

**BOOK
ENDS**

**COMPILED
BY**

J. L. HERRERA

Dedicated To The Memory Of:
Anthony Raymond

And With Thanks To:

All at Vinnies in Argyle Street,
especially Ken Carroll and Jean Doran, also
Cheryl Perriman, Ken Clarke, Margaret Malone,
Patrick Herrera, Pat Firkin, Ken Herrera, Marton Historical Society,
Chris and Janet at The Hobart Book Shop.

Introduction

I was tempted to call this book ‘To Believe or Not’ and look at mysteries, ghosts, the supernatural, claims and counter-claims, urban myths and suchlike. Then I thought I would stay with bookish titles and just have occasional forays into the puzzling.

All mysteries have commonsense explanations. Sometimes we just don’t happen to have the explanations. I believe the supernatural, like the natural, is underpinned by a kind of logic and commonsense too. One day perhaps we will have those explanations but I don’t mind if they don’t come in my lifetime because I like to ponder on puzzles, on things that tempt the mind out of its safe little grooves.

And the most obvious kind of puzzle to come my way most of the time is the one that poses a mystery at the beginning and solves it at the end. In other words: The Whodunit, the Whydunit, the Howdunit, and sometimes the Wheredunit. There are times when I think it doesn’t say anything nice about me, that I would happily and page-turningly wallow in other people’s misery, (and Eugene Ionesco’s “People like killers. And if one feels sympathy for the victims it’s by way of thanking them for letting themselves be killed” is hardly comforting), but I do find that aspect of puzzle-solving fascinating. Nevertheless human puzzles are not cosmic puzzles. They are firmly rooted in the Mind of Humanity not the Mind of God. They have a comfortable contained sense of Game, Set, and Match to them.

Whereas the puzzles of the universe which may remain to puzzle us until we manage to either destroy ourselves or find more sensible ways to protect our little ‘corner’ of the universe remain to intrigue me. And in passing, isn’t it odd the way people talk about ‘the four corners of the earth’ or ‘this little corner of the universe’? It makes us sound like something in a box. Is it that someone said ‘you must refer to the four cardinal points’ and someone else said ‘oh, that’s just being pedantic—next thing you’ll be objecting to phrases like ‘the sun rose’—’

Never mind, read with pedantry, read with gay abandon, read for fun, read for the most serious of reasons ... read in the bath, read in bed, read in the bus and while waiting at the dentist ... May you never get tired of Reading ...

J. L. Herrera
Hobart 2018

BOOK ENDS

January 1: Maria Edgeworth
Sir James Frazer
Seabury Quinn
Joe Orton

January 2: Isaac Asimov
Charles Beaumont

January 3: J. R. R. Tolkien

January 4: Michele Turner

January 5: Umberto Eco

January 6: Kahlil Gibran
R. M. Gilchrist
Hristo Botev

January 7: William Peter Blatty

January 8: Wilkie Collins
Dennis Wheatley
Elvis Presley

January 9: Karel Capek
Anne Siddons

January 10: Philip Levine

January 11: Alan Paton
Bayard Taylor
Rick Kennett

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I went looking for Bayard Taylor because his names resonated. American travel writer, journalist, traveler, he went to California to write about the gold rush, he went much further afield, to Russia, to Egypt. He was extremely popular in the 19th century. I looked for T. D. Allman for the same reason. Another American travel writer and author of books like *Finding Florida* his books too have gained a wide readership. And I looked for Mark Huband for the same reason, another journalist and widely-traveled writer.

It doesn't mean they *are* related, it was just that sense of sharing a family name which made me want to know more. I look for authors, pick up books, browse in things for all sorts of reasons. But the sense of a name resonating has brought interesting writing my way. You might like to try it if you are feeling jaded or can't decide what to read next ...

In my family a Taylor married an Allman and one of their granddaughters was my grandmother. But they had a niece who is listed in an old photograph as 'Aunt Bayard'. No one seems to know anything about her, just one of those women who didn't marry and lived an almost invisible life, and she had a nephew called Robert Bayard Allman. But the Bayard is a puzzle. The Allmans came from France to Ireland but no one seems to know where the Bayard comes from other than the vague belief it too is French as it is a French place name.

Bayard Taylor was born in America to Quaker parents so there didn't seem likely to be a connection but how did he come to be named Bayard? I like these little mysteries. They add puzzles to the everyday and sometimes lead on to interesting little discoveries. So I thought I

would see if I could trace Bayard Taylor back a generation or two. In fact I found someone had already traced his family back many generations. Not a sign of any link to my family and also, more puzzlingly, no indication of any previous Bayard in the family. Did the name become popular around 1800?

So what of his actual writing? Is it still accessible? Readable? Interesting? I bought a copy of his account of his trip to the Californian goldfields in 1949 which he titled *Eldorado*. He is a (mostly) sympathetic and observant chronicler. He recounts his journey from the eastern side of the United States down to Cuba and through the Caribbean to the Panama Peninsula where, before the Canal was built, they had to travel by canoe and mule, and then embark on another ship to travel north to San Francisco. He begins his account:

“On the 28th of June, 1849, I sailed from New York, in the U.S. Mail steamship Falcon, bound for Chagres. About eight months had elapsed since the tidings of an Eldorado in the West reached the Atlantic shore. The first eager rush of adventurers was over, yet there was no cessation to the marvellous reports, and thousands were only waiting a few further repetitions, to join the hordes of emigration. The departure of a steamer was still something of an incident. The piers and shipping were crowded with spectators, and as the Falcon moved from her moorings, many a cheer and shout of farewell followed her. The glow and excitement of adventure seemed to animate even those who remained behind, and as for our passengers, there was scarcely one who did not feel himself more or less a hero. The deck rang with songs, laughter and gaily-spoken anticipations of roving life and untold treasure, till we began to feel the heavy swell rolling inward from Sandy Hook.”

Everything is grist to his mill, the scenery, the animals, the people, the geology ... He even answers one small question I had. My husband said there were Chilians in California for the gold rush. I was a little dubious. But sure enough Bayard Taylor writes of San Francisco: “By nine o’clock the town is in the full flow of business. The streets running down to the water, and Montgomery street which fronts the Bay, are crowded with people, all in hurried motion. The variety of characters and costumes is remarkable. Our own countrymen seem to lose their local peculiarities in such a crowd, and it is by chance epithets rather than by manner, that the New-Yorker is distinguished from the Kentuckian, the Carolinian from the Down-Easter, the Virginian from the Texan. The German and Frenchman are more easily recognized. Peruvians and Chilians go by in their brown ponchos, and the sober Chinese, cool and impassive in the midst of the excitement, look out of the oblique corners of their long eyes at the bustle, but are never tempted to venture from their own line of business. The eastern side of the plaza, in front of the Parker House and a canvas hell called the Eldorado, are the general rendezvous of business and amusement—combining ’change, park, club-room and promenade all in one.”

He sometimes waxes lyrical as when he writes of Monterey—“The extremity of the Point is a mass of grey rock, worn by the surf into fantastic walls and turrets. The heavy swells of the open sea, striking their bases with tremendous force, fill their crevices with foaming spray, which pours off in a hundred cataracts as the wave draws back for another shock. In the narrow channels between the rocks, the pent waters roll inland with great force, flooding point after point and flinging high into the air the purple flags and streamers of sea-weed, till they reach the glassy, sheltered pools, that are quietly filled and emptied with every pulsation of the great sea without. A cold mist hung over the sea, which heightened the wildness and bleakness of the scene and made it inspiring. Flocks of sea-gulls uttered their shrill, piping cry as they flew over us, and a seal now and then thrust up his inquisitive head, outside of the surf”—but in general he is more interested in what the future prosperity of California will be built upon and he gives a lot

of attention to climate, soils, water, and possible crops. He could not have envisaged movies and celebrities ...

“The discovery of the vast metallic and mineral wealth in her mountains had already attracted to her, in the space of twelve months, more than one hundred thousand people; an extensive commerce had sprung up with China, the ports of Mexico on the Pacific, Chili, and Australia.”

What I didn't know was that unlike in Victoria where the British Crown was very thoroughly in control of the colony and the gold-seekers, California was in a kind of free-floating state.

He writes, “In some respects, the political history of California for the year 1849, is without a parallel in the annals of any nation. The events are too recent for us to see them in the clear, defined outlines they will exhibit to posterity; we can only describe them as they occurred, throwing the strongest light on those points which now appear most prominent.

“The discovery of the Gold Region of California occurred in little more than a month after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, by which the country was ceded to the United States. Congress having adjourned without making provision for any kind of civil organization, the Military Government established during the war continued in force, in conjunction with the local laws in force under the Mexican rule—a most incongruous state of things, which gave rise to innumerable embarrassments. Meanwhile, the results of the gold discovery produced a complete revolution in society, upturning all branches of trade, industry or office, and for a time completely annulling the Government. Mexico and the South American republics sent their thousands of adventurers into the country like a flood, far outnumbering the native population. During the winter of 1848-9, the state of affairs was most critical; the American and foreign miners were embittered against each others; the authorities were without power to enforce their orders, and there seemed no check to restrain the free exercise of all lawless passions. There *was* a check, however—the steady integrity and inborn capacity for creating and upholding Law, of a portion of the old American settlers and emigrants newly arrived. A single spark of Order will in time irradiate and warm into shape a world of disorderly influences.

“In the neglect of Congress to provide for the establishment of a Territorial Government, it was at first suggested that the People should provisionally organize such a Government among themselves. Various proposals were made, but before any decisive action was had on the subject, another and more appropriate form was given to the movement, chiefly through the labor and influence of a few individuals, who were countenanced by the existing authorities. This was, to call a convention for the purpose of drafting a State Constitution, that California might at once be admitted into the Union, without passing through the usual Territorial stage—leaping with one bound, as it were, from a state of semi-civilization to be the Thirty-First Sovereign Republic of the American Confederacy. The vast influx of emigration had already increased the population beyond the required number, and the unparalleled speed with which Labor and Commerce were advancing warranted such a course, no less than the important natural resources of the country itself. The result of this movement was a proclamation from Gov. Riley, recommending that an election of Delegates to form such a Convention be held on the first of August, 1849.”

I was at first confused because he often uses ‘Native’ to refer to the Spanish and Mexican inhabitants rather than the indigenous people whom he usually refers to as Indians. He points out that when the gold rush started Mexican laws were still in place. The men, American and Mexican, who sat down to draw up a Constitution had to decide whether California's borders would follow the border the Mexicans had used or incorporate or be incorporated by the neighbouring American states. They decided to keep the existing borders. Should they allow

slavery? No. Should they allow the entry of ‘free persons of color’ (ie. ex-slaves)? Yes. Should they allow Indian men to vote? They decided yes because many of the Mexican dignitaries and businessmen had some Indian ancestry. Should married women keep their property? Yes. Should children be educated? Yes. It all sounds nice and orderly and progressive but the flood of immigrants sorely taxed the fledgling state. And the money to pay for wages, infrastructure, and building came mainly from customs duties rather than from such things as miners’ licences.

But the people who lost out in the rush and the mass of immigration were the Native Americans. When the missions were turned into parishes in the 1830s the Indians who had been virtual slave labour were allowed to have individual plots of land but were not allowed to farm communally or to sell their land. They gradually drifted away from this uncongenial lifestyle and returned according to Taylor to lives of “sloth and stupidity”. In fact he rarely has a good word to say for the indigenous people. “Two or three tulé huts stood on the opposite bank, and a number of dirty, stupid Indian faces stared at me through the apertures.” And for the immigrants flooding overland by wagon-trains they faced the Indians’ “thievish and hostile visitations”.

He points out that it was the Indians who knew of the gold but didn’t value it. It was the hundreds, then thousands, of people flooding in who gouged Indian land, polluted the waters, and drove away both people and animals. Whether Bayard Taylor as an intelligent observant man was representative of those who came to California and felt that the Indians were largely a nuisance is unclear but things do not seem to have improved for the indigenous people in the 170 years since then. Yet his book, because most of his readers would never see the places he visited, was a mine of information. Climate, topology, vegetation, crops, buildings, opportunities, history. It is probably a good guide to that California on the cusp of statehood and prosperity.

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January 12: Dorothy Wall
January 13: A. B. Guthrie
January 14: Thomas Tryon
Richard Layman
January 15: Kate Llewellyn
January 16: William Spencer
January 17: Anton Chekhov
Ronald Firbank
January 18: D. F. Lewis
January 19: Edgar Allan Poe
January 20: Nancy Kress
January 21: Emma Gad
January 22: Lord Byron
August Strindberg
January 23: Derek Walcott
January 24: Edith Wharton
Keith Douglas
January 25: Robert Burns
Virginia Woolf
January 26: Jonathan Aycliffe
January 27: Lewis Carroll
D. M. Thomas
January 28: Sabine Baring-Gould

Colette
January 29: Thomas Paine
 Germaine Greer
January 30: Shirley Hazard
January 31: Kenzaburo Oe
February 1: Muriel Spark
February 2: Christopher Marlowe
 James Joyce
February 3: Simone Weil
 Gertrude Stein
 Clarence E. Mulford

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“He seemed reluctant to put away the picture, held it for another minute, lingeringly, before my eyes. Then he returned the wallet and pulled from his pocket a ragged old copy book called *Hopalong Cassidy*.

‘Look here, this is a book he had when he was a boy. It just shows you.’

He opened it at the back cover and turned it around for me to see. On the last fly-leaf was printed the word SCHEDULE, and the date September 12, 1906.” This was a book owned by F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby and in it he has jotted good resolutions including “Read one improving book or magazine per week” and “Bath every other day”. But an endnote in *The Great Gatsby* says *Hopalong Cassidy* was first published in 1910.

And did it qualify as an “improving book”? I vaguely remember Hopalong Cassidy from my childhood though I think I was more interested in his horse than in him. The other day I came across Mulford’s *Hopalong Cassidy Serves a Writ* and I realized I was wrong in remembering him as a cowboy. In fact he is “sheriff of Twin River County” and in a way he is a man of many qualities, brave, tough, determined, knowledgeable, resourceful.

The book is a Western whodunit. It also contains interesting little bits of lore about things such as whether people wore beards, how to tan hides and salt meat, and that the stage coach was drawn by 5 mules in a 2 – 2 – 1 formation. And these being gunslingers it has Hopalong putting on his own guns. “He began to get into his clothes, and not long thereafter he reached for one of the gun belts hanging from the back of a chair. The loops were full, the projecting lead carefully wiped clean of grease to keep them from accumulating sand and dust, which in time would ruin the barrels of the guns. As it was he had new barrels put in about every second year. The most important part of a barrel was near the muzzle, and that was where most of the sand and grit collected. He clamped an elbow against the heavy holster, holding it tightly against his hip, and then swung the belt around his waist, catching the free end and making it fast in the buckle. The second belt, also, was full. In a moment it, too, was in place, resting against the hipbone, the other side sagging properly. If heavy gun belts were not properly hung their weight seemed to grow and to drag on a man. He bent down and tied the hold-down thongs around each leg.

“An idea out of nowhere popped into his head: he should have given more thought and time and practice to the cross-arm draw but still he believed it was not so good with two guns. Of course the best, shortest, and quickest of all was the belly draw, but to get the most speed and to do it properly required a short-barrelled gun, and a short barrel meant too short a sight base for accurate shooting at the longer ranges which necessity from time to time forced him to shoot over. Also the belly draw meant an uncomfortably tight belt.”

This book came out in 1942 so Clarence Mulford and Hopalong had a long career.

And did Mulford write other things, do other things?

Francis M. Nevins in *Twentieth Century Western Writers* says his first Hopalong Cassidy actually came out in 1912. And although he was a journalist and wrote a few other Western novels and short stories it was Hopalong who made him money and fed his fascination with Western history and lore. Nevins says, “Clarence E. Mulford’s style is a fairly vivid but stiff and humorless Victorian English. His skills with character and relationship were feeble, especially when it came to women. His versions of cowboy and ethnic dialect grate harshly on the ear. But in grasp of historic detail and breadth of vision he was among western writers second to none, and his best action sequences rank with the most exciting in the genre.

“The factual data on his enormous library of books and materials on the west were cross-indexed on more than 17,000 file cards. Thanks to these, even though he set foot in the West only once and then was vastly disappointed, he could describe ranch life, cattle drives, trail towns, poker games, roundup lore, firearms trivia, and everything else in the interstices of his novels with meticulous accuracy. But beyond the factual details in his books was a philosophic vision, the Darwinian view of nature as a violent panorama and of a life as a struggle in which each creature tries to become more fit to survive. And the people of Mulford’s world aren’t at all like workaday cowboys but resemble the brawling larger-than-life heroes of the Greek epics and Arthurian legends and Dumas.”

Though, strictly speaking, there was not one stereotypical cowboy. I have read that they could be Basques, Swedes, and of course English, Scottish, Irish and homegrown Americans. Mulford gave up writing his Hopalong books well before he died in 1956 but the 1950s saw such an explosion of western TV programs as well as paperbacks and novels that Louis L’Amour was persuaded to write four more Hopalong books.

“Mulford’s books are the first great series Westerns, yet they are not so much a string of adventures about the same characters as a sort of Galsworthy-esque Forsyte Saga set in a less polite and far more violent milieu.” And in which Hopalong who started out as an energetic young redhead in his twenties becomes a man with thinning hair and calloused hands and a somewhat jaundiced response to wrongdoing and even to life itself.

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February 4: François Rabelais

W. Harrison Ainsworth

February 5: Susan Hill

Hans Fallada (Rudolf Ditzen) (d)

February 6: Dermot Bolger

Eric Partridge

February 7: Charles Dickens

February 8: Jules Verne

Robert Burton

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“I’ll not change life with my king
I ravisht am: can the world bring
More joy than still to laugh and smile
In pleasant toys time to beguile?
Do not, O do not trouble me,
So sweet content I feel and see
All my joys to this are folly
None so divine as melancholy.

Physicians and psychiatrists who write entertainingly are rare. Among the literary treasures of medicine is Robert Burton’s seventeenth-century *The Anatomy of Melancholy*.

Aurelianus was not alone in perceiving that depression had two sides. Robert Burton saw both sides and described accurately and entertainingly not only the darkness of despair but also the intoxication of the mania of what we now call bipolar affective illness.”

John White in *The Masks of Melancholy*.

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Lord Peter Wimsey may have carted Burton’s book around for light reading in spare moments but I wasn’t sure that I wanted to read a book about melancholia. And if the snippet Sayers uses in *Gaudy Night* is representative then there is another problem.

“’Tis proper to all melancholy men, saith *Mercurialis*, *what conceit they have once entertained to be most intent, violent and continually about it. Invis occurrit*, do what they may, they cannot be rid of it, against their wills they must think of it a thousand times over, *perpetuo molestantur, nec oblivisci possunt*, they are continually troubled with it, in company, out of company; at meat, at exercise, at all times and places, *non desinunt ea, quae minime volunt, cogitare*; if it be offensive especially, they cannot forget it.”

Nicolas Bentley in *A Choice of Ornaments* writes, “It was not until I was thirty, for instance, that under the necessity of spending a week or two in bed I began dissecting *The Anatomy of Melancholy*”; he goes on to say that many of its allusions were probably lost on him because of his limited knowledge of the classics, something which resonated with me, but that “few books have given me such a long-lasting reward.”

I have an even bigger problem, beyond recognizing allusions: I don’t speak Latin.

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Northrop Frye in *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* wrote, “In my *Anatomy of Criticism* I remarked that literary criticism was approaching the area of the social sciences. The statement was strongly resisted, as it cut across the conditioned reflexes of most humanists at the time, but language since then has been taken to be a model of investigation in so many fields, and the theory of language has revolutionized so many approaches in psychology, anthropology, and political theory, to say nothing of literary criticism itself, that no one can any longer regard the humanistic concern with language as separable or even distinguishable from other concerns.”

He goes on to say, “The Bible is clearly a major element in our own imaginative tradition, whatever we may think we believe about it. It insistently raises the question: Why does this huge, sprawling, tactless book sit there inscrutably in the middle of our cultural heritage like the “great Boyg” or sphinx in *Peer Gynt*, frustrating all our efforts to walk around it? Giambattista Vico ... worked out an elaborate theory of culture as he saw it, confining himself to secular history and avoiding the whole of the Bible. This was doubtless for prudential reasons, but there is no such excuse today for scholars who, in discussing cultural issues originally raised by the Bible and still largely informed by it, proceed as though the Bible did not exist. It seems to me that someone not a specialist in the Biblical field needs to call attention to the Bible’s existence and relevance.” So he approached the Bible as a literary theorist and began teaching a university course in Canada not as ‘the Bible as Literature’ but in the ways literary theory might ‘unpack’ the differing books that make up the Bible. He turned to what Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*, that is “a putting together of bits and pieces out of whatever comes to hand.” And out of those bits and pieces might come a unified system of thought.

And, “In a way I have tried to look at the Bible as a work of *bricolage*, in a book which is also that. I retain my special affection for the literary genre I have called the anatomy, especially for Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, with its schematic arrangements that are hardly those of any systematic medical treatment of melancholy, and yet correspond to something in the mind that yields a perhaps even deeper kind of comprehension. Such books as Burton’s have an

extraordinary pulling power: I understand very well what Samuel Johnson meant by saying that Burton's was the only book that got him out of bed earlier than he wanted to."

Perhaps. And perhaps it is 'conditioned reflexes' which urge me away not towards anything with 'melancholy' in its title. But that is probably a cowardly response. If it could make Dr Johnson, who had his share of melancholy, get up earlier ...

And the DNB says of it, "In 1621 appeared the first edition of Burton's 'Anatomy of Melancholy', one of the most fascinating books in literature. The full title is—'The Anatomy of Melancholy, What it is. With all the Kindes, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Seuerall Cvres of it. In Three Maine Partitions with their Seuerall Sections, Members, and Sybsections. Philosophically, Medicinally, Historically opened and cvt vp. By Demicritus Iunior with a Satyricell Preface conducing to the following Discourse. Macrob. Omne meum, Nihil meum. At Oxford, Printed by Iohn Lichfield and Iames Short, for Henry Cripps, Anno Dom. 1621'.

I'm not sure that that would be an inducement to buy or read the book. And among the things inducing melancholy he included Love, Hypochondria, Superstition, Madness, Jealousy (and he subsumes many aspects of marital discord and unhappiness under Jealousy) and Solitude. When asked why he had chosen this subject he responded "I write of melancholy by being busy to avoid melancholy."

Would it be equally helpful to be able to say "I read of melancholy by being busy to avoid melancholy"? This week, bearing in mind my provisos, I have been reading Robert Burton's famous book. He chose to call himself a Young Democritus