

THE LONG WAY HOME

**COMPILED
BY**

J. L. HERRERA

DEDICATED TO:

Marianela, Carolina, Bernie, and all the family.
And to the memory of
Floridor Ugarte

WITH THANKS TO:

Patrick Herrera, Anthony Raymond,
Ethel and Gordon Sewell, Ken Carroll,
Ken Herrera, Ellen Gray, and Lise Levaque

AND TO THE MEMORY OF:

My great-grandmother Caroline Huband-Smith (née Martin)

INTRODUCTION

When I decided to focus on older and sometimes forgotten authors and books in *A Well-Worn Trail* I did not at first realise how fascinating some of the snippets I turned up would be. I don't mean that all these books struck me as great literature or books that should be brought back from the edge of the grave, reprinted, republished, re-promoted as 'forgotten classics'. No. But they were evocative of time and place. And, hidden in there, were books and ideas and memories which brought considerable enjoyment with them.

So after some pondering I decided I would do a similar book, an almost sequel, another wander down memory lane. It would be overstating the case to say I am bringing forgotten writers, forgotten books, back from oblivion but perhaps this, at times, is the case.

And talking of books I came upon a mention by P. D. James on how hard it actually is to read in bed. This is true. If you lie on one side your elbow gets tired. If you lie on your back both wrists get tired. If you lie on your tummy both elbows get tired. If you prop yourself up on pillows your top half gets cold. Why hasn't anyone come up with an amazing invention which would make reading in bed the pleasure it promises? But even without the Amazing Turn as You Read Portable Armrest, Patent Pending, I still read and enjoy reading in bed.

I hope you do too.

J. L. Herrera
Hobart 2017.

P.S. After some thought I changed the title of *The Final Chapter* to *A Final Chapter* as I had not kept to my plan to compile calendars around a theme such as travel, childhood, politics. Sometimes there is a satisfying feeling in saying 'there, that's done' but at other times I find I can't let an idea, a theme, a series, go. I am now pondering on whether this should be *A Long Way* rather than *The Long Way* ...

THE LONG WAY HOME

January 1: Maria Edgeworth

James Frazer

January 2: Isaac Asimov

John O'Donohue

January 3: J. R. R. Tolkien

January 4: Michele Turner

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Paula Kamen wrote *Finding Iris Chang* which is about the author of *The Rape of Nanking*, though not precisely a biography.

“Too long the ethic in journalism has been the short-sighted macho one of swallowing feelings, maybe compartmentalizing them, and facing trauma all alone, perhaps by medicating sorrows in drinks after work. Or reporters just leave themselves to feel the impact years later with a worsening of health. Journalism schools lack a basic curriculum to teach about trauma, along with a vocabulary for expressing it, the impact on victims, and its possible fallout to those who report about it. This is especially negligent considering that so much that journalists do involve trauma, from day one; typical first-year beat reporters pay their dues, as I did, covering crime and major accidents.”

This is a little different to someone who carefully and conscientiously decides on a topic for a book then plunges into the research. Someone sent out to a siege, a road accident, a fire, prepares for something horrible but probably hopes it will all end safely. Someone choosing to write about atrocities knows they are not going to melt away, that they cannot say the victim was airlifted to hospital and is now in a stable condition.

She goes on, “This blindness is deeply rooted in journalism. “The eternal culture of news organizations does not tolerate expressions of weakness,” observed longtime newspaper reporter Roger Simpson. He is also the founding director of the groundbreaking Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the University of Washington in Seattle. He did give me some hope, saying that the ethic in journalism recently has started to slowly change. The Dart Center, founded in 2000 in the Department of Communication at the university, helps to educate journalism professors and organizations internationally about the process of trauma and its possible impact on journalists. Some of this corporate investment is out of common sense to keep reporters going over the long term, and some is out of fear of a major lawsuit for a news organization in the future. He described the center as following a greater national movement of trauma awareness, spurred by the past three decades of work by the women’s movement in exposing such issues as sexual assault, and by psychological research on post-traumatic stress disorder.

“Simpson’s recently reissued coauthored book, *Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting about Victims & Trauma*, points to the need for education of journalists on many specific dynamics of different traumas, including sexual abuse and domestic violence, terrorist attacks, war, and genocide. As he told me, a special challenge of tackling the topic of genocide is the typical denial involved, such as the Armenian genocide in Turkey from 1915, still a hot-button topic there. Talking to veterans should also involve familiarity with post-traumatic stress disorder and managing it in the interview.”

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“For more than a year, a discharged GI, Ron Ridenhour, who had heard about the massacre (at My Lai), tried to interest the American press at home and those based in Saigon, notably *Newsweek*, without success. Finally, the story was broken not by any of the 600 accredited correspondents in

Vietnam, but by a young freelancer in the United States, Seymour Hersh, who regarded the murder of unarmed civilians by American soldiers as shocking.

“In November 1969, Hersh had spotted a small press agency item that one Lieutenant William Calley had been charged with the murder of 109 ‘Oriental human beings’ and that had gone unnoticed. He tracked Calley down to Fort Benning in Georgia, where he interviewed him. He then set out on a journey in the United States of, he estimates, more than 50,000 miles, finding and interviewing more than fifty members of Charlie Company. In 1970, he wrote a reconstruction of the atrocity for the little-known Dispatch News Service. When *Newsweek* finally acknowledged his scoop, its banner headline said, ‘An American Tragedy’. This set the tone for the coverage of My Lai as an aberration that called for sympathy for Americans, not the Vietnamese – even though other atrocities were now being revealed.”

John Pilger introducing Hersh’s report in *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism That Changed the World*.

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But sometimes the journalists who suffer the most are not the ‘big names’, the people with a prestigious paper or a major news service. Take for instance the case of Molly Norris in William Shawcross’s *Justice and the Enemy*. “Particularly poignant was the case of Molly Norris. In April 2010, Ms. Norris, a cartoonist on the *Seattle Weekly*, was appalled by the worldwide self-censorship over images of Mohammed. She drew a poster advertising an event—“Everybody Draw Mohammed Day”—on May 20, 2011. Her intention was not to abuse Islam but to create safety in numbers and to defend freedom of speech. This was honorable but rash.

“To her horror, her idea went viral on Facebook with thousands of different sorts of drawings of Mohammed submitted. As worldwide arguments over her initiative began, she disassociated herself from it. Too late. Like some ghastly mythical fury lurking in faraway mountains, Anwar al-Awlaki immediately issued from his eyrie in Yemen a fatwa demanding the death of Molly Norris and everyone else who had drawn Mohammed. “The medicine prescribed by the Messenger of Allah is the execution of those involved,” he said in *Inspire* magazine. “The large number of participants makes it easier for us because there are more targets to choose from.” He said it would be difficult for the authorities to protect them all. And there were indeed more than enough radicalized American Muslims to pose a real and perpetual threat to Molly Norris. The F.B.I. declared it would not defend her and the *Seattle Weekly* announced “there is no more Molly.” She became a non person, hiding in Washington State—or somewhere else.

“Molly Norris’s entire life, not just her freedom of speech, was ruined in the land of the First Amendment by a threat from an Islamist terrorist demanding the murder of yet more Americans. This is the route down which freedom dies. We make fun of Christianity, mock (or malign) the Jews, laugh at the Dalai Lama, but we often maintain a respectful silence about Islam. Why is one religion being accorded so much more deference than all the others?”

It could be said that, like Salman Rushdie, she should have been aware of the forces she was dabbling with. But this seems unfair. Can anyone fully comprehend the mentality of an Anwar al-Awlaki? It could be reiterated, what other people have reiterated: that the people she was dealing with are peculiarly lacking in any sense of humour. But I would like to bring forward what seems to be the underlying problem. The *boringness* of the people she unwittingly tangled with, the tedium of their slogans, the lack of imagination and profound thought. Like Communist slogans, like advertising jingles, they soon become tired and dull. *Unless* ... Yes, unless you can offer something dramatic to back them up. Take away all the trappings behind Hitler. The swastikas, the marching, the songs, the torchlight parades and the rallies. Let Hitler stand alone. And very soon his messages cease to

mesmerize and just plain bore ...

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Those who write with their pens dipped in a passion to see justice done, to see wrongdoing exposed, to see the innocent dead remembered, usually write about people. But sometimes the destruction of things resonates down the years. I am sure you can find any number of stories to arouse regret or indignation but here are two I have recently come upon:

“However bad the disruption and destruction of the public libraries, the worst loss to the country was the burning in June 1922 of the Public Record Office in Dublin. This housed legal records and documents from the year 1170. Attached to the Four Courts, the Public Record Office was used as a bomb and mine factory by the republican Rory O’Connor. In a bombardment from the Free State troops on 30 June the fire spread rapidly and reached the main explosive dumps in the cellars. In one of the most massive explosions of the Civil War the Public Record Office was blown apart and priceless and irreplaceable documents were destroyed to the chagrin of all Irish scholars ever since.”

Mary Casteleyn in *A History of Literacy and Libraries in Ireland*.

“While it was true that the Turkish troops were the worst offenders, killing civilians without mercy and raping the Russian women, the British and the French were not without blame. Houses were ransacked, the booty taken to the waiting ships and, disgracefully, Kertch’s museum was sacked and destroyed. With its collection of early Hellenic art it was an important repository, yet such lofty considerations did not impinge on the thoughts of the soldiers who looted it. Later, (William) Russell came across a hastily written note in the museum condemning ‘*la guerre des barbares*’ but by then it was too late. Age-old statues and tablets lay in shards and the remains of one civilisation lay shattered at the hands of those who followed in its wake:

The floor of the museum [he wrote on 28 May] is covered in depth with the debris of broken glass, of vases, urns, statuary, the precious dust of their contents, and charred bits of wood and bone, mingled with the fresh splinters of the shelves, desks, and cases in which they had been preserved. Not a single bit of anything that could be broken or burnt any smaller had been exempt from reduction by hammer or fire.

It was a shocking incident, deprecated by Raglan and by Brown who sent in fifty British cavalrymen to patrol Kertch and to prevent further outrages, but the damage had been done. When the news reached St Petersburg the Russians were rightly outraged. So too was the US minister, Thomas H. Seymour, who informed Marcy that ‘the atrocities of the allies at Kertch and other places in the Crimea, which they have easily overrun, exceed in enormity the atrocities the British were guilty of in the war of 1812 against us’.”

Trevor Royle in *Crimea*. (Kertch is in the Crimea on the strait leading to the Sea of Azov.)

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Iris Chang committed suicide and it is hard not to see her work on her important book on Japanese atrocities in the Chinese city of Nanking as playing a role in her depression, trauma and death. This is a question which I grappled with when I came to write the In Memorium for Michele Turner’s posthumous award from the government of Timor Leste. There is no way to fully untangle and understand all she had gone through in the writing of her book *Telling East Timor* and before she committed suicide in 1995.

IN MEMORIUM: MICHELE TURNER

Michele Therese Turner was born in Hobart on the 4th January 1952. She went to Mount Carmel College in Hobart where she excelled as a student, then to Catholic Ladies College in Melbourne and later to La Trobe University. She had various jobs in Melbourne before going to work full-time for the Commonwealth Employment Service in 1974. Out of this experience came her book *Stuck! Unemployed people talk to Michele Turner*. She bought an old Morris truck, turned it into an interview room, and drove round Victoria talking to nearly 200 unemployed people. When her book was published in 1983 it was at Number One on best-seller lists for 5 weeks. It didn't repay her for all the work and savings she had put into it but Penguin Books said that it had "made a significant contribution to understanding of the plight of the unemployed in this country."

She also stood as a candidate, against Barry Jones, for the Australian Party though she didn't get elected. How different many things might have been if she could have taken her passion for social justice to parliament! She worked on other issues, including the campaign to save Victoria Markets in Melbourne, and joined Amnesty International. Next time you walk through the Markets you might like to think of it as a kind of memorial to Michele.

She married David Bunn and moved to Sydney, then took on a far larger project: to write an oral history of East Timor. As she explained, "My first child was born in 1982. Our children revive in us our own childhood, and I remembered constantly then my dead grandfather, a gentle man who read to me for hours through childhood illnesses. He was an Australian soldier kept alive by Timorese during the Second World War. Without their help I would never have known him."

Though she had two small children, Cate and Jane, she began doing solidarity work with East Timor support groups such as the Australia East Timor Association and the East Timor Relief Association as well as contacting Timorese refugees to record their stories. She also contacted dozens of World War Two veterans and did research in the Australian War Memorial and other archives, becoming in the process one of the most knowledgeable people in Australia about this little-known aspect of Australian history. One of these veterans, Paddy Kenneally, came to Hobart and spoke movingly about Michele when she received a posthumous Human Rights Award in December 1995.

Out of more than eight years of research and interviews came her book *Telling East Timor: Personal Testimonies 1942 – 1992*, typed by her mother Ethel, and published in 1992. The book became a key publication used by both Timorese communities and supporters around the world. Nineteen years after Michele's death people still mention what an impact it made on them or ask where they can get a copy. But it also took a toll on her personal life and peace of mind. She said once that only a fraction of the horrifying stories told to her made it into the book but she continued to carry this horror round with her every day. She said, "I didn't know what I was taking on with this book ... other people's nightmares and their ghosts became mine."

She helped with the writing of a film *Women of the Crocodile* and began work on her own idea for a film *Palmira Feto* which was to be about the life of a Timorese woman. She continued to write articles, to send hundreds of letters and faxes, to take phone calls from people around the world wanting her help, her support, or the benefit of her knowledge. She moved to Hobart after the break-up of her marriage and joined the Hobart East Timor Committee. She bought an old sandstone house in Bothwell with the idea of renovating it. But unbeknown to her or anyone else she had developed two

small brain tumours. No one knows to what extent stress, anxiety, personal worries, ‘burn-out’ and ill health combined but in early 1995 Michele tragically committed suicide.

Pat Walsh described her as a ‘shooting star’ and it still seems an apt description of this remarkable woman who achieved so much in such a short life. She was lauded for her human rights work, for her expertise as an oral historian, as a determined and committed activist, but also as a loving mother, daughter, sister, friend and colleague. She dipped deeply into her own pocket to help others. She always had time for anyone in need of any kind of help. She was a torrent of ideas and plans. She brought an immense amount of energy and enthusiasm to her work. She went over and over the things she published in a meticulous effort to provide information people could trust and which could be used to rebut many of the misleading things said about East Timor. She combined her work with a love of music, sculpture, art and theatre, to the mutual benefit of everything she did. When her brother Michael heard of her death he said it was like a light going out. Many people felt the same sense that the world was suddenly a darker place.

She drew inspiration from many things such as T. S Eliot’s poetry including the line ‘For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business’, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes’ very humble response to his nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, and Francisco Borges da Costa’s beautiful poem ‘One Minute of Silence’ ...

Michele Turner lies beside her beloved grandparents, Arthur and Edna Hickman, in the serenity of Cornelian Bay Cemetery in Hobart. She is now at peace. She probably watches over her beautiful daughters with love and pride. Probably, too, she watches over East Timor like a guardian spirit.

So perhaps we could all take a minute of silence to remember this very special woman ...

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And perhaps too a minute of silence for all those, like Iris Chang, who look unflinchingly at human atrocities in the hope of us all saying ‘Never Again’—not least for the toll it also takes on those who feel compelled to chronicle those atrocities ...

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January 5: Umberto Eco
Rudolph Christoph Eucken
January 6: Kahlil Gibran
Jedediah Smith
January 7: Zora Neale Hurston
January 8: Wilkie Collins
January 9: Karel Capek
January 10: Robinson Jeffers
January 11: Alan Paton
Bayard Taylor
January 12: Dorothy Wall
January 13: A. B. Guthrie
Lorrie Moore
Victor de Laprade
Horatio Alger
January 14: J. F. Archibald

January 15: Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin)
Ernest J. Gaines

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“Molière said that for the theatre all he needed was a platform and a passion or two.”
Thornton Wilder.

“In 1673, France’s greatest comic dramatist, Molière, wrote a play called *Le Malade Imaginaire – The Hypochondriac* – about a man who is so obsessed with his health problems that he wants to marry his daughter to a doctor to save on medical bills, and threatens to banish her to a convent if she refuses. It was supposed to be a satire, but the French seem to have decided that he is a role model rather than an anti-hero.

“In this they are aided and abetted by the state. The French social-security system may be cutting back on expenses, but it is still one of the most generous in the world, and this encourages the French to get ill as often as possible.”

From *Talk to the Snail* by Stephen Clarke. This play is also translated as *The Imaginary Invalid* although hypochondriacs and imaginary invalids are not quite the same thing.

“The practice of doctors’ use of obscure Latin in front of patients is lampooned in Molière’s *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673).”

From Barry Blake’s *Secret Language*.

A *Guide to French Literature* (Jennifer Birkett and James Kearns) says, “Molière’s satire showed no mercy to the follies of the modern. Self-seeking, injustice and oppression, deceit and, most of all, hypocrisy were roundly condemned. *Les Précieuses ridicules*, like *Les Femmes savants* (1672), targeted the social-climbing imitators of the worst excesses of Parisian salon life, for the damage done to language and morals by their self-important prudery and lack of brains and taste. Tyrannical heads of family were attacked for keeping their wives morally and intellectually imprisoned (*L’École des femmes*, 1662), marrying off their children for money, position or mere personal convenience (*L’Avare*, 1688; *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, 1670; *Le Malade imaginaire*, 1673) or, simply, reveling in their patriarchal power. In *Le Tartuffe* (1664; first authorised representation 1669), Orgon is vulnerable to the religious confidence trickster because of his insistence on being absolute master in his own home and his declared pleasure in annoying his family. (Act III, Sc. 7). The sharpest barbs were kept for the men of the professions – Churchmen, lawyers and, especially, doctors – who tried to mask ignorance and rapacity with costume and jargon (*L’Amour médecin*, 1665; *Le Médecin malgré lui* (1666); *Le Malade imaginaire*).”

I am not sure I would want to go to a play about someone obsessed with enemas and laxatives, no matter how funny, but I found myself wondering whether Molière had had some dismal encounters with doctors ... and given the state of medicine in the 1670s with its leeches and strange potions he was probably not alone in having little faith in doctors ... We know he suffered (and died) from TB but whether he felt that his symptoms had been wrongly treated or left untreated or he had been charged too much or in some other way the medical profession had failed him ...

And are you wondering about hypochondriacs and imaginary invalids? My dictionary defines a hypochondriac as “a person who is excessively worried about their health.” An invalid is “a person made weak or disabled by illness or injury.” So an imaginary invalid would be “a person who imagines they have become weak or disabled by illness or injury.” While the hypochondriac is always worrying that they *might have* something, undiagnosed, wrong with them the imaginary invalid believes they

have something wrong and that it will be chronic and disabling. I think Molière was quite right. Both of these possibilities are fertile sources of ideas ...

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January 16: Margaret Wilson

Zhou Zuoren

January 17: Anton Chekhov

January 18: A. A. Milne

Rubén Darío

January 19: Edgar Allan Poe

Gustav Meyrink (Meyer)

Bernardin de St Pierre

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The Golem by Gustav Meyrink is described as the “Most famous supernatural novel in modern European literature, set in Ghetto of Old Prague around 1890. Compelling story of mystical experiences, strange transformations, profound terror.” But *The Golem* by Avram Davidson in *The Giant Book of Fantasy* is a spoof in which Mr and Mrs Gumbeiner are out walking on their California street discussing the need to get their lawn mowed when a stranger joins them and interrupts their mundane conversation. They can’t make him out but assume he is a foreigner of some kind.

“Listen, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is,” the old woman said, “maybe where you came from is different, but in this country you don’t interrupt people the while they’re talking....Hey. Listen—what do you mean, he made you? What kind of talk is that?”

The stranger bared all his teeth again, exposing the too-pink gums.

“In his library, to which I had a more complete access after his sudden and as yet undiscovered death from entirely natural causes, I found a complete collection of stories about androids, from Shelley’s *Frankenstein* through Capek’s *R.U.R.* to Asimov’s—”

“*Frankenstein*?” said the old man, with interest, “There used to be a *Frankenstein* who had the soda-wasser place on Halstead Street—a Litvack, nebbich.”

“What are you talking?” Mrs. Gumbeiner demanded. “His name was Frankenthal, and it wasn’t on Halstead, it was on Roosevelt.”

“—clearly shown that all mankind has an instinctive antipathy towards androids and there will be an inevitable struggle between them—”

Things grow heated between the Gumbeiners and the mysterious stranger and old Mr. Gumbeiner strikes the stranger and knocks him down.

“Gumbeiner, look! He’s all springs and wires inside!”

“I told you he was a golem, but no, you wouldn’t listen,” the old man said.

“You said he walked like a golem.”

“How could he walk like a golem unless he was one?”

“All right, all right....You broke him, so now fix him.”

“My grandfather, his light shines from Paradise, told me that when MoHaRaL—Moreyne Ha-Rav Löw—his memory for a blessing made the golem in Prague, three hundred? four hundred years ago? he wrote on his forehead the Holy Name.”

Smiling reminiscently, the old woman continued, “And the golem cut the rabbi’s wood and brought his water and guarded the ghetto.”

“And one time only he disobeyed the Rabbi Löw, and Rabbi Löw erased the Shem Ha-Mephorash from the golem’s forehead and the golem fell down like a dead one. And they put him up in the attic of the shule and he’s still there today if the Communisten haven’t sent him to Moscow....”

And so the old couple work to fix their golem.

It is a very funny story but I wondered if Meyrink's story was similarly light-hearted. Mystical experiences, strange transformations and profound terror suggest not.

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I am not usually a reader of futuristic novels but I happened to pick up one by Marge Piercy called *Body of Glass*. Yes, it is set in the future but it also leaps back to Old Prague. "This is the story of one Judah Loew, several men and women around him, and one un-man. But it is also the story of a city, and of a town within a city, a town as special and as isolated and as endangered as our own free town of Jews huddled here ... Prague is the city, beautiful Prague just taking on its grey and golden, mustard and terracotta, strawberry and pistachio stucco warmth ... Every day from the university buildings I looked back into what had been the ghetto, every day I crossed it, past the Altneushul, past the Jewish cemetery to my neighbourhood ... a medieval warren of narrow streets, two- and three-story houses washed with mustard stucco over the ancient crumbling bricks on Rasnovka Street. In the Pinkas synagogue, built in the thirteenth century, a synagogue already old when Rabbi Judah Loew walked those ancient streets ... In the ghetto at Prague there are a few quite rich Jews ... and many, many poor Jews. There are a handful, such as the Loews, in between the hell of the very poor and the heaven of the rich. ... Let's look at Judah Loew ... He's called the Maharal. In those days big rabbis have nicknames like sports stars and stars of stimmies. In the embattled ghettos, they are culture heroes and entertainers besides. His given name: Judah Loew ben Bezalel, Judah the Lion."

This is the man folk lore says created an un-man, a Golem. "What is the golem he hears the voice commanding him to make? A being in human form made not by ha-Shem but by another human through esoteric knowledge, particularly by the power of words and letters. The Sefer Yezirah, the mystical Book of Creation, is supposed to contain what you must master to form a golem with the power of the Names of G-d and the power of letters and numbers. Kabbalistic tradition tells us of many sages and saints who created a golem, not for any use but as a mystical rite. They would make and unmake these moving clay men, joining themselves to the power of creation, and in the chanting and the act, achieve ecstasy." Some created golems as small helpers but Rabbi Loew makes his "to fight, to police, to save."

And not long after this I came upon Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*. Perhaps golems were going to take over from vampires and werewolves as traditional horror characters, I thought, and certainly in this story which is an unusual take on the Jack the Ripper life and times and in which terror is spread by the rumour that the killings are being done by a golem Ackroyd says, " 'Golem' is the medieval Jewish word for an artificial being, created by the magician or rabbi; it literally means 'thing without form', and perhaps sprang from the same fears which surrounded the fifteenth-century concept of the 'homunculus' which was supposed to have been given material shape in the laboratories of Hamburg and Moscow." But whereas other objects of fear have cut their ties with their traditional homes and landscapes golems do still seem to need a connection with a Jewish community at the very least. They may not prove as adaptable within the horror genre as vampires ...

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H. P. Lovecraft in his article 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' writes, "A very flourishing, though till recently quite hidden, branch of weird literature is that of the Jews, kept alive and nourished in obscurity by the sombre heritage of early Eastern magic, apocalyptic literature, and cabbalism. The Semitic mind, like the Celtic and Teutonic, seems to possess marked mystical inclinations, and the wealth of underground horror-lore surviving in ghettos and synagogues must be much more considerable than is generally imagined. Cabbalism itself, so prominent during the Middle Ages, is a

system of philosophy explaining the universe as emanations of the Deity, and involving the existence of strange spiritual realms and beings apart from the visible world, of which dark glimpses may be obtained through certain secret incantations. Its ritual is bound up with mystical interpretations of the Old Testament, and attributes an esoteric significance to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet – a circumstance which has imparted to Hebrew letters a sort of spectral glamour and potency in the popular literature of magic. Jewish folklore has preserved much of the terror and mystery of the past, and when more thoroughly studied is likely to exert considerable influence on weird fiction. The best examples of its literary use so far are the German novel *The Golem*, by Gustav Meyrink, and the drama *The Dybbuk*, by the Jewish writer using the pseudonym ‘Ansky’. The former, with its haunting shadowy suggestions of marvels and horrors just beyond reach, is laid in Prague, and describes with singular mastery that city’s ancient ghetto with its spectral, peaked gables. The name is derived from a fabulous artificial giant supposed to be made and animated by mediaeval rabbis according to a certain cryptic formula. *The Dybbuk*. Translated and produced in America in 1925, and more recently produced as an opera, describes with singular power the possession of a living body by the evil soul of a dead man. Both golems and dybbuks are fixed types, and serve as frequent ingredients of later Jewish tradition.”

Lovecraft died in 1937.

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Isaac Asimov in his collection *Robots* traces humankind’s desire to create walking talking people right back to creation myths. “Folk tales of all nations tell of objects, usually considered inanimate, that through magic of one kind or another, achieve human or even superhuman intelligence. These can vary from the “golem,” a giant made of clay, supposedly given magical life by a rabbi in sixteenth-century Bohemia, down to the magic mirror in “Snow White” who could tell “who is the fairest of them all.” Various medieval scholars, such as Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, and Pope Sylvester II were supposed to have fashioned talking heads that gave them needed information.”

Then came automata and increasingly sophisticated machines. And then came Karel Capek with his play R.U.R. in 1920 where an Englishman called Rossum (‘reason’ in Czech) created his robots (‘slave’ in Czech) who would do the world’s work and make life better for us all. “In the end, though, the automata rebelled, wiped out humanity, and started a new race of intelligent beings themselves. It was Frankenstein again on a much more grandiose scale.”

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Meyrink was born in 1868 and the *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* says of him: “Gustav Meyrink’s literary career began when he became a regular contributor to the satirical weekly *Simplicissimus*. The brief tales he produced for the magazine—samples of which are included in *The Opal (and Other Stories)*—are as calculatedly bizarre as they are calculatedly bitter. Meyrink had plenty to be bitter about, having suffered insult, injury and discrimination by virtue of his illegitimate birth. His early business career had been ruined by malicious charges of fraud and he was eventually driven into exile from his beloved native city of Prague. Before turning his resentments to constructive purposes he had come close to suicide, but had been deflected by his growing fascination with occultism; he sought out and joined all the secret societies he could find, actively cultivating the outsider status that others were so enthusiastic to thrust upon him. Although he could never make up his mind how seriously occultism ought to be taken—his exposure to so many rival theses prevented his capture by any one faith—his scholarly investigations lasted throughout his life and provided the raw materials for all his best literary works.”

The Golem “is a nightmarish visionary fantasy in which a man who accidentally puts on another man’s hat becomes privy to the inmost secrets of Athanasius Pernath, a late-19th-century

jeweller in the Prague ghetto.” But the Guide suggests *The Angel of the West Window* as a better work than *The Golem*. In this the narrator “is a descendant of John Dee who comes into possession of various documents relating to his ancestor, including fragments of his diary.”

“*The Angel of the West Window* combines all the best features of Meyrink’s work: the vivid melodrama, the philosophical urgency and the ironic insight. It is something of a patchwork, stylistically so uneven that a few critics have alleged that some of its chapters might be the work of another hand, but it is fascinating nevertheless. Meyrink’s work carries forward the German tradition of hallucinatory and allegorical fantasy instituted a century before by E. T. A. Hoffman, bringing it decisively into the period between the two world wars and abandoning it—with almost perfect timing—on the eve of Hitler’s rise to power. In retrospect, its distinctive combination of phantasmagoric apocalyptic anxiety and desperate hopefulness seem exceptionally prescient.”

Meyrink died in 1932.

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January 20: Eugène Sue

January 21: Bernardin de St Pierre (d)

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“In the museum is a remnant of another romantic story, far more famous than the fight at Grand Port. The battle is merely described in history books and recorded on the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, the second occurrence still lives as a great love story. A ship’s bell, green and cracked, is all that remains of the Saint Geran which on a clear, moonful night in August 1744, was allowed to drift onto the rocks at l’Ile d’Ambre, off the Mauritius coast. She had suffered a stormy five months’ passage from France and now, becalmed, and within sight of her harbour, she was allowed to fall among the rocks and reefs which tore into her hull. Among the awakened passengers were Mesdemoiselles de Mallet and Caillou, who were engaged to two officers, Messieurs de Payramon and de Longchamp. As the masts tumbled and the ship collapsed the two ladies were urged to take off their voluminous clothes, jump into the sea and swim for the shore. They stoutly refused on the grounds of delicacy and died for prudery, clasped in the arms of their gallant lovers. In another version of the tale we have Captain Delamare, who had permitted the disaster, refusing to take off his uniform because it was below his dignity as a sailor. It was probably the most competent decision he made all that long night.”

(I cannot help wondering how those poor ladies could have been expected to know how to swim; if anything they were probably safer on board than in the sea.)

“The novelist, Bernardin de Saint Pierre, a friend of Rousseau, heard the story when he spent two years in the Ile de France, and from it he fashioned the romance of Paul et Virginie, one of the classic love stories of France, still read and enjoyed today. In this fictionalized version the heroine Virginie is returning to the island. Her faithful and patient lover, Paul, waits on the shore, only to see the Saint Geran wrecked within sight of the beach. His drowned beloved is washed up almost at his feet. He dies of a broken heart. A simple tale that has so far been published in five hundred editions.

“The bell of the Saint Geran was found wedged in the wreckage by a diver in 1968. It stands in the museum, cracked but crudely reassembled. Soon after its finding it was stolen and smashed for scrap. Recovered and patched it now stands with a somewhat sorry appearance. So much for romance.”

*

“Despite the oppressive heat that choked the rude streets of Port Louis, capital of Mauritius, the afternoon of August 16, 1744, there was a flurry of activity because sails had been sighted, far off but drawing steadily closer to the island where no ship from France had landed in more than two years. She appeared to be a French East Indiaman and small clusters of excited sugar planters in threadbare garb gathered to speculate on her long-awaited cargo. Hopefully she carried the colony’s first sugar

refining machinery and desperately needed currency in the form of Spanish silver pillar dollars. There would be vital staples, cloth, trimmings, trinkets and precious letters from home to appease their transplanted wives. That night, more than one settler on the remote Indian Ocean island savored the last of his carefully rationed French brandy in anticipation of the bountiful kegs that would roll down the gangplank onto the quay the next morning when the ship finally docked.

“But dawn’s first light brought an end to jubilation. During the night the ship, the *St. Géran*, had wrecked and those who flocked to the shore to welcome her found a grisly scene of debris and bodies strewn along the glistening beach. To those aboard the sinking of the ship was not the beginning of a nightmare but the end, for during her long and difficult passage from France more than 100 of the 145 crew and passengers had perished of scurvy and other diseases.

“The loss of the 600-ton merchantman is familiar to almost every Frenchman having passed into French literature as the inspiration for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre’s 1788 novel *Paul et Virginie*. The idyllic-tragic romance of two young lovers aboard the doomed ship has been published in more than 200 editions in countless languages. On Mauritius they still talk of the *St. Géran* as if she had gone down only last night.”

Robert F. Marx in *In the Wake of Galleons*.

You can see some of the remains of the St. Geran and its cargo in the Maritime Museum there.

“Paul and Virginia, we know from Bernardin St. Pierre, ‘had neither clock nor almanack.’ They knew the hours of the day by the shadows of the trees. ‘It is time to dine,’ said Virginia, ‘the shadows of the plaintain trees are at their roots;’ or, ‘Night approaches, the tamarinds close their leaves.’ ‘When will you come to see us?’ inquired some of her companions in the neighbourhood. ‘At the time of the sugar-canes,’ answered Virginia. We smile at this simplicity, but country people retain in much of their talk the same kind of pastoral allusiveness. ‘We will put off the party till after hay-harvest’—‘We will come and see you next week, because there will be a moon’—these are turns of speech which are not strange in English homesteads far from towns; and they smack of that nearness to Nature, and that conscious dependence upon her hospitality, which the dweller in towns must lose.”

Matthew Browne in *Chaucer’s England*.

Bernardin de St Pierre undoubtedly knew the story well as he was in Mauritius for several years (and as a disciple of Rousseau he had undoubtedly been influenced by Rousseau’s ideas on the natural man, the noble savage, the advantages of living in uncivilized places) but the curious thing about *Paul et Virginie* was that it was originally treated as a *children’s* story rather than a romance or a tragedy.

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January 22: August Strindberg

* * * * *

Swedish playwright August Strindberg tends to be seen as a ‘tormented genius’. Tormented may well be right. He suffered from a persecution mania. He married three times and each marriage seems to have gone from high hopes to recriminations and misery. He lurched from poverty to mild comfort and back again. As one of a big family he seems to have felt that if only his mother (and later his stepmother) had given him affection and attention none of his problems would have overwhelmed him. Children from big families frequently expected more attention and affection than tired mothers had to give. And some children, whether it is permissible to say so or not, are more lovable than others.

But was he a genius?

I have just been reading a collection of three of his plays, ‘The Father’, ‘Easter’ and ‘Miss Julia’ and I would say no. Perhaps a broader reading of his work would change my mind but my impression was of a competent playwright but nothing more. ‘The Father’ is a battle of the sexes but

unlike Ibsen's 'A Doll's House' in this one Laura has her husband shut up as a lunatic after convincing him that no man can be certain of his paternity. (As Strindberg refused to acknowledge the child he had out of wedlock it may be that there was a sense of guilt playing out.) In 'Miss Julia' the rich spoilt young woman tries to persuade her two servants to fly with her to a new life in Switzerland. But as soon as a knock on the door is heard which they assume is her father coming home all three of them return to their usual craven attitudes towards this authority figure, Miss Julia seemingly taking this fear and lack of self-esteem to the ultimate length. 'Easter' deals with an old case of theft and threat which ends with forgiveness and if not hope then a resigned sense of a new beginning.

I don't know how well each script would play on the stage but I wondered if they would be seen as too wordy with not enough happening, now. Perhaps that was what Swedish playgoers expected. *A History of Swedish Literature* (edited by Lars G. Warne) says, "Strindberg's international reputation rests on his dramatic production. In this genre he was an innovator and a pioneer. ... Strindberg proceeds to outline a new approach to drama and staging, which can be viewed as a manifesto of the modern realistic theater with its emphasis on greater concentration in dramatic structure, more psychologically complex characters, ensemble acting rather than star performance and greater naturalness in diction and gesture." All three plays belong in this naturalistic style, what Strindberg thought would make him the 'Zola of the North', and which was an interesting and probably helpful direction for Swedish theatre.

But as I pondered on these three works and why I found them unattractive I felt it was because not only did I not find any of the characters particularly likeable but that Strindberg himself probably didn't like them. They were a means to an end.

Michael Meyer in *Strindberg A Biography* writes, "Strindberg made enemies all his life, and some reminiscences of him were written with the same hatred and malice of which he himself was so often guilty." Of course conflict can help a play along. A good villain is a plus. But just a sense of people not liking each other can send the reader or playgoer away with a feeling of greyness and gloom. It has to be an extraordinarily good play to make you feel that despite the play depressing you you still want to come back for more.

While I was pondering on the little I knew about his work I came across a book called *Selected Poems of August Strindberg* put together and translated by Lotta M. Löfgren. She writes, " "Street Pictures" and "Cloud Pictures" illustrate Swedenborg's and Linné's influence on Strindberg, both poems make use of Swedenborg's theories of correspondences and of Linné's ideas of Nemesis Divina." So here is his "Cloud Pictures":

The sky is covered; the clouds career
Gossamer airships march with the wind;
All day long they may sail about,
But toward evening they join up
Gather the fleet in the western sky—
Rest in the lingering rays of the sun.
Now they stand up, dressed for games!
Now begins that mocking mirage;
Wanderer tricked by dazzling deceit,
Smoke and vapors in borrowed beauty.

*

Golden skies in the evening's glow
Fashion strongholds and castle ruins;
At the top of the red shale cliff

By a valley with small ravines,
Vineyard walls and peach tree groves,
Grand cathedrals and city halls,
Singers' contests, knightly sport
Rounded turrets on arcing bridges ...
Now! Now the cloud changes its outline,
Red scorched desert desolate stretches
The Bedouin on his horse makes rounds,
Covers both the caravan's flanks.
There are palm trees and there an oasis,
There the camels and pyramids,
Gaze at themselves in water like glass ...
Now, once again the picture glides
Glides and moves to another phase
Spreading outward, the cloud dissolves,
Gathers again at a kiss from the sun
Builds, paints, reshapes as before.

*

Land! It is land that I see,
When from the stormy ocean
Aimlessly drifting I fell,
Praying I'd find a grave.
Green-glowing shoreline, shade-giving alders,
Rocking reeds in the tranquil bays
Here I am home among equals
Here are my country, my valleys!

*

I stand, my verdant island,
Bouquet in the ocean's wave!
Fragrant newly mown hay,
You I saw in my dream.
I saw in caressing meadows roaming
Light-clad children with flowing locks,
Singing and playing in motley flocks
Clasping each other in peace and love.

*

Friends and kinfolk I see
Hatred once parted our ways
No one remembers now
What occasioned our tears.
Homesickness grips me, I want to go there,
Leave the crowded tedious earth
Torturing thoughts, insulting words——
Woe! They are clouds, they are merely air!

*

Clouds, ye children of heaven,

Stay in your soaring world!
Treading upon earth's filth
I'm never likely to fly!
Sometimes a black cloud comes sailing by
Tumbles down, and forms little pools;
Rain to clean but it soils the earth,
Heaven, though vast, is reflected in puddles—
Little blue mirrors cover the heath!

Strindberg was said to have found comfort and peace in the ideas of Swedenborg (1688 - 1772) and perhaps too he found moments of contentment in his chaotic life as he contemplated clouds, trees, ponds, 'newly mown hay', the natural world ...

He died in 1912.

* * * * *

January 23: Charles Harpur
January 24: Edith Wharton
 E. T. A. Hoffman
January 25: Robert Burns
 John Norton
January 26: József Pusztai
January 27: Lewis Carroll
January 28: Colette
January 29: Thomas Paine
 Emanuel Swedenborg

* * * * *

After writing about Strindberg I went to find out a little bit about Swedenborg, in what ways he might have influenced Strindberg's ideas and writing. In fact Swedenborg was a very interesting man. He trained as a scientist and mathematician. He wrote the first book on algebra in Swedish. He founded Sweden's first scientific magazine, *Daedalus Hyperboreus*, he traveled, he did researches in physics and chemistry, he met other people doing interesting scientific research. And then he had a 'Road to Damascus' experience. He was sure he had seen and heard Jesus.

He went on writing in his dry scientific way but his subject matter became his search for scientific proof of religious beliefs. He believed, and this sounds very modern, that there were infinities in everything and the infinities were both the creation of God but also were God. We can never say we've found the smallest particle, end of story, end of research. He would have taken atoms, electrons, quarks, bosons, gravitons and all their relatives in his stride because he believed they were there for the finding. He saw the idea of the trinity as love, wisdom and activity—and rather than seeing his struggle to understand God and infinity as a reason to sit back in deep contemplation he believed that by bringing scientific enquiry to every aspect of the natural world he would eventually find the proofs he was seeking. In that he was not so far removed from the current scientists who write 'Mind of God' books; that scientific research and enquiry eventually bring the searcher up against the imponderable of scientific laws which seem too precise and astonishing to be the result of anything but an act of creation.

The surprising thing for me was that I had always found Swedenborg described as a mystic with all the baggage that word carries of imprecision and otherworldiness. You don't expect a mystic to be slaving over a Bunsen burner or doing complex calculations on a blackboard.

Less surprising was the influence he had on other writers; not only Strindberg but also people like Balzac, Baudelaire, Ralph Waldo Emerson and W. B. Yeats. So having left you with what I hope is an intriguing taste of Swedenborg I am off to see what is available in the way of a proper meal.

Gerhard D. Wassermann wrote in *Shadow Matter & Psychic Phenomena*. “Let me cite now a case described by the great philosopher Immanuel Kant ... concerning an experience by Swedenborg:

In the year 1759 towards the end of September, on Saturday at four o'clock pm, Swedenborg arrived at Gothenburg from England, when Mr. William Castle invited him to his house, together with a party of fifty persons. About six o'clock Swedenborg went out, and returned to the company quite pale and alarmed. He said that a dangerous fire had just broken out in Stockholm, at the Södermalm, and that it was spreading very fast. He was restless and went out often. He said that the house of one of his friends, whom he named, was already in ashes, and that his own was in danger. At eight o'clock, after he has been out again, he joyfully exclaimed, ‘Thank God! the fire is extinguished; the third door from my house.’ This news occasioned great commotion throughout the whole city, but particularly among the company in which he was. On Sunday morning Swedenborg was summoned to the governor who questioned him concerning the disaster. Swedenborg described the fire precisely, how it had begun and in what manner it had ceased, and how long it had continued. On the same day the news spread through the city, and as the governor thought it worthy of attention the consternation was considerably increased; because many were in trouble on account of their friend’s property which might have been involved in the disaster. On Monday evening a messenger arrived at Gothenburg, who was dispatched by the Board of Trade during the time of the fire. In the letters brought by him, the fire was described precisely in the manner stated by Swedenborg. On Tuesday morning the royal courier arrived at the governor’s with the melancholy intelligence of the fire, and the loss which it had occasioned, and of the houses it had damaged and ruined, not in the least differing from that which Swedenborg had given at the very time when it happened; for the fire was extinguished at eight o'clock.” With no phones or radios back in 1759 it could be asked how Swedenborg ‘knew’. Wassermann’s thesis is that Dark Matter or Shadow Matter may help to explain what are currently called psychic phenomena. They may have explanations in the field of physics rather than psychics. I think Swedenborg would have found this exciting and plausible ...

* * * * *

January 30: Walter Savage Landor

January 31: Zane Grey

February 1: Muriel Spark

February 2: Christopher Marlowe

Dorothy Macardle

Havelock Ellis

Hannah More

* * * * *

“The screenplay for *The Uninvited* by Frank Partos and Dodie Smith (the playwright famous for *Dear Octopus*, 1938, and *I Capture The Castle*, 1952) was faithful to both the contemporary evidence about the nature of ghosts and the supernatural as well as the original novel from which it (had) been adapted, *Uneasy Freehold* by the Irish authoress, Dorothy Marguerita Callan Macardle (1889-1958). A lady of fierce political beliefs whose involvement in the Irish Nationalist Movement led to her being imprisoned in Mountjoy Jail in 1922, Dorothy used her confinement to good effect by writing a series of ghost stories and launching her career as a writer. Apart from *Uneasy Freehold*, she also wrote two other highly regarded mystery thrillers, *The Unforseen* (1946) and *Dark Enchantment* (1953), not

forgetting a major study of the political conditions in Ireland at that time, *The Irish Republic* (1951). Dorothy first began to explore the supernatural in the manner that made *The Uninvited* such a success on the screen and as a book (it sold over half a million copies in hardcovers alone) in the short stories she wrote while in the Irish prison. ‘Samhain’ is one of the best from that now rare collection and with its presentiment of the great novel to come ...”

Peter Haining in *Classics of the Supernatural*.

*

When I was browsing through *Fantasy Literature* edited by Neil Barron I came across mentions of writers I had never heard of but who intrigued me, such as:

Aulnoy, Marie Catherine, Comtesse d’: *Tales of the Fairies in Three Parts*. “The other great writer of fairy tales, Madame d’Aulnoy, differed from Perrault by creating more intricate plots and writing in ornate language suited for sophisticated adults rather than children: nor do her characters always live “happily ever after.” In “The Yellow Dwarf”, for example, the King of the Gold Mines is slain, and his beloved dies of a broken heart. Both are then transformed (in fantasy a favorite balm for loss) into trees with intertwining branches. More lavish, less influential but occasionally more arresting as art than Perrault’s fairy tales.”

And:

Marie de France. 12th century. “Marie is thought to have been the half sister of King Henry II of England. She spent most of her life at the English court, though she wrote in French. She was the greatest master of the lai, generally speaking a short romance in rhyme that fuses a theme based on chivalric love with supernatural elements and a fairy tale setting. Her masterpiece, Bisclavret, has a werewolf hero; the transformation does not rob him of his intelligence. Service to a great king ends with the transformed man’s regaining his rightful form. Like all good medieval tales, this one hides beneath the entertainment an idea: here, the role of divine grace in the struggle for virtue.”

It is often hard to know where to draw the line between the fairy tale, the folk tale, the myth, the classic horror story, the writing that uses occult elements, Sword and Sorcery, all the genres, and indeed all fiction which leaps beyond fiction into unknowable areas.

So should Dorothy MacArdle be seen as a writer of fantasy, ghost stories, stories on supernatural themes or more in the nature of a writer of Gothics? She is listed in the *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost & Gothic Writers* (ed. David Pringle) which trawls quite widely. It says of her, “Dorothy Macardle made her name as a political activist, playwright (including work for the prestigious Abbey Theatre) and historian before branching out into fiction. The British edition of her novel *Uneasy Freehold* was handicapped by the fact that the United Kingdom was at war, but America was not yet involved and as *The Uninvited* it was a big hit there; the Literary Guild helped to boost it to best-seller status and Paramount filmed it—with Ray Milland in the lead—in 1944.” But none of her subsequent novels managed to repeat its success. “*The Uninvited* is what American paperback publishers of a later period would call a “Gothic romance”: a love story in which the play of the characters’ emotions is melodramatically heightened by anxiety and unease.” Gothics, from such giants of the genre as Phyllis Whitney, became very popular but they usually depended more on the ‘madwoman in the attic’ type of unease than straightforward ghosts, if ghosts can be straightforward. And then they too went out of fashion and it was the kind of Stephen King type of paranormal horror which grabbed best-seller status.

“However successful the first of them was, Macardle’s novels are trivial achievements by comparison with her massive history of *The Irish Republic*” but there is another curious question in there. Ireland threw up writers of Gothic grandeur with gay abandon, Le Fanu, Bram Stoker, Maturin, Morgan, O’Brien and many more. So did Macardle place herself in this tradition or did she want to

break with the Irish tradition and try to do something new with the genre?

* * * * *

The preparation of the screenplay of *The Uninvited* was possibly not that straightforward. Dodie Smith spent WW2 in Hollywood looking for opportunities both to keep her happy and busy and to keep her in her accustomed lifestyle. Valerie Grove in her biography *Dear Dodie* writes, “And although jobs in the films were becoming scarcer, Mary Martin’s husband, Richard Halliday, managed to get Dodie an offer from Paramount to work with Charlie Brackett on adapting *The Uninvited* by Dorothy Macardle, a sub-*Rebecca* ghost story set in a lonely house on a Devon cliff-top.

“Though Dodie found in Brackett a true ally – ‘Has anyone ever told you that you write like an angel?’ were his words on reading her first draft of the script – and though she was paid a soothing \$1250 a week, her experience was no happier. Another writer was brought in to make ‘a few technical changes’. Charlie told Dodie she was writing down to her movie audience because she despised them; and that she was over-sentimental. The Hollywood habit of hammering things out incessantly was a pleasant enough way of working once one stopped feeling guilty about it, but the constant unpicking and patching meant the original plot was quite lost. (‘Now do remember you’re better than Dorothy Macardle,’ said Charlie one day. ‘Who?’ said Dodie: after four months she had forgotten even the author’s name.) But Charlie was amiable to work with, a true friend and ally. He suggested that Alec, who looked so like Hollywood’s idea of the English officer, should take a screen test (Alec was sure he could not act, and declined) and even offered Dodie a small part in *The Uninvited*, playing the lunatic: a good story with which she could amuse friends.”

Dodie, like her husband Alec, turned down the offer of a part. (And it was her later story *A 101 Dalmations* which made her name in Hollywood rather than her script of *The Uninvited*.) But I couldn’t help feeling sorry for Dorothy Macardle. How did she feel as the child of her creative mind was treated with such cavalier unconcern?

* * * * *

Macardle was a teacher at Alexandra College in Dublin but in 1922 went to prison where she wrote a collection of short stories called *Earth Bound*. She also wrote studies of luminaries such as Patrick Pearse and James Connolly. It was in the 1940s that her ghost story *Uneasy Freehold* became popular; its follow-up *Fantastic Summer* less popular, and then she wrote *The Irish Republic*. *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature* (ed. Robert Welch) says she gave the royalties from this book to Eamonn de Valera. Well, I thought, if she admired him so much—why not? But *did* she admire him?

Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland* suggests the earlier passion women like Macardle had felt for de Valera and the Republican cause had cooled. “When Eamonn de Valera came to write his Constitution of 1937, his former comrades of a feminist disposition were outraged at its treatment of women” and “Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, true to form, accosted de Valera. So did the veteran Protestant republican, Dorothy Macardle. So did the Association of Women Graduates, led by three professors: Mary Hayden, Agnes O’Farrelly and Mary Macken. Pointing out that his own Constitution was markedly less liberal in its attitudes to women than the Collins Constitution of 1922, they demanded the retention of articles from the earlier document; otherwise women would be treated as “half-wits”. Even this rather cautious request was refused. Dorothy Macardle wrote in a letter to de Valera on 21 May 1937: “The real crux is the question of employment. The language of certain clauses suggests that the state may interfere to a great extent in determining what opportunities should be open or closed to women; there is no chance whatever to counter balance that suggestion or to safeguard women’s rights in that respect.” That ultra-conservative Constitution which, among other things, outlawed divorce has cast a long shadow.

I can understand Macardle turning to her ghost stories as a pleasant break from Irish politics but

I still wonder why she gave de Valera her royalties ...

* * * * *

February 3: Gertrude Stein

Simone Weil

Walter Bagehot

February 4: François Rabelais

Robert Coover

February 5: Johan Ludvig Runeberg

Dwight L. Moody

February 6: Eric Partridge

February 7: Charles Dickens

February 8: Jules Verne

Francis Webb

* * * * *

John Macleod wrote in *Highlanders: A History of the Gaels*: “The cult of the Highlands began with the work of one James MacPherson, born in the Badenoch district of Inverness in 1736. He was of the local gentry, but from a family of modest means. If he was witness to the outrages that followed Culloden – and the little boy must have been; Badenoch and its MacPhersons suffered greatly – James MacPherson never sought to avenge it. He was raised as a Gaelic speaker but, like many in the post-Culloden world, broke with the popular culture of his infancy. MacPherson went south and made his way in the world. He became a civil servant, a propagandist for the government. He sat for a time in parliament. He was London consul for an Indian prince; it was, however, a book published in 1760 – when he was still a young man – that made James MacPherson rich and famous.

“It was called *Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland*; it was followed by two other books in much the same vein, in 1762 and 1763. These, MacPherson led readers to believe, were remnants of the verse of the celebrated, semi-mythical Ossian, a Gaelic bard of the early Celtic period, who was thought to have flourished even before Columba. The books were an astonishing success. They attracted a huge following in the cities of the empire. By the turn of the century they had been translated into almost all European tongues. They sold well in America. More than anything else, these cod-Homeric effusions of ‘Ossian’ made the Highlands known and famous. MacPherson’s work has coloured, to a remarkable degree, perceptions of the region ever since.

“It is a little too strong to say that the work was faked: MacPherson had a deep and genuine knowledge of Gaelic tradition, and collected much ancient rhyme and legend; in the excitement he triggered, many scholars headed northwards to continue the work. Samuel Johnson and others, though, plainly accused MacPherson of fraud: the writing, they insisted, came from his own fertile imagination, and he had no business passing it off as the work of the great Ossian. This was unfair. MacPherson’s oeuvre was heavily indebted to genuine, and ancient, Gaelic myth. He certainly had access to some ancient manuscripts. But the work was not Ossian’s, and it was indubitably polished, styled and finished to the tastes and dictates of MacPherson himself. History was adjusted for artistic licence. He laid claim for Scottish Gaeldom what belonged more properly – certain sagas and legends – to Ireland. Though he dated his discoveries at the third century AD, the Vikings were introduced to the tale for some additional blood and thunder. The debate on MacPherson’s integrity has never been resolved. But, as Derick Thomson puts it, he ‘was neither as honest as he claimed nor as inventive as his opponents implied’.”

So what of its impact? “MacPherson’s Highlands are a world of mist, damp, gloom, misery, a general sense of past tragedy, present trouble and impending doom. It is a world where the sun never

shines, the trees are always bare, the hunter is always alone and the grave is always haunted. It is quite foreign to the cheerful, leafy world of most traditional Gaelic poetry. But it appealed hugely to a world now beginning to weary of Enlightenment sophistication. By the last decades of the eighteenth century, intellectuals across Europe were in full revolt against the ‘smile of reason’; men such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau challenged the flattening, denaturing influence of civilisation itself.”

Perhaps MacPherson was far more a post-Culloden child than people have realised; he read into the distant past the pain he had seen and experienced as a small boy and made it ‘safe’.

And the people influenced by his work were legion: Sir Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, “Herder, Schiller, Hugo, Byron and Yeats; the etchings of Alexander Runciman, the music of Brahms and Mendelssohn. In our own era J.R.R.Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* shows the unmistakable influence of ‘Ossian’.” To that could be added William Blake and even Mrs Radcliffe in her Gothic best-seller *The Mysteries of Udolpho* quotes lines from Ossian, “Pleasant as the gale of spring, that sighs on the hunter’s ear when he awakens from dreams of joy, and has heard the music of the spirits of the hill.” While Oliver Goldsmith in a comic poem called ‘Retaliation’ wrote “Our Dodds shall be pious, our Kenricks shall lecture/Macpherson write bombast, and call it a style”. And Wordsworth took up Ossian as subject matter in ‘Glen Almain, The Narrow Glen’:

In this still place, remote from men,
Sleeps Ossian, in the Narrow Glen;
In this still place, where murmurs on
But one meek streamlet, only one:
He sang of battles, and the breath
Of stormy war, and violent death;
And should, methinks, when all was past,
Have rightfully been laid at last
Where rocks were rudely heap’d, and rent
As by a spirit turbulent;
Where sights were rough, and sounds were wild,
And everything unreconciled;
In some complaining, dim retreat,
For fear and melancholy meet;
But this is calm; there cannot be
A more entire tranquility.

Does then the Bard sleep here indeed?
Or is it but a groundless creed?
What matters it?—I blame them not
Whose fancy in this lonely spot
Was moved; and in such way express’d
Their notion of its perfect rest.
A convent, even a hermit’s cell,
Would break the silence of this Dell:
It is not quiet, is not ease;
But something deeper far than these:
The separation that is here
Is of the grave; and of austere
Yet happy feelings of the dead:

And, therefore, was it rightly said
That Ossian, last of all his race!
Lies buried in this lonely place.

And Goethe has his young Werther say, “Ossian has replaced Homer in my heart, and what a world it is into which this divine poet leads me! Oh, to wander across the heath in a blustering wind storm, by the light of a waning moon, as it conjures up the ghosts of our ancestors in clouds of mist! Oh, to hear, above the rushing of a forest stream, the half-fading groans of specters issuing from caves in the hillside, and the keening maiden weeping herself into her grave beside the four moss-clad, grass-o’ergrown stones of her noble, fallen hero—her beloved. When I see him—the roving, hoary bard—seeking the footsteps of his forefathers on the wide moor only to find their gravestones; and he looks up, lamenting, at the gentle star of eve about to sink into the rolling sea and times gone by revive in his heroic soul, times when a friendly light still guided the brave man in his peril, and the moon cast its serene light on his garlanded ship, sailing home victorious ... when I read the profound sorrow on his brow and see this last forsaken, magnificent one reel exhausted to his grave, still finding a melancholy yet glowing joy in the powerless presence of the shades of his departed ones, and can hear him cry as he looks down upon the cold earth and tall waving grasses, “The wanderer will come, will come, who knew me in my glory and will ask, ‘Where is the bard, oh, where is Fingal’s admirable son?’ His footsteps cross my grave and he asks in vain for me on earth!” Ah my friend, then, like a noble armiger, I would like to draw my sword and in a trice free my liege lord from the agonizing torment of a life that is a gradual death and send my own soul after the liberated demigod!”

Werther’s attraction to these poems is understandable but whether he really took on board that ancient Celtic belief that death was happiness and birth a sorrow I am not sure ...

And to that list should be added Jules Verne. He visited Scotland as a young man. His grandson Jean Jules-Verne wrote a biography of his famous grandfather and said, “This trip to Scotland impressed him greatly. Later on, he used it for a novel (*Les Indes noires*) and it was perhaps the source of his affectionate regard for the Scots that is apparent in many of his novels. Verne wrote a slightly fictionalized account of the journey that makes for very entertaining reading: Hignard and himself, disguised behind invented names, react naively to the strangeness they encounter; their utter inexperience of travel and foreign *mores*, together with their schoolboyish sense of fun, gets them into scrapes that are related in Verne’s best manner” and later, older and wealthier, he returned in his steam yacht to cruise the islands in the west. Out of this came his novel *The Green Ray* set in the Hebrides. Helena Campbell lives with two elderly uncles who hope to marry her to a tiresome pedant called Aristobulus Ursiclos but Helena says she cannot think of marriage until she has seen the green ray.

So what is the green ray? It is a strange atmospheric phenomenon. As the summer sun in a clear sky dips to the straight horizon of the sea it suddenly and very briefly sends out a beautiful green ray. The two uncles agree to a voyage up the west coast of Scotland from Glasgow, first to Oban, then Iona, then to Staffa, following very closely the itinerary Verne had taken in his own yacht *St Michel III*, but something happens to continually frustrate their efforts to see the green ray. And Helena meets a man, Oliver Sinclair, she likes much better than the tedious bore Ursiclos. Unfortunately Helena and Oliver are gazing in to each other’s eyes when finally the green ray briefly sparks in to existence and disappears again.

Verne litters his book with quotes and places from Ossian. Does this mean he believed implicitly that MacPherson’s collections were Ossian’s voice just tidied up and edited? Probably. The habit of presenting novels and stories as being a ‘lost manuscript’ was extremely prevalent through the 18th and

19th centuries. And why not? H. P. Lovecraft was able to convince many readers in the 20th century that his stories came from an ancient Arab manuscript.

“They peppered their conversation with images and quotations borrowed from the famous owner of Abbotsford, and more particularly from the epic poems of Ossian, which they doted upon. But who could reproach them for this in the land of Fingal and Walter Scott?”

“Stars appeared (above) the horizon, and with them returned many memories of Ossian’s poems. In the midst of the profound silence, Miss Campbell and Oliver Sinclair would hear the two brothers reciting alternative stanzas by the ancient bard, the ill-fated son of Fingal.

Star of the descending night! fair is thy light in the west! thou that liftest thy unshorn head from thy cloud: thy steps are stately on thy hill. What dost thou behold in the plain? The stormy winds are laid. The murmur of the torrent comes from afar. Roaring waves climb the distant rock. The midges of evening are on their feeble wings, and the hum of their course is on the field. What dost thou behold, fair light? But thou dost smile and depart. The waves come with joy around thee, and bathe thy lovely hair. Farewell, thou silent beam!”

“And is it possible to forget Ossian’s stanza, which seems to have been inspired by this very place?”

Son of the distant land! Thou dwellest in the field of fame! O, let thy song arise, at times, in praise of those who fell. Let their thin ghosts rejoice around thee”—

“No doubt the brothers would have continued indefinitely to indulge in the poetry of Ossian, had not Aristobulus Ursiclos abruptly interrupted them by saying: ‘Sirs, have you ever seen one of these so-called spirits of which you speak so enthusiastically? No! And can they be seen? No, they can’t, can they?’

‘That’s where you are mistaken, sir, and I pity you for never having noticed them’, resumed Miss Campbell, who would not have yielded a hair of a single one of these imps to her opponent. ‘You can see them throughout the highlands of Scotland, gliding along abandoned glens, rising from the bottom of ravines, flitting about on the surface of lakes, frolicking in the peaceful waters of our Hebrides, playing in the midst of the storms that the boreal winter throws at them’ ”

“A fair number of famous caves can be cited in many places on the globe, but particularly in volcanic regions. They are distinguished by their origin, which is Neptunian or plutonic.

Of these cavities, some have been hollowed by the water, which bites into and wears away even granite masses little by little, to the point at which they become vast caves, like the caves at Crozon in Brittany, those of Bonifacio in Corsica, of Morghatten in Norway, St Michael’s Cave in Gibraltar, at Scratchell on the coast of the Isle of Wight, and those of Tourane in the marble cliffs off the Cochinchine coast.

Others are formed very differently by the retreat of granite or basalt walls, produced by the cooling off of igneous rocks, and, in their structure, they have a brutal character that is absent from the Neptunian caves.

For the first, nature, faithful to her principles, has economised on effort; for the second, she has economised on time. The famous Fingal’s Cave belongs to that group whose matter has bubbled in the fires of geological eras.”

“Only the wind carried its long chords into the cave. They seemed to be made from a melancholic series of reduced sevenths, rising and falling little by little. Under its powerful whistle, it almost seemed as if the prisms were resonating like the reeds of an enormous harmonica. Was not this bizarre effect the origin of the name ‘An-Na-Vine’ or the harmonious grotto, as the cave is called in the Celtic language?

‘What name could be better suited to it?’ said Oliver Sinclair, ‘For Fingal was Ossian’s father,

and Ossian's genius united poetry and music in a single art.'

'Undoubtedly,' replied brother Sam, 'but as Ossian himself said: "When now shall I hear the bard? When rejoice at the fame of my fathers? The harp is not strung on Morven. The voice of music ascends not on Cona."

'Yes', added brother Sib, 'Dead, with the mighty, is the bard. Fame is in the desert no more.' "

Inside Fingal's Cave is a rock formation called Fingal's Chair. " 'I would like to call up the spirit of Ossian here!' resumed the enthusiastic young girl. 'Why should the invisible bard not reappear at my voice after fifteen centuries of slumber? I like to think that the ill-fated one, blind like Homer and a poet like him, singing of the great deeds of his time, has more than once taken refuge in this palace, which still bears the name of his father! There doubtless, the echoes of Fingal have often repeated his epic and lyrical inspirations in the purest Gaelic accent and idioms.' "

Unfortunately as she is carried away with her ideas about Fingal and Ossian she does not notice that the tide is rising, cutting her off. It is Oliver who comes to her rescue and the two of them realise they have more in common than a love of Ossian's ancient epics.

* * * * *

Patrick O'Brian wrote in *Post Captain*: 'Ossian,' said Jack, at a moment when both their mouths were full, 'was he not the gentleman that was quite exploded by Dr Johnson?'

'Not at all, sir,' cried Macdonald, swallowing faster than Stephen. 'Dr Johnson was a respectable man in some ways, no doubt, though in no degree related to the Johnstones of Ballintubber; but for some reason he had conceived a narrow prejudice against Scotland. He had no notion of the sublime, and therefore no appreciation of Ossian.'

'I have never read Ossian myself,' said Jack, 'being no great hand with poetry. But I remember Lady Keith to have said that Dr Johnson raised some mighty cogent objections.'

'Produce your manuscripts,' said Stephen. 'Do you expect a Highland gentleman to produce his manuscripts upon compulsion?' said Macdonald to Stephen, and to Jack, 'Dr Johnson, sir, was capable of very inaccurate statements. He affected to see no trees in his tour of the kingdom: now I have traveled the very same road many times, and I know several trees within a hundred yards of it – ten, or even more. I do not regard him as any authority upon any subject. I appeal to your candour, sir - what do you say to a man who defines the mainsheet as the largest sail in a ship, or to belay as to splice, or a bight as the circumference of a rope? And that in a buke that professes to be a dictionary of the English language? Hoot, toot.'

'Did he indeed say that?' cried Jack. 'I shall never think the same of him again. I have no doubt your Ossian was a very honest fellow.'

*

So who was Ossian? "The saint comes from Ireland to see his parishioners in Barra and other places on the west of Scotland, and has a favourable wind coming and returning. He is in Highland lore described as "Patrick who blessed Ireland" (*Pàdruig a bheannaich Eirinn*), and is said to have been married to the daughter of Ossian, bard, and last, of the *Feinne*. He was born A.D. 373, but it is disputed whether his native place was Scotland, or Wales, or England, or France. There can be no question that in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland the more lively and kindly recollections of him have been retained. Numerous places called after him are found scattered over Scotland, Wales, and Ireland."

John Gregorson Campbell in *Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*.

It makes St Patrick sound very 'domesticated', doesn't it? And then I came upon a little piece Maeve Binchy wrote in her column in the *Irish Times* collected up as *Maeve's Times*, "And on the bus

I met a man wearing a shamrock, too. And he and I had a great chat about St Patrick and what a shame it was that he wasn't more highly thought of everywhere.

“And then the man went on and said that the real rot set in when some scholar in Ireland had done a bit of investigation and decided that there might be more than one St Patrick, but since the scholar was my uncle I kept quiet on that point.”

Did St Patrick come to Scotland, and were there two of him, and when William Butler Yeats wrote ‘The Wanderings of Oisín’ was he referring to Ossian traveling from Ireland to Scotland? I assumed so. Perhaps I needed to see what things like encyclopaedias had to say. Not of course that they are necessarily the *right* place to look. But then I came upon this in Sean O’Faolain’s *The Irish*, “The best old Irish poets are the anonymous lyrists, some Christian, mostly pagan, but all eloquent of that free and mobile life of which Vendryes speaks so affectionately. We will find the most attractive pictures of that early Irish world, I suggest, not in the greater sagas but in these pre-tenth-century lyrics and the Middle Irish Ossianic tales and poems. Their constant motifs are the open-air, the hunt, the changing seasons, love, animals, food and drink. That life seems very close to us when, for example, Oisín, returning to earth after hundreds of years in the Land of the Young, finds his old pagan world gone and the new Hero reigning—Saint Patrick. He is listening to the saint, humbly and sadly, when, suddenly, he hears the blackbird’s whistle. Lifting his hand he cries:

The call of the blackbird of Derrycairn,
The belling of the stag from Caill na gCaor,
That is the music by which Finn met early sleep;
And the wild duck of Loch na dTri Caol,

The grouse in Cruachan Cuinn,
The otter whistling in Druin da Loch,
The eagle crying in Gleann na bFuath,
The laughter of the cuckoo in Cnoc na Scoth;

The dogs barking from Gleann Caoin
The scream of the eagle from Cnoc na Sealg,
The pattering of the dogs returning early
From the Strand of the Red Stones ...

Ah! When Finn and the Fian lived
They loved the mountain better than the monastery,
Sweet to them the blackbird’s call.
They would have despised the tonguing of your bells!

We get the same intimate touch when this aged Oisín allows his ‘poor bald pate’ to be washed by a Christian woman and remembers the time when his hair was long and fine and fair, and how his teeth, now mere sunken rocks, ‘would crunch the yellow-topped nuts.’

They’d gnaw the haunch of a stag,
Hard and hungry and hound-like;
They’d not leave a jot or a joint
That they would not mince.

Love and the chase are mingled in one of the sweetest of all these poems—Grainne’s sleep-song for her lover Diarmuid one night when, worn out by their flight from their enemies, he falls asleep (so one imagines it) with his head in her lap and she, listening to the little noises all around from the disturbed animals in the darkness, knows their enemies must be near, but says, softly:

Sleep a little, a little little,
thou needst not feel or fear or dread,
lad to whom I give my love,
Son of O’Duibhne—Diarmuid ...

The stag is not asleep in the east,
he never ceases belling,
although he is cosy in the blackbirds’ wood,
he has no mind for sleep.

Why is not the hornless doe asleep,
calling for her speckled calf?
Running over the tops of the bushes
she cannot sleep in her lair.

The linnet is awake and twittering
above the tips of the swaying trees:
they are all chattering in the woods—
and even the thrush is not asleep.

Why does not the wild duck sleep,
not sleep, nor drowse?
Why does it not sleep in its nest?
Why is it swimming steadily with all its strength?

To-night the grouse does not sleep
above the high, stormy, heathery hill;
sweet the cry of her clear throat,
sleepless among the streams.

Caoilte, O Diarmuid, is loosed on thy track!
Caoilte’s running will not take him astray.
May nor death nor dishonour touch thee—
but leave thee, rather, in an everlasting sleep ... ”

Ossian or Oisín was a character in ancient Celtic folklore. But this doesn’t preclude him being a real person, a memorable bard, even if given remarkable powers and unrealistic travel itineraries. Celtic folklore is much more down to earth than the heroes in many traditions. As O’Faolain points out these are poems from before towns, these are poems which “come out of the abstruseness of contemporary or local mythical references now hardly to be understood, like little snatches of

landscape through a mountain mist” and “I think one can tell safely that they were, whatever they professed to be, pure pagans”. MacPherson had not only to reach a city-based often university-educated readership but take those aspects which were not purely local but which could be presented as timeless. And out of fragments and varying versions he had to try and weave a unified whole. Clearly this was a difficult juggling act. His popularity probably owed little to what people saw as the source of his material and more to the simple fact that he provided them with a stirring narrative.

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February 9: Brendan Behan
February 10: Boris Pasternak
 Alex Comfort
February 11: Patrick Leigh Fermor
February 12: Charles Darwin
February 13: Eleanor Farjeon
 Géza Csáth
 Lewis Grassic Gibbon
February 14: Bruce Beaver
 Frederick Douglass
February 15: Bruce Dawe
 Susan B. Anthony
 Alfred North Whitehead
February 16: Peter Porter
 Richard Ford
 Hal Porter
February 17: A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson
February 18: Luis Muñoz Marin
February 19: Carson McCullers
 Amy Tan
February 20: Voltaire
February 21: W. H. Auden
February 22: Morley Callaghan
 R. D. FitzGerald
 John Shaw Nielson
 Gerald Stern
 Sheila Hancock
 Ishmael Reed
February 23: Samuel Pepys
February 24: Wilhelm Grimm
February 25: Anthony Burgess
February 26: Victor Hugo
February 27: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
February 28: Stephen Spender
 Wilfred Grenfell
February 29: Emmeline B. Wells
 ‘Jaguar’ (Brazilian cartoonist)
March 1: Robert Lowell
 Lytton Strachey

Basil Bunting
 Ian Mudie
 William Dean Howells
 March 2: Sholom Aleichim
 March 3: Edward Thomas
 Manning Clark
 Annie Keary
 March 4: Dr Seuss
 March 5: Leslie Marmon Silko
 Georg Friedrich Daumer
 Howard Pyle
 March 6: Cyrano de Bergerac
 March 7: Mochtar Lubis
 John Herschel
 March 8: Kenneth Grahame
 March 9: Vita Sackville-West
 Pat Jarrett
 March 10: Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake

* * * * *

“I feel so much better since I confided in you ... ‘touched your soul in shadowland,’ as Shakespeare says.”

“I think it was Pauline Johnson,” said Anne gently.

“Well, I knew it was somebody ... somebody who had lived.”

From *Anne of Windy Willows* by L. M. Montgomery.

In the same book Montgomery has a character say to Anne, “But of course Marilla Cuthbert brought you up. Her mother was a Johnson.” It might be a name plucked from the air but I suspect Montgomery was fond of the poetry of Pauline Johnson and this was her oblique way of paying tribute.

* * * * *

Thomas King in *The Truth About Stories* mentions Charles Eastman, a Lakota man who wrote in *From the Deep Woods to Civilization*, “I have wondered much that Christianity is not practiced by the very people who vouch for that wonderful conception of exemplary living. It appears that they are anxious to pass on their religion to all races of men, but keep very little of it themselves”. Pauline Johnson did not put her readers on the spot in that way, though I suspect she would have agreed, but she did have ways of her own to make a point. King goes on to say, “While Charles Eastman was making his way from the deep woods to civilization, E. Pauline Johnson was making her way from the Mohawk reserve at Six Nations (near Brantford, Ontario) to the stage and the lectern. A mixed-blood like Eastman, Johnson was best known for her poetry performances that played to sell-out crowds in Canada and England. Dressed for the first half of the program in a composite/makeshift, semi-traditional Native-inspired outfit complete with fur pelts, wampum belts, her father’s hunting knife, and a scalp she was given by a Blackfoot chief, Johnson would then switch to an elegant evening gown for the second half, providing the audience with the Native exoticism they craved and the English sophistication they trusted.

On occasion, Johnson would reverse the order of the costumes and do the first half of her performance in a gown, only then switching to her Native outfit. But this was not as popular because it inverted and challenged the idea of order and progress that Western civilization had decreed and that her audiences expected.

And desired.

Both Eastman and Johnson were performers, though Johnson arguably realized it more completely than did Eastman. Eastman, if we can trust the sentiment in his books, was searching for a way to explain the dichotomy between Christian theory and Christian practice, while Johnson was looking for a way to make a living. Delightfully, her business card read, “Pauline Johnson, Mohawk Author – Entertainer.”

The success that both Eastman and Johnson had at the turn of the century depended, in large part, on their Native pedigree. Eastman’s origins as a “wild” Indian were a never-ending source of fascination for his White audiences, while Johnson’s connection to “Mohawk royalty” (her father and grandfather were major figures at Six Nations) provided her with equally intriguing credentials.”

I would like to think that some in the audience came to hear her poetry rather than strain to catch a glimpse of that dangling scalp.

The literary world in Canada has dismissed her work as “shallow” and perhaps for someone caught between two worlds she could never dip sufficiently deeply into one of those worlds to please the pundits but the First Nations people in Canada are rediscovering her as a poet and collector and re-teller of their legends and folklore. And she wrote her poems for performance, not for students and critics to mull over. Take for instance her poem ‘The Song My Paddle Sings’ and it did not surprise me to learn that the two groups she joined were the Canadian Women’s Press Club and the American Canoe Association—

West wind, blow from your prairie nest,
Blow from the mountains, blow from the west,
The sail is idle, the sailor too;
O! wind of the west, we wait for you.
Blow, blow!
I have wooed you so,
But never a favour you bestow.
You rock your cradle the hills between,
But scorn to notice my white lateen.

I stow the sail and unship the mast;
I wooed you long, but my wooing’s past;
My paddle will lull you into rest:
O! drowsy wind of the drowsy west,
Sleep, sleep,
By your mountains steep,
Or down where the prairie grasses sweep!
Now fold in slumber your laggard wings,
For soft is the song my paddle sings.

August is laughing across the sky,
Laughing while paddle, canoe and I,
Drift, drift,
Where the hills uplift
On either side of the current swift.

The river rolls in its rocky bed;
My paddle is plying its way ahead;
Dip, dip,
While the waters flip
In foam as over their breast we slip.

And oh, the river runs swifter now;
The eddies circle about my bow.
Swirl, swirl!
How the ripples curl!
In many a dangerous pool awhirl!

And forward far the rapids roar,
Fretting their margin for evermore.
Dash, dash, with a mighty crash,
They seethe, and boil, and bound, and splash.

Be strong, O paddle! be brave, canoe!
The reckless waves you must plunge into.
Reel, reel,
On your trembling keel,
But never a fear my craft will feel.

We've raced the rapids; we're far ahead!
The river slips through its silent bed.
Sway, sway,
As the bubbles spray
And fall in tinkling tunes away.

And up on the hills against the sky,
A fir tree rocking its lullaby,
Swings, swings,
Its emerald wings,
Swelling the song that my paddle sings.

I am discovering rather than re-discovering but it's not been an easy road. An occasional poem here or there in anthologies is nice but insufficient. Chris Pearce at the Hobart Book Shop managed to order a copy of her *Flint and Feathers* for me and I have been reading it with much interest.

She did not have much education: two years schooling at home, three years in an Indian day school, two years in a school in Brantford. But she obviously did a lot of reading. Immersing herself in Victorian verse was possibly not always the best preparation for her own writing and her presentation of herself as a loyal British subject though it might have appealed to audiences then jars a little now. But when she writes with passion it still comes over with powerful intensity. Take for instance her poem 'The Cattle Thief'; the old man has been shot by white settlers who say they will feed his body to the wolves but a Cree woman, probably his daughter, dashes forward to protect the body and cry out—

“Stand back, stand back, you white-skins, touch that dead man to your shame;
 You have stolen my father’s spirit, but his body I only claim.
 You have killed him, but you shall not dare to touch him now he’s dead.
 You have cursed, and called him a Cattle Thief, though you robbed him first of bread—
 Robbed him and robbed my people—look there, at that shrunken face,
 Starved with a hollow hunger, we owe to you and your race.
 What have you left to us of land, what have you left of game,
 What have you brought but evil, and curses since you came?
 How have you paid us for our game? how paid us for our land?
 By a *book*, to save our souls from the sins *you* brought in your other hand.
 Go back with your new religion, we never have understood
 Your robbing an Indian’s *body*, and mocking his *soul* with food.
 Go back with your new religion, and find—if find you can—
 The *honest* man you have ever made from out a *starving* man.
 You say your cattle are not ours, your meat is not our meat;
 When *you* pay for the land you live in, *we’ll* pay for the meat we eat.
 Give back our land and our country, give back our herds of game;
 Give back the furs and the forests that were ours before you came;
 Give back the peace and the plenty. Then come with your new belief,
 And blame, if you dare, the hunger that *drove* him to be a thief.”

I wonder how white audiences responded?

*

And what of that line I began with? It comes in Johnson’s poem ‘Moonset’:
 Idles the night wind through the dreaming firs,
 That waking murmur low,
 As some lost melody returning stirs
 The love of long ago;
 And through the far, cool distance, zephyr fanned,
 The moon is sinking into shadow-land.

The troubled night-bird, calling plaintively,
 Wanders on restless wing;
 The cedars, chanting vespers to the sea,
 Await its answering,
 That comes in wash of waves along the strand,
 The while the moon slips into shadow-land.

O! soft responsive voices of the night
 I join your minstrelsy,
 And call across the fading silver light
 As something calls to me;
 I may not all your meaning understand,
 But I have touched your soul in shadow-land.

* * * * *

March 11: Ronald Syme
 Ezra Jack Keats

March 12: Jack Kerouac
March 13: R. F. Brissenden
 Hugh Walpole
 Paul Morand
 Yeghishe Charents
March 14: Maxim Gorki
March 15: Lady Augusta Gregory
March 16: Sully Prudhomme
March 17: Jean Ingelow (some sources give her the 15th)
 Paul Green
 Kate Greenaway

* * * * *

There is a widespread belief that nineteenth century female poets—Jean Ingelow, Eliza and Annie Keary, Kate Greenaway, Felicia Hemans and others—wrote endless saccharine, sentimental, simple, forgettable verse. But now, when I find myself surrounded by so much that is violent, sordid, crude, in-your-face, callous and uncaring, (I was shocked to hear someone say that young men believe the sex they view on pornographic films and web-sites is ‘normal sex’) a great sense of nostalgia and longing for the sweet and sentimental comes over me.

* * * * *

Eliza Keary in *At Home Again*.

A cosy corner! yes, indeed!
 Where one might gladly come,
Who, after travelling far, has found
 There is no place like home.

A cosy corner, where two friends
 Might one another greet;
A pleasant and a peaceful place,
 After the crowded street.

A cosy spot for Mother dear
 To sew in, or to rest;
A place to make us think and dream
 Of those we love the best.

A cosy corner, warm and bright,
 Where stories might be read
To children, after work or play,
 Before they go to bed.

A place where any one might wish
 An hour or so to stay;
But no, we only take a peep,
 Then go upon our way.
 ‘A Cosy Corner’

Says one little duck to the other,
“What a good world we live in, my brother!”
Says the other, “Yes, all one can wish,
Frogs and tadpoles and nice little fish.”
There comes o’er the field to the water
A maiden, good Mrs. Bond’s daughter—
Says she, “They will make a nice dish.”

Says one little duck to the other,
“How happy all ducks are, my brother!”
Says the other, “That’s true as can be,
And none are more happy than we.”
There comes o’er the field to the water
A maiden, good Mrs. Bond’s daughter—
“They’re just fit for killing,” says she.

‘The Ducks’

Annie Keary gets more attention than her

sister Eliza so I was glad to come upon a book of Eliza’s poems. But the poet I have been reading at great length is Jean Ingelow. I bought *The Poetical Works of Jean Ingelow* and it wasn’t her sweetness which bothered me but her verbosity. A poem that I might express in three verses she carries on for page after page until I have forgotten the beginning and lost the thread. Yet 19th century readers probably would not have treated this as a fault. Nobody expected Tennyson to whip through ‘In Memorium’ in three verses. Succinct was the one thing nobody expected a poem to be.

Jean Ingelow was a talented poet, her *Poems* sold more than 200,000 copies and her children’s book *Mopsa the Fairy* was a best-seller, but I had difficulty singling out a poem to re-read; rather it was a matter of ‘moments’ and I felt I liked her simple traditional ‘nature’ poems best, rather than her long disquisitions on Classical or Biblical subjects.

That 200,000 copies is extraordinary when I stop to consider it. Take for instance the Brontë sisters. The consensus is that they were in a different league to poets like Ingelow. Yet their combined book of poetry sold two copies. So why did buyers prefer Ingelow’s poems? I have just been reading some of Emily Brontë’s poems and I think I can see two very good reasons to prefer Ingelow.

The old church tower and garden wall
Are black with autumn rain,
And dreary winds foreboding call
The darkness down again.

I watched how evening took the place
Of glad and glorious day;
I watched a deeper gloom efface
The evening’s lingering ray.

And as I gazed on the cheerless sky
Sad thoughts rose in my mind ...

Sad thoughts are almost inescapable in Brontë’s poems:

Sleep brings no joy to me,
Remembrance never dies;

My soul is given to misery
And lives in sighs.

Or:

Weaned from life and torn away
In the morning of thy day,
Bound in everlasting gloom,
Buried in a hopeless tomb.

Or:

‘Well, some may hate and some may scorn
And some may quite forget thy name,
But my sad heart must ever mourn
Thy ruined hopes, thy blighted fame.’

Apart from their gloom everything is generic, flowers and homes, birds, moors, mountains, love and sadness. It is all vague and misty. I never got any real insight into the writer other than that she cultivates a sense of sad thoughts. We don’t know why hopes have been blighted or who has died. And without knowing it is hard to care very much.

And the second thing is that Jean Ingelow is simply a better poet. She saw it as a craft and she worked hard at honing her knowledge and skill as a poet. It wasn’t something she did to fill in rare quiet hours. But she didn’t write novels. So, curiously, we are interested in the Brontës as poets and Ingelow is largely forgotten ...

I liked Ingelow’s suite ‘Songs on the Voices of Birds’. Her view of nature, such as the beginning of ‘Winstanley’, was not innovative or profound but I had the feeling she had sat somewhere with her paper and pencil and simply let it envelop her—

*Quoth the cedar to the reeds and rushes,
“Water-grass, you know not what I do;
Know not of my storms, nor of my hushes,
And—I know not you.”*

*Quoth the reeds and rushes, “Wind! O waken!
Breathe, O wind, and set our answer free,
For we have no voice, of you forsaken,
For the cedar-tree.”*

*Quoth the earth at midnight to the ocean,
“Wilderness of water, lost to view,
Naught you are to me but sounds of motion;
I am naught to you.”*

*Quoth the ocean, “Dawn! O fairest, clearest,
Touch me with thy golden fingers bland;
For I have no smile till thou appearest
For the lovely land.”*

* * * * *

March 18: Wilfred Owen
Bernard Cronin

* * * * *

When I asked at the State Library if they had any of Bernard Cronin's books available for loan they said they had never heard of him but a quick search turned up the information that there were several of his books in the Fiction Stack. They also turned up this interesting bit of background. (I always feel that I am educating more people than just me when I go looking for forgotten writers.) This turned out to be from *The Oxford Literary Guide to Australia* and it said he was UK born, came to Australia in 1890, went to Dookie Agricultural College, worked as a jackeroo, then on a cattle property in north-west Tasmania, and began writing books with rural backgrounds. The piece said, "Tasmanian places in his fiction include Burnie, the hardwood timber country outside Marrawah in *Timber Wolves* (1920), and Trowutta in the story 'Hoodoo Jo'. Back on the mainland, Cronin worked as a journalist, then as a publicity censor in the Second World War. While some subsequent novels were set in northern Australia, he returned to Tasmania's north-west in *Sow's Ear* (1933), the tale of a bitter forced marriage in a claustrophobic rural community."

* * * * *

Alan Davies asked why A. J. Cronin had not appealed to potential biographers. "It is an altogether unsatisfactory situation compared to other British writers of arguably no greater literary ability. Choosing at random, there are, for example, two recent D.H. Lawrence biographies, as well as a D.H. Lawrence Research Centre at the University of Nottingham. Evelyn Waugh boasts three biographies, in addition to his own published diaries. Frank Swinnerton's Arnold Bennett 1867-1931, as well as the existence of an Arnold Bennett Society, assures that writer of immortality. Graham Greene even appointed his own official biographer, Norman Sherry, and to assist his perpetuity there is the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust complete with a Treasurer, a Trust Office and a Newsletter Editor. Many of the books by the writers mentioned above were adapted for the screen, which can only have helped to popularize them, but so were Cronin's. Who did not watch *Dr Finlay's Casebook* in the 1960s?"

Was there any connection between the two Cronins? It seems not. Or not obviously. A. J. was born in Scotland, Bernard in England and came to Australia in 1890. The *Australian Biographical Dictionary* gives more details about his life including this interesting snippet: "In 1920, with Gertrude Hart, Cronin had founded the Old Derelicts' Club for struggling authors and artists. Out of this in 1927 came the Society of Australian Authors; as first president in 1928-34, Cronin strove to improve conditions and win recognition for writers. The Society was wound up in November 1936 because, according to Cronin, it was becoming 'infiltrated by politics'. In 1933 he founded the Quill Club. He was long a member of the International P.E.N. Club (Melbourne) and was accorded life membership in 1961." He also wrote a popular children's book *Kangaroo Rhymes* in 1922 with Doris Boake Kerr who used the pen-name Stephen Grey.

* * * * *

I realized that although I had never come upon any of Bernard Cronin's books I had read a piece of his journalism. In *The Sun Children's Supplement* of 23/5/1948 he had this stirring piece: "In pitch darkness in February, 1943, the U.S. submarine Gudgeon surfaced off Timor.

"A mere handful of ragged Australian Commandos of the 2/4 Company and four others slipped into the sea and swam in silence to the sub.

"A whispered tally showed all complete, and within minutes the Gudgeon was heading for Darwin and safety.

"Left behind were 20,000 Japs fearfully and cautiously probing a last corner of jungle where they fondly imagined they would at long last corner the "ghosts." For 13 hectic months the "ghosts" had smitten them hip and thigh, and withheld from the Jap High Command a fighting force which, had

it been available elsewhere, might well have tipped the scale in general battle against us.

The story of the Australian Commandos in Timor is one of the most gallant in the history of the Japanese threat to this country, and sets a noble jewel in the diadem of the Anzac tradition.

“It stems from the success of the British Commandos in Europe and a secret visit to Australia by a British military mission in 1940.

“Things were not going well with us, and although Japan had not yet declared against the Allies, there was plenty of work on commando lines in the immediate pattern of the war.

“As a result of the mission, four independent companies were formed in Australia between July, 1941, and February, 1942.

“The 2/2 Company underwent a tough training at a special camp on Wilson’s Promontory, then moved to the Northern Territory.

“Most of them were crack shots and skilled bushmen from Western Australia.

“When Pearl Harbor came on December 7, 1941, the 2/2 was ripe for action.

“Within a few days it was on the way to Timor, the 300-mile long island north-west of Darwin.

“With it was the 2/40 battalion AIF, to act as a light covering force for airfields.

“On arrival, the main body settled in Koepang, in the island’s Dutch territory.

“The Commandos, with a small force of Dutch, occupied Portuguese Dili. Altogether the Australian force on Timor numbered 2000.” And so on.

And thinking of War Correspondents, though not in this case Bernard Cronin who was long dead, I came across this curious article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 5th November 1990 when I was going through piles of clippings: “The United States seriously considered in late 1941 a proposal that it “furnish funds to Japan” so that Tokyo could buy all or part of New Guinea from Australia and Holland, according to declassified State Department documents.

“Under the proposal, which was made three weeks before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan would have been awarded New Guinea in return for withdrawing its troops from China.

“Tokyo would have reimbursed the US through the transfer of merchant ships “or possibly certain categories of naval vessels”.

“The bizarre proposal came in the wake of a joint US Army-Navy memorandum of November 5 which urged President Roosevelt to buy time by making concessions to Japan.

“Three months were needed, the service chiefs had warned, before General Douglas MacArthur could build a substantial US force in the Philippines to block a Japanese strike southwards. Any measure that furthered that build-up would be welcome.

“The idea of transferring New Guinea to Japanese control, which seems never to have been communicated to Australia, would have caused an uproar here.

“It came at a time when the Australian War Cabinet was deeply concerned about the possibility of a Japanese move on Singapore and the Dutch East Indies.

“A memo proposing the sale of New Guinea to Japan was drafted by Maxwell M. Hamilton, the head of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs at the State Department, on November 18, 1941. It is clear from the memo that Hamilton saw the offer of New Guinea as an inducement that might persuade Japan to withdraw from China.

“The proposal,” he wrote, “might cause Japan to feel that she was being given sufficient ‘face’ to enable her to agree in good faith to remove all her troops from China.”

“Hamilton noted that “at first blush” the proposal may appear to represent appeasement.

“He also made the point that the Australians and the Dutch would be “perturbed” by such a proposal, “especially at first glance”.

“He stressed that it would be necessary to discuss the idea “with the Australians and the British (and the Dutch if their territory should be involved) *before* making any mention of the proposal to the Japanese”.

“The documents containing the suggestion about the sale are contained in declassified State Department files on microfiche at Cornell University in Ithica, New York.

“Historians and retired diplomats in Australia said they had been unaware of the Hamilton proposal.

“That’s a new one on me,” said Dr Peter Edwards, an official historian at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and author of a 1979 book, *Australia Through American Eyes, 1935-45*.

“The British, Americans and Australians were all putting up proposals at that stage to buy time. But I’ve never heard of this idea and I’d be pretty sure no hint of it reached the Australians.”

* * * * *

And this week I have been coming to grips with Bernard Cronin. The library tracked down *Timber Wolves* and *The Sow’s Ear*. So I am reading and enjoying these forgotten books.

A Melbourne lawyer, Mr Colvin, needs to find the heir for the deceased estate of a Richard Moyes. He has left his sizable fortune to an old shipmate Peter Philip Barkley ‘of parts unknown’. Colvin sends his junior, Jack Heritage, to hunt for Barkley in the last place he’d been heard of, a small timber town in north-west Tasmania. Heritage doesn’t have his heart in the law and he finds he is also not a very good sleuth. Timber Bend is a dangerous and not very law-abiding place. He has gone to see a big timber baron in Melbourne, Sam Frame, before he leaves on his quest. Frame has large timber concessions around Timber Bend and asks Heritage to keep an eye out for other suitable logging concessions he might be able to acquire. Heritage finds Timber Bend is a place of sly grog, illegal taking and selling of possum skins—and he also discovers that men like Sam Frame, the so-called Timber Wolves, do their best to squeeze out the small loggers and sawmillers.

He meets a very nice girl called Peggy Adaire and he comes up with a way in which small local entrepreneurs might be able to band together to compete with the big timber merchants. He goes back to Melbourne and gets a loan from a company which sounds as if it genuinely wants to help start-up businesses. But Heritage is no match for the local baddies, the timber wolves, the sham company offering finance—nor for Peggy’s father. He has the vague feeling that Mr Adaire might be the man he is looking for but someone has spread it round the community that he is there to catch a fugitive from justice. And he is constrained by not being allowed to brute the inheritance abroad . . .

Sam Frame comes to Timber Bend having used his fake company to bring Heritage’s brave little consortium to its knees but he comes face to face with Adaire. Both men, with things to hide in their pasts, have been hiding behind other names and react in shock.

Heritage comes through almost unscathed and finds love but he is almost the only one to do so. Yet for all that it is not a happy or peaceful community Cronin makes it a place with its own beauty and possibilities.

“In spite of the monotony of the button-grass plains stretching on either side of the track, something in the prospect attracted him immensely. They were riding across a kind of plateau dotted with ragged clumps of stunted gum and tea-tree. Coastwards the plains opened out as far as the eye could reach, a seemingly interminable vista of wind-swept scrub and fast browning grasses, stretching onwards to the horizon, unbroken save by an occasional belt of timber or the twisting line of shining brown that marked the course of some winter creek. Back of the plains rose a wide circle of precipitous hills, fringed and patched with blotches of ragged, wind-blown bush” and “Presently he began to look about him, the sap in his veins rising to the spell of the coastlands. He saw before him the entrance to a narrow valley. On one side rose the sombre green of the timber line, a living wall of swiftly-changing

shadow, rising stiffly to the grey summit of the hills; on the other, there stretched the brown and purple of the plains, a sun-kissed vista of swelling radiance” so it is perhaps not surprising that Cronin returned to this landscape to set *The Sow’s Ear*. It is the early twentieth century in the small farming and logging community of Valley Point. Henry Windsor has a general store there, he runs a narrow sect called The Church of The Lord Jesus and he belts his children into submission to his wishes and his plans. He wishes his 16-year-old daughter June to marry a prosperous older farmer Edgar Bree whom she hates.

A young schoolteacher Brian Forbes comes to Valley Point. He has to build a small school, persuade parents to send their children and to see some value in education, before he can begin teaching. June falls in love with the young man with his wider horizons and his willingness to share his love of poetry. Her father, smugly, believes he can bend June to his will. But love makes her strong enough to wish to defy his narrow plans for her future. Sadly Brian is killed in an accident and June, hopelessly, gives in to her father and marries Edgar Bree.

Cronin now and then takes a slap at the government. “Neglected revenue. Here are—I should say were—many thousands of acres of the finest milling timber in the world. The selector ringbarks it and kills it. He burns logs of figured blackwood worth anything up to a hundred pounds a log on the wharf at Melbourne. He destroys whole beds of priceless celery-top pine and a host of good cabinet timbers. What else is he to do? Grass is what he wants, and there is no man to say him nay. If he could sell his milling timber he would gladly do so, but there is no means of getting it to market. He buys his land from the Crown at a pound an acre, and the timber on it that ought to be worth a thousand pounds costs him that much and more to get rid of. Enough timber has been ruthlessly destroyed in Tasmania to pay off her share of the Commonwealth debt almost, if heads instead of turnips ruled in Hobart.”

Clearly Cronin was passionate about the forests and their interiors. “He was fascinated by the splendor of the bush that rolled to the four horizons like some great restless ocean, in wide waves of purple and green. The crests of the waves were the canopied heads of tall stringybarks and blue-gums; on the slopes gleamed the darker hues of ironwood and peppermint, red and white myrtles, blackwood and pencil-cedars and celery-top pine; and in the trough a tumbling current of sassafras, musk, dogwood, hazel and fern, and a hundred lesser growths. And from this sylvan sea rose southwards, like islands, the peaks of a distant range, pearl-grey against the blue. He had an impression of great depths and superlative heights. He was amazed and awed. He was also a little afraid. There was beauty and charm, but there was threat, too. So was beauty found in the tiger ... The big timber fought back at the destroyer, man, as though it were no less sentient than the beast. It called to its aid the savagery of wind and fire, and the cunning of the flood. It was armed with a thousand weapons of mis-adventure. Man had need to walk warily or not at all.

“It was here that Brian had his first glimpse of a devil in its native seclusion. He came upon it at dusk one evening in a patch of horizontal blackwood—an ugly black creature, with bars of white hair on the neck and haunches, and the mouth of a bulldog. It came and went in a flash. The scrub, he learned, was alive with the brutes.

“On a later occasion—but this was in the stunted timber on the edge of the plains—he stumbled on a Tasmanian tiger that lay dead in the jaws of a steel trap. The cruel method of capture revolted him, but the find was rare and he studied the catch with interest. The beast—unique to Tasmania, as is the devil, and now all but extinct—was about five feet in length, with a yellowish-brown striped back, short legs, and an immense head. It was covered with short stiff hair.”

*

“Beaumaris Zoo was the last resting place of the Tasmanian tiger, or thylacine. At least the last one in captivity which died there in 1936. The zookeeper’s daughter recalled in later years how she

would lie in bed in the family home adjoining the zoo and hear the tiger calling out in the night, calling for a mate. I could now hear sounds, moaning and groaning, against the traffic sound rising from the Tasman Highway. As I stood there, waiting for the smell of burnt rubber to clear, I was thinking of a lone thylacine, pacing a concrete enclosure and pushing against the bars, looking out into the night, calling for a mate, a reassurance that it was not the last of its kind alive on the planet.

I don't believe in ghosts, spirits, things that go bump in the night. All the same, at the gates of the old zoo a chill always runs through my bones, and a melancholy pierces my heart."

Don Knowler in *Riding the Devil's Highway*.

*

Brian Forbes is not presented as an early conservationist but he is more open-minded and sympathetic than the majority of the people round Valley Point who are mostly concerned with killing creatures and chopping down trees.

June, bereft after his death, marries Bree and has three children, but her husband is paralysed in an accident. She is left with the worst of all worlds; a husband who torments and belittles her, poverty, hard work, a future offering nothing but helping a man she dislikes. And then even worse happens. Bushfire. "The season was the driest in the memory of the old hands for many years. The Tasmanian bush is well served with rain normally, otherwise the north-west must inevitably have suffered a holocaust comparable only to that Victorian Black Thursday of February 6, 1851, when the whole of that colony seemed to be on fire." The fire is approaching their little shingle and iron hut when local cattle dealer, Tasman East, who has deep affection and sympathy for her and the children persuades them to leave and persuades two scrub-cutters to carry Edgar Bree. But the fire catches them and they abandon the dead weight of Bree. Though it is a horrible way to die it is hard to rouse up a great deal of sympathy for Bree who has mis-used his little bit of power in domestic tyranny.

