another in Santiago. Even luxury hotels have been called after him.

Fuchsias came from the lower slopes of the Andes to enrich the flora of Europe, and from a small island a few hundred miles west of those slopes came Robinson Crusoe to enrich English literature. There is no need to repeat the story of how, on 2nd February 1709, a boat which was sent ashore at Mas-a-tierra in the Juan Fernandez Islands by Captain Woodes Rogers, commanding the frigate *Duke*, 320 tons, returned not only with an abundance of crawfish but 'with a Man cloth'd in Goat-skins, who look-d wilder than the first Owners of them'—Alexander Selkirk, born in the county of Fife in

Scotland, and ‘bred a Sailor from his Youth.’

Captain Joshua Slocum, the first man to sail round the world alone and who must surely have known the fears of solitude, having called at Mas-a-tierra in 1896, wondered why Selkirk ever wished to leave the island with its fertile valleys, well-wooded hills, and streams of pure water; no serpents and no wild beasts other than pigs and goats. But then Mas-a-tierra was not uninhabited when Slocum called there, and he was free to leave it when he chose, weather permitting. Unlike Selkirk, it was at sea that he experienced solitude.

Selkirk’s life afloat during the four months immediately after his rescue must have seemed to him a strange contrast to his four years’ loneliness ashore, for not only was he concerned directly or indirectly with the capture of nine ships as ‘prizes,’ but he also took a leading part in the capture of Guayaquil. From the day when he was taken on board the Duke, though at that time ‘he had so much forgot his Language for want of Use, that ... he seem’d to speak his words by halves,’ he held none but positions of rank, either as mate of one of the ships of the ever-increasing fleet or as commander of one of the smaller prizes. At the assault on Guayaquil, he and another man named Connelly, presumably from Ireland, were so civil to ‘above a Dozen handsom genteel young Women well dress’d’ whose jewels they were plundering, that ‘the Ladies offer’d to dress ’em Victuals and brought ’em a Cask of good Liquor.’ In an attempt to save their jewels the ladies had concealed them under their clothes, ‘but the Gentlewomen in these hot Countries being very thin clad with Silk and fine Linnen,’ the despoilers had only to press with their hands on the outside of the ladies’ apparel and then through their interpreter modestly request that the jewels be taken off and surrendered. Captain Woodes Rogers, having emphasized in his diary the gallantry of this behaviour, adds: ‘Being young Men, I was willing to do ’em this Justice, hoping the Fair Sex will make ’em a grateful Return when we arrive in Great Britain, on account of their civil behaviour to these charming Prisoners.’

It would seem that Selkirk at any rate was, to some extent, repaid, for soon after his return to Scotland, when wandering on the hills, lonesome for his island, he met a girl who, if not lonesome, was at any rate alone. He persuaded her to elope with him and he made a will in her favour. Sad to relate, a few years later he forgot both her and the will and left the little he had to another woman, a widow, who in the meantime he had married. I suppose four and a half years’ solitude is bound to affect a man’s memory.”

* * * * *

Tim Severin wrote a book called *Seeking Robinson Crusoe* in which, although he trawls what is known of Selkirk’s life and the more general history of other castaways and marooned sailors on the island (along with the curious snippet that marooned dogs, like people marooned in solitude, have been known to cease barking) he mainly focuses on the Caribbean and the possible original for Defoe’s choice of a suitable island there.

He also says, and I had no idea that Defoe’s book was one of a curious kind of trilogy, that Defoe’s first book, the best seller of its time, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, was followed by *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* and *Serious Reflections during the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. The second book being written to capitalize on the success of the first and the third book to ponder the impact of solitude on a good Christian soul ... or perhaps a not so good Christian soul, given that Selkirk ended up on his island because he was a difficult troublesome man, at times violent, a liar, and almost certainly a bigamist. But then of course Robinson Crusoe is not really Selkirk and is the embodiment of many solid virtues.

J. M. Coetzee in *Stranger Shores* also mentions Defoe’s trilogy: “Like Odysseus embarked for Ithica, like Quixote mounted on Rocinante, Robinson Crusoe with his parrot and umbrella has become a figure in the collective consciousness of the West, transcending the book which – in its multitude of editions, translations, imitations and adaptations (‘Robinsonades’) – celebrates his adventures. Having pretended once to belong to history, he finds himself in the sphere of myth.

“His pretended history – The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of

York, Mariner: Written by Himself – appeared on the market in 1719 and sold well. Four months later it was followed by a second instalment, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, and a year later by *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe: with His Vision of the Angelic World*. Though the second volume managed to travel some distance on the coattails of the first, it is nowadays the *Strange Surprising Adventures* to which we refer when we speak of *Robinson Crusoe*.” In some ways Defoe is a far more interesting, though not necessarily always more admirable, person than Selkirk because Selkirk largely ‘fell into’ his situation whereas Defoe made his own choices.

The Lonely Planet Guide to Chile & Easter Island says the Archipiélago Juan Fernández is 667 kilometres east of Valparaiso. It is made of the two little islands of Isla Alejandro Selkirk and Isla Santa Clara and the big island of Isla Robinson Crusoe, formerly Isla Masatierra, but after Selkirk had been marooned there from the privateer Cinque Ports in 1704 for four years and later re-imagined into the character of Robinson Crusoe and removed to a fictitious Caribbean island by Daniel Defoe in 1719 the island was renamed.

It has rainforest and grassland, market gardens, the little lobster-fishing port of San Juan Bautista—and what makes the islands unique is a flora and fauna found nowhere else and which has caused it to be designated a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Unfortunately it also has introduced problems like cats and rats and the goats that Selkirk lived off. It was used as a prison island. Now it has a small tourist industry. But its problem is that it is not on the way to anywhere. It depends on Robinson Crusoe, a balmy Mediterranean climate, and its unique biosphere to bring people, by boat or plane, that long way out and back again.

But the Guide did have this interesting little snippet: “Decades before Alexander Selkirk was stranded on the island, a Miskito from Nicaragua spent several years in solitary exile on the archipelago. This man, known as Will, survived with a resourcefulness that Selkirk would have envied, but ended up as Crusoe’s native sidekick, Friday, in the book. The term ‘Man Friday’ has come to mean an assistant or devoted helper in the English language. In truth, had they inhabited the island at the same time, Selkirk would have been dependent on Will.

“The young Miskito was accompanying the famous English privateer William Dampier to the Pacific when Spanish forces surprised Dampier’s expedition at Bahia Cumberland in 1681, and Will was inadvertently left ashore. For three years he successfully evaded Spanish detection and survived with such skill that he could afford to be selective in his diet, eschewing seal entirely (which he called a ‘very ordinary meat’). Will was picked up by a passing ship in (1684). Relatively speaking, Selkirk blundered through his years of solitude on the island, but made a better protagonist for the Eurocentric 18th-century novel.”

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August 2: Isobel Allende

August 3: P. D. James

Robert Walter Campbell Shelford

* * * * *

Robert Shelford wrote one book *A Naturalist in Borneo*. He was also a world authority on the insect family *Blattidae* which if you didn’t know already is the cockroach family. I could well believe there are cockroaches in the towns and villages of Borneo but somehow I didn’t picture them out in the jungle.

It is an interesting book. For instance, did you know that orang-utans sleep on their backs and *snore*? Or that “In Borneo the Dayak omen-bird, Nandak, *Cittocincla suavis*, is a frequently heard and a most melodious song-bird; the Magpie-Robin, *Copsychus saularis*, also sings sweetly; the melody of the Bulbuls is far-famed. The song of the Crested Bulbul, *Trachycomus cristatus*, a species occurring in gardens and along the river-banks of Sarawak, is, in my humble opinion, quite unrivalled; it is a richly

bubbling, gurgling melody, poured out in an almost unceasing flow for several minutes; instinct with a gladsome vitality, it infects the sympathetic listener and vividly suggests the luxuriant wealth of tropical life.” Or that “I once received from an officer in the Sarawak service a number of pebbles, which, together with some peculiar-looking objects, he had removed from the stomach of a large Crocodile killed in his district. The latter I could not at first identify, but at last came to the conclusion that they were the empty and deflated eggshells of some species of Turtle ... surely a very curious article of diet for a Crocodile. The presence of large water-worn pebbles in the stomach was of great interest, for the place where the reptile was killed was situated in the vast delta of the Rejang River—an area made up of nothing but swamps, where one might search for a year without finding a pebble. It is evident, then, that the Crocodile had travelled some hundreds of miles towards the head-waters of this, or some other river, in order to get the stones, and it is equally evident that the stones played some important part on its digestive economy.”

And he makes cockroaches surprisingly interesting; the name he suggests “is derived from the Spanish “cucaracha,” a word of obscure etymology but possibly derived from some South American Indian word signifying this insect.” And “The common Cockroach or “black beetle” is familiar to all of us, and too familiar to some, for in many houses it swarms in multitudes. It has a disgusting smell and a repulsive appearance; still it has been asserted that it is an enemy of those loathsome parasites the bed-bugs. Its scientific name is *Blatta orientalis*, and it has been known under that name to naturalists since the days of Linnæus. Curiously enough it has not been met with in a truly wild state until quite recently; the first specimens that were found were caught in houses, and though it has always been assumed that it was imported into Europe from the East, I am not aware that it has ever been found in Asia except as an unwelcome guest in human habitations. The discovery of specimens in the Crimean peninsula living under dead leaves, vegetable detritus and stones, in woods and copses far from any human habitation, is a fact of considerable interest, and it is perhaps permissible now to regard Southern Russia as the centre whence this ubiquitous insect has spread.” But he found cockroaches living in “forest and jungle”, some able to blend into bark or leaves, others “gorgeously coloured” and “On Mt. Matang, in Sarawak, I discovered some immature Cockroaches lurking beneath the vegetable debris that bestrewed the banks of a stream trickling down the hillside. When disturbed these Cockroaches took to the water and swam and dived with ease.” Cockroaches *are* more interesting than I had ever realised.

Shelford, an Englishman, was in Borneo in the late 19th century. “For seven years I occupied the post of Curator of the Museum at Kuching, Sarawak, and I would fain pay a small tribute to the delights of this appointment. The pay was adequate; I was granted abundant opportunities to visit other parts of the State for making collections; there was an entire absence of tedious officialism and red-tape, for all the Museum accounts were kept at the Treasury. The Museum was well stocked, and yet acquisitions to it were always welcome, as the collections were by no means complete. The Rajah had wisely ordered that the Museum should be confined to the fauna, flora, and ethnography of Borneo, and as this rule was strictly adhered to, the collections did not become unwieldy, and there was no great difficulty in the determination of species. The officials of the Sarawak Government vied with each other in presenting specimens, so that a constant stream of material flowed into the Museum. In fact there never was a museum where the accessions were obtained at so small a cost, and as the Museum staff was composed of a Chinese clerk, Malay attendants, and Dayak hunters, the wages bill was small. The Museum to-day contains the most complete collections illustrating the fauna, flora, and ethnography of Borneo, and its annual upkeep amounts to under £750. A museum in the tropics has a treble function: it provides for the inhabitants of the country a constant source of interest; it makes possible an increase in the knowledge of the fauna, flora, and ethnography of the country; and it is a centre of scientific research. In establishing and maintaining the Museum at Kuching, H.H. the Rajah of Sarawak has deserved well of science. Although foreign countries have been quick in expressing gratitude for the services he has rendered to naturalists visiting his country, the debt has never been

acknowledged by a single English learned society.”

Sarawak is now part of Malaysia. But in Shelford’s time, “Sarawak as most people know, is a large tract of territory in Borneo, owned and ruled by the Rajah, Sir Charles Brooke, G.C.M.G., second of his line. This independent state is quietly prosperous, and, since it is very much off the track of the globe-trotting tourist, it is never much in the public eye.”

I am sure Sarawak’s cockroaches continue to thrive even if its forests and orang-utans are under severe threat. But what of the Museum in Kuching?

The Lonely Planet Guide to Borneo says: “Established in 1891, the excellent Sarawak Museum has a first-rate collection of cultural artefacts and is a must-visit for anyone interested in Borneo’s peoples and habitats.

“At the top of the hill, on the western side of Jln Tun Abang Haji Openg, the Old Building has an ethnography section upstairs with superb exhibits on: Indigenous crafts, including masks, spears, basketry, musical instruments and a Bidayuh door charm for keeping evil spirits at bay; native customs such as tattooing and the infamous *palang* (a rod men inserted into the penis); and long houses, including a full-size Iban longhouse and scale models for other groups.

“Downstairs is an old-fashioned natural-history museum whose highlight – remembered with horror by generations of Kuching children – is a hairball taken from the stomach of a man-eating crocodile, accompanied by the following explanation: ‘human dental plate found attached to hairball’ ” ... Perhaps that crocodile couldn’t find any pebbles? And I wonder if it was the children or their teachers who “remembered with horror”?

Charles Brooke, nephew of the first rajah James Brooke, was father of Vyner Brooke, third and last rajah and husband of Sylvia Brett who wrote of their life together in *Queen of the Head Hunters*. James had been given the territory in gratitude by its Malay ruler for putting down a rebellion. It ushered in a long period of relative peace until the Japanese invaded and after the war Sarawak was ceded to the Crown and then became a part of independent Malaysia.

“As long as I live I shall not forget the moment we turned from the sea into the Sarawak river, and saw the broad and winding beauty of its pale brown water. The little villages were clamped on to the mud banks as if the palm-leaf houses had been tumbled from a basket and left exactly where they fell; coffee-coloured women stood waist deep in the water with their long bamboo jars upon their shoulders; and children, too young even to walk, dived and swam among them like little brown tadpoles. There were tangled mangrove swamps along uncultivated banks, and behind them rose the real jungle with its majestic trees and monkeys swinging from branch to branch. There was something fearsome about the richness of this ancient foliage in a land of mysterious legends and beliefs; and yet, as I gazed at all its luxuriant beauty, I knew that a long dark chapter in my life was ending. My childhood was over at last, and I was home.

When we sighted Kuching it was about midday; and then I heard the beating of many gongs. The river banks were lined with people, and, as we passed the Fort, the great gun fired a Royal Salute. With its echoes still rolling, we anchored close to the Astana steps. Crackers were fired and more and more people were gathered along the front of the bazaar. A company of young men, each carrying a Sarawak flag and dressed in neat white uniform with a coloured sash and a black and red velvet head-dress, was drawn up on the river wall facing the Astana. They sang a long welcome to us in Malay. Spread across the sky was an enormous yellow banner:

WELCOME TO THEIR HIGHNESSES,
THE RAJAH MUDA AND THE RANEE MUDA

Mr Caldicott, Resident of Saeawak proper; Mr Baring Gould, Resident of the Third Division, and Mr Dallas, the Treasurer, came on board to meet us. They looked serious as undertakers and almost as depressed as they viewed with unconcealed amazement my inadequate five feet; no doubt they were

remembering the majestic beauty of my mother-in-law, the Ranee Margaret. In complete silence we made our way towards the Astana. A Guard of Honour, under the command of Captain Cunningham, was drawn up on the lawn, and as we passed, they presented arms. The Rangers' Band blared forth the Sarawak National Anthem. Slowly, amid a thousand watching eyes, the Rajah Muda, heir to this incredible inheritance, walked up the stone steps of the Astana, while I followed four paces behind him, as custom demanded, for as well as being his consort, I was his slave.

The Astana Palace was a fantastic medley of beauty and bad taste. Outside, its walls were white and it had a grey tower where a sentry stood on guard day and night. Inside, tremendous rooms stretched the whole length of the building. There was nothing wrong with their proportions; but the old Rajah had filled them with appalling imitation stuff from every period of English and French history. Cheap gilt stood side by side with poor mahogany. Early Victorian sofas rested stiffly against the walls. Crude Dresden figures held caskets in their chipped and broken hands, and mirrors were dotted about on thin-legged tables. Only the ceilings were beautiful. They were heavily carved with gorgeous dragons and wide-open flowers of plain plaster, designed and executed by an ordinary Chinese workman. With Oriental furniture to match, the palace would have been a masterpiece instead of a travesty. In the dining-room was a gleaming table made of native billion wood, and on the walls were portraits of James Brooke and Charles Brooke but none of my husband. He firmly refused to join that family group.

We slept in gigantic cages on hard beds with a Dyak mat on them. We had a reading table and a light; and it gave me a wonderful feeling of security when I closed the door of my cage. No mosquiroes, no wandering animals or creepy-crawly things could nestle under my pillow. It did not matter if bats flapped against the wire netting, or soft enormous atlas moths fluttered noiselessly outside. Safely we lay in our austere and simple beds, listening to the tree frogs with their never-ending love call. There is a certain bird in Sarawak whose full-throated song, softer than a flute, makes my heart stand still even now as I remember it. It is called a "bubet", and is somewhat like an English blackbird, only fiercer.

People speak of the silence of the East. Sarawak had no such silence. All day, hawkers plied their wares in the bazaar, gongs beat in the mosque, and now and again, one heard the wailing of a one-stringed instrument in the air. At night there was the eternal chorus of the tree-frogs, bull frogs, and strange beetles. Often this clamorous chorus would swell into a million tiny sounds until it seemed that every leaf, every flower and every blade of grass possessed some living thing that was calling to its mate. The magic of it all possessed me, sight, sound, and sense; there was in this brilliant and abundant land everything for which my heart had yearned."

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August 4: Tim Winton

August 5: Ted Hughes

August 6: 'Rolf Boldrewood'

August 7: Dean Farrar

August 8: Marjorie Rawlings

August 9: John Dryden

August 10: Laurence Binyon

August 11: Enid Blyton

August 12: Robert Southey

August 13: Allan Aldous

August 14: Bryce Courtenay

John Galsworthy

Founding of Pakistan

* * * * *

"Four factors have prevented Pakistan from stabilizing and becoming a cohesive state. First, its

political elite has failed to establish a coherent national identity capable of uniting the nation. The very subject remains deeply contentious: Is Pakistan an Islamic state, or is it a state for Muslims that has space for other religions and ethnic minorities? Is it not a democratic state as envisioned by its founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah? Are its people Muslims first, Sindhis or Punjabis second, and Pakistanis third? Or are they Pakistanis first and foremost? ... The second factor dividing the country is Pakistan's national security paradigm: Is it to remain India-centric, as determined by the military? Or is it to adopt an alternative vision, as advocated by civil society and the progressive political elite? ... Third, Pakistan has become an abnormal state that uses Islamic militants—jihadi groups, nonstate actors—in addition to diplomacy and trade to pursue its defense and foreign policies. These nonstate actors have deeply antagonized its neighbors, all of whom have, at one time or another, felt their pressure. ... The fourth factor perpetuating Pakistan's fragility is the inability of its ethnic groups to find a working political balance with one another, and the failure of Pakistan's political system, its parties, and its army to help them do so."

Pakistan on the Brink by Ahmed Rashid. After reading this I found myself wondering why anyone would go to Pakistan unless they had friends or family there. The massive over-population, the strains on water supplies as climate change makes glaciers and snowmelt grow ever less, the massive deforestation, a sense of noise and clamour and conflict and lack of privacy ... the fact that Pakistan has at least one hundred nuclear warheads and a military which does not promote confidence ...

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Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb wrote in *I Am Malala*, "We lived in the most beautiful place in all the world. My valley, the Swat Valley, is a heavenly kingdom of mountains, gushing waterfalls and crystal-clear lakes. WELCOME TO PARADISE, it says on a sign as you enter the valley. In olden times Swat was called Uddyana, which means 'garden'. We have fields of wild flowers, orchards of delicious fruit, emerald mines and rivers full of trout. People often call Swat the Switzerland of the East – we even had Pakistan's first ski resort. The rich people of Pakistan came on holiday to enjoy our clean air and scenery and our Sufi festivals of music and dancing. And so did many foreigners, all of whom we called *angrezan* – 'English' – wherever they came from. Even the Queen of England came, and stayed in the White Palace that was built from the same marble as the Taj Mahal by our king, the first wali of Swat.

"We have a special history too. Today Swat is part of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, or KPK, as many Pakistanis call it, but Swat used to be separate from the rest of Pakistan. We were once a princely state, one of three with the neighbouring lands of Chitral and Dir. In colonial times our kings owed allegiance to the British but ruled their own land. When the British gave India independence in 1947 and divided it, we went with the newly created Pakistan but stayed autonomous. We used the Pakistani rupee, but the government of Pakistan could only intervene on foreign policy. The wali administered justice, kept the peace between warring tribes and collected *ushur* – a tax of 10 per cent of income – with which he built roads, hospitals and schools.

"We were only a hundred miles from Pakistan's capital Islamabad as the crow flies but it felt as if it was in another country. The journey took at least five hours by road over the Malakand Pass, a vast bowl of mountains where long ago our ancestors led by a preacher called Mullah Saidullah (known by the British as the Mad Fakir) battled British forces among the craggy peaks. Among them was Winston Churchill, who wrote a book about it, and we still call one of the peaks Churchill's Picket even though he was not very complimentary about our people. At the end of the pass is a green-domed shrine where people throw coins to give thanks for their safe arrival."

It is also a place of bigotry and intolerance, blood feuds and 'honour killings' and it was here that Osama bin Laden lived safe and protected for many years. And Malala's life itself is a reminder as to why I might not want to come on holiday. Shooting schoolgirls is not the mark of a civilized nation nor of a safe place to visit.

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But while I was pondering on this question of what might entice visitors to Pakistan I came across a book called *The Indus Civilization* by Sir Mortimer Wheeler. He begins, “In volume I of the *Cambridge History of India*, published in 1922, Sir John Marshall introduced his chapter on the monuments of ancient India with the observation that ‘before the rise of the Maurya Empire a well-developed and flourishing civilization had existed in India for at least a thousand years; yet, of the structural monuments erected during those ages not one example has survived save the Cyclopean walls of Rajagriha’ (of the sixth century B.C.). Too late to modify this established view, in the previous year a member of Sir John’s own Indian staff, Rai Bahadur Daya Ram Sahnî, had already in fact nullified it. Sealstones bearing animal-designs in intaglio and inscribed in an undeciphered pictographic script had long been known from ancient city-mounds at Harappā, a small town in the Montgomery district of the Punjab, and a trial excavation in 1921 had quickly established their chalcolithic context. What that implied in terms of absolute chronology was still undetermined, but it was clear enough that an urban culture appreciably earlier than the Maurya Empire, or indeed than Rajagriha, had now been identified. And in 1922 another member of Sir John’s staff, Mr R.D. Banerjî, was already finding similar remains beneath a Buddhist stūpa which crowned the highest of a large group of mounds known as *Mohenjo-daro* (possibly = ‘the hill of the dead’) nearly 400 miles away in the Lārkanā district of Sind. Within a few weeks of publication, it was abundantly clear that a new chapter would have to be added to the pre-history of India and to the record of civilization.”

This ancient civilisation was centred on what is now Pakistan but also covered a small part of India and Afghanistan. So what is the current situation with these ancient buildings, graves, and artifacts?

Arun Bhattacharjee in *A History of Ancient India* writes, “There was a time when historians supposed that history had begun with Greece. Europe was happy to believe that India was a hotbed of barbarism until their Aryan cousins of European stock migrated from the shores of the Caspian to bring the arts and sciences to the savage and benighted peninsula. In 1924 the world of scholarship was aroused by the news of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa which according to Sir (John) Marshall represented “the oldest of all civilisations known.” According to Will Durant, the Indus Valley civilisation was “older than that which flowered out of the mud of the Nile.” ... One of the most sensational discoveries about the pre-historic past of the Asian subcontinent was made in 1922 at an obscure spot located along the old bed of the Indus in the heart of present Pakistan. ... Apparently the Harappa civilisation flourished between 3300 B.C. to 1500 B.C. In 1922 Dr R. D. Banerji operated the excavation in Mohenjo-daro and in the same year Dr R. B. Dayaram Sahnî excavated Harappa. Later both the sites were dealt with more completely by Sir J. Marshall. There is such a remarkable similarity in the remains of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa that historians have no doubt that the type of civilisation of the two places was identical.”

Historians divide ancient history in India into three phases: the first period up to 5000 – 4000 B.C. which saw the beginning of agriculture, “The second period begins with the earliest villages which mark the first outburst of urbanisation in the form of the Indus Valley civilization” and the third period “goes up to the time of the Buddha around 500 B.C.”

So why did this exciting discovery not make major headlines? Possibly Howard Carter and Tutankhamen’s tomb may have drawn attention elsewhere.

“The pottery of the Indus valley is of amazing interest. Most of it is wheel-made, pinkish in colour, with a bright pink slip. The decoration is usually painted in black with geometric and plant motifs often combined in patterns.”

“The most wonderful aspect of Indus civilisation was the excellent town-planning. The Indus civilisation was an urban civilisation and Mohenjo-daro was the oldest planned city of the world. ... The excellent town-planning is in itself a puzzling novelty. According to Dr R. S. Sharma: “No other people in antiquity had built such an excellent drainage system except perhaps those of Crete in

Knosses.” ”

But the copper and terracotta of Harappa could not compete with the gold and silver of Egypt and an admirable drainage system did not have the fascination of Curses and Sphinxes ... And, ironically, the mysteries surrounding the Indus Civilisation did not intrigue people in the way that the Rosetta Stone did. It seems to me extraordinary that “as many as 250 alphabets” have been discovered in Harappa and a Mr S. R. Rao managed to decipher some of the messages on seals. “They spoke an Indo-European language having close affinity to Indo-Aryan in vocabulary, semantics and phonology. This is indeed an epoch-making discovery of the century in the field of epigraphy.” So why haven’t we heard and read of Mr Rao? There are thought to have been at least four different ethnic groups living in these ancient towns. But how close their links to Sumeria, to Egypt, to other ancient civilizations is still a puzzle. And the jury is still out on why these places declined. Was it invasion, was it natural disasters like floods, or did they deforest and denude and eventually move on?

And I had another query: are these ancient sites safe from Taliban zeal? Evidence of sophisticated administration and planning possibly doesn’t have the same ‘attraction’ to zealots with dynamite but will they continue to be safe into the future?

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August 15: Sir Walter Scott

August 16: Georgette Heyer

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Georgette Heyer researched her periods meticulously. She made of the Regency period, the time when George III was incapacitated and his son stood in as Prince Regent, a time she probably felt she knew almost as well as the twentieth century. Clothes, carriages, buildings, speech, manners, food, she studied them all in great detail. But how did she feel about a sense of place? Almost all her books are set in England. Just a couple in continental Europe, and then usually to do with Waterloo or a short excursion across France in books like *Devil’s Cub*, and of her books London, her own domicile, predominates. She goes to Bath a couple of times, such as in *Bath Tangle*, and country houses feature quite prominently. But whether they are in Gloucester or Kent or Yorkshire they are not remarkably different.

She mentions other towns, such as the old coaching town of Grantham, and Brighton and the Prince’s ‘set’ get various mentions. But it always came back to London. And her London is a kind of intimate enjoyment, a vicarious enjoyment of the lives of the wealthy and titled. She takes the reader into clubs such as White’s, Jackson’s boxing saloon, Almack’s, Bow Street and its runners, Vauxhall Gardens, more rarely into the slums. Some of the places she mentions are very definitely still there, like the Tower of London, but others such as Almack’s have long since gone. I wonder if she wandered round London, seeing in effect two Londons; the one of her own time and the one she so often conjured up with its smart carriages and high-stepping horses. And speaking of horses I always wondered just what kind of horses drew those smart carriages. She sometimes refers to them as ‘blood’ horses which is what we would use to refer to thoroughbreds but you wouldn’t put a thoroughbred between the shafts of your landau. But elsewhere she speaks of ‘high-steppers’. So clearly she had in mind well-bred horses but not thoroughbreds. The most likely horses were of course hackneys. R. S. Summerhays in *The Observer Book of Horses & Ponies* says: “The modern Hackney is a harness-horse with a characteristic high-stepping, long, round striding trotting action, which is truly brilliant.

“Its immediate ancestor is the Norfolk trotter, which sprang from the blood of two horses, an Arab stallion and a Yorkshire stallion, in about 1729. The Norfolk Roadster, as it came to be known, was a powerful, heavily built animal bred for utility, used by farmers. It possessed speed and stamina, and had to be up to weight, often carrying not only the farmer to market but his wife as well, riding pillion behind him. The most famous of that breed was the “Norfolk Cob,” bred from Burgess’s “Fireaway” in the early 1820s. He is said to have trotted 24 miles in the hour, and is definitely recorded as having done 2 miles in 5 minutes 4 seconds. Another famous trotter “Nonpareil,” was driven 100

miles in 9 hours 56 minutes 57 seconds.

“As is obvious from its description, the Hackney has Arab blood in its veins, and almost every Hackney sire can trace its descent directly back to the Darley Arabian, through his son “Flying Childers.” Another famous sire was “Sampson,” whose grandson, “Messenger,” was the foundation of the present American trotting horse. During the 19th century, with the advent of the railway, the Norfolk breed fell into disuse, to be revived again by the Hackney Horse Society in the animal that we know today.

“The ultimate origins of the Hackney, however, go back far into English history, the trotting horse, as distinguished from the ambler and the galloper, being recognised in very early times, for it was definitely mentioned as such in 1303. There was also at one time a strong infusion of Spanish Andalusian blood. The name itself is derived from the Norman French word *haquenée*.” He says the most usual colours were “dark brown, black, bay and chestnut” but Georgette Heyer’s heroes seemed to go for matched bays, matched greys, and more occasionally chestnuts. The horses stood from 14.3 up to 16.2 hands.

And what of the places? Jennifer Kloester in Georgette Heyer’s *Regency World* says of Almack’s, “Of all the venues in Regency London, Almack’s was undoubtedly the most exclusive. Founded in 1763 by a Scotsman, William Macall, it derived its name from a simple reversal of the two syllables of Macall’s surname. Macall became known as William Almack and the original Almack’s was a gambling club in St James’s Street which eventually became the famous Brooks’s club. In 1764 Almack commissioned the building of a magnificent set of rooms on a site in King Street, behind St James’s Square, in the centre of fashionable London. Almack’s opened on 20 February 1765 with a subscription price of ten guineas which admitted the purchaser to the three rooms where a ball and a supper were held once a week for twelve weeks.” Almack’s niece and her husband, a Mr Willis, inherited the club and continued to develop it as an exclusive and much in demand place.

Almack set up a management committee of powerful women, the talkative Lady Jersey known as ‘Silence’, Lady Cowper, Lady Castlereagh, Lady Sefton, Mrs Drummond-Burrell, Countess Lieven, and Princess Esterhazy wife of the Austrian Ambassador, who dictated the very strict rules and allowed no concessions, not even to people like the Duke of Wellington. What could be worn, what could be eaten and drunk, what could be danced, how people could behave—everything was firmly governed by these patronesses. It is not surprising that some older men must have felt it was like going back to school. But it didn’t stop people seeing a voucher for Almack’s as being proof that, socially, they had ‘arrived’.

Mark Edward Perugini in *Victorian Days and Ways* writes of Almack’s after the Regency era. It was no less strict with Lady Londonderry, Lady Jersey, Lady Willoughby d’Eresby and Lady Brownlow keeping a sharp eye on everything, not least to make sure people connected to Trade did not slip in. You had to apply in writing to become a member and send a messenger around for the reply. But the waltz had been accepted and along with quadrilles you could dance the Caledonian, the mazurka, even the polka “to the music of Weipperts’ wonderful band.” Candles gave way to gaslight but you still ascended “the great staircase to the famous ballroom, “chastely decorated with gilt columns and pilasters, classic medallions and mirrors, and lit with gas in cut-glass lustres” ” and he suggests that “As to the brightness of the scene, the only thing one could liken it to in modern times perhaps would be some of the brilliant balls given at the Albert Hall in the years just before the Great War, only they were bigger and not quite so exclusive.”

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“I have an almost feminine partiality for old china. When I go to see any great house, I inquire for the china-closet, and next for the picture gallery. I cannot defend the order of preference, but by saying that we have all some taste or other, of too ancient a date to admit of our remembering distinctly that it was an acquired one. I can call to mind the first play, and the first exhibition, that I was taken to; but I am not conscious of a time when china jars and saucers were introduced into my imagination.

‘I had no repugnance then—why should I now have?—to those little, lawless, azure-tinted grotesques, that under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective—a china tea-cup.’”

So wrote Charles Lamb in an essay ‘Old China’. Old china, old furniture, old embroideries, old glass; curios, old books, I am not surprised that hundreds of thousands of people turn up to and watch programs like the Antiques Roadshow, that people visit National Trust houses, that people enjoy browsing though not necessarily buying in antiques shops and bazaars. It is not only the things themselves but the baggage they carry. Someone was sitting reading this book two hundred years ago. Someone put on this dress to go to Almack’s two hundred years ago. Someone put their china on this dresser two hundred years ago. Briefly it is a moment of travel into the past ... I came upon an ancestor described as a ‘chinaman’. He was a Yorkshireman from Doncaster so I assumed he made, transported, sold, painted or had some other connection to china. In fact a ‘chinaman’ went round with a catalogue from one or more of the potteries to get orders from wealthy clients for dinner services and such like. As this, the mid-eighteenth century, might be described as the hey-day of the English potteries and the hey-day of wealthy families in big houses I hope he did quite well. He had other irons in the fire, including running a coach service between Doncaster and London. But then, for some reason, he left Yorkshire and moved to East Retford in Nottinghamshire. Perhaps to find new clients ... perhaps because he was tired of the sight of elaborate dinner services ...

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One day a friend invited me to come and fossick in the old Hobart tip. Bits of glass, china, metal, ancient shoes. Very interesting. But in a way I find that time travel aspect more interesting. What was a place like two hundred years ago? This can be intensely depressing. What was once beautiful forest and clear water is now concrete or rusty tin or uninteresting brick. But it can be inspiring too. I went looking to see what is now on the site where my gr-gr-gr-grandfather had his pawnbroking business in Dublin. I was delighted to find that Amnesty International now has a Freedom Café at that address. I was puzzled when I initially found him given two addresses. Did he, I wondered, have two shops? But it was one shop with two entrances. Better off people, ashamed that they should need to visit a pawnbroker used to sneak in through the back entrance. There were other interesting, and often sad things to be found in it. For instance the things most likely to be pawned were clothes and bed-linen. And desperate people stole things no one would bother to steal now—like a small coir mat which could be resold for about a shilling ...

George Bernard Shaw’s grandfather made the family’s money by his pawnbroking business in Dublin but the family was ashamed of this and never mentioned it. My ancestor John Phair seems from the bits I have been able to glean to have been a kind and generous man and certainly the family saw no reason to be ashamed of the family business.

So what of the place that Georgette Heyer sent so many of her young characters to, to meet, to flirt, to dance, to exchange information and news, to fall in love: Almack’s? What now stands on its place? Almack’s was begun in 1765 by a man called William Macall and the name is a play on his name; it was extremely successful, not least because it was a place where men and women could meet and mix in safety and propriety. In 1871 its name was changed to Willis’s Rooms and the building in King Street (near Pall Mall) was destroyed in 1944 by German bombs. A dreary office building (all office buildings are dreary) rose on the site in post-war London. But so famous had been its previous incarnation that they called the building Almack House.

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August 17: V.S. Naipaul

August 18: Nettie Palmer

August 19: Samuel Griswold Goodrich

August 20: Robert Herrick

H. P. (Howard Phillips) Lovecraft

August 21: M. M. Kaye

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M.M. Kaye wrote as a postscript to *Trade Wind*. “Back in the mid-fifties I was fortunate enough to be invited to Zanzibar, and as a result of my stay in that lovely island, I wrote a light-hearted ‘whodunnit’ entitled *The House of Shade*. Its plot hinged on certain papers left by a black-sheep ancestor of one of the characters: Emory Frost, one-time slave-trading owner of Kivulimi. Later on, after the publication of that book, it occurred to me that it would be interesting to try my hand at writing the story of this fictional Emory. The reason being that I had discovered a fabulous hoard of books about the slave trade, the Island and the Arabs from Oman in the little library of Zanzibar’s British Club; read the lot and taken copious notes.”

She wrote *Trade Wind* as a 19th century romantic adventure novel. Yet as soon as anyone tries to put anyone on the spot for the evils of slave-trading or slave-owning they turn round and make the accusation of hypocrisy. Slaving undermined every aspect of the characters’ moral universe. Perhaps ‘romantic adventure’ is a misleading description.

The *House of Shade* was later re-printed as *Death in Zanzibar*. But the books in the British Club were doomed. Even though “these contained a treasure-trove of information on Zanzibar, and one of them gave a detailed and horrific eye-witness’s account of the cholera epidemic – a far more gruesome one than I have given here” it was not enough to save them; “I heard later than when the Island ceased to be a British Protectorate and became independent, all the books in the library were removed and burnt; which, if true, is a tragedy, as the ones I read were all first editions and irreplaceable. Most, though not all, can be read in the British Museum. But it would have been nice to know that they were still available in Zanzibar.” She ends this with the rather wistful “Maybe they are.”

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I don’t suppose people travel to Zanzibar to hunt for forgotten libraries, neglected old books, but what is the main drawcard now? Beaches, hiking, wildlife, bargains in the bazaars?

The little islands of Zanzibar and Pemba had two traditional exports: slaves and spices. Adventure Travellers Guide to Southern Africa says, “A few *dhow*s had nothing more than palm-thatched canopies for shelter. Hamisi informed me that their design hadn’t changed for hundreds of years—a chilling thought, when one looked down into the dark openings leading to their cargo holds, where Zanzibar’s most infamous commodity was once packed. By the mid-19th century, up to 30,000 slaves were passing through Zanzibar each year.”

Slaving slowly and reluctantly died. “No visit to Zanzibar would be complete without a guided tour of one of the spice plantations that have made the archipelago famous worldwide. ... After passing through the almost regimental ranks of tall, straight coconut palms, the spice plantation we finally reached appeared wonderfully lush and unkempt—a riot of exotic plant growth. We walked on narrow footpaths through the cultivated jungle. Every few minutes Hamisi would dart into the undergrowth, reappearing clutching a different spice to challenge my senses of smell and taste.

“For someone familiar only with the packaged, dried and shrivelled products that end up in supermarkets, these encounters with fresh spices “in the raw’ were a revelation. Hamisi unearthed the vivid, yellow root of turmeric, which he said local women used to make their faces “shiny and nice.” We unravelled vanilla vines, wrinkled our noses at lemongrass and split open yellow pods containing glistening scarlet and black nutmeg. Another random turn off the path revealed cardamon, peppercorns, ginger, cinnamon and, of course, cloves. By the latter half of the 19th century, the Zanzibar archipelago was producing over 90 percent of the world’s cloves.”

And if spice plantations aren’t on your list of things to see you can go snorkeling on the coral reefs or birdwatching—or you can go hunting for old books ...

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August 22: Ray Bradbury

August 23: Geoffrey Faber

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Behind every Mills & Boon author is—what? A down-to-earth practical writer who has seen this as a way to make writing pay the bills? An incorrigible and wishful romantic? A fascinating life in its own right, more fascinating perhaps than anything written about? An indefatigable traveler?

I was thinking about this when I came across a book called *Safe Passage* by Ida Cook. She and her sister Louise as young Englishwomen managed to get twenty-nine refugees, mostly Jewish, safely out of Germany and Austria just before the Second World War. They had no particular skills, no links to powerful political or diplomatic circles. But the one thing they did have, which proved to be unexpectedly useful in their travels, was a love and knowledge of opera and of several well-known Continental opera people—as well as knowing Wagner’s operas, the language and venues and history of opera, and having already made several visits to Europe.

And they had another small advantage. Ida had begun writing romantic serials in the 1930s, several of which were novelised. She wrote of this experience, “It took me a long time to write that first one. But I had a wonderful time over it. I cried over all the best bits myself, and when it all came out right in the end, I could hardly believe it. And in the end, she bought it.” (Her editor Miss Taft.) “I was never so excited in my life. For one thing, I had never seen so much money in my life.”

She goes on, “The next great problem was—what was I going to call myself? When you first write my kind of book you are self-conscious about it, and you think, “I wouldn’t like the people up the road to think I wrote that scene in chapter seven.” So I decided I would change my name and never tell anyone about my writing. I chose Mother’s first name, Mary, and the maiden name of Dad’s mother, which was Burchall. Thus my writing name, Mary Burchall, was born.

I need hardly add that, when the story came out, I was so pleased with myself I told everybody. I might just as well have called myself Ida Cook. But it is quite a good trick to practise on yourself at the beginning. Later, you become completely hardened. You don’t even mind when people come up to you—as they frequently do—and say, “Of course, I don’t read your sort of stuff.”

It used to wound me very much when I was young. But now I don’t mind a bit. I just look them in the eye and say, “No? And you can’t write it either, can you?” Then they fade away.

Wife to Christopher appeared as a new serial, either late in 1935 or early in 1936. And almost immediately after its appearance, the fiction editor of the firm sent for me and informed me that he thought the story would make a good romantic novel. There were at least three firms he thought might be interested, and he would give me the pros and cons so that I could decide which we should try first.

I chose Mills & Boon. And in nearly forty years, I have never had reason to be anything but thankful from the bottom of my heart for that decision.

Wife to Christopher was sent along to Charles Boon—the father of the men I now work for. And in a week’s time—think of that in these days when publishers take nine months to tell you they don’t want the thing—back came the answer: It was highly approved, and the firm would accept it, provided I would sign a contract giving them the first refusal of my next two.

Just as I had never meant to tell anyone I had written a book, so I had never visualized myself writing more than one. But I said “Of course!” and went along to sign my first contract.

I was so bemused and excited that I would have signed anything. When Mr. Boon handed me the contract, I reached for a pen immediately.

“No, no!” he said firmly. “You must never sign anything like that. You take the contract home and show it to your father, and if he says you can sign it, you can.”

How’s that for the wicked old world of publishing? No wonder I knew from that moment that I was in safe hands.”

Indirectly Mills & Boon and its thousands of romance readers helped Ida and Louise get desperate people to safety in England. They provided much of the money required. They also helped provide the confidence the young women needed.

* * * * *

Romance writing is a vicarious form of travel, often to expensive and exotic places. The other day I went over to the romance shelf in the Glenorchy Library, closed my eyes, and took six books off the shelf. Then I opened my eyes to see what exotic places the lovers had been transported to. If armchair traveling is all you can afford you might like to try it. My six books yielded up:

Cathy Williams *A Suitable Mistress*. London.
Penny Jordan *The Sicilian's Baby Bargain*. Sicily.
Anne Mather *Savage Innocence*. Cornwall.
Cathie Linz *The Cowboy finds a Bride*. Colorado.
Annie West *The Greek's Convenient Mistress*. Crete.
Daphne Clair Salzano *Captive Bride*. Venezuela.

I don't happen to think anger and arrogance make good partners for a long-lasting marriage. In fact if someone behaved to me the way some of those men behaved no amount of bulging pectorals and rakish hair would seem worth the humiliation they seem determined to dish out. But I can see the attraction involved in 'travelling' to new and different places every month in return for a few dollars. No passport needed. No need to have inoculations. No troubles with money. No travel-sickness. No lost documents or stolen traveller's cheques ...

Tell yourself those bullying men will end up with bald heads and pot bellies to bring them down to the level of ordinary decent mortals—and off you go on a magic carpet ride ...

And if Venezuela isn't the first place you would choose as a romantic location ... I have just been reading a real life love story set there. Lisa St Aubyn Teran married a young Venezuelan man in London and went to live in his home country. In *The Hacienda* she tells something of her life and difficult marriage there. Even her descriptions of the landscape are mixed.

"By day the valley was scented with the cloying sweetness of wild lilies blended with the rich moist smell of tropical undergrowth. Overlaying this was the residual fermented sweetness of the piled vagasse and a sickly smell, which was also strangely sweet, of decomposing flesh. Circling vultures pinpointed the sources of the last. One or two could always be seen hovering somewhere along the valley, ready to tear the meat off whatever carcass was on the day's menu. Since there was no rubbish collection anywhere in the neighbourhood, there was always something for the vultures.

"By night, the musty smell of mould competed with the heavy fragrance of the dama de noche, the night-flowering jasmine that grew all over the end of the workshop."

This might suggest a holiday destination for birdwatchers but I would think again if it was a man I wanted.

"The general assumption in the district of Valera was that within the two-tier class system, every man had a right to make love to every woman if he could. The men and boys of every household used the maids for sex. If they were caught red-handed, the maid in question was fired. If the girl got pregnant, then she was also fired, usually with a couple of weeks' wages to help her out, but often with nothing more than a thrashing." (Not so different to the hero's behaviour in *Love in a Time of Cholera* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.) "Peasant men were not allowed to make advances to the rich or even to notice them as sexual beings. Within any network of family and friends (and friends were almost always distantly related), the men made advances to the women. In theory daughters and wives within the family were sexually taboo, in practice this was not the case. Rebuffing the sexual advances, and often harassment, of Jaime's family had come to be a matter of course. Like bees to a honeypot, they kept coming round. When a woman 'fell', it was usually more as a trophy to her seducer than as anything else. Then the kiss and tell began. The men boasted of their conquests to each other, carefully keeping the infidelity secret from the father, brother or husband in question. After one 'fall', further conquests were easy, the next cousin threatened to tell if he too didn't get a share. If a brother, husband or father found out, whoever was named responsible was summarily shot, or, since it went against the grain to kill a cousin, the seduced woman was. Men who were soft and not serious, sometimes merely

turned their wives out to fend for themselves, taking all children away from them and forbidding any further access. The disgraced woman then had to leave the neighbourhood. There was little leniency, though, as far as I could observe. The men who didn't make advances were few and far between. It was never possible to relax around them, or to drop my guard. The very few men friends I had who didn't try to manoeuvre me into corners, whisper obscenities or grab, were doubly valued for their tact and discretion. The others were no more respecters of place than they were of person. Twice I had to fight my way out of the tiny bathroom at the clinic in the few days that I was resident there."

Of course things change. Slowly.

Of course Mills & Boon heroes are fantasies and do not seduce servant girls.

Of course there is more to Venezuela than one book.

* * * * *

Ida and Louise Cook saved people from things like the horrors of Auschwitz. Colin Rushton's book *Spectator in Hell* is about the unexpected inmates in Auschwitz, such as British POW Arthur Dodd and dozens of other British men captured during the war. Rushton writes, "There are few gentiles who can testify to the barbarism of the concentration camps. The current argument of neo-fascists is that the Holocaust is a fiction or, at least, a gross exaggeration. Tell that to Arthur Dodd. He has no political axe to grind, no theological or genetic point to make. His story is simply an account of what he saw and it has taken him more than fifty years to tell it. ... Even students of World War Two are generally unaware that British POWs were held captive at Auschwitz and there are now only a small number of them left. ... Film-maker Maurice Hatton became aware of the existence of British survivors of Auschwitz after reading Primo Levi's account of the camp in *If This is a Man* and put together the documentary *Satan at his Best*, a title suggested by Arthur himself. Levi was a trained chemist and had worked at the same Buna synthetic rubber plant, financed by I. G. Farben, as Arthur. The close proximity of a coalmine, three rivers and an endless supply of slave labour made the location of Oswiecim a sound investment for the chemical industrialists, but it is to the credit of both the POWs and the partisans that not one ounce of synthetic rubber ever left the plant."

To build the camp an attractive birch forest was leveled and then, extraordinarily, the Germans had beds of flowers planted. "The camp was near a beautiful village in Upper Silesia known to the local Poles as Oswiecim. The Germans gave it another name, now synonymous with mankind's most perverse and darkest hours.

They called it Auschwitz."

Vitali Vitaliev wrote in *Borders Up!* " 'Welcome! We are going to Auschwitz!' a cheerful young guide greeted us the next morning as we boarded a tourist bus with 'Auschwitz-Birkenau' written on its side." When the bus arrives at the site, "Our jolly mood evaporated the moment we reached Auschwitz. Fast-food stalls at the entrance were selling meat pies, crisps and borscht in plastic cups. There had been plans to build a supermarket and a McDonald's outlet there, and only public outrage in the West had stopped Polish developers from carrying out their plans."

My first reaction to his account was horror. But then I found myself asking should we remember all horror sites, not only remember but keep them forever. Should there be time limits. Are some sites, some peoples, more important to remember than others. And how should we memorialize atrocities. And do people in one country have the right to tell people in other countries how they should memorialize and remember. I don't know the answers to these questions.

John Pilger in *Tell Me No Lies* wrote, "However, unlike Auschwitz, Tuol Sleng was primarily a political death centre. Leading members of the Khmer Rouge Army, including those who formed an early resistance to Pol Pot, were murdered here, usually after 'confessing' that they had worked for the CIA, the KGB or Hanoi. Whatever its historical model, if any, the demonic nature of Tuol Sleng was its devotion to human suffering."

I remember Val Nichols' poem 'On Coming Home From Kampuchea' and her struggle to deal with what she had seen.

I could cry for these people,
but tears will not come. So many things destroyed, so many people,
so many pillars of dead houses standing like naked begging
agonised fingers
clutching at empty air.

Cry for the travesties of homes that now squat meager on wide
concrete bases,
flimsied in palm-leaf. They will not last, but they will have to do
in the thin hungry scrabble to survive.

I could cry for these people,
for the long haunted years of dwelling in caves and tunnels,
the brutalizing rain of bombs that made young girls and boys
grow into merciless savages,
whirled by the whipping wind of ideologies,
turning against their own.

I could cry for these people now, walking numb,
pretending, hoping to be real again —
mind-wounds and aching memories of suffering unexplained,
the shadow of a demon and demoniacal cadres raging whips.

Unscathed by the terror and the pain
which ravaged this once lovely land, these gentle people,
I am a dazed onlooker, dismayed and sick, marvelling
that creatures so bruised can lift themselves to their feet again.
Old women with their eyes mercifully blank,
Young women lined and old, mainly their eyes alive,
watching over the precious children.
Theirs is the burden, mine the onlooker's emotionality.
Tears will not come to comfort my tight aching throat
as I look at shattered femurs disintegrating on the ground
(too far gone to collect and display)
beside a chequerboard of gaping holes, unearthed mass graves,
so many empty piled skulls,
so many children's garments in filthy heaps,
so many bloodstains showing on the floor of the horror prison, Tuol Sleng,
so many ordinary faces in the weird display —
photos of torturers as well as victims —
How can I understand the WHY of it? but the sight
prickles the nape-hairs in broad daylight,
as the smell of whistling sorcery in the evil dark of the spirit's night.

After that horror, the torture prison,
and the mind-paining, heart-jabbing booted-in-the-guts misery of one
hour there,
it was a so blessed relief,
a merciful return to sanity
to find a group of children at the gate,
just a knot of giggling, peeping, curious kids

ready to burst out laughing at a foreigner, given the slightest chance —
God's good gift of young green grass
springing in a desert place.

Tuol Sleng in Cambodia is also open to visitors. We would say that it is the Cambodian people who have the right to decide how long and in what way they will keep this as a museum of atrocity.

Long after every person with any kind of involvement is dead the little Polish village of Oswiecim will be left with the ugly remnants of the camp. Tourists from all around the world come to see the camp and walk through its buildings and museum. But I suspect that the money they bring into that part of Upper Silesia is poor compensation for living your life in full view of that ugly drab grey embodiment of evil. And equally importantly the people of Oswiecim, unlike the people of Cambodia, have no say in the future of the remnant buildings at Auschwitz. They don't belong to them. They belong to the world.

* * * * *

Brian and Eileen Anderson in *Writing about Travel* say, "Travel writing is seen with some justification as an enviable profession. Like any other job, it has its pressures and rewards, its good times and its bad times. Every travel writer can relate horror stories of travelling, delays, hardship and tiring journeys. The fun side is very obvious; visiting exotic places, experiencing quality hotels and leaving footprints in the sand of the world's most beautiful beaches.

"Writers rarely talk about the real benefits, the deep personal enrichment from experiencing and writing about other cultures. Something of yourself goes into every piece of written work. The knowledge that readers find pleasure in an article is the icing on the cake for the writer. It simply reinforces the pleasure and satisfaction already experienced."

But there is an important difference from traveling and researching to writing travel articles, guides, 'My Journey Through the Owen Stanleys' etc, and researching to provide an attractive and interesting backdrop to a romance. You can immerse yourself in every detail of the Parthenon if you've been asked to write a 10,000 word article on it. But you can't have all the fascinating details you've unearthed overwhelming your two lovers as they admire the ruin by moonlight.

So what of Mary Burchall? Where did she set her romances? And are any of them still around? The other day I thought there would be no harm in asking even if libraries don't usually catalogue their Mills & Boons ... But she, though she used opera as a background in a number of her stories, wasn't like modern Mills & Boon writers. She set many of her stories firmly in England not on exotic Caribbean islands ...

And Mary Burchall is still remembered. Take this eulogy in *Beyond Heaving Bosoms* by Sarah Wendell and Candy Tan which came out in 2009: "Mary Burchell published over 130 novels for Harlequin/Mills & Boon in a career spanning more than fifty years. Burchell was the pen name of Ida Cook, one half of an opera-mad pair of sisters who made it their life's purpose to scrimp and save every farthing so that they could travel to Europe to see their favorite sopranos. When the Cook sisters learned of the effects of Hitler's rule in Germany from a Jewish friend, Ida Cook began devoting the profits of her novels, which were considerable, toward their travel, which, under the guise of opera tourism, was in reality a mission to interview families hoping for passage to England, and to smuggle the possessions of Jewish families in portable form. In Ida Cook's obituary after her death in 1986, Francesca Segal wrote, "The mild-mannered spinsters became expert smugglers, regaling border guards with tales of the previous night's performance, switching labels in fur coats, and wearing real diamonds with outfits so dowdy that customs officers would presume the jewels were paste." Ida and her sister Louise saved the lives of at least 29 people, and were named Righteous Among the Gentiles by Yad Veshem in Israel."

I think we can assume Ida did not write steamy sex scenes but opera tourism is still alive and well.

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August 25: Thea Astley
August 26: Eleanor Dark
August 27: Antonia Fraser
August 28: Sheridan Le Fanu
 Joachim von Goethe
August 29: Gillian Rubinstein
 John Locke
August 30: Carmel Bird
 Mary Shelley
August 31: Charmian Clift
September 1: Edgar Rice Burroughs
September 2: D. K. Broster
September 3: Will Dyson
 Eduardo Galeano

* * * * *

“The richest countries in the world are Switzerland and Luxembourg. Two small nations, two large financial markets. About miniscule Luxembourg, little or nothing is known. Switzerland, in contrast, is famous for the marksmanship of William Tell, the precision of its watches, and the discretion of its bankers.”

So wrote Eduardo Galeano in *Upside Down*. But if little is known about Luxembourg it is simply because people have not taken sufficient time and interest to find out. Still, he does, indirectly, make a very important point. Why are so many countries pushing for more and yet more people? When people do not equate with wealth? I just happened upon the information that the population of Ethiopia is nearly a hundred million. Can any nation realistically protect its environment and provide comfort and security for such numbers in an area about the size of New South Wales?

The Rough Guide to Belgium & Luxembourg says, “Meanwhile, Luxembourg isn’t reserved for bankers and diplomats. Its UNESCO-listed capital, perched on a plateau above green gorges, will instantly charm travellers; its regional wines will tickle the taste buds; and its thermal spas unwind every last knot. So much more than convenient targets for a weekend-break or cross-Channel booze-run, Belgium and Luxembourg are central to Europe’s cultural identity – EU or no EU.”

And:

“Often tacked on to a Belgium trip as an afterthought, Europe’s seventh-smallest country – it’s a mere 85km from tip to toe – shouldn’t be underestimated. The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is packed with intensely pretty hilltop villages, castles galore (over 130), deep forested valleys ideal for hiking and rivers ripe for canoeing. Add to this its proud culinary traditions, delicious home-produced Moselle Valley wines and a UNESCO-listed capital, and you’ll understand why this ultra-clean, efficient and well-maintained duchy is Europe’s best-kept secret.”

When I look round at blowing litter, often lazily dropped within arm’s reach of a litter bin, and miserable graffiti, the desire to go somewhere pleasant and *clean* is almost overwhelming.

Janet Morgan according to the Rough Guide wrote a book she called *The Secrets of Rue St Roch*. I have not so far been able to hunt down a copy so here is their tantalizing note on the book: “Intriguing account of British spy operations in occupied Luxembourg during World War I. Drawn from the assorted documents of a certain Captain George Wellington, a Paris-based intelligence officer who ran several agents, including a Belgian soldier who began by landing behind enemy lines in a

balloon.” Just as we are likely to be hard-pressed to find Luxembourg on the map so, I suspect, are we mostly ignorant of Luxembourg’s history. Take for instance those 130 castles and their reason for dotting the landscape ...

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September 4: Mary Renault
September 5: Arthur Koestler
September 6: Richard Hull
September 7: C. J. Dennis
September 8: Siegfried Sassoon
September 9: James Hilton
September 10: Stephen Jay Gould
 Sir Mortimer Wheeler
September 11: O. Henry
September 12: Kevin Brophy
September 13: Roald Dahl
September 14: Eric Bentley
September 15: Agatha Christie

* * * * *

M. Karazin wrote in *Cranes Flying South*, “The first wonder on our way was Cairo—a remarkable city with flat roofs, beautiful buildings, and a unique view of the Nile.

The Trifler showed me the gilded roof of a high minaret from which on a memorable occasion he had dispersed the swallows and the pigeons.

The streets were dark and narrow, but they were crowded and full of life. People in white and brightly coloured garments thronged the roofed bazaars and the squares, and sat in picturesque groups in the shadows of trees, drinking something from tiny cups and smoking their long pipes.

Women with veiled faces strolled along the streets or drove by in their light carriages, chirping like the swallows that were seen flying by millions over the city.

Some birds, similar to us cranes, roamed the streets unafraid. These were ibises, still closer friends of man than our storks, who also were seen here in great numbers. But what beauties these ibises were! When we first saw them they were standing erect in a line along a shoal bank. Then, frightened, they rose and, stretching to their full length, looked in the sultry evening air like giant flame-red crosses. They are much larger birds than we, their necks are much longer, and their beaks are altogether different from ours, being rather short, solid, and curved in the form of a spoon.

We made a few trips to the sands on the left bank of the Nile and saw the majestic rows of pyramids. We saw a colossal stone head with human features, the nose broken and flattened; its strange headgear made it look as if huge ears were hanging on either side. The head was sticking out of the sands, giving the impression that the rest of the body must be buried underground. The whole thing was so enormous that, compared with it, not only people but the camels too seemed like gnats. We saw the tall date trees and how cleverly the people climbed up to their thick crowns to get the clusters of ripe, luscious fruits. The ground was strewn with dates, so that we couldn’t help eating them, as well as some of those growing on the trees, since it was great fun to pluck them.

Desolate and dead, the sand deserts stretched beyond the pyramids. But no, there was life even there. Dark-skinned people in floating white cloaks sped on the backs of the light-footed camels; strings of caravans moved along and, soaring in the air, the great birds of prey of these lands—the buzzards—kept a vigilant eye on the level sands, seeking dead animals.

Once, at night, when a full moon poured its cool light over the silent desert, we noticed an animal with a beautiful, abundant mane; it moved with the light gait of cat, casting a long shadow on the sands. Then came another shadow, and an animal almost exactly like the first, but without the mane appeared. They met, snuffed at each other, and waved their tails.

“These are lions—the most ferocious of all the animals,” the Trifler whispered to us. “Even the people fear them, and when they begin to roar it is like distant thunder! Most awe-inspiring! We cranes have no need to fear them, but I would advise the people and other animals to avoid them.”

Later, we heard the roaring of the lions many times at night, and the howling of their servile attendants, the despised jackals, those vilest of all animals—cowardly thieves.”

They continue on their journey. Monuments with strange inscriptions, waiting crocodiles, more sand, the broad river flowing. As an offbeat introduction for children to Egypt I thought it was quite readable. But Karazin never manages to really convince the reader that this is a bird’s-eye view.

Countless writers, travelers, explorers, archeologists, and tours take you to Egypt but I always tend to think of Agatha Christie first. Her *Death on the Nile* sums up what has been the tourist experience for so many people. A visit to the Pyramids. A cruise on the Nile. Some shopping. Fake scarabs.

But how do Egyptian writers write of their homeland? I thought the place to start would be at the ‘top’, with Egypt’s Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz. But unfortunately his books are about the almost claustrophobic life lived by some of Cairo’s families. Nary a bird or a tree ...

“In Alexandria, as in France and Italy, they shoot thrushes, pigeons, hummingbirds, sparrows, turtledoves, squabs and beccafics—figpeckers, the orphan warblers of southern Europe—as well as ducks and quails. They have been killing the birds for hundreds, if not thousands, of years.

“My father tells me the quails fly over Alexandria every year from Europe. They fly very fast with their eyes shut, have no tail, no direction, and they fall exhausted either on the beaches where they are caught in the nets by the Arabs who collect them and sell them in baskets, or in fields of wheat and barley where my father waits for them with his gun cocked.

“Papa pays the Arab boys to thrash the wheat where the quails are hiding so that he can shoot them when they flutter out. Papa has the most powerful shotgun in Alexandria. The other shooters have only .410 gauge. And his eyesight is terrific. He tells me proudly that when he was out hunting with his friend Maurice the day before, he shouted ‘A vous!’ just as the migratory doves flew over their heads and his friend said, ‘No, it’s too high!’ But Papa aimed and got them. It was all in the length of the barrel and they all wanted his gun, he said.

“He shot wild duck too, on the lake at Aboukir. There he would lie in a flat-bottomed boat among the reeds, waiting for the dawn to break, then start blasting with his friends. Mama spent hours trying to remove the buckshot from the flesh of the ducks before she cooked them with herbs in red wine. Mama and I never liked eating the ducks, they tasted too strong and gamey, but we had to eat them so as not to upset Papa.”

Victoria Thompson in *Losing Alexandria*.

People go to Egypt for many reasons—the Pyramids, the Sphinx, shopping, romance, history—but I think birds would be wise to leave it off their itinerary. And the stay-at-home birds were not, it seems, more fortunate. Lawrence Durrell wrote in *Clea*, one of his novels of *The Alexandria Quartet*, “The mirrors, the heart-rending sweetness of the voices of blinded canaries, the bubble of *narguilehs* in their rose-water bowls, the smell of patchouli and joss.”

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September 16: Grey Owl

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I had always thought of beavers as being an American animal. And American beavers were almost sent to the brink of extinction by hunters wanting beaver pelts. But in fact beavers also were common across northern Europe, Scandinavia and Russia, and suffered if anything even more terribly there. But beavers are slowly coming back in northern Europe. Lars Wilsson wrote in *My Beaver Colony* of the efforts of beavers to re-establish themselves in northern Sweden. “Elias Eriksson lives on

top of a steep sandy riverbank with a view over Homsele between Vagnforsen and Rabbstuguforsen. In 1957, when I met him for the first time, it was one of the most beautiful places I had ever seen. Tourists on their way up through the Ström valley often stopped on the main road opposite Elias' farm to admire the view over Faxälven."

"The valley of Faxälven is a very beautiful valley. All along the twenty-five-mile stretch between Ramsele and Lake Helgum the river winds between steep banks. Well-built villages lie on fertile terraces above these banks, which are often clothed with woods of birch and aspen. Plant life is luxuriant on the old hay-fields along the riverside and on the islands in the river. On the south banks the lily of the valley is often out as early as in southern Sweden, and in the summer everything is blue with wild geraniums and harebells, white with ox-eye daisies and cow parsley, and yellow with buttercups and marsh marigolds. Ramsele has its own speciality, the riverbank anemone, and lady's slipper grows in profusion close to the river."

But there was a very different problem waiting for the beavers in this seemingly idyllic valley: hydro-electric dams and power stations. The beavers could not cope with the constant raising and lowering of the water levels. And in winter the river was drained completely. Wilsson and others tried to re-establish the baby beavers they had taken to study into smaller less tampered-with rivers ...

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Englishman Grey Owl who became first a hunter then a conservationist in Canada wrote about his own experiences with two young beavers in *Pilgrims of the Wild*. "They had contradictory, if not complex characters, with strongly marked individual traits. McGinnis, if reprimanded, obeyed immediately and busied himself elsewhere, only to return to the forbidden act at a later date with an air of the most disarming innocence, again to retire when requested. McGinty had to be practically forced into compliance, and would seize the first opportunity to continue whatever depredation she had been engaged in. As soon as she saw that she had again attracted unwelcome attention, she would start to squeal in advance protest against the inevitable interference, meanwhile addressing herself to the matter in the most determined manner, sticking at it until the last possible moment. Yet it was all taken in good part and there were never any hard feelings, and this willfulness, with resultant scoldings, in no way impaired their affection for us."

The little beavers are determined to find out what is up on top of the table. At one stage they manage to haul off the oilcloth and bring dishes crashing down, fortunately tin and not china, but their real opportunity comes when he and his wife are away for a night. When they return ... "We found the door hard to open. That was because the blankets were piled against it. This however was the least of our troubles. Beavers can, under good direction, do a lot in a short space of time ... The place was a wreck."

The beavers, unable to climb on the table, had instead chewed through the table legs and carried away the dishes. They had chewed through the washstand's legs and removed the soap. A large tin of coal oil had landed on the floor, fortunately right way up, and everything was spread everywhere mixed in with wood chips.

"Meanwhile these whimsical playmates of ours, interrupted in their setting-up exercises by our arrival, were cautiously inspecting us through the loophole in their fortification, and identifying us now came out, two little capering gnomes that hopped over the piles of debris to welcome us home.

"It was no use to punish them, as they would not have known what it was all about, being no longer in the act. We had thwarted their natural instincts and must pay for it.

"So we fed them the dainties that the cook had sent while they sat amongst the wreckage and ate them – enjoying the finishing touch to what probably had been the most perfect day of their lives."

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And what of Sweden's beavers now? Are they safe and flourishing in the valley of Faxälven? I found myself thinking that beavers are some of the most fascinating of creatures and that a holiday to go and see beavers in the wild would be rather delightful.

The Lonely Planet Guide to Sweden only makes a brief mention, “Forests, lakes and rivers support beavers, otters, mink, badgers and pine martens.” And none of those places, mentioned in *My Beaver Colony* are mentioned in the travel guide. Is this because tourists simply aren’t interested or conservationists would prefer not to have tour buses and noisy visitors tramping all over the place? Or hydro dams have spread and spread? I just hope it isn’t because beavers are still under threat with continually declining numbers. So if not to see beavers where might you go instead? How about Gotland? “Gorgeous Gotland has much to brag about: a Unesco-lauded capital, truffle-sprinkled woods, A-list dining hot spots, talented artisans and more hours of sunshine than anywhere else in Sweden. It’s also one of the country’s richest historical regions, with around 100 medieval churches and countless prehistoric sites, from stone ship settings and burial mounds to hilltop fortress remains.” And “The port town of Visby is medieval eye candy and enough in itself to warrant a trip to Gotland. Inside its thick city walls await twisting cobbled streets, fairy-tale wooden cottages, evocative ruins and steep hills with impromptu Baltic views.” And “The town is a noble sight, with its 13th-century wall of 40 towers – savour it for a few hours” ... and give a thought, as you savour, to the wonderful ‘walls’ beavers also build ...

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September 17: William Carlos Williams
September 18: Dr Samuel Johnson
September 19: William Golding
September 20: Upton Sinclair
September 21: H. G. Wells
September 22: Murray Bail
September 23: Baroness Orczy
September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald
September 25: Jessica Anderson
 William Faulkner
September 26: T. S. Eliot
September 27: Louis Auchincloss
September 28: Ellis Peters
September 29: Elizabeth Gaskell
September 30: Truman Capote
October 1: Louis Untermeyer
October 2: Graham Greene
October 3: James Herriot

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Winifred Holtby’s most famous book was *South Riding* but its fame does not depend on its landscape descriptions. They are there. Occasionally.

“Acre beyond acre from her bedroom window, Midge could see the broad swelling sea of rain-rinsed green, the wet bluish green of wheat in blade, the dry tawny green of unploughed stubble, the ruffled billowing green of uncut meadow grasses, the dark clump of trees, elm and ash and sycamore. There was not a hill, not a church, not a village. From Maythorpe southward to Lincolnshire lay only fields and dykes and scattered farms and the unseen barrier of the Leame Estuary, the plain rising and dimpling in gentle undulations as though a giant potter had pressed his thumb now more lightly, now more heavily, on the yet malleable clay of the spinning globe.”

And ...

“A source of financial loss to the Ministry of Agriculture, of controversy to the Council, of ridicule to their neighbours and bewilderment to themselves, the survivors hung on tenaciously, some of them even learning to love the wide Dutch landscape, haunted by larks and seabirds, roofed by immense pavilions of windy cloud; the miles of brownish-purple shining mud, pocked and hummocked

by water and fringed by heath-like herbs; the indented banks where the high tides sucked and gurgled; the great ships gliding up to Kingsport, seen from low-lying windows as though they moved across the fields; the brave infrequent flowers, the reluctant springs, the loneliness, the silence, the slow inevitable rhythm of the tides.”

But she says her inspiration for writing the book was her mother and her mother’s work. “I admit that it was through listening to your descriptions of your work that the drama of English local government first captured my imagination. What fascinated me was the discovery that apparently academic and impersonal resolutions passed in a county council were daily revolutionising the lives of those men and women whom they affected. The complex tangle of motives prompting public decisions, the unforeseen consequences of their enactment on private lives, appeared to me as part of the unseen pattern of the English landscape.”

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These days most writing about Yorkshire seems to be of the gritty variety, the Dalziel and Pascoe type of crime, the images of racial conflict and urban decay. But I was seduced by a very different Yorkshire long ago. The Yorkshire of James Herriot. And knowing that it is a partial image does not remove its power. Now it undermines and pales other version by comparison.

—“We had been climbing steadily now for the last fifteen miles or so, moving closer to the distant blue swell of the Pennines. I had never been in Yorkshire before but the name had always raised a picture of a county as stodgy and unromantic as its pudding; I was prepared for solid worth, dullness and a total lack of charm. But as the bus groaned its way higher I began to wonder. The formless heights were resolving into high, grassy hills and wide valleys. In the valley bottoms, rivers twisted among the trees and solid greystone farmhouses lay among islands of cultivated land which pushed bright green promontories up the hillsides into the dark tide of heather which lapped from the summits.”

—“As I drove west across the Plain of York I began to catch glimpses over the hedge tops and between the trees of the long spine of the Pennines lifting into the morning sky; they were pale violet at this distance and still hazy in the early sunshine but they beckoned to me. And later, when the little car pulled harder against the rising ground and the trees became fewer and the hedges gave way to the clean limestone walls I had the feeling I always had of the world opening out, of shackles falling away. And there, at last, was Darrowby sleeping under the familiar bulk of Herne Fell and beyond, the great green folds of the Dales.”

—“This was a little lost valley in the hills, a green cleft cut off from the wild country above. One of the bonuses in a country vet’s life is that he sees these hidden places. Apart from old Arnold nobody ever came down here, not even the postman who left the infrequent mail in a box at the top of the track and nobody saw the blazing scarlets and golds of the autumn trees nor heard the busy clucking and murmuring of the beck among its clean-washed stones.

“I walked along the water’s edge watching the little fish darting and flitting in the cool depths. In the spring these banks were bright with primroses and in May a great sea of bluebells flowed among the trees but today, though the sky was an untroubled blue, the clean air was touched with the sweetness of the dying year.”

It isn’t that he tells you at great length about the types of wildflowers growing along the roads or the birds nesting in the trees. Rather it is that sense of space and freedom, of clean fresh air, and a place where time and bustle is irrelevant, which is so seductive. Like Emily Brontë he was in love with the moors and mountains and takes the reader on that seductive journey.

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I have just been reading one of Nicholas Rhea’s books *Constable at the Fair*. Rhea (pen name of Peter Walker) created the series on which the TV drama ‘Heartbeat’ was based and although the TV series showed lots of countryside the books, though pleasant, are fairly pedantic and lacking in atmosphere. Their value, I think, lies in their interesting little snippets of Yorkshire history.

He has this to say about a particular kind of fair. “Mop fairs had developed from the hiring fairs that were sometimes known as statute fairs. In some parts of Yorkshire, they were called statis fairs, a local pronunciation of ‘statutes’. The people who worked in farms and large estates as labourers or servants were employed for fifty-one weeks out of every year and most lived at their places of work with beds and food provided. Manors and larger farmhouses had separate bedrooms for their staff, inevitably with a second staircase for their use. When each period of fifty-one weeks was complete they had a week’s holiday during which time they could go home to see their families, but during that time they were also supposed to find work for the next fifty-one weeks. They did this by attending the hiring fairs that were visited by people wanting staff as well as those who were seeking employment.

The fairs were held in every market-town and also in many larger villages in England and Wales during the week that embraced 11 November. This was the feast day of St Martin of Tours, consequently the hiring fairs became known as the Martinmas Hirings, Martinmas Fairs or simply Hiring Fairs. The hiring fairs became known as Statute Fairs after they were regulated by law rather than following ancient custom.

Mop fairs can be dated to the middle of the fourteenth century when there was an acute shortage of labour due to the aftermath of the Black Death. A law of the time required every able-bodied man to offer himself for hire at a fixed rate of payment, then an Act of 1563 confirmed, strengthened and extended that law. The decline of hiring fairs began in the 1860s when Servants’ Registration Offices were established and the end came with the establishment of Labour Exchanges in 1909.

Surprisingly, memories of the old hiring fairs in rural areas prevailed well into the twentieth century and even later. In fact, some continued for several years after 1909 but they were probably unofficial and perhaps illegal.

When attending the hiring fairs, hopeful workers would have to present themselves to prospective employers who would question them and test their strength or skill before appointing them. It became traditional for the workers, male and female, to carry a particular object that would indicate to the observer the type of work they were prepared to undertake. For example, milkmaids would wear a tuft of cow’s hair, shepherds placed a lock of sheep’s wool in their caps and girls seeking a post in domestic service would often carry a mop, hence the alternative name of these fairs.

Apart from seeking work, however, the hiring fairs also provided fun and relaxation for the workers during the week they were not employed. There were competitions of all kinds such as tossing the sheaf, wrestling, foot races, high jumps, trials of strength and skill, or, for the girls and women, a show of their skills in matters like making fine lace, creating samplers or baking bread, pies, cakes and making butter. There were displays of farm animals, and examples of the work of craftsmen in wood, metal and stone plus entertainment such as music, singing and dancing. Every type of rural activity could be represented at a hiring fair and so they became the main focus of what we might term holidays for the working people.”

And what of Yorkshire’s most famous fair: Scarborough Fair? I was surprised to learn that it had ended in 1788. But the anonymous folk song, which Simon and Garfunkel made into a hit song in 1966, has an evergreen sense to it. It begins:

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme
Remember me to one who lives there,
For she once was a true love of mine.

“The narrator of this traditional folk song, which is said to date from medieval times, was a man who had been rejected by the girl he considered to be his true love. In the song, he appears to be asking travellers who are heading for Scarborough Fair to find the girl and ask her to complete a series of difficult or impossible tasks by which she will show that she truly loves the jilted character. For example, he asks her to plough the land with the horn of a lamb and reap it with a sickle of leather, or to make him a shirt without any seams or fine needlework.”

Somehow I can't see her wanting to come back to him.

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“Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr. Heathcliff’s dwelling. “Wuthering” being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure. Bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed; one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong; the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

“Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date “1500,” and the name “Hareton Earnshaw.” ” Although Emily Brontë mentions the moors in her famous book there isn’t very much description of the landscape. The people, their moods, their interiors, their quarrels, form the bulk of *Wuthering Heights*. And yet as soon as I had closed up the book and thought ‘the moors hardly get a mention’ I found myself still believing that the moors cannot be separated from the book. Why is this? Perhaps it is instead simply the knowledge that Emily Brontë loved the moors beyond the parsonage in Haworth and walked there frequently ...

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Beneath every grimy industrial city in Yorkshire the moors still lie, as land, as memory. E. R. Wickham did a study of Sheffield he called *Church and People in an Industrial City*. “Sheffield is like a man’s right hand. If you place your right hand, palm uppermost, and your arm in a north-easterly direction, with fingers widely spread, you have a rough map of the ancient parish, the fingers being streams running into the Don.

“Five rivers, like the fingers of a hand,
Flung from black mountains, mingle and are one.”

In the palm the early township of Sheffield (as distinct from the wider parish) nestled on the end of a long spur running down from the Pennine and Derbyshire moors. Down the thumb from the north runs the River Don, turning north-east along the arm, into the broad flat valley that runs down to what was the village of Attercliffe, 1½ miles from the Market Place, and then on to the hamlet of Carbrook 2½ miles from Sheffield, where on its easterly side the parish joined that of Rotherham. A mile south of Attercliffe was the village of Darnall. Attercliffe-cum-Darnall constituted a township and chapelry within the parish, all of which was on the right side of the Don. It all falls in what is now called the ‘East End of Sheffield’.

North of the Don in the loop made by the river was the township of Brightside Byerlow, including from the late eighteenth century at the very bottom of the loop, as suburbs of the Sheffield township, the populous areas of Wicker and Bridge-houses, and further afield in the byerlow the hamlets of Neepsend, Pitsmoor, Grimesthorpe and Brightside. Much of this township too, particularly Grimesthorpe and Brightside, falls in Sheffield’s ‘East End’.

We are left with the south and westerly townships, where the fingers of the hand extend to represent the valleys and streams dropping down from the lovely moors of Derbyshire which still form a large part of the City’s area. From the moors several smallish rivers tumble down rocky drops into the city, to flow into the Don. There is the Rivelin from the due west, joining the Loxley from the north-west whose waters flow into the Don 1½ miles north of the city centre. And parallel to the Rivelin, a mile south, runs the Porter Brook, joining the Sheaf (which gives Sheffield its name) running from the south-west, just before that river runs into the Don at the southern edge of the old Sheffield township. These streams, now much culverted and not easily viewed except on the outskirts of the city, are historically of great importance. From early times they turned the grinding wheels of the Sheffield cutlers and provided power for the tilt-hammers and thereby made possible the distinctive industry of

the area.”

And the roll-call of other little hamlets gobbled up by the spreading city is a long one. Whiteley Wood, Abbey Dale, Banner Cross, Bents Green, Button Hill, Sharrow, Crooks Moor, Broomhill, High Field, Cross Pool, Fulwood, Nether Green, Ranmoor, Sandy Gate, Uppertorpe, Malin Bridge ... and all describing a now lost countryside ...

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October 4: Damon Runyon

October 5: Vaclav Havel

October 6: Val Biro

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Len Deighton wrote in *Billion-Dollar Brain*: “Under the armpit of Scandinavia, Finland fits like a gusset; and if this gusset was a piece of rotten calico then it would rip in the ragged shredded way that Finland has done. The rips are lakes. They are large and numerous and they contain islands that contain lakes that contain islands until the tatters of the coastline fray into the cold northern sea. But at this time of the year there is no sea. For miles and miles the shadow of the aeroplane has flitted across hard shiny ice. It is only when a glimpse of brown forest is seen through the snow that one can be sure that the coast has been crossed.” And, “Helsinki is a well-ordered provincial town where it never ceases to be winter. It smells of wood-sap and oil-heating, like a village shop. Fancy restaurants put smoked reindeer tongue on the menu next to the tournedos Rossini and pretend that they have come to terms with the endless lakes and forests that are buried silent and deep out there under the snow and ice. But Helsinki is just the appendix of Finland, an urban afterthought where half a million people try to forget that thousand upon thousand square miles of desolation and Arctic wasteland begin only a bus-stop away.”

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Mildred Widmer Marshall wrote *Two Oregon Schoolma'ams Around The World 1937* and she said of their visit to Finland:

“But the most impressive thing I saw that morning was the Finnish parliament building – new, modern, and beautiful. The halls were finished in marble, varied in colour and pattern. Elevators were of glass and chrome. A round mosaic on the floor depicted the main industries of Finland: fishing, ship building, agriculture, and manufacturing. The reception room was elegantly simple with a crystal chandelier, chrome chairs upholstered with gold handwoven linen, and double doors of Brazilian mahogany. A large circular assembly room for the 200 members of their unicameral parliament had a desk for each member. Each desk was equipped with a fluorescent lamp and two electronic buttons, one for a yes vote and one for a nay. If a member wished to abstain, he or she pressed both. In this way the count was completed in one and a half minutes, with a record of yes votes, nays, abstentions, and absences.”

“The guide told us that the government owned the tobacco monopoly, the radio stations, and other industries that produced the money for building some of the apartments. We passed one apartment complex where the government gave free space to couples married for fifty years. Another was reserved for the very poor, whose rent was about twenty-five dollars a year. This was financed by the flower fund, a cause supported by memorials which many requested in lieu of flowers for their funerals. The residents of these units paid their own utilities, said the guide. “Then they don’t get inferior complexions.””

Another view of modern Helsinki comes in Craig Cormick’s *Kurikka’s Dreaming*. “Much of Helsinki has not changed greatly in one hundred years. In the autumn and early winter, before the snow falls, it is a dark city. Tall stone buildings glisten damply in the rain and the citizens scuttle across the cobblestones much in the way they always have.

The weather is heavy and oppressive at this time of year. People huddle into themselves and walk quickly, glancing down at the ground, not meeting any strangers' eyes.

There are still traces of Russian colonialism here too. The buildings around the Senate Square are yellow with white edging, so similar to those of St Petersburg that films set in Russia have been filmed here. The Senate Square is still cobbled, though marked out now with painted white lines for cars – yet little else has changed.

A cathedral sits atop a pyramid-like set of steps at the head of the square. There is a statue of the former Russian Governor-General, Nikolai Bobrikov, in dark metal near the foot of those steps. He was quite a dictator, and was assassinated by a Finnish nationalist in the Senate building in 1904. There is no statue of the assassin, Eugene Schuman. The old Senate buildings are off to one side of the square and the university library is to the other. Down beyond the square, on the harbour, the ships move slowly – but easily until the ice has begun to form heavily.”

This is an intriguing book about a Finnish socialist, Matti Kurikka, who left Russian oppression behind to try to set up a socialist utopia in north Queensland near Chillagoe west of Cairns in 1899. But he seems to have been an impractical dreamer and the promises made to his followers were empty hopes. He gave up in Queensland and went to North America where he died.

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It is curious to think that a Finnish socialist was seeing Queensland as the place to create a ‘new and fairer world’ while William Lane had just left Queensland to create his socialist utopia in Paraguay.

John Gimlette subtitled his book *At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig* as *A Riotous Journey into the Heart of Paraguay*. “The small problem of an impoverished and potentially complaining populace was taken care of by Pastor Coronel, the head of the *pyragüés*. Whilst he was neither hairy-footed nor even fleet of foot (an Argentine secret agent once described him as ‘a refrigerator with a tennis ball on top’), he was an enthusiastic interrogator. People were pulled in on the slightest of pretexts. An Australian writer, Gavin Souter, was arrested for taking a photograph of the bullet-riddled lamp-post by the Municipal Theatre, and after a day in the cells found himself in front of Pastor Coronel. He was almost smothered by Coronel’s charm. There had been a terrible mistake. He was discharged with all the Inquisitor’s warmest blessings and good wishes.”

Souter had gone to Paraguay to research his book about William Lane’s Australian commune. I remember meeting a German woman whose family had come to Paraguay as part of a Hutterite community, hoping to create their own religious utopia there. The Mennonites had a similar idea. Then there was New Bordeaux, Nueva Germania, even a Japanese venture. The puzzle of course is: why Paraguay? Its leaders have never been interested in creating utopias of any sort for their own people.

Being remote and little known was part of the mystique and the draw. Gimlette writes, “For some, it was not enough to see Kingsley’s prose swinging around the page. They had to be there. Edward Knight was not the first traveller to arrive in Paraguay with a well-thumbed *Westward Ho!* When a group of Australian socialists arrived in the country in 1893, searching for Utopia, Kingsley’s book was one of the few that accompanied them. It was not only their inspiration, it was their guide; they had little clue as to what else to expect.

“But perhaps the greatest work of English literature to be set in this region was yet to come. It would be inspired by the dreadful catastrophes that befell Paraguay in the second half of the nineteenth century. This time, the perception would shift the other way; whilst still the land of the Improbable, Paraguay would no longer be Paradise but Purgatory – torrid, amoral and despairing. The book would be Joseph Conrad’s *Nostramo*.”

Gimlette went looking: “Curiosity for the Australian Utopia landed me by the side of the great east-west road, *Ruta Dos*, at the dead of night. The bus dropped me at the sign for Nueva Londres.

‘It’s up there,’ said the driver. ‘Eleven kilometres.’ ”

After a long walk in the dark he asks around for a room as there is no hotel. A boy with a horse

offers to help. “Five minutes later, I was bedded down in the dog-house of a large villa. Everything, including my bed, was richly gravelled in rabbit-flavoured biscuits. I was embarrassingly grateful. What, I asked the horse-boy, was his name.

‘Kennedy,’ he said. ‘Welcome to New Australia.’ ”

He describes William Lane, disillusioned with Australia in the aftermath of the shearers’ strike of 1891 as a “bushy-tailed English hack”. Lane also had a large ego, seeing himself as someone who would eventually help to lead a world revolution though a revolution that would be exclusive: there were to be no relations with Paraguayan women.

“Two hundred had set out in 1893, aboard *The Royal Tar*.” They included Lane, Dave Stevenson, a cousin to Robert Louis (who had provided some funds), Arthur Tozer, and Mary Gilmore (though in fact she was Mary Cameron then). But things began to go wrong almost immediately and there was a split in the community with some of them moving to Cosme but that also ran into problems. “After an allegation of sexual impropriety with a new recruit, Lane fled the continent in 1899 and rediscovered himself as a right-wing politician in New Zealand.” Mary eventually returned to Australia to become a famous poet and to be made a Dame. Stevenson went to the First World War and didn’t return to Paraguay. Arthur Tozer stayed on and found work on the railways, and others gradually re-invented themselves as farmers and cattlemen becoming modestly wealthy. Their socialism went by the board but “They were good men, and in deference to the original settlers, they asked the Australian government for permission to call it (their small town) New Canberra. When no one answered, they called it New London instead.”

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“Motorists in northern Finland might have thought that they had been a bit heavy-handed with the Finlandia vodka when they came across reindeers glowing in the dark.

Their eyes, and brains, were not deceiving them.

The reindeers had been sprayed with a glow-in-dark liquid to prevent accidents. Members of the Finland Reindeer Herders’ Association hoped that the project would help avoid the thousands of reindeer-related accidents that occurred each year in the Rovaneimi district of the Lapland region.

The association had started testing two reflective sprays on the animals’ antlers in the autumn of 2012 so they were more visible to motorists at night. There was a more permanent one for the antlers and one that washed away for the fur.”

Don Knowler in *Riding the Devil’s Highway*.

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Tove Jansson is best known for her ‘Moomintroll’ books for children but wrote a novel *The Summer Book* about a family living on a small Finnish island. The family is rather strange but the small granite island has its attractions. Mushrooms and bilberries, cotton grass and wild roses, alders, rowans, and pines. She writes, “On the outside of the island, beyond the bare rock, there was a stand of dead forest. It lay right in the path of the wind and for many hundreds of years had tried to grow directly into the teeth of every storm, and had thus acquired an appearance all its own. From a passing rowboat it was obvious that each tree was stretching away from the wind; they crouched and twisted, and many of them crept. Eventually the trunks broke or rotted and then sank, the dead trees supporting or crushing those still green at the top. All together they formed a tangled mass of stubborn vegetation. The ground was shiny with brown needles, except where the spruces had decided to crawl instead of stand, their greenery luxuriating in a kind of frenzy, damp and glossy as if in a jungle. This forest was called ‘the magic forest’. It had shaped itself with slow and laborious care, and the balance between survival and extinction was so delicate that even the smallest change was unthinkable. To open a clearing or separate the collapsing trunks might lead to the ruin of the magic forest. The marshy spots could not be drained, and nothing could be planted behind the dense, sheltering wall of trees. Deep under this thicket, in places where the sun never shone, there lived birds and small animals. In calm weather you could hear the rustle of wings and hastily scurrying feet, but the animals never showed themselves.

... “Except in the magic forest, the island became an orderly, beautiful park. They tidied it down to the smallest twig while the earth was still soaked with spring rain, and, after that, they stuck carefully to the narrow paths that wandered through the carpet of moss from one granite outcropping to another and down to the sand beach. Only farmers and summer guests walk on the moss. What they don’t know – and it cannot be repeated too often – is that moss is terribly frail. Step on it once and it rises the next time it rains. The second time, it doesn’t rise back up. And the third time you step on moss, it dies. Eider ducks are the same way – the third time you frighten them up from their nests, they never come back. Sometimes in July the moss would adorn itself with a kind of long, light grass. Tiny clusters of flowers would open exactly the same height above the ground and sway together in the wind, like inland meadows, and the whole island would be covered with a veil dipped in heat, hardly visible and gone in a week. Nothing could give a stronger impression of untouched wilderness.”

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October 7: Thomas Kenneally

October 8: John Cowper Powys

October 9: Miguel Cervantes

October 10: Louise Mack

George ‘Kootenai’ Brown

R. K. Narayan

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Long before David Malouf was living in Tuscany or people were writing about their farmhouse, their summer, their food, young Australian writer Louise Mack was living and writing there. For a time she was editor of the English-language *Gazette* and using Florence and its countryside as settings for romantic stories. Such as, “His car reached Settignano, turned to the right through the dirty little beautiful village and along the road that ran swiftly out into the open country ... exquisite villas every now and then ... among their black cypresses ... the faraway purple Apennines golden in the sunset ... The grass on the hillsides was red with wild tulips and early poppies ... the green shutters and pale pink walls of his home came gleaming at him through the twilight ... ” (*Maiden’s Prayer*) Even when she wrote nostalgically of life in Sydney, in a novel such as *Children of the Sun*, she ended her story in Italy. She didn’t stay very long but Italy was to be a lifelong preoccupation of hers. Many years later when she was living in Sydney again she was trying to recreate a little bit of Italy in her small cottage and cooking Italian food in her kitchen.

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Those books about Tuscany keep coming, cook books, travel books, My Year in Tuscany type of thing. But here is a mention of Tuscany back in the 1500s. It comes from Niccolò Machiavelli’s famous book *The Prince*. “A prince, therefore, should have no concern, no thought, or pursue any other art besides the art of war, its organisation and instruction. This is the only art that those who command are expected to master. This art has such potency, that not only does it ensure that those who are born princes remain princes, but it often enables men of humble rank to rise to that position. By contrast, it is noticeable that when princes have paid more attention to luxuries than to arms, they have lost their states. Loss of state results primarily from neglecting this art, whilst being proficient in it will lead to the acquisition of state.

“Francesco Sforza, formerly a private citizen, became Duke of Milan because he was armed. His sons, because they avoided the inconvenience of armies, became private citizens having formerly been dukes. For, amongst the other things that will bring difficulties, being unarmed will bring contempt. This is one of the infamies against which a prince must guard, as I will make clear later, as there is no comparison between a man who is armed and a man who is not armed. It is unreasonable to expect that an armed man should willingly obey one who is unarmed, or that an unarmed man should feel secure surrounded by armed subordinates. For when one party is contemptuous and the other suspicious, it is impossible for them to work well together. A prince who fails to understand military matters, therefore,

in addition to other difficulties, as stated, can neither be respected by his troops nor place his trust in them.

“He should never, therefore, cease to think about the occupation of being a soldier, and should exercise more vigorously in times of peace than in times of war. This he can do in two ways, physically and mentally. As far as physical exercise is concerned, in addition to keeping his army well organised and trained, he should always be out hunting. This will help him both to accustom his body to discomfort and to learn something of the lie of the land, so that he knows where the mountains rise up, where the valleys narrow down and how the plains extend, and observes the characteristics of the rivers and marshes. He should take great care in all this. This knowledge is useful in two ways. Firstly, he becomes familiar with his own country and better understands how to defend it. Secondly, through his knowledge and experience of those areas, he can more easily understand every other area that it might be necessary for him to spy out. For the hills, the valleys, the plains, the rivers and the marshes of Tuscany, for example, have a certain similarity to those of other regions, so that from a knowledge of how the land lies in one region, he can easily come to understand another. The prince who lacks this skill, lacks the first attribute that a commander must possess, since it teaches him how to locate the enemy, where to strike camp, how to lead armies, plan battles and besiege towns to his advantage.”

I wonder if writers as they mention the crusty bread on the wooden table in their Tuscan kitchen spare a moment to be thankful that Tuscany is no longer a battlefield?

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In fact, though, Louise Mack’s most powerful writing was about the German occupation of Belgium. Her romantic serials and her barely disguised autobiographical novels made her money but her writings as a war correspondent in 1914 show her at her most courageous and indomitable. In Nancy Phelan’s *The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack* is a woman who is sometimes more tedious and selfish than admirable but she was capable of being more than that.

Of Aerschot she wrote: “In pouring rain, wearing a Belgian officer’s great-coat, I trudged along the shell of a town ... The inhabitants have fled ... Oh Beethoven, Goethe, Heine! Not even out of respect for your genius can I hide the truth about the Germans ... long streets of hollow blackened skeletons ... but between the ruins, strange, touching, unbelievable, are the scarlet and white of dahlias and roses in the gardens behind ... and the red and white and green intensify the black horrors of the town.” Aerschot on the Demer River suffered severely in WWI, its mayor shot, its inhabitants forcibly evacuated. It has been rebuilt and is now a bustling modern city but its old buildings were not recreated. If you go, go not for what was lost but to enjoy a pleasant city on a river.

Of Antwerp: “... In every street ... the same thing: hundreds of empty bottles. In the church, a great dim interior lit with little bunches of yellow candles, on the high altar ... empty champagne bottles, empty rum bottles, a broken bottle of Bordeaux and five bottles of beer ... In the confessionals empty champagne bottles, brandy bottles, beer bottles ... in the Holy Water font; stacks of bottles under the pews or on the seats themselves ... The marble floors are covered with piles of straw and bottles and heaps of refuse and filth and horse-dung ... The Madonna’s head has been cut right off. They had set fire to the Christ, the beautiful wood-carving, and burnt the figure all up one side and on the face and breast ... slit the brocade on the altar, slashing the oil paintings on the walls, chopping them right out of their frames. A dead pig lies in the little chapel to the right ... the floor is chipped and smashed where they stabled their horses. Pinned outside on the door of a small praying room is this message in German: THIS ROOM IS PRIVATE. KEEP AWAY. Inside are women’s garments, a pile tossed hastily on the floor, torn from the wearers ...” And Rupert Brooke said of it, “I don’t know if you heard of my trip to Antwerp. A queer picnic. They say we saved the Belgian army, and most of the valuable things in the town—stores and ammunition ... However, we at last got away ... Antwerp that night was like several different kinds of hell—the broken houses and dead horses lit up by an infernal glare. The refugees were the worst sight. The German policy of frightfulness has succeeded so well, that out of that city of half a million, when it was decided to surrender Antwerp, not ten thousand

would stay ... I'll never forget that white-faced, endless procession in the night ... the old men crying, and the women with hard drawn faces."

Antwerp is Belgium's second city, a port on the River Scheldt, a position which saw it suffer in virtually every European conflict including both world wars. But now it bustles as the centre of Flemish-speaking Belgium and perhaps more intriguingly as the heart of the world's diamond trade.

Of Louvain: "... Heaps of debris nearly meet across the streets ... rain is falling; it beats through the ruined spaces. The brave people ... are actually making a pretence of life. A few shops are open ... a café opposite the ruined theatre ... Louvain is just alive enough to whisper the word Death. I wander about. I am utterly indifferent today. If a German officer took it into his head to suspect me I wouldn't care. The destruction is less than at Aershot but German proclamations on the walls threaten that people will be shot, imprisoned for insulting Germans ... at the same time the conquerors beg the citizens of Louvain to understand they will meet with nothing but kindness and consideration – so long as they behave themselves. An American who asked a German colonel how he could let his troops destroy such a beautiful city, was told, "We didn't know it was beautiful!" "

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says of Louvain (Leuven), "Louvain suffered considerable damage in World Wars I and II. During the German invasion of 1914, the University's famous library and the Cloth Workers' Hall (1193) were burned." The destruction of Louvain's priceless library by the Germans is indelibly etched into twentieth-century history but it was certainly not the first time the city had come under threat. I came upon this curious little story in Nicholas Crane's *Mercator*. In 1542 in a time of religious and political ferment Louvain came under siege by the Lutheran Duke Wilhelm of Cleves and his commander Maarten van Rossum 'Black Maarten'. They had decided that Antwerp was beyond their resources so turned to plunder Louvain. "The hero here was the Portuguese poet-musician who had gone to print in defence of the Lapps and Ethiopians. Just as d'Affaytadi had rallied the merchants of Antwerp, Damião de Góis rallied the students of Louvain. The city had cannon, but no commanders, and the council seemed incapable of organizing a coherent defence."

De Góis organized the students, went out to parley with Black Maarten, convinced him that the forces of the Habsburg Queen Marie were almost in sight, paid some money to spare the city ... and after doing some minor damage Black Maarten packed up and headed south, taking de Góis and the Mayor of Louvain as hostages with him. The city paid the Mayor's ransom to free him but refused to pay for de Góis who was taken to Picardy with the Duke's forces. De Góis, a man of great religious tolerance and vision, had averted the destruction of Louvain. But what was his own fate? Crane doesn't say.

* * * * *

So how have other writers seen Tuscany? Alice Leccese Powers in *Tuscany in Mind* gathered up some views—and it had the impression that any writer worth his or her salt had come by, from the Shelleys to Charles Dickens, from Tobias Smollett to Bruce Chatwin to the Brownings—but although many mentioned olive orchards and food, festivals and cypress trees, the responses were by no means all complimentary. Take this one from Mary McCarthy:

"The summers are the worst. The valley of the Arno is a natural oven, in which the city bakes, almost without relief, throughout July and August. Venice has the sea; Rome has a breeze and fountains; Bologna has arcades; Siena is high. But the stony heat of Florence has no extenuation. Some people pretend that it is cooler in Fiesole or near the Boboli Garden, but this is not true, or at least not true enough. For the populace and the tourists, the churches are the only refuge, except for UPIM, the local five-and-ten (a Milanese firm), which is air-cooled, and for an icy swimming pool, surrounded by a flower garden, in the Tennis Club of the Cascine that few tourists hear about and that the native population, on the whole, cannot afford. The Boboli Garden is too hot to walk in until sunset, which is the time it closes. In some Italian cities, the art galleries are cool, but the Uffizi, with its small rooms and long glassed-in corridors, is stifling, and the Pitti stands with wings extended in a glaring gravel courtyard, like a great brown flying lizard, basking in the terrible sun. Closed off, behind blinds and

shutters, the city's inhabitants live a nocturnal life by day, like bats, in darkened rooms, wanly lit for the noon meal by electricity. At seven o'clock in the evening, throughout the city, there is a prolonged rumble that sounds as if it were thunder; the blinds are being rolled up to let in the exhausted day. Then the mosquitoes come."

I assume air-conditioning and insect repellent have changed that picture.

* * * * *

October 11: François Mauriac

October 12: James McAuley

October 13: Guy Boothby

October 14: Miles Franklin

October 15: C. P. Snow

Isabella Bird

October 16: Oscar Wilde

October 17: Les Murray

October 18: Heinrich von Kleist

October 19: John le Carré

* * * * *

John le Carré begins his 1968 novel *A Small Town in Germany* thus: "Ten minutes to midnight: a pious Friday in May and a fine river mist lying in the market square. Bonn was a Balkan city, stained and secret, drawn over with tramwire. Bonn was a dark house where someone had died, a house draped in Catholic black and guarded by policemen. Their leather coats glistened in the lamplight, the black flags hung over them like birds. It was as if all but they had heard the alarm and fled. Now a car, now a pedestrian hurried past, and the silence followed like a wake. A tram sounded, but far away. In the grocer's shop, from a pyramid of tins, the handwritten notice advertised the emergency: 'Lay in your store now!' Among the crumbs, marzipan pigs like hairless mice proclaimed the forgotten Saint's Day.

Only the posters spoke. From trees and lanterns they fought their futile war, each at the same height as if that were the regulation; they were printed in radiant print, mounted on hardboard, and draped in thin streamers of black bunting, and they rose at him vividly as he hastened past. 'Send the Foreign Workers Home!' 'Rid us of the Whore Bonn!' 'Unite Germany First, Europe Second!' And the largest was set above them, in a tall streamer right across the street: 'Open the road East, the road West has failed'. His dark eyes paid them no attention. A policeman stamped his boots and grimaced at him, making a joke of the weather; another challenged him but without conviction; and one called 'Guten Abend' but he offered no reply; for he had no mind for any but the plumper figure a hundred paces ahead of him who trotted hurriedly down the wide avenue, entering the shadow of a black flag, emerging as the tallow lamplight took him back.

The dark had made no ceremony of coming nor the grey day of leaving, but the night was crisp for once and smelt of winter. For most months, Bonn is not a place of seasons; the climate is all indoors, a climate of headaches, warm and flat like bottled water, a climate of waiting, of bitter tastes taken from the slow river, of fatigue and reluctant growth, and the air is an exhausted wind fallen on the plain, and the dusk when it comes is nothing but a darkening of the day's mist, a lighting of tube lamps in the howling streets. But on that spring night the winter had come back to visit, slipping up the Rhine valley under cover of the predatory darkness, and it quickened them as they went, hurt them with its unexpected chill. The eyes of the smaller man, straining ahead of him, shed tears of cold.

The avenue curved, taking them past the yellow walls of the University. 'Democrats! Hang the Press Baron!' 'The World belongs to the Young!' 'Let the English Lordlings beg!' 'Axel Springer to the gallows!' 'Long Live Axel Springer!' 'Protest is Freedom'. These posters were done in woodcut on a student press. Overhead the young foliage glittered in a fragmented canopy of green glass. The lights were brighter here, the police fewer. The men strode on, neither faster nor slower; the first busily, with a beadle's flurry. His stride though swift was stogy and awkward, as if he had stepped down from

somewhere grander; a walk replete with a German burgher's dignity. His arms swung shortly at his sides and his back was straight. Did he know he was being followed? His head was held stiff in authority, but authority became him poorly. A man drawn forward by what he saw? Or driven by what lay behind? Was it fear that prevented him from turning? A man of substance does not move his head. The second man stepped lightly in his wake. A sprite, weightless as the dark, slipping through the shadows as if they were a net: a clown stalking a courtier.

They entered a narrow alley; the air was filled with the smells of sour food. Once more the walls cried to them, now in the tell-tale liturgy of German advertising: 'Strong Men Drink Beer!' 'Knowledge is Power, Read Molden Books!' Here for the first time the echo of their footsteps mingled in unmistakable challenge; here for the first time the man of substance seemed to waken, sensing the danger behind. It was no more than a slur, a tiny imperfection in the determined rhythm of his portly march; but it took him to the edge of the pavement, away from the darkness of the walls, and he seemed to find comfort in the brighter places, where the lamplight and the policemen could protect him. Yet his pursuer did not relent. 'Meet us in Hanover!' the poster cried. 'Karfield speaks in Hanover!' 'Meet us in Hanover on Sunday!'

An empty tram rolled past, its windows protected with adhesive mesh. A single church bell began its monotonous chime, a dirge for Christian virtue in an empty city. They were walking again, closer together, but still the man in front did not look back. They rounded another corner; ahead of them, the great spire of the Minster was cut like thin metal against the empty sky. Reluctantly the first chimes were answered by others, until all over the town there rose a slow cacophony of uncertain peals. An Angelus? An air raid? A young policeman, standing in the doorway of the sports shop, bared his head. In the Cathedral porch, a candle burned in a bowl of red glass; to one side stood a religious bookshop. The plump man paused, leaned forward as if to examine something in the window; glanced down the road; and in that moment the light from the window shone full upon his features. The smaller man ran forward: stopped; ran forward again; and was too late."

If you want to know who was being followed, who was doing the following, and why, you will need to read the book. The thing, though, which struck me was that I had never thought of Bonn, capital of West Germany as a 'small town'. It might not have the size and vigour of Berlin, the long trading history of Hamburg, the medieval traditions of Cologne, but how small was small? Or was this tongue-in-cheek? For the diplomatic community it was undoubtedly small.

Bonn had been a provincial town for most of its history. So why was it chosen as the capital when Germany was divided in the wake of World War II? Ian McDougall wrote in *Foreign Correspondent*, "The decision to establish the capital of the German Federal Republic on the Rhine instead of in Frankfurt – at one time a confident candidate – was, it is rumoured and even believed, the outcome of Dr Adenauer's determination not to abandon his roses. Of these he had a magnificent collection in the garden of his house on the eastern bank of the river, and in the course of a long life had given them daily personal attention. A move of the seat of government to Frankfurt, two and a half hours away by road, would have seriously interfered with this harmless hobby. Adenauer was not a man who welcomed interference. As Mayor of Cologne immediately after the occupation he had stood up to General (later Field-Marshal) Sir Gerald Templer. He also stood up to his own German colleagues, all of whom were terrified of him.

"So Bonn became the capital of the new Germany: a smallish university town where even after many years the professors and minor academics found it hard to accept the presence of diplomats, politicians and journalists in vast numbers. The town centre, while continuing to revere its statue of Ludwig van Beethoven who happened to have been born in Bonn, displayed no extra sense of bustle as a result of having been chosen as the nucleus of what was shortly to become the most dynamically expansive economy in the world, those of Japan and the United States not excepted."

* * * * *

Bonn had its share of fame. "What musician, going up the Rhine, would fail to make a call at the

pretty university town of Bonn, where Ludwig van Beethoven was born in the December of 1770? There, to-day, stands a memorial monument, on the pedestal of which is engraved, in all its rugged simplicity and appropriateness, the one word "BEETHOVEN." And there, too, in a side street known as the Bonngasse, one may see the identical house whose lowly walls echoed to the infant cries of this musical giant who bound the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. For many years the house was given over to common and even ignoble uses; but at last, in 1889, it was purchased (for nearly £3000) by a number of Beethoven enthusiasts, and now it is filled with relics of Beethoven interest, which every admirer of the great master loves to see." So wrote J. Cuthbert Hadden in *Master Musicians*. I wondered about the use of 'van' and it is true that Beethoven's grandfather was born in Antwerp. Unfortunately both his grandparents and his father were alcoholics and the young Ludwig was beaten if he didn't slave away at the piano. It wasn't Bonn's fault that he had a miserable childhood but "He left it when he was twenty-two, and he never went back." He moved to Vienna which was then the draw for aspiring young musicians.

Romain Rolland in his biography *Beethoven* suggests that the composer always remembered Bonn with affection. "Though compelled to leave Bonn, and destined to spend nearly the whole of his life in the frivolous city of Vienna with its dull environs, he never forgot the beautiful Rhine valley and the majestic river. "Unser Vater Rhine" (our father Rhine) as he called it, was to him almost human in its sympathy, being like some gigantic soul whose deep thoughts are beyond all human reckoning. No part is more beautiful, more powerful, more calm, than that part where the river caresses the shady and flowered slopes of the old University city of Bonn. There Beethoven spent the first twenty years of his life. There the dreams of his waking heart were born—in the fields, which slope languishingly down to the water side, with their mist-capped poplars, their bushes and their willows and the fruit trees whose roots are steeped in the rapid silent stream. And all along lying gently on the banks, strangely soft, are towns, churches, and even cemeteries, whilst away on the horizon the blue tints of the Seven Mountains show in wild jagged edges against the sky, forming a striking background to the graceful, slender, dream-like silhouettes of old ruined castles. His heart remained ever faithful to the beautiful, natural surroundings of his childhood, and until his very last moment he dreamt of seeing these scenes once again. "My native land, the beautiful country where I first saw the light of day; it is always as clear and as beautiful in my eyes as when I left it." He never saw it again."

I hope Beethoven's "beautiful country" is not a sea of concrete high-rise now ...

* * * * *

October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

October 21: Ursula Le Guin

October 22: Doris Lessing

Thomas Hughes

October 23: Gore Vidal

October 24: Nairda Lyne

October 25: Thomas Macauley

October 26: John Romeril

October 27: Dylan Thomas

October 28: 'Tasma'

October 29: John Keats

October 30: Paul Valéry

October 31: Dick Francis

November 1: Christopher Brennan

November 2: Odysseus Elytis

November 3: Martin Cruz Smith

November 4: Eden Phillpotts

Eleanor Atkinson (d)

Eleanor Atkinson wrote several books for children and some school textbooks. But she is remembered for just one book. *Greyfriars Bobby*. It is still, more than a hundred years later, a delight. Its hero was a real dog, a little Skye terrier called Bobby, who refused to leave the graveside of his owner. His faithful vigil in the cemetery of Greyfriars Kirk in Edinburgh made him famous. Atkinson changed some things, for instance his owner was not an old Pentlands shepherd but an old night watchman in the capital, of whom Emma Heathcote-James writes in *Psychic Pets*, “John Gray, a gardener, together with his wife Jess and son John, arrived in Edinburgh around 1850. Unable to find work as a gardener, he avoided the workhouse by joining the Edinburgh Police Force as a night watchman. To keep him company through the long winter nights, John took on a partner, a diminutive Skye Terrier, his ‘watchdog’, called Bobby. Together John and Bobby became a familiar sight trudging through the old, cobbled streets of Edinburgh. Through thick and thin, winter and summer, they were faithful friends.

“The years on the streets appear to have taken their toll on John, as he was treated by the police surgeon for tuberculosis. He eventually died of the disease on 15 February 1858 and was buried in Greyfriars Kirkyard. Bobby soon touched the hearts of the local residents when he refused to leave his master’s grave, even in the worst weather conditions. The gardener and keeper of Greyfriars tried on many occasions to evict him from the Kirkyard. In the end, he gave up and provided a shelter for Bobby by placing sacking beneath two tablestones at the side of John Gray’s grave.”

Atkinson also gives Bobby thoughts and feelings. But rather than sentimentalising him this gives the little dog a sense of authenticity. It is hard now to see Bobby’s life in terms other than those of her story. More remarkably she was born and brought up on the prairies of the United States and spent most of her teaching and writing life in Chicago. Readers knowledgeable about Edinburgh’s geography have pointed up various small mistakes. Yet the pleasure of her recreation of the little dog’s life still shines through. Greyfriars Bobby has a monument in the graveyard by the church. He died on the 14th January 1872.

She sketches in the churchyard, Bobby’s home for fourteen years, throughout the book.

“Greyfriars’ two kirks formed together, under one continuous roof, a long, low, buttressed building without tower or spire. The new kirk was of Queen Anne’s day, but the old kirk was built before even the Pilgrims set sail for America. It had been but one of several sacred buildings, set in a monastery garden that sloped pleasantly to the open valley of the Grassmarket, and looked up the Castle heights unhindered. In Bobby’s day this garden had shrunk to a long, narrow, high-piled burying-ground, that extended from the rear of the line of buildings that fronted on the market, up the slope, across the hilltop, and to where the land began to fall away again, down the Boroughmuir. From the Grassmarket, kirk and kirkyard lay hidden behind and above the crumbling grandeur of noble halls and mansions that had fallen to the grimiest tenements of Edinburgh’s slums. From the end of the bridge-approach there was a glimpse of massive walls, of pointed windows, and of monumental tombs through a double-leafed gate of wrought iron, that was alcoved and wedged in between the ancient guildhall of the candlemakers and a row of prosperous little shops in Greyfriars Place.”

“By a gesture the caretaker directed the bearers to the right, past the church, and on down the crowded slope to the north, that was circled about by the backs of the tenements in the Grassmarket and Candlemaker Row. The box was lowered at once, and the pall-bearers hastily departed to delayed dinners. The police men had urgent duties elsewhere. Only the Bible-reader remained to see the grave partly filled in, and to try to persuade Bobby to go away with him. But the little dog resisted with such piteous struggles that the man put him down again.”

“Encroached upon, as it was, by unlovely life, Greyfriars kirkyard was yet a place of solitude and peace. The building had the dignity that only old age can give. It had lost its tower by an explosion of gunpowder stored there in war time, and its walls and many of the ancient tombs bore the mark of fire

and shot. Within the last decade some of the Gothic openings had been filled with beautiful memorial windows. Despite the horrors and absurdities and mutilation of much of the funeral sculpturing, the kirkyard had a sad distinction, such as became its fame as Scotland's Westminster. And there was one heavenward outlook and heavenly view. Over the tallest decaying tenement one could look up to the Castle of dreams on the crag, and drop the glance all the way down the pinnacled crest of High Street, to the dark and deserted Palace of Holyrood. After nightfall the turreted heights wore a luminous crown, and the steep ridge up to it twinkled with myriad lights."

"As soon as the crocuses pushed their green noses through the earth in the spring the congregation began to linger among the graves, for to see the old burying-ground renew its life is a peculiar promise of the resurrection. By midsummer visitors were coming from afar, some even from overseas, to read the quaint inscriptions on the old tombs, or to lay tributes of flowers on the graves of poets and religious heroes. It was not until the late end of such a day that Bobby could come out of hiding to stretch his cramped legs. Then it was that tenement children dropped from low windows, over the tombs, and ate their suppers of oat-cake there, in the fading light."

"Had the grave of his haunting been on the Pentlands or in one of the outlying cemeteries of the city Bobby must have been known to few of his generation, and to fame not at all. But among churchyards Greyfriars was distinguished. One of the historic show-places of Edinburgh, and in the very heart of the Old Town, it was never missed by the most hurried tourist, seldom left unvisited, from year to year, by the oldest resident. Names on its old tombs had come to mean nothing to those who read them, except as they recalled memorable records of love, of inspiration, of courage, of self-sacrifice. And this being so, it touched the imagination to see, among the marbles that crumbled towards the dust below, a living embodiment of affection and fidelity. Indeed, it came to be remarked, as it is remarked today, although four decades have gone by, that no other spot in Greyfriars was so much cared for as the grave of a man of whom nothing was known except that the life and love of a little dog was consecrated to his memory."

"Greyfriars on a dripping autumn evening! A pensive hour and season, everything memorable brooded there. Crouched back in shadowy ranks, the old tombs were draped in mystery. The mist was swirled by the wind, and smoke smeared out over their dim shapes. Where families sat close about scant suppers, the lights of candles and crusie lamps were blurred. The faintest halo hung above the Castle head. Infrequent footsteps hurried by the gate. There was the rattle of a belated cart, the ring of a distant church bell. But even on such nights the casements were opened and little faces looked into the melancholy kirkyard. Candles glimmered for a moment on the murk, and sweetly and clearly the tenement bairns called down:

'A gude nicht to ye, Bobby.'

* * * * *

Alice Munro wrote in *The View from Castle Rock*: "The Etrick Valley lies about fifty miles due south of Edinburgh, and thirty or so miles north of the English border, which runs close to the wall Hadrian built to keep out the wild people of the north. During the reign of Antoninus the Romans pushed farther, and built a line of fortification between the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth, but that was not so lasting. The land between the two walls has been occupied for a long time by a mix of people—Celtic people, some of whom came from Ireland and were called Scots, also Anglo-Saxons from the South, Norse from across the North Sea, and possibly some leftover Picts as well.

"The high stony farm where my family lived for some time in the Etrick Valley was called Far-Hope. The word hope, as used in the local geography, is an old word, a Norse word—Norse, Anglo-Saxon, and Gaelic words being all mixed up together in that part of the country, as you would expect, with some old Brythonic thrown in to indicate an early Welsh presence. Hope means a bay, not a bay filled with water but with land, partly enclosed by hills, which in this case are the high bare hills, the near mountains of the Southern Uplands. The Black Knowe, Bodesbeck Law, Etrick Pen—there you have the three big hills, with the word hill in three languages. Some of these hills are now being

reforested, with plantations of Sitka spruce, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they would have been bare, or mostly bare—the great Forest of Ettrick, the hunting grounds of the Kings of Scotland, having been cut down and turned into pasture or waste heath a century or two before.

“The height of land above Far-Hope, which stands right at the end of the valley, is the spine of Scotland, marking the division of the waters that flow to the west into the Solway Firth and the Atlantic Ocean, from those that flow east into the North Sea. Within ten miles to the north is the country’s most famous waterfall, the Grey Mare’s Tail. Five miles from Moffat, which would be the market town to those living at the valley head, is the Devil’s Beef Tub, a great cleft in the hills believed to be the hiding place for stolen cattle—English cattle, that is, taken by the reivers in the lawless sixteenth century. In the lower Ettrick Valley was Aikwood, the home of Michael Scott, the philosopher and wizard of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who appears in Dante’s *Inferno*. And if that were not enough, William Wallace, the guerrilla hero of the Scots, is said to have hidden out here from the English, and there is a story of Merlin—Merlin—being hunted down and murdered, in the old forest, by Ettrick shepherds.

“(As far as I know, my ancestors, generation after generation, were Ettrick shepherds. It may sound odd to have shepherds employed in a forest, but it seems that hunting forests were in many places open glades.)

“Nevertheless the valley disappointed me the first time I saw it. Places are apt to do that when you’ve set them up in your imagination. The time of year was very early spring, and the hills were brown, or a kind of lilac brown, reminding me of the hills around Calgary. Ettrick Water was running fast and clear, but it was hardly as wide as the Maitland River, which flows past the farm where I grew up, in Ontario. The circles of stones which I had at first taken to be interesting remnants of Celtic worship were too numerous and well kept up to be anything but handy sheep pens.”

Ettrick Church also disappointed her too, not least because it was raining and the church was only built in 1824. But inside the churchyard ... “There I found, first, the gravestone of William Laidlaw, my direct ancestor, born at the end of the seventeenth century, and known as Will O’Phaup. This was a man who took on, at least locally, something of the radiance of myth, and he managed that at the very last time in history—that is, in the history of the people of the British Isles—when a man could do so. The same stone bears the names of his daughter Margaret Laidlaw Hogg, who upbraided Sir Walter Scott, and of Robert Hogg, her husband, the tenant of Ettrickhall. Then right next to it I saw the stone of the writer James Hogg, who was their son and Will O’Phaup’s grandson. He was known as The Ettrick Shepherd.”

Some of the Laidlaws left Scotland for Canada and some remained behind. James Hogg wrote *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. And Sir Walter Scott managed to offend Margaret Laidlaw Hogg by publishing some of her old ballads in his *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. She didn’t mind to share them but she didn’t want them printed in a book. She thought that would make people give up singing and reciting ...

I had another glimpse of Ettrick in Marion Lochhead’s *Portrait of the Scott Country* and its other poets: “A third poetess of the Borders is Lady John Scott whose life nearly spanned the century, from 1810 till 1900; she was born Alicia Spottiswoode. Among her delightful songs are a version of the “Annie Laurie”, and one, most fitting for this account of the Borders, called “Ettrick”; a song of youth and love, age and inevitable sorrow.

When we first rade down Ettrick,
Our bridles were ringing, our hearts were dancing,
The waters were singing, the sun was glancing ...

...

When we next rade down Ettrick,
The day was dying, the wild birds calling,
The wind was sighing, the leaves were falling ...

...

When I last rode down Ettrick,
The winds were shifting, the storm was waking,
The snow was drifting, my heart was aching,
For we never again were to ride together
In sun or in storm on the mountain heather.

The lyric and elegiac note, as old almost as the land and the rivers, is heard in modern as in the ancient poetry of the Borders.”

* * * * *

“He will not come,”
Said the gentle child ;
And she patted the poor dog’s head ;
And she pleasantly called him,
And fondly smiled :
But he heeded her not
In his anguish wild,
Nor arose from his lowly bed.

’Twas his master’s grave
Where he chose to rest—
He guarded it night and day ;
The love that glowed
In his grateful breast,
For the friend who had fed,
Controlled, caressed,
Might never fade away.

And when the long grass,
Rustled near,
Beneath some hastening tread,
He started up
With a quivering ear,
For he thought ’twas the step
Of his master dear,
Returning from the dead.

But sometimes, when
A storm drew nigh,
And the clouds were dark and fleet,
He tore the turf
With a mournful cry,
As if he would force
His way or die,
To his much-loved master’s feet.

So there, through the
Summer’s heat, he lay,
Till Autumn nights grew bleak,
Till his eyes grew dim

With his hope's decay,
And he pined, and pined,
And wasted away,
A skeleton gaunt and weak.

And oft the pitying
Children brought
Their offerings of meat and bread,
And to coax him away
To their homes they sought ;
But his buried master
He ne'er forgot,
Nor strayed from his lonely bed.

Cold winter came,
With an angry sway,
And the snow lay deep and sore ;
Then his moaning grew fainter
Day by day,
Till, close where the broken
Tomb-stone lay,
He fell, to rise no more.

And when he struggled
With mortal pain,
And Death was by his side,
With one loud cry,
That shook the plain,
He called for his master—
But called in vain ;
Then stretched himself, and died.

'The Dog at his Master's Grave' by Mrs Sigourney in *Coles Funny Picture Book No 2*. And, yes, the monument is still there.

* * * * *

November 5: Ella Wheeler Wilcox

November 6: Barry Dickens

November 7: Albert Camus

November 8: Bram Stoker

* * * * *

Bram Stoker is usually assumed, though without supporting evidence, to have based his *Dracula* on the Eastern European tyrant Vlad the Impaler—and it is true that his brother George Stoker spent some time as a surgeon in the Turkish Army. But Peter Haining and Peter Tremayne in *The Un-Dead* look much closer to home for influences. They point out that Stoker spent his first 31 years in Ireland and never visited Eastern Europe.

And they point, on the one hand, to Bram's familiarity with the popular Irish literature concerning vampires; principally Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's famous novel of a female vampire *Carmilla* which came out more than 20 years before Bram's famous book and Dion Boucicault's play 'The Vampire' which was possibly based on Dr John Polidori's story of a vampire. In fact there were quite a few vampire tales wandering around. The weird, the macabre, the unexplained were common

fare in the late Victorian era.

On the other hand, Bram's mother was a lively teller of Irish folk tales and legends; as were family friends William and Jane Wilde, Oscar's parents. Both William and Jane wrote of the superstitions and strange tales they had collected. Haining and Tremayne write: "The fact that Sir William and Lady Wilde were experts on Irish folklore and mythology was, we believe, an essential ingredient in the creation of Bram's major weird novel — Dracula.

"It has been accepted without question that Bram Stoker took all his ideas for his vampire novel from the traditions of the Carpathian region of Eastern Europe. Indeed, when Irish actor, Ivan Stokes Dixon, once argued that Dracula owed more in essence to Ireland than to Rumania, he was not regarded with any degree of seriousness."

They go on to the key question: "Was there a vampire tradition in Ireland? The short answer is that there are such traditions in most ancient cultures and Ireland is no exception. And, in fact, it can be argued that Bram Stoker, though a city man from Dublin, was well placed to hear stories of the deamhan-fhola or blood-sucking demons which peopled the shadowy places of the rural Ireland. Whatever he may initially have picked up from his mother, there is surely no doubt that over convivial dinners with the Wildes on dark winter evenings, Sir William and Lady Wilde recounted to Bram tales of the neamh-mhairbh or the Un-Dead that permeate Irish legends and folklore."

They also focus on another source. "It has been suggested by the prolific Irish author and novelist Cathal Ó Sándair (1922-1996), in 'Dracula Domharfa' (Dracula the Immortal), Irish Times, 18 May 1993, that while at Trinity College, Bram undoubtedly came across and read Seathrún Céitinn's Foras Feasa ar Éireann, the History of Ireland, written between 1629 and 1631. Dr Céitinn dwelt on the subject of the neamh-mhairbh (the Un-Dead) in Volume I, Chapter 10."

And "It was Ó Sándair, writing to the authors in April 1995, who also made the observation that Bram might have been guided to use the name of the historical Wallachian hero — Dracula — because it sounded the same as the Irish droch-fhola (pronounced drok'ola), bad blood; he might even have connected the name with a Kerry folk-tale about 'Dún Dreach-Fhola' (pronounced drak'ola), the castle of blood visage. The castle was said to be high up in a lonely pass among the Macgillicuddy's Reeks, a range in Co. Kerry which contains Ireland's highest mountain." And George Stoker was married to the daughter of Richard Macgillicuddy, The Macgillicuddy of the Reeks.

All this is suggestive but as Stoker left no notes to tell people how he came to create his character we can only guess. Or can we? Bram called his novel The Un-Dead and only changed the name just before publication. And his Dracula was not a mass-murderer. He was a discriminating almost fastidious man living under the burden of being unable to die and stay dead. He is a figure of legend and superstition rather than a recreation of a figure in history. I think, only think, that his Dracula owed as much to Ireland as any remote castle in Transylvania.

* * * * *

But Roumania benefits from Bram Stoker's novel. And why not? Bram Stoker had not been there but he imagined his hero Jonathan Harker into a mysterious and spine-tingling scene. He writes, "Having had some time at my disposal when in London, I had visited the British Museum, and made search among the books and maps in the library regarding Transylvania; it had struck me that some foreknowledge of the country could hardly fail to have some importance in dealing with a nobleman of that country. I find that the district he named is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states, Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina, in the midst of the Carpathian mountains; one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on any map or work giving the exact locality of the Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey maps; but I found that Bistritz, the post town named by count Dracula, is a fairly well-known place."

People try to dissuade him but he sets out on the last part of his journey. "I soon lost sight and recollection of ghostly fears in the beauty of the scene as we drove along, although had I known the

language, or rather languages, which my fellow-passengers were speaking, I might not have been able to throw them off so easily. Before us lay a green sloping land full of forests and woods, with here and there steep hills, crowned with clumps of trees or with farmhouses, the blank gable end to the road. There was everywhere a bewildering mass of fruit blossom—apple, plum, pear, cherry; and as we drove by I could see the green grass under the trees spangled with the fallen petals. In and out amongst these green hills of what they call here the “Mittel Land” ran the road, losing itself as it swept round the grassy curve, or was shut out by the straggling ends of pine woods, which here and there ran down the hillsides like tongues of flame.” ... “Beyond the green swelling hills of the Mittel Land rose mighty slopes of forest up to the lofty steeps of the Carpathians themselves. Right and left of us they towered, with the afternoon sun falling full upon them and bringing out all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks, green and brown where grass and rock mingled, and an endless perspective of jagged rock and pointed crags, till these were themselves lost in the distance, where the snowy peaks rose grandly. Here and there seemed mighty rifts in the mountains, through which, as the sun began to sink, we saw now and again the white gleam of falling water. One of my companions touched my arm as we swept round the base of a hill and opened up the lofty, snow-covered peak of a mountain, which seemed, as we wound on our serpentine way, to be right before us:—

“Look! Isten szek!”—“God’s seat!”—and he crossed himself reverently.”

It is a landscape he probably did find in the British Museum and sundry libraries but he cleverly juxtaposes beauty and pleasant views with a sense of doubt and menace.

* * * * *

Mary Drewery in her book about Richard Wurmbrand, *The Man Who Came Back*, “Winter is a bitter season in Bucharest. The crivat, a frost-hard wind from the north-east, blows down across the plains from Siberia bringing gnawing cold to Rumania’s capital. The streets are mantled in snow; the string of lakes round the city’s northern perimeter gleam dully like pewter under their coating of ice.”

It was on a Sunday in 1948, February the 29th, that Wurmbrand was snatched from the cold streets of Bucharest. “A little later, from the plank bed that provided his only seating accommodation, Richard Wurmbrand examined the tiny, bare, concrete cell in which he was confined. The only illumination came from a small, barred window so high up in the wall that he could not reach it to see out. If the thin sunshine still brought a promise of spring to Bucharest on its wide plain between the mountains and the sea, he would have no means of telling, for the grimy panes acted more as a blind than a window.

“Wryly, he contemplated the new name he had been given: Vasile Georgescu. It was as if, in England, he had been called ‘John Smith’. The Communists were determined that he should lose his identity under a common name. Even his guards were not to know how famous was the man they were watching, in case they were questioned outside. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, like so many other Christians and Jews and intellectuals in Communist-occupied Rumania, was to disappear without trace.” Richard and Sabina Wurmbrand survived.

* * * * *

Heinz G. Kosalik in his novel *The Last Carpathian Wolf* has four German soldiers during WW2 trying to avoid capture by the arriving Russians and make their way through the Carpathian Mountains towards home. But these Carpathians have a different fear, apart from people with guns: “By now it was spring, and Easter was approaching. The meadows in the valley began to blossom, although they were still snow-covered up in the mountains, where the winter’s cold seemed to be conserved by the rock walls. The shepherds drove the lambs out into the first valley meadows clear of snow, but many lambs were torn to pieces by the wolves roaming hungrily through the countryside, and still prowling near the villages in search of food. Their howling pierced the clear spring air as they ruthlessly hunted and were in turn hunted.

“In the church, preparations were being made for Easter. The old priest, with three boys to help

him, polished the golden crucifix and the frames of the icons. Stalls were set up in the village square and along the main road. Travelling vendors and gypsies with hand-made merry-go-rounds came to the town. Stalls for wine and ices, lemonade and confectionaries, trimmed the edge of the square, where the youth of the village would be dancing. A gypsy with a long black beard appeared in Tanescu, with a great brown dancing bear, which he dragged behind him on a chain fastened to a ring that went through the bear's nose.

“In the houses, the villagers were getting out their festive attire: the men's wide, knee-length shirts with sleeves going down to the wrists, and shoulders, cuffs and seams decorated with much embroidery. The narrow, tube-like white trousers of best sheep's wool had been washed and bleached in the sun.”

Now, though, the wolves and bears are endangered species and Dracula has moved to Hollywood so what will the tourists be taken to see? Dracula was too good a draw not to be used. But it is Bran Castle, a summer residence of the country's long gone Royal family north of Bucharest, which has been given this honour. The gothic type palace has its interest and its beauty for visitors but I wonder if any of them after a close reading of Stoker's novel really feel the place might once have belonged to Dracula? My main relief was that they don't seem to have been tempted to dress someone up and give him white pointy teeth and very red lips ...

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November 9: Ivan Turgenev

November 10: Martin Luther

November 11: Feodor Dostoyevsky

November 12: Janette Turner Hospital

November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson

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One of the most famous books about Samoa is Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*. But Derek Freeman in *Margaret Mead and Samoa* takes many of her ideas and assertions to task. He writes, “On the morning of 31 August 1925, “remembering Stevenson's rhapsodies,” Mead was up early for her Matson liner's arrival in the romantically remote islands of Samoa. The “whole picture,” alack, was badly skewed by the presence of numerous battleships of the American Pacific fleet, with airplanes screaming overhead, and a naval band playing ragtime. She was given a room in a ramshackle hotel by the edge of Pago Pago harbor, which Somerset Maugham had described a few years previously in his wry tale of the downfall of a prudish missionary. Margaret Mead's Samoan researches, which were to have such a profound influence on twentieth-century anthropology, were about to begin” and this reminder that Margaret Mead was in American Samoa and Robert Louis Stevenson was in Western Samoa is important. Samoa by complicated means became a German colony in the 19th century. But under the Tripartite Treaty of 1899 the USA acquired, and keeps, one part as a colony. The other, German, part was invaded by NZ at Britain's behest at the beginning of WWI, and eventually became an independent nation.

I found Freeman's book an interesting insight into Samoan society but I had the feeling that he and Margaret Mead were ships that passed in the night. To a considerable extent they were looking at Samoa in vastly different ways. He dwells predominantly on adult male Samoan society. Mead's focus was adolescent girls. He predominantly uses written records, letters, government and church materials, statistics, she was primarily there to observe, listen and record what she was told. In other words his approach was an historical one. Hers was an oral one. He wrote his book in the 1980s, she wrote hers in the 1920s. And she was there as the Americans moved in to take over the former German colony. It was a time of adjustment to American ways and Margaret Mead was undoubtedly seen as part of this adjustment process. And she having come of age against the backdrop of the carnage of WWI undoubtedly was predisposed to see Samoan life as peaceful even if all those American warships hadn't been there to keep the peace.

Freeman suggests that the girls lied to Mead about their sex lives. But I found this hard to believe. I cannot see their parents, their elders, their church pastor, their older siblings, being unaware that this material was going to become part of a book—even if the girls didn't know or care. I think rather that her arrival in their village was tremendously exciting. For the first time their quiet relatively uneventful lives were of interest to this exotic stranger. It must have been a heady experience and I can understand them talking, perhaps vying with one another to sound more interesting, of wishes, ideas, plans, hopes, dreams, even perhaps the hope that she would provide a way for them to meet and marry these young American men arriving in such numbers and being taken away to exciting lives elsewhere.

And there is another problem in there. Margaret Mead did not pretend that she was writing a definitive work of anthropology on Samoa. Her brief was very limited, her time there was limited, her language skills were still rudimentary. It was, if you like, an introduction in which she drew some conclusions but which obviously should never have been taken by anyone as a definitive work on Samoan society. She cannot be blamed for the way other people used it.

While I was pondering on all this I came upon a clipping of *The Age's* Monthly Review, which I had kept for a different reason, and finding in it a review of Freeman's book by Peter Sheldrake. He clearly isn't impressed by Freeman's effort to demolish Mead's book but he has a more fundamental problem with both books. "The real myth is anthropology itself. Anthropology is essentially a colonial creation, a means by which Europeans could salve their conscience over the rape (or perhaps the manual defloration) of other cultures by preserving them on paper. The enterprise was shaky from the beginning, for seldom did the anthropologist get there before the colonialist (whether administrator or man of God) and from the beginning the task became the reconstruction of the way things were. The portrayal of the exotic, and the attempt to convey the unique and yet integrated nature of other societies, their symbols and their processes, has proved conceptually more and more difficult to sustain, the more so as we begin to run out of "new" primitive peoples to describe. Freeman's shadow boxing will certainly give him a brief degree of public exposure, but he has missed the real target, the opportunity to critically evaluate anthropology itself."

And neither book is going to tell you what you will find if you book a fortnight's holiday to Samoa. So what of the holidaymaker, who may be looking for the chance to meet lively young Samoan women?

* * * * *

I was surprised to learn that Robert Louis Stevenson came to Samoa by 'accident'. Leslie Thomas in *My World of Islands* wrote, "Robert Louis Stevenson was already famous and wealthy when he arrived with his entire family in Tahiti in 1888, searching for a climate that he hoped might ease his tuberculosis. He loved the island and its brown people and walked round the village of Tautira in striped pyjamas. The family lived royally in the chief's house where, contrary to his voluptuous surroundings, Stevenson worked hard on his grim Scottish novel *The Master of Ballantrae*. His publishers, however, suggested that Samoa rather than Tahiti might be a better place for their prize author since the mail ships from Australia to England called there regularly. So Stevenson went to Samoa. They called him Tusitala, 'The Teller of Tales'. And he is buried there, like Rupert Brooke, beneath the epitaph he composed for himself. Today the church at Tautira, in Tahiti, has a lasting gift from the writer's mother – a silver communion service that is still used each Sunday."

So what is his self-penned epitaph? Thomas writes, "Robert Louis Stevenson's epitaph is, curiously, a misquotation. The original version of his poem 'Requiem' has the line 'Home is the sailor, Home from Sea' which on his grave has become 'the sea'."

Men go 'to sea' so 'from sea' would be equally applicable. But A. E. Housman later wrote a poem he called 'R.L.S.':

Home is the sailor, home from the sea:
Her far-borne canvas furled
The ship pours shining on the quay

The plunder of the world.

Home is the hunter from the hill:
Fast in the boundless snare
All flesh lies taken at his will
And every fowl of air.

'Tis evening on the moorland free,
The starlit wave is still:
Home is the sailor from the sea,
The hunter from the hill.

So I wondered if the epitaph was actually taken from Housman's poem, not Stevenson's? It would depend when that memorial was created. And, curiously, Housman was only nine years younger than Stevenson so his affection for Stevenson would not have been nurtured in the nursery on Stevenson's poems for children. It must have been an affection for his adult books. Or perhaps he knew Stevenson personally ...

Frank McFlynn in his biography of Stevenson writes, "According to local lore, Vailima had once belonged to a blind Scottish blacksmith, and had been cultivated in the past, but the jungle had reclaimed its own until Moors's gang began work. The cleared area was still only partially recovered, as the labour gangs had worked round the biggest obstacles. Still standing were a number of giant trees, mainly banyans, up to one hundred and fifty feet in height and thirty feet in girth: these provided a nature garden in miniature, for their trunks were festooned with creepers, orchids grew in the forks of their branches, fruit-eating bats roosted in the high places until dusk, and the foliage played host to hundreds of rich-throated birds. On each side of the clearing was a stream and one of them, constantly fed by a waterfall and fringed by wild orange trees, converted naturally into a deep clear swimming pool. The house and clearing faced the sea, and the surge and thunder of the booming surf were clearly though distantly audible. On one side of them the forested slopes rose to Mount Vaea, 1,300' feet high, and on the other they could see clear to the distant blue mountains of Atua." Stevenson's house is now a museum and open to visitors.

And what of that epitaph? McFlynn writes, "Since Louis had to be buried by 3 p.m. next day, according to the advice of the doctors on the decomposition of corpses in the tropics, Fanny enlisted the help of the Samoan chiefs who had built the Road of the Loving Heart to cut a path up to the summit of Mount Vaea, Louis's chosen resting place. By early afternoon on the 4th the toiling work party had completed the task. At 1 p.m. the Samoan pallbearers began the difficult ascent – made more difficult because they held the coffin shoulder-high. At the top, the service was read and the coffin lowered into place; later, a large tomb built of cement blocks was placed over the grave. In 1897 a plinth was added, flanked by two bronze plaques. One, in Samoan, bore the legend: 'The Tomb of Tusitala', followed by Ruth's speech to Naomi: '... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, will I die ...' On the other side was the 'Requiem' which Louis had written many years before:

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig the grave and let me lie
Glad did I live and gladly lie,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me;
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from sea,
And the hunter home from the hill."

It would seem that someone decided 'the sea'

would sound better ...

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November 14: Karen Armstrong

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“When the guide switches off his flashlight in the underground caverns of Lascaux in the Dordogne, the effect is overwhelming. ‘The senses suddenly are wiped out,’ one visitor recalled, ‘the millennia drop away ... you were never in darker darkness in your life. It was—I don’t know, just a complete knock out. You don’t know whether you are looking north, south, east or west. All orientation is gone, and you are in a darkness that never saw the sun.’ Normal daylight consciousness extinguished, you feel a ‘timeless dissociation from every concern and requirement of the upper world that you have left behind’. Before reaching the first of the caves decorated by our Palaeolithic ancestors in the Stone Age, seventeen thousand years ago, visitors have to stumble for some eighty feet down a sloping tunnel, sixty-five feet below ground level, penetrating ever more deeply into the bowels of the earth. Then the guide suddenly turns the beam of his torch on to the ceiling and the painted animals seem to emerge from the depths of the rock. A strange beast with gravid belly and long pointed horns walks behind a line of wild cattle, horses, deer and bulls that seem simultaneously in motion and at rest.

In all there are about six hundred frescoes and fifteen hundred engravings in the Lascaux labyrinth. There is a powerful belling black stag, a leaping cow, and a procession of horses moving in the opposite direction. At the entrance to another long passage known as the Nave, a frieze of elegant deer has been painted above a rocky ledge so that they appear to be swimming. We see these images far more clearly than the Palaeolithic artists did, since they had to work by the light of small flickering lamps, perched precariously on scaffolding that has left holes in the surface of the wall. They often painted new pictures over old images even though there was ample space nearby. It seems that location was crucial, and that for reasons we cannot fathom, some places were deemed more suitable than others.”

And Karen Armstrong beginning *The Case For God* adds, “There are about three hundred decorated caves in this region of southern France and northern Spain.” These caves came into my life many years ago through a fascinating book called *Ten Years Under the Earth* by Norbert Casteret. I liked it that he went caving with his wife and his mother rather than leaving them home to cook his dinner and worry over his safety. He also tells the story of ‘The True Source of the Garonne’: “One day at school, when I was about eight, we had for our geography lesson ‘The Garonne and its Tributaries.’ My class-mates stood up one after another to repeat in a rapid monotone: ‘The Garonne rises in Spain at the foot of the Val d’Aran.’

“I got up in my turn, and I can still hear the giggles that greeted my opening sentence: ‘The Garonne rises in Spain among the glaciers of the Monte Maladetta.’ The teacher stopped me to ask what book I had learned the lesson from. I had to confess that I had preferred an old geography full of pictures to our own dry school-book.

“Our kind old teacher smilingly explained that geographers had changed their minds. The former ascription of the Garonne to the Monte Maladetta was a mistake. He also took occasion to tell us what a delicate matter it sometimes was to find a stream’s true source; he cited, among others, the Nile, whose rise was still mysterious.

“I should have been the last to imagine that a quarter-century later I should answer the ancient riddle of the Garonne.”

In his underground explorations he began to wonder if a river he had found there in the French caves might actually connect to the Garonne or even to be the Garonne in its early stages before it burst out of a Spanish hillside. The Spanish wanted to dam the river. But if the river was part of a complex underground system in France this could be a disaster. He got permission to put a quantity of Fluroscein into the underground river system. If there was no connection then this green dye would not appear in the Spanish river. But, probably to the dismay of the Spanish, green water gushed out of the

hillside. The headwaters of the Garonne were most definitely in France. This created a diplomatic flurry as it was the first case of its kind, but the Spanish finally backed down and cancelled the dam.

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John Sturrock in *The French Pyrenees* writes, “This is a book about the French Pyrenees, with only the barest digressions over the top into Spain. It suits me very well to be thus one-sided, because I find the French Pyrenees more interesting and hospitable than the Spanish. The two sides of the chain are remarkably different. In France, the Pyrenees rise up with a splendid suddenness as you drive towards them, especially if you have come across the flatnesses of Aquitaine and the region of Landes. The transition from plain to mountains on the French side is quick and surprising, and on clear days the spread of high peaks can make a stunning horizon from towns such as Pau, themselves only a few hundred feet above sea level. On the Spanish side the mountains take longer to flatten out and the eventual plains are quite high anyway, so that the heartening sense of an abrupt elevation into the highlands is lost. There is simply more of the Pyrenees on that side than on the French; indeed two-thirds of the 55,000 square kilometers which the mountains are estimated to cover are in Spain. And because the climate on the two sides is markedly different, so is the condition of the land; mountain greenness is for the most part to be had in France, where the rain falls, carried in plenty by the north-west winds. The Spanish side is contrastingly dry, a barer, tougher country, lending plausibility to the old romantic claim that Africa begins at the Pyrenees, as in a way it did during the prolonged Islamic occupation of the peninsula.”

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C. F. D’Arcy, later Archbishop D’Arcy, wrote of botanizing and climbing expeditions in his youth in *The Adventures of a Bishop* often with William Colgan (my great-grandfather) and Nathaniel Colgan (my gr-great-uncle) as companions: “We did not limit ourselves to Ireland. A few expeditions in the Scottish Highlands and to Wales helped to extend our knowledge of the flora of these islands. But, for my part, I often looked with longing eyes at maps of the great ranges of the Continent, and determined to see something of heights loftier than our native hills. Our first venture was to the Pyrenees. Saving up all our available money, we managed to get enough to last us, with care, for some weeks. There were four of us altogether: the two Colgans, and another friend, Kinsley Doyle, completed the party.

“Nathaniel Colgan, the oldest of us and the most experienced, was our leader. A good linguist, he could talk French and Spanish, the needful tongues, with sufficient fluency. He had travelled already in several parts of Europe, and had gained some experience of Alpine climbing. We were proud of the fact that, with two friends, he had climbed Mont Blanc without a guide. It was something, in those days, to travel with a man who had accomplished such a feat. He was indeed, as I found afterwards on many occasions, a climber of rare ability. Kinsley Doyle was little more than a boy, though strong and agile.

“Making for the centre of the range with an eye to the Maladetta, we chose Luchon, lovely Luchon, as our point of departure for the higher hills. Our first effort was to cross the Port d’Oo without a guide, trusting to a map and Packe’s *Guide*. We failed, for the clouds came down at the critical moment. A terrific thunderstorm came on, and, getting quite lost in a chaos of crags and gorges, we were preparing to spend the night on the mountains, when a sudden rent in the clouds showed us, across a deep valley, a peculiar gap in the mountain-wall which we had noted on the way up as marking our path down. In a moment, before the curtain of cloud fell again, we had taken the direction with our compass, and, after some hours scrambling found ourselves on the Col d’Espingo with a well-marked path under our feet. But it was now dark, for night had fallen, clouds were thick about us, the path soon became quite invisible, our only light was an occasional flash of lightning. Nevertheless we groped our way down, keeping the roar of the great cascade on our left, and about midnight found ourselves at the Cabane which was then, as now, the only place where the traveller could find shelter in that delightful valley.

“This was the first of our adventures. But, from that day on, every day had its adventure. Crossing the Port de Venasque, we made our way to that quaint old Spanish town, which we made our headquarters for some time. The old *posada*, with its courteous host, Antonio Saura, and Teresa, the cook and maid of all work, reminded us at every turn of some incident in *Don Quixote*. And, indeed, it may well have been much the same as in the time of Cervantes. For, so far as we could discover, the march of progress had stopped in Venasque some time in the seventeenth century. Only one house in the town showed any sign of what are called modern improvements. Antonio explained, with some degree of misgiving, that it belonged to “the Liberal.” He also besought us earnestly not to cross the boundary, from Aragon into Catalonia, for, he explained, the Catalans of those parts were very religious and very wicked.

“It was in the month of July that we found ourselves in Venasque. In that enclosed valley, with the mountain barrier shutting out all cool airs from north, east, and west, and the stream debouching to the south, the heat in the daytime was tremendous. In the evening the whole population came out to enjoy the coolness; and charming it was to see the ladies of Venasque, wearing their mantillas, and, sitting in the balconies of their seventeenth-century houses, exchanging compliments with gallants in the street below, dressed in all the finery of mediæval Spain. Where else in Europe, we said, could such a sight of old-world manners be seen?

“We did not stay long in the town. Sometimes hiring a mule, and getting occasional help from natives as guides, we explored some of the high valleys in the neighbourhood of the Maladetta. We discovered that the main valleys which run, generally speaking, north and south from the central chain towards the plain, were burnt almost to a cinder by the fierce glare of the summer sun, but that the lateral valleys, running at right angles to these, were green and flower-starred, beautiful beyond description.

“The Spanish side of the chain proved to be a glorious wilderness: its only roads were then a few rough mule-tracks, its forests were like those of some unexplored land, its inhabitants, outside the little towns, were a few half-savage herdsmen who guarded the cattle which were pastured on the green floors of the valleys. Sometimes we got welcome refreshment of milk from these men. For the rest, we had to carry our supplies of food on mule-back or on our own shoulders. At night, when, having selected some suitable spot for a camp, we fixed up a wigwam, protecting ourselves by a little tent of waterproof within, and having made a fire of sticks for the cooking of our evening meal, we felt like pioneers in some remote continent. The tent was necessary, for almost every night there was a thunderstorm with torrents of rain. But, by day, the sun shone out gloriously.

“It was on one of these expeditions that, making our way to a high rocky col, we rounded a corner of rock, and suddenly found ourselves close to a little flock of wild izzards, as chamois are called in the Pyrenees. They were but some twenty or thirty yards away. For a moment they stood spellbound. Then, with a sudden movement, they sprang up the steep crags, leaping from rock to rock with incredible agility, and were soon out of sight.”

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“As far back as August 1959, a correspondent for *The Economist* wrote a short piece on ‘The Last Days of Andorra’. He observed that tourists still went to Andorra in search of the exotic and in order ‘... to see its medieval houses and bridges, fine Romanesque church towers and unsullied mountain vistas; to enjoy its eyrie-like calm and pure air. As a result of the tourist invasion, however, Andorra’s air is at the moment a nicely balanced blend of exhaust fumes and cement dust, vibrant with the competing *chachachas* of Radio Andorra and Andorradio; parking is the same kind of problem as in London; and every other beauty spot is pock-marked with hotels, bungalows and camping sites. One of the liveliest church towers in the country, that at Ordino, has been dwarfed by a graceless new block sited exactly six inches from it.’

‘... Building sites are being snapped up in Andorra-la-Vella at £25 a square yard. At the present rate of development the whole of the central valley from Encamp to Santa Julia will soon be one

unbroken ribbon of flamboyant facades.’

With slight alterations, these observations summarise the recent architectural history of hundreds of Mediterranean resorts.”

E. J. Mishan in *The costs of Economic Growth*. I assume he means loveliest rather than liveliest unless Andorra had very unusual church towers. Andorra is the small independent nation tucked into the Pyrenees between France and Spain, its people mostly Catalan speakers, its population less than 100,000, its capital Andorra-la-Vella a duty-free shopping bonanza, and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says of its founding, “Andorra’s independence is traditionally ascribed to Charlemagne, who recovered the region from the Muslims in AD 803, and to his son Louis I the Pious, who granted the inhabitants a charter of liberties.” I doubt if the liberties were all-encompassing and he certainly would not have offered anyone the freedom to ‘shop till you drop’. That is a modern malaise.

And having read that I wondered if I wanted to go looking for the church at Ordino or ‘lovely Luchon’ let alone the medieval houses of Venasque; it might be a journey towards disappointment. And I can only hope that the chamois still live and flourish in the Pyrenees ...

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When I went looking I found that although the whole region is dotted with caves and underground rivers the famous Grotte de Lascaux is actually in Dordogne near Montignac. And in the interests of preservation you can no longer go into the famous cave. A replica has been made close by which you can explore and there is a museum to broaden your experience. But there are in fact dozens of caves in which people lived and painted and carved twenty thousand years ago. And scholars have by no means answered all the questions the fascinating paintings raise. Were they of some religious significance? Were they drawn as a way to bring good fortune in the hunt? Or were they drawn from life as people looked down at the dead animals they had carried home and this was perhaps a way to placate the spirits of these creatures? Or even perhaps as a by-way when people spent time in the deep caves for other reasons, perhaps as a test of the courage and stoicism of young hunters? Perhaps walking through the replicated cave you will have your own ideas ...

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November 15: William Cowper

November 16: Michael Arlen

November 17: Auberon Waugh

November 18: Gwen Meredith

November 19: William Yang

Victoria Finlay

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“Back in Gdansk the city was celebrating the sunshine: the streets were full of people eating impossibly tall ice-creams as they strolled past old façades and statues. As I stood in the medieval precinct of Long Market, listening to a string quartet playing in the open air, it felt a universe away from Kaliningrad, where everything was grey, dull and disconnected. However, sixty years before, the two cities had been almost the same: Gdansk, too, had been mostly rubble. But while the Russians had rebuilt their city without regard to the past, the Poles had rebuilt theirs with pride. If their people were poor, then they were going to make sure their buildings were rich. If they had lost everything, then they were going to build it again, just the same. Although most elements of the ‘seventeenth-century’ houses lining Long Market were barely fifty years old, they looked wonderful.”

From *Buried Treasure* by Victoria Finlay.

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People travel to see all kinds of animals: on safaris to see lions in Africa, on yachts to see giant tortoises in the Galapagos, Japanese tourists come to Australia to see koalas, they go on expensive cruises to see penguins in the Antarctic; people go to specific things, the Spanish Riding School in

Vienna, Crufts Dog Show in England, the Calgary Stampede in Canada ... I am tempted by anything which involves horses but I think if someone offered me a 'wildlife tour' I would choose some of the world's wetlands. Wetlands, marshes, swamps, are under threat worldwide. Freeport mining is destroying the southern swamps in West Papua, elsewhere from the Everglades to the Okavango wetlands of Botswana they are under threat from pollution, development, the desperate need for water, population pressures, the desire to destroy mosquito habitats ... Wetlands are rarely dramatic places in the sense that snow-clad Alps or golden beaches are but they have a stillness and mystery to them ...

Poland has the Biebrza Marshes ...

This seems, from my little bit of research, to be an amazing place. You can still find moose (yes, moose!), elk, wild boar, European beavers, wolves, otters, beautiful birds like cranes, rare plants like the Siberian iris as well as mosses, sedges and fungi, all in a National Park open to visitors. I am tempted to begin saving. It sounds an unforgettable place ...

To actually find it The Lonely Planet Guide to Poland sends you to the north-east of the country where the Biebrza River rises near the Belarus border and flows into the Narew and thus in to the Baltic. The guide says, "Despite its overall marshy character, large parts of the park can be explored relatively easily on foot." (Though minding out for those wild boar!) "About 200km of signposted trails have been tracked through the park's most interesting areas, including nearly 50km through the Red Marsh alone. ... Another way of exploring the park is by boat. The principal water route in the park goes from the town of Lipsk downstream along the Biebrza to the village of Wizna. This 139km stretch can be paddled at a leisurely pace in seven to nine days. Bivouac sites along the rivers allow for overnight stops and food is available in towns on the way. The visitors office in Osowiec can provide kayaks, maps and information."

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Was Victoria Finlay unusually kind when it came to Gdansk? I had always pictured it as a grim place of sooty brick and rusting girders. But my guide paints a different picture. "The Russians arrived in March 1945; during the fierce battle the city virtually ceased to exist. The destruction of the historic quarter was comparable to that of Warsaw's Old Town – Polish authorities put it at 90%." But after the war the Poles set about rebuilding and recreating. They removed 2 million cubic feet of rubble and then they spent more than 20 years restoring it. "Nowhere else in Europe was such a large area of a historic city reconstructed from the ground up."

"Of the three Royal Ways in Poland (Warsaw, Kraków and Gdańsk), the Gdańsk one is the shortest – only 500m long – but it's architecturally perhaps the most refined. ... Once you pass the Golden Gate, you are on the gently curving Long Street (ul Długa), one of the loveliest streets in Poland, though despite its name it's only 300m long. In 1945 it was just a heap of smoking rubble."

Given our habit of turning things into 'smoking rubble' I found this a very inspiring little insight. And perhaps it is not so surprising that Gdansk was the home of the Solidarity movement ...

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November 20: Nadine Gordimer

November 21: François Voltaire

November 22: George Eliot

November 23: Robert Barnard

November 24: Laurence Sterne

Marlon James

November 25: Brenda Niall

November 26: Charles Schultz

November 27: Charles Austin Beard

Daniel Wheeler

November 28: Randolph Stow

William Blake

November 29: Louisa May Alcott
November 30: Mark Twain.
L. M. Montgomery

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“He told how his vessel had been run down by a steamer; how he had been boarded by Malay pirates; how his ship had caught fire; how he helped a political prisoner escape from a South African republic; how he had been wrecked one fall on the Magdalens and stranded there for the winter” ...

“Captain Jim was away, too—that was the winter he was wrecked on the Magdalens.”

Anne’s House of Dreams

“Rosemary was engaged once, you know—to young Martin Crawford. His ship was wrecked on the Magdalens and all the crew was drowned. Rosemary was just a child—only seventeen. But she was never the same afterwards.”

Rainbow Valley

I had not the slightest idea where the Magdalens might be when I came upon this in my youth but they were obviously remote, rocky, dangerous, and to be avoided. So I was very surprised to come upon a memoir of a woman who had been a nurse there in the early twentieth century—and to discover that they are only a little to the west of L.M. Montgomery’s beloved Prince Edward Island, in the St Lawrence estuary.

The other day I went looking for some facts. The islands, part of the province of Quebec, are 205.53 square kilometres, popular with visitors and reachable by ferry from Prince Edward Island in five hours. Very pleasant. People ride horses, cycle, walk, explore long deserted sandy beaches. But ... that long history of shipwrecks is also an ever-present part of the islands. More than four hundred ships were wrecked on that wee morsel of land and some of the shipwrecked people settled down on the islands with the descendants of those early Acadians and made their homes there.

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And not far away are another couple of islands where even more wrecks piled up, more than five hundred, some deliberately enticed by ‘wreckers’ on shore, the little islands of St Pierre and Miquelon also in the throat of the St Lawrence Gulf. But these little windy foggy islands are not part of Canada. Leslie Thomas in *My World of Islands* says, “Difficult though it is to reach, some people do go to Saint-Pierre simply because it is a piece of true France. There is a college on the island for students from Canada and the United States who want to learn to speak the French they speak in France without actually going there. The tricolour flies over the prefecture in the Place General de Gaulle, as it does from many outlying cottages, which also display the flags of the islands, stretched out in the brisk wind. This incorporates the strange red, green and blue ‘Union Jack’ of the Basques. The governor of the islands is sent from France and serves a term of two years, as do the Prefect of Police and his thirty-six gendarmes, the hospital doctors and the schoolteachers. Most bring their families. Teenage children (thirty-seven per cent of the population is under twenty) are entitled to complete their education in France, at the government’s expense, and most do. Many never return.”

Though as the islanders are predominantly from the French coastal provinces originally it may be that their French is not seen as ‘the French they speak in France’.

Thomas suggests a place physically similar to the islands off Scotland, “In these latitudes, in summer, they have long evenings, often grey and rather eerie, which the Scots of the Shetlands and Orkneys call the ‘simmer dim’. It was almost uncanny walking along the harbour at that time, a lovely melancholy feeling, scarcely another soul about; the water creaked, the boats stood dumb, and there are few gulls in Saint-Pierre now that the fishing is virtually finished.”

And the islands, not warmed by the Gulf Stream, are colder than Scotland’s offshore islands. Pack warm clothes.

* * * * *

December 1: Max Stout

December 2: Mary Elwyn Patchett
December 3: Joseph Conrad
December 4: Rainer Maria Rilke
December 5: Christina Rossetti
December 6: Evelyn Underhill
December 7: Willa Cather
Noam Chomsky

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“After the Haitian slave uprising of the late eighteenth century, Napoleon sent his brother-in-law Charles Leclerc to reinstate French control and, says Ribbe, perpetrate a hideous act of genocide in order to clear the way for the importation of a fresh crop of more pliant, docile slaves. General Leclerc was allegedly given orders to kill as many black Haitians as possible, and pursued his remit with ghastly vigour. In particular, says Ribbe, on the direct orders of Napoleon, sulphur was extracted from deposits on the flanks of Haitian volcanoes, and then burned to produce the poisonous gas, sulphur dioxide. This was employed on prison ships with sealed holds, known as *étouffiers* – ‘chokers’. ‘Victims of both sexes were piled up, one against the other’, wrote a contemporary historian who had sailed with the expedition; the poisonous sulphur gas was then pumped into the holds to suffocate them en masse. Up to 100,000 people were murdered in the course of Leclerc’s reign of terror.”

Joel Levy in *Poison A Social History*.

“Haitians were “little more than primitive savages,” according to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who claimed to have rewritten the Haitian Constitution during Wilson’s military occupation—so as to permit US corporations to take over Haiti’s land and resources after its recalcitrant Parliament had been sent packing by the marines.”

Noam Chomsky in *Hegemony or Survival*.

“In the beginning it was like that—palm groves and thirsty white beaches and the shadowy dark mountains beyond. Lying in the clear pagan air, an unknown island untrodden by the foot of a white man, that was to be one of the great landmarks in the history of colonization.

Columbus was exploring westwards in search of a new continent. Months had passed and still there was no sight of land; the sailors were becoming mutinous, food was scarce, and then, one momentous day, came the welcome shout of “Land ahoy!” Their months of hardship were at an end.

And Columbus landed there; that much is known; but his records are not explicit as to whether he stayed much longer than to unfurl the Spanish flag and christen his new discovery Hispaniola. The great explorer was still unsatisfied. He knew he had not yet reached his goal, and so, despite the wishes of his crew, who, it is certain, felt their long search to be over, he set sail and headed still further westwards.

How wonderful it must have been—the white beaches and the green palms and the blue-gray mountains beyond. Well—it is still like that today, but Haiti, as the island is now called, looks back on the past few centuries of her history with a bloodstained face. A whole dark chapter separates the old Hispaniola from the present day. Those were years filled with merciless fighting and cruel carnage; with the foul butchery of the entire white population by the frenzied negroes. In those days the clean white beaches ran red with blood. It was a holocaust of murder and primeval madness. A seeming record of unrelieved brutality; yet even a white man may come to understand, as I did later, the terrible wrongs that filled the blacks with such uncontrollable blood-lust, and caused them to set up an independent Black Republic.

The tales of tropical cruelties, tropical death, and tropical disease still act as a powerful deterrent to the casual traveler and Haiti has ever proved an inhospitable soil to the majority of its white visitors. It must be confessed therefore that it was not without some slight misgivings that I determined to visit and explore this strange country; to try and discover how much, if any, was true of the rumors of secret

cults, black magic, and human sacrifices which were reported to exist in present-day Haiti.”

Voodoo Fire in Haiti by Richard A. Loederer and Desmond Ivo Vesey.

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Graham Greene’s *The Comedians* is a surprisingly funny book (I do not think of Greene as a humorous writer) so you may not believe me when I say it is set in Haiti. Bleakly blackly comic.

Bernard Diederich wrote in *Seeds of Fiction*, his book about Greene and the writing of *The Comedians*, “We came upon the border but had to settle for looking at Haiti from the Dominican side. For the most part, the roughly 195-mile border that separate(s) the two countries was a desolate and ill-defined line. There was no border fence. No single highway ran its length; only a series of feeder roads or narrow paths linked the few towns that populated both countries. Rivers served as the demarcation line in the valleys. In the mountainous sections the border could be delineated by the fact that the Haitian side had been eroded by tree-cutting for charcoal to the point where the land was virtually bald, while the Dominican side was still green with trees and vegetation. The border had an aura of evil, the unhappy feeling of a place not to wander about. The demarcation line, such as it was, had been soaked in the blood of ancient enemies.” And, “As we approached the misty summit we came to a forest called Angel Felix, where we encountered a group of woodcutters. I slowed the car and headed towards them, but they quickly disappeared into the dense tree line. The mountain forest, which looked as if it still had virgin timber, was in stark contrast to the eroded Haitian landscape next door.”

The border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has had a chequered history but the thing which puzzled me was the very different landscapes. After all, both countries were originally clothed in lush jungle, both countries were predominantly Catholic, both countries were partially populated with freed slaves, neither country has a markedly different attitude to its eco-systems or rural peasants. So why is Haiti seen as an ecological disaster, bare and eroded, while the Dominican Republic isn’t?

I haven’t done enough research to do more than make a couple of tentative suggestions ...

1. The mountains of the Dominican Republic capture the rain and leave Haiti in a rain shadow. Removing trees has exacerbated this.

2. While the Dominican Republic’s population growth has leveled off Haiti’s population has continued to grow. I know Haiti has suffered a severe earthquake but I am not sure that this has encouraged a re-assessment of the environment and its carrying capacity. It might even have made it harder to encourage reafforestation and family planning ...

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December 8: James Thurber

Robert F. Marx

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“The port of Cadiz Bay is a good example of how little governments and the public care about preserving the past. It has been in continual use for over three millennia ever since the Phoenicians came to southern Spain to pick up cargoes of gold and other items. During the Colonial Period most of the gold and silver brought back from the New World was funneled through Cadiz. Over the years, more than three thousand ships met their doom here and I have always considered Cadiz “the underwater museum of the world.” For more than three decades I attempted to get permission to undertake a major excavation of some of the ships in Cadiz Bay; however, even with the backing of King Juan Carlos, I failed in this endeavor. Government bureaucrats always insisted that they would do the job themselves. Instead of doing the job, they have stood by and watched the destruction and disappearance of more than 95 percent of the bay’s archeological sites through dredging and landfill operations. Between 1961 and 1964, I located 235 shipwrecks in the bay. In 1985, when I returned, under the auspices of the king, to make a survey I found that fewer than forty remained. The rest were covered over by landfill and the others destroyed by the hungry jaws of the dredges. Worse still, an area where I had discovered a number of standing Roman ruins (which I had informed the government about) now had a container ship dock covering them.” (Who needs the Taliban and its dynamite?)

“Here we have a government that never showed an iota of concern about thousands of historically unique shipwrecks in their own waters and now wants to claim ownership of all Spanish shipwrecks worldwide. In the summer of 1999, after scuba divers discovered two Spanish shipwrecks off the shores of Virginia, Spain went to court in Norfolk, Virginia. To everyone’s astonishment they were awarded ownership of said wrecks. Encouraged by this, they followed up by claiming sovereignty of all Spanish wrecks around the world. To date no nation has challenged this claim.

“Back in 1959, I was one of the three founders of the Council of Underwater Archaeology. I stayed on as a member of the Advisory Council until 1993 when I resigned in disgust. The reason I chose to leave the leading underwater archaeological organization was over Cadiz and other matters. I asked the membership to join me in condemning the ongoing destruction of shipwreck sites in Cadiz Bay and also in Portugal. Some members didn’t want to back this plan on the grounds that it might antagonize these governments and cause them problems at home. All the dissenters were bureaucrats working for federal or state governments and it was hard not to draw the conclusion that they were more concerned with their pensions than in saving the underwater treasures belonging to all mankind.”

In the Wake of Galleons by Robert F. Marx.

It is a curious question: who owns a shipwreck in another nation’s territorial waters? I imagined myself sharing a car to drive, say, from France into Spain and we have a nasty accident. I can abandon the car, I can get it fixed and leave Spain again, I can get it put on a long-loader and taken back to France, or I can sell it to a Spanish wrecker for parts. If I abandon it then clearly I have given up all claims to ownership and further use. A ship is more problematical in that it is in water rather than by the side of the road. It is bigger. It cost more to build and sail. But the principal seems to be the same. But then there are two additional questions when it comes to my wrecked car. Is there a dead body inside it and is there luggage, shopping, stolen goods, souvenirs, toolboxes and other items. If I choose to abandon them with the car then I can no longer claim them. It becomes more tricky if I was in hospital and someone cleared the car and took everything ...

Shipwrecks are three things: a ship, the people aboard, and its cargo. Spain might indeed be able to claim the ship itself if they can prove they built it and owned it. They clearly do not own any skeletons found unless they can prove they were Spanish citizens and deserve to be brought back for a dignified burial. And cargo becomes even more contentious given the way Spain looted the Americas. Can they prove they legitimately owned everything aboard the wrecked ships?

And of course they only want to lay claim to such wrecks because of the hope that Inca and Aztec gold and silver are still aboard. Would they be making claims if the ships were carrying iron ore to be smelted or pewter mugs or ordinary kitchen china or some rotting timber?

But I had a different query when I first read this piece: why so many wrecks in Cadiz Bay? Did the treasure ships get scuttled there as not being worth repairing for further voyages? And then I thought perhaps there are other matters at work in the harbour’s history. I have just been reading Garrett Mattingly’s *The Defeat of the Spanish Armada*. He writes of that day in 1587, “On Wednesday, the 29th of April, at four in the afternoon, it would have been pleasant in the gardens of Charles V’s old hunting-lodge at Aranjuez. In all the high plateau of New Castile there is no place like Aranjuez for flowers, and there is no season at Aranjuez like the beginning of May. Usually Philip passed the month there. Only when he was making himself King of Portugal had he missed spending May at Aranjuez. Then he had written wistfully of the flowers and the nightingales in its gardens. This year he had hurried thither as soon as he could decently leave Madrid. In springtime the late afternoon sun was kindest to his gout, and this was the time of day Philip visited his flowers. While he lingered among them a dispatch came from Paris. Don Bernardino de Mendoza wrote that on April 12th Drake had sailed from Plymouth with some thirty ships. His mission was almost certainly to hinder the assembling of the Spanish fleet, and his first target would probably be Cadiz. Perhaps the King stayed longer than usual that day in his garden; perhaps his gout sent him earlier than usual to bed. Whatever

the reason he did not read Mendoza's alarming dispatch until the next morning. It was too late, anyway." The English fleet was already on its way. "At the Rock of Lisbon it was decided, if it had not been decided before, that Cadiz was the first objective. Two intercepted Dutch merchantmen reported a great concentration of shipping there, meant for the armada gathering at Lisbon." Yet Cadiz was behaving like a holiday destination. "At four o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday the 29th of April the town of Cadiz could not have been more relaxed. Most of the principal gentlemen and citizens were watching some strolling players perform a comedy. In the great square a larger audience admired the skill of a tumbler bold enough to pit the rhythms of trained muscles against the acrobatics of verse. Since sailors of a dozen nations thronged the streets one may assume that the wine-shops had their share of custom. Among this cheerful crowd the word that a line of great ships was standing in for the harbour spread but slowly. By the time much attention had been drawn from the tumbler and the comedians the leading ship was almost off the monument called 'the Pillar of Hercules' at the entrance to the harbour." At first they were assumed to be Spanish ships but as people realized their mistake panic spread. Women and children were trampled to death in the rush to leave. "In Cadiz anchorage there was something of the same panic that had seized the town. The roadstead was crowded with a medley of shipping, perhaps sixty sail. Some of them, of course, were for the Armada at Lisbon, including five *urcas*, round tublike freighters fully loaded with wine and biscuit, and a number of Dutch hulks, confiscated by the Spanish for eventual service with the invasion fleet and meanwhile stripped of their sails. But Cadiz was a busy port. There were ships from the Mediterranean, bound for French, Dutch and Baltic ports, waiting for a fair wind for Cape St Vincent. There were ships from the Atlantic bound east and pausing for one reason or another before making for the Straits of Gibraltar. There were, as there usually were at appropriate times of the year, ships waiting to join the fleet for the Americas. There was even a stray Portuguese bark taking on cargo for Brazil. And because Cadiz is the port of Xerez there were ships of several countries loading the noble wines to which English drinkers were to remain loyal throughout the long war with Spain."

Drake and his fleet fell upon this confused mass of unprepared shipping and eventually "was able to anchor his squadron among them and set to work, sorting out the prizes he wanted and the cargoes worth shifting, and marking for destruction ships cleared or empty. As night fell the first hulks were towed free, fired and set adrift on the flood-tide. Soon the blazing ships lighted up the bay and cast a glow on the white walls of Cadiz."

"Drake estimated that he had sunk, burned or captured thirty-seven vessels in Cadiz Harbour. Robert Leng, a gentleman volunteer with the expedition thought 'about thirty'; an anonymous Italian observer in the town named the same figure; and the official Spanish estimate, prepared not for propagandist purposes but for King Philip's eyes, listed twenty-four, valued at a hundred and seventy-two thousand ducats. Probably the figures depend on how many of the small craft one counts, and whether one adds in the unsuccessful Spanish fire-ships. 'The loss,' said Philip after he had studied the news, 'was not very great, but the daring of the attempt was very great indeed.' "

Does this partly explain why very few Spanish people have been interested in the wrecks in Cadiz Bay—because they are a reminder of loss and failure?

The Dorling Kindersley Travel Guide to Seville & Andalusia says of Cadiz: "Jutting out of the Bay of Cadiz, and almost entirely surrounded by water, Cádiz can lay claim to being Europe's oldest city. Legend names Hercules as its founder, although history credits the Phoenicians with establishing the town of Gadir in 1100 BC. Occupied by the Carthaginians, Romans and Moors in turn, the city also prospered after the Reconquest on wealth taken from the New World. In 1587 Sir Francis Drake raided the port in the first of many British attacks in the war for world trade. In 1812 Cádiz briefly became Spain's capital when the nation's first constitution was declared here."

There are the expected 'sights', churches, museums, art, carnivals, but no suggestion of the underwater destruction. And perhaps it is better to focus on what *is* there rather than mourn what *isn't*

there any more?

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December 9: John Milton

December 10: Emily Dickinson

December 11: Alexander Solzhenitsyn
Naguib Mahfouz

December 12: Louis Nowra

December 13: Heinrich Heine
Laurens van der Post

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Beth Bennett brought a box of van der Post books for a stall and I enjoyed reading them before putting them out: *Venture to the Interior, Journey into Russia, The Lost World of the Kalahari, In a Province, The Night of the New Moon, A Far-Off Place.*

“Often at dawn we stood still in the shallows among the rocks above the rapids armed with long, supple, blue-bush wands. When the golden bream on their way up-stream rose to the surface, a surface so filled with the light of the opening sky that they might have been birds with folded wings swooping out of the blue, we would smack the water smartly over their heads just as the River Bushman had done, and the shock would turn the fish over on their backs to drift helplessly into our clutches. At home our coloured and Bushman nurses would send us to sleep with stories of animals, birds, streams, and trees, which were part of the response of the Bushman’s creative imagination to the reality of his great mother earth. Somehow, in imagination, the Bushman was always with us even when the two little old men were no longer there to represent him. And in an even more subtle way the earth too participated profoundly in the process. Ever since I can remember I have been struck by the profound quality of melancholy which lies at the heart of the physical scene in Southern Africa. I recollect clearly asking my father once: ‘Why do the vlaktes and koppies always look so sad?’ He replied with unexpected feeling: ‘The sadness is not in the plains and hills but in ourselves.’

“This may be true for others, but it was not true for me. For me, the country in its own melancholic right was sad and in a deep mourning. As a young boy I came to believe that some knowledge of the tragedy of the Bushman was always deeply implicit in the physical scene, making the blue of the uplands more blue, the empty plains more desolate, and adding to the voice of the wind as it climbed over the hilltops and streaked down lean towards the river, the wail of the rejected aboriginal spirit crying to be re-born. It seemed to me that both the earth and I were aware that spread out before us was the scene of a great play in which the principal actor was absent and He who first created it, missing.

“I soon came to believe, too, that the country was haunted. Late at night on lonely journeys when I climbed out of cart or wagon to open a gate in a pass, I would suddenly tremble with fear for the nearness and certainty of unacknowledged being. It was not just a normal fear of darkness. Often I would find the horses sharing my feeling and shivering deeply under my hand as I laid it on their necks as much to comfort myself as to calm them. Sometimes when the sense of a presence in the dark was at its most acute, a silent jackal would let out a yelp of pain as if one of the arrows that fly by night had suddenly hit it. Another time, out with a Hottentot groom on the veld many miles from any habitation in a night as black as an Old Testament Bible, our horses reared, stopped dead, and stood, legs wide apart, heads up, snorting with terror and trembling all over. The Hottentot groom who believed as do all his kind that horses have second sight, cried hysterically: ‘Please little master, let’s turn back! Please don’t go on! ...’ But he would never say what he thought he had seen. I have seen black women come screaming back to their homesteads in the dying fire of dusk sobbing that they had been beckoned by a compelling ‘little man’ who had suddenly risen up from the river reeds.

“Ghosts in the conventional semblance of themselves may not exist, but looking back at moments like these I am certain that the pattern which makes the use of a ghost in Macbeth so meaningful is

constant in the spirit of all persons and countries who have perpetrated a crime against life which they refuse to acknowledge. I am certain it was the mechanism of a spirit haunted in this sense that was so intensely at work among us all no matter what our race or colour. However, the climax in childhood awareness came for me when the two little old men died, one I believe of pneumonia, the other, soon after, of a broken heart. I was inconsolable and lay awake at nights close to tears because I was convinced that now, never again, would the Bushman and his child-man shape be seen upon the earth.

For some years I grieved secretly in this manner until one day a man more picturesque than most appeared among the many colourful people who were always passing through our simple home. He was tall, lean, burnt almost black by the sun, and his skin of the texture of wild biltong. His grey eyes in a dark face glittered so that I could not take mine from his. He had just come from some far northern frontier and had been everywhere in Africa. Our rebel community frowned upon him because he was thought to be on his way to join the British in their Great War. Then one day I heard him volunteer casually that on a recent journey to an oasis in the Kalahari Desert he had found the authentic Bushman living there as he had once lived in the country around us. After that, I could think of nothing else. Later in the afternoon I locked myself in the study of my father who had died some weeks before and took out a diary in which, secretly, I had begun to write poetry and record my thoughts. The day was 13 October 1914 and in High Dutch I wrote: 'I have decided today that when I am grown-up I am going into the Kalahari Desert to seek out the Bushman.' ”

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There are many reasons you might want to visit Namibia: the dinosaur footprints near Kalkfeld, the huge meteor near Grootfontein, the psychedelic fish in Lake Otjikoto, strange plants like *Moringa ovalifolia* and *Welwitschia mirabilis*, the ghost town of Kolmanskop and then there are brilliant multicoloured rocks and dunes ...

Brian Mayfield-Smith in *The Outsider* says, “My first encounter with the Sesriem Dunes of the Namibian Desert stays strongly in my mind’s eye too. These are the world’s highest and biggest dunes, stretching for sixty kilometres. The road that runs through the middle of them is a dry river bed, almost always passable considering that the river flows only every twenty years or so. The dunes change colour as the day goes on, from pink, to peach, to red, to brown. They are amazing—so strange they seem to be unreal ... ”

If you were tempted to believe that dunes are just dunes I can now, after reading a *Lonely Planet Guide to Namibia*, say ‘Not so’.

“The Namib dunes, which take on mythical proportions in tourist literature and nature specials, stretch from the Orange to the Kuiseb Rivers in the south (this area is known as ‘the dune sea’) and from Torra Bay in Skeleton Coast Park to Angola’s Curoca River in the north. They’re composed of colourful quartz sand, and come in varying hues – from cream to orange and red and violet.

Unlike the ancient Kalahari dunes, those of the Namib are dynamic, shifting with the wind, which sculpts them into a variety of distinctive shapes. The top portion of the dune, which faces the direction of migration, is known as a slipface, where the sand spills from the crest and slips down. Various bits of plant and animal detritus also collect here and provide a meager food source for dune-dwelling creatures, and it’s here that most dune life is concentrated.

Parabolic Dunes

Along the eastern area of the dune area – including around Sossusvlei – the dunes are classified as parabolic or multicyclic and are the result of variable wind patterns. These are the most stable dunes in the Namib and, therefore, are also the most vegetated.

Transverse Dunes

Near the coast south of Walvis Bay, the formations are known as transverse dunes, which are long narrow, linear dunes lying perpendicular to the prevailing south-westerly winds. Therefore, their

slipfaces are oriented towards the north and north-east.

Seif Dunes

Around Homeb in the Namib Desert Park are the prominent linear or seif dunes (also known as linear dunes), which are enormous north-west-south-east-oriented sand ripples. With heights of up to 100m, they're spaced about 1 km apart and show up plainly on satellite photographs. They're formed by seasonal winds; during the prevailing southerly winds of summer, the slipfaces lie on the north-eastern face. In the winter, the wind blows in the opposite direction and slipfaces build up on the south-western face.

Star Dunes

In areas where individual dunes are exposed to winds from all directions, a formation known as a star dune appears. These dunes have multiple ridges and when seen from above may appear to have a star shape.

Barchan Dunes

Around the southern portion of the Skeleton Coast Park and south of Lüderitz, barchan dunes prevail. These are the most highly mobile dunes of all, and are created by unidirectional winds. As they shift, these dunes take on a crescent shape, with the horns of the crescent aimed in the direction of migration. It is barchan dunes that are slowly devouring the ghost town of Kolkmanskop near Lüderitz. These are the so called 'roaring dunes' of the northern Skeleton Coast, named for the haunting roar created when air is pressed out from the interstices between the sand granules on the slipface. Therefore it's loudest in the warmth of the afternoon.

Hump Dunes

Considerably smaller than other dune types are hump dunes, which typically form in clusters on flat expanses near water sources. Sand builds up around vegetation – usually a tuft of grass – and is held in place by the roots of the plant, forming a sandy tussock. They rarely rise more than 2m to 3m above the surface.

* * * * *

I came across a copy of John Gordon Davis's *The Land God Made in Anger* and I was under the impression it was a travel book. But no, it is a thriller, set in Namibia. It begins "On these harsh shores it hardly ever rains. The sun beats down onto the desert coast, blinding white and yellow and brown and apricot and pink on the sand dunes that stretch on and on to the east. To the west the cold Atlantic seethes and crashes, stretching for thousands of miles to the Americas; this land is called the Skeleton Coast, for so many ships have wrecked themselves on its treacherous expanse, and so many shipwrecked men have perished. If they survived the savage sea, they died of thirst and starvation after they came crawling ashore. Here nobody lives. The only people who sometimes pass through this land are the strandlopers, hardy people from the hot hard hinterland of Namibia, who journey out of the vast desert to catch seals and shellfish."

Much of the action takes place along this mysterious empty stretch of coast, the sort of place which in ancient times would have been marked out with 'Here Be Dragons'. And if you are wanting a very readable and fast-paced introduction to Namibia this book is not a bad place to start.

But the thought continued to nag at me that there was a travel guide to Namibia with the same or a very similar title ...

* * * * *

Although Laurens van der Post was primarily concerned with the great injustice done to the Bushmen in South Africa where they were massacred and the remnants pushed back into Botswana and Namibia, there is some small comfort in knowing that, "The 37,000 San people – 19,000 of whom

remain in Namibia – were the region’s earliest inhabitants, and still inhabit the north-eastern areas of the country” And “In the past, the flexibility of their society helped the San people to evade conquest and control. But, at the same time, it made it exceedingly difficult for them to organise themselves to form pressure groups and claim and defend their rights. However, through organisations such as the NNFC in Namibia, the Nyae Nyae Conservancy (which oversees tourism in Bushmanland) and the First People of the Kalahari in Botswana, some things, at least, are improving. The first signs of hope were the two regional conferences on Development for Africa’s San People (in 1992 and 1993), in which San delegations from both Namibia and Botswana were present and made their needs known.”

Unfortunately Botswana’s record doesn’t seem to bear out this sense of hope. Sandy Gall writes, “In my book, *The Bushmen of Southern Africa: slaughter of the innocent*, I ask whether the Botswanian government’s campaign to remove the Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve is genocide ‘by stealth’. It is genocide, alright, but not by stealth. It is open, unashamed and contemptuous of world opinion.” Botswana, perhaps in contrast to Zimbabwe, has been painted as democratic and tolerant. But for reasons of racism, westernisation, and diamond-mining it has seriously blotted its copybook when it comes to its treatment of its Bushmen population. Gall, writing in *The Ecologist* also pointed out something I didn’t realise, having thought of the Kalahari as a part of Namibia: “The Kalahari ‘sandface’, as the Bushmen call it, stretches across seven countries: the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Zambia in the north, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia in the centre, and South Africa in the south. Unlike the Sahara and Saudi Arabia’s Empty Quarter, it is partly covered with thick bush and trees and criss-crossed by underground rivers” whereas I was simply picturing sand and more sand.

A mailout from Survival International says “For thousands of years the ‘Bushmen’ have eaten parts of the hoodia cactus to suppress their hunger and thirst during long hunting trips and journeys in the desert. Now, a US drug company is using the plant to develop what may become a new anti-obesity drug.

“In 2001, Survival alerted the southern African minorities organisation, WIMSA, that the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was negotiating licensing rights to run drug tests for the cactus. CSIR had not consulted with any Bushmen until Survival intervened. Finally, after long negotiations with the Bushmen’s lawyers, it agreed to recognise the Bushmen’s intellectual property rights. In March 2003, Bushmen representatives in South Africa signed an agreement on behalf of the region’s 100,000 Bushmen to receive some of the royalties from the new drug if it is successful.

“This is one of the first cases in which tribal people anywhere have been paid for their expertise. Kxao Moses, chairman of WIMSA, said, ‘In the past it used to be the norm to exploit (our) knowledge and culture but today is an example of how things have changed.’ ”

The hoodia cactus sounds far more useful than diamonds which, to me, are about the most boring of precious stones. And I hope the cactus will prove an unalloyed good ...

* * * * *

- December 14: Michael Cook
- December 15: Edna O’Brien
- December 16: Jane Austen
- December 17: Erskine Caldwell
- December 18: Christopher Fry
‘Saki’ H. H. Munro
- December 19: Jean Genet
- December 20: John Wilson Croker
- December 21: Frank Moorhouse
- December 22: Edwin Arlington Robinson
- December 23: Robert Bly
Alice Kober
- December 24: Matthew Arnold

Mary Higgins Clark

December 25: Paul Berry

December 26: Thomas Gray

Henry Miller

Admiral George Dewey

* * * * *

“United Fruit captured the spirit of the times. Until recently the US, in its foreign affairs, had been inhibited by history. In 1893 a posse of planters, mainly from the US, had overthrown Hawaii’s Queen Liliolukani and called on Washington to annexe the islands. President Cleveland refused: this was no way for an anti-colonial power to be acting. In 1898 President William McKinley had no such qualms and went ahead with the annexation. In the space of 113 days that year, McKinley had successfully fought the Spanish-American War, ejecting Spain from Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. When the Filipinos protested against US rule merely taking over from that of imperial Spain, McKinley resolved to ‘uplift, civilize and Christianise them’.

Peter Chapman in *Jungle Capitalists*.

“The Japanese knew the earth of America was soaked with Indian blood, the continent haunted by the ghosts of tribes who had been pushed, kicked, raped, and slaughtered. Indeed, the European immigrants had cleansed the continent of Native Americans so efficiently that soon there was no more civilizing left to do. American expansionists then looked to America’s far west, the Pacific. As Teddy Roosevelt’s political mentor New York senator Orville Platt stated, “It is to the oceans that our children must look as we once looked to the boundless west.”

“As vice president under William McKinley, then as president in his own right, Teddy Roosevelt had relished the chance to bring Christian civilization to America’s first major colonial possession in the Pacific, the Philippines. “Not one competent witness who has actually known the facts believes the Filipinos capable of self-government at the present,” Roosevelt said. He found it unthinkable to “abandon the Philippines to their own tribes.” To him, the Filipino freedom fighters were “a syndicate of Chinese half-breeds,” and to grant them self-government “would be like granting self-government to an Apache reservation under some local chief.”

“Christian intellectuals saw nothing wrong with “helping” Filipinos by denying them freedom. The Literary Digest polled 192 editors of Christian publications and found only three who recommended independence for the Philippines. “Has it ever occurred to you that Jesus was the most imperial of the imperialists?” asked the Missionary Record.

“Just three decades before Enomoto-san was taught that the Chinese were beasts, American veterans of the Indian wars sailed off to the Philippines. “We had been taught ... that the Filipinos were savages no better than our Indians,” an American officer said. When Senator Joseph Burton of Kansas defended the slaughter of Filipinos on the Senate floor as “entirely within the regulations of civilized warfare” by citing earlier massacres of Indians as a precedent, “no one even bothered to respond.”

“America would cause the deaths of more 250,000 Filipinos — men, women, and children — from the beginning of the hostilities on February 4, 1899, to July 4, 1902, when President Roosevelt declared the Philippines “pacified.” That is pretty serious killing. America fought WWII over a period of fifty-six months with approximately 400,000 casualties on all fronts. So Hitler and Tojo combined, with all their mechanized weaponry, killed about the same per month — 7,000 — as the American “civilizers” did in the Philippines.

“The Filipino uprising against their former Spanish masters had been a guerrilla operation, a popular insurgency supported by the civilian population. The brutality of the Spanish response had been one of the American rationales for kicking Spain out in the first place. Now American replaced the oppressor and adopted the same methods — widespread torture, concentration camps, the killing of disarmed prisoners and helpless civilians — but with a ruthlessness that surpassed even that of the Spanish. The majority of Filipinos killed by the American soldiers were civilians. An army circular

attempted to assuage any guilt by rationalizing that “it is an inevitable consequence of war that the innocent must generally suffer with the guilty,” and since all natives were treacherous, it was impossible to recognize “the actively bad from only the passively so.”

“One American army captain wrote of “one of the prettiest little towns we have passed through” — the people there “desire peace and are friendly to Los Americanos. When we came along this road, the natives that had remained stood along the side of the road, took off their hats, touched their foreheads with their hands. ‘Buenos Dias, Senors’ (means good morning).” The good American boys then proceeded to slaughter the residents and ransack the town.

Anthony Michea of the Third Artillery wrote, “We bombarded a place called Malabon, and then we went in and killed every native we met, men, women and children.” Another soldier described the fun of killing innocent civilians: “This shooting human beings is a ‘hot game,’ and beats rabbit hunting all to pieces. We charged them and such a slaughter you never saw. We killed them like rabbits; hundreds, yes thousands of them. Everyone was crazy.”

“I want no prisoners,” one American general ordered. “I wish you to kill and burn, the more you kill and burn the better it will please me.” An officer asked for clarification, “to know the limit of age to respect.” The general replied in writing to kill all those above “ten years of age.”

“Corporal Richard O’Brien wrote home about “The Beast of La Nog,” a Captain Fred McDonald who ravished a village by that name. “O’Brien described how his company had gunned down civilians waving white flags because McDonald had ordered ‘take no prisoners.’ Only a beautiful mestizo mother was spared to be repeatedly raped by McDonald and several officers and then turned over to the men for their pleasure.”

“Americans back home knew what was happening in the Philippines. Private Joseph Sladen wrote home about a helpless group of enemy fighters his company trapped in the middle of a stream: “From then on the fun was fast and furious,” as dead Filipinos piled up ‘thicker than buffalo chips,’ Sladen recorded. Several western lads informed their dads that ‘picking off niggers in the water’ was ‘more fun than a turkey shoot.’ A soldier from Kingston, New York, wrote his parents a letter that was soon published nationally about the massacre of a thousand civilians in the town of Titatia: “I am probably growing hard-hearted, for I am in my glory when I can sight my gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger. Tell all my inquiring friends that I am doing everything I can for Old Glory and for America I love so well.” Letters appeared in American newspapers about American boys “routinely firing on Filipinos carrying white flags.” Soldiers were “ordered to take no prisoners and to kill the wounded.” American soldiers had no qualms about obeying orders to kill POWs. Private Fred Hinchman complained about some newly arrived Yankee soldiers “with about fifty prisoners, who had been taken before they learned how not to take them.”

“Killing Filipino POWs was official American policy. Commanders were told that whenever an American soldier was “murdered,” the commander was to “by lot select a POW — preferably one from the village in which the assassination took place — and execute him.” Officers set the example. “Colonel Funston not only ordered the regiment to take no prisoners, but he bragged to reporters that he had personally strung up thirty-five civilians suspected of being insurrectos. Major Edwin Glenn did not even deny the charge that he made forty-seven prisoners kneel and ‘repent of their sins’ before ordering them bayoneted and clubbed to death.”

“For those unfortunates who made it alive into American hands, widespread torture was the rule. Harvard-educated First Lieutenant Grover Flint later recalled for a Senate panel the routine torture of Filipino combatants and civilians — thirty here, forty there. Lieutenant Flint described the “water cure,” the standard U.S. Army torture:

A man is thrown down on his back and three or four men sit or stand on his arms and legs and hold him down, and either a gun barrel or a rifle or a carbine barrel or a stick as big as a belaying pin ... is simply thrust into his jaws and his jaws are thrust back, and, if possible, a wood log or stone is put

under ... his neck, so he can be held firmly.

Senator Julius Caesar Burrows of Michigan interrupted to ask, “His jaws are forced open, you say? How do you mean, crosswise?”

Lieutenant Flint: Yes, sir, as a gag. In the case of very old men I have seen their teeth fall out — I mean when it was done a little roughly. He is simply held down, and then water is poured into his face, down his throat and nose from a jar, and that is kept up until the man gives some sign of giving in or becoming unconscious, and when he becomes unconscious he is simply rolled aside and he is allowed to come to ... Well, I know that in a great many cases, in almost every case, the men have been a little roughly handled; they were rolled aside rudely, so that water was expelled. A man suffers tremendously; there is no doubt about that. His suffering must be that of a man who is drowning, but he cannot drown.

“President Theodore Roosevelt excused his army’s atrocities in the Philippines and hailed “the bravery of American soldiers” who fought “for the triumph of civilization over the black chaos of savagery and barbarism.” To Roosevelt, the extermination of hundreds of thousands of noncombatant civilians and defenseless POWs in the Philippines represented “the most glorious war in the nation’s history.”

From *Flyboys* by James Bradley.

Louis Stanley Young in *The Life of Admiral Dewey and the Conquest of the Philippines* dedicates the book:

To The
Gallant American Sailors and Soldiers
Whose
Heroic Deeds In Manila Bay
And In
Their Sanguinary Battles With The Philippine Insurgents
Have Gained For Them
Imperishable Renown And The Honor Of Their
Grateful Countrymen
This Volume Which
Recounts In Glowing Terms Their Superb Valor, Their
Self-Sacrificing Patriotism And Magnificent
Achievements
Is Respectfully Dedicated
As A Sincere Tribute To The Dauntless Heroism That Has
Won The Admiration Of The Whole World
And Brought
New Glory To Our Flag

It is worth remembering the meaning of ‘sanguinary’ ...

Other nations had colonies. The United States wanted some of its own. It could take small islands such as Hawaii and Guam but there was a bigger prize if they chose to seize the moment: the ramshackle remnants of the once mighty Spanish Empire: Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines. Not because they cared about liberating the inhabitants who had been struggling against the Spanish for

decades. Oh dear me no. But these were potentially wealthy countries, strategically placed and ideal as the beginnings of an American Empire.

Admiral George Dewey and the American fleet fell upon the ten ships the Spanish had in Manila Bay then on the city itself, driving the Spaniards to capitulation. The terms of surrender sound mild until you notice things like Article 6 which says, “All the funds in the Spanish Treasury and all other public funds, shall be turned over to the authorities of the United States.” The Americans had every intention of making the Philippines pay for the American conquest.

Although the Filipino insurgents had been fighting the Spanish for a generation, and seen their charismatic leader Jose Rizal executed, it seemed to puzzle the Americans that the Filipinos did not respond to the removal of one set of colonial masters with gratitude and submission. The journal the American Soldier responded in time-honoured fashion to this lack of gratitude and meek falling in with the wishes of the new coloniser: “For other reasons than that he would become ambition’s victim Aguinaldo is wise in renouncing his dream of independence. The Filipinos are unfit for self-government. It is fair to assume, and testimony of men familiar with the peoples of the islands bears out the assumption, that the Tagalogs are the most advanced of all the native tribes. They have had the advantage, such as it is, of association with Spanish civilization. That is not the greatest good fortune that could have befallen them, but it is a tremendous advance over the other fellows, who have had for associates simply themselves or other savages. Ideas of government are in the crudest state among them, and even among the Tagalogs and pure Filipinos—Spanish half-castes—there are comparatively few men who understand the scope and responsibility of self-government.”

In other words: YOU NEED US. But the Filipinos did not see it like this and refused to tamely capitulate to the new form of colonialism.

Louis Stanley Young only touches on the ‘sanguinary’ nature of the conquest—“The Filipinos had massed along the beach, where they had been driven by General Otis’ brigade, and hundreds of them were literally torn to pieces by the terrific rain of shells from the warships”—but then he was writing to present Admiral Dewey as the all-American-hero and he was writing in 1899 when the conquest was still underway.

“Admiral Dewey several times incidentally referred to the destiny of the Philippines in public or private utterances, but when he arrived at Hong Kong on his homeward journey, he expressed his views on the subject of handling the Philippines as follows: “We must never sell them. Such an action would bring on another great war. We will never part with the Philippines, I am sure, and in future years the idea that anybody should have seriously suggested it, will be one of the curiosities of history.” ” But the ‘great war’ and the Japanese invasion radically changed the history of the Philippines and America parted with the Philippines, albeit in an administrative not an economic sense ...

The Philippines has not always been a victim but it suffered in WW2, it suffered under dictatorship, it has suffered under poverty and typhoons; as my brother (whose wife is a Filipina) said recently the country is heading towards a hundred million people in a country denuded of forests, with few resources except the export of young women, and depending on the economic health of other countries. This might not seem a glowing travel advertisement. But I remember seeing a film called, I think *Igorot*; it is about a young woman from the famous and fascinating rice-growing terraces who marries a Manila businessman. She is bitterly unhappy there. His family treat her as though she is an ignorant savage. And she eventually commits suicide. The terraces are still there but they are under threat not least because young people no longer want to do the hard manual work involved in their maintenance. But one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen was a crater lake south-east of Manila in which a small (dormant and perhaps extinct) volcano makes an island in the lake. This was the Taal volcano and lake and I took a picture of it but lent my Philippine slides to someone who lost them. The picture is still clear in my mind though. I saw it early in the morning and it was a place of

shimmering silver and rose. Magical. I would like to think that it, unlike tropical forests, cannot be destroyed but lakes do get polluted, drained, hidden in smog, surrounded by ugly buildings ...

In *Hawaiian Legends of Volcanoes* William D. Westervelt mentions those very active volcanoes,. Mauna Loa and Kilauea, and writes, “Of all the noteworthy groups of islands of fire rock in the Pacific Ocean, the Hawaiian Islands are the most stupendous.

“The crack in the floor of the ocean upon which they are built extends from the large island Hawaii northwesterly about two thousand miles toward Japan. The islands for the first four hundred miles are large and mountainous, but as the chain is followed toward the end, the islands quickly become mere bluffs rising out of the sea, or low coral islands which have been built on the rims of submerged volcanoes.”

“When Pele came to the island Hawaii, seeking a permanent home, she found another god of fire already in possession of the territory. Ai-laau was known and feared by all the people. *Ai* means the “one who eats or devours.” *Laau* means “tree” or a “forest.” Ai-laau was, therefore, the fire-god devouring forests. Time and again he laid the districts of South Hawaii desolate by the lava he poured from his fire-pits.”

... “When Pele came to the island Hawaii, she first stopped at a place called Ke-ahi-a-laka in the district of Puna. From this place she began her inland journey toward the mountains. As she passed on her way there grew within her an intense desire to go at once to see Ai-laau, the god to whom Kilauea belonged, and find a resting-place with him as the end of her journey. She came up, but Ai-laau was not in his house. Of a truth he had made himself thoroughly lost. He had vanished because he knew that this one coming toward him was Pele. He had seen her toiling down by the sea at Ke-ahi-a-laka. Trembling dread and heavy fear overpowered him. He ran away and was entirely lost. When Pele came to that pit she laid out the plan for her abiding home, beginning at once to dig up the foundations. She dug day and night and found that this place fulfilled all her desires. Therefore, she fastened herself tight to Hawaii for all time.” ... “Pele’s story is that of wander-lust. She was living in a happy home in the presence of her parents, and yet for a long time she was “stirred by thoughts of far-away lands.’ At last she asked her father to send her away. This meant that he must provide a sea-going canoe with mat sails, sufficiently large to carry a number of persons and food for many days.”

Though Pele is not described as coming from New Zealand in the most ancient of these legends, that name not then plonked on the islands across the Tasman, that is where researchers believe the legend originated. It makes sense. Hawaii and New Zealand both rejoice in their volcanoes.

And the Maoris also had their goddess of fire, called Mahuika in one manifestation. A. W. Reed in *Legends of Rotorua* writes “Te Arawa is the canoe. Proud vanguard of the Fleet, it sailed southward from Tahiti six centuries ago. Its crew settled at Maketu in the Bay of Plenty and spread inland. Today the Arawa people live in the Hot Lakes district, the guardians of the weird thermal region of New Zealand.” He goes on to talk of the intense thermal activity at the southern end of the town: “This famous settlement, now occupied by descendants of the Tuhourangi tribe who left Te Wairoa, the Buried Village, at the time of the Tarawera Eruption in 1886, lies under Pohaturoa (Long Rock) and the lesser hills of Whakarewarewa and Te Puia. These heights were crowned by impregnable pas, or fortresses. It was the pa of Whakarewarewa which later gave its name to the larger area of geysers, boiling pools of water and mud, and sinter deposits.”

Like the uneasy land they rest upon there is a restlessness, so different from the sense of ancient settledness of many Aboriginal legends, underpinning the stories. Sometimes they speak of coming from elsewhere—“The name Mourea or Morea, which is said to mean Remnant, was a name imported from the Society Group by an earlier generation of Maoris”—but most of the stories are about internal travels. Perhaps this stood Maori society in good stead, this sense of not being indelibly tied to a certain territory ...

“The cataclysm of 1886, when Mount Tarawera erupted and devastated a vast area of country, is a major event in New Zealand history. ... It was at Te Wairoa that we see most clearly the evidence of the appalling devastation that occurred on the night of June 10, 1886. The hand of nature covers the scars made by the titanic underground forces, and in the course of time the tiny Lake Rotomahana, which grew thirty-fold in size, appears ageless as the surrounding hills, but in Te Wairoa, the little village which was once a busy overnight stopping place for travellers on their way to see the wonders of the Pink and White Terraces, the remains of buried buildings can still be seen. Once upon a time it was a peaceful village in a pleasant setting of green; then for a time it was an ugly mud-covered waste; today the former beauty of the valley is restored and it preserves the memory for all time of that night of terror and destruction.” The eruption turned the small Lake Tarawera into a much larger lake; “and deep beneath the boiling waters which hiss and surge on the steaming cliffs of Hape-o-toroa, lies all that remains of the glistening stepped pools of the Pink Terraces. Long ago these world-renowned silica terraces were crowned by the boiling fountain Otu-kapua-rangi (Cloud of Heaven), while on the far side of the lake their beauty was challenged by the gleaming White Terraces.”

I was fascinated by volcanoes when I was young. I desperately wanted to *see* a volcano. But they also gave me cold shivers up the spine. One of the accounts I read and re-read was the part in Ivan Southall’s *Danger Patrol* where the supposedly sleeping volcano in New Guinea comes back to life. In 1994 the Tavurvur Volcano erupted and buried the city of Rabaul under ash and mud. But as the book came out nearly 40 years before then it seems more likely he had a different volcano in mind. Melanie Guile in *Papua New Guinea* says, “The townspeople of Higatura were used to the rumblings of nearby Mt Lamington. But, in 1951, they were caught without warning when the side of the volcano blew out. Reaching 200°C and traveling at 3000 kilometres per hour, a poisonous gas cloud burned everything in its path, and killed all 3000 of the town’s inhabitants.” She goes on to say, “Eruptions such as this are rare on the main island of New Guinea, but the eastern islands have some of the most restless volcanoes in the world. Ulawan rises over two kilometres out of the sea off the coast of New Britain, and is Papua New Guinea’s most active volcano. Since 1970 Ulawan has erupted about 100 times. Kavachi is an underwater volcano off the Solomon Islands. Named ‘Kavachi’s oven’ by locals, it first erupted in 1937, when a cone thrust up from the one kilometre-deep seabed. Since then the island has sunk and re-risen eight times!”

And I was fascinated by the volcano in the film *Tanna* in Vanuatu. Is it visitable, I wondered. Yes, indeed. The island of Tanna lies to the south of the capital Port Vila and the Lonely Planet Guide to the South Pacific says, “The Tannese are passionate about their island – and you will be, too. There are lush undisturbed rainforests, heady night-perfumed flowers, coffee plantations, plains where wild horses run with their foals, mountains, hot springs and waterfalls. Presiding over it all is fuming, furious Mt Yasur, the world’s most accessible volcano. The local chiefs have formed marine and wildlife sanctuaries, and there are gardening, surfing, cycling, walking or volcano enthusiasts everywhere. Note that there are very serious quarantine controls – the island has no nasty bugs, so everything’s grown without insecticides, herbicides or pesticides, and the locals want to keep it that way. Christianity, cargo cult and *kastom* are important, and all natural phenomena have a fourth dimension of spirituality and mystique.” And volcanoes have their own special mystique ...

People do travel the world to visit and study and take amazing pictures of volcanoes—and occasionally to get killed by volcanoes. Other travelers just complain when their flights are grounded by volcanic ash. I suspect they are missing something in their experience of life and travel ...

* * * * *

December 27: Elizabeth Smart
December 28: Alasdair Gray
December 29: Dobrica Cosic
December 30: Timothy Mo

Stephen Leacock
Rudyard Kipling

* * * * *

Timothy Mo wrote in *An Insular Possession*: “How different are Canton and Macao (to which our story and heroes now pass). The traveller who went away from Naples to Stockholm would not have felt a greater difference. For the distinctions which do exist are accentuated by the short physical distance between the two water-borne cities, barely 80 miles. The sensation is not so much of crossing a delta, mighty obstacle though that was and is, as of a continent of the mind; of performing an interior journey as well as one demarcated in space. One feels, simply, different in Macao. The skin which crawled and prickled with the dank heat of the southern Chinese metropolis tingles here, rejoices in the cooling, balmy breezes which play along the Portuguese settlement’s leafy esplanades and vivid gardens. The spirit lifts, the eye is refreshed.

“Pastel villas, pink, green, and blue, or just dazzlingly whitewashed, face the sea. This is presently being whipped into spume horses by the first gentle breezes of the new north-east monsoon (which is starting to supplant the dying south-west monsoon). Along the Praia Grande, the noble, tree-lined carriageway which curves around the perfect crescent bay of the Outer Harbour, can dock shallow-draught vessels, mostly fishing junks and lorchas. On the other side of the peninsula is the Inner Harbour. At the fashionable hour of 6 p.m. smart carriages, bearing the society of Macao, will trot up and down the Praia and bloods on horseback will ogle the occupants and, if favoured, retrieve a dropped handkerchief or two.

“The settlement, already almost 300 years old, is situated on a narrow-necked promontory jutting out of a large island which forms much of the left bank of the Canton estuary. A wall ‘the Barrier’, is built across the narrowest part of the isthmus. Held by a debauched and lousy band of professional gamblers, bullies, and opium-addicts who masquerade as soldiers, it separates this little piece of Portugal, or the transplanted civilization of the Atlantic, from the Celestial Empire.

“In shape Macao resembles a dog’s tongue, with a few carbuncles on it, representative of its low hills, on one of which crouches a flat, Jesuit-engineered fort built for defence against the Dutch in the seventeenth century: a potent work in its day but become nothing more than a monument and public urinal. The grotto of Bamoës has been spared this last defilement and indignity (smelling floral rather than ammoniac) mainly because it is, through accident of entail and sale, positioned in the garden of the last head of establishment of the British Factory in Macao. Yes, the Honourable Company had premises here, too, for the off-season of the summer when (officially) they were meant to be out of Canton and privately also preferred to be in this balmy sea-zone. They were grand premises. Nothing grand about Luis Camoes, a scribbler merely, who wrote his epic *Os Lusíadas* (1557) in the said Grotto (a lean-to of insignificant granitic rocks) and returned to Lisbon to die a debtor in 1480, like several of those early navigators whose exploits he celebrated. In 1802, the year Harry O’Rourke is said to have arrived from Calcutta, there was already a sense of a backwater about the settlement, a sense of a passing, not merely of a port (measurable in smaller manifests and declining tonnage, and harbour lists of smaller numbers of vessels frequenting) but also less quantifiably of an empire, a mission. And so Camoes is perhaps as representative a figure as any for the place, the Portuguese, and their empire; that is, if the artist can be said to be emblematic of anything but his own piffling neuroses. Which he transmutes, of course, into the universally and perpetually current coin of particular creation.”

A weed from Catholic Europe, it took root
Between some yellow mountains and a sea,
Its gay stone houses an exotic fruit,
A Portugal-cum-China oddity.

Rococo images of Saint and Saviour

Promise its gamblers fortunes when they die,
Churches alongside brothels testify
That faith can pardon natural behaviour.

A town of such indulgence need not fear
Those mortal sins by which the strong are killed
And limbs and governments are torn to pieces:

Religious clocks will strike, the childish vices
Will safeguard the low virtues of the child,
And nothing serious can happen here.

‘Macao’ in ‘A Voyage’ by W. H. Auden.

“Our nice house, it seemed, was haunted. It had belonged to a rice merchant who had made a vast profit during the war by hoarding grain. Finally the people of Macao, who were starving, had come up to the house to kill him. While they were massing round the gates, he was seen pacing up and down the flat roof, and then he died of a heart attack before they got to him. He had cursed the house before he died and no one would live there; but the Foreign Office, with typical English phlegm and a nice sense of economy, rented it cheaply for their consuls. Sometimes at night you could hear quite clearly the footsteps on the roof, pacing up and down. Our dogs would go rigid with fear, the hair on their spines stiffening, and they would howl and snarl at the bottom of the stairs to the roof, nothing would induce them to go up those stairs, and we would lie uneasy in our beds waiting for the morning.”

Erin Pizzey telling of her childhood home in Macao in *Infernal Child*.

“The one day tourist visiting Macao probably would not hear of Ho Yin. He would, though, be likely to hear the name Lobo. If there was one name that seemed even more potent in Macao than that of Ho Yin it was the name of P. J. Lobo.

Dr Lobo (his doctorate was in economics) was born in Portuguese Timor in circumstances even poorer than Ho Yin’s, and he was an orphan. An exceptionally bright lad, he was sent by the Church, which had schooled him, to the seminary at Macao to study for the priesthood. Lobo left the seminary, clerked for the government and studied economics, and rose to be chief of the Economic Bureau. He left this position to go into business for himself.

Curiously, a whole-page article about Dr Lobo in a Hong Kong newspaper supplement did not mention what his business was. It certainly referred to him as The Fabulous Master of “Vila Verde” meaning Radio Vila Verde, his radio station (or, rather, two stations) at Macao; and it said that Pedro Jose Lobo “heads an empire that covers most of big business in Macao”; but, as has been noted, Ho Yin and others covered a lot of what is not really “big” business anyway, any more than radio is in Macao.”

Though it didn’t describe his business it did say “No institution in charity-prone Macao is completely independent of the Lobo handout. His donations, in regular and sizeable amounts, help sustain Portuguese, Chinese, religious, government and private organizations.” This included his own orchestra as well as churches and convents and all their activities. But Colin Simpson in *Asia’s Bright Balconies* says he remained perplexed by where all this largesse was coming from. What actually was Dr Lobo’s business?

It was finally an issue of Time magazine which lifted the lid a little. Dr Lobo traded in gold. Dr Lobo was not immune to smuggling gold ...

“In Macao dealers in gold could operate openly and legally because Portugal was not a signatory to the Bretton Woods agreement. Other countries agreed to regulate dealings in gold by buying and

selling it at a price fixed by the International Monetary Fund. Macao was not obliged to observe any such gold-trading restrictions.”

He goes on to say “Since 1946, by Macao’s own report, some \$601 million worth of gold (Time said) had poured into and through Macao, and it went on to say: Most of it has also passed through the hands of Dr Pedro Lobo, one time chief economic advisor of Macao, who is credited with monopolizing gold import licences for Macao’s “gold syndicate”. Now nearly seventy, Lobo (Portuguese for Wolf) is gradually turning over the business to his son, Rogerio, 36, who is one of the owners of a single-plane airline that flies gold in from Hong Kong, 15 minutes away.

On arrival each shipment of gold is meticulously weighed by the Portuguese authorities determined to collect the import duty of 42-cents an ounce, the biggest source of Macao’s revenue.

After the weighing the authorities discreetly withdraw. Then the syndicate’s employees melt down the international gold bars (usually weighing around 27 lbs) into 9-oz. bars of thin gold sheets preferred by the smugglers.”

The gold, curiously, mostly came from the Bank of England via Hong Kong. The gold then found a ready market in India and an equally ready market among the Chinese who didn’t trust banks and felt much safer with some sheets of gold tucked away for a rainy day. The gold syndicate appeared to be making about a million pounds a year from the trade.

Although he tried to meet Dr Lobo he was unsuccessful but foreign correspondent Dick Hughes in Hong Kong said he had managed “to have lunch with Dr Lobo and had taken along a writer who very much wanted to meet him, Ian Fleming, whose James Bond detective novels have made him a very successful author.

Fleming subsequently reported that the meal was not a memorable one. Dr Lobo he described as a small, thin Malayan Chinese, and the living-room where they were received as rather sparsely furnished.

When Fleming got on to the subject of gold, Dr Lobo said yes, it was very interesting. Did Mr Fleming know the Bank of England? Such nice, correct people to deal with. The Doctor himself had not been to England.

Was he (Fleming wrote) correct in thinking that Dr Lobo bought gold at thirty-five dollars an ounce and then sold it at a premium to anyone who cared to buy; how it left Macao for the outside world being none of his business?

Yes, agreed Dr Lobo, that was more or less the position.

If they bought gold in Macao, I insisted gently, how did they get it out?

Dr Lobo’s face went blank. These were matters of which he knew little.

What had I learned of Dr Lobo, the gold king, whose name is whispered with awe throughout the East? Absolutely nothing at all.

I did not presume to think that I could learn anything Fleming hadn’t been able to learn, especially when he had the doughty support of Dick Hughes.”

I remember a Timorese friend being annoyed by this portrayal. I can understand him not liking to see a Timorese Catholic described as a Malayan Chinese. But more than that it was the image of a recluse, a spider in his web, rather than a hospitable Timorese always with time and generosity for other Timorese, he objected to. Perhaps if Ian Fleming had not seen the story through Western eyes but had sought out a Timorese living in Macao he might have found himself with an invitation to visit ...

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The small enclave has given its name, appropriately, to a game of chance. *The Key to Hoyle’s Games* says of Macao: “Straight from the casinos of Macao, famed gambling center of the Far East, this is a cross between Baccarat and Blackjack. The count resembles Baccarat; Ace:1, Two:2, up to Nine:9, Tens and picture cards:0. But in this game 9 is the limit, as with 21 in Blackjack.

Bets are made before the deal, and a single card is dealt to each player, dealer included, all face down. Sevens, Eights and Nines are naturals and are promptly turned up. A player beating the dealer

collects the amount bet on a Seven, twice that on an Eight, three times that on a Nine.

Conversely, the dealer collects triple from each player for a Nine, double for an Eight, the amount bet for a Seven, except in the case of a tie, when individual bets are off, as in Blackjack. If the dealer has no natural, he pays off winners; then the other players draw or stand, aiming to reach 9.

A player going over, loses his stake to the dealer, who then draws or stands, hoping to beat or tie those who stopped at 9 or less. If dealer goes bust, he pays the remaining players; otherwise he settles according to individual scores.”

* * * * *

Timothy Mo came to Australia to promote his novel of a fictitious East Timor, *The Redundancy of Courage*, and Michele Turner took him to various engagements around Sydney. At one stage they found themselves on the wrong side of a flooded creek and sat there for a while as the water went down. She said he was an extremely nice man. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, of course, didn't use words like 'nice'. Instead they said of him (3 June 1991), "The English author Timothy Mo, best known for his novel *Sour Sweet*, arrived in Sydney yesterday to promote his new book, *The Redundancy of Courage*, set in Danu, the eastern half of an island to the north of Australia.

“No prizes for guessing that Danu is a fictionalised East Timor.

“At the same time as Mo's new book is released, television viewers have seen Timorese soccer players weeping as they decide whether to return home, while four of their team mates stayed in Australia or flew to Portugal.

“The final third of the book is taken up with exactly the questions that concerned these soccer players – what it is like to live under a military regime, fear of reprisals on families, curfews, people disappearing.

“Mo believes control of the media can hide the significance of events such as East Timor.

“If it doesn't get on TV in the West, there is a sense in which it hasn't happened,” he said. “To put someone or something in a brief on page four is, in fact, to bury them. This is what happened with East Timor.”

“Mo called Indonesia's invasion of East Timor an outrageous act.”

So what connection did Timor and Macao have? The Catholic Church in Timor was part of the Diocese of Macao up until the late 1930s. The Governor in East Timor sent Timorese troops to Macao to help protect Macao from the Japanese. It is an irony that it was Timor which was wrecked and Macao suffered only very minor damage in WW2. And wealthy Chinese in Macao used Timor as a place to send their black sheep, not unlike England sending remittance men to Australia. Timor, it was felt by disillusioned and annoyed fathers, did not have the temptations, particularly gambling, that Macao had ...

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December 31: Simon Wiesenthal

Fumiko Hayashi

And ...

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“Historical Note: On 31 December 1600, Queen Elizabeth granted a charter to the English East India Company. The aim of the game was to bring back peppers and spices of the East. The fabled turn-on vegetables. This charter granted over 350 years ago has had more effect on the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s than Sandor Laboratories and its lysergic discoveries. Without the East India expedition LSD would be a pharmacological curiosity.

It happened like this. From 1600 to 1946 several hundred thousand Englishmen – soldiers, administrators, scholars – took a trip to India. They went there to mind a colony, but many of them got their minds colonized by smiling Krishna, the aphrodisiac love god. The impact of a visit to India is psychedelic. You are flipped out of your space-time identity. Indian life unfolds before you a million-flowered-person-vine-serpent coil of life ancient, wrinkled, dancing, starving, laughing, sick,

swarming, inconceivable, unreasonable, mocking, singing multi-headed, laughing God dance.

And the English in India got turned on. Even today the tourist who strays from the deluxe plastic path and wanders into the villages will be offered bhang, ganga, attar, some one of a thousand ways the Indians prepare hemp.”

Timothy Leary in *The Politics of Ecstasy*

Of course it is one thing to write about a place, and enjoy the writing about, it is another to actually want to go there, to want go through all the hassle of packing and organizing and buying tickets and sitting leg-numbing hours in an aircraft. So if asked to give a Writer’s Choice—what would I choose? Or Choices ...

Armenia, the Cape Verde Islands, Iceland, Ireland, Samoa, Reunion Island, South Africa, the Azores, Scotland ... that seems a good start. Many years ago I wanted to go to Madagascar and then it was Tierra del Fuego, then Bolivia ... it just takes an intriguing article or set of photos and my thoughts are engaged. Last week it was PNG ... before Christmas I was thinking of New Zealand ... And I keep meaning to go to Evandale to see the penny-farthing bikes race ...

Writers of armchair travel books can be indecisive, imprecise, vague and dreamy. Writers of armchair travel books do not need to tie themselves to Eighty Places; they can say ‘about eighty, who is counting’. Just as armchair travelers do not have to worry about missing trains or leaving their passport on the kitchen table ...

I asked several people where they would choose to go in their armchairs. Florence. Iceland. The Scottish Islands. A Mediterranean cruise. Brazil. Ghana. But, curiously, Florence was the most mentioned destination. And given the congestion there I think staying firmly in that armchair and waiting for a virtual reality Florence is wise ... But perhaps they were drawn more to the idea than to the reality ...

Such is the wonder of armchair traveling ...

AND SO ... BON VOYAGE

And I wonder when those words became THE way to farewell the traveler in English-speaking countries?