Eventually East asks June to marry him. "When he had gone she knelt on the couch by the window, looking with dimmed eyes at the beauty of the sunset. The air was still and fragrant. As she gazed a cloud swept from the face of the sun like a great white hand, trailing a golden shadow. Between far-off wings of land she caught sight of the ocean, serene and lovely, an azure meadow ...

She whispered "Brian."

At the back of her mind words stirred ... She frowned in the effort to recall them. Beautiful words she had once heard ... A poem about Greece by someone named Keats ... They touched her dreaming softly, dim as a bell chiming deep under the sea ...

"For ever wilt thou love and she be fair."

June was smiling when East came softly back into the room."

* * * * *

March 19: Tobias Smollett

March 20: David Malouf

B. F. Skinner

Hugh MacLennan

Vera Lynn

March 21: Elizabeth Riddell

Thomas Shapcott

Alice Henry

Frank Hardy

March 22: Johannes Semper

Nicholas Monsarrat

March 23: Ama Ata Aidoo
Josef Capek
March 24: Fanny Crosby
Malcolm Muggeridge
March 25: A. J. P. Taylor
Toni Cade Bambara
March 26: Robert Frost
John Kennedy Toole (d)
Barcroft Boake
A. E. Housman

* * * * *

“The tragedy is that John Kennedy Toole never knew he was John Kennedy Toole. I do not mean that he was some sort of foundling or psychotic. I mean it in the same sense that Vincent Van Gogh never knew he was Vincent Van Gogh – that his name would one day be conjured with, and revered. But compared to Toole, even the unhappy Van Gogh had a productive career. Though he only sold one picture in his lifetime, he produced a compelling body of work, and had reason to believe that his time might come.”

Rick Gekowski wrote that in *Tolkien’s Gown & Other Stories of Great Authors and Rare Books* and I was immediately intrigued: who was J. K. Toole? He goes on, “Ken Toole, as he was known, is the author of the acclaimed comic novel *A Confederacy of Dunces*, and one of a surprising number of Southern novelists – Margaret Mitchell and Harper Lee come immediately to mind – who wrote only one, important novel. Mitchell and Lee had the good sense to quit while they were ahead, as if in recognition of the sad fact that most novelists get worse. But Toole never even got to see his book in print. Unable to find a publisher for what he considered a masterpiece, its author grew more and more despondent, and committed suicide in 1969. How the novel eventually found its way into print is one of the most interesting, tragic, and (belatedly) heartening, stories of publication history in the twentieth century.”

Publishers complained that the book wasn’t about anything, that it had no meaning, and although Toole re-wrote it trying to take on board this criticism he didn’t succeed, and at the age of thirty-one he went out and ended his life.

The story of course didn’t end there because his mother did not allow it to. Thelma Toole bullied and browbeat people into reading the manuscript—and four years later it was published, was an almost instant success, and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Although Gekowski didn’t make the book itself sound particularly attractive—I was in two minds whether to rush out and hunt down a copy—something about his description made me curious. Because I am fascinated by the idea of a book which isn’t about anything if it can also keep you wanting to read on ...

* * * * *

Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin wrote a book called *The Novel Cure*. In it they suggest books to read when you’re suffering from various ailments. Under ‘Flatulence’ they put John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces*. “If you have a tendency to suffer from excessive gas leading to belching or flatulence – or, heaven help us, both – you will no doubt feel a great sense of camaraderie and solidarity with the highly educated but seriously slobbish thirty-year-old Ignatius J. Reilly. The hero of John Kennedy Toole’s posthumously published novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, is beset by such calamitous gastro-intestinal problems that he is forever swelling to gargantuan proportions and bouncing supine, on his bed in order to try and release his ‘pyloric valve’ – and thus the pockets of air

that tear through his stomach in ‘great gaseous rages’. When his mother, with whom he still lives (and who, incidentally, is something of a belcher herself) complains about the terrible stink in his room, Ignatius claims that he finds the smell of his own emissions ‘comforting’. ‘Schiller needed the scent of apples rotting in his desk in order to write,’ he points out. ‘I, too, have my needs.’

According to Ignatius, the gas has several causes: his mother’s erratic driving, the absence of a ‘proper geometry and theology’ in the modern world, and lying in bed in the morning ‘contemplating the unfortunate turn that events had taken since the Reformation.’ (Unsurprisingly, his mother, in despair at his slothful lifestyle, is constantly urging him to get a job.) According to his girlfriend Myrna Minkoff (a mouthy wench from the Bronx whom he met at college) it’s lying around in his room and feeling like a failure that’s the problem ... ‘The valve closes because it thinks it is living in a dead organism,’ she tells him. ‘Open your heart, Ignatius, and you will open your valve.’

It’s impossible – unless you’re Ignatius – to ignore the role of diet in generating all this gas. Ignatius is partial to a fizzy drink called Dr Nut, and also hotdogs: he works for a while as a hotdog seller and eats far more than he sells. At one point he emits ‘the gas of a dozen brownies’.

We suggest that fellow-sufferers allow themselves to cohort with Ignatius only for the duration of the novel. After that, they should avoid processed and fatty foods, quit lying around and go and find a decent job – not as a hotdog seller.”

* * * * *

I did actually go and buy a copy of his book—after reading the first quote but before reading the second—and I cannot honestly say the world would have been the poorer if Thelma Toole had simply had the manuscript bound and passed it around to interested friends and relatives. The puzzle is not so much why publishers did not rush his offering but why he regarded it as a masterpiece. And the tragedy is that he was obviously a writer of potential. What else might he have chosen to write about? Or did he believe he had written one semi-autobiographical novel and he had nothing more to say?

* * * * *

Publishers tend to turn down books if a) they are not well-written and b) if they don’t think they will sell. But all sorts of other issues can influence their decisions. Take for instance Miles Franklin’s *My Career Goes Bung*. She had had an unexpected success with her tongue-in-cheek *My Brilliant Career* and in 1902 she brought forward its sequel. George Robertson of Angus & Robertson was sympathetic but decided not to publish and, in fact, it wasn’t published until 44 years later. His reasons were that it was ahead of its time in terms of talking about women’s rights and that real people might see themselves portrayed in the book and complain.

It does give the status quo a sideswipe:

‘It seemed to develop into a storm between Ma and me. Ma at last said, “Bother it, I have nothing to do with it. It is God’s will.”

It was a relief to be indignant with God, but a trial not to be able to get at Him in any way. In my perturbation I collided with Great-aunt Jane, who said that the Lord loveth those whom He chasteneth. His way of saving the world did not appear to me as efficient for a being who was all-powerful. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to save it, and allowed Him to be nailed on a cross in ghastly agony – without saving anything considerable as far as history goes.

“Heaven knows what He would have permitted to be done to a daughter,” I remarked.

Aunt Jane stood this pretty well. “Ah,” she laughed, “You’ll grow to sense. A husband and children of your own will put you in your place.”

The dire soul-crushings with which old wives threaten me consequent upon the glories of motherhood are enough to quell a quadruped. Aunt Jane repudiated the blame too, and said I should have to wait until the next world to have things righted.’

But the real danger with books which are intensely focused on the one character (and even more so with those written in the first person) is that if you don't find that character interesting, likable, intriguing ... then the whole book just becomes a lot of tedious self-indulgent navel-gazing. It may be that George Robertson did Miles Franklin a favour. Ten sequels to *My Brilliant Career* would have driven most readers up the wall ...

* * * * *

March 27: Kenneth Slessor

March 28: Nelson Algren

March 29: Marcel Aymé

March 30: Sean O'Casey

Paul Verlaine

March 31: Antonia White

April 1: Maria Polydouri

Peter Cundall

Abbé Prevost

April 2: Hans Christian Andersen

Flora Annie Steel

Kenneth Tynan

* * * * *

Flora Annie Steel though you may not have heard of her wrote a famous book called *The Complete Indian Housekeeper*. And it was a best seller. The Marjorie Bligh of her day perhaps. But I came to her not through her household wisdom and handy hints on how to use up leftovers but through her folklore. Her *Tales of the Punjab* introduces her: "Flora Annie Steel was a remarkable Victorian. In 1867, when she was twenty years old, she accepted a written proposal of marriage, and within a few months was sailing to India with her husband, a member of the Indian Civil Service. He suffered from the heat, and from numerous strange fevers, and so Mrs Steel, with her 'appalling energy', took on many of his responsibilities. She became the local 'doctor', a Schools' Inspectress, and acted as a 'peace maker' when local troubles arose. The Steels were constantly being transferred to different stations, and sometimes there would be no other white people for miles. Flora Annie determined to understand the Indian philosophy, and the birth of her daughter provided the first link with the local women, enabling her to learn much of their language. Unlike most of the ladies of the Anglo-Indian society, she was anxious to establish relations with Indians of all classes. She informed herself on Indian Art and Architecture, encouraged and assisted the revival of local handicrafts, and collected and translated folk stories, although she said: 'to get to the truth in India, one should have nine lives like a cat.' "

The image of the Mem-Sahib, cordoned off from Indian society, a little coterie of like-minded women complaining about their servants, the dust and noise and heat and longing for 'home', doesn't seem to fit Flora Annie. She stepped outside that inward-gazing community. She developed a knowledge of Indian folklore and languages and customs. And she brought meticulous care to her transcribing of folktales, getting as many versions as she could of each tale in the struggle to find the definitive version. Her *Tales of the Punjab* though written for 19th century readers is still an interesting and entertaining collection.

The *Tales* certainly have their share of princes and princesses, ogres, and sorcerers, demons and spells, but they also have local animals, buffaloes, rats, bears, jackals and crocodiles as well as crows, bulbuls, cuckoos and more, and they have a liveliness and sense of humour in them which remains very attractive. Sometimes it comes out of her style—

“Just then a bear came swinging by, with its great black nose tilted in the air, and its keen little eyes peering about; for bears, though good enough fellows on the whole, are just dreadfully inquisitive.” (‘The Bear’s Bad Bargain’)

And sometimes the touch of farce—

“Once upon a time there lived a barber, who was such a poor silly creature that he couldn’t even ply his trade decently, but snipped off his customers’ ears instead of their hair, and cut their throats instead of shaving them. So of course he grew poorer every day, till at last he found himself with nothing left in his house but his wife and his razor, both of whom were as sharp as sharp could be.” (‘The Barber’s Clever Wife’)

Princesses, curiously, often have golden hair. Was this to mark them out as princesses? And princesses are often given away with ‘half the kingdom’ and no say in the matter. But many of the female characters are strong and brave and clever.

Undoubtedly Punjabi readers would find resonances and allusions I would miss, such as “*Jau kî roti*, barley bread, is the poor man’s food, as opposed to *gihûn kî rotî*, wheaten bread, the rich man’s food. Barley bread is apt to produce flatulence.” Or: “From time immemorial the tiger has been supposed to be accompanied by a jackal who shows him his game and gets the leavings as his wages. Hence the Sanskrit title of *vyâghranyaka* or tiger-leader for the jackal.”

And undoubtedly students of folk lore would find connections and similarities with folk tales from many lands. Such as the Emerald Mountain. “Koh-i-Zamurrad in the original. The whole story of Bahrâmgor is mixed up with the ‘King of China’, and so it is possible that the legendary fame of the celebrated Green Mount in the Winter Palace at Pekin is referred to here ... It is much more probable, however, that the legends which are echoed here are local variants or memories of the tale of the Old Man of the Mountain and the Assassins, so famous in many a story in Europe and Asia in the Middle Ages, e.g. *The Romans of Bauduin de Sebourg*, where the lovely Ivorine is the heroine of the Red Mountain, and which has a general family likeness to this tale”; in this tale (‘The Faithful Prince’) Prince Bahrâmgor travels through many dangers and adventures to reach his abducted wife being held in the Emerald City. “So the Prince journeyed joyfully to the north, until in the far distance he saw the glittering Emerald Mountain. Then he rubbed the powder on his eyes, and behold! what he desired was near, and the Emerald City lay before him, looking as if it had been cut out of a single jewel. But the Prince thought of nothing save his dearest Princess, and wandered up and down the gleaming city protected by his invisible cap. Still he could not find her. The fact was, the Princess Shâhpasand’s father had locked her up inside seven prisons, for fear she should fly away again, for he doated on her, and was in terror lest she should escape back to earth and her handsome young Prince, of whom she never ceased talking.”

Her *Tales of the Punjab* was first published in London and New York in 1894. I wonder if among its many readers was a writer casting round for a new idea for a book, a man who said “The Emerald City ... hmmm ... that has possibilities ... but not a prince, American readers don’t really want princes ... perhaps a little girl ... ”

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April 3: George Herbert
April 4: Maya Angelou
April 5: Thomas Hobbes

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That phrase, that life for most people was ‘nasty, short and brutish’, is brought out to prove various things about life for our ancestors. But is it a correct quote? And what was the context?

The other day I came upon a copy of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* and thought I would give it a

‘quick read’. But whatever else it is it is certainly not a quick or an easy read. Nor did it conform to my vague idea that it was about civil society in Hobbes’ time. He certainly dwells on questions of democracy, monarchy, succession, civil society and attitudes, not surprisingly as he was born in the reign of Elizabeth I, in 1588, and lived through the Stuarts and Cromwell’s republic, dying at the age of ninety-one in 1679. But he is also hunting beneath the surface to find the laws that underpin life. He believed in human beings as a form of perpetual motion machine. He wrote, “There be in Animals, two sorts of *Motions* peculiar to them: One called *Vitall*; begun in generation, and continued without interruption through their whole life; such as are the *course* of the *Bloud*, the *Pulse*, the *Breathing*, the *Concoction*, *Nutrition*, *Excretion*, &c; to which *Motions* there needs no help of *Imagination*: The other is *Animall motion*, otherwise called *Voluntary motion*: as to *go*, to *speak*, to *move* any of our limbes, in such manner as is first fancied in our minds.” And he works to list and link every human attribute, the passions, the vices and virtues, the imagination and the memory, to laws of nature. Like a problem in geometry everything links back to what came before and if followed back and back you will come to the law of nature governing it.

But human beings are not hermits; they live in societies, these may be ‘Paternall’, they may be ‘Despotically’, but in this ‘Common-wealth’ the laws of nature may come into conflict with the civil laws of society. And this is further complicated by the laws of God; he goes through the books of the Bible seeking their potential underpinning of laws that have enduring significance. He belonged to the first generations to have easy access to Bibles in English, principally the King James’ version, but probably he had been brought up on an earlier version and it is interesting to see how he both interprets the Biblical stories but also takes aspects to support his basic contention. And from here onwards it is not hard to see philosophy hunting in two different directions: is the world, the universe, a clockwork toy wound up and unable to follow anything but its set path and inflexible rules—or is Will a genuine gift which enables creatures, primarily humans but potentially others, to act outside the physical laws governing everything.

*

And that famous quotation? It is actually: “And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.” But he very obviously does not see this as the natural condition of the life of man.

“For as the nature of Foule weather, lyeth not in a showre or two of rain; but in an inclination thereto of many dayes together: So the nature of War, consisteth not in actuall fighting; but in the known disposition thereto, during all the time there is no assurance to the contrary. All other time is PEACE.

“Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withal. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

“It may seem strange to some man, that has not well weighed these things; that Nature should thus dissociate; and render men apt to invade, and destroy one another: and he may therefore, not trusting to this Inference, made from the Passions, desire perhaps to have the same confirmed by Experience. Let him therefore consider with himselfe, when taking a journey, he armes himselfe, and seeks to go well accompanied; when going to sleep, he locks his doores; when even in his house he locks his chests; and this when he knows there bee Lawes, and publike Officers, armed, to revenge all

injuries shall be done him; what opinion he has of his fellow subjects, when he rides armed; of his fellow Citizens, when he locks his doors; and of his children, and servants, when he locks his chests. Does he not there as much accuse mankind by his actions, as I do by my words? But neither of us accuse mans nature in it. The Desires, and other Passions of man, are in themselves no Sin. No more are the Actions, that proceed from those Passions, till they know a Law that forbids them: which till Lawes be made they cannot know; nor can any Law be made, till they have agreed upon the Person that shall make it.”

In a world before antiseptics and antibiotics and artificial limbs and skin-grafts and well-run hospitals life during war time was undoubtedly miserable but I wondered about his use of ‘solitary’ because being alone was the one thing that man in a time of war wasn’t. But I think he means there is then no one that man can absolutely trust and feel safe with. Civil War is far from civil.

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Crawford Macpherson introducing *Leviathan* writes, “Hobbes’ bold hypothesis was that the motion of individual human beings could be reduced to the effects of a mechanical apparatus consisting of sense organs, nerves, muscles, imagination, memory, and reason, which apparatus moved in response to the impact (or imagined impact) of external bodies on it. The apparatus was not, strictly speaking, self-moving, but it was always in motion because other things were always impinging on it. In a looser sense it *was* self-moving, because it had, built into it, a desire or endeavour to maintain its motion. Hobbes postulated an innate impulsion to keep going, which in its most fundamental form was the impulsion to avoid death: ‘every man ... shuns ... death; and this he doth, by a certain impulsion of nature, no less than that whereby a stone moves downward.’ This same impulsion to keep going could be said to determine the whole activity consisted of endeavours towards what could also be called appetites and aversions. Man’s most complex and refined actions could be explained as effects of the operation of this mechanical system, not, of course, by treating them all as mere reflex actions like blinking, but by treating all voluntary (that is, willed) actions as results of a process of deliberation or calculation which called into play memory, imagination, and reason as well as sense perception, and put them all to work in the service of appetite and aversion.

“This was Hobbes’ striking scientific hypothesis. All human actions could be resolved into elementary motions of body and mind which the scientist could recombine in a way that would explain everything. Hobbes believed that he had done this.”

*

It is not only modern commentators; Hobbes’s contemporaries and near-contemporaries were equally willing to remove it from its context. Duncan Graham in *Dying Inside* wrote:

“Roebourne is in what locals like to call ‘Dampierland’ where the English buccaneer William Dampier landed 100 years before Cook touched the east coast. He is widely remembered in white histories for his great feats of exploration and scathing comments on the local inhabitants, but blacks remember him for another reason. Dampier was probably the first white man to shoot an Aborigine. It happened like this.

“In 1688 Dampier was aboard the *Cygnets*, commanded by a Captain Swan. The ship needed to lay up for careening (the scraping of barnacles off the keel) and to get away from searching Spaniards whose ships the Englishmen had been plundering. It appears the *Cygnets* anchored somewhere between the present towns of Broome and Derby on the Kimberley coast in the area now known as the Buccaner Archipelago. (The town of Dampier, further south on the Pilbara coast, marks the location of the sailor’s next visit to Australia in 1699.) While on the beach Dampier tried, though without much success, to get the Aborigines to wear clothes and cart water to the ship. One day the crew chased a black along the shoreline. They wanted to get him on board. It was more a fun event for the whites

until they rounded a headland and found armed warriors waiting for them. There was a moment of panic. A gun was fired, an Aborigine was shot. It is not known whether he was killed or wounded, but the crash of that gunfire was to echo around the land for the next 300 years, the starting signal for the entrance of the Europeans, the marking of the end of innocence.

The people who met Dampier were probably members of the Bardi tribe. His harsh description was to influence generations to come:

The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty people, yet for wealth are gentlemen to these, who have no houses and skin garments, sheep, poultry and fruits of the earth, ostrich eggs etc as the Hodmadods have: and setting aside their humane shape, they differ little from brutes.

(Western Australian historian Neville Green claims the term ‘miserablest’ meant poor in European terms rather than ‘unhappy’.)

Dampier’s observations were largely influenced by the seventeenth-century philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, the latter famous for his comment that the life of humans in a state of nature was ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. Dampier wrote about his adventures in *A Voyage to New Holland* which was widely read by a thrill-hungry public in Europe. The book was translated into French and Dutch. It aroused the imagination of Jonathon Swift who wrote *Gulliver’s Travels* and Daniel Defoe who modeled the experiences of Robinson Crusoe and Man Friday on Dampier’s writings.”

It was, of course, the former rather than the latter and if taken in context ...

* * * * *

April 6: Ram Dass

April 7: Gabriela Mistral

William Wordsworth

Donald Barthelme

April 8: Tilly Armstrong

April 9: Charles Baudelaire

April 10: Montague Summers

April 11: Bernard O’Dowd

April 12: Alan Ayckbourn

* * * * *

I remember writing that Agatha Christie had three plays running in London at the same time and I found that very impressive. But I just came on this in Paul Allen’s book on Alan Ayckbourn which is even more impressive: “London, 1973. With five plays running concurrently in the West End, British theatre’s commercial heartland, Alan Ayckbourn has achieved what nobody else has, before or since. Soon he also has four plays running concurrently on Broadway; New York renames a street Ayckbourn Alley to mark this, also unique, record.”

But perhaps even that impressive record has been bettered. Peter Watts introducing three of August Strindberg’s plays writes, “It had long been his ambition to have his plays performed in Paris and now *The Father* was an enormous success (though all that Strindberg made out of it was 300 francs!), and at one time there were six of his plays running at once. The honour had come to him before it did to Ibsen, of whom he was bitterly and contemptuously jealous. At any other time he would have been overjoyed, but now all that he cared about was proving that carbon could be isolated from pure sulphur.” But perhaps it is not the number of plays running concurrently but the prestige of

the theatres they are running in ...

* * * * *

Noel Coward said of John Osborne: “I cannot believe that this writer, the first of the ‘angry young men’, was ever really angry at all. Dissatisfied, perhaps, and certainly envious and, to a degree, talented, but no more than that. No leader of thought and ideas, a conceited, calculating young man blowing a little trumpet.”

Maurice Shadbolt in *One of Ben’s* saw Osborne through different eyes: “There was a play I imagined I needed to see. ‘There aren’t any big brave causes left,’ cried Jimmy Porter from the stage of the Royal Court. *Look Back in Anger* was electrifying and demoralising. It seemed John Osborne had left my generation with no more to say. I was quiet on the tube ride home, quieter still the next day. It was a week before I argued myself back to my typewriter with a faint heart.

“Within a month I knew that reaction extravagant. Even Tolstoy, alas for Aunt Sis, hadn’t said it all: Osborne’s ranting and randy hero with the sweet stall certainly hadn’t. The play also began to seem the last gasp of a literary culture losing its resonance.”

Osborne’s first play *Look Back in Anger* premiered in London in 1956. It might have been another flop for the English Stage Company—except that Kenneth Tynan wrote an admiring review. Osborne was the first Angry Young Man but it came to encompass a whole group which included, although it was not the sort of group where you filled in a form and paid your membership, John Braine, Arnold Wesker, Bernard Kops, Alan Sillitoe, Tynan, John Wain, even Doris Lessing and Kingsley Amis. They were having a good slap at the English class system, at the general unfairness of English society, and loudly and brashly seeming to break with what had come before. But there was an intrinsic problem. Anger is powerful on stage—if it is directed at things we can all be angry about. But after the initial interest and publicity their work began to seem self-pitying. They wanted what other people had and were angry that society was not doing much to provide it. You could struggle to bring down an unfair system and replace it with something better but, except perhaps for Doris Lessing, this wasn’t what they were writing about, demanding, treading on conventional toes, generally making lots of noise but very few practical suggestions ... With time they stopped being Young and with time their Anger tended to retreat into alcohol, cigarettes, and increasingly conservative views. But most of them did stay Men ...

* * * * *

Although I can understand something of the drive behind the ‘angry young men’ I am glad that their type of theatre was superseded and that we now have Alan Ayckbourn’s much more interesting and sometimes quirky offerings.

But while I was thinking on this I came upon a bit about Arthur Miller’s training as a playwright at the University of Michigan. Jeffrey Meyers in his book titled with suitable hyperbole, *The Genius & the Goddess*, writes, “In the 1930s the university was a radical outpost in the generally conservative Midwest. The energetic Miller washed dishes in a cafeteria in exchange for meals and supported himself on the fifteen dollars a month (a quarter of his warehouse salary) he earned by feeding mice in a cancer research laboratory. After classes he worked as night editor at the *Michigan Daily*.” This prompted two questions: Can you learn to be a playwright? And did the USA have its own version of the Angry Young Men? Writing magazines now offer dozens of courses helping you to become a novelist, a poet, or a playwright. Clearly Agatha Christie never did a course in playwriting but did John Osborne or Alan Ayckbourn? And you can certainly learn the nuts and bolts side of things—which is essential if your final masterpiece is going to play well on a stage and not just bore people with long, albeit clever, dialogue and static actors.

I had thought of them as a group of playwrights but they included as many novelists. Still I

think it is ‘Men’ in their title which is more important than ‘Angry’ or the general emphasis on changing the theatre or the reading public’s tastes. Their works were often as misogynistic as the plays of an earlier generation but without any sense of courtesy or chivalry. They weren’t going to usher in a more equal society. The women’s movement still had to come along and provide its own version of the Angry Young Women ... And, curiously, the movement does not seem to have ever embraced playwrights like Brendan Behan who would seem to have more to be angry about. But then it is hard to keep that kind of anger alive if you have to face people who have suffered more than some supercilious indifference from those who like to think they are somebody ...

And I don’t think it would be possible to describe America’s most talked-about post-war playwrights, Miller himself, Eugene O’Neil, Tennessee Williams and their ilk, as ‘angry young men’, not least because if they were rebelling they were rebelling against different things and in different ways. They weren’t setting up writers like Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan with their mannered comedies and seeing them as ‘the enemy’.

And I don’t mind if Alan Ayckbourn writes the occasional angry play. I am sure it would still be entertaining in a way that *Look Back in Anger* was not ...

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April 13: Seamus Heaney
Samuel Beckett
Max Harris
April 14: Arnold Toynbee
James Branch Cabell
Ray Mathew
April 15: Henry James
Emile Durkheim
April 16: Anatole France
John Millington Synge
April 17: Isak Dinesen
Cynthia Ozick
April 18: Henry Clarence Kendall
April 19: Richard Hughes
April 20: Dinah Craik
April 21: Charlotte Brontë
John Manifold
April 22: Henry Fielding
April 23: William Shakespeare

* * * * *

John Gross put together a collection he called *After Shakespeare* which looks at Shakespeare’s influence on later poets, playwrights, novelists, composers, philosophers, even politicians, but there was one area that got overlooked.

I knew that several of Shakespeare’s plays had inspired music such as Verdi’s opera *Othello* but I hadn’t thought of them as inspiring art—until I came upon a book called *Fairy Art* by Iain Zaczek. He writes, “it was the theatrical associations of the subject that actually led to the biggest upsurge in fairy art. The spectacular effects in William Macready’s staging of *The Tempest* (1838) and Lucia Vestris’s version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1840), coupled with the rise of fairy subjects in the ballet, left their mark on a generation of fairy painters.”

“Why did fairy painting become so popular in Britain and not elsewhere? The answer is

Shakespeare. In the late eighteenth century, when the authorities were trying to promote a national school of British art, the depiction of Shakespearean subjects was actively encouraged. They enjoyed the same prestige as historical, mythological or Biblical themes, and were certainly preferred to other theatrical work, which was generally considered a minor, specialist field.”

“Shakespeare probably got the idea of using an Indian boy from *Huon of Bordeaux*, his source for the character of Oberon. In the book, Huon crosses paths with the fairies while he is traveling east, on his way to meet up with the fairest maid in all of India. The precise location, however, was immaterial. The main idea was to underline the supernatural powers of the fairies by showing that they could fly to the other side of the globe with ease.”

“Shakespeare derived his fairies from a number of different sources. Oberon stems from *Huon of Bordeaux*, a thirteenth-century romance that was first translated into English by Lord Berners (c. 1469-1533). In this, Huon performs a number of seemingly impossible tasks, with the magical assistance of the fairy king. Titania, meanwhile, came from a Classical source. Ovid (43BC-AD17) had used the name to describe a number of female woodland spirits who were descended from the Titans, an ancient race of Greek gods. Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, was well known from English folklore, but Shakespeare may have found additional information in Reginald Scot’s (c. 1538-99) *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).”

“Shakespeare is thought to have had two sources in mind when creating the character of Bottom. Firstly there was the famous legend of King Midas, who was given the ears of an ass after offending Apollo. In addition there was the tale of Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*, in which the narrator persuades his mistress to steal a jar of ointment from a witch in the hope that it will transform him into a bird. Instead, to his dismay, he finds himself turned into an ass. During this transformation period, however, a friendly maid offers to “finely combe thy maine” and “tye up thy rugged tayle”, which may have given the playwright the idea for Titania’s flirtation.”

“Shakespeare’s influence on fairy painting was enormous, although the material was confined almost exclusively to two plays: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*.” Yet, “Gustave Dore’s picture serves as a reminder that for much of its history *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was performed as a spectacle of music and dance, rather than a traditional play. Generations of directors found it virtually impossible to stage and made savage cuts to the text. It was performed only once during the Restoration period, when Pepys praised the dancing but condemned the rest as “the most insipid ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life”. In his version, David Garrick (1717-79) removed all but 600 lines of the original text, basing the performance around the antics of the fairies and the lovers.”

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“By the mid-nineteenth century fairies were everywhere, breeding like flies in the compost of medieval escapism and Gothic romanticism that made up the Victorian artistic imagination. During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment they had become an endangered species, but now they were back with a vengeance, and had somehow managed to make their way into the impregnable edifice of reason and materialism.

“It was a growing interest in fairy tales that had reactivated them. Walter Scott’s 1802 essay on ‘The Fairies of Border Suspicion’, which appeared in a collection of traditional ballads called *The Minstrelsey of the Scottish Border*, had been particularly influential. In 1829, Thomas Keightley published an entire book, *The Fairy Mythology*, designed to preserve the best stories, and in the process powerfully reinvented the nostalgic nether world of fairyland” and “That spring, that most happy spring seemed to be bursting out all over the Victorian arts. It could be found in the revival of interest in Shakespeare after years of neglect. His were the plays that Ada insisted on seeing at Drury

Lane when her interest in drama was at its height. One of the most popular was *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the eighteenth century the story of Bottom, Puck, Titania and Oberon was just the sort of silly, mystical nonsense that provoked Dr Johnson to criticize Shakespeare for his failure to observe the classical unities of time, space and action. Now the kingdom of the fairies that Shakespeare so playfully invoked captured the Victorian imagination. It inspired not just new productions and favourable reappraisals, but a whole genre of art, the fairy painting.”

From *The Bride of Science* by Benjamin Woolley; his book about Ada Lovelace, daughter of Byron. He also points to another aspect of this fascination with fairies: the desire to create an ethereal sense of otherworldliness in ballet. Filippo Taglioni and his daughter Maria ushered in the tutu and dancing *en pointe* or what Margot Fonteyn saw as ‘the image of the ballerina that we now take for granted, standing on one toe in an airy arabesque’.

Possibly serious professional writers and anthologists like John Gross felt that writing about fairies was beneath their notice. Shakespeare deserved better. But Zaczek’s book is a delight.

* * * * *

April 24: Robert Penn Warren

April 25: Walter de la Mare

April 26: Morris West

Bernard Malamud

April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft

April 28: Sylvia Ashton-Warner (d)

April 29: Egon Erwin Kisch

April 30: John Crowe Ransom

Alice B. Toklas

May 1: Joseph Addison

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Bobbie Ann Mason

* * * * *

John Evangelist Walsh wrote in *Unravelling Piltdown*, “Here is no cause for derisive accusation, as happens too often, no occasion for snide humor. The Piltdown fraud was nothing short of despicable, an ugly trick played by a warped and unscrupulous mind on unsuspecting scholars. All the men involved, those conscientious scientists who first eagerly welcomed Piltdown Man, acted openly and in good faith. None had the slightest reason to doubt the plain evidence of his eyes. A clever antagonist (in this case a brilliant one), working underhandedly as he preys on trusting colleagues, can almost always score an initial triumph, even with victims otherwise astute. How long such an imposture may live thereafter depends less on the skill of the forger, or the gullibility of the target, than on circumstances beyond the immediate control of either. In the matter of Piltdown, on three or four occasions at its start the developing affair threatened to collapse because of the forger’s astonishing boldness. But each time it was rescued by the fortuitous favorable circumstances.”

I thought Walsh might have some reason for indignation as the story unfolds but I didn’t accept his thoughts about ‘unsuspecting scholars’. Scholars should not be ‘unsuspecting’; they are not little old ladies willing to trust an unscrupulous window-cleaner. Their job is to doubt everything until it is proven beyond doubt. They should not be ‘trusting colleagues’. Trust and faith have their place in life but the science lab is not their obvious home, not if we want science and scientific results which we can trust absolutely. Neither friendship, nor hope, nor any other virtue, neither ambition nor ego nor self-esteem nor any other natural behaviour, should have pride of place in the laboratory; only the

rigorous search for the truth.

True, the researchers did not have carbon-dating or DNA to turn to in 1912. But they did have excellent microscopes and an increasingly sophisticated understanding of dentistry, chemistry, fossilization, the development of soils and gravels and river-beds, and other relevant disciplines and I cannot believe that the two parts of the skull supposedly part of the one Early Man did not show significant and vital differences.

Nor were the things which would buttress such a find—charcoal from camp fires, bones from past meals, flint tools, suitable caves for winter living, realistic prey animals, middens—ever adequately found, only a scattering of flints and a few scraps of teeth from large animals; nor were there any signs of similar ‘fossils’ found in the countries such Early Man would have had to traverse to reach England, particularly France ...

Piltdown should surely have made those ‘unsuspecting’ and ‘trusting’ people very wary. After all, medical students had been hoaxing people with skulls and skeletons for generations ...

In fact many scientists refused to believe that the skull and the jaw bone *did* belong together. Their reasons for doubt were various. But it seems amazing that no one mounted a concerted campaign to insist that the two finds be kept separate. Had that been done there would have been a skull of indeterminate age, possibly Neanderthal, and a jaw possibly belonging to a member of the ape family. But no Piltdown Man. Because the Piltdown Man required the two parts to be himself. Extraordinarily it was not until the 1950s that a scientist, Joseph Wiener, took the various doubts and did some detailed work and showed among other things that the teeth were still white inside, their brown staining had not infiltrated the whole tooth in the way it would have if the teeth were ancient. With his care in investigation and his work in showing how relatively easy it was to create a fake—the whole edifice came toppling slowly down. And the new technique of carbon dating then showed conclusively that: “Piltdown Man, the most famous creature ever to grace the prehistoric scene, had been ingeniously manufactured from a medieval Englishman and a Far Eastern ape.”

Walsh brings calm skill to the task of tracking down the hoaxer. And, surprisingly, there were two famous names, as well as some forgotten ones, among those who went to that quarry: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Fr Teilhard de Chardin. Doyle was too much the busy public man to have the time or the opportunity to carry out a prolonged hoax. But Stephen Jay Gould in the US strongly advocated Teilhard de Chardin as the fraudster. As a young Frenchman he was “already known to Woodward for his work on the fossil flora of Sussex. An ordained priest assigned by his order in France to pursue further study at the Jesuit seminary near Hastings, and a budding paleontologist, thirty-year-old Pierre Teilhard de Chardin had enjoyed a loose association with Dawson since the summer of 1909, when he was still a seminarian. One day both had been in search of fossils at the Hastings quarry, had happened to meet, and had found each other congenial. The young priest, eager to make a mark as a scientist, was happy to accept the older man’s offer of guidance in matters of English geology. In turn, Dawson had found Teilhard’s youthful eyes and energy, and his knowledge of Hastings stone and gravel beds, impressive and helpful.”

Those youthful eyes had found a tooth in the gravel pit where Woodward and Dawson were digging with the help of a man called Hargreaves who wielded, oh horrors!, a mattock. But his seminary ordered him back to France. “Before he had reason to return again to the Hastings-Lewes area, World War One had broken out, and he entered military service as a stretcher bearer. Afterward, the currents of his life in both science and religion, as well as philosophy and mysticism, took his attention far elsewhere (remarkably, he would be intimately connected with the discovery, in China in the twenties, of Sinanthropus, Peking Man, now among the pivotal fossils of evolutionary theory). In

time, with such challenging and controversial books as *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*, he would earn fame for his ambitious attempt to fuse evolutionary theory with a religious and spiritual concept of man and his origin. But always he would think of his Piltdown days as “one of my brightest and earliest palaeontological memories.””

Did he have doubts or did he accept the skull and jawbone as a Missing Link, evidence of a curious Ape Man who had fetched up in southern England? When the hoax was finally and thoroughly debunked he tried to put the kindest interpretation on it; that the bones had ended up there accidentally, and that he would rather talk of more recent advances in paleontology. It suggests that although he never took a public position on the bones he had always accepted them as genuine.

Despite Stephen Jay Gould’s accusations Walsh shows convincingly that Teilhard de Chardin could not have been the hoaxer and, instead, he homes in on Charles Dawson as the fraudster. But curiously Dawson doesn’t seem to have carried out the long and detailed fraud to make money, or to debunk current evolutionary theory, but rather to promote himself as an amateur geologist, antiquarian, and paleontologist with genuine credentials and worthy of membership in the Royal Society. He failed in his ambition. But he did achieve something he probably hadn’t intended to: he showed that science can be used and mis-used.

It raises the question: what kind of modern Piltdown Men are out there simply because we all tend to see what we want to see, hear what we want to hear, believe what we want to believe ... and scientists are not a race apart ...

*

Jonathan Culler in *Structuralist Poetics* wrote, “This historical effect, it seems to me, already depends upon a misunderstanding here, because *science* in French (like the German *Wissenschaft*) means systematic thought, not, as in English, an empirical and experimental enterprise, and British and American skepticism about a science of literature (the phrase still seems an oxymoron) relied on the current English sense of *science*. But poetics need not be linked to science. It could be thought of, for instance, as the attempt to understand what a poet or novelist must know implicitly to be able to construct the literary work.” So did Teilhard de Chardin, every time he sat down to write, bring the idea of science as ‘systematic thought’ to the desk with him or the idea of science as an ‘empirical and experimental enterprise’?

*

Piltdown Man is shelved away
Piltdown Man has had his day,
nine split fragments joined in one,
parietal pieces of cranium.
All to himself in the British Museum
Pultdown Man is singing this song:

‘Mandible, canine, turbinal,
stegodon, flint, and broken skull,
we all lay low in a gravel-bed—
if there ever was a body it lost its head.

‘They found us out and they joined us up,
pieced my skull like a broken cup;
eminent men in the lecture room
threw up their hats when I came in.

‘Prolonged applause for antiquity,
stamping feet for stratigraphy—
I held the stage but it didn’t last long:
fluorine tests have done me wrong.

‘Radio counts that showed excess,
spectrographic analysis—
applications of science proved
Piltdown Man has never lived.’

Piltdown Man is quite disproved.
He never lived and he never loved.
A gravel-bed’s a private place—
but whom (and what with) to embrace?
Oh listen hard and listen long
For the sad lost notes of the Piltdown song.

‘Piltdown Man’ by Rosemary Dobson.

*

And what of Teilhard de Chardin when he came to write his famous books? Susan Greenfield in *Tomorrow’s People* says, “Early in the 20th century Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit, conceived a most bizarre and visionary notion, especially by the clipped and clear standards of the imperialist era: the concept of a ‘noosphere’ – from the Greek for ‘mind’, ‘reason’. His noosphere was a collective system of thinking that linked up all individuals around the globe. Now, of course, such a scenario does not seem so crazy, substantiated in part as it has been by the web and the net. There are those who have already likened the web-net to a brain, each individual, fancifully compared to a neuron, eventually communicating incessantly with each other. But the most important aspect of de Chardin’s vision has been so far overlooked: each person in the noosphere is completely subsumed by the greater, collective consciousness. In brief, the notion of an independent individual, with a private life and a unique portfolio of thoughts, knowledge and opinions, is finished.” It seems to contain echoes of Jung’s collective unconscious, of ideas about collective hysteria. It might also contain within it the seeds of doom. But there is a fuzziness in his writing which suggests he would rather play with ideas than pin anything down firmly.

For instance, in his *Building the Earth* he writes, “The love of interaction, above the love of attraction:—elements which merge in order to undergo Union. Who can tell the plenitude of the yet almost unknown quality, the immense fulfillment of fraternal friendship, which, in the Noosphere, will accompany victory over its remaining internal divisions; that is to say the ultimate achievement of consciousness of human Unity in order to advance it?” and “Yet a little while and the Spirit of the Earth will emerge with its specific individuality and its own character and physiognomy. And then, on the surface of the Noosphere, gradually sublimated in thought and passion, ever striving to solve more lofty problems, to possess greater objects, *the tension towards being will be at its maximum.*”

It sounds attractive at first reading but then doubt sets in. What exactly does he mean? How might his ideas apply to the world, to living a better life? And then there is a feeling of walking on shifting sand. He appears to be suggesting that there are other kinds of evolution than the strictly material and that this different evolution is inevitably towards some kind of unity.

But it was de Chardin’s role in the discovery of Peking Man which was more on my mind.

Karen Mutton in *Scattered Skeletons in our Closet* writes, “In 1921 Swedish geologist Johan Gunnar Andersson and American palaeontologist Walter Granger arrived in Zhoukoudian, near the capital of Peking to search for human fossils. Local quarrymen directed them to dragon Bone Hill where Andersson recognized deposits of quartz which indicated it was a rich area for fossils. The discovery of a fossilized human molar, followed by two more molars persuaded the Rockefeller Foundation to allot funding to the project.

The discovery of another tooth in 1927 by Davidson Black, of Peking Union Medical College, led him to identify a new species, *Sinanthropus pekinensis*. After his article was published in ‘Nature’, many fellow scientists were skeptical of Davidson’s claims which were based on a single tooth, and the foundation threatened to withdraw funds.

Fortunately at the very end of the 1928 season, Pei Wenzhong made the historic find of an almost complete skull of *Sinanthropus* embedded partly in loose sands. Black was awarded an \$80,000 grant that he used to establish the Cenozoic Research Laboratory.

According to Cremo: “With the financial backing of the Rockefeller Foundation for the Cenozoic Research Laboratory secure, Black resumed his travels for the purpose of promoting Beijing Man. He then returned to China, where work was proceeding slowly at Zhoukodian, with no new major *Sinanthropus* finds reported.”

The discovery made Black (although not Pei) a media sensation and ensured continued access to the Rockefeller Foundation funds. Over the next few years Chinese archeologists Yang Zhongjian, Pei Wenzhong, and Jia Lanpo uncovered 200 human fossils, including six almost complete skullcaps from more than forty individuals.

Reports showing extensive use of fire and the presence of stone and bone tools at Zhoukoudian were first published by Henri Breuil in 1931. This was unusual as evidence of fire usage had been omitted or overlooked in earlier reports. Black, Pei et al, embarrassed by the revelation, claimed that they had many doubts about the evidence of tool and fire usage so they did not report it. Or they could have deliberately withheld the information because it might have removed *Sinanthropus* from its unique position as China’s earliest ancestor.

The Japanese occupation of 1937 put an end to further excavations at Zhoukoudian. Unfortunately the original specimens allegedly disappeared during the war en route to the port city of Qinghuandao although casts remain.

The discovery of Peking man was fortunate for Java Man, who was upgraded to the genus *Homo* based upon its supposed fire making and hunting abilities. Peking and Java men were both classified as *Homo erectus*, fire and tool maker.

However, its status of fire maker has been challenged on various occasions. Binford and Ho, anthropologists at the University of New Mexico, claimed the ash deposits were actually huge guano droppings inside the cave which could have burned. “The assumption that man introduced and distributed fire is unwarranted, as is the assumption that burned bones and other materials are there by virtue of man’s cooking his meals.” (Cremo) In 1998 Steve Weiner of the Weizmann Institute of Science also came to a similar conclusion.”

You can see why I was a little dubious.

- a) that very opportune find of a skull just when funds were about to dry up.
- b) the simple fact that if we only had a plaster cast of the Piltdown Man it probably would not be possible to determine whether it was a fake or a genuine skull, let alone its age.
- c) and the fact that these people who had apparently found something both unique and priceless simply whacked it in a box and consigned it to China’s very unreliable postal service instead of at least sending it in charge of a trusted colleague.

I was also dubious about them finding the skull in sand. Most skulls seem to have been found either in caves or crusted or embedded in rock or deep sediment layers. But against that doubt is the discovery of many other fossils in that particular area—though not, it would seem, any other identifiably human or near human bones of an apparently similar and suitably ancient age. But then the age of Peking Man can never satisfactorily be resolved.

* * * * *

The other day I came upon a book called *From Piltdown Man to Point Omega: The Evolutionary Theory of Teilhard de Chardin* by Noel Keith Roberts. I hoped this would do something to elucidate that ‘bizarre and visionary notion’. He says de Chardin wrote of the noosphere that it was ‘the highest and greatest complexity achieved (so far as we know) in the universe’ and that ‘Man has gradually been raised to the position of constituting a specifically new envelope to the earth. He is more than a branch, more even than a kingdom; he is nothing less than a ‘sphere’—the noosphere (or thinking sphere) superimposed upon, and coextensive with (but in many ways more close-knit and homogeneous) [than] the biosphere.’ And Roberts says of Point Omega, “Teilhard referred to an unnamed power which forces matter to arrange itself biologically. An analogy was drawn with the gravitational force which compresses the cosmic mass. Teilhard identified this unnamed power with point Omega,” He also connects point Omega with Christ, that Christ is both salvation and energy.

He was predominantly interested in evolution but not in the sense of Darwin’s ‘survival of the fittest’ or as random adaptations to a changing world but rather as a process whose final aim was perfection. Julian Huxley says of his writings: “Teilhard, extrapolating from the past into the future, envisaged the process of human convergence as tending to a final state, which he called ‘point Omega’, as opposed to the *Alpha* of elementary particles and their energies ... [At] point Omega the noosphere will be intensely unified and will have achieved a ‘hyperpersonal’ organisation. Here his thought is not fully clear to me.” I’m not sure if it was fully clear to anyone, not even de Chardin himself. I think he was still wrestling with his own ideas in the hope that they would become clearer.

He didn’t necessarily believe that both parts of Piltdown Man’s head belonged together. But he did believe in Piltdown Man himself as a part of evolution. As it became clear the whole thing was a hoax he expunged references from his own work. But curiously the hoax had helped to set him on a journey of exploration which he might not otherwise have embarked upon. Because what were a few small fossils, trilobites, perhaps some bones from an ancient fish or pterodactyl, compared to the fascination of looking at human evolution and pondering on its beginnings, its meaning, and its possible end point?

* * * * *

May 2: Jerome K. Jerome
Theodor Herzl
Gottfried Benn
May 3: Tadeusz Peiper
Dodie Smith
May 4: Thomas Kinsella
May 5: Karl Marx
May 6: Sigmund Freud
Douglas Stewart
Chris Wallace-Crabbe
May 7: Robert Browning
Angela Carter
May 8: J. Meade Faulkner

George Woodcock
May 9: Mona Van Duyn
May 10: Karl Barth
Larthicesu Sivathamby
B. Taylor Bradford
May 11: Stanley Elkin
May 12: Edward Lear
May 13: Daphne du Maurier
May 14: Malise Ruthven
May 15: L. Frank Baum
Xavier Herbert

* * * * *

I was surprised to find that Frank Baum lived and died much earlier than I had thought; perhaps because I was thinking of him as a contemporary of Judy Garland! Lyman Frank Baum was born in New York way back in 1856 and died in 1919. And another surprise was that he was an extremely prolific author and wrote a swag of books about the Land of Oz, not just the one which is quoted from, filmed, turned into plays or toys. And a further surprise was that he wrote some of his books for young people under female pseudonyms such as Laura Bancroft and Edith Van Dyne.

When I was young we had a battered copy of *Queen Zixie of Ix*. But no one I've mentioned this to had ever heard of it. I actually found it quite a scary book. I associated the Roly-Rogues with the roly-polies, the dried-out prickly bushes which would come bounding across the paddocks in a strong wind, and imagined them coming to life and chasing me. So re-reading the book was also a way of looking at the fears that young children can take from books but because they cannot articulate their fear (or no one takes it seriously) it never gets addressed. All it needed was for someone to say 'A man in America made up this story—it has nothing to do with anything here' but I doubt very much if my mother ever noticed my horrified fascination with the story.

Martin Gardner introducing a reprint of Baum's book writes, "*Queen Zixie* is indeed the most classical in form of all Baum's book-length fairy tales, and in MacFall's opinion, Baum's best book next to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Edward Wagenknecht, in his 1929 booklet *Utopia Americana* (the first critical study of Baum's Oz books), as well as in later writings, has praised *Queen Zixie* as one of the best fairy tales ever written by anyone. It is in direct line with earlier fantasies in which palace life is combined with fairy lore and outrageous humor. One thinks of Andrew Lang's *Prince Prigio* (1889) and its sequel *Prince Ricardo* (1893), which Baum may have read and consciously imitated. (*Prince Prigio* was in turn a deliberate imitation of Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring*; Lang even mentions that his mythical land of Pantouflia is near to Thackeray's kingdom of Paflagonia.) Some of the traditional fairy-tale elements that Baum adopts in *Queen Zixie* are noted by MacFall: the magic wishing device used foolishly, the moralizing against vanity, the cruel foster mother (Aunt Rivette), and the Cinderella child (Fluff).

"The name of Baum's kingdom, Noland (no-land), reminds one of Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (with two letters switched, "Erewhon" is "nowhere" backward) and the Neverland (in the play, Never-Never-Land) of J. M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy*. According to the official map of Oz and its environs, by artist Dick Martin and cartographer James Haff, Noland is just across the northeast corner of the Deadly Desert that surrounds the rectangular-shaped Oz. Noland is bounded on the southeast by Merryland, on the west by Ix."

(Russell P. MacFall wrote a biography of Frank Baum, *To Please a Child*, and quotes Baum as saying "In some ways *Queen Zixie* is my best effort, and nearer to the 'old-fashioned' fairy tale than

anything I have yet accomplished.”)

The fairies have woven a cloak which will grant the wearer, provided he or she hasn't stolen it, one wish. Fluff as a miserable little girl is given the cloak and her wish to be happy is granted. She and her brother Bud and Aunt Rivette go to the city not knowing that the old king has died without heirs and his courtiers, Tallydab, Tollydob, Tillydib, Tullydub and Tellydeb, will choose the 47th person to enter the city gates as their next monarch. This turns out to be Bud who is no more foolish than previous rulers but his new power does rather go to his head. Queen Zixie is an ancient witch who “used her knowledge of sorcery to please her own fancy or to benefit her kingdom, but never to injure any one else.” Other people see her as young and beautiful but when she looks in a mirror she sees a withered old crone. She hears about the magic cloak and uses trickery to steal it so it doesn't grant her wish that she may be able to look in a mirror and see the beautiful woman everyone else sees.

The Roly-Rogues invade Noland and Bud begs Queen Zixie for help but when people finally go looking for the magic cloak, which she has abandoned in disgust, it is to find that an old lady has cut it up to use the squares for patchwork and given bits of it away. They chase after the pieces without success and it is Zixie's use of cunning which finally defeats the Roly-Rogues. And the Queen of the Fairies, dismayed at all the silly things people have wished for and the things done to the cloak comes and takes it back after letting Bud have his wish granted.

The thing about the book which I think makes it a better story than the Oz books is the sense of a unified whole. The *Wizard* always gave me the feeling of a story in which Baum was thinking up characters and thrusting them into the story as he went along.

The other day I came on an omnibus of the first five Oz stories and bought it. The introduction says, “In 1900, a moderately successful writer for children by the name of L. Frank Baum set out to write a new type of “wonder tale” in which (in his words) “the stereotyped genie, dwarf and fairy are eliminated, together with all the horrible and bloodcurdling incident devised by their authors to point a fearsome moral to each tale.” *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, as he entitled his tale, fulfilled his intentions magnificently. In place of the beings of traditional fairy- and folktales, Baum employed creatures of his own invention: diminutive Munchkins, winged monkeys, talking china figurines, bearlike Kalidahs, and giraffelike Quadlings.” I had thought that Dorothy comes to Oz, Dorothy goes home from Oz, end of story. But not so. Baum wrote thirteen more Oz stories.

The omnibus also included *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (1901) which “introduces the Powder of Life, which the main character, Tip, uses as a marvelous mechanism for creating a whole new cast of characters, among them Jack Pumpkinhead, the Saw-Horse, and the Gump. The book also established a recurring pattern for all subsequent novels, that of having characters from previous Oz adventures put in return appearances.” Then came *Ozma of Oz* (1907) which “introduces the mechanical man Tik-Tok, who would become one of the best-known series characters.” *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz* (1908) brings back the original Wizard and Dorothy and “vegetable people, invisible bears, and Gargoyles” and it was followed by *The Road to Oz* (1909) which has Dorothy, “Polychrome, the Daughter of the Rainbow, and Button-Bright, and introduces the frightening Scoddlers, who fight by throwing their heads at their enemies.” (And which has Queen Zixie visit Oz.)

So this week I have been absent from one Land of Oz and wandering in Baum's Land ...

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Though the majority of Baum's readers would have been children in the big cities, New York and Philadelphia and so on, I think he understood very well that to have Dorothy whirled up and away from the streets and tenements of New York would have been less believable. He was writing a story of escape and he transferred the greyness of city streets and buildings to Kansas. I picture Kansas as

brown when the paddocks are ploughed and green when the new crops sprout but his vision of Dorothy's home and family is all grey. "When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side." The land is "a gray mass", the grass is a "gray color", their house is "dull and gray", Aunt Em's eyes and cheeks and lips are "gray also" and Uncle Henry is equally grey "from his long beard to his rough boots"; the stories are an escape from the greyness of life to the vivid colours of the Emerald City and all the other mysterious places and creatures. Baum was popular because he understood this need for escape into magical places but I think, too, his stories were popular because he avoided most of the things which quickly date stories or make them inaccessible to later generations. Certainly Dorothy wears a 'sunbonnet' and churns cream into butter but there is no mention of history or politics or current events or colloquialisms which are here today and forgotten tomorrow. The stories remain very readable and accessible and almost timeless.

*

"Please tell me, Mr. Wizard, whether you called yourself Oz after this great country, or whether you believe my country is called Oz after you. It is a matter that I have long wished to inquire about, because you are of a strange race and my own name is Ozma. No one, I am sure, is better able to explain this mystery than you."

"That is true," answered the little Wizard; "therefore it will give me pleasure to explain my connection with your country. In the first place, I must tell you that I was born in Omaha, and my father, who was a politician, named me Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmannuel Ambroise Diggs, Diggs being the last name because he could think of no more to go before it. Taken altogether, it was a dreadfully long name to weigh down a poor innocent child; and one of the hardest lessons I ever learned was to remember my own name. When I grew up I just called myself O.Z., because the other initials were P-I-N-H-E-A-D; and that spelled 'pinhead,' which was a reflection on my intelligence."

From *Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz*.

So I have one final little query. The story goes that Baum saw O – Z on his filing cabinet and took it as the name of his imaginary land. But now I really wonder whether Frank Baum actually *had* a filing cabinet, let alone several. How many writers in the 19th century ran to filing cabinets? I wonder if Baum, brought up in a pious German family, was instead thinking of the Land of Uz, the mysterious land in which the Book of Job is placed? No Biblical scholar has ever been able to identify Uz and link it to a real place. This does not really surprise me. The story is an allegory, a fable with a moral point, not an excursion into history. After all, no scribe no matter how visionary, no matter how bumptious, would claim to have been present at a conversation between God and Satan. Baum may well have read some of the new Biblical research and thought: 'The Mysterious Land of Uz ... my mysterious Land of Oz' ... and why not. It is a simple yet memorable little name for young readers ...

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May 16: Honoré de Balzac
May 17: Robert Smith Surtees
May 18: Bertrand Russell
May 19: Charlotte Guest
Lorraine Hansberry
Ho Chi Minh

* * * * *

"In 1833, (Welsh industrialist Sir Josiah) Guest married Charlotte Elizabeth Bertie (1812-95), the daughter of the 9th Earl of Lindsey, who gave him ten children during the next thirteen years. She

also found time to be one of the great Welsh scholars of all time, translating the medieval manuscripts that formed the *Mabinogion*, published between 1838 and 1849. These provided her friend, Alfred Tennyson, with the Arthurian legends that formed the basis for his *Idylls of the King* in 1859.”

Rodney Legg in *Dorset Families*.

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Colm Tóibín in *Lady Gregory’s Toothbrush* says of her, “Her folklore collecting was not part of an unusual ambition, nor was her urge to create popular, or readable, versions of the ancient sagas. Her best friend in London, Lady Layard, who had given her the gift of her typewriter, was the daughter of Lady Charlotte Guest, who had made a readable and popular translation of the Welsh epics known as *The Mabinogion*. In 1878 her cousin Standish James O’Grady published his *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period*, in which he told the story of the sagas: “The forefront of Irish History we find filled with great heroic personages of a dignity and power more than human ... Century after century the mind of the country was inflamed by the contemplation of these mighty beings whom ... men believed to be their ancestors.” In 1892 Standish Hayes O’Grady, also her cousin, had published his *Silva Gadelica*, which included translations from ancient Irish sagas that were stilted and literal but accurate.”

But *The Mabinogion* is less well known here than the Irish epics. So do Welsh children grow up on Lady Charlotte’s stories—or have they long since been superseded by more modern translations and adaptations?

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Andrew Eames in *The 8.55 to Baghdad* tells this story (‘a common tale but true’): “Contemporary Nineveh is the epitome of Muzahin’s worst fears: decades of meticulous archaeology reduced to a jumble of ancient rubble by a few short years of sanctions. Until recently the palace had been protected by a roof, a fence and an armed guard and was officially designated a Site Museum, but now it resembles an abandoned quarry. Key parts of all the slabs are missing, and there’s barely a carved palm tree or a figure that remains complete, thanks to a combination of rain, vandalism and antiquities theft.

“American archaeologist John Malcolm Russell, who went to Nineveh in 1989-90 to document the palace, watched helplessly over the following five years as twelve individual chunks were removed from what he had so recently seen and photographed on site and then appeared in quick succession on the international art market. Russell describes the plundering as a ‘world heritage disaster of the first magnitude’, and points the finger unwaveringly at the United Nations, whose sanctions ‘have finally destroyed Sennacherib’s Palace, finishing the work begun by the ancient Medes and Babylonians who sacked Nineveh in 612 BC’.

“Mind you, that process was begun long ago by Layard, who calmly strolled away from Nineveh with a group of twenty-eight Assyrian sculptures which he presented to his cousin, Lady Charlotte Guest, mother of ten and wife of the wealthiest industrialist in England. Lady Charlotte displayed them at her home, Canford Manor in Dorset, a building which later became a private school for boys. The bulk of the collection was later sold on to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, but in 1992 John Russell visited Canford School as part of his Nineveh research and realized that an original carving was still in place on the wall of the garden pavilion, which was being used as the school tuck shop. There was never any idea of returning it to the Iraqis, because for the school this discovery represented manna from heaven. The relief eventually sold for £7.7 million, the highest price ever paid for an antiquity at auction.”

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While I was pondering on whether I should search for a copy of *The Mabinogion*, any version

not specifically that of Charlotte Guest, (as it was so long since I had read a version I had forgotten the characters and plots) I came upon a book called *The Mabinogion Tetralogy* by Evangeline Walton. Though this re-writes four of the stories, *The Prince of Annwn*, *The Children of Llyr*, *The Song of Rhiannon* and *The Island of the Mighty*, as fantasy novels it is an excellent introduction to the ancient myths. Purists may believe it has moved too far from the originals, I don't know, but Evangeline Walton clearly loved *The Mabinogion* even if she didn't regard herself as a Welsh scholar. She was an American, born in Indianapolis in 1907, and at first glance seems a very unlikely re-teller and adapter of ancient Welsh sagas because her re-telling and adapting suggests both an intimate knowledge of the sagas and a deep knowledge of Welsh history and folklore.

The books are full of battles, sorcery, magic, princes looking for wives, horses, dogs, stags, crows, creatures with strange abilities. The fighting does become tedious, I must admit, but she sketches in the landscapes with a sure pen and she touches on the ancient druidic beliefs and even more ancient ideas from the time of matriarchal beliefs

"The Welsh say, "She is casting rain," not "it is raining," and in Pwyll's day men still knew why. Rain and sun, crops and the wombs of beasts and women, all were ruled by that old, mysterious Goddess from whose own womb all things had come in the beginning. The wild places were Hers, and the wild things were Her children. Men of the New Tribes, Pwyll's proud golden warrior-kind, left Her worship to women, made offerings only to their Man-Gods, who brought them battle and loot. But now Pwyll began to wonder if those hunters were right who said that all who went into the woods to slay Her horned and furry children should first make offerings to Her, and promise not to kill too many. So folk of the Old Tribes had always done."

"Our world is one of many. The uninstructed group them all together in the lovely, capricious, ever-perilous realm of Faery, but Pwyll being kingly blood, had had some druidic instruction forced upon him. He knew that the Otherworld nearest earth was Annwn, the Abyss; that primal womb in which all things first took shape. There a horde of nameless beings had struggled up, through form after form, until after untold ages, they were ready to be born upon earth as men. There most men returned at death, only a few being able to go on to a higher, brighter place. "Every world has its grey Man," his cousin Pendaran Dyvved, the only druid he trusted, once had told Pwyll. "Only among us of earth none dwells, because we are afraid to look upon his face. So he that dwells in Annwn is our Lord also. He is the gardener who tends every garden. He gathers the flowers and the ripe fruit, to make room for the new to grow. He fells the old trees, that the young trees may have room to grow."

Betty Ballantine, introducing Walton and her work, writes, "Rooted in the oral myths and legends of Wales, the Mabinogion, which scholars believe was first set down, possibly by a single hand, before the mid-twelfth century, is the backbone and masterwork of Welsh medieval literature.

"The original title, *Pedair Cuine y Mabinogi*, refers to the four branches that appear in this volume, comprised of the loosely connected tales of Pwyll, Branwen, Manawyddan, and Mâth. The work was first translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1834-49, but perhaps the most prestigious translation, of more recent times, is that of Gwyn and Thomas Jones, published in 1949, just a century after the first English chronicle. Since then, various articles, monographs, commentaries, and papers of many kinds have analyzed, dissected, and ruminated over this monumental work, a rich source and subject of scholarly debate. (Indeed, it is evident from her footnotes that Miss Walton was herself a scholar of some note.) One side effect of this academic interest is that the form "Mabinogion" became commonly used for the Four Branches, rather than the contraction "Mabinogi." (*The Oxford Companion to the Literature of Wales* describes the version by Gwyn and Thomas Jones as 'magisterial'.)

She goes on to say, “until Miss Walton elected to do so, apparently no one had undertaken to tell the stories of the four Branches in the form in which they must have originated, as fiery, passionate, and very immediate accounts of real men and women, historic figures set in a time when belief in the gods of air and earth, of fire and water, were vast, inexplicable realities in a world pregnant with magic, a world of marvels and wonders, teeming with strange creatures who might well be denizens of strange other landscapes, and who almost certainly would have monstrous arcane powers. One of the great gifts of magic is mystery.”

Walton was a sickly child, educated at home, and a lover of books. While still in her twenties she re-wrote part of *The Mabinogion* and it was published in 1936 as *The Virgin and the Swine*. She wrote her own Gothic fantasy *Witch House* in 1945 but it wasn't till the 1970s that renewed interest was shown in her work. Even if no one wanted to publish her writing (and the post war world was not a fertile time for fantasy) she had continued to work on her Welsh sagas. *The Virgin and the Swine* was renamed *The Island of the Mighty* and her whole collection was published, eventually making her a celebrity in the growing world of fantasy writers and readers. And deservedly so.

Here and there she gives little glimpses into her thinking. “My original rule was never to alter anything I found in The Four Branches of The Mabinogi, whatever I might add or subtract.” But she admits to bending her rule at times. She also ponders on the possible real locations; “Geologists agree that the Preseli Mountains must have been the original home of Stonehenge’s famous “bluestones,” so that gave me another batch of ideas.” And should her characters have realistic psychological reasons for doing what they did even if the ancient bards were not so constrained? And did the transcribers of *The Mabinogion* change things so as not to upset newly Christian sensibilities? Pagan rituals, despite a modern white-washing tendency, were not always suitable reading for the young or the squeamish.

There is, too, that intriguing question of links to the folk lore and myths of both Ireland and England. “If Gawain’s renowned “Green Knight” really should be called the Gray Knight, as many think, (Irish *glas* meaning either gray or green), a connection with the Gray Man seems clear. And in his fascinating *The Corpse and the King*, the distinguished scholar Heinrich Zimmer identified this mysterious Knight with Death Himself.”

And that other question: did the sagas originally revolve around real people who gradually became mythologized? Is it possible to disentangle ancient royalty and family connections from the thickets of magic and mystery and supernatural lives?

When I looked a little into this question I discovered that each of the twelve books of *The Mabinogion* has its own history. Take for instance *The Book of Taliesin* incorporated into *The Mabinogion*. Meic Stephens in that *Oxford Companion* says Taliesin lived in the late 6th century; “a poet named with Aneirin in a famous passage in Nennius’s *Historia Brittonum* which lists the poets who once flourished in the Old North of Britain. In *The Book of Taliesin* there is a group of twelve poems believed to represent his authentic work together with a much larger number of religious, scriptural, prophetic and legendary poems which were once supposed to be by him but cannot possibly be so. In language, style, technique and metrical features the poems in the early group resemble Aneirin’s ‘*Y Gododdin*’. Six are eulogies addressed to Urien ap Cynfarch (Urien Rheged) and to his son Owain ab Urien, and these include the earliest extant example of a *dadolwch* (‘intercession’) by the poet after a period of estrangement from his patron. Two other poems present graphic accounts of battles fought by Urien and Owain against Angle invaders from the east and against Picts from the north.”

The Old North referred to the territory in southern Scotland, Cumbria and parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire; “This was the old Cumbria, the land of the *Cumbri* or *Cumbrenses*, the ‘fellow-countrymen’ of the *Cymry* or *Cymru*, whose lands marched with Wales until the connection between

them was severed by the Battle of Chester in 615. Their language was Cumbric, a Brittonic dialect sufficiently close to Welsh for the early poetry of Aneirin and Taliesin, which was originally composed in it, to have been transmitted down the ages as belonging to Wales.”

The *Hanes Taliesin* grew up as a folk tale combining the real work of Taliesin composing poetry and a mythological world with goddesses, magic potions and rebirth. “Ifor Williams believed that *Hanes Taliesin* developed in North Wales through the ninth or tenth century.” There are allusions to it along the way as it grew into the 14th century *The Book of Taliesin* and was incorporated into a wider body of work. “Throughout the Middle Ages the *Gogynfeirdd* and the *cywyddwyn* referred to Myrddin and Taliesin as the two great and authoritative poets who stood together at the very beginning of the Welsh tradition.” Myrddin or Merlin is not regarded as a real person. So it begs the question: who wrote the poems attributed to him? Taliesin? Or someone lost in the mists of time?

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May 20: Samuel Dickson Selvon

Hector Malot

Gardner Fox

May 21: Plato

May 22: Arthur Conan Doyle

May 23: Carl Linnaeus

May 24: Mary Grant Bruce

William Trevor

May 25: Dante Alighieri

Raymond Carver

Jamaica Kincaid

May 26: Denis Florence Macarthy

May 27: Julia Ward Howe

John Barth

May 28: Patrick White

Nathaniel Colgan

Dorothy Auchterlonie Green

* * * * *

Nathaniel Colgan is very unfamous, at least in comparison with Patrick White. He wrote several books about plants including *Flora Of The County Dublin*, he was in a modest sense a traveler going as far as Spain and Morocco, he spent his working life quietly as a clerk in the courts in Dublin and lived peacefully and happily with a brother and three sisters.

But he does have several claims to fame.

When people want to get the definitive word on what actually qualifies as a shamrock they turn to Nat Colgan.

When Robert Lloyd Praegar set out to do the first comprehensive research into the ecology of an Irish environment, the Clare Island Biological Survey, he asked Nat Colgan to do the mollusca, those little creatures that live on and in beaches, and to record the local Irish names for the flora and fauna.

When it was seen as important to update the definitive book of Irish plants, A. G. More’s *Cybele Hibernica*, Nat Colgan and Reg Scully were asked to undertake the work. The bulk of it fell to Colgan who spent around ten years researching and recording.

And he is my great-grandfather’s brother.

* * * * *

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814 – 1873) wrote a short story he called ‘An Account of Some

Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street'. In it two cousins, students, are lodging in Aungier St.

“The sound had ceased by this time – the dark and chill were discouraging; and, guess my horror, when I saw, or thought I saw, a black monster, whether in the shape of a man or a bear I could not say, standing, with its back to the wall, on the lobby, facing me, with a pair of great greenish eyes shining dimly out.”

Could it be a rat? A servant tells them that a judge hung himself from the banisters in their house.

“Now, I may add thus much, in compliance with the immemorial usage of the realm of fiction, which sees the hero not only through his adventures, but fairly out of the world. You must have perceived that what the flesh-blood-and-bone hero of romance proper is to the regular compounder of fiction, this old house of brick-wood-and-mortar is to the humble recorder of this true tale. I, therefore, relate, as in duty bound, the catastrophe which ultimately befell it, which was simply this – that about two years subsequently to my story it was taken by a quack doctor, who called himself Baron Duhlstoerf and filled the parlour windows with bottles of indescribable horrors preserved in brandy, and the newspapers with the usual grandiloquent and mendacious advertisements. This gentleman among his virtues did not reckon sobriety and one night, being overcome with much wine, he set fire to his bed curtains, partially burned himself and totally consumed the house. It was afterwards rebuilt and for a time an undertaker established himself in the premises.”

Nathaniel went to a school in Aungier Street. But when I came to look for details on the street I found it was a Huguenot name, as of course was Le Fanu, although the Aungiers seem to have done better than the Le Fanus. It was an interesting street. Thomas Moore was born there. It had St Peter's Church where George Bernard Shaw's family had a connection. It was home to Jacob's Biscuit Factory. It had several schools and is now home to the Dublin Institute of Technology. I do not have the details of Nathaniel's school life but he would probably have seen a rat with 'great greenish eyes' as a fascinating natural specimen—not a fulcrum for a terrifying story.

And what of the school? The reason I was curious about the school was that Nathaniel did not go to university yet he spoke several languages and was a skilled naturalist and botanist. Was the school he attended a very superior school or was he largely self-taught? His father had a pawnbroking business in Fleet Street but both his parents died when he was only a teenager; the three youngest children also died, two in the fever hospital in Cork Street, and the family story goes that the parents had asked the older children to take care of the younger. In practice this meant that Nathaniel and his brother John Joseph and their three sisters, Anne, Letitia and Sarah, banded together to send their little brother William Henry to university. Nathaniel used his pay as a clerk and the money he made from writing magazine and travel articles to pay for his journeys to Europe. If he ever regretted not being better educated there is no sign of it.

The other day I came upon Karl Whitney's book *Hidden City*. Housing developments, shopping malls, car parks, industrial estates, slowly creep over the fields and ditches and bogs and dunes and copses Nathaniel knew intimately. But Whitney also went down underneath Dublin to look at its sewers and pipes and the streams, once part of people's lives, now hidden away underground. The one Nathaniel would have undoubtedly known was the Poddle.

“Both the Poddle and the Abbey Stream are channelled separately under the Grand Canal. While the main course of the Poddle flows below the Liberties street known as Blackpitts, near the eastern flank of the area, the Abbey Stream flows under the National Boxing Stadium on South Circular Road and emerges briefly at the entrance to an industrial estate on Donore Avenue, before continuing north to Marrowbone Lane. From there, it loops eastwards before doubling back and passing above the point where the two archaeologists had stood, then travels parallel to Mill Street before rejoining the main course of the Poddle at the end of Blackpitts, flowing along New Row towards St Patrick's Cathedral.

At Donore Avenue, another branch, known as the Tenter Water – which follows the course of the older Hangman’s Stream – channels some of the Abbey Stream water directly to Blackpitts. ... The Poddle reaches St Patrick’s Cathedral and flows south through the tunnel that I walked along with Dave Green and Robert Buckle, turning eastwards along the old wood-lined tunnel under Ross Road before flowing into the grounds of Dublin Castle beneath the Ship Street gate. The river subsequently curves around the site of Dublin Castle, flows under the Olympic Theatre and empties into the River Liffey through a grating on the south quay between the Millenium footbridge and Grattan Bridge. In the ‘Wandering Rocks’ section of *Ulysses*, Joyce wrote that ‘from its sluice in Wood quay wall under Tom Devan’s office Poddle river hung out in fealty a tongue of liquid sewage’. (In fact, the Poddle emerges at Wellington Quay, but Joyce scholars maintain the mistake was intentional.)”

Unlike the Joyce family which was declining from a degree of prosperity into semi-poverty the Colgans had generations back been silk weavers in the area around New Row but had gradually achieved some comfort and modest prosperity. But the comparison which interested me was a different one. I have heard various people say that if the Dublin of the early 1900s was lost it could be re-created from *Ulysses*. I am not sure about this. But if the natural world of County Dublin from the early 1900s was lost then I feel sure it could be re-created from the meticulous researches that went into *Flora Of The County Dublin ...*

And in a sense it *is* being lost. Its little hidden places and back roads and wild corners are disappearing even more surely than the built environment Joyce remembered ...

* * * * *

In the 1860s and 1870s Nat Colgan often had as companions on his rambles his little brother William Henry and Charles D’Arcy who became a clergyman and gradually climbed the tree of clerical advancement, becoming in his old age Archbishop of Dublin. He wrote a book called *The Adventures of a Bishop* in which he says of Nat Colgan, “Nathaniel Colgan came within the circle of my acquaintance as the elder brother of a school and university friend, William Colgan, now Rector of Kiltullagh in the West of Ireland. Both brothers were linguists of extraordinary attainments. The younger was a classic of note in his year, second only to J. B. Bury, afterwards Regius Professor of History in Cambridge. ... My friendship with these brothers was not, however, founded mainly on admiration for attainments in which, indeed, I could not venture to rival them. It was based on something far deeper; for I shared with them a passion which to me, in those days, was deeper and more absorbing than any other interest. We were lovers of the wild. ... Whenever we could get away, we buried ourselves in the wilderness. If only a few days were to be had, there was Co. Wicklow close at hand. In part, it is, and was in those days, a beautiful but fairly civilised country, full of charming houses, parks, and gardens. But, as we knew well, it was only necessary to get behind some of the higher hills in order to find a real wilderness. From some spots, where rooms of a kind were to be had, we could, in a few hours’ tramp, get into the wild gorges of Lugnacuilliagh or others of the taller summits, where every sign of human habitation was left far behind.

“Beginning with Co. Wicklow, we extended our explorations to every range of high hills in Ireland. Some of these were very difficult of access. The mountains of Kerry were our special delight. After them came the wild hills of Mayo, Connemara, Donegal, and Sligo; while even the hills of Tipperary, Down, and Antrim, though more civilised in their surroundings, were also explored. Nor was it merely our delight in the wildness of untouched Nature which impelled us. We set before ourselves a definite purpose – to trace out the distribution of the alpine and sub-alpine flora of Ireland. This aim my friend Nathaniel Colgan and I pursued through many years. Beginning in my college days, and following it up until the duties and engagements of life became too exacting, we examined, with an interest and joy which might almost be described as passionate, the crests and crannies of all

the higher hills of Ireland. Colgan became a really scientific botanist: I remained an amateur. The results of his labours, interwoven with those of other workers, are enshrined in the *Cybele Hibernica*, the so-called second edition of that work. It was really a new book, and Colgan was the maker of it. The former *Cybele* was the work of an eminent botanist of an earlier generation, A. G. More. But the progress of research had left it behind, and a new work on the distribution of Irish plants was needed. With the approval and help of relatives of Mr. More, who desired to preserve his name and share in botanical research, a new edition was undertaken and committed to Colgan and Mr. R. Scully. There was a real co-operation between these two, but the main burden certainly fell upon Colgan. The work as a whole may be called his. He also wrote an admirable *Flora of County Dublin*. These works remain as permanent monuments of his labours. They will endure as records of value as long as there are people who desire to know about the native plants of Ireland. The pains he bestowed upon them, to make them accurate, formed an amazing example of patient and loving care. But the real enjoyment was in the research which provided the materials, and here I shared his labours and his delight. With minute examination we checked old records of importance, and with deep satisfaction we made new discoveries. We had some thrilling moments. Never can I forget the day when, quite early in our explorations, we found the rare alpine *Saussurea* on the face of a dripping cliff on one of the highest summits in Wicklow. It was the first time that this rare and shy alpine, named after the great de Saussure, first man of science to climb Mont Blanc, had been found in eastern Ireland. Later on we found it in abundance on the high crags of Brandon in Kerry, and in one or two other wild spots in western Ireland, but the thrill of the first discovery can never be forgotten.

“Nor again can I forget how, in a remote glen of utmost Kerry, we found the famous Killarney fern, *Trichomanes Radicans*, which was supposed to be extinct, growing in glorious profusion in hidden clefts where the drip and spray of never-failing water-flow gave it the conditions it demands.

“Discoveries like these helped to lure us on, but they did not in themselves create the blissful state of soul which possessed us in our wanderings. To sit aloft in some cleft of a great precipice, while the mists coiled and uncoiled about us, and the splash of a waterfall sounded near, and sometimes a high point of rock became visible, and below, through a rent, appeared the burnished surface of a little lough, and to know that no habitation of man, or even mountain road, was anywhere near – this was sheer delight.”

Reading this I always want to rush away and pack my bags and book my ticket ...

He says of Colgan, “It was no small part of the happiness of those days that I had a friend with whom to share every experience. No purer soul, no cleaner mind, no more alert intellect, no wider attainments of knowledge and of thought, than his, have ever come within my acquaintance. Not deficient in classic lore, his knowledge of modern European languages was extraordinary. He could talk with ease in French, German, Italian, and Spanish; and had an excellent literary knowledge of all those tongues. To mention a classical or modern writer in any one of them was to touch upon a theme which at once excited his interest and drew forth some sign of knowledge.” Perhaps that high school in Aungier Street was a very special place with very special teachers? “He made no claim to learning, and would have denied with emphasis his possession of it, but his knowledge was fuller, more varied, and more delightful in its application to common things, than that of any learned man it has ever been my lot to meet. He suffered from an excess of modesty, yet this defect – if such it was – did not rob his conversation of a gentle and delicious irony which played over the surface of every theme.”

*

Although I have never been to Ireland I find *Flora Of The County Dublin* a fascinating book. Several early attempts had been made to research and record the botany of the county such as William How, 1650, Caleb Threlkeld 1727, and John Rutton in 1772, but they laboured under a difficulty I had

not previously considered: there was no agreed method of describing and classifying plants before the work of Linnaeus. Plants could be described in detail but without being fitted into families. Researchers could turn to local names for help. But this too was fraught with problems. As Colgan points out, “The common Corn Poppy (*Papaver Rhæas*), known only as the Dog Rose in Fingall, assumes the less elegant name Scabby Hands to the south of the Liffey, and the Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum Sphondylium*), which is the Heffrane of North Dublin, becomes the Shoorawn of the southern mountain districts.”

This question of common names for plants was an enduring interest. “The popular plant names now current in the County Dublin may, like the plants themselves, be divided into two classes, the native and the introduced. The first, and by far the smaller class, is made up almost entirely of Gaelic plant names handed down to the peasantry of the present day from their ancestors, who in certain parts of the county retained the native tongue almost up to the opening of the last century. In some cases these names have been transmitted unchanged, and are heard to-day in the coast district of Fingall or on the Meath border, just as they may be heard over more or less extended areas of Western or Southern Ireland where the living Gaelic still prevails. In other cases the names have been more or less modified by attrition with English speech. Small as is this class of names (so far, only a score have been well ascertained to survive in the county), it is evidently but a remnant of a once copious botanical vocabulary in the native tongue. This is sufficiently proved by even a cursory study of the current Gaelic of the Carlingford Hills, further north along the east coast, some 30 miles from the Dublin border. Here, where a sharply defined island of Gaelic rises out of the surrounding sea of English, the present writer was able in the course of one day’s botanising in the summer of 1901 to collect 35 native plant names, all in common use amongst the unlettered peasantry and all applied by them to definite species. In the extensive Gaelic areas of Western and Southern Ireland, this native plant vocabulary might be increased ten-fold, for in spite of the exaggeration or misrepresentation of uncritical or uncandid writers on this subject, Irish plant lore is remarkably rich. Along with the purely Gaelic plant names of Dublin, we may include in this first or indigenous class a small number of names which though English in form would appear to be of purely native invention. The name, Strongbow, may be taken as an instance. This name is commonly applied to *Melilotus officinalis* along the sandy coasts of the Fingall district, especially about Rush, where the plant, like its famous godfather, the Earl of Pembroke, has proved to be a highly aggressive alien.”

In amongst the technical information are intriguing snippets:

—he says of the Bog orchis, “This, the smallest and most elusive of all our native orchids, is really rare in Co. Dublin, though it may not infrequently escape detection by its close similarity in colour to the plashes of living *Sphagnum* in, or rather at the edge of, which it usually grows. In size, the Co. Dublin plant varies from 1½ in. in the Glendhu station to fully 4 inches in Glenasmole. Its peculiar mode of increase by minute bulbils thrown off from the leaf margins often causes it to appear in small ring-shaped groups suggestive of the well-known fairy-rings of certain species of field mushrooms.”

—“The famous Brian Boru yew at Yew Park, Clontarf, beneath whose branches Brian, King of Munster, is said to have been slain at the close of the great battle in which he routed the Danes under King Sithric in 1014, was found to have the following dimensions when measured by N.C. in 1903: girth of trunk, 12 feet, of two main branches, 3 feet and 2 ft. 8 in. respectively, spread of branches, 50 to 60 feet. The spread of branches is very hard to measure owing to the peculiar growth of this fine tree, the lower branches spreading downwards so as to rest on the ground at a distance from the trunk, where, without rooting, they send up vigorous vertical shoots which simulate an independent yew copse surrounding the parent stem.”

—Foxglove in English often became Foxlove in Ireland. “This is a famous fairy plant in Gaelic folk-lore, with a long array of Gaelic names still in use throughout the Irish-speaking districts of the island. So far, however, I have found none of these native names extant in Co. Dublin, nor indeed any English name derived from the Gaelic. “It’s grand for sneezin’. Sometimes the ould women roast the leaves and grind them up for snuff” (*Ballynamanach*).” Even roasted I am not sure I would want to put foxglove leaves up my nose.

—“Pig’s-milk. *Euphorbia Helioscopia. Sun Spurge*.—This name was given me by an old man at Rush in the face of indignant opposition from an old woman present, who maintained that the right name was Fairy’s Milk. Both, however, agreed that the plant was “grand for warts”.” The same plant was sometimes known as Wart Weed but Fairy’s Milk is certainly a more attractive name.

James Joyce could not wait to leave Ireland. Nat Colgan turned down the offer of a government job in England. Now I can appreciate just why he couldn’t bear to leave. A Martello Tower to Joyce had its place in history and in fiction. A Martello Tower to Nat Colgan would have had its place in a landscape, such as his discovery of Field Woundwort round the tower at Howth, and in the deepest sense he had made that landscape his own.

* * * * *

May 29: Oswald Spengler

Lars Bo

Paul R. Ehrlich

May 30: Countee Cullen

Alfred Austin

May 31: Walt Whitman

Judith Wright

June 1: John Masefield

June 2: Thomas Hardy

June 3: Cicero

Vivian Smith

June 4: Elizabeth Jolley

June 5: Socrates

June 6: Alexander Pushkin

June 7: Elizabeth Bowen

Louise Erdrich

June 8: Gwen Harwood

Ernst Enno

Marguerite Yourcenar

June 9: Marcia Davenport

June 10: Saul Bellow

* * * * *

John Sutherland wrote in *50 literature ideas you really need to know*: “Another problem for the modern epic is the nationalistic origin of the genre – more particularly the select league of nations qualified to possess it. Epics are the offspring of ‘noble and puissant nations’, as Milton called them. Could Luxembourg, or the Principality of Monaco, however gifted its authors, host an epic? Could the nationally diffused European Union have one?”

“When Saul Bellow asked his insolent question, ‘Where is the Zulu Tolstoy, where is the Papuan Proust?’ he was, essentially, making the point that only great civilizations have great literature. And

only the greatest of great nations possess epics.”

(James Atlas in his biography *Bellow* writes, “Bellow’s skittishness about journalists never stopped him from saying what was on his mind. In the course of an interview with the reporter from the *Times* who’d been assigned to write about Bloom, Bellow uttered what was to become one of the most controversial remarks of that politically turbulent era: “Who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus? The Proust of the Papuans? I’d be glad to read him.” This challenge to “politically correct” academics who insisted that all cultures were equal was delivered with the self-delighting laugh, head thrown back, that accompanied his funniest one-liners. But for years afterward, the comment—often misquoted—was trotted out by old leftists and outraged defenders of multiculturalism as an egregious example of reactionary tendencies. “My heart sank with each fresh report of Bellow’s contempt for the lower orders,” wrote Alfred Kazin sanctimoniously.”)

But Sutherland then names *Tom Jones*, *Middlemarch*, *War and Peace*, and *Ulysses* as epics. Do any of these require ‘great civilizations’ for their existence? Was *Tom Jones* in his wanderings any more epic than some of the great Polynesian voyagers—even if they did end up on tiny Pacific atolls? Is the provincial life displayed in *Middlemarch* absolutely predicated on the British Empire? Could it not have happened in provincial life in Borneo or Paraguay? *War and Peace* requires the clash of two nations, France and Russia, but is it a better story because of the size and power of those two nations? When Paraguay fought Brazil and Argentina were there not elements of a *War and Peace* in the human emotions and tragedies evoked? And *Ulysses* set in Dublin on one day with several relatively uninteresting protagonists without the great march of history compelling their ideas and actions ...

It isn’t the ‘great civilization’ that makes the epic. It is the great writer. Or comparatively great. Henry Fielding was well known in his time but was he ‘great’? And to ask where is the Zulu Tolstoy or the Papuan Proust is to compare an oral society with a written society. Homer’s stories undoubtedly circulated as oral histories long before being written down. Who knows, perhaps that orality was essential to the creation of the written epics?

Perhaps this was on Martin Flanagan’s mind when he wrote about Samoan writer Albert Wendt in *One of the Crowd*. “Albert Wendt’s achievement, in single-handedly initiating an indigenous literature for his country, is, to my mind, extraordinary, a sort of national home birth.

“It would be difficult to overstate the achievement of Albert Wendt. If writing is about finding a voice that is distinctively one’s own, how much harder must it be in a culture which has no models to offer? Before Albert Wendt, who was in Melbourne last week to help judge the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, there were no Samoan writers.”

There were of course lots of Samoan storytellers. Oral societies abound in storytellers. I remember reading Margaret King Boyes’ writing on Timor in the 1960s. When an important person died days would be taken up in reciting their genealogy, going back hundreds of years, along with formal stories from their life. Michele Turner told me much later that people would immediately correct the official version if the reciter deviated by so much as a word from the accepted version. But alongside these were the less formal stories: ‘a funny thing happened on the way to the market’, ‘when the Great Cyclone hit our village’, ‘my first day at school’, ‘when grandfather was in the army’ ... But how do you distill this whole rich mix into the linear narrative required by a book or magazine? Marshall McLuhan has pointed out that oral or pre-literate societies were Ear societies where you processed multiple viewpoints by *hearing* them. A literate society is an Eye society where your *seeing* travels the page line by line. And there is no simple way to transfer oral storytelling to the page.

Flanagan writes, “The alternative to looking inward was to look outward. Wendt, who had become interested in writing while attending a boarding school in New Zealand, began to devour world literature. Lately, it has been American Jews such as Saul Bellow, but along the way he has read

writers ranging from Thomas Mann and William Faulkner to South American fabulists such as Jorge Luis Borges.”

But that doesn't answer all the pressing questions. You cannot simply take over a way, a style, a fashion from elsewhere. Maybe Homer was familiar with Gilgamesh or Egyptian storytelling, maybe Homer always had a clear vision on how the handed-down anecdotes from the Trojan wars should be woven into a narrative whole ... We don't know. But, “It has taken Wendt twenty-five years of trial and error to fashion the tools he has needed. One of the devices he invented, to portray the tensions of what he calls a post-colonial society, was a pidgin language not, in fact, spoken in Samoa. While his labours have won him recognition outside his country of birth, they have, perhaps predictably, met a degree of resistance within.”

Mike Greicus introducing *Three Short Novels from Papua New Guinea* (by Benjamin Umba, August Kituai and Jim Baital) writes: “Papua New Guinean fiction is a recent phenomenon. The diverse cultures and languages in the country have lent themselves to the existence of elaborate, oral literary traditions and these have only in the past few years become available for general consideration by scholars and an interested public. With over seven hundred language groups and a geographical diversity which has encouraged the existence of isolated clan social structures, it is inevitable that the dominant literary modes of Papua New Guinea should survive in the form of orally transmitted legends, myths, histories, poems and songs. Since 1967, when the extensive publication of literature from Papua New Guinea may be said to have begun, fiction has become a dominant mode of expression for those Papua New Guineans who have been exposed to education in English language and who have appeared among the forerunners of nationalist aspirations in the country. Writers like John Kasaipwalova and Rabbie Namaliu, both of whom have been published extensively in the literary journal, *Kovave*, were quick to use both drama and fiction as a basis for commentary on their country and the new nationalism, with particular reference to colonialism as they understood it.

“The adroitness with which the ‘Niuginian’ writer can address the problems of his time in prose, poetry, and drama suggests the intensity of commitment to the word, oral or written, on the part of almost every ‘placetalk’ group in the country. Far from having the inexpressive culture that early anthropologists suggested, Papua New Guineans testify, in their attempts to preserve their cultural heritages and their pre-occupation with creating appropriate new forms, to a literary vitality that is as extensive as anything that exists in developed countries around the world.”

What Homer was putting down was “orally transmitted legends, myths, histories, poems and songs”. When musical notation became available it made possible much more complex orchestral pieces but it didn't automatically create more profound, more beautiful, more moving, more remarkable works. It still required hard work, inspiration, and what we would call genius to create the music which lasts the centuries.

Proust did not have to agonise over what language he would write in. Tolstoy did not have to ponder over whether to write in Russian or a dialect or a pidgin or an imposed colonial language. It might be more appropriate to say that Proust was assured of a large reading public who all read in French. Tolstoy faced a less literate society but there was a sufficiently large group of readers in Russian to assure his writings of a sizeable public. If he had written a brilliant book in Police Motu or Zhosa or Tagalog or Dzonka would we have ever heard about it?

And there is another question in there: were Proust and Tolstoy writing to that perceived public and did this influence the way they chose to write, the subjects they chose to write about, and the final form of their books? And alongside those questions is a sigh of relief. Because I think the people of PNG were fortunate that no one dumped a large body of self-indulgent introspection in the tradition of Proust on them and insisted that they bow down to it as part of their classical heritage. When Saul

Bellow asked “Who is the Proust of the Papuans?” I hope someone said cheerfully, “If he turns up we’ll send him back home.”

* * * * *

June 11: Anna Akhmatova

June 12: Johanna Spyri

June 13: William Butler Yeats

Fanny Burney

James Clerk Maxwell

* * * * *

“The rugged individualists of the 19th century, such as Michael Faraday and John Dalton, who set up labs in their cellars, scabbled around rocks or simply observed, like Darwin, the world around them, eventually gave way to the more institutionalized genre of academic scientists, funded by governments and charitable trusts to give, as Haldane predicted long ago, ‘the answer of the few to the demands of the many for wealth, comfort and victory’.”

Susan Greenfield in *Tomorrow’s People*.

Robyn Arianrhod in *Einstein’s Heroes* provides a fascinating introduction to Michael Faraday the man. We had a little piece in our reading books when I was young about the properties of candle flames which I only recently realized came from Faraday’s book *The Chemical Properties of Candles*. But it told us nothing about the man behind the experiments.

Faraday created his first electric motor in 1821 and followed it with an electric generator and then in 1831 he discovered electromagnetic induction. Then he began pondering on more theoretical possibilities such as lines and fields of force; how for instance did a magnetic force travel through space.

But unlike most of the university-educated people who made important discoveries in the 19th century Arianrhod points out that Faraday came from a very humble background. “Faraday was the son of a blacksmith; he was born in 1791, the third of four children in a close-knit but impoverished family that did not have much truck with education. They were members of a small religious sect, originally a breakaway group of Anglicans and Presbyterians called Sandemanians (after the sect’s founder, Robert Sandeman); they believed in maintaining a childlike faith, based on the self-evident miracle of the created universe and on the teachings of the Bible. Consequently, they were not interested in formal education, but were concerned with simplicity in language, believing most of the Bible to be literally interpretable because it was written in what they called ‘plain style’. (The perennially humble Faraday would remain a devoted Sandemanian all his life.) At thirteen he was apprenticed to a bookbinder. History owes something to this man George Riebau who gave his young worker encouragement and the opportunity to read the books he bound. With Riebau’s encouragement, he began to conduct his own experiments at the back of the shop, after work; he soon found he had such a flair for experimenting that he set out to reinvent himself as a scientist – a seemingly impossible dream for a young tradesman who could barely read.” He was encouraged to take notes and attend lectures (when he could afford to) by reading Isaac Watts’ *The Improvement of the Mind*. He had some luck—such as meeting physicist Sir Humphrey Davy but in a way it was his passion for science which made the luck. Davy took him to Paris as his valet. And William Dance got him a job sweeping floors at the Royal Institution. He took elocution lessons and eventually became a popular speaker himself, audiences obviously appreciating his simple presentation of his ideas and his passion for his subject. He didn’t understand complex mathematical formulae himself and so he didn’t wander off into abstruse areas. Or as Melvyn Bragg put it in *12 Books That Changed The World*, “He avoided jargon and mathematics, and made the books far less daunting than was the usual case. They are, given their subject matter,

very accessible – at the opposite end of the spectrum to the work of Newton ... Instead of proposing theories in mathematical formulae, he used his experiments as demonstrations, and it was through these that he transformed the science of electricity.” Rather than start with figures on a blackboard or in a notebook he began with experiments and it was these which grew into his 3 volume *Experimental Researches in Electricity*. But unlike modern scientists he never patented his many discoveries. He saw them as something God-given; it was for people like himself to unravel and demonstrate these aspects of nature. And on his curiosity and constant experimental work a whole world of electrically-driven gadgets and processes has been built.

He regretted his lack of education in mathematics and yet that lack also meant that he came at complex problems not burdened by the legacy of Newton and the other great names in science. He brought a fresh eye and a different perspective. And although the scientific establishment was reluctant to embrace his ideas on ‘lines of force’ they gradually began to make inroads into scientific thinking. It was James Clerk Maxwell who distilled Faraday’s equations, according to Bragg, and it “was through these equations that Faraday, through Maxwell, reached Einstein and quantum physics.”

He turned down a knighthood and the chance to be buried in Westminster Abbey. The first seemingly motivated by his simplicity and modesty, the second probably motivated by his religion. And now I think I understand why his writing was seen as suitable for primary school children when most scientific writing is not. It was interesting and accessible and I still remember that little piece telling us that a candle flame is hotter at the tip and that placing a tumbler over the candle starves it of oxygen and so it goes out. Bragg says of it, “A series of six children’s lectures published in 1860 as *The Chemical History of a Candle* has become a classic of scientific literature.”

And what of Faraday’s cellar? Where was it and what part did it play in his work? Bragg introduces it with, “If you stroll west from Piccadilly Circus, which once marked the key point of reference for distances to all the countries which were part of the British Empire, you will reach Albemarle Street, elegant, rich in the finest goods and crowned, at its northern end, by the most magnificent building in the street, the classically columned Royal Institution of Great Britain. In the basement is a hidden museum, probably in its time the most fertile experimental laboratory not only in London and the British Empire but in the world. The work done in that modest and modestly equipped space by Michael Faraday in the first half of the nineteenth century changed the way we all live. His dedication to science was extraordinary. He spent his entire adult working life in that building.”

* * * * *

Scotsman James Clerk Maxwell was also a modest man. But he comes much closer to our image of a scientist. He was educated. He was accepted by the scientific establishment of his day. He published and lectured and was accepted by academia ... perhaps not completely accepted ...

John Maddox in *What Remains To Be Discovered* says, “Many of the developments of the age of certainty marked an important trend in the practice of fundamental science—that of bringing together phenomena of different kinds under a single umbrella of explanation. In the 1860s, James Clerk Maxwell, a Scot then teaching in London, put forward a mathematical scheme for describing in one set of equations both electricity and magnetism. His prize was not just a coherent account of unified electromagnetism, but an explanation of the phenomenon of light. A ray of light is indeed a wave phenomenon, and the speed of light in empty space is simply related to the electrical and magnetic properties of empty space. Maxwell’s wave theory is an explanation of all kinds of electromagnetic radiation, most of which have since been discovered.

“At the end of the nineteenth century, Maxwell’s triumph raised a conceptual difficulty. A ray of light, or some other form of radiation, may be a pattern of oscillating electromagnetic fields, but it can have an existence independent of its source; the flashes of light from an exploding star, for

example, keep on traveling outward long after their source has vanished. What could sustain the vibrations of such a disembodied flash? Maxwell took the view that there must be something, which he called the *lumeniferous æther*, filling all of empty space. How else could one part of an electromagnetic field influence its neighbouring elements? Only after a quarter of a century of fruitless and fanciful searching did people appreciate that they were looking for a will-o'-the-wisp: the lumeniferous æther was no different from empty space, or the vacuum as it is called. It has taken almost a whole century since to reach some (imperfect) understanding of the subtlety of the vacuum.” Can ‘empty space’, a vacuum, have properties? Is this why people are excited by the concept of Dark Matter or Shadow Matter, Dark Energy, the Invisible rather than the Dark?

This week I have been browsing in several popular and current science books looking to see what, if anything, they have to say about Maxwell.

—“There is a form of symmetry-breaking with a vengeance that has become of considerable topical interest. It is known as ‘chaos’. Chaotic phenomena are those whose evolution exhibits extreme sensitivity to the starting state. The slightest change in the starting state results in an enormous difference in the resulting future states. The majority of complicated, messy phenomena, like turbulence or the weather, have this property. The significance of such behaviour was first recognized by James Clerk Maxwell in the second half of the nineteenth century. When asked to lead a *conversazione* on the problem of free will in his college at Cambridge, he drew his colleagues’ attention to systems in which a minute uncertainty in their current state prevents us from accurately predicting their future state. Only if the initial state were known with perfect accuracy (which it cannot be) would the deterministic equations be of use. The neglect of such systems, which are the rule rather than the exception in Nature, had subtly led to a bias in favour of determinism in natural philosophy. The traditional preoccupation with only simple, stable, and insensitive phenomena had created over-confidence in the all-encompassing influence of the laws of Nature. He suggests rather that

much light may be thrown on some of these questions by the consideration of stability and instability. When the state of things is such that an infinitely small variation of the present state will alter only by an infinitely small quantity the state at some future time, the condition of the system, whether at rest or in motion, is said to be stable; but when an infinitely small variation in the present state may bring about a finite difference in the state of the system in a finite time, the condition of the system is said to be unstable.”

—“Maxwell’s work included the study of the behaviour of molecules in gases where the sheer number of collisions produce an overall situation that defies exact description. Each collision is individually chaotic; yet, because each is effectively independent of the others, a stable statistical pattern of molecular velocities arises. These systems of microscopic chaos creating a stable large-scale order. The larger the number of molecules in the system, the smaller will be the occasional fluctuations away from the stable average behaviour.”

John D. Barrow in *New Theories of Everything*.

—“The possibility of influences flowing backwards from the physical future may not seem worth considering. Most people assume that time-reversed causation is scientifically impossible. But, surprisingly, most of the laws of physics are reversible, and work just as well from the future to the past as from the past to the future. In James Clerk Maxwell’s classical equations for electromagnetic waves, put forward in 1864, there are two answers that describe the movement of light waves. In one answer, the waves move at the speed of light from the present to the future, as in the conventional understanding of causation. But in the other answer, the waves move from the present into the past at the speed of light, in the opposite direction to ordinary causation. These waves moving backwards in time are called ‘advanced waves’. They imply influences working backwards in time. Advanced waves

are part of the mathematics of electromagnetism, but physicists ignore them because they are regarded as ‘non-physical’.

However, some interpretations of quantum mechanics allow for physical influences working backwards in time or, in other words, causal influences from the future.”

Rupert Sheldrake in *The Science Delusion*.

—“It’s not only “stuff” that’s made of Lego-like building blocks ... so is light, being composed of particles called *photons*, inferred by Einstein in 1905.

Four decades earlier, James Clerk Maxwell had discovered that light is an electromagnetic wave, a type of electrical disturbance. If you could carefully measure the voltage between two points in a beam of light, you’d find that it oscillates over time; the frequency f of this oscillation (how many times per second it oscillates) determines the color of the light, and the strength of the oscillation (the maximum number of volts you measure) determines the intensity of the light. ... We humans give these electromagnetic waves different names, depending on their frequency (by increasing frequency, we call them radio waves, microwaves, infrared, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, ultra-violet, x-rays, gamma rays), but they’re all forms of light and they’re all made of photons. The more photons an object emits each second, the brighter it looks.”

Max Tegmark in *Our Mathematical Universe*.

—“Why, you might legitimately ask, should we bother to introduce this rather abstract notion of a field? Why not stick to the things we can measure: the electric current and the compass needle deflections? Faraday found the idea attractive because he was at heart a practical man, a trait he shared with many of the great experimental scientists and engineers of the Industrial Revolution. His instinct was to create a mechanical picture of the connection between moving magnets and coils of wire, and for him the fields bridged the space between them to forge the physical connection his experiments told him must be present. There is, however, a deeper reason why the fields are necessary, and indeed why modern physicists see the fields as being every bit as real as the electric current and compass deflections. The key to this deeper understanding of nature lies within the work of Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell. In 1931, on the centenary of Maxwell’s birth, Einstein described Maxwell’s work on the theory of electromagnetism as “the most profound and the most fruitful that physics has experienced since the time of Newton.” In 1864, three years before Faraday’s death, Maxwell succeeded in writing down a set of equations that described all of the electric and magnetic phenomena Faraday and others had meticulously observed and documented during the first half of the nineteenth century. ... Maxwell wrote down his equations in the language of fields because he had no choice. It was the only way of bringing together the vast range of electric and magnetic phenomena observed by Faraday and his colleagues into a single unified set of equations. ... Maxwell’s genius was to invite the fields to emerge from the shadows and take center stage.” And then Maxwell added an extra thing “known as the displacement current”. “With the displacement current included, a deep relationship between the electric and magnetic fields emerges. Specifically, the new equations can be recast into a form known as wave equations ... Maxwell’s wave equations describe how these two fields are linked together, oscillating backward and forward with a particular speed. ... What did Faraday’s benchtop measurements, coupled with Maxwell’s mathematical genius, predict for the speed of the electromagnetic waves? This is one of many key moments in our story. It is a wonderful example of why physics is a beautiful, powerful, and profound subject: Maxwell’s waves travel at 299,792,458 meters per second. Astonishingly, this is the speed of light—Maxwell had stumbled across an explanation of light itself. ... The existence in nature of this special speed, a single, unchanging, 299,792,458 meters per second will lead us ... just as it led Einstein, to jettison the notion of absolute time. ... It seems that Maxwell’s equations are telling us that the speed of light is a constant of nature.

... Imagine the consternation in the minds of the late nineteenth-century scientists when they were faced with Maxwell's equations and their implicit attack on the very foundations of the Newtonian worldview. Surely there could be only one winner. Surely Newton and the notion of absolute time would reign victorious. Nevertheless, the twentieth century dawned with the problem of the constant speed of light still casting dark clouds: Maxwell and Newton could not both be right. It took until 1905 and the work of a hitherto unknown physicist named Albert Einstein for it to be finally demonstrated that nature sides with Maxwell."

Brian Cox and Jeff Forshaw in *Why Does $E=mc^2$? (and why should we care?)*

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June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe

Kathleen Raine

Roland Robinson

June 15: Amy Clampitt

June 16: Isabelle Holland

Katharine Graham

Adam Smith

June 17: Henry Lawson

James Brunton Stephens

* * * * *

James Brunton Stephens is largely forgotten except for occasional pieces in anthologies. Leon Cantrell in one such anthology, *The 1890s*, speaks of his 'flatulent style' and I must admit I have never yet come upon a Federation poem which wasn't either declamatory, jingoistic or ... yes, flatulent ...

Stephens begins his Federation poem 'Fulfilment' with

We cried, "How long!" We sighed, "Not yet;"

And still with faces downward set

"Prepare the way," said each to each,

And yet again, "Prepare," we said;

And toil, re-born of resolute speech,

Made straight the path her feet should tread:-

Now triumph, faithful hands and steadfast wills,

For, lo! whose pomp the bannered Orient fills?

Whose feet are these upon the morning hills?

But one day I came upon a history of Stanthorpe here. It seemed a curious thing to find in a Hobart op-shop so I got it out of curiosity and found it had a sympathetic mention of Stephens when he lived and worked there in the 1870s as a schoolteacher. It is a curious thing but if you come at someone through a literary source you may get a very different view to the one you get as a small town 'identity'. And which matters more to posterity?

The book was called *They Came to a Plateau: The Stanthorpe Saga* by Jean Harslett and Mervyn Royle and I took from it these little snippets:

"It appears that many knew of the presence of tin, for a long period, but perhaps its value was not recognised. Legend suggests that the first death since the rush began, was that of a shepherd Joseph Muller, who committed suicide at Spring Creek on the 26th June 1872. A life of struggle, poverty, disappointments, when in fact he lived within reach of hidden wealth, played deeply on his mind, driving him to desperation. This story and similar ones of disappointment, inspired the perceptive poet Brunton Stephens to write "A Lost Change".

“Just to miss it by a hair’s breadth! Nay, not miss it!
 to have held it
 In my hand and oft times through my fingers run the
 swarthy ore!
 Minus only the poor trick of Art or Science that
 compelled it
 To unveil, for others good the hidden value, and to
 pour
 On a thousand hearts the light of Hope, that shines
 for me no more!
 To have held in my hand in vacant listlessness
 of wonder.
 Taken with its dusky lustre all incurious of its
 worth
 To have trod years upon it, I above, and
 Fortune under.”

“In five different localities Chinamen have established market gardens and Stanthorpe is better supplied with fresh vegetables than Toowoomba and Warwick. ... Brunton Stephens gave credit, where credit was due.

“A placid-eyed Mongolian
 From Sandy Pechelee
 Who’d stimulate an inch of soil
 To do the work of three
 Or make a metamorphic rock
 Sprout into cabbage;”

“Meanwhile the manse was vacant, and J. Brunton Stephens rented it as a quiet retreat where he could concentrate on his writing. But even in the two-roomed hut in a one-acre allotment, west of the present site of the Methodist church, Stephens failed to find the solitude he sought. In a humorous letter to his friend Watson (later of Watson Ferguson & Co.) he complained of goats taking shelter there on wet days. Their noise disturbed him, but his efforts to remove them were futile.”

“By the end of 1875 enrolment at Stanthorpe had risen to 348, the staff being Mr. J.J. Caine, Mrs. Caine, J. Brunton Stephens, and pupil teachers M. Caine, R. McClay and F. Caine.”

“Reports in the Warwick “Examiner and Times” on the 3rd September 1873, read, “There is gratifying progress on various buildings in Stanthorpe. The stone foundations are laid for both the Masonic and Good Templar’s Hall. Large stacks of bricks are on the ground in both places, and work in rapid progress. These two buildings when completed will add considerably to the architectural appearance of the town.” More than one man who found himself in the grasp of alcohol, found help within the Good Templar’s Walls. Not the least of these was James Brunton Stephens who confesses, “I have now been fourteen months a Good Templar, and I think I have good reason to believe the enemy has lost hold of me. I must confess that this closing year in Stanthorpe has been by far the happiest I have spent since I came to Australia.” Stephens apparently brought his habit with him and left without it.”

He was there as a teacher 1874 – 1876 and the town was originally a tin mining camp called Quart Pot Creek. He wrote of the little mining settlement:

“Where Quart Pot Creek to Severn streams
Its mighty tribute rolls,
There stands a town – the happiest town,
I think, betwixt the Poles;
And all around is holy ground;
In fact, it’s ‘full of holes!’”

But what of his more serious poems? Are they still included in other anthologies? Cecil Hadgraft in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* says discreetly, “There are suggestions that his erratic moves were caused by drink.” After his time in Stanthorpe he went to Brisbane and became a figure of settled respectability as a headmaster, a married man with a family, and then in the Colonial Secretary’s office. This was undoubtedly good for his health and wellbeing but was it good for his poetry? His entry says, “For about twenty years after the death of Henry Kendall in 1882 he had been regarded as the greatest Australian poet living, even though his best work had been produced in the 1870s. This repute, which lasted for some time after his death, has decreased considerably, but there is reason for claiming that *Convict Once* does not deserve all the denigration it has received nor *The Godolphian Arabian* the neglect.”

The difficulty is in finding his work to make my own judgement. But there is the interesting possibility that Stanthorpe was good not only for his health but also for his writing. Poets are not necessarily better poets for living in large cities and among fellow poets ...

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June 18: Rosemary Dobson

George Essex Evans

June 19: Ethel Pedley

Salman Rushdie

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I vaguely remember that I didn’t particularly like *Dot and the Kangaroo* when I was young. But I cannot haul up my reasons from nearly sixty years ago. I think I found it a sad book because I always knew farmers were not going to stop shooting and poisoning native animals and birds. And the old hardback copy was drab and dark and unattractive.

The other day I saw a copy in Vinnies and thought I would re-read it.

And I can see how young readers would not really warm to it. She speaks of ‘selections’ which imply small farms. She refers to the countryside looking ‘English’ at one point. She takes Dot through wild country with cliffs and hills. She has wide open spaces with sheep and emus. She is equally eclectic with her animals and birds. Emus and plovers and bitterns and bower-birds and willie wagtails and cockatoos and pelicans. Kangaroos and koalas and possums and a platypus. It isn’t really a landscape to encourage young readers to see it as ‘just like our farm’.

The Kangaroo gives Dot some berries to eat so she can understand and talk with all the creatures but the conversations though they have a hint of humour or pathos at times are not gripping. And Dot as a small flaxen-haired girl is not terribly interesting either. As a small brown-haired girl I never felt a sense of empathy with Dot.

Ethel Pedley came to Australia as a teacher and wrote the book she said for “the children of Australia in the hope of enlisting their sympathies for the many beautiful, amiable, and frolicsome creatures of their fair land; whose extinction, through ruthless destruction, is being surely

accomplished". She is selective with her creatures. A black snake is a 'horrid creature' which moves 'like a slimy cord'. Both black and white humans are a danger to the bush creatures but the blacks 'did not look like human beings at all, but like dreadful demons; they were so wicked and ugly in appearance.'

And she dilutes her message of sympathy by an exhortation to bush children, 'the writer would like to warn little people, that the best thing to do when one is lost in the bush, is to sit still in one place, and not to try to find one's way home at all. If Dot had done this, and had not gone off in the Kangaroo's pouch, she would have been found almost directly.' As *The Child Lost in the Bush* was a staple of nineteenth century Australian stories it must have reflected reality. I suspect this is the message adults used the book to promote.

So is the book an early plea for conservation? I think it deserves this accolade. In a world where farmers and graziers wielded the axe, the saw, the gun, the barbed-wire fence, and the poisoned bait with gay abandon, it helped to begin the tradition of children's stories with sympathetic bush creatures as central characters. And even if this sympathy did not leap up and change children's perceptions of the environment it must have played a more subtle role.

* * * * *

And whether or not it influenced children—did it influence later writers? This question was on my mind the other day. I remembered reading Dorothy Cottrell's *The Singing Gold* when I was young and I just vaguely assumed that was all she wrote. Years later someone told me she thought Cottrell was blind. Recently I happened upon a second-hand copy of Cottrell's *Wilderness Orphan: The Life and Adventures of Chut the Kangaroo*. So clearly she wasn't a One Book Wonder. And did this mean that she also wasn't blind?

The best known animal story in Australian fiction, after the immortal Dot, is perhaps *Man-Shy* (unless you count fantasies like *The Magic Pudding* or Aboriginal fables), but lots were written such as Henry Lamond's *Tooth and Talon* or Erle Wilson's *Coorinna* which is an interesting story of a young Tasmanian Tiger. Nevertheless *Wilderness Orphan* is an attractive little book.

"While the blue doe stooped to the water, ever-increasing chirrups issued from her pouch, and it was just after the drink was finished that Chut took his first good look at the world. From this it must not be gathered that he was doing anything as exciting as being born. On the contrary, he had lived in his mother's pouch for a long time, changing there from the semblance of a rather undressed pink mouse to a plump, small, ten-pound creature of an exquisitely delicate loveliness. He was confiding, velvety, with huge dark eyes and little dark clutching hands.

To-night for the first time he was dissatisfied with the warm, musky security of the pouch. His legs felt suddenly in need of stretching.

"Chut!" he called sharply. "Chut!"

His mother, the little blue doe, answered with a reproving "chit," and drew shut her pouch mouth with matronly severity. But Chut wanted to get out! He kicked, he clawed, making strange commotions beneath his mother's cream-velvet pinafore until at last she lifted him out and set him on the grass."

But the local graziers have come out to shoot kangaroos at the waterhole and his mother is shot. Chut and two other orphaned joeys end up as pets on the station of Tom Henton where they are christened Chut, Zodie and Blue Baby. But drought hits the land and finally the Hentons sell Chut and Blue Baby to a traveling showman.

Shorty McGee files down Chut's long claws and puts boxing gloves on his 'hands'. Blue Baby is taught to leap through a burning hoop. It is a hard cruel life and McGee ends up accidentally killing Blue Baby. With half of his act gone he takes to the grog and forgets to keep Chut's long nails filed

back. He also gets more and more careless about feeding and watering him. Taken into the ring maddened by thirst Chut ends up killing the man and escaping.

He sets off on the five-hundred-mile journey north-west across NSW to Queensland. Some traveling drovers, seeing the brass collar on him, assume he was someone's pet and treat him as such. But the cook comes upon an old newspaper with the news Chut has killed a man and a picture of him in his collar. His assistant to save Chut from the cook's attempt to shoot him frightens him off. But the cook gets a local man with kangaroo dogs to go after him. Chut finally manages to elude them by leaping a seven-foot fence though by now he is wounded and exhausted.

But this is a children's story and although an animal story doesn't allow Cottrell the wry sense of humour she brought to *The Singing Gold* she eventually brings Chut back to that waterhole. The Hentons have let Zodie go and ...

"... And now, each still evening just at dusk, a great red kangaroo leads his ever-growing harem down to water; and among the does are many vivid red joeys. But sometimes the "old man" exhibits a strange impatience, and breaks away from all his flock, and goes ranging and calling alone through the bush.

Henton's wife believes that he is looking for Blue Baby."

In fact Dorothy (1902 – 1957) had polio and was in a wheelchair from the age of six but this did not stop her traveling, marrying, and writing several popular books. When *The Singing Gold* was published and serialized in the USA she moved there. In 1935 *Chut* was serialized and the following year it came out as both a book and a film, directed by Ken Hall, and called *Orphan of the Wilderness*. Of course it wasn't really 'wilderness' but that sounds better than *Orphan of the Sheep Country* or *Orphan of the Backblocks*.

The thing which struck me as I browsed in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Children's Literature* (Stella Lees and Pam Macintyre) was how popular kangaroos had been as characters in books. Just a sample:

1890. Davenport Cleland. *The White Kangaroo: a Tale of Colonial Life — Founded on Fact*.

1896. 'Arthur Ferres'. *His First Kangaroo: an Australian Story for Boys*.

1914. Florence E. Lord. *Kangaroo Kingdom*.

1945. Charles K. Thompson. *King of the Ranges, the Saga of a Grey Kangaroo*.

1953. Henry Lamond. *Big Red*.

1954. Dennis Clark. *Boomer: the Life of a Kangaroo*.

1960. Margaret Paice. *A Joey for Christmas*.

1964. Joyce Nicholson. *Andy's Kangaroo*.

1985. Pam Blashki. *Chai the Kangaroo*.

And then of course there was Skippy. He was the creation of Victor Barnes (1913 – 1989) who wrote a number of animal stories, retold Aboriginal legends, and in a more weighty vein created the 1964 *Modern Encyclopaedia of Australia and New Zealand*.

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June 20: Lillian Hellman

Paul Muldoon

June 21: Jean-Paul Sartre

June 22: Erich Maria Remarque

H. Rider Haggard

June 23: Frank Dalby Davidson

Roger McDonald

June 24: Ambrose Bierce
 Mary Wesley
 Anita Desai

June 25: George Orwell (Eric Blair)
 John Horne Tooke

June 26: Pearl Buck

June 27: Lafcadio Hearn

June 28: Luigi Pirandello
 Jean Jacques Rousseau
 Geoffrey Lehmann
 Norman Lewis

June 29: Frédéric Dard
 Minard Fannie Crommelin

June 30: Czeslaw Milosz
 Joseph Dalton Hooker

July 1: George Sand
 James M. Cain

July 2: Hermann Hesse
 Edward Vaughan Hyde Kenealy

July 3: Franz Kafka
 Julian Assange

July 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne

July 5: Jean Cocteau

July 6: Dalai Lama
 Peter Singer

July 7: Lion Feuchtwanger

July 8: Fergus Hume
 Vincent Buckley

July 9: Ann Radcliffe
 ‘Monk’ Lewis

* * * * *

“In Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* the heroine, Catherine Morland, follows the novels of Ann Radcliffe into social embarrassment. Later she recants and concludes that Radcliffean Italy, with its pines and vices, is no guide to life in the Midland counties of England.

“Austen mocks the overwhelming effect on feeble intellects of the Radcliffe formula of suspense and wicked deeds. Yet her mockery does not encompass Radcliffe as an author; the witty hero, Henry Tilney, is allowed to read her novels through with his hair standing on end and receive no lasting damage. Nor does the Austen mockery really diminish the gothic mode; it simply indicates what it is not, a real picture of real life, a forerunner of Jane Austen herself and her social subject. Indeed *Northanger Abbey* is in a way a tribute to Radcliffe. While the heroine is presented with many horrid novels, it is *The Mysteries of Udolpho* that is most compelling and that keeps her from the sights of Bath. In her own slightly earlier time too Radcliffe was distinguished from her numerous followers partly by her sheer mastery of suspense and partly by the obvious seriousness of her enterprise.”

From *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660—1800* by Janet Todd.

So does a knowledge of Ann Radcliffe’s books enhance the pleasure of reading *Northanger Abbey*? And more fundamentally did Austen believe women could succeed as novelists because Ann

Radcliffe had so obviously done so?

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“The Gothic novel was now settled as a literary form, and instances multiply bewilderingly as the eighteenth century draws towards its close. *The Recess*, written in 1785 by Mrs Sophia Lee, has the historic element, revolving round the twin daughters of Mary, Queen of Scots, and though devoid of the supernatural, employs the Walpole scenery and mechanism with great dexterity. Five years later, and all existing lamps are paled by the rising of a fresh luminary of wholly superior order – Mrs Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), whose famous novels made terror and suspense a fashion, and who set new and higher standards in the domain of macabre and fear-inspiring atmosphere despite a provoking custom of destroying her own phantoms at the last through laboured mechanical explanations. To the familiar Gothic trappings of her predecessors Mrs Radcliffe added a genuine sense of the unearthly in scene and incident which closely approached genius, every touch of setting and action contributing artistically to the impression of illimitable frightfulness which she wished to convey. A few sinister details like a track of blood on castle stairs, a groan from a distant vault, or a weird song in a nocturnal forest can with her conjure up the most powerful images of immanent horror; surpassing by far the extravagant and toilsome elaborations of others. Nor are these images in themselves any the less potent because they are explained away before the end of the novel. Mrs Radcliffe’s visual imagination was very strong, and appears as much in her delightful landscape touches – always in broad, glamorously pictorial outline, and never in close detail – as in her weird phantasies. Her prime weakness, aside from the habit of prosaic disillusionment, are a tendency toward erroneous geography and history and a fatal predilection for bestrewing her novels with insipid little poems, attributed to one or another of her characters.

“Mrs Radcliffe wrote six novels; *The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne* (1789), *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), *The Italian* (1797), and *Gaston de Blondville*, composed in 1802 but first published posthumously in 1826. Of these *Udolpho* is by far the most famous, and may be taken as a type of the early Gothic tale at its best. It is the chronicle of Emily, a young Frenchwoman transplanted to an ancient and portentous castle in the Apennines through the death of her parents and the marriage of her aunt to the lord of the castle – the scheming nobleman Montoni. Mysterious sounds, opened doors, frightful legends, and a nameless horror in a niche behind a black veil all operate in quick succession to unnerve the heroine and her faithful attendant Annette; but finally, after the death of her aunt, she escapes with the aid of a fellow-prisoner whom she has discovered. On the way home she stops at a chateaux filled with fresh horrors – the abandoned wing where the departed chatelaine dwelt, and the bed of death with the black pall – but is finally restored to security and happiness with her lover Valancourt, after the clearing-up of a secret which seemed for a time to involve her birth in mystery. Clearly, this is only the familiar material re-worked; but it is so well re-worked that *Udolpho* will always be a classic. Mrs Radcliffe’s characters are puppets, but they are less markedly so than those of her forerunners. And in atmospheric creation she stands pre-eminent among those of her time.”

H. P. Lovecraft in his essay ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’.

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The DNB praised Mrs Radcliffe for her creation of suspense (though not for her creation of character): “In her peculiar art of exciting terror and impatient curiosity by the invention of incidents apparently supernatural, but eventually receiving a natural explanation she has been surpassed by two Americans, Brockden Brown and Poe, but it is doubtful whether many English writers have rivaled her. The construction of her tales is exceedingly ingenious, and great art is evinced in the contrivances by which the action is from time to time interrupted and the reader’s suspense prolonged. The spell

which she exerts, however, arises no less from the manifestation of a higher artistic faculty, the creation of an environment for her personages in which their actions and adventures appear not violently improbable, and almost natural. No stories are more completely imbued with a romantic atmosphere, or are more evidently the creations of a mind instinctively turned to the picturesque side of things. To this day she has had few superiors in the art of poetical landscape, which she may almost be said to have introduced into the modern novel, and in the practice of which, as Scott remarks, she showed herself as competent to copy nature as to indulge imagination. Except, indeed, for the ingenuity of her plots, she is rather to be ranked among prose poets than among storytellers, and is especially interesting as a precursor of that general movement towards the delineation and comprehension of external nature which was to characterise the nineteenth century.”

Yet she is a very different author to Brockden Brown and Poe. Born Ann Ward she married William Radcliffe who started out to become a lawyer and then turned to running a magazine, the *English Chronicle*. She lived what appears to have been a happy and equable life, not given to alcohol, laudanum, wild parties or dissipation. She was an asthmatic, which in the end brought about her death, and this may be part of the reason she retired from the life of a writer. But the increasingly sadistic and lurid directions the Gothic novel was being taken (by people such as ‘Monk’ Lewis) may also have played a part. In other words she was happy to write suspense, she didn’t mind to scare the pants off her readers, but she had a very clear vision of good triumphant.

So are any of her novels still readily available? Yes, indeed, I had no trouble in getting *The Mysteries of Udolpho* from the library. It is still very readable. It has the stock props, storms around the mountains, midnight assignations, mysterious groans, dark cold castle corridors; for example, “The night was stormy; the battlements of the castle appeared to rock in the wind, and at intervals long groans seemed to pass on the air, such as those which often deceive the melancholy mind in tempests and amidst scenes of desolation. Emily heard, as formerly, the sentinels pass along the terrace to their posts, and looking out from her casement, observed that the watch was doubled; a precaution which appeared necessary enough, when she threw her eyes on the walls, and saw their shattered condition.”

And her ‘insipid little poems’? Here is an extract:

Long on the stern, with waving hand, he stood;
The crowded shore sinks, lessening, from his view,
As gradual glides the bark along the flood;
His bride is seen no more—Adieu!—adieu!

The breeze of eve moans low, her smile is o’er,
Dim steals her twilight down the crimson’d west:
He climbs the topmost mast, to seek once more
The far-seen coast, where all his wishes rest.

He views its dark line on the distant sky,
And Fancy leads him to his little home;
He sees his weeping love, he hears her sigh,
He soothes her griefs, and tells of joys to come.

Eve yields to night, the breeze to wintry gales,
In one vast shade the seas and shores repose:

He turns his aching eyes—his spirit fails,
The chill tear falls; sad to the deck he goes! Etc

Neither ‘little’ nor ‘insipid’ were the first suggestions to come to mind but her poems sometimes seemed like songs in a musical—the author had decided it was time to pop in another one, regardless of whether it really helped the story along.

At the end we learn that it is pirates who have spread the idea the castle is haunted, and who have used its secret passages and doors for entering unseen to hide their looted treasures. And at the end Emily St. Aubert marries, we assume happily, her Valancourt. It is just a pity she is such a stick.

But the odd thing about Mrs Radcliffe is that she gives the impression of someone writing gothic fiction because it was the way to get published and make money and find readers but that she would have felt more at home writing light-hearted romances, travel diaries, or perhaps a comedy of manners ... If she was writing in 2016 with many more options what would she have chosen to write?

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July 10: Marcel Proust

Frederick Marryat

Alice Munro

July 11: Alexandr Afanesev

July 12: Henry David Thoreau

Pablo Neruda

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At an FAW meeting people were talking about clichés, particularly the clichés we use for clouds; cotton wool clouds for instance. It is an apt description for some clouds but all clichés fall in and out of favour. Children reared on cotton buds probably do not think of lumps of cotton wool any more. When I was young you often heard clouds likened to powder puffs but in a world where fewer and fewer women own or use powder puffs that one is disappearing, if not already gone.

And when Jean Ingelow wrote in ‘Divided’:

‘A shady freshness, chafers whirring,

A little piping of leaf-hid birds;

A flutter of wings, a fitful stirring,

A cloud to the eastward snowy as curds’

she was using a description no one would think to use now for who, these days, has seen, tasted, smelled, even thought about curds and whey?

A couple of days later I came upon this description:

‘The clouds travel like white handkerchiefs of goodbye,
the wind, travelling, waving them in its hands.’

Como pañuelos blancos de adiós viajan las nubes,
el viento las sacude con sus viajeras manos.’

‘The Morning Is Full/Es La Mañana Llena’ by Pablo Neruda.

And then I came upon H. P. Lovecraft in his ‘Poetry and the Gods’, “The sky is flecked with clouds like the scales of a dragon.” This gave me pause. It suggests what I would call a mackerel sky as in ‘Mackerel skies and mares’ tails/Make tall ships carry short sails’.

I had not thought of Lovecraft as a poet, just as I had not thought on the exact colour of a dragon's scales (a sort of blackish-brown perhaps?) but put into his poem it suggests a silvery moonshiny effect and it also suggests he is using it in a more allegorical way; the dragon beset by troubles ...

Moon over Japan,
White butterfly moon!
Where the heavy-lidded Buddhas dream
To the sound of the cuckoo's call ...
The white wings of moon-butterflies
Flicker down the streets of the city,
Blushing into silence the useless wicks of round
 lanterns in the hands of girls.

Moon over the tropics,
A white-curved bud
Opening its petals slowly in the warmth of heaven ...
The air is full of odours
And languorous warm sounds ...
A flute drones its insect music to the night
Below the curving moon-petal of the heavens.

Moon over China,
Weary moon on the river of the sky,
The stir of light in the willows is like the flashing of
 a thousand silver minnows
Through dark shoals;
The tiles on graves and rotting temples flash like
 ripples,
The sky is flecked with clouds like the scales of a
 dragon.

And I picked up a day later a book called *Clichés* by Nigel Fountain. This has the tongue-in-cheek subtitle *Avoid Them Like the Plague!* He begins his book with: “ ‘In the beginning,’ Saint John tells us in his Gospel, ‘was the word.’ Soon after, as he keeps quiet about, came the cliché. There are ancient clichés, lovingly handed down from generation to generation; there are old, half-timbered clichés, with roots in Elizabethan England and, once the Industrial Revolution got going, clichés that put their coats on and got going too. Modern clichés, meanwhile, can graze on the rich and verdant pasturelands (adding adjectives always helps) of Hollywood, the Internet, television, and pop.”

Clouds like thought balloons perhaps? Clouds à la satellite weather maps? Or reminiscent of those early TV screens bothered by ‘snow’?

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July 13: Isaac Babel

John Clare
Amelia Simmons

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No one seems to know exactly when or where Amelia Simmons, the woman credited with

producing America's first cookbook, *American Cookery*, was born. She describes herself in the book as an orphan. And it has been assumed that she worked for someone as a cook. The book came out in 1796 and proved popular and like popular books from the past it was soon plagiarised.

In one respect I suppose all cookbooks are variations on a theme. There are only so many things you can do with a potato or a pork chop. But it is thought that she actually paid to bring out her book, something which cannot have been easy unless she worked for someone who really appreciated her cooking, and the first printing is now extremely rare. Given her modest background I have put her under John Clare who also struggled to get his work known.

You can, of course, buy a reprint and it is said to contain "authentic recipes for colonial favorites—pumpkin pudding, winter squash pudding, spruce beer, Indian slapjacks, and more."

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Michael Steinberger in *Au Revoir To All That* mentions a much earlier cookbook. "The consensus is that a distinctive, modern French cuisine mainly took shape on its own. *Le Cuisinier François*, a cookbook published in 1651 by Burgundian chef François Pierre de La Varenne, is widely credited with being the first literary work to demonstrate "a clear break with medieval food and the recognizable beginning of the modern French cuisine," as Stephen Mennell puts it in his excellent book *All Manners of Food*.

"La Varenne was part of a group of talented chefs who transformed French cuisine—which is to say, French court cuisine—during the seventeenth century. They cut back on exotic spices, long a hallmark of aristocratic fare, in favor of domestic herbs and seasonings, such as thyme, parsley, and shallots. During this period, butter became a staple of French sauces, along with meat and pan juices and the combination of fat and flour. *Le Cuisinier François* included a recipe for bouillon, from which the base sauces of French cuisine would later emerge, and recipes for such future classics as *boeuf à la mode* and asparagus with *sauce hollandaise*. The cuisine that emerged during this period wasn't just a uniquely French one; as Jean-Robert Pitte notes in his book *French Gastronomy*, it was also a triumph of northern France over southern—"of the Capetians, of dairy breeding and dairy products over the south." "

But then along came the French Revolution and there was no longer a court to create recipes for. So chefs began opening restaurants to cater for a wider public. And to cater for this much broader demand Marie-Antoine Carême wrote his 5 volume opus, *L'Art de la cuisine française au dix-neuvième siècle*, which came out between 1833 and 1847 and "is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive cookbooks ever written". And "Carême's literary efforts put him at the vanguard of another important development: food as intellectual fodder. Indeed, his career intersected with those of Jean-Anthème Brillat-Savarin and Alexandre Grimod de la Reynière, men of aristocratic backgrounds for whom dining was as much a cerebral pursuit as a restorative one. As Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson observes in *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, more than any recipe or chef, it was the gastronomic discourse fostered by the writings of Brillat-Savarin and Grimod that cemented "the iconic status of the culinary in French culture." "

Then came people like Escoffier. So it may come as a surprise that Steinberger subtitles his book 'Food, Wine, and the End of France'. Because the problems he points to in the wine, cheese, and broader food industry also point to wider problems in French society and cultural life ...

I am perhaps not the right person to write about food because I am the sort of person who refers to a 'nice sandwich', come lunchtime, but I do like browsing in old cookbooks. I have just been flipping through *The Original Boston Cooking School Cook Book 1896* by Fannie Merritt Farmer. This was created for the young women who went to a cooking school either to gain a marketable skill or to

be better housewives. I have chosen out her ‘Baking Powder Biscuits’ because people in books of that era, including L. M. Montgomery, often had their characters making ‘Baking Powder Biscuits’ and I always wondered what exactly they were.

2 cups flour.

4 teaspoons baking powder.

1 teaspoon salt.

1 tablespoon lard.

¾ cup milk and water in equal parts.

1 tablespoon butter.

Mix dry ingredients, and sift twice.

Work in butter and lard with tips of fingers; add gradually the liquid, mixing with knife to a soft dough. It is impossible to determine the exact amount of liquid, owing to differences in flour. Toss on a floured board, pat, and roll lightly to one-half inch in thickness. Shape with a biscuit-cutter. Place on buttered pan, and bake in hot oven twelve to fifteen minutes. If baked in too slow an oven, the gas will escape before it has done its work.

(“The cold meat pie you will find on exhibition wherever people are out for a good time. They are usually on a counter of some sort and come in shipments of a dozen, sometimes under a glass cover to keep the crows from swooping down on them. They look almost like food at first, owing to a superficial resemblance to a baking-powder biscuit. But on being pressed with a fork, or bitten into, they turn out to be a collection of pastry flakes inclosing a nubbin of meat just large enough to bait a hook for a medium-sized trout. This is to be covered with mustard and devoured greedily, leaving as much of the pastry flakes for the sparrows as you choose. (Several hundred English sparrows got up a petition to keep me in England, so lavish was I with the pastry flakes from my cold meat pies.)” Robert Benchley in a wry look at going to the races in England in *Benchley Lost and Found*. Perhaps his mother’s baking powder biscuits came out the size and shape and colour of English meat pies?)

“When you don’t have what you want, you have to want what you have. It’s one of the first lessons the colonists learned when they came to America and found that they couldn’t make the trifles and steamed puddings they’d loved in England because the ingredients didn’t exist here. That discovery led to a rash of innovation, in which settlers used seasonal fruits and berries to make quick dishes that were served for breakfast or even a main course. They came with names like buckle and grunt, crumble and cobbler and crisp, brown Betty, sonker, slump, and pandowdy. There have been whole books written on the origins of these names – grunt is the sound of the fruit cooking; Louisa May Alcott affectionately called her family home in Concord, Massachusetts, “Apple Slump” – but some of the strange titles have never been explained.

The buckle, for one.

Maybe it’s because the top is like a streusel, which gives it a crumbled appearance. But then why not call it a crumble, which is actually more like a crisp?”

Jodi Picoult in *Handle With Care*.

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So is it possible at this late date to find out anything more about Amelia Simmons? She actually titled her book *American Cookery or the Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry and Vegetables, and the Best Modes of Making Pastes, Puffs, Pies, Tarts, Puddings, Custards and Preserves, and all kinds of Cake, from the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake. Adapted to this country and all Grades of Life*. By Amelia Simmons. An American Orphan. Hartford 1796. Her book was taken, adapted, changed, re-

written, but she had, it seemed, done the same thing with Susannah Carter's 1772 *The Frugal Housewife*. She put in recipes for cooking such unexpected things as turtles, she called pumpkins 'pompkins' and cranberries 'cramberries' and plums 'plumbs', but her recipes are largely simple, straightforward and sensible. The most curious thing about her book was her emphasis on being an orphan. In her introduction she says "The orphan, tho' left to the care of virtuous guardians, will find it essentially necessary to have an opinion and determination of her own." And "It must ever remain a check upon the poor solitary orphan, that while those families who have parents, or brothers, or riches, to defend their indiscretions, that the orphan must depend solely upon character." It suggested her life was defined by orphanhood. So I wonder if people bought her book because they urgently needed a cookbook or because they felt sorry for her?

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July 14: Gertrude Bell

July 15: Iris Murdoch

July 16: Christopher Koch

David Campbell

July 17: Christina Stead

Charles Waterstreet

July 18: William Makepeace Thackeray

Clifford Odets

July 19: A. J. Cronin

Gottfried Keller

July 20: Francesco Petrararch

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"Petrarca is, in my mind, a sing-song love-sick poet; much admired, however, by the Italians; but an Italian, who should think no better of him than I do, would certainly say, that he deserved his Laura better than his Lauro; and that wretched quibble would be reckoned an excellent piece of Italian wit."

Lord Chesterfield in *Letters to his Son and Others*.

Lord Byron wrote,

Think you, if Laura had been Petrarch's wife,

He would have written sonnets all his life?

But was Laura a real woman in Petrarch's life? Was she a woman briefly glimpsed, like Dante's Beatrice, and then idealized? Or was she more in the nature of his muse and therefore someone he always carried with him?

Robin Kirkpatrick introducing his translation of Dante's *Inferno* writes, "the continuity of Dante's influence was noticeably interrupted, and even eclipsed, for a span of nearly five hundred years, during the centuries that are now conventionally designated as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. But the poet who might be thought most significantly to have anticipated the Renaissance is Francesco Petrararch (1304-74) who by descent, if not by domicile, was himself a Florentine. Petrarch's reaction to Dante indicates in large part the nature of the prejudices against Dante's poem which were to prevail for so long, and would eventually lead the French Enlightenment (until Charles Sainte-Beuve and Honoré de Balzac brought other views into prominence) to regard Dante as a 'disgusting' example of Gothic extravagance.

"The influence of Dante's writing on Petrarch's is indisputable. There would have been no Laura if there had not first been a Beatrice. Yet in an early manifestation of the 'anxiety of influence' (as the

critic Harold Bloom conceives it), Petrarch refused to allow a copy of Dante's *Commedia* on to his bookshelf. Plainly, Petrarch wished to escape from Dante's long shadow, and, in doing so, he set European poetry on a course that for several centuries would largely distract it from the merits of Dante's way of writing. In choosing, for instance, lyric verse as the principal medium of his art, he turned his back on Dante's narrative poetry. Likewise, in favouring the sonnet, Petrarch gave kudos to a genre that, in Dante's eyes, was trivial compared with the great lyric form of the *canzone* and far too unsophisticated in its metrical schemes to be adopted in the treatment of grand philosophical themes. Above all, Petrarch developed a form of highly refined poetic diction that sought to avoid all the controversial frictions and spurts of aggression that characterize Dante's essentially public voice. Dante never hesitated to use a vulgarism, if that was what was needed, and generally developed a vocabulary of the widest possible range ... Petrarch deliberately restricted the spectrum of his vocabulary, and cultivated a melodic elegance which, for much of the Renaissance, was taken as the standard of what poetic diction should be."

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Laura certainly existed. Petrarch was born in Arezzo where his Florentine father had been exiled; the said father caught up in the disputes between the two rival Florentine families, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Although an educated and sophisticated family their lives had been thrown into chaos. Petrarch traveled widely in France and Italy, considered the church, wrote, sometimes held positions and sometimes sought seclusion and sometimes entertained fellow writers such as Boccaccio.

It was in Avignon, in France, that he saw Laura in the church of St Clare on Good Friday, the 6th of April 1327; in the words of John Took "he first caught sight of Laura, a figure who thereafter stood both materially and symbolically at the centre of his complex spirituality", and 'carried' her with him on all his future journeys. Laura herself died of the plague in 1348 so that material before then was in the vein of the chivalric romances and also more esoterically as an Idea, a Muse, an Image, but after her death though still a kind of Muse she could also become his Guide to the worlds beyond this world.

Though he wrote in both Latin (and was credited with finding some lost writings of Cicero) and Italian it is his long poem in the vernacular, the *Canzoniere* or *Rime*, on which he is mainly judged, compared, and studied. Took in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature* (ed. Peter Brand and Lino Pertile) says, "The *Canzoniere* consists of 366 poems, made up of sonnets (317), *canzoni* (29), *sestine* (9), ballads (7) and madrigals (4). The vast majority of these poems concern Laura and the vicissitudes of Petrarch's love for her." But the poems are about many things, Italy, Rome, the 1333 crusade against Islam, poets and poetry and inspiration, the death of friends, aspects of church life, philosophy, spiritual conflict, "But by far the majority of the poems in the *Canzoniere* are erotic in inspiration. They set out to explore the patterns of thought and emotion generated by Petrarch's love for Laura, the subjective and psychological aspect of this love figuring, within the economy of the whole, altogether more prominently than its objective or descriptive aspect, than the figure of Laura itself." It is almost as though poets were expected to be deeply in love with an unattainable woman about whom they could weave erotic fantasies. Many of course, but not Petrarch, had perfectly sensible nice practical women at home, but that didn't take away the advantage of having this unattainable and beautiful woman to dream and muse upon. I get the impression that Petrarch took this expectation to extremes. But if it didn't bother Laura and if it created beautiful poetry ... then why not?

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July 21: Ernest Hemingway

A. D. Hope

July 22: Frederic Manning

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One day someone asked me if I had ever read Frederic Manning's famous book about WWI *Her Privates We*. I had come upon an occasional excerpt in an anthology but, no, I had never read the book. The other day I came upon a chapter about Manning in David Malouf's *The Writing Life*: "Frederic Manning was an Australian from a well-to-do Catholic family; his father was Lord Mayor of Sydney. He came to England, aged fifteen, in 1897, with his tutor Arthur Howard Galton, and lived until 1921 at Edenham near Bourne in Lincolnshire, where Galton was vicar. A classical scholar, intellectually refined and disabblingly fastidious, he wrote for the *Spectator* and Eliot's *Criterion*, was close for a time to Pound and later to T. E. Lawrence, and between 1907 and 1926 published one long poem, *The Vigil of Brunhild*, two slim volumes of verse, a series of imaginary conversations, *Scenes and Portraits*, on philosophical themes (the conflict between Fate and individual will), and the introduction to a study of Epicurus. In all ways unlikely, one might have thought, to be the anonymous author of a book whose 'language', when it was published in 1929 – the same year as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *Goodbye to All That* – caused a minor sensation, and which Hemingway would call 'the finest and noblest book of men in war that I have read'. But then, everything about *The Middle Parts of Fortune* is unlikely.

"Between August and December 1916, Manning, already in his middle thirties, had served as a private on the Somme. He wrote *The Middle Parts of Fortune*, in just a few weeks of intense productivity, on the urging of the publisher Peter Davies, to whom it is dedicated: 'To Peter Davies who made me write it'. Davies, who knew his man, took the manuscript 'sheet by sheet' before Manning could re-write it out of existence. 'What an escape!' the author admits. Originally published in a limited edition by 'Private 19022', it was quickly cleaned up for general release under the new title *Her Privates We* and sold fifteen thousand copies in three months. The original text was not reprinted until 1977."

The strange thing about this is that it didn't promise an Australian view of the war, the men, trench life. He seemed to have been away for too long to be the ideal person to write such a book. So I was intrigued. Was his book about Englishmen in the trenches but written by a man born in Australia? Or was his book about Australians in the trenches written by a man who had been domiciled in England for nearly 20 years? And maybe those weren't the right questions anyway.

Malouf writes, "It is that naked, inexorable fact," (that it "strips man of every conventional covering he has"), "and the power with which Manning in page after page makes it real, that sets *The Middle Parts of Fortune* beside the best of Mann, Kafka, Hamsun, Camus, Beckett, among the indisputable classics of its century."

Maybe my question was simpler: would I agree with this high praise?

It is a curious novel in that it is virtually plotless. The men get through each day dealing with the same every day, a desire for a drink or a cigarette, scrounging food, changing billets, rats, lice, there is virtually no mention of women, no connections with the top brass, only rare contact with the French, hardly any mention of their lives or origins before they ended up in a trench. It might suggest something ghost-like waiting for the end but instead there is an almost laconic feel to the men and their lives. Bourne, Shem, Martlow, Tozer, Malet, Thompson, Jakes ... we don't really get to know them as individuals and personalities, rather they are differentiated slightly by their rank.

Nor is the landscape a player in this sordid life. A brief glimpse of men on horses came almost as a surprise. "Presently arrived magnificent people on horseback, glancing superciliously at the less fortunate members of their species whom necessity compelled to walk. Bourne, who loved horses, had seen nothing for months but mules, Rosinante, some sorry hacks ridden by their officers, and a few lusty percherons threshing corn on a kind of treadmill outside a French farm. The sight of these daintily stepping animals, with a sheen on their smooth hides, gave him a thrill of pleasure. He was

less favourably impressed by some of the riders.”

The dead are an ever-present reality. “Suddenly he remembered the dead in Trones Wood, the unburied dead with whom one lived, he might say, cheek by jowl, Briton and Hun impartially confounded, festering, fly-blown corruption, the pasture of rats, blackening in the heat, swollen with distended bellies, or shrivelling away within their mouldering rags; and even when night covered them, one vented in the wind the stench of death.”

But for all the awfulness of endlessly waiting to go ‘over the top’ it isn’t an anti-war book. Manning says of Bourne “though he thought that the war as a moral effort was magnificent, he felt that as a mechanical operation it left a great deal to be desired.” He gives the impression of someone writing a book ‘to tell it like it was’, not a terrible mistake, not high drama, just a resigned and rather fatalistic acceptance that they were doing the right thing but it would probably all end badly.

Manning says in his preface: “War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss at least half of its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime. That raises a moral question, the kind of problem with which the present age is disinclined to deal. Perhaps some future attempt to provide a solution for it may prove to be even more astonishing than the last.”

Manning died in 1935.

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Why did Manning apparently cut himself off from his family and his Australian roots? What was discreetly called ‘ill health’ was sometimes drunkenness, something he might not have wanted his family to know about, it has been debated as to whether his reclusiveness was because he was a closet homosexual but no evidence has ever been brought forward; I have also found it suggested that he was a loner because he didn’t belong anywhere: an Australian in England and an Englishman in Australia, but as both sides of his family were Irish it may be that he found the questions this raised too hard to deal with. He was an asthmatic which may have encouraged him to live a quiet life. But as I was looking at his family I felt that he may not have wanted to come home simply because he hadn’t achieved the things his father and his brothers had achieved. (His father William and one of his brothers, Henry, were knighted for their public service; they made names for themselves in business, municipal life, law, finance, engineering and politics.) Until his book was a success in 1929 the family may have felt vaguely ashamed of his dilettantism ... or he may have felt they would see him in that way ... that he took their money but didn’t achieve very much ...

But he did return for a visit shortly before he died. I wonder what the family thought of his book and his unexpected fame? The ADB says of it, “It depicts a temporary release from isolation through a heightened form of comradeship and is a kind of acceptance of war, despite its suffering and horrors, as a heightened form of the reality of all human lives.”

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July 23: Coventry Patmore

Eugène-François Vidocq

Bharati Mukherjee

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Apart from Victor Hugo “Vidocq was source material for a host of other writers. The basis of the short story by Wilkie Collins, *A Terribly Strange Bed*, is probably from Vidocq’s account of a case in Nanterre while whole passages are lifted from *Les Vrais Mystères*. He was also used by Melville in *Moby Dick*. Balzac’s *Une fille d’Eve* came from an idea suggested by Vidocq, as did Alexandre Dumas père’s *Gabriel Lambert*.

“As for the detective novel, it is impossible to overstate his influence on the genre. Edgar Allen

Poe's detective Dupin is based on Vidocq. Gérard Dôle wrote a number of Dupin stories in which Vidocq also features, rather mischievously giving Vidocq's tormentor, the journalist Saint-Hilaire, a part as well. He is the basis of Monsieur LeCoq, the investigating detective in the novels of Emil Gaboriou. There is more than a hint of him in Magwich in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, as there is in Sherlock Holmes and his French rival, Arsène Lupin, in the immensely popular novels and short stories by Maurice Leblanc."

From *The First Detective* by James Morton.

It is hard to say how good a literary model he was because the mystery in its infancy was feeling its way. But he did make one huge contribution: he made The Detective into the hero. Not the detectives. Not the investigating team. No. The Man Himself. And this has flowed right through the intervening centuries and still influences our view of The Mystery. Now he may be a she. Think Kinsey Milhone or V. I. Warshawski. Then think Adam Dalgliesh or Dalziell and Pascoe or 'Pufferfish' or Murray Whelan. But the sense of a towering figure around whom a series will be developed is still a, and possibly the, key aspect of mystery writing. If you can't come up with a gripping series detective then you might as well turn to writing *How to Build a Shed in Three Days*.

And I am part of the problem, if it is a problem: I do prefer to read series books ...

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I have just been reading a book of Chinese detective stories, *The Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee*, translated by Robert Van Gulik, or *Dee Goong An*. *Goong* = judge. Actually a district magistrate who is investigator, judge and jury. *An* = cases or stories. Though detective stories have a long history in China, and although they too liked to have a series detective, they are not quite what we would call detective stories.

Van Gulik points to 5 key differences.

"In the first place, the criminal is, as a rule, introduced formally to the reader at the very beginning of the book, with his full name, an account of his past history, and the motive that led him to commit the crime." It is move and counter-move with the investigator outsmarting the criminal. Although the detective had much more power than a Sherlock Holmes or a Hercule Poirot he could also find himself in very serious trouble if he made a mistake. Judge Dee and his real life colleagues could be tortured and even executed.

"Second, the Chinese have an innate love for the supernatural. Ghosts and goblins roam about freely in most Chinese detective stories; animals and kitchen utensils deliver testimony in court, and the detective indulges occasionally in little escapades to the Nether World, to compare notes with the judges of the Chinese Inferno." We can allow the presence of a psychic, people can have premonitions, a place or a person can give out 'bad vibes', but in general the supernatural does not solve the crime in the way that dreams and ghosts helped Judge Dee.

"Third, the Chinese are a leisurely people, with a passionate interest for detail. Hence all their novels, including detective stories, are written in a broadly narrative vein, interlarded with lengthy poems, philosophical digressions, and what not, while all official documents relating to the case are quoted in full." The changes in Chinese society might explain why the traditional Chinese detective story is also changing. They are taking on board the idea that 'time is money' rather than 'time is free' and the western idea of the detective story is infiltrating and changing the Chinese whodunit.

"Fourth, the Chinese have a prodigious memory for names and a sixth sense for family relationships. An educated Chinese can reel off without the slightest effort some seventy or eighty relatives, each with his name, surname and title, and the exact grade of relationship" but a book populated with hundreds of characters is less to our taste unless it is a massive historical saga or non-fiction.

“Fifth, the Chinese have quite different ideas as to what should be described in a detective novel, and what may well be left to the reader’s imagination.” This can include details of suspects being tortured, minute details of their execution, and the suffering of the wrongdoer after his death as he enters the next world. This might have appealed to western readers in the 19th century when people came to witness public hangings. And we still seem to like detailed descriptions of what the pathologists find when they cut up the victim’s corpse. But I think we would feel uneasy about long and detailed descriptions of suspects being tortured.

Added to this is an expectation that Chinese readers will be knowledgeable about the law and how it plays out in an investigation. Probably many ordinary people did have quite a good idea of how a Judge Dee went about investigating crimes ...

The court room drama is very popular though readers are not expected to know the ins and outs of court procedure. But the investigations of a district magistrate like Judge Dee were much closer to the people he served than the western idea of the remote figures of judge and jury. The inquisitorial system in Europe where the judge oversees the investigation is a little closer to the Chinese way than the adversarial system we have inherited from Britain but it does not give to a judge the multiple tasks and powers of a Judge Dee. A Chinese district magistrate could be easily worn down with work but I think we would feel uneasy about the lack of checks and balances which have gradually been developed in the West ...

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- July 24: Lord Dunsany
Alexander Dumas
- July 25: Elias Canetti
- July 26: Carl Jung
George Bernard Shaw
- July 27: Hilaire Belloc
- July 28: Beatrix Potter
Jim Davis
- July 29: Booth Tarkington
- July 30: Emily Bronte
John Blight
- July 31: Primo Levi
- August 1: Herman Melville
- August 2: Geoffrey Dutton
Ernest Dowson
Béla Bálazs
- August 3: Leon Uris
P. D. James

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In her novel *A Taste for Death* P. D. James writes:

“He hadn’t come empty-handed. His hostess was a passionate collector of 1920s and 1930s girls’ school stories, her series of early Angela Brazil being particularly notable. The shelves of her sitting room were witness to her addiction to this potent nostalgia; stories in which a succession of sloping-bosomed heroines, bloused and booted, called Dorothy or Madge, Marjorie or Elspeth, whacked hockey sticks with vigour, exposed the cheat in the upper fourth or were instrumental in unmasking German spies. Dalglish had found his first edition some months earlier in a second-hand bookshop in

Marylebone. ... He handed over his offering with the customary chaste kiss which seemed to have become a social convention even among comparatively recent acquaintances.

‘For you,’ he said. ‘I think it’s called *Dulcy on the Game*.’

Nellie Ackroyd unwrapped it with a little squeak of pleasure.

‘Don’t be naughty, Adam. *Dulcy Plays the Game*. How lovely! And it’s in perfect condition. Where did you find it?’

‘In Church Street, I think. I’m glad you haven’t got it already.’

‘I’ve been looking for it for years. This completes my pre-1930 Brazils. Conrad, darling, look what Adam has brought.’ ”

Angela Brazil, a young woman born in 1868 in Lancashire, broke new ground with her girls’ stories. That they later became something to smile about doesn’t alter the fact that she was writing exciting stories for girls when there wasn’t very much being written to make girls more than the supporting characters; her stories created independent-minded girls who had to think for themselves, to act, to work together, and more than that in a world where educating girls was still looked on askance in many families and by many men she was presenting a world in which girls getting an education were doing a perfectly natural and normal thing. That she wrote and published around a hundred titles is a reminder that these books had a huge readership. And her books often had cheerful titles: *The Jolliest Term on Record*, *A Fourth Form Friendship*, *The Nicest Girl in the School*, *A Fortunate Term*, *Joan’s Best Chum*. Did girls gravitate towards a book about the ‘jolliest term’?

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“That common dream of children’s literature, of independence from the power of adults, and a safe, warm place of their making, filled my fantasies. Often they were shared. At eight or nine I planned to run away with my friend Ann, to escape from the unjust punishments, the complaints of ingratitude, the wrongs I unwittingly committed. In our games we borrowed lives from the books we read or from the hardy and hard-done-by heroines of *Bunty*, *Girls’ Crystal* or *School Friend*. We shared their dreams of escape and vindication.”

Liz Heron in *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties*.

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James Booth in *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love* tells this curious story: ”In the spring of 1943 Larkin adopted a new and radical literary strategy. He began to experiment with female styles and genres. At the same time he adopted a tone of frivolous comedy, at an opposite extreme from Yeats’s high seriousness. During summer and autumn 1943 he devoted much energy to writing girls’-school fiction under a female pseudonym. This seems a strange development for a twenty-year-old male undergraduate in the middle of a war.”

Oxford with so many young men at war was a far more feminine place than normal. He could escape into stories which did not require a masculine interest in weaponry and military strategy. And he liked girls’ fiction. He might change the guidelines, he might make it more strongly lesbian, he might turn it into sophisticated comedy, but he wasn’t sending it up. Under the pen-name of Brunette Coleman he began his first such novel. “He devoted great care to *Trouble at Willow Gables*, typing it out neatly on 143 pages of poor war-quality paper. It is comic parody, but the parody of affectionate homage rather than satire. Larkin treated this disregarded genre with all the respect due to D. H. Lawrence or Dylan Thomas. He read numerous examples, absorbing their conventions and idioms. In her essay ‘What Are We Writing For?’ Brunette cites seven works, most of them recently published. In chronological order of publication they are: Dorita Fairlie Bruce, *Dimsie Moves Up Again* (1922), Elsie J. Oxenham, *The Abbey Girls Win Through* (1928), Dorothy Vicary, *Niece of the Headmistress* (1939), Phyllis Matthewman, *The Queerness of Rusty: A Daneswood Book* (1941), Joy Francis, *The*

Girls of the Rose Dormitory (1942), Judith Grey, *Christmas Term at Chillinghurst* (1942), and Nancy Breary, *Two Thrilling Terms* (1943). There are also unspecific references to Elinor Brent-Dyer's *Chalet School* stories and the Farm School stories by Josephine Elder. Two of his particular favourites, he told Amis, 'charming in their way', were Vicary's *Niece of the Headmistress*, and Breary's *Two Thrilling Terms*."

George Orwell could write about boys' school stories, Larkin as Brunette felt that girls' stories were just as fruitful a subject. But his novel *Trouble at Willow Gables* was not published until many years after his death. It is an interesting question to ponder upon. In fact there are two questions in there. Are all those names of authors also names of women or are there other men in there? And is it actually good for young writers to write from a completely different perspective, in the same way that young actors gain confidence by playing parts very different from their own personalities?

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The other day I picked up Angela Brazil's *A Popular Schoolgirl* in an op-shop and I have been enjoying it. By modern standards it moves slowly and rather quietly but it is a well-realised milieu in which the girls are intelligent, interested, forward-thinking and though they quarrel they are rarely really nasty to each other. Perhaps more importantly for girl's fiction there is never a sense that they are being written down to or that they are in any way inferior to men and boys. The girls believe in honour, kindness, and courage. They are told "The schoolgirls of to-day are the women of to-morrow, and the women of a country have an enormous amount to do with the formation of public opinion—more nowadays than ever before—and their influence will go on increasing with every year that passes." They are interested in things beyond the school fence, they have their own school 'parliament', they are aware of the needs left by World War One so they create a Rainbow League to help the reconstruction effort (and when the younger girls cry 'Down with Prefects!' they are fobbed off with the chance to have their own Junior Rainbow League); the adventures of the girls are not large and dramatic but they develop a sense of time and place and attitudes and even the language they used then. No one now would talk of having 'spasms' nor do we wear crêpe de chine nor do we call people 'chatter-boxes' or 'blue-bottles' or describe things as 'ripping'.

The Rainbow League takes its name from the rainbow seen after Noah's great flood in the Bible but it also has its own symbolism which gives an insight into the times and Brazil's own attitudes:

VIOLET = VIRTUE—the bed-rock of women's influence.

INDIGO = INDUSTRY—which means willing service.

BLUE = BEAUTY—in its many and varied forms.

GREEN = GENEROSITY—to give of our best to others.

YELLOW = YOUTH—to offer our best years to God.

ORANGE = ORDER—which includes organization.

RED = RADIATION—the Love Force going out to others.

I also bought a book by one of her contemporaries, Ethel Nokes, called *The Fourth Form Gang*, because I wondered if these books would begin to seem like clones of one another. I found Nokes' book readable and interesting but I thought Brazil brought a greater depth to her writing, her sense of an era, of the problems her girls will face in the wider world, and in the many small dilemmas that school life provides.

It could be said that these kinds of stories are limited because they weren't just school stories but they were very often *boarding school stories* and many girls did not go to boarding schools. They went to the school down the road, they went to small and often inadequate country schools, they were taught at home by a governess or a family member—or they went to one of the thousands of small schools set up by spinsters or widows as a way to make a living. Often such schools were just a few rooms in the

family home or a hired space. Sometimes they were little more than glorified child-minding services. At their best, run by women with a passion and a flair for providing girls with a love of learning, they could compete with the best of the big schools. But they don't offer themselves as a milieu for a school story because they were very often day schools; their pupils went home every evening.

The schools of those popular writers were little worlds of their own. From their headmistress down to the newest pupil they were a female world. They showed strong-minded women running things but equally they showed the ways in which the girls were encouraged to believe they too could achieve and run things. They didn't need husbands. They would have the knowledge, the confidence, and the skills to achieve in their own right. Perhaps it is a pity that those novels of life in a girls' school have been superseded by novels in which schools are places of girl-boy relationships or in which girls seem to take great pleasure in being mean to each other.

Brazil's story, set in the aftermath of World War One, has as its central character Ingrid Saxon whose family have fallen on hard times and Ingrid is a kind of in-between girl living in a hostel rather than as a boarder or at home. She resents the loss of her home and snubs the girl whose family have moved in. But she comes to accept that the clock cannot be turned back and makes her mark in the school and is in line to become Head Girl in the following year.

The book ends with, 'On the afternoon before breaking-up day, the School Parliament met for the last time. Lisbeth, rather sad, and inclined to be sentimental, reviewed from The Chair the events of the past year.

"It has been pioneer work," she said. "I dare say we might have done it better, but at least we've tried. We laid ourselves out to set a standard for the tone of the school, and I think it has kept up fairly well on the whole. The Rainbow League seems thoroughly established, and likely to go on. May I read you some of the things it has done during the year? We made four pounds for the 'War-Orphans Fund', and sent ninety-seven home-made toys to poor children's treats. The Posy Union gave nine pots of crocuses and fifty-six bunches of flowers to cripples and invalids; the penny-a-week subscriptions have kept two little girls all the summer at the children's camp, and the Needlework Guild has made thirty-seven garments. It doesn't sound much when you put it all in hard black and white like that! I hate reports and statistics of societies, they always sound to me somehow so pharisaical, as if we were saying: 'Look how good we are!' You know I don't mean that. What I *do* mean, though, is that we've tried not to run everything entirely for ourselves. A rainbow shines when the world is clearing up, and perhaps our little efforts, small as they are, show that things are moving in the right direction. Next term all of us girls in the Sixth will have left, and a new set will take the lead. I can't say yet who will be Head of the school, but I don't fancy there's very much doubt about it. I hope whoever has the reins will keep up what we have worked so hard for this year."'

I can understand how, in a world where girls were rarely seen as leaders, inspirers, innovators, that Brazil's books did give girls a sense that they too could achieve things ...

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August 4: Knut Hamsun

August 5: Wendell Berry

August 6: Rolf Boldrewood

Daniel O'Connell

August 7: Dean Farrer

E. J. Brady

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While I was doing some family history research I came upon a second cousin of my grandfather's who married a man called Walter Farrar. He, in his later years, became Anglican Bishop

of Honduras and Central America. But the curious thing was that as soon as I put Farrar into the system to see what might come up a very different Farrar kept popping up. Dean Farrar. He was the author of *Eric, or Little by Little* which was a popular school story in the late nineteenth century. Some diligent person managed to track down a very remote connection between Walter Farrar and the Dean, Frederic Farrar, but my interest was in that once immensely popular genre: the school story.

Frederic Farrar's daughter Maud married Henry Montgomery, Bishop of Tasmania, and had the future Field-Marshal Montgomery ('Monty'), but she was apparently distinctly unmaternal, it does not seem to have been a happy marriage, and the young 'Monty' was a bully; not a remarkably pleasant family from the exterior evidence but Dean Farrar was an interesting man. Born in India he later became headmaster of Marlborough College, Dean of Canterbury, a writer on the evolution of language as well as religious topics, and the man who preached the sermon at Charles Darwin's funeral. But it was his school stories, *Eric, or Little by Little* (which had young Eric sent to Britain from India for his unhappy school days and which was said to have popularized the name Eric—though it was Eric Blair's dislike of the story which led him to change his name to George Orwell) and *St Winifred's or the World of School*. Farrar was at pains to say his schools were imagined places, *St Winifred's* is just presented as being on the seashore of a small bay with hills behind it (as is Roslyn in *Eric*), but that hasn't stopped people identifying his fictitious schools with the schools he attended. The thing that struck me, though, is that a school whether ancient grey stones and green sward or a few shabby demountables on cracked asphalt *is* a world of its own. It has its own rules, traditions, expectations, dress code, even sometimes its own slang.

I could come up with endless stories about schools, fact and fiction, building them, funding them, experiencing them, enduring them, leaving inspired or damaged for life ... but there is the other interesting side to it. The people for whom school was their world.

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NZ writer Sylvia Ashton-Warner is mentioned in C. K. Stead's *Kin of Place*: "She married a fellow-teacher, moved with him to a sole-charge school in the remotest part of the country, and bore three children. After the second birth she was asking to be allowed to teach again. Her husband objected but she won out (he would later repeatedly talk her out of resigning) and the pattern of their life together was established – he headmaster of small remote schools teaching predominantly Maori children, she mistress of the infant room where she evolved the reading method based on what she calls a 'key vocabulary'.

"The best insights are simple and hers was that her Maori infant pupils were failing to progress in reading because the imported books (usually Janet and John) bore no relation to their lives and emotions. She discovered that for each child there were certain key words related to their day-to-day lives and to their feelings. Find one of his or her key words and the child who had taken three weeks to learn and forget a phrase from Janet and John would learn it in a few seconds and retain it. (A typical list for one of her Maori infants reads 'butcher-knife', 'goal', 'police', 'sing', 'cry', 'kiss', 'Daddy', 'Mummy', 'Rangi', 'haka', 'fight'.) She wrote and illustrated her own reading books for Maori children, making multiple copies one at a time by hand. The story of how these books developed, proved successful in the classroom, and failed to gain the recognition of the New Zealand Department of Education (which also inadvertently burned the final master copies she submitted to them) is one of the saddest, and most sadly convincing, she has to tell. Maori frustration and violence, she believes, begin in the infant room and in the slowness or failure to read, which puts many Maori children behind their pakeha schoolfellows. Gang violence, and the disproportion of Maori in New Zealand jails, follow."

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“Children are a wonderful gift. They are young and small persons, with minds and ideas, hating to be talked down to. They have an extraordinary capacity to see into the heart of things, and to expose sham and humbug for what they are.”

“Children learn about the nature of the world from their family. They learn about power and about justice, about peace and about compassion within the family. Whether we oppress or liberate our children in our relationships with them will determine whether they grow up to oppress and be oppressed or to liberate and be liberated.”

Bishop Desmond Tutu in *Believe*.

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The other day I got a copy of *Eric, or Little by Little* in an op-shop. It has the sub-title ‘A Tale of Roslyn School’, it was given in 1914 at St Augustine’s in Bayswater to an Eric Nielson (so obviously the name Eric had taken off by the time this little Eric was old enough to deserve a book prize) and at some stage in its frequent re-printings Farrar had written a new introduction (for the twenty-fourth reprint in 1889), surely an introduction designed to put off the vast majority of boys who might be given a copy: “The story of “Eric” was written with but one single object—the vivid inculcation of inward purity and moral purpose by the history of a boy who, in spite of the inherent nobleness of his disposition, falls into all folly and wickedness until he has learnt to seek help from above. I am deeply thankful to know—from testimony public and private, anonymous and acknowledged—that this object has, by God’s blessing, been fulfilled.

“The fact that new editions are still called for thirty-one years after its publication shows, I trust, that the story has been found to be of real use. I have not thought it right to alter in any way the style or structure of the narrative, but I have so far revised it as to remove a few of the minor blemishes. I trust that the book may continue to live so long—and so long only—as it may prove to be a source of moral benefit to those who read it.”

It may have inspired parents to buy it for their sons, they may have tucked it into their suitcases as they packed their boys off to boarding-school, they may have felt that with “Eric” as company their sons were in safe hands—but I hesitated to sit down and read it.

Eric comes to stay with relatives in England and is sent to a small local school where despite its many shortcomings—“there was one point about Ayrton Latin School which he never regretted. It was the mixture there of all classes. On those benches gentlemen’s sons sat side by side with plebeians, and no harm, but only good, seemed to come from the intercourse”—but it is felt that he needs more. So off he goes to a boys’ boarding school. This is Roslyn with its 250 boys.

Here he is unmercifully bullied by a boy called Barker. “Why is it that new boys are almost invariably ill-treated? I have often fancied that there must be in boyhood a pseudo-instinctive cruelty, a sort of “wild trick of the ancestral savage,” which no amount of civilisation can entirely repress. Certain it is, that to most boys the first term is a trying ordeal. They are being tested and weighed. Their place in the general estimation is not yet fixed, and the slightest circumstances are seized upon to settle the category under which the boy is to be classed. A few apparently trivial accidents of his first few weeks at school often decide his position in the general regard for the remainder of his boyhood. And yet these are *not* accidents; they are the slight indications which give an unerring proof of the general tendencies of his character and training. Hence much of the apparent cruelty with which new boys are treated is not exactly intentional. At first, of course, as they can have no friends worth speaking of, there are always plenty of coarse and brutal minds that take a pleasure in their torment, particularly if they at once recognise any innate superiority to themselves. Of this class was Barker. He

hated Eric at first sight, simply because his feeble mind could only realise one idea about him, and that was the new boy's striking contrast with his own imperfections. Hence he left no means untried to vent on Eric his low and mean jealousy."

Barker is forced to stop his physical bullying but continues to look for ways to make trouble. And Eric, desiring to be seen as a popular boy, is led into mischief and (mild) swearing. He runs the risk of putting the very decent boys who have helped him offside. He is seduced by the idea that as a ringleader in mischief he will be popular. So he starts smoking and sneaking out of school to drink beer. Eric is on the downward path and nothing, it seems, can stop him except death. His little brother Vernon comes to the school but Eric largely ignores him. Vernon is killed when trying to rob a cormorant's nest he falls into the water below and is drowned. But Eric continues getting in to trouble. He attacks a teacher, he is accused of theft, he runs away from school and takes a job as a cabin-boy but is flogged by the captain and runs away home to his aunt. It turns out that another person has been caught as the thief but by now Eric's health is wrecked and he too dies. What moral did Victorian schoolboys take from the book? That once you're determined to be anything but a good well-behaved studious boy not even the cane will draw you back from the brink? Or that school is a terrible place and you could only hope that you would come out of it alive? Or that Eric was such a pain that it was nice to know that he wouldn't be back for a sequel? It would be interesting to know ...

The book is lively and readable and the action moves along and the moralizing is no more intrusive than in most boys' stories of that era. After all, when Eric goes to school the boys are still using candles to see themselves to bed. The school doesn't have the innovations, such as prefects, we have come to expect in school stories. But the thing which struck me was: what impact did the book have on *parents*? Mr and Mrs Williams, far away in India, have left their two sons in the care of what they believe to be a good well-run Christian school but both their sons end up dead. Did it give parents pause? That maybe boarding-schools back in Britain were *not* the best option for their precious children?

"School life, like all other life, is an April day of shower and sunshine. Its joys may be more childish, its sorrows more trifling, than those of after years—but they are more keenly felt."

And I am not sure about 'trifling'. If adults were the victims of the level of physical punishment, floggings and abuse, handed out to quite small boys, it would have raised an outcry. If every time a politician misused a Latin verb he got flogged we would be astonished. But it was assumed that the only way some boys were going to learn anything was at the end of a stick.

We have largely replaced sticks with carrots but the simple fact remains—we still do not know how to get a lot of children to work at their lessons or really value an education. Neither punishments or inducements ... we could perhaps try bribery, a nice little nest-egg waiting if you leave school with a good pass ... or we could go back to the 19th century and set our children to selling matches on the street instead of getting an education ... or we could create schools and teachers and systems so good children clamour to go to school ... or ...

The headmaster of Farrar's imaginary school would have reacted in astonishment to the news that many children leaving school in the 21st century not only cannot read and write in Latin but cannot read and write in English ...

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August 8: Marjorie Rawlings

August 9: John Dryden

Isaak Walton

Philip Larkin

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That poem of Philip Larkin's, 'This Be The Verse', is still quoted *ad nauseum*, so much so that I thought it was typical of Larkin's work and so was not inspired to go looking for anything else of his. I am inclined to think that people like it because it seems to give permission to readers to blame the problems and the miseries and the traumas and the bad dreams people carry around with them on their parents. Of course parents and other kin do have a lot to answer for but at some point most people find they have to let go and face forwards ...

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And add some extra, just for you.

But they were fucked up in their turn
By fools in old-style hats and coats,
Who half the time were sippy-stern
And half at one another's throats.

Man hands on misery to man.
It deepens like a coastal shelf.
Get out as early as you can.
And don't have any kids yourself.

Larkin followed his own advice and didn't hand on any miseries to another generation. But the thing which intrigued me when I came to his *Collected Poems* is that his early poems are very different to what I would call his later 'socially engaged' poems. Later poems include ones like 'Fiction and the Reading Public' which begins:

Give me a thrill, says the reader,
Give me a kick;
I don't care how you succeed, or
What subject you pick.
Choose something you know all about
That'll sound like real life:
Your childhood, your Dad pegging out,
How you sleep with your wife.

Or 'Money' which begins:

Quarterly, is it, money reproaches me:
'Why do you let me lie here wastefully?
I am all you never had of goods and sex.
You could get them still by writing a few cheques.'

Or 'Sad Steps' which begins:

Groping back to bed after a piss
I part thick curtains, and am startled by
The rapid clouds, the moon's cleanliness.

Or 'Homage to a Government' which begins:

Next year we are to bring the soldiers home
For lack of money, and it is all right.

Places they guarded, or kept orderly,
Must guard themselves, and keep themselves orderly.
We want the money for ourselves at home
Instead of working. And this is all right.

You could suggest that this is just plain sarcasm rather than social engagement, not that there is any reason why poetry should not be sarcastic, but I found myself liking his earlier more pastoral poems better. Such as 'Night-Music' which begins:

At one the wind rose,
And with it the noise
Of the black poplars.

Long since had the living
By a thin twine
Been led into their dreams
Where lanterns shine
Under a still veil
Of falling streams;
Long since had the dead
Become untroubled
In the light soil.
There were no mouths
To drink of the wind,
Nor any eyes
To sharpen on the stars'
Wide heaven-holding,
Only the sound
Long sibilant-muscle trees
Were lifting up, the black poplars.

And in their blazing solitude
The stars sang in their sockets through the night:
'Blow bright, blow bright
The coal of this unquickened world.'

* * * * *

James Thurber wrote of himself in his introduction to the *Selected Letters of James Thurber*: "The effect of Thurber's letters on his generation was about the same as the effect of anybody's letters on any generation; that is to say, nil. It is only when a man's letters are published after his death that they have any effect and this effect is usually only on literary critics. Nobody else ever reads a volume of letters and anybody who says he does is a liar. A person may pick up a volume of correspondence now and then and read a letter here and there, but he never gets any connected idea of what the man is trying to say and soon abandons the book for the poems of John Greenleaf Whittier. This is largely because every man whose letters have ever been published was in the habit of writing every third one to a Mrs. Cameron or a Mrs. Winslow or a Miss Betch, the confidante of a lifetime, with whom he shared any number of gaily obscure little secrets. These letters all read like this: "Dear Puttums: I love what you say about Mooey! It's so devastatingly true! B—— dropped in yesterday (Icky was out at the time) and gave some sort of report on Neddy but I am afraid I didn't listen (*ut ediendam aut debendo!*)."

He and Liddy are in Venice, I think I gathered, or Newport. What in the world do you suppose came over Buppa that Great Night? ? ? You, of course, were as splendidly consequent as ever (*in loco sporenti abadabba est*) — but I was deeply disappointed in Sig’s reaction. All he can think of, poor fellow, is Margery’s ‘flight.’ Remind me to tell you some day what Pet said about the Ordeal.” These particular letters are sometimes further obscured by a series of explanatory editorial footnotes, such as “Probably Harry Boynton or his brother Norton,” “A neighbor at Bar Harbor,” “The late Edward J. Belcher,” “Also sometimes lovingly referred to as Butty, a niece-in-law by his first marriage.” In the end, as I say, one lays the book aside for “Snow-Bound” in order to get a feeling of reality before going to bed.”

In a way Thurber was lucky—or sensible—to make the choices himself. The letters of most writers are gathered up after their death and published willy-nilly. And yet most people, and I include myself, have written things in letters that would be better not published. Think of the way letters are written. If it’s not a rush to catch the mail it’s trying to remember what you meant to tell someone or the things you meant to ask them. And then there are the things you want them to do for you (‘Could you send—’ ‘Could you drop round and check—’) There are the grizzles about your children, your neighbours, people at church, politicians, the state of society. That chance to let off steam is valuable but should it be enshrined between covers? And then there is the subtle or not so subtle slant caused by the person you are writing to. You write the things you think they will want to hear about. You tend to tailor your letter to their views if they are close. So do letters really give a good insight into their writer? And should they be published? Quite a lot of Larkin’s letters have been published but I am not sure that they have helped his reputation or given us a better understanding of either the man or the poet.

* * * * *

He was not enthused by the idea that that one line should be enshrined in a Dictionary of Quotations. I am not surprised.

His own parents, although not in the running for Father of the Year or Mother of the Year, were relatively average parents, muddling along as most of us do.

Alan Bennett writes in his introduction to his play *Kafka’s Dick*, “There was another emperor nearer at hand, the emperor in the armchair, Kafka’s phrase for his father. Hermann Kafka has had such a consistently bad press that it’s hard not to feel a sneaking sympathy for him as for all the Parents of Art. They never get it right. They bring up a child badly and he turns out a writer, posterity never forgives them – though without that unfortunate upbringing the writer might never have written a word. They bring up a child well and he never *does* write a word. Do it right and posterity never hears about the parents; do it wrong and posterity never hears about anything else.

‘They fuck you up your Mum and Dad’ and if you’re planning on writing that’s probably a good thing. But if you are planning on writing and they haven’t fucked you up, well, you’ve got nothing to go on, so then they’ve fucked you up good and proper.”

He goes on, “Many parents, one imagines, would echo the words of Madame Weil, the mother of Simone Weil, a child every bit as trying as Kafka must have been. Questioned about her pride in the posthumous fame of her ascetic daughter Madame Weil said, ‘Oh! How much I would have preferred her to have been happy.’ Like Kafka Simone Weil is often nominated for secular sainthood. I’m not sure. Talk of a saint in the family and there’s generally one around if not quite where one’s looking. One thinks of Mrs Muggeridge and in the Weil family it is not Simone so much as her mother who consistently behaves well and elicits sympathy. In the Kafka household the halo goes to Kafka’s sister Ottla, who has to mediate between father and son, a role in weaker planetary systems than that revolving round Hermann Kafka which is more often played by the mother.”

And what of Larkin and children. As opposed to Larkin *as* a child? I came upon this little insight in A. N. Wilson's *Iris Murdoch As I Knew Her*. "JOB (John Bayley, Murdoch's husband) has never made any secret of his detestation of 'kids', implying, as Larkin and A. L. Rowse in their differing ways were wont to do, that begetting them was not merely boring but, for anyone aspiring to be taken seriously as an intelligence, discreditable.

'Look at them!' Rowse would trumpet, when driving me into the hinterland of St Austell or Bodmin, and waving a contemptuous hand at the rows of ugly bungalows. 'FUCK hutches, deah! For all those stupid heteros, and their bloody KIDS! Why are they too stupid to see that there are too many bloody PEOPLE in the world as it is!'

Larkin, in his poem 'Dockery & Son', is shocked, on revisiting his old college, to discover that one of his undergraduate contemporaries has had a child almost as soon as going down from university – the child is himself now a student at the college. 'How convinced he was he should be added to!' he exclaims about the elder Dockery. 'Why did he think that adding meant increase/To me it was dilution.'

I was first introduced to Larkin by JOB in 1970 but it was only later, when I knew him much better, that I asked if these lines were considered. Much as many of us might want a child, at any age, did the act of procreation imply that one had been making a cerebral equation between adding and increase? Surely one just made love, had children, without such theorising coming into the picture?

He was adamant that he had meant every word of this poem, and that he thought that Kingsley Amis, for example, was a 'bloody fool' for having kids.

'Surely in that particular case,' I said to the curmudgeon of Hull, 'you could say that the kids had been rather a credit to old Kingsley?'

'I want someone to compile a list,' he replied. 'Talentless Kids of Famous Fathers. Notice I didn't say Talented Kids of Talented Fathers.'

'Who would be on the list?'

'Auberon Waugh. Little Martin, of course.'

To 'kids' themselves, in what one might call real life, old Larks could actually be kind in his quiet way. He was very fond of the Amises. JOB, by contrast, seemed twinkly and kind, but his detestation of 'kids' – people in general? – was palpable. I only came to this conclusion about him very late in the day.

When Emily, my eldest child, her mother and I were bound for a garden party at St Hilda's College, Larkin asked if he could come too, to soak up some of the memory of the sainted Barbara Pym. (It had been her old college and she had enjoyed the gaudies and garden parties.) Emily and Larkin were both shy, but they formed a bond in the discussion of her pet rabbit, and when this beloved creature died, he sent her, aged nine, a letter of condolence. Like the poet, Francis the rabbit was large, timorous, yet in his strange way companionable."

James Booth in his biography of Larkin writes, "He reasserts his own voice against the literary clutter of the previous months in the confident Armstrong-like trumpet line of this, his most pungently 'Larkinesque' comic poem. No doubt also, in a familiar dialectic of contraries, he felt the need to answer the filial piety of 'To the Sea' with something less 'bloody dull'. His elliptical late style is evident in the way the first line appropriates, and as it were copyrights, the most commonplace of phrases. The sentence 'your parents certainly fuck you up' or 'your mum and dad always seem to fuck you up', or even Larkin's precise formulation, 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad', must have been uttered millions of times in ordinary conversation. But simply by ordering the words into a neat

tetrameter in a brisk abab stanza of facile rhymes, he makes it into an unforgettable aphorism:

They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
They may not mean to, but they do.
They fill you with the faults they had
And some extra, just for you.

This sentiment will now always be a quotation from Larkin. The casual inflections are perfect for recitation, and the malicious relish of that final insinuating phrase ‘some extra, just for you’ has the verbal taste of vermouth in a martini. The poem takes the imperious form of a crude syllogism: thesis, antithesis, synthesis: i) Your parents fuck you up; ii) *but* they were fucked up too; iii) *because* we are all fucked up. To add to the fun the concluding synthesis modulates into ripe fatalistic orotundity (‘Man hands on misery to man’), and portentous ‘apocalyptic’ imagery (‘It deepens like a coastal shelf’). The poem’s sentiment is sad, but the poem is full of *jouissance*. This must bid fair to be the funniest serious English poem of the twentieth century. It must also already rival Gray’s ‘Elegy’ in the number of parodies and pastiches it has generated.”

* * * * *

August 10: Laurence Binyon

August 11: Enid Blyton

Mavis Gallant

August 12: Robert Southey

August 13: Fidel Castro

William Wentworth

Lucy Stone

August 14: John Galsworthy

August 15: T. E. Laurence

Sir Walter Scott

Thomas De Quincey

August 16: Georgette Heyer

Mary Gilmore

August 17: V. S. Naipaul

Oliver St John Gogarty

Patricia Grace

* * * * *

I am not sure that I would want Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O’Brien) writing my obituary. His humour was not of the gentle picnic-on-the-lawn variety. Very funny, yes, but it could be pretty savage. But this piece in *Further Cuttings from Cruiskeen Lawn* was unexpectedly benign. James Joyce was said to have used Gogarty as his model for Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*. I am inclined to think Myles also when he sat down to his biggest and best known novel *At-Swim-Two-Birds* ran his eye, or perhaps his ear, over Gogarty as he pondered on his characters.

*

“There is a phrase, normally used ironically, that there is very few of them left. I hope it is permissible for myself to record here, in a corner often used for derision, a personal but also very widespread regret at the passing of Oliver St John Gogarty. Requiem-writing (if I may invent that phrase) is difficult, and could easily be presumptive or even offensive, no matter much what the intention. But I personally knew this great man and here attempt to record qualities known also to the

many others who knew him.

He had courage.

This word is usually ascribed as the attribute of an Irishman. Sometimes some diminishing qualification is added, such as 'physical'. It implies, and often is intended to do so, an absence of other forms of courage. Confining this remark of mine to Gogarty's own respect for the dignity of language, I would be content to say merely that he had courage. That quality, almost obsolete, does not need an adjective. When one says that somebody was good, one derogates rather than adds when one says he was 'very good'.

Courage is never enough. One trouble about it is that its possessor is hardly ever out of trouble and requires other skills for self-extraction. The last word is not to be confused with self-exculpation, but if a man wishes to be elsewhere (possibly on a professional medical appointment) and is talking to a friend (the late Alf Bergan, for instance), he does not make a crude or objectionable exit.

Two minutes of that tongue and very subtle mind at the back would convince anybody of his day that Gogarty's departure involved for the party of the other part something of the nature of a bereavement. To a stranger it may seem that he was glib. Less glib or more honest man I personally never met. Wit, adjustment to an existing situation, improvisation, all those qualities he had, he had in a profusion unexampled. Now and again a remark seemed cruel. Occasionally a handy quotation betrayed him into saying something that seemed unkind. Against whom can this charge not be laid? Even his majesty the sun has spots.

Was Gogarty afraid to die? A curiosity about him—perhaps of a rather literary kind—is the number of times he considered this emergency in verse. He was, after the manner of his day, addicted to classical mode. He discerned much of merit in the work of Catullus. Familiar though it be, let this be his epitaph:

Enough! Why should a man bemoan
A fate that leads the natural way?
Or think himself a worthier one
Than those who braved it in their day.
If only gladiators died,
Or heroes, Death will be his pride;
But have not little maidens gone,
And Lesbia's sparrow—all alone?

The restatement thus of an ancient thought ennobles the man who did it. I think that is true. But may Gogarty himself forgive if this morning I feel sentimental. The fact is that I am."

*

Gogarty's best known book was *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* but he was better-known for himself than for his books. James M. Cahalan in *The Irish Novel* writes, "Moore named the protagonist of his most celebrated Irish novel, *The Lake*, after Joyce's infamous friend, Oliver Gogarty, and when Gogarty's mother complained, Moore replied, "Madame, supply me with two such dactyls and I will gladly change the name ... Joyce did just that, renaming his friend "Buck Mulligan" in *Ulysses*, and having Mulligan make derisive comments about Moore's French affectations and love of "French letters." Mulligan's comic plunge at the Forty-Foot in the first chapter of *Ulysses* may very well be a parody of Moore's hero's liberating swim at the end of *The Lake*, especially since Joyce indicated in a letter that he found Moore's description of the priest's buttocks quite laughable."

Cahalan looks at two comic writers, Patrick Kavanagh and Gogarty, and says of them, “Both Kavanagh and Gogarty were renowned as comic “characters” in Dublin, a city with a well developed appreciation for eccentricity” but whereas Kavanagh left school at twelve Gogarty was a graduate of Trinity College Dublin and became a doctor. And while Kavanagh moved on from anecdotal and comic prose to become a well-regarded poet, Gogarty continued to write episodic prose such as his novel *Tumbling in the Hay* which “contains a series of loose, rambling, lighthearted experiences of a set of young vagabonds which very much recall some of the novels of Charles Lever, especially *Charles O’Malley*.” Gogarty eventually gave up doctoring for writing. I am not really surprised. His hangovers and his alcoholic breath may not have given his patients great confidence in him.

But despite his very up and down relations with various writers in Dublin it was a very much exiled one who took him to court. Samuel Beckett. “Beckett had found his own brief returns to Ireland to be humiliating and injurious to his health, especially when he was derided as a Parisian degenerate during cross-examination in the libel suit over Oliver Gogarty’s *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* in 1937. Thereafter he chose to remain in France during World War II, later insisting that “I preferred France in war to Ireland in peace”.”

Strictly speaking it was Beckett’s uncle’s brother, Harry Sinclair, who took out the libel case against Gogarty. Both his grandfathers Morris Sinclair and Morris Harris were Jewish and both were antique dealers. Neither of them are named in Gogarty’s book but Sinclair took out the case against Gogarty for libel. Beckett swore out an affidavit to say: ‘I purchased a copy of a book, *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* from Green’s Library, 16 Sheriff Street, Dublin. My attention had been called to it by the many advertisements I had read and the notoriety of its author. On reading the paragraphs complained of I instantly inferred that the lines quoted referred to Mr Henry Maurice Sinclair and the late Mr William Abraham Sinclair and that the words ‘old usurer’ and ‘grandsons’ referred to the late Mr Morris Harris and his said two grandsons. I also considered that the words constituted a very grave charge against the said Henry Maurice Sinclair and his late brother.’

Beckett came back from France to be a ‘publication witness’, that is, some one who had actually read the book. Anthony Cronin in his biography of Beckett, *Samuel Beckett The Last Modernist*, says, “Prosecuting Counsel had claimed in his opening address that Gogarty had ‘vilified the living and the dead in a pen dipped in the scourgings of a putrid and amoral mind.’ ”

The Defence in its turn drew attention to Beckett’s privately printed book *Whoroscope* and his publicly printed *More Pricks Than Kicks* to try to show that Beckett’s mind was not exactly pure and moral either. But the thing which astonished me was that Harry Sinclair admitted that he had documentary evidence that his grandfather “had indeed been guilty of enticing newspaper girls under twelve into his shop and interfering with them – precisely what Gogarty had insinuated the old usurer mentioned in his book had done.” He tempted them in to his back room with sweets, those little girls from poor families, and then sexually abused them.

Cronin writes, “The jury was out for an hour and a half, coming back to announce that they had found for the Plaintiff and were awarding him £900 in damages. This was a big sum for those days and, together with the legal costs which he had to pay, it was, in spite of a fashionable practice, the country house and the Rolls-Royce, a ruinous blow to Gogarty, who claimed afterwards that the case had cost him £2,000 in all. This was of little satisfaction to Beckett, however, who was seriously out of pocket for the return trip to Paris.”

Gogarty with his drinking and carrying on wasn’t popular with the respectable matrons of Dublin such as Mrs Beckett but I cannot help wondering if there wasn’t also some ‘class envy’ at work. Gogarty was both more socially prominent and better off than Sinclair and the jury, if made up of

twelve solid tradesmen and small shopkeepers, may have sympathized with Sinclair. Because I cannot help thinking that if the old man was known to be a paedophile then was it equally well-known that he was doing some private loan-sharking in that back room?

Mrs Beckett, horrified at this public washing of dirty family linen, never spoke to the Sinclairs again.

*

So how did Joyce represent Gogarty? It is hard to see the point of Buck Mulligan except as a way to start the book off and introduce Stephen Dedalus. *Ulysses* begins, “Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressing-gown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him by the mild morning air.”

Then “Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untensured hair, grained and hued like pale oak.”

Mulligan has “even white teeth glistening here and there with gold points”, a “plump shadowed face and sullen oval jowl recalled a prelate, patron of arts in the middle ages”, “great searching eyes”, “stroking palps of fingers”. What did Mrs Gogarty think of *this* portrayal of her darling boy? And we know he is a medical student because he says, “You saw only your mother die. I see them pop off every day in the Mater and Richmond and cut up into tripes in the dissecting room. It’s a beastly thing and nothing else. It simply doesn’t matter.”

But when the old woman delivers the milk it is Mulligan who pays. Is this a subtle acknowledgement that Joyce owed Gogarty in some way and putting him in his book was to be his way of repaying a debt? Ulick O’Connor in his biography of Gogarty says, “he gave him money and lent him clothes so that the artist might practise his craft undisturbed” and Gogarty also had a reputation for kindness and generosity towards his poorest patients ...

Except that ...

Mulligan gets several more brief appearances but it only gets worse ...

He is ‘that Mulligan cad’ and ‘That Mulligan is a contaminated bloody doubledyed ruffian by all accounts. His name stinks all over Dublin. But with the help of God and His blessed mother I’ll make it my business to write a letter one of those days to his mother or his aunt or whatever she is that will open her eye as wide as a gate’ and then he has a ‘ribald face, sullen as a dean’s’ and I can only hope that Mrs Gogarty had given up on the book after the first few pages ...

*

And how did Gogarty represent Beckett’s relatives? In *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* he wrote, ‘An old usurer who had eyes like a pair of periwinkles on which somebody had been experimenting with a pin, and a nose like a shrunken tomato, one eye of which swung independently of the other. The older he grew the more he pursued the immature, and enticed little girls into his office, That was bad enough; but he had grandsons, and these directed the steps of their youth to follow a grandfather’s footsteps, with more zeal than discrimination.’

And he incorporated a verse into his dialogue:

‘And one thing more – where can we buy antiques? –

‘Nassau Street, Sackville Street, Liffey Street where Naylor’s is, and all along the Quays. Have you not heard?

‘Two Jews grew in Sackville Street,
and not in Piccadilly,

One was gaitered on the feet,
The other one was Willy.

‘And if you took your pick of them,
Which ever one you choose,
You’d like the other more than him,
So wishful were these Jews.

‘They kept a shop for objects brought
by Masters famed of old,
Where you, no matter what you bought,
Were genuinely sold.

‘But Willy spent the sesterces
And brought on strange disasters
Because he sought new mistresses
More keenly than old Masters.’

Of course, if you’ve got a reprint of *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street* you won’t get all this offending material. You would need a first edition. My reprint is 1982 and only gives the first two verses, set out more formally and merely asking where you can find an antiques dealer, and has ‘wistful’ rather than ‘wishful’. But what of the book itself? It is a curious book. A kind of cross between a memoir, a travel book, a history of Dublin, a gossip column, a sometimes witty sometimes tiresome sometimes pretentious trawl through bits of Dublin’s literary, political and business world, dropping names all the while. I didn’t really know what to make of it. How to untangle fact from fiction, for instance. He says Grafton Street was “a little over one hundred yards in length”. Now my gr-gr-gr-grandfather had a shop at 101 Grafton Street, now the home of Allied Irish Banks, so I have gone to maps. But perhaps Gogarty’s yards were longer than anyone else’s yards or was he referring only to the connecting streets ... It would help to be an habitué of Dublin, preferably in the Twenties and Thirties, and I suspect people read it precisely in the hope of unearthing hidden and salacious clues and insights and pointers to public figures in Dublin. But could they trust what they read? Did Gogarty embalm the body of Michael Collins? Did the IRA burn down his house? Did he spend every spare minute doing down Prime Minister De Valera?

The book has lots of witty little moments but were they tossed off without thought or did he slave over every word? Just a taste:

—The heresy politicians suffer from is belief in themselves.

—‘Politics is the chloroform of the Irish people or, rather, the hashish.’

—‘De Valera is about as good a nation-builder as an advocate of birth-control.’

—‘We’re half-beggared and twice taxed.’

—George said, ‘No country is run rationally. Even rationalist Russia has to stage pageants of force and to use the sex symbols of the Hammer and the Sickle.’

—‘We were never a very militant nation,’ said Joe – ‘that is, compared with the Scots. As late as 1746 they fought Culloden, where one thousand of the Clansmen went down in one battle for the House of Stuart. Where is Scotland now? Dominating, directing and leading the British Empire. And where is King George? Down at Balmoral every summer, dressing himself up in a kilt and wearing a – what d’ye call it – a sporran. And his son married to a Scotswoman. The Scots were wise enough to get a share of what they built. They are as honoured as the English now.’

‘Winning battles in the spirit in which they were lost?’ I asked, thinking of Æ.

‘Do you suggest,’ said Batt, ‘that if Ireland lost more men and had a better beating than the Scots

at Drumossie Muir, that the King would come over here every year and dress in a caubeen and knee-breeches and twirl a Shillelagh and stay with Buckley near the gas-works in Monkstown?’

—Can it be that all governments have to be protected from the governed?

—‘After the debate Asquith passed him a note saying that he heard him read the last Will and Testament of the Liberal Party; but that for his part he intended to die intestate.’

—‘It is the absence of scandals that makes the heart grow fonder and long for home.’

‘Can the reason why the English are great colonists be that they make their own scandals wherever they go?’

—It should not be necessary to be clever to retain one’s property.

—Irishmen like to be melancholy. It is the national pastime to brood full of black bile. I remembered the dark figures in the Connemara pub. Even their drink is black! They chew on melancholy as a cow on the cud.

—‘No one has taken the trouble to ask if the adaptation of the British Parliamentary system will suit our people, or if it is adaptable at all.’

—One of the constituents of courage is contempt.

—‘What amazes me,’ said George, ‘is that the Germans are sending over professors of English to trace out the imaginary itinerary of Joyce’s imaginary Mr Bloom through the different pubs he is supposed to have visited. They all miss the one that Joyce liked.’

‘The Bloom that never was on sea or land! He is quite unconvincing. A mere chorus to Joyce.’

* * * * *

August 18: Nettie Palmer

August 19: Frank McCourt

Ogden Nash

August 20: Robert Herrick

* * * * *

Robert Herrick is remembered for that line

‘Gather ye rosebuds while ye may’ which isn’t, in its theme, unique to him. Edmund Spenser’s ‘Gather therefore the Rose, whilst yet is prime,’ suggests a popular image. But the bits of Herrick’s poems which turn up as quotes here and there—

So Good-luck came, and on my roofe did light

Like noyse-lesse Snow, or as the dew of night:

Not all at once, but gently, as the trees

Are, by the Sun-beams, realiz’d by degrees.

‘The Coming of Good Luck’ or

Lord, Thou hast given me a cell

Wherein to dwell,

A little house, whose humble roof

Is weather proof.

—suggests a poet of great simplicity, kindness, and sincerity. So would that be a realistic image of Robert Herrick? My first surprise when I looked briefly at his life was to discover that he wasn’t Scottish as I had always assumed. Herrick, 1591–1674, was born in London and eventually became a clergyman in Devon.

And what of Herrick’s most famous poem?

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,

Old Time is still a flying:

And this same flower that smiles to day,

To morrow will be dying.

The glorious Lamp of Heaven, the Sun,
The higher he's a getting;
The sooner will his Race be run,
And nearer he's to Setting.

That Age is best, which is the first,
When Youth and Blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times, still succeed the former.

Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, goe marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may for ever tarry.

That one verse suggests death but Herrick, by calling it 'To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time' implies something quite different. And his use of imagery such as flowers, particularly roses, and sun are a reminder that although he was an ordained minister his lack of preferment had, probably, quite a lot to do with an unorthodox, even pagan, delight in the natural world.

Nicolas Bentley in *A Choice of Ornaments* presents a kind of autobiography using excerpts from some of his favourite writers. He calls himself a miscellanist. Perhaps I could use the same word for myself but it doesn't really attract ...

"Herrick invoked 'musique to becalme his fever' with these words:

*Charm me asleep, and melt me so
With thy Delicious Numbers;
That being ravisht, hence I goe
Away in easy slumbers.
Ease my sick head,
And make my bed,
Thou Power that canst sever
From me this ill:
And quickly still:
Though thou not kill
My Fever.*

*Thou sweetly canst convert the same
From a consuming fire,
Into a gentle-licking flame,
And make it thus expire.
Then make me weep
My paines asleep;
And give me such reposes,
That I, poore I,*

*May think, thereby,
I live and die
'Mongst Roses.*

*Fall on me like a silent dew,
Or like those Maiden shours,
Which, by the peepe of day, doe strew
A Baptisme o'er the flowers.
Melt, melt my paines,
With thy soft straines;
That having ease me given,
With full delight,
I leave this light;
And take my flight
For Heaven.*

The marvellous economy of Herrick's poetry is a perpetual wonder. With words and forms and images that are of the simplest he evokes sentiments that are among the most difficult to apprehend or to describe, of which the effects of listening to music are perhaps the most elusive. Not even Shakespeare can better express the sensation produced in one's mind by the cadence of a song or the gentle, melancholic strains of a lute. It is an art within an art, this faculty of interpreting one form of experience in terms of another. Ruskin demonstrates it in his analysis of Turner's art, and in a different sphere, Respighi in describing the fountains of Rome. It is instructive in the difficulties of this form of aesthetic interpretation to take the example of a writer of luxuriant imagination and exotic vocabulary who nevertheless fails where Herrick succeeds."

Susan Hill also takes readers through an interesting tour and chance to browse in her own library in *Howards End is on the Landing*. Among her books is David Cecil's *Library Looking Glass: A Personal Anthology* which she says he shaped loosely round the alphabet but that it is "an extraordinarily wide-ranging, surprising, varied and thought-provoking" collection of excerpts garnished with his "comments, observations, explanations, insights" and she opens it at random to find four lines from Herrick's poem 'To the Water Nymphs, Drinking at the Fountain':

Reach, with your whiter hands, to me
Some crystal of the spring;
And I about the cup shall see
Fresh lilies flourishing.

It seems to be Herrick's fate to be given a few lines here and a few lines there. This time she adds David Cecil's comments: "If Herrick had said 'white' instead of whiter' the charm of the first line would be lost. It is the use – now an obsolete use – of the comparative which makes this charm so compelling. It is an ambiguous charm; for, I suppose, that Herrick simply meant that the hands of the water nymphs were whiter than lilies. But the fact that this is only stated implicitly and elliptically suggests that they possess some supreme ultimate radiancy of whiteness, that they are whiter than anything else in the whole world."

* * * * *

August 21: Will Ogilvie
August 22: Ray Bradbury

August 23: Clifford Geertz
August 24: Jorge Luis Borges
William Wilberforce
Jean Rhys
August 25: Bret Harte
Thea Astley
August 26: Eleanor Dark
August 27: Theodore Dreiser
C. S. Forester
David Rowbotham

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C. S. Forester was best known for his Captain Hornblower books—until someone decided to turn his one-off novel *The African Queen* into a film—and sign up Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn. I assume Forester, who does not seem to have had the wariness about Hollywood that many other writers felt, was pleased to see his book brought to the screen but was he happy with what Hollywood did to it? Probably.

Katherine Hepburn wrote *The Making of The African Queen* and gave it the subtitle *How I went to Africa with Bogart, Bacall and Huston and almost lost my mind*. She begins the journey with:

“Then the telephone rang. Well, that’s what happens in our business. The telephone rings or a letter comes or flowers come with a card: May I call. This time it was the telephone.

“Hello, Miss Hepburn, I’m Sam Spiegel. I’m going to do a picture with John Huston—it’s by C. S. Forester and it’s called *The African Queen*. Have you read it?”

“No.”

“Shall I send it to you? I’m anxious to know how you feel about it.”

“Thank you. I’ll read it right off.”

Well, I read it. And it really made me sit up and take notice. Great part for me—Rosie—English—but that was O.K. I’d played a lot of English ladies. I called Sam.

“It’s fascinating. Who’s going to play what’s his—yes—Charlie Alnutt?”

“I’ll come to see you,” said Spiegel.

He came and we talked about all the possible men—all English—because Charlie was supposed to have a cockney accent.

Then Sam said, “What about Bogart—he could be Canadian.”

“Why not?”

“Now, looking back at that conversation—can you imagine anyone but Bogie playing that part” He was really it—hook, line and sinker.

As he was leaving, Spiegel turned to me:

“Do you know Bogart?”

“No,” I answered.

“Do you know Huston?”

“No, Mr. Spiegel, I don’t.”

“He’s really anxious to have you do it.”

“That’s very nice,” I answered.

Spiegel started out the door. I stopped him.

“Where, Mr. Spiegel—Africa?”

“Well,” he hesitated, “we’ll see—”

“Oh no, sir,” I said, “must be Africa—”

He smiled at me. "I'm so pleased that you like the book—"
"Yes, sir. So am I. But remember, it's Africa!" ' "

She got her wish. The film was made in what was then the Belgian Congo and finished in London.

And C. S. Forester, unlike many writers who went to Hollywood and found it a miserable experience, went regularly and thoroughly enjoyed his times there. I assume this means he was also happy with what Hollywood did with his book. Unhappy writers tended to stay away unless they were tied in to unbreakable contracts. But he did apparently get homesick and this is why he started writing his Hornblower books. If he couldn't be in England in person he could be there in imagination. And this also led to him writing a curious 'lost' mystery, *The Pursued*, which was set in London. He found a publisher for it but decided it would draw attention away from his second Hornblower book. So it languished in manuscript until in 1999 Dr Colin Blogg and Lawrence Brewer founded the C. S. Forester Society and heard that a C. S. Forester manuscript was coming up for auction in London. The book they acquired was this mysterious forgotten novel. In 2011 Penguin published it.

The Pursued seems quite unlike anything else of C. S. Forester's, no whiff of the sea, no odd couple facing a fraught future, but I can see why he chose not to go ahead with publication. It is a sad sordid little domestic tragedy over which the ghosts of Thompson and Bywaters hang, remote from any sense of swashbuckling heroes and history-changing battles. Marjorie Grainger comes home and finds her sister Dot who was baby-sitting has killed herself by putting her head in the gas oven. But the post mortem shows Dot was three months pregnant. Both Marjorie and her mother Mrs Clair gradually put the small clues together and realize Marjorie's husband Ted was both the seducer and the murderer. Marjorie cannot bring herself to do anything which would brand her children's father a murderer but Mrs Clair furious at the murder of her daughter begins plotting revenge. Marjorie meets and falls in love with her mother's lodger George Ely. The whole tragic story comes to a climax when Ted says he will bash their daughter Anne if Marjorie will not have sex with him. She shrinking from him rings her mother in panic. Mrs Clair and Mr Ely come round and in the ensuing confrontation they kill Ted. In the hope of making it look like an accident they try to take him down to put his body on the railway line but they are caught by police. Mrs Clair and Marjorie manage to escape but they eventually accept there is no escape and give themselves up. We are not told their fate but the book ends with a neighbour being "the only eyewitness to the arrest of the notorious Mrs Grainger. To accentuate the importance of this, in her subsequent descriptions of it, she always maintained that of course Mrs Grainger was certainly guilty, and that the jury's verdict was utterly incorrect. Not many people agreed with her."

They are all very ordinary suburban people, not well off, not educated, but Forester creates a claustrophobic intensely emotional tragedy which stays in the mind.

* * * * *

Forester was better known for his Captain Hornblower series. So how many devotees of *The African Queen* knew its origin? Hornblower in the British Navy rackets round in the Napoleonic era but curiously he misses the Battle of Trafalgar. I have just been reading the book Forester was writing when he died, *Hornblower and the Crisis*. It isn't a good introduction to the series. There are some gaps and incoherencies that Forester might have repaired if he hadn't had a stroke. Yet it does have a sense of authenticity to it. He obviously had done a lot of research.

But Bernard Cornwell in his introduction asks a curious question: "One mystery is why the French fought Trafalgar at all. They had no need to, and the Spanish had even less. It was, for the combined Franco-Spanish fleet, a disaster, and an entirely avoidable one." As Napoleon prepared to

invade England the plan was for Admiral Villeneuve to pretend to attack Britain's colonies in the West Indies and thus lure the British fleet westwards, leaving the Channel clear. But the Franco-Spanish fleet after successfully luring Nelson to the Caribbean came back to Cadiz rather than the Channel. Napoleon meanwhile had abandoned his invasion plans and turned to his campaign for continental expansion. Villeneuve need only have taken his fleet safely in to the Mediterranean, perhaps to Marseilles, and avoided conflict completely. Instead he skulked round Cadiz until Nelson got back from the West Indies and then half-heartedly engaged the British. It was a disaster for Villeneuve and his fleet was destroyed. But it achieved little for the British, no territory, no real setback let alone a ringing victory against Napoleon, and only the comfort that invasion, given the loss of ships, would not be back on the agenda. Yet I still hear and read that Trafalgar saved Britain from invasion by Napoleon. Perhaps it is the need to keep Nelson as some shining golden hero. But given the failures, the vacillations, and the confusions of Villeneuve Nelson did not have an adversary worthy of this image.

* * * * *

Forester ends his book of the odd couple Charlie Alnutt and Rose Sayer thrown together with, "So they left the Lake and began the long journey to Matadi and marriage. As to whether or not they lived happily ever after is not easily decided."

Hepburn ends her book with, "Now what do you suppose ever happened to Charlie and Rosie? Where did they live? Did they stay in Africa? I always thought they must have. And lots of little Charlies and Rosies. And lived happily ever after. Because that's what we wanted them to do. And every summer they take a trip in the old *Queen*—and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh....."

* * * * *

August 28: Johann von Goethe

Sheridan Le Fanu

Janet Frame

August 29: John Locke

August 30: Mary Shelley

August 31: Charmian Clift

September 1: Edgar Rice Burroughs

Eve Langley

September 2: D. K. Broster

Eugene Field

September 3: Alison Lurie

Caryl Churchill

September 4: Mary Renault

September 5: Arthur Koestler

Victor Daley

Sir Walter Alexander Raleigh

September 6: Robert Pirsig

John Dalton

September 7: C. J. Dennis

Nancy Keesing

September 8: Siegfried Sassoon

Ann Beattie

September 9: James Hilton

Phyllis Whitney

September 10: H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)
 Franz Werfel
 September 11: O. Henry
 September 12: H. L. Mencken
 Michael Ondaatje
 Michael Dransfield
 September 13: Roald Dahl
 September 14: Eric Bentley
 Baron von Humboldt
 September 15: James Fenimore Cooper
 Agatha Christie
 September 16: Wilfred Burchett
 James McPherson
 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: Phillip Dormer Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield
 September 23: Baroness Orczy
 September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald
 September 25: Jessica Anderson
 Kenneth Mackenzie
 William Faulkner
 September 26: T. S. Eliot
 Mary Hannay Foott
 Andrea Dworkin
 Martin Heidegger

* * * * *

A potted history: Mary Hannay Foott, 1846 – 1918, born in Scotland came to Australia 1853 with her parents and trained as a teacher in Melbourne, then became an artist, and wrote poems and stories to support herself. She married Thomas Wade Foott in 1874 and came to live in south west Queensland three years later. Her husband died in 1884 leaving her with two young sons and she opened a school in Brisbane and wrote articles and poems and edited the *Queenslander's* women's page for ten years. She sometimes used the pen name La Quenouille. She published *Where the Pelican Builds and Other Poems* in 1885 and *Morna Lee and Other Poems* in 1890.

William Wilde in *Australian Poets & Their Words* wrote of her most famous poem 'Where the Pelican Builds' that "it records, from the viewpoint of the waiting women, the tragedy that so frequently struck the pioneer families – the loss of loved ones who were drawn by the lure of the land further out."

The horses were ready, the rails were down,
 But the riders lingered still—
 One had a parting word to say,
 And one had his pipe to fill.
 Then they mounted, one with a granted prayer,
 And one with a grief unguessed.

‘We are going,’ they said as they rode away,
‘Where the pelican builds her nest!’

They had told us of pastures wide and green,
To be sought past the sunset’s glow;
Of rifts in the ranges by opal lit;
And gold ’neath the river’s flow.
And thirst and hunger were banished words
When they spoke of the unknown West;
No drought they dreaded, no flood they feared,
Where the pelican builds her nest!

The creek at the ford was but fetlock deep
When we watched them crossing there;
The rains have replenished it twice since then,
And thrice has the rock lain bare.
But the waters of Hope have flowed and fled,
And never from blue hill’s breast
Come back—by the sun and the sands devoured—
Where the pelican builds her nest.”

* * * * *

But behind that brief potted history what of the real Mary? It cannot have been easy to have made a living by her pen in 19th century Australia. I noticed the Glenorchy Library was getting rid of their series of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, wanting everyone to go on-line, so I bought the set. There are of course deficiencies; it is about white men doing things in Australia, predominantly, rather than an overview of invaders and invaded, men and women, but it does have an occasional entry for a white woman. It says of Foott’s most famous poem that “much anthologized” it “uses the legend that the best land outback is where the pelican builds her nest, that is, at the end of the rainbow. It was possibly occasioned by the tragic fate of the Prout brothers. For the *Queenslander* she wrote some poems but mostly contributed notes, articles and reports.”

She had the sadness of losing one son in the First World War and the other one in the Second World War. But the ADB says of her, “From her letters and the memories of her elder son, Mary Hannay Foott emerges as a woman of great courage and initiative. Despite her hardships and difficulties she preserved a bright vitality. Though a minor poet, she was probably the first woman in Queensland to make a mark in Australian literature.”

And as I browsed in my ‘new’ set of the ADB I came upon several other interesting women who don’t deserve to be forgotten. Take, for example, Minard Fannie Crommelin, born in 1881 and died in 1972. Now the only Crommelins I had ever heard of were Louis and his family who are credited with developing the linen industry in Ireland. Where would the world be without Irish linen? But it had a down side. By pushing the Irish to grow flax instead of sheep it undermined competition from the wool trade. The ADB doesn’t link Minard to this family but says she too was of Huguenot descent. She went to work in the post office in NSW at twelve and over the years relieved in more than a hundred country post offices. She became passionate about conservation, joining the International Society for the Protection of Nature, the Royal Zoological Society and other groups. She was a founding member of the Warrah Sanctuary on the Hawkesbury River. “As a ranger, she constantly protested against thefts of wild flowers, shooting of native fauna, careless back-burning by local

residents and ‘improvements’ such as a sewerage disposal plant and a rifle range on her ‘waratah patch’.” She faced hostility from local residents and when she offered her property to the fore-runner of the CSIRO they declined. But in December 1946 “the Senate of the University of Sydney accepted it as a biological and natural field station for research and named it after her.” She tried to get support for a ‘national botanic garden, fauna park and arboretum’ and a national ecological conservation authority. When governments failed to act she put her own money into a Fund for conservation.

So why do we know so little about women who deserve to be remembered?

*

The other side of Mrs Foott was her journalism. I have just been reading Audrey Tate’s biography of trailblazing journalist and editor Pat Jarrett, *Fair Comment*, and she takes a brief journey into the past as women like Alice Henry, Mary Gaunt, and Mary Gilmore worked hard to make their mark in the men’s world of 19th century Australian newspapers. Tate writes, “The first Australian women journalists were writers of fiction serials who were then able to interest editors in non-fictional articles. Because society frowned on their involvement in the profession, most early women journalists were forced to use pseudonyms, and they are therefore hard to trace. Yet it is clear that, given the opportunity, women journalists proved they were as capable as their male counterparts. For example, in the 1850s, still only in her early twenties, Adelaide Eliza Ironside was said to have been a leader-writer for the Sydney press. Starting in the 1860s, Anna Blackwell spent over thirty years in the coveted position of Paris correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Louisa Atkinson was the first native-born woman to exploit the newspaper and periodical market, publishing articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Sydney Mail* in the 1860s. She was followed by a handful of others. Emily Manning also wrote under the pseudonym of ‘Australie’ in the 1870s, and was praised by the *Sydney Morning Herald* for her incisiveness and honesty of purpose. The novelist ‘Tasma’—Jessie Couvreur—was a prolific freelance journalist for many years, writing for the Melbourne *Australasian*, then, after her second husband’s death, taking over his prestigious position as Brussels correspondent for *The Times*. Lucinda Gullett wrote as ‘Humming Bee’ for the *Daily Telegraph* until she moved to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. When she died in 1900, she was described as a pioneer woman journalist who encouraged other women to enter the profession. Mary Hannay Foott, one of the first women staff journalists in Australia on the *Queenslander*, was an equally important figure.”

And you only have to pull up Trove, the digitized archive of Australian newspapers, and put in La Quenouille to bring back her articles from a hundred years ago. For instance, although she wrote the expected articles on what women were wearing at the Lord Mayor’s Ball 14 September 1889, and in her column ‘The Housekeeper’ she wrote things like ‘Recipes for Cooking Rabbits’ which included Rabbit Pie and Jugged Rabbit, she also spread her interests beyond the traditional clothes and meals of a woman’s sphere. In 1893 she had an article on ‘Ivy Day’. What, I wondered, was Ivy Day? It was the 8th October “the anniversary of the death of Charles Stuart Parnell”. It suggests a woman of wide sympathies ...

* * * * *

September 27: Frederick T. Macartney

Jim Thompson

September 28: Ellis Peters

Kate Douglas Wiggin

Prosper Mérimée

September 29: Elizabeth Gaskell

September 30: Truman Capote

October 1: Louis Untermeyer

Tim O'Brien
October 2: Graham Greene
Wilfrid Wilson Gibson

* * * * *

Matthew Hollis in *Now All Roads Lead to France; The Last Years of Edward Thomas* wrote, "After W. B. Yeats and John Masefield, Wilfrid Gibson was the most popular poet of his day. He was an affable character, cherished for his kindness and his warmth (D. H. Lawrence: 'I think Gibson is one of the clearest and most lovable personalities I know'), and Frost took to his unpretentious style instantly. 'He's just one of the plain folks with none of the marks of the literary poseur about him – none of the wrong-headedness of the professional literary man.' The two became such fast friends that by November Frost had announced Gibson as the closest of his peers in England, and a finer poet than the man he had briefly befriended, Ezra Pound. But Gibson had a streak of vanity that would soon undo him in Frost's eyes, and he would later imply that the American had called unannounced to push his work upon him. Frost would come to detect a superior tone in Wilfrid Gibson that would later enrage him, but in the immediate months ahead their friendship would blossom.

"Frost saw in Gibson's mature poetry a mirror of his own: the verse of a 'people's poet' who concerned himself with the lives of working folk and who, in Elkin Mathews, had found himself a publisher of repute from the start. Yet Gibson's first verses, published in his early twenties, had been cruelly exposed when he sent them out into the sharp-toothed world of literary London. Where a young Edward Thomas, just six months older than Gibson and busily making his own name as a critic, lay in wait.

" 'He seems to us to be nearly a perfect minor poet – without the intellectual equipment for originality,' wrote Thomas in a damning first review in 1902."

So what was wrong? Gibson wrote sympathetically about women, about working people, but Hollis suggests he was lazy, careless, and lacked an 'inner ear', that thing that turns prose in short lines into poetry.

"Wilfrid Wilson Gibson published the most widely read book of war poetry by a non-combatant, but his popularity would not endure. In 1934 he wrote to Frost to say, 'I am one of those unlucky writers whose books have predeceased him'; he did not write a single line of verse for the final twelve years of his life."

Perhaps his private life also played a role? Penelope Fitzgerald in *Charlotte Mew and her friends* wrote of Edward Marsh and Harold Monro and their creation, *Georgian Poetry*: "Meanwhile they printed 5,000 copies of *Georgian Poetry 1911 – 12* and sold in the end, 15,000. With only an office boy and a lady secretary to help him at the Bookshop, Monro had more work than he could manage. The office boy was so absent-minded that the kettle, which was a slow boiler, was named after him; then Wilfrid Gibson, the simplest and most delightful of poets, disorganized the business by eloping with the secretary."

But Robert Giddings in *The War Poets* says of him, "Seeking inspiration from Brooke's work, however, did not preclude originality. Wilfrid Gibson was a very close friend of Brooke's and a member of Edward Marsh's circle too, but his war poetry has an unusual quality, written as it was from the point of view of the ordinary foot soldier (Gibson served as a private in the infantry). His was a voice from the ranks and his poetry lacks the declamatory, self-consciously chivalric quality of much of the early First World War period. Before the war his poetry had been concerned with the lives of industrial workers and village labourers, and the themes of his war poetry can be seen as an extension of these interests, capturing and rendering poignant the fleeting moments of experience:

"We ate our breakfast lying on our backs

Because the shells were screeching overhead."

And this is mirrored in Dominic Hibberd's biography *Wilfred Owen*: "In December he studied books by two pioneers of the Georgian style, John Masefield and Wilfrid Gibson. Gibson's *Battle* (1915), with its brief, simple poems about the psychological experience of ordinary soldiers, had been the first book of its kind, providing a model for subsequent work by the anthology's trio of young soldier poets, Sassoon, Graves and Robert Nichols."

* * * * *

"There's nothing as entertaining as a catfight between poets. Poe's arch nemesis was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the eminent author of "Song of Hiawatha" and other poems. For reasons still unclear nearly two centuries later, Poe went from fawning admiration to outright hostility toward the man, his poetry, and his character. In 1840 he wrote a scathing review of Longfellow's latest poem, accusing him of plagiarizing it from Alfred Lord Tennyson. When that provoked no response, Poe claimed that Longfellow had ripped off one of his poems as well. The so-called "Longfellow War" was on. Unfortunately for Poe, it was nothing but a waste of ammunition. He never produced a shred of evidence that Longfellow was a plagiarist, and the New England poet serenely refused to respond to the younger man's ad hominem attacks. After Poe's death, Longfellow had nothing but nice things to say about him, adding: "The harshness of his criticisms I have never attributed to anything but the irritation of a sensitive nature, chafed by some indefinite sense of wrong." Oh, smack!"

Robert Schnakenberg in *Secret Lives of Great Authors*.

* * * * *

It wasn't a 'catfight' but when I came upon W. H. Auden's scathing comments upon Stephen Spender's timid choice as favourite poet "W—" I naturally wondered who W was and wished that he had provided two initials. But when I came upon that mention of Wilfred Gibson I had the sudden and inexplicable sense that this was the poet Spender meant. I cannot prove that but I was interested in what Hollis had to say and thought I would keep an eye out for Gibson's work. For such a popular and saleable poet this curiously has not been easy. I came upon one poem in the very large *The Faber Book of War Poetry*; a piece called 'Breakfast':

We ate our breakfast lying on our backs
Because the shells were screeching overhead.
I bet a rasher to a loaf of bread
That Hull United would beat Halifax
When Jimmy Stainthorpe played full-back instead
Of Billy Bradford. Ginger raised his head
And cursed, and took the bet, and dropt back dead.
We ate our breakfast lying on our backs
Because the shells were screeching overhead.

And another piece called 'In the Ambulance':

Two rows of cabbages,
Two rows of curly-greens,
Two rows of early peas,
Two of kidney-beans.

That's what he keeps muttering,
Making such a song,
Keeping other chaps awake
The whole night long.

Both his legs are shot away,
And his head is light,
So he keeps on muttering
All the blessed night:

Two rows of cabbages,
Two rows of curly-greens,
Two rows of early peas,
Two of kidney-beans.

And Giddings provides several more including 'Mad':
Neck-deep in mud,
He mowed and raved—
He who had braved
The field of blood—
And as a lad
Just out of school
Yelled—*April Fool!*
And laughed like mad.

I can see that his laconic simplicity might not have appealed to poets and readers steeped in the traditions of lyric poetry. Philip Larkin putting together *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* said of Gibson that he “*never wrote a good poem in his life*. Grim thought.” Yet he put in six of Gibson’s poems. And that vexed question lurks. What *is* a good poem? A popular poem? A quoted poem? An anthologised poem? A poem which finds a wide audience? A poem which can speak to later generations? A poem of perfect rhythm? A poem which evokes an emotional response?

Gibson too had produced his share of more traditional poetry, bringing out his first book *Mountain Lovers* in 1902 and it is possible that in the flood of Georgian-era poetry this had not impressed Auden.

We who are left, how shall we look again
Happily on the sun or feel the rain
Without remembering how they who went
Ungrudgingly and spent
Their lives for us loved, too, the sun and rain?

A bird among the rain-wet lilac sings—
But we, how shall we turn to little things
And listen to the birds and winds and streams
Made holy by their dreams,
Nor feel the heart-break in the heart of things?
‘Lament’

Gibson has not been completely forgotten. The other day I treated myself to some old Dr Who videos including ‘Horror of Fang Rock’ and the ending has a lighthouse abandoned with several dead bodies in it, their cause of death mysterious to whoever might eventually find them, and Tom Baker quoting Gibson in his magnificent voice, “Of three men’s fate/We found no trace/In any time, in any place/A door ajar/And an untouched meal/And an over-toppled chair.” I must go and

hunt for the complete poem.

* * * * *

October 3: James Herriot

October 4: Damon Runyon

Hugh McCrae

October 5: Václav Havel

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Reading through *Kenneth Tynan Letters*, edited by Kathleen Tynan, I came to the conclusion that reading lots of someone's letters is not a gripping pastime. True, there are occasional little curiosities such as this one:

"If possible, it should be an English-speaking premiere. There would be little point in reading a play that was already available in print. There's a new play by the brilliant young Czech, Vaclav Havel, called THE MEMORANDUM, which might fit the bill." 18/10/1965.

I had thought of Havel as a novelist and a president. But was he also an occasional, or indeed a prolific playwright?

Timothy Garton Ash in his collection of essays *The Uses of Adversity* describes Havel as, "a short, stocky man with curly blond hair; his moustache and lower face remind me of a friendly walrus. He is dressed entirely in shades of damask—slippers, cord trousers, and a T-shirt that declares TEMPTATION IS GREAT. (His latest play is called *Temptation*.) He is warm, intense, a concentration of nervous energy. He tells me the police turned up yesterday evening and have been there ever since" (he resorted to such things as hiding manuscripts in trees to defeat the police) and says, "In autumn 1979 the playwright Václav Havel and four other members of the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS) were themselves unjustly prosecuted and summarily convicted, despite worldwide protests. Havel was released from prison only last year (1983), seriously ill. He described to me the oppressive police surveillance under which he now lives: the threat of a house search hanging over him whenever he sits down at the typewriter; the knowledge that every visitor is photographed and every conversation bugged; police narks following him wherever he goes—even into the sauna." He came through this to become president, like other inspiring ex-prisoners such as Xanana Gusmão and Nelson Mandela.

In prison the only writing he could do was one letter a week to his wife (later published as *Letters to Olga*). Ash says, "What makes this book so compelling is the incidental detail of prison life—the elaborate rituals that surround the drinking of tea, toasting the New Year in with a foaming glass of soluble aspirin—and the intense personal detail of his relationship with his wife" and in prison he began mulling on a play that would be a modern version of Dr Faustus. Ash says of the resulting play *Temptation*, "The dénouement is desperately predictable, and predictably political: The Mephisto figure (called Fistula) turns out to be working for the secret police. Despite some grimly amusing dialogue ... most of the action is so carefully plotted, and so obviously pointed, as to be quite schematic. It feels like a plan for a play rather than the play itself. Not surprising, again, when you consider that it was planned and replanned through almost four years in prison."

*

And quite unexpected people have drawn inspiration from him. I came across this in *Exiles* by Michael Frost. "In Craig Van Gelder's book *Confident Witness—Changing World*, contributor Mary Jo Leddy reports that the poet-president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, was asked to account for the remarkable success of the so-called Velvet Revolution against the communists in the former Czechoslovakia. Havel answered like this: "We had our parallel society. And in that parallel society we wrote our plays and sang our songs and read our poems until we knew the truth so well that we

could go out to the streets of Prague and say, ‘We don’t believe your lies anymore’—and communism *had* to fall.” So, for Leddy, in a post-Christendom culture the church must worship as a similarly parallel society. Our gathering together, then, is an opportunity to speak our language, to read our narratives of God at work, to sing authentic hymns of the faith in all kinds of styles, to chant and pour out our prayers until we know the truth so well that we can go out to the world around us and invade that world with the message of our friend Jesus. The people of the Velvet Revolution became a parallel society precisely because of their commitment to the mission of overthrowing the communist regime. The mission gave rise to the parallel community, which in turn gave rise to plays, songs, and poems of the revolution.”

*

There was a thorny problem in regard to the Czech language. This had been resolved well before Havel began writing but it took decades of conflict to come anywhere near to resolution. Michael Steen in *The Lives and Times of The Great Composers* wrote, “The language revival developed like one of Rossini’s magnificent crescendos. At the start of the 19th century, although the German language was deeply entrenched, Czech was by no means dead. Towards the end of the previous century, some poems in Czech were published, the first Czech newspaper was inaugurated and the professorship of Czech language and literature at Prague University was founded. Major operas were performed in Czech, such as *Don Giovanni*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Der Freischütz* and *La Muette de Portici*. The first opera known for certain to have been composed specifically to a Czech text was in 1826, a simple Singspiel called *The Tinker*; it was composed by a conductor at the Estates Theatre, František Škroup. In 1834, his comic opera, *The Fiddlers’ Festival*, had its first performance; one of its songs was used for the Czech national anthem.

“It was, however, in the second half of the century that the nationalist movement really took off. It was given a considerable boost in 1860 when the Habsburg emperor issued the so-called October Diploma, which, although primarily directed at Hungary, signaled a U-turn in the repressive policies adopted since the revolutionary time some twelve years earlier: the attempt to impose absolutist rule had failed. Certain of the restrictions imposed after the 1848 Revolution were now removed. Prague civic authorities started doing business in Czech in 1860. From 1862, education in Czech started in all primary schools in Prague. From 1863, the Prague polytechnic was teaching in both Czech and German.” This makes it sound like an irresistible force but the place of German in the national life did not diminish without conflict and division.

* * * * *

John Keane wrote in *Václav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts*, “His earliest – still unappreciated - plays like *You’ve Got Your Whole Life Ahead of You* and *Hitchhiking* matured into award-winning side-splitting plays like *The Memorandum*, which granted him the gift of global fame for defending the view that theatre should raise more questions than it answers, that it should make people laugh at unaccountable power, and that theatre should democratically unnerve, not soothe or patronize its audiences.”

Havel was born into a democracy, lived through the years of the Nazi Occupation, then the Communist era, before seeing democracy again. And although he certainly wrote prose and poetry it was as a playwright that he made his mark. This is understandable. There is an immediacy about plays and he could use satire to say all kinds of things about the government and the system. He had two strong-minded women in his life, his mother Božena and his wife Olga, to help him through the worst times (which isn’t the same as saying they got on). But he comes across as an optimist and a man passionate about his writing and the theatre.

Unlike Mandela and Gusmão who wrote simply to record their experiences he found himself in

power as the writer on the receiving end of the satire and the absurd as he became as all presidents must, a wheeler-dealer, a compromiser, a person surrounded by players with other ideas and other agendas, and he found himself presiding over the break-up of Czechoslovakie into two countries. That it was done peacefully was to his credit but I think he also saw it as his failure. Probably some people make better dissidents than leaders. And however difficult that ‘parallel community’ he lived in it with integrity, skill, hope, success, courage, and as a figure of inspiration. Whatever criticisms are directed at his presidency no one can take that away from him.

So why did both Keane and Tynan like *The Memorandum*? Keane says of it, “The air was so ripe with whiffs of confused hypocrisy that Havel decided to make it the target of his wonderfully absurdist satire *The Memorandum*. The ribald, two-part, twelve-scene drama unfolds within the offices of a large department that is somehow connected to a larger, undefined, bleak bureaucracy. The stage set of Jan Grossmen’s first production of the play at the Theatre on the Balustrade included special fire extinguishers with removable coats of arms, one for each new director; filing cabinets containing nothing but clerks’ cutlery, wrapped in plastic bags, withdrawn and replaced with chromatic precision; an empty can, front stage, into which water drips with deadening regularity; and contrastingly loud snatches of bouncy music, resembling some terrible mixture of *Nabucco* and *Lohengrin*, designed as a counterpoint, to make the audience laugh. Laugh it certainly did when the department director, Josef Gross, discovers in his morning mail a memorandum written in a strangely jumbled language. He is surprised to find that his subordinates already know that the language exists. It is called Ptydepe. So Gross tries to have the memorandum translated, without success. His secretary hasn’t yet grasped the grammar of Ptydepe, while his other subordinates haven’t been authorized to attempt the translation. Entangled in red tape, feeling ever more isolated, Gross slowly realizes that he has been disempowered within his department, that there has been a plot behind his back, and that his deputy Baláš, is responsible for the introduction of the strange new *lingua franca*.” The language is meant to do away with all ambiguities, imprecisions, confusions, by using simple clear words for the most used concepts; big words are only for those things which are never likely to need memos, like ‘wombats’. But ... like all languages Ptydepe refuses to remain stationary, it changes, grows, develops its own ambiguities ...

“It is easy to see that *The Memorandum* is a satirical attack on an imaginary world – a world only a few notches away from Havel’s current reality – defined by the absence of communicative interaction and the complete destruction of freely expressed public opinion, that is, a pure totalitarian order in which the exercise of power no longer needs to be legitimated because nobody is capable of speaking and interacting with others.”

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- October 6: Hendrik Adamson
Caroline Gordon
- October 7: Thomas Keneally
(Archbishop) Desmond Mpilo Tutu
- October 8: John Cowper Powys
- October 9: Miguel de Cervantes
- October 10: R. K. Narayan
- October 11: François Mauriac
- October 12: James McAuley
‘John O’Brien’ (P.J. Hartigan)
- October 13: Guy Boothby

October 14: Miles Franklin

October 15: C. P. Snow

Virgil

* * * * *

In old books with boys in them those boys were often set to construe a certain number of lines from Virgil. I assumed this meant they were set some Latin homework but the finer details of 'construe' were lost on me. Also lost was the more important question: why was it always Virgil? And sometimes it was girls as in "A tall, slim girl, 'half-past sixteen,' with serious grey eyes and hair which her friends called auburn, had sat down on the broad red sandstone doorstep of a Prince Edward Island farmhouse one ripe afternoon in August, firmly resolved to construe so many lines of Virgil.' As in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Avonlea*. And Richard Conolly introducing R. D. Williams' *An introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* writes, "In the 1920s the schoolboy son in Sinclair Lewis' novel *Babbitt* is studying Virgil at school as a matter of course. When I first read the novel in the 1940s I hardly noticed that detail. In the 1970s it strikes me as amazing."

Graham McInnes in *The Road to Gundagai* goes in to more detail. "I didn't meet the full force of his authority until the celebration of the Bimillenary of Virgil. For this occasion my grandfather had, at Dr. Leeper's request, written an eclogue in which two shepherds, idling the time away in the Mantuan Hills, learn of the sad event from a companion and then enlarge, in rustic measures, on the poet's achievement. This eclogue, which was of course written in Latin and in Iambic pentameters, was to be given a single performance before the Classical Association and its friends. Dr. Leeper had persuaded two keen young classics masters at Geelong Grammar (former undergraduates of Trinity) to take on the production. The headmaster of the school was also an enthusiastic classicist and was considered rather daring and modern because he persuaded the boys to act out episodes from the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*. A paper-and-canvas Troy was burned on a headland and the boys rowed across Corio Bay in racing fours disguised as triremes. A prefect in the role of Odysseus resisted, from the prow of a racing pair, the wiles of a fourth-form Circe who sat on a rock surrounded by maidens from the Senior School, and sent forth honeyed words in an as yet unbroken schoolboy soprano. Because of these pioneer efforts it was decided that the eclogue should be produced as a true theatrical entertainment and that the shepherds should dress in sandals, cross garters and goat-skins, or the nearest equivalent that could be found among Melbourne's theatrical costumiers."

A Bimillenary sounds rather impressive. So when was Virgil so honoured? As a millenary is a thousand years and as Virgil was born in 70 BC that would take two thousand years to 1930.

My dictionary defines construe as: "Interpret something in a particular way" from the Latin *construere* meaning 'heap together, build'.

Seamus Heaney in *Aeneid Book VI* says, "This translation of *Aeneid VI* is neither a "version" nor a crib: it is more like classics homework, the result of a lifelong desire to honour the memory of my Latin teacher at St. Columb's College, Father Michael McGlinchey ... The set text for our A-level exam in 1957 was *Aeneid IX* but McGlinchey was forever sighing, "Och, boys, I wish it were Book VI." ' The curious thing in there is that if the students were not allowed to come up with a "version" then who had produced the definitive *Aeneid*?

latet arbore opaca
aureas et foliis et lento vimine ramus,
Iunoni infernae dictus sacer; hunc tegit omnis
lucus et obscuris claudunt convallibus umbrae.

sed non ante datur telluris operta subire,
auricomos quam quis decerpserit arbore fetus.
hoc sibi pulchra suum ferri Proserpina munus
instituit; primo avulso non deficit alter
aureus, et simili frondescit virga metallo.
ergo alte vestige oculis et rite repertum
carpe manu; namque ipse volens facilisque sequetur,
si te fata vocant; aliter non viribus ullis
vincere nec duro poteris convellere ferro.

Hid in the thick of a tree is a golden bough,
Gold to the tips of its leaves and the base of its stem,
Sacred (tradition declares) to the queen of that place.
It is safe there, roofed in by forests, in the pathless
Shadowy valleys. No one is ever allowed
Down to earth's hidden places unless he has first
Plucked this sprout of fledged gold from its tree
And handed it over to fair Proserpina
To whom it belongs, by decree, her own special gift.
And when it is plucked, a second one grows every time
In its place, golden again, emanating
That same sheen and shimmer. Therefore look up
And search deep, and as soon as you find it
Take hold of it boldly and duly. If fate has called you,
The bough will come away in your hand.
Otherwise, no strength you muster will break it,
Nor the hardest forged blade lop it off.

Seamus Heaney

In a shady tree
Lies hidden a golden bough; gold are its leaves
And gold is its pliant stem, and holy 'tis held
To her who is Juno in realms that lie below earth.
This bough is concealed by the whole of the woodland, shut in
By shadows in dimly lit valleys. But no one may pass
To the secret places of earth, unless and until
He have plucked this gold-tressed growth away from the tree.
This has the fair Persephone duly ordained
To be brought as a gift to her. Tear the first one away,
And another as golden is found there, the branch bearing leaves
Of the same metal. So keep thine eyes watching above thee,
And when thou hast found it, pluck it away in thy hand –
Of itself it will freely and easily follow thy touch,
If fate so wills; otherwise with no power of thine
Canst thou ever attain it, or lop it with hard steel.

Michael Oakley

Clearly there are many translations, many ‘versions’, and who decides which one those students sitting down to their exam papers should accept as definitive?

* * * * *

“Virgil’s enigmatic appearance carries with it something of the aura of a fable and far-off legend, as – refusing to name himself – he lays before Dante a series of cryptic hints as to who he is.”

And ...

“Virgil, as Dante’s guide in the other world, exercises his powers of discourse on behalf of his pupil. Equally, as author of the Aeneid, he inspires in the author of the Commedia a confidence that cultures and texts can connect across the centuries, and thus be enlisted to explore and expand the possibilities of human relationship across time as well as in time. Measured against that standard, irrationality is a refusal to enter upon that communal endeavour in which discourse must always involve us.”

“Dante’s position in the canon of European literature is a peculiar one. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the poet has been recognized, with increasing confidence, as (to quote Ruskin) ‘the most central man in all the world’. Henry Cary, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and even Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow give colour to this view. The twentieth century, in its own more analytical and hard-headed way, added to this claim. Dante over the last eighty years has become an awe-inspiring but none the less practical model for writers as different as T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, Osip Mandelstam and Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Seamus Heaney, Primo Levi and Derek Walcott.”

Robin Kirkpatrick introducing *Dante’s Inferno*.

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“Early myth systems preceded writing, but once literacy spread, the old, oral mythologies were absorbed into the new medium, which at first simply recorded them—The Iliad existed in oral form before it was written down, we are told—and then imitated them, as Virgil did with The Aeneid. However, when people cease to believe that myths are literally true, believe-it-or-be-damned rituals cease to be based on them, “art” separates itself from the liturgy and ritual and iconography, and myths become hidden structural principles or else the subject matter in an art that is essentially allegorical or decorative.”

From *In Other Worlds* by Margaret Atwood.

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J. M. Coetzee called a lecture ‘What Is a Classic?’ taking his title from a lecture given by T. S. Eliot to the Virgil Society in London in 1944. “The title of the lecture was ‘What Is a Classic?’ and its aim was to consolidate and re-argue a case Eliot had long been advancing: that the civilization of Western Europe is a single civilization, that its descent is from Rome via the Church of Rome and the Holy Roman Empire, and that its originary classic must therefore be the epic of Rome, Virgil’s Aeneid. Each time this case was re-argued, it was re-argued by a man of greater public authority, a man who by 1944, as poet, dramatist, critic, publisher and cultural commentator, could be said to dominate English letters. This man had targeted London as the metropolis of the English-speaking world, and with a diffidence concealing ruthless singleness of purpose had made himself into the deliberately magisterial voice of that metropolis. Now he was arguing for Virgil as the dominant voice of metropolitan, imperial Rome and Rome, furthermore, imperial in transcendent ways that Virgil could not have expected to understand.”

It doesn’t seem to be the most tactful moment to be reminding people of imperial and expansionist Rome as people were fighting and sometimes dying to roll back any such imperial dreams

emanating from Rome. Perhaps, more importantly, in terms of history it was like trying to roll back the non-Classical tide as fewer and fewer school students chose to study Latin or to care very much about the writers and poets of Ancient Rome ...

* * * * *

“We decided to put the *Sortes Virgilianae* to the proof. Virgil through the Dark Ages was regarded as a necromancer. Some dim memory of his magical mouth flickered in the Central Darkness. And his book was used to foretell the future, for had he not foretold the Golden Age that Christianity was about to bring in his Fourth Eclogue?

“There are two ways in which a great poet may foretell the future. One by his aloofness from mundane affairs, which gives that distance which makes stars so fixed that they may be used as guides. Something afar from the question is necessary, why else should not a *sors* with a newspaper or a volume of Ella Wheeler Wilcox suffice? And the farther it be the vaguer and more mysterious is the atmosphere conjured up for prophesying. If a bridegroom as vacillating as was Panurge were to put his key into a volume of Shakespeare and to find that it rested on the first two lines of the first sonnet, need he ‘take counsel’ any more? And the second way which helps the first is the exultation which the muttering of great verse alone can give, an exultation which on those attuned can produce a magnification of soul which makes everything possible and the future pliable.”

Oliver St John Gogarty in *As I Was Going Down Sackville Street*.

Apart from esoteric questions about foretelling and prophesy I had a much simpler one. What do we know of Virgil and following on from that a much more personal one: what might I take from *The Aeneid*? The obvious one is admiration. That long before pens, paper, easily accessible libraries, not to mention typewriters, computers, the internet, he could compose his opus of three long and detailed works, the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics* (made up of four books of epic poetry about farming; cultivation of crops, trees and vines, livestock and bee-keeping) and *The Aeneid*, his verse epic in twelve books about the founding of Rome. Though he draws heavily on Homer and more local stories and legends it is still an impressive body of work. At times he had a scribe but he wrote much of it down himself and he is said to have recorded his way of working. Dr Mandy Green writes, “Virgil’s working methods shed some light on his poetic achievement in creating a monumental yet living structure that combines the balanced precision of architectural proportions with the dynamic vitality of organic growth. He is said to have completed a first draft in prose before transforming it into verse. Thereafter he would take up sections just as he fancied in no particular order, and, so as to avoid impeding the flow of inspiration, he left some parts unfinished, completing the verses with stop-gap measures that would act, Virgil jokingly commented, ‘like props to support the structure until the solid columns should arrive’.”

Was he like other writers of antiquity, more figures of speculation, assumption, myth-making or the joining together of scraps to try and make a whole, than flesh-and-blood people? Surprisingly quite a lot is known about Virgil, his life, his way of working, and the early history of his writings.

He was born to a farming family near Mantua and received some education in Cremona and Milan before going to Rome to study rhetoric. He was said to be “tall, dark and robustly built”. He was also something of a recluse and never married but he gained the support and admiration of the Emperor Octavian who was said to like hearing Virgil read his latest work to him; understandable perhaps as *The Aeneid* though it doesn’t pretend that an empire can be gained without war and suffering was also a paean to the greatness of Rome and its ruler ... He seems to have seen himself doing for the Romans what Homer had done for the Greeks. Virgil died on the 29th September in 19 B.C.

* * * * *

October 16: Oscar Wilde

Noah Webster
J. B. Bury
October 17: William Smith O'Brien
October 18: Terry McMillan
Pierre Choderlos de Laclos
October 19: Thomas Browne
Adam Lindsay Gordon
October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge
October 21: Ursula Le Guin
Francois Voltaire
October 22: E. Phillips Oppenheim
Doris Lessing

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One day I was browsing on a book stall at a school fair and I came upon a copy of Oppenheim's novel *The Great Impersonation*. It is a spy story with a difference. Everard Dominey is an English black sheep, a wastrel, sent away in the hope the tough open air life in the Colonies will make a man of him. In Africa he meets a German he knows, von Ragastein, who realizes they look and sound very similar. The German sees the chance to take on Dominey's persona and spy on England with impunity. The book came out in 1920 but the action is set just before the First World War. It has its share of twists and turns. Will von Ragastein be exposed? What has happened to Dominey? What of the women in their lives? Although he is usually described as a writer of melodrama I found the book quite entertaining and although the twist in the ending is a little hard to believe in I thought it stood up quite well within the thin ranks of early spy novels.

* * * * *

I can understand people not knowing a child when it turns up many years later, for instance, a baby adopted out which turns up thirty years later to claim its biological mother. Unless there was something very special or unusual about the baby, such as a strangely-shaped birthmark, then it is very hard to know exactly how a baby will change as it grows. But I find it much harder to believe people would be fooled by a returning adult. It might be possible to fool everyone if it is only a very brief contact, such as in Agatha Christie's *After the Funeral*, but not living day by day with the Prodigal Son. Because it is more than someone's looks. The timbre of the voice, the shape of their ears, the way their hair curls, their little mannerisms, the shape of their teeth, how they walk ... The most famous 'returnee' I suppose was the Tichborne Claimant and the whole long saga raised more questions than it ever answered. After all, why would a butcher in Wagga Wagga suddenly claim to be a long-lost heir unless there were compelling reasons to feel that? And why did he continue with his claim all the way through calumny, derision, and disaster? And why did his 'mother' believe absolutely in him? The claim that she was desperate to find her son doesn't seem a good enough reason to claim a man almost everyone else in the family believed was an imposter ... That she was mentally unstable, possibly more than unstable, may go some way to explaining her behaviour.

The other day I came across a book called *The Man Who Lost Himself* by Robyn Annear and thought it might resolve some of my questions. It is a fascinating read and it is a reminder that a number of people including the Claimant himself hoped to make some money. But it leaves many questions unanswered, principally of course the one that can never be answered now: what did people *really* think when they met him? And what did the simple uneducated girl he had married in Wagga Wagga think when he put himself forward as Sir Roger? Did she really want to be Lady Tichbourne? It seems not. And when did he realize he simply couldn't win? Because if he became the heir his massive

debts would have bankrupted the estate, which was already in a parlous state, (described by *The Times* as ‘that not much beyond shells will be left to the Tichbourne baronet when the oyster is opened.’) and if he lost there was a good chance he would end up in a debtor’s prison. But he was an exhibitionist and I suspect he actually enjoyed being the most famous man in England for a little while.

And his lawyer Edward Kenealy was also an exhibitionist. Michael Roe wrote an interesting book about him, *Kenealy and the Tichbourne Cause*, in which he presents him as an ambitious loquacious charismatic Irishman whose talents were never quite sufficient to bring him the success he longed for. As a writer, a poet, a potential politician, as a lawyer, there was always the feeling of someone who didn’t have either the ability or the steadiness of purpose to achieve the rewards he believed were his due. But the Tichbourne case undoubtedly brought him the high public profile he craved. Roe sums him up: “Kenealy was megalomaniac, greedy, bitter, resentful—in all, not a sympathetic character. This was true at least of the public man, although in family life a more benign quality had its play. Even ignoring that, Kenealy must yet command some respect. He was a man of sorrows no less because he sought so much.”

But going back to my question about recognizing people ... a small but to me telling piece of evidence was about his ears. Roger Tichbourne had almost no lobes on his ears, Arthur Orton, the Claimant, had pendulous ear lobes. No amount of ill health, travel, weight gain, or any other normal life process can cause you to grow your ear lobes. Apart from weighing your ears down with heavy metal ear rings the only thing that might help, plastic surgery, wasn’t around in the nineteenth century.

*

There was a famous earlier Tichborne, the 16th century poet Chidiock Tichborne who wrote a poem he called ‘Written the Night Before His Execution’:

My prime of youth is but a froste of cares:
My feaste of joy, is but a dishe of payne:
My cropp of corne, is but a field of tares:
And all my good is but vaine hope of gaine:
The daye is gone, and yet I sawe no sonn:
And nowe I live, and now my life is donn

The springe is paste, and yet it hath not sprong
The frute is deade, and yet the leaves are greene
My youth is gone, and yet I am but yonge
I sawe the world, and yet I was not seene
My threed is cutt, and yet it was not sponn
And nowe I lyve, and now my life is donn.

I saught my death, and founde it in my wombe
I lookte for life, and sawe it was a shade.
I trode the earth and knewe it was my Tombe
And nowe I die, and nowe I am but made
The glasse is full, and nowe the glass is rune
And nowe I live, and nowe my life is donn.

I wonder if the Claimant was familiar with this poem? It seems to predict something of both his confusions and his fatalistic acceptance of loss, disgrace, calumny, poverty, and imprisonment.

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In *Jew Süss* Lion Feuchtwanger makes his central character Josef Süss Oppenheimer: “The Jews of Frankfurt assembled in wonder and excitement, gathered in gesticulating groups, clicked their tongues in astonished admiration and waved their lifted and eloquent arms. Eh, Josef Süss Oppenheimer! Eh, the High Steward and Privy Financial Councillor of Württemberg! Eh, how he has got on in the world! His father was an actor, his mother, the singer, was lovely and elegant, yes, yes, but a frivolous woman, no honour to the Jewish community; his grandfather, Reb Selmele, an upright man of blessed memory, an honest man, but still a poor and humble man. And now Josef Süss, so high, so brilliant, so powerful, much higher up than his brother in Darmstadt, the renegade, who turned Christian to be a baron. Eh, how visibly the Lord has exalted him! Although he is a Jew, the Goim doff their bonnets to him and bow down to the earth before him, and when he whistles, the councilors and Ministers come running as if he were the Duke himself.”

Did this, by an association of ideas, mean that Oppenheim came from a German Jewish background? If so, it must have been some way back. His father Edward John was born in Berkshire in 1838. As well as the famous writer they had a daughter Amelia (Minnie) who is down on the census lists as an ‘imbecile’; this probably just means the poor dear had cerebral palsy or somesuch. I hope her famous brother cared for her after their parents died. And their mother was Henrietta Susanna Budd of Chard in Somerset. So he was much more English than his fellow thriller writer William Le Queux ...

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At the time I thought I had done well to come upon anything of Oppenheim’s but the other day as I was looking at the publisher’s list in an old novel I realised he was an incredibly prolific author and there must still be dozens of his books around. That one list gave me: *Jeanne of the Marshes*, *Havoc*, *The Hillman*, *The Kingdom of the Blind*, *The Illustrious Prince*, *The Double Traitor*, *The Devil’s Paw*, *The Curious Quest*, *The Box With Broken Seals*, *The Cinema Murders*, *The Betrayal*, and *Anna, the Adventuress*. These days whenever you come across someone reading on the bus it’s quite likely to be Jeffrey Deaver, Lee Childs, maybe still Stieg Larsson. I suspect that if I were to leap back eighty or ninety years and meet The Man on the Clapham Omnibus he would be reading an Oppenheim.

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October 23: Robert Bridges
Gore Vidal
Doris Lessing
October 24: Sarah J. B. Hale
October 25: Thomas Babington Macaulay
October 26: Pat Conroy
October 27: Dylan Thomas
Graciliano Ramos
Maxine Hong Kingston
October 28: ‘Tasma’
Desiderius Erasmus
Evelyn Waugh
October 29: James Boswell
Henry Green

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“But the novel (*Concluding*) isn’t a fully worked-out allegory and many details root it in the past – particularly the comic creations, Miss Edge and Miss Baker, variations on the well-worn comic

theme of the famous pair of Victorian headmistresses, Miss Buss and Miss Beale.”

Jeremy Treglown in *Romancing: The Life and Work of Henry Green*.

“The tantalizing, manipulative Moira is one of the more dangerous sources of beauty in *Concluding*, though the relationship is on Rock’s part both very restrained and mildly alarmed. True, like some of the mistresses in the school, he lacks the imperviousness imputed to Miss Buss and Miss Beale, who ‘Cupid’s darts do not feel./ (How different from us,/ Miss Beale and Miss Buss.)’ ”

I bought a copy of Henry Green’s omnibus containing *Caught, Back, and Concluding* in the mistaken idea that it would have something about Miss Beale and Miss Buss. But Miss Edge and Miss Baker are two eccentric elderly women running a small school in rural England in the middle of the twentieth century and they are far removed from the vision and dynamism which marked out Beale and Buss. Green says “Edge was short and thin. Baker, who hardly cared for early rising, fat and short.” They are trying to get old Mr Rock out of his cottage but not only are they not particularly pleasant, they are also not particularly successful. But I was curious: did Henry Green tell his friends he had Miss Buss and Miss Beale in mind or was that something his biographer read in to the novel?

There were silly rhymes which went around about them. They were treated as figures of fun by some (male) writers and journalists. But they were not comic. To establish schools for girls against male unhelpfulness, ribaldry, and undermining, and not just tiny schools run for a dozen girls but schools which provided a comprehensive, demanding, and admirable range and quality of subjects well taught and which sent pupils on to excel at the universities newly being opened to girls deserves applause not laughter.

Dorothea Beale founded Cheltenham Ladies College. Frances Buss founded the North London Collegiate School for Girls. *The Times* said it was founded by Miss Buss and her mother in 1849 to provide “a sound commercial and classical education”. Commercial for girls seeking “mercantile employment” and “classical for women planning a university education”. In the beginning it cost 2 guineas per term. It included “English, French, drawing, class singing, and needlework”. But a letter to *The Times* pointed out that while appeals for boys’ schools could net thousands of pounds the latest appeal for girls at North London had netted £47/2/6. The writer described the school as “founded and endowed by the energy, ability, and generosity of the Principal, Miss Buss” and this energy and ability eventually helped to set up a National Union for the Improvement of Education for Women.

My great-grandmother was fortunate enough to be able to go to Miss Buss’s school for several years with a “free place”. Not only did she receive a good academic grounding but she also learnt subjects which proved very useful when she came to Australia such as First Aid. A seaman on the voyage fell and broke his leg. She set it so skillfully that a doctor on arrival said he could not have done a better job. She set up a little school in the Hunter Valley of which Coral Chambers wrote in *Lessons for Ladies*, “Around rectories and vicarages in advantageous suburbs of the larger cities and in the church halls of provincial towns, mixed day schools such as St Paul’s, Ipswich, Queensland were in operation; and a number of more advanced vicarage schools for girls, such as that of Mrs. Husband-Smith, Jerry’s Plains, NSW, successfully prepared young Protestant ladies for the public examinations.” It was actually Husband-Smith and she ran her little ‘Acacia’ school in Jerry’s Plains until she and her husband retired to Toowoomba.

It was said of Frances Buss that she was “a great educator who should never have been allowed to come into contact with children”. But Coral Chambers writes, “girls’ education was in the throes of a revolution, for from the rallying point of the Governesses Benevolent Institution, trained teachers had been emanating from their college in Harley Street, Queen’s College, and from the National Society’s Whitelands College for Women since the 1840s. One of the first students at Queen’s (to the evening

classes) was Frances Mary Buss, who founded North London Collegiate School for Girls in 1850; and among the pioneer day pupils of Queen's College was Dorothea Beale, later Principal of Cheltenham Ladies' College. These two women with Emily Davies (who inspired the struggle for admission of women to university education) and a sisterhood of supporters, were to overturn traditional ideas on girls' schooling." I, for one, am glad my great-grandmother came in contact with Frances Buss.

And I can't help thinking there is a novel waiting to be written, a more interesting novel than *Concluding*, with women like 'Miss Beale and Miss Buss' to draw us into that struggle to get quality education for girls ...

"And Henry Yorke, the son of a Birmingham businessman and relative of the Earls of Hardwicke, actually published his first novel when he and Waugh were still at Oxford. His subsequent novels were published under the pseudonym Henry Green, and, quite unusually for that time and his background, dealt primarily with the lives of working-class people."

David Lebedoff writing of Waugh and Orwell in *The Same Man*.

Perhaps this helps to explain the sense of detachment in all three of Green's novels I've read. He takes you into their thoughts but leaves you outside the reality of his characters' lives. He is sympathetic but I never felt deeply engaged. He asks his reader to observe, to think, but to remain outside looking in.

* * * * *

James MacGibbon introducing the *Selected Poems* of Stevie Smith writes, "She was born in Hull, Yorkshire, and when she was three came with her mother and sister to live with her aunt in Palmers Green, London, eventually going to the North London Collegiate School for Girls, one of the late Victorian educational establishments that pioneered the idea that girls deserved as good a schooling as boys."

This school was the brainchild, the vision, and the struggle of Frances Buss. She of course was dead by the time Stevie Smith became a student there. But I found myself wondering if teachers encouraged Stevie, appreciated her way of writing, found her droll, said she might have a future in the world of letters ... what for instance might a firmly Anglican establishment make of Stevie Smith in a poem like 'Sunt Leones'?

The lions who ate the Christians on the sands of the arena
By indulging native appetites played what has now been seen a
Not entirely negligible part
In consolidating at the very start
The position of the Early Christian church.
Initiatory rites are always bloody
And the lions, it appears
From contemporary art, made a study
Of dyeing Coliseum sands a ruddy
Liturgically sacrificial hue
And if the Christians felt a little blue—
Well people being eaten often do.
Theirs was the death, and theirs the crown undying,
A state of things which must be satisfying.
My point which up to this has been obscured
Is that it was the lions who procured
By chewing up blood gristle flesh and bone

The martyrdoms on which the Church has grown.
I only write this poem because I thought it rather looked
As if the part the lions played was being overlooked.
By lions' jaws great benefits and blessings were begotten
And so our debt to Lionhood must never be forgotten.

* * * * *

October 30: Paul Valéry
October 31: Dick Francis
November 1: Christopher Brennan
 Stephen Crane
 Edward Said
November 2: Odysseus Elytis
November 3: Karl Baedeker
November 4: Eden Phillpotts
November 5: Ida Tarbell
 P. Moe Nin
 Eugene V. Debs
 John Berger
 James Elroy Flecker
November 6: Robert Musil
November 7: Albert Camus
November 8: Bram Stoker
November 9: Ivan Turgenev
November 10: Jose Hernandez
November 11: Feodor Dostoyevsky
 Godfrey Alfred 'Alf' Rattigan
November 12: Amelia Opie
November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson
November 14: Steele Rudd
November 15: William Cowper
 Andrew Marvell
November 16: Michael Arlen
 Chinua Achebe
 Charles Eliot Norton
November 17: Auberon Waugh
November 18: Gwen Meredith
 Margaret Atwood
 Rodney Hall
November 19: James Garfield

* * * * *

Did Garfield the Comic Cat get named after Garfield the President? It is an odd name for a cat. Cats get simpler more descriptive names. Usually. I remember a fierce cat which lived down the road from us and which we called Fang. It fought other cats but also was not averse to sinking a claw into a human hand or a human shin. One day I asked its owner who had taken it in as a kindness what she called it. I was rather taken aback when she said 'Fluffy'.

Henry Beard in *French for Cats: All the French Your Cat Will Ever Need* writes, The Cat

Names *Les Noms du Chat*: I will not answer to these names: *Je ne répondrai pas à l'appel de ces noms*:

Muffin	<i>Miche</i>
Fluffy	<i>Peluche</i>
Felix	<i>Félix</i>
Mittens	<i>Moufles</i>
Kitty	<i>Minet</i>
Garfield	<i>Garchamp</i>

That is surely fame! A million Fluffies but only one Garfield.

Actually Jim Davis writes, "Garfield, named after Jim's cantankerous grandfather, James Garfield Davis, is a fat, lazy, Lasagna-loving, cynical cat who hates Mondays, loves coffee breaks and long naps. According to Garfield, eating and sleeping are the most important things in life, and his motto is: "The meek shall inherit squat." "

Ah, I thought, here is a grandfather born in the 19th century. Perhaps *he* was named after President Garfield? The President when he was assassinated in September 1881 left a wife and seven children. But it seemed to me more likely that lots of children afterwards were named in his memory. Lots of children were named for Winston Churchill, including John Winston Howard. So I went to have a quick look at the presidency of James Garfield. He was quite an impressive man. He came from poverty, from a family without any kind of influence, he worked hard to get himself educated.

But the interesting thing is that although Garfield was only 50 when he was assassinated several of his children lived well into the 20th century: Harry dying in 1942, Mary in 1947, James in 1950, Irving in 1951, and Abram in 1958.

"You cannot bring prosperity by discouraging thrift.
You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.
You cannot help the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer.
You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn.
You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.
You cannot help man permanently by doing what they could and should do for themselves."
Abraham Lincoln.

I suspect President Garfield endorsed Lincoln's attitude to life. But it could be argued that Garfield the Cat is funny precisely because he turns that home-spun wisdom on its head.

* * * * *

November 20: Nadine Gordimer

November 21: Francois Voltaire
Ada Cambridge

November 22: George Eliot
George Gissing

November 23: Richard Hakluyt (d)

* * * * *

Hakluyt's Voyages gets quoted, referred to, mentioned whenever 'sea dogs' come up. But who was Hakluyt and what was in his narratives of famous voyages of exploration? He actually wrote both *Divers Voyages ... the Discoverie of America* (1587) and *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589 – 1600) but his overwhelming obsession was the desire to plant a colony in North America, at what became Jamestown in Virginia. Yet his enduring fame is not with this settlement, which was a disaster, but with the world of exploration. The Hakluyt

Society still publishes material on discovery, exploration, new information. You can find it at www.hakluyt.com

It isn't known for certain exactly when or where he was born but the thing which surprised me was that he was Welsh rather than Dutch as I had always vaguely assumed. The name underwent various permutations, Haklute, and many other variations.

While I was pondering on him I came across a book for schoolchildren in The Golden Legend Series; this one *Sea-Dogs and Pilgrim Fathers* came out in 1953 and its editor John Hampden writes, "The tales of great adventure which "sea-dogs and pilgrim fathers" left behind them would fill scores of volumes such as this. Only a few of the best of them can be given here—some of the most fascinating and exciting stories in the world. We can be grateful that among the seamen who dared so much there were many who could also write so well, and grateful too that the greatest of Elizabethan editors, Richard Hakluyt, devoted his life to bringing their stories together in that "prose epic" of England, "The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation".

It is a reminder first of all that Hakluyt, though a talented writer himself, was principally a collector, a collater, an editor, a publisher; I can imagine him urging Drake, Raleigh, Frobisher and more to write their experiences down and these old sea-dogs in their retirement sat down, perhaps reluctantly, perhaps with nostalgia, perhaps with alacrity, with their logs and notes and memories, and tried to do justice to their energetic roving lives, and Hakluyt, perhaps urging them on, gathered up the fruits of their labours and brought them to an admiring public.

And there is the second issue. We don't feed children their stories now. We are much more aware that these men were not totally admirable. Hakluyt himself wrote candidly, "We and the French are most infamous for our outrageous, common and daily piracies." We know that these adventurers were out to loot and pillage, to take slaves, to steal and damage, to spread disease, and their idea of trade was often not 'fair exchange' but the chance to take anything for which there was a lucrative market. If they denuded an island of seals, of geese, of timber, if they sought gold in any shape or form, they were looking for a return on the cost of building and outfitting their ships, not setting up mutually beneficial and respectful relationships.

And yet I cannot help being in awe of their courage and stoicism. They braved uncharted seas without any knowledge of their dangers, their reefs, their currents, their coastlines; they had no maps, their navigation instruments were rudimentary, their food was appalling, their small wooden ships were vulnerable and unsafe, their minds were still prey to superstitions about monsters and boiling waters and whirlpools. They had no idea if they would find sophisticated people who would trade and provide fresh water or people who would send them fleeing with a shower of poisoned arrows. Which raises the question: where might our children find their heroes now? The celebrities pushed at them day and night are hardly living more admirable, more courageous, more stoical lives.

* * * * *

I came upon a book called *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh* and I wondered if it was the 19th century Sir Walter who is memorable for writing:

"I wish I loved the Human Race;
I wished I loved its silly face;
I wish I liked the way it walks;
I wish I liked the way it talks;
And when I am introduced to one
I wish I thought What Jolly Fun!"

But no, it was the Elizabethan adventurer. The story we had in school of him placing his cloak over a mud puddle for the Queen to step on was probably just that, a story. And although he was

at times in the Queen's good books he was equally often not. His expedition to Guyana did not bring back gold and jewels. He married one of the Queen's women, Elizabeth Throckmorton, without the Queen's permission, and perhaps too he did not have the powerful backing of an already wealthy and noble family to help him through. No matter how charming and accomplished he probably always came over as a young man 'on the make'.

Robert Marx wrote, I think, though I was careless in jotting this down with its author, "I was reading about the foolish search for El Dorado, and the murderous interloping of the English hero, Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1595 he raided Trinidad, killed all the Spanish he could, and went up the Orinoco looking for El Dorado. He found nothing, but when he went back to England he said he had. He had a piece of gold and some sand to show. He said he had hacked the gold out of a cliff on the bank of the Orinoco. The Royal Mint said that the sand he asked them to assay was worthless, and other people said that he had had bought the gold beforehand from North Africa. He then published a book to prove his point, and for four centuries people have believed that Raleigh had found something. The magic of Raleigh's book, which is really quite difficult to read, lay in its very long title: *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana, with a relation of the great and golden city of Manoa (which the Spaniards call El Dorado) and the provinces of Emeria, Aromaia, Amapaia, and other countries, with their rivers adjoining.* How real it sounds! And he had hardly been on the main Orinoco.

"And then, as sometimes happens with confidence men, Raleigh was caught by his own fantasies. Twenty-one years later, old and ill, he was let out of his London prison to go to Guiana and find the gold mines he said he had found. In this fraudulent venture his son died. The father, for the sake of his reputation, for the sake of his lies, had sent his son to his death. And then Raleigh, full of grief, with nothing left to live for, went back to London to be executed."

His poetry is accomplished. His long poem 'Cynthia' may have been written to gain the Queen's favour (though I feel sorry for her constantly being given poetic effusions by hopeful young men) and it may have been his attempt to follow in the tradition of Dante and Petrarch with their Beatrices and Lauras. And many doubts remain about which poems traditionally attributed to him are actually his. He didn't keep neat piles ... But this one certainly belongs.

Three things there bee that prosper vp apace
And flourish, whilst they growe a sunder farr,
But on a day, they meet all in one place,
And when they meet, they one an other marr;
And they bee these, the wood, the weede, the wagg.
The wood is that, which makes the Gallow tree,
The weed is that, which stringes the Hangmans bagg,
The wagg my pretty knave betokeneth thee.
Marke well deare boy whilst these assemble not,
Green springs the tree, hempe growes, the wagg is wilde,
But when they meet, it makes the timber rott,
It frets the halter, and it choakes the childe,
Then bless thee, and beware, and lett vs praye,
Wee part not with the at this meeting day.

'Sir Walter Ravleigh to his sonne'. I am not sure how his son would have felt but from the small indications we have Sir Walter was very fond of both his wife and his son. And perhaps his son, facing the loss of his father, found comfort in his father's sense of fatalistic calm.

Sweete ar the thoughtes, wher Hope persuadeth Happe,
Great ar the Joyes, wher Harte obtaynes requeste,
Dainty the lyfe, nurst still in Fortunes lappe
Much is the ease, wher troubled mindes finde reste.
These ar the fruictes, that valure doth advaunce
And cuts off Dread, by Hope of happy chaunce.

Thus Hope bringes Hap; but to the worthy wight,
Thus Pleasure comes; but after hard assay,
Thus Fortune yelds, in manger oft for spight,
Thus happy state is none without delay.
Then must I needes advaunce my self by Skyll,
And lyve to serve, in hope of your goodwill.

‘Sweete ar the thoughtes, wher Hope persvadeth Happe’.

In 1603 he was consigned to the Tower on what seems to have been a trumped-up charge of treason and after languishing there for thirteen years James I sent him on another voyage to Guyana in which Raleigh’s son was killed. The ‘terms of reference’ (to attack and rob the Spanish fleets) were undermined by James I turning to the possibility of a Spanish marriage for his son. It was an impossible situation for Raleigh and on his return James I had him beheaded on the 1603 charge. That is the other problem the great voyagers faced, alongside the terrors and discomforts of their calling—that they were at the mercy of kings and queens. Only those who saw themselves as merchant-adventurers building and sailing ships to the ports where they were assured they could carry on a profitable trade (such as those who traded to the Baltic) and who largely stood outside the charmed circle of those vying for a monarch’s pleasure remained largely immune from the vagaries and intrigues of courts.

The night before his expected beheading, not knowing he would be reprieved that time, Raleigh wrote to his wife (its language somewhat modernized). “You shall now receive, my dear wife, my last words, in these my last lines, my Love I send you, that you may keep it when I am dead, and my Counsel that you may remember it when I am no more. I would not by my will present you with Sorrows, dear Bess. Let them go into the grave with me, and be buried in the dust. And seeing it is not the will of God that I shall see you any more in this life, bear it patiently and with a heart like thyself.

“First I send you all the thanks which my heart can conceive or my words can express for your many travails and care taken for me, which, though they have not taken effect, as you wished, yet my debt to you is not the less; but pay it I never shall in this world.

“Secondly, I beseech you, for the love you bare me living, do not hide yourself many days after my death, but by your travails seek to help your miserable fortunes, and the right of your poor Child. Thy mournings cannot avail me, I am but dust.

“Thirdly, you shall understand that my land is conveyed *bona fide* to my child. The writings were drawn at Midsummer twelve months, my honest Cousin Brett can testify so much, and Dalberrie, too, can remember somewhat therein. And I trust my Blood will quench their malice that have thus cruelly murdered me; and that they will not seek also to kill thee and thine with extreme poverty.

“To what friend to direct thee, I know not, for all mine have left me in the true time of trial; and I plainly perceive that my death was determined from the first day.

“Most sorry I am, God knows, that being this surprised with death, I can leave you in no better

estate. God is my witness, I meant you all my office of wines, or all that I could have purchased by selling it, half my stuff, and all my jewels; but some on't for the boy. But God hath prevented all my resolutions, and even that great God that ruled all in all. But if you can live free from want, care for no more; the rest is but vanity.

“Love God, and begin betimes, to repose yourself on Him, and therein shall you find true and lasting riches, and endless comfort. For the rest, when you have travailed and wearied all your thoughts over all sorts of worldly cogitations, you shall but sit down by sorrow in the end.

“Teach your son also to love and fear God whilst he is yet young, that the fear of God may grow up with him; and the same god will be a husband to you and a father to him, husband and a father which cannot be taken from you.

“Baylie oweth me £200 and Adrian Gilbert £600. In Jersey, I have also much money owing me, besides the arrears of the Wines will pay my debts. And howsoever you do, for my soul's sake, pay all poor men.

“When I am gone, no doubt you shall be sought by many; for the world thinks that I was very rich. But take heed of the pretences of men, and their affections; for they last not but in honest, and worthy men; and no greater misery can befall you in this life than to become a prey, and afterwards to be despised. I speak not this, God knows, to dissuade you from marriage, for it will be best for you, both in respect of the world and of God.

“As for me, I am no more yours, nor you mine. Death hath cut us asunder; and God hath divided me from this world, and you from me.

“Remember your poor child, for his father's sake, who chose you, and loved you in his happiest times.

“Get those Letters (if it be possible) which I wrote to the Lords, wherein I sued for my life. God is my witness, it was for you and yours I desired life. But it is true that I disdain myself for begging it; for know it, dear wife, that your son is the son of a true man, and one, who in his own respect, despiseth death and all his misshapen and ugly shapes.

“I cannot write much. God knows how hardly I steal this time, while others sleep; and it is also high time that I should separate my thoughts from this world.

“Beg my dead body, which living was denied thee; and either lay it at Shirbourne (if the land continue) or in Exeter church by my Father and Mother.

“I can say no more, time and death call me away.

“The everlasting, powerful, infinite and omnipotent God, that Almighty God who is goodness itself, the true life, and true light, keep thee and thine; have mercy on me, and teach me to forgive my persecutors and accusers, and send us to meet in His glorious kingdom.

“My dear wife farewell. Bless my poor Boy, Pray for me, and Let my good God hold you both in his arms.

“Written with the dying hand of sometime thy Husband but now (alas) overthrown.”

And he ends with “Yours that was, But now not my own.”

Richard Hakluyt, unlike some of his explorers, died peacefully at home and was buried in Westminster Abbey in 1616.

* * * * *

November 24: Laurence Sterne
Benedict Spinoza
Evangeline Walton

November 25: Virgil Thomson

Elsie J. Oxenham
Harley Granville-Barker
November 26: Charles Schulz
James Hinton
Roderic Quinn

* * * * *

I came upon a blurb for a book called *Snoopy's Guide to the Writing Life* which was described as 'more than 180 heartwarming and hilarious Snoopy "at the typewriter" comic strips by Charles M. Schulz, paired with 32 delightful essays from a who's who of famous writers' and I wondered if people do turn to comic strips to learn about writing, about living life, about understanding the world. Certainly there are those moments when you feel a cartoon has opened an insight, made you look at things in a slightly different way, and Snoopy provided a gentle window into Charles Schulz's world.

"Snoopy, the philosophical beagle from the Charlie Brown comic strip, may have assumed a more historical, perhaps even religious significance. Professor Filippo Magi, director of the Vatican's Archaeological Study and Research, reports a strange find at a dig beneath one of Rome's most historic churches: the papal Basilica of St Mary Major. Under the church are the remains of a huge first-century AD forum, or market, and among the crowded Roman graffiti on its walls is a perfect image of Snoopy the beagle.

Some Roman newspapers are reported to be showing a picture of the famous dog lying on the roof of his kennel thinking: 'Suspirium! Acetate progredi, heu!' (Sigh! The years roll on alas!)."

This *Daily Mail* story was collected by Colin, Damon and Rowan Wilson for their *World Famous Weird Stories*. I would like to believe in a first-century Snoopy but I don't think I can really believe in beagles in Rome two thousand years ago ...

* * * * *

"E. C. "Elzie" Segar (1896-1938) began his illustrating/cartooning career in Chicago in the mid-1910s and soon had his own strip at the *American*, one of the Windy City's several newspapers. By 1919 Segar had been hired away by William Randolph Hearst's *New York Evening Journal*. There E. C. inaugurated the syndicated property *Thimble Theater*. Although Segar was not a remarkable artist, he had the knack of presenting engagingly loopy adventures in his newspaper forum. These strips not only satirized other adventure offerings but also poked fun at mores and politics at home and abroad. The initial roster of lead characters in Segar's new strip included Ham Gravy (the hero), Olive Oyl (his gal friend), and Castor Oyl (her brother). Despite its complicated, sprawling, and often weird plotlines, *Thimble Theater* caught on with the newspaper-reading public.

"The January 17, 1929, installment of *Thimble Theater* introduced a new character. In that installment Ham and Castor, about to embark on an ocean voyage requiring a sturdy seaman, approach a veteran salt they spy standing on the dock. They ask the mangy stranger with the one-eye squint, "Are you a sailor?" To which the corncob pipe-smoking individual replies, "Ja think I'm a cowboy?" This was the birth of Popeye, the Sailor Man. The inimitable figure quickly became the focus of the on-going strip, which soon became known as *Thimble Theater, Starring Popeye*." He went on through animated shorts, radio, books, toys ... till finally an expensive full-length motion picture was churned out ... and bombed.

"Over these decades the spinach-loving gob with the massive arms became world famous, renowned for mumbling slangy dialogue out of the side of his mouth and foiling his adversaries. Everyone seemed enamored of this crusty old dog, along with his super-skinny, perpetually jittery girlfriend (Olive) and his burly, bearded nemesis (Bluto). The original movie cartoons were released to

television in 1958, followed by a freshly made *Popeye* cartoon TV series (1960-62). That, in turn, prompted the animated *The All-New Popeye Hour* in 1978 (which in different formats endured until 1983).”

James Robert Parish in *Fiasco: A History of Hollywood's Iconic Flops*.

Perhaps all of America was ‘enamored’ of Popeye but we weren’t. Even when the cartoons were genuinely funny (and they often weren’t) there was always that lurking suspicion that Popeye was really an adult plot to get us to eat our spinach.

And yet I have an enduring affection for many comic strips. Schulz asked that no one continue on with his strips after he died (he died in 2000) but other famous characters continued on. When the creator of Dagwood and Blondie died his son carried on, virtually seamlessly, but the man who took over Radish the Racehorse was apparently criticized, the new Radish wasn’t the old Radish, and the strip ended. I was sorry about that, I liked both new and old. I liked Ginger Meggs but Little Iodine always left an unease. At the end of every strip her dad put her over his knee and belted the bejesus out of her. And why? Was she torturing cats? Robbing banks? No, she was just being a normal mischievous little girl. So it was a relief to turn to Fred the Basset Hound—or Snoopy the Beagle. Fred’s owners may at times have sniped at each other. The children around Snoopy were at times mean, critical, sarcastic. But they were never physically abusive.

Charles Schulz was born in the US in 1922 but his father had been born in Germany which may be why the Red Baron often featured. Schulz went to a school in St Paul where his drawings were reportedly turned down by the school magazine but, in an irony which I am sure was not lost on Schulz, decades later the school erected a large statue of Snoopy.

Schools may exist to nurture the potential of their pupils but their real reason for existence is to keep children off the streets—and even that is not a given. Never mind, so long as children learn enough to be able to read and enjoy Snoopy they will probably have a happy life ...

* * * * *

November 27: James Agee
Katherine Milhous
November 28: William Blake
Randolph Stow
November 29: Louisa May Alcott
Frank Kermode
November 30: Mark Twain
Jonathon Swift
John Bunyan (bap)

* * * * *

“At or about the turn of the century Mark Twain, then at the height of his fame, visited Oxford and the University was full of tales of his wit and humour and of the brilliance of his conversation. The President of St. John’s of that time enjoyed a reputation of the same kind, but he was growing old and he disliked publicity and self-advertisement. It seemed, therefore, that the dictates of good taste demanded that, if these two were to meet, the meeting should be of a private nature, so that the brisk interplay of epigram and reply should not deteriorate into an unworthy striving for verbal mastery. It was arranged, therefore, that Mark Twain should take a cup of afternoon tea with the President in the quiet privacy of the College Garden. To the Fellows, however, it seemed that such a plan might rob posterity of some memorable conversational bequest; perhaps, too, they were not without a natural curiosity. In any case, they determined that the interview should not pass without some record. You are to think of them, then, on that summer afternoon, concealed like the villains of a melodrama behind the

arras—or, to speak plainly, lurking securely hid behind the bosky groves which border the great lawn; straining their ears to catch the *bons mots* which were to fall from the lips of the humorist or of the President. Here, they thought, are two of the cleverest men from two hemispheres—what may we not hear from them? Surely we can dine out on the treasured witticisms of this occasion for the next year or more! Mark Twain arrived and seated himself beside his host; there was a long pause, and the Fellows in their place of concealment hardly dared breathe. Finally, after deliberation, Mark Twain hazarded the remark that the weather was fine. The President considered this gambit and cautiously replied that he agreed but that he thought rain not improbable within the next few days. A promising start, but alas! a start only, for thereafter the silences became longer and neither man seemed able to keep the conversation at this high level—nothing, at least, beyond this opening gambit seemed worthy of record to the eager listeners.”

To Teach The Senators Wisdom or An Oxford Guide-Book by J. C. Masterman.

* * * * *

How much does it influence you—the first book in which you come across a writer? I came upon Graham Greene through *The Power and the Glory* and it attracted me to read more, the seedy tropical settings, the strange humour of *The Quiet American* and I remember someone pointing to a table in a Saigon hotel and saying that was where Greene sat to write his book; I don't know if that had become a kind of local myth or whether it was strictly true, but when I came upon his early novels written before he aroused interest with *Stamboul Train* I found them barely readable and utterly depressing. There always seemed to be characters, men, going up and down dark and rancid staircases. I tried Thomas Kenneally through *A Dutiful Daughter* which I thought was a gripping read, Scott Fitzgerald through *The Great Gatsby* but his collection of short stories I am now reading, *The Last of the Belles and Other Stories*, hardly seems worth the effort, and imagine coming at Shakespeare via *Timon of Athens* or *King John*; you might say, no, no more, let him rest in peace.

I imagine a great many people come at Mark Twain through *Tom Sawyer*. The fence-painting incident was in our reading books when I was in primary school. Of course you have to start somewhere but it has one unfortunate effect—you start believing all a writer's books will be similar. I kept looking for 'kids in small towns' whenever I picked up a Mark Twain. Whereas it might be more correct to see *Tom Sawyer* as an aberration. Twain's books were given to children but he wasn't actually a children's writer.

Did I want to know how and why Twain came to write *Tom Sawyer*? Did I want to know what Twain did on a visit to Oxford. Perhaps. But I also enjoyed leaving these questions for moments of idle speculation ...

* * * * *

December 1: Max Stout

December 2: Adolph Green

Joseph P. Lash

December 3: Joseph Conrad

December 4: Rainer Maria Rilke

Thomas Carlyle

December 5: Christina Rossetti

Joan Didion

December 6: Haraprasad Shastri

December 7: Willa Cather

December 8: Padraic Colum

James Thurber
 December 9: John Milton
 Joel Chandler Harris
 Bob Hawke
 December 10: Emily Dickinson
 December 11: Naguib Mahfouz
 Alexander Solzhenitsyn
 Grace Paley
 Alfred de Musset
 December 12: Vasily Grossman
 John Osborne
 December 13: Heinrich Heine
 December 14: Tycho Brahe
 December 15: Edna O'Brien
 December 16: Jane Austen
 Philip K. Dick
 V.S. Pritchett
 December 17: Erskine Caldwell
 John Greenleaf Whittier
 Ford Madox Ford
 Sylvia Ashton-Warner
 John Kennedy Toole

* * * * *

As soon as we see a pretty young woman with a long pale face, possibly with flowers in her hair, we say Pre-Raphael ... we link names like Burne-Jones to the movement ... We link more British art of the mid to late nineteenth century in some way to Pre-Raphaelism. But—should we?

Ford Madox Hueffer in his *The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* which he brought out in 1906 would say an emphatic No.

“So we may, fittingly enough, set about deciphering that least clear of many modern problems:—“What was Pre-Raphaelism?”

Even the name was problematical. Hueffer says, “Mr Hunt insists on the name “Pre-Raphaelitism,” because the English Seven were disciples not of the painters who painted before Raphael, but of the painters who painted before the painters who imitated Raphael. The imitators of Raphael he calls Raphaelites, Raphael himself being a Pre-Raphaelite. But in that case Mr Hunt should style himself a Pre-Raphaeliteite. At any rate “Pre-Raphaelism” is a word much less repulsive.”

He goes on to explain the meaning: “Pre-Raphaelism was, of course, a return to Nature—it was nothing more and nothing less. It was a thing, in its inception, as perfectly clear, as simple, and as sharp cut as a ray of sunlight driven through the gloom of a cellar from a key-hole in a door. But it fell—this particular ray—at a moment when there were so many vapours, so many winds, so many cross-currents in the air, and in the ensuing half-century so many other rays have since whirled and flashed from so many other searchlights, that it is difficult enough now for any who have not studied au fond this relatively unimportant by-way of human thought and its projection to see that original ray in its clear definiteness. For Pre-Raphaelism was a revolt in the midst of revolts, a Gironde, a Mountain in a very French Revolution of the plastic arts. As a producing agency it gave to the world ten or a dozen pictures, five or six poems, a few statues—and it has caused an inordinate heap of Memoirs.

It lasted, this brilliant and impracticable manifestation of the spirit of youth, at the very most

some five years—from 1848-1853—then no one any more wrote P.R.B. behind his name.”

And it only had seven members: Hunt, Millais, Woolner, Stephens, Collinson, and the Rossetti brothers.

And then ... “But it had to come to an end, and that end came, to all intents and purposes, on the memorable evening in 1853 when all the remaining members gathered together to draw each other’s portraits. These portraits were intended as a present and a memento for the Brother in Australia. Woolner had in fact given up gold-digging, and was earning a living by making portrait-busts. To his sitters he talked of his intimacy with the Pre-Raphaelites, and he desired his friends’ portraits at once as token of friendship and as letters of introduction. For the fame of Pre-Raphaelism had spread even to the Antipodes. But, a very little later, Mr Hunt himself set sail for Palestine, to search there for the very landscape and the very fall of light and shadow that had gilded the presence of the Saviour of mankind. Then indeed the whole Round Table was dissolved.”

This was Ford Hermann Hueffer, confidently and sharply pronouncing on the cultural landscape of nineteenth century England. But then came the anti-Germanism of the First World War and he changed his name to Ford Madox Ford (one of his grandfathers was the painter Ford Madox Brown) and wrote his well-known novels of the war such as *The Good Soldier*. Of course a novel asks for different ideas and qualities and ways of seeing but I had the curious feeling that when he wrote *The Pre-Raphaelites* he didn’t expect to be challenged or contradicted. When he came to write after the war there is a less confident sense ...

‘Ford Madox Hueffer wrote a poem which he called Heaven. In it he told how he had waited in a little town in the south of France, knowing nothing of passing time, until when the years were over the woman for whom he had waited came to him, and their days together began. It was strange for her, he said, to come from England straight into heaven. ‘And all night long she lay in the crook of my arm’—a pretty thought and one that has often recurred to me. Alas, I snore: the crook of my arm holds no attraction. Isn’t it an odd thing that he who designed marriage also designed snoring? In parts of America such nocturnal cadences are considered justification for divorce. Medical science, it seems, can do next to nothing to help. It merely tells us that ‘the sounds in the stertorous inhalations of the habitual snorer are produced by the vibrations of the soft tissues of the nasopharynx and oropharynx,’ and that the quality of those vibrations is ‘to some extent dependent on the tone of the musculature of the glossopharyngeal arch.’ But what sleep-seeking Dulcinea is going to accept those explanations at three o’clock in the morning?’

Coming down the Seine by Robert Gibbings.

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Stella Bowen in her memoir *Drawn from Life* tells of a young woman born in Adelaide who, after her mother’s death, moved to London in 1914 to study art. There she met many interesting people including T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, the Coles, and “Arthur Waley, though apparently a shy and diffident little man, was another teaser with a redoubtable tongue ... He had a high and breathless little voice and an almost feminine love of gossip. He was rather beautiful, but you did not notice this at first, because his face was always averted ... When you *did* get him going, his talk was highly amusing, penetrating, and slightly malicious.” And then, “It must have been about nine months before the Armistice that we were introduced to Ford Madox Ford. We knew him very well by reputation because he was one of the writers whom Ezra allowed us to admire. *Ladies Whose Bright Eyes* and *The Good Soldier* were two of the best-thumbed books on our shelves, and Ford’s war poems, *Footsloggers* and *Old Houses in Flanders*, were being discussed and admired at Harold

Monro's Poetry Bookshop, whose weekly poetry readings we frequented. Indeed, Phyllis herself used sometimes to give readings there; I can remember her rendering of *Mr Prufrock*, and our flattered pleasure when T. S. Eliot turned up, with his gentle and benevolent smile and a black satin chest-protector, at some of our beer-and-gramophone parties.

"Ford was an innovation in our circles because not only was he in khaki, but he actually liked it. He was the only intellectual I had met to whom army discipline provided a conscious release from the torments and indecisions of a super-sensitive brain. To obey orders was, for him, a positive holiday, and the pleasure he took in recounting rather bucolic anecdotes of the army was the measure of his need for escape from the intrigues and sophistications of Literary London.

"Ford was considerably older than the rest of our friends, and much more impressive. He was very large, with a pink face, yellow hair, and drooping, bright blue eyes. His movements were gentle and deliberate and his quiet and mellow voice spoke, to an Australian ear, with ineffable authority."

She initially had mixed feelings about him. But when he suggested marriage and a cottage in the country she eventually succumbed. They had a daughter Julia, they moved to France, they had happy years together (she doesn't say whether he snored), they met interesting people, Gertrude Stein, Diagheliv, Ernest Hemingway, they started a magazine, the *Transatlantic Review*, and Ford met and fell in love with Jean Rhys; "The girl was a really tragic person. She had written an unpublishably sordid novel of great sensitiveness and persuasiveness, but her gift for prose and her personal attractiveness were not enough to ensure her any reasonable life, for on the other side of the balance were bad health, destitution, shattered nerves, an undesirable husband, lack of nationality, and a complete absence of any desire for independence. When we met her she possessed nothing but a cardboard suitcase and the astonishing manuscript. She was down to her last three francs and she was sick." They took her in, provided her with clothes, food, support, and eventually found her a job. But Ford, when he recovered from Jean, found himself another mistress and Stella decided this was no life. She set herself up in a studio and began to make her name as a portrait painter. In World War II she became an official war artist.

I wonder how he described her non-pre-raphaelite art ...

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December 18: 'Saki', H. H. Munro

December 19: Jean Genet

December 20: Sandra Cisneros

December 21: Nat Gould

Anthony Powell

December 22: Edwin Arlington Robinson

Jean Racine

December 23: Olive Senior

December 24: Matthew Arnold

William Brighty Rands

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I came upon a book called *Chaucer's England* by a Matthew Browne which came out in 1869 and which I found very interesting. I didn't give the author a thought, probably just some worthy academic in Cambridge turning out books of medieval history and speculation, so it was only when I came upon a description of William Rands as the 'Laureate of the Nursery' with the suggestion that his children's nursery rhymes and verses were of greater literary quality than most such offerings that I was interested enough to go and look for something about him—and discovered that Matthew Browne was the pen name he used when he turned to writing history. In fact he had two known pseudonyms:

Browne and Henry Holbeach.

His writings about Chaucer's world raise many intriguing questions. "The perch was a frame let into the wall, and clothes, armour (when there was any), and domestic utensils that would hang, were hung upon it; but I suppose the article received its name from its being, first of all, appropriated to the use of falcons and other pet birds in houses of high class. Pegs, and what we call clothes, horses, were an obvious expedient; but, considering the length of time it appears to have taken the human race to invent a chimney, it is not safe to speculate about such matters. A hole in the roof to permit the escape of smoke, or a flue going a little way up the wall, and then letting the smoke out by a sidelong aperture (such as might be seen at Rochester Castle and elsewhere) is one thing; but the chimney proper is another, though apparently one of the most obvious things in the world."

"In the Canterbury Tales we have no Midwife,—a more important personage in those days than the doctor himself, besides that women so often undertook the functions of the 'leech,' and probably fulfilled them well. It is, indeed, quite possible that the natural nursing instinct of a woman,—'*l'instinct céleste du sexe pour le Malheur,*' as Buffon calls it,—may have made her in many cases a much safer person to deal with sickness than the Doctor of Physic in Chaucer. We are told that there was in all the world none like him to speak of physic and surgery, because he was well grounded in astronomy; as if Zadkiel or Francis Moore were now-a-days to practise physic on the 'principles' of their prophetic almanacks."

Chaucer is critical of monks and friars, seeing them as lazy and greedy. The friar "is well dressed, in double-thick woollen. He lisps, 'to make his English sweeter;' and he has the *twinkling* eye which belongs to the sensual nature, especially when dashed with cunning" but something I didn't know: "By the law of the Peace of God, fighting and violence were once forbidden from Wednesday night to Monday morning, and, naturally, upon the festivals of the Church. That the rule of St. Benedict enforced agricultural labour upon his monks, is a familiar fact, and the mediaeval church took agriculture under its protection by making the neighbourhood of a plough a place of sanctuary,—an amiable institution, not unconnected with the fact that in the form of the plough might be discerned the form of a cross." So did people get all the violence and anger out of their system on a Tuesday?

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It is interesting that nursery rhymes were traditionally simple and repetitive but the poetry created for children in the 19th century as more and more children learnt to read and more and more families could afford to buy books for their children became increasingly thoughtful and sophisticated. Robert Louis Stevenson immediately comes to mind. Poetry for children also needed to have aspects of fun and rhythm to it and to be about things which would interest children but poets who wanted to write for children must have felt whole new opportunities were opening up.

Rands doesn't immediately come to mind in the way that a Robert Louis Stevenson or Kate Greenaway does but his verses are light and lively. Here are two of his poems for children, 'The Peddler's Caravan' and 'The World':

"I wish I lived in a caravan,
With a horse to drive like a peddler-man!
Where he comes from nobody knows,
Or where he goes to, but on he goes!

His caravan has windows two,
And a chimney of tin, that the smoke comes through;
He has a wife, with a baby brown,

And they go riding from town to town.

Chairs to mend, and delf to sell!
He clashes the basins like a bell;
Tea-trays, baskets ranged in order,
Plates, with alphabets round the border!

The roads are brown, and the sea is green,
But his house is like a bathing-machine;
The world is round, and he can ride,
Rumble and slash, to the other side!

With the peddler-man I should like to roam,
Write a book when I came home;
All the people would read my book,
Just like the Travels of Captain Cook!"

“Great, wide, beautiful, wonderful World,
With the wonderful water round you curled,
And the wonderful grass upon your breast—
World, you are beautifully drest.

The wonderful air is over me
And the wonderful wind is shaking the tree,
It walks on the water, and whirls the mills,
And talks to itself on the top of the hills.

You friendly earth, how far do you go,
With the wheatfields that nod and the rivers that flow,
With cities and gardens, and cliffs, and isles,
And people upon you for thousands of miles?

Ah, you are so great, and I am so small,
I tremble to think of you, World, at all;
And yet, when I said my prayers today,
A whisper inside me seemed to say,
‘You are more than the Earth, though you are such a dot:
You can love and think, and the Earth cannot.’

* * * * *

Rands had very modest beginnings; the son of a small shopkeeper in London, the DNB says of him, “He received a very limited education, and derived much of what he knew from a habit of reading at the second-hand bookstalls.” He was a jack-of-all-trades in his working life and also in his writing life, writing short stories, poetry, reviews, articles, hymns, shorthand reports in Parliament, nursery rhymes, fairy tales (he tried to bring out one for each Christmas), history, adult poetry collections such as *Chain of Lilies and other Poems*, in fact whatever would bring him in an income. It was James Payn

of *Chambers's Journal* who christened him the 'laureate of the nursery' which perhaps makes him sound better-known and better-regarded than he really was. He had four children of his own and I wonder whether he tried his tales and rhymes out on them. But I couldn't help thinking it was a pity he hadn't left the children and written more history than the two volumes of *Chaucer's England*. He had the knack of making the distant past 'come alive'.

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December 25: Nan McDonald
December 26: Thomas Gray
 Charles Babbage
December 27: Elizabeth Smart
December 28: Alasdair Gray
December 29: Dobrica Cosic
December 30: Rudyard Kipling
December 31: Simon Wiesenthal

THE END

Afterthoughts: I touched very briefly on clerical abuse in *The Ultimate Birthday Book* but in John Cornwell's book *The Dark Box* he deals with an aspect of the problem I hadn't previously considered or even known about. In the early twentieth century Pope Pius X changed the age at which children would start to go to confession. Previously it had been around 12, 13 or 14. Now, he said, children as young as 7 were to go to confession. This had major implications. I will summarise them as:

Priests had mostly seen children this young in company up till then, with their families, in classes, teams, choirs, or as groups at camps, playgrounds etc. Now they had regular access to children in private one-on-one sessions.

The little naughtinesses of most children at seven-years-old, refusing to eat their carrots, using a rude word, not doing a small chore, pulling the hair of a younger sibling, were profoundly uninteresting to the priests listening, men who had grown up in the smutty furtive guilt-ridden confines of seminaries where masturbation was THE big sin. Some of these men began probing their young charges to find similar sins. Had the young penitents gazed upon their own or other bodies with sinful thoughts, had they touched themselves, had they touched anyone else ... children who should not have been encouraged to think about sex were, in effect, sexualised in the confessional. Now we are concerned about the sexualisation of our children by corporate culture but generations of children were exposed to a different kind of sexualisation by the Catholic Church.

The swathe of clerical abuse which has bankrupted some Catholic dioceses around the world and placed the church in a situation of moral bankruptcy can often be traced back to children given this

view of sex as something ‘smutty furtive guilt-ridden’ and vaguely obsessional who grew up and chose or were encouraged to choose a sexless life with all this unresolved baggage in their psyche.

I came away from Cornwell’s book with a profound sense of pity for the victims and even, at times, for the perpetrators. And that is the real sadness: no church should behave in such a way that it needs to evoke that kind of pity. When it does it ceases to be a source of inspiration and a bulwark against the evil of the outside world.

I came across a mention by Graham Greene of a game called Tom Tiddler’s Ground which I hadn’t previously known about. It took another little book to explain it: “Have one part of the garden or lawn marked off as “Tom Tiddler’s Ground,” and have this area scattered with sweets or toys. One guest is elected as “Tom Tiddler,” and he has to guard his “treasure.” All the other boys or girls stand outside the area, and try to run in and grab one of the sweets, peanuts, or toys. If they are tagged (touched) by Tom Tiddler before they get outside his area, they have to give up their booty and drop out of the game. The game finishes when all players are tagged, or all the treasure gone. Only have small things for this game, as some children will get a number and others nothing.”

The Children’s Party & Games Book by Joyce Nicholson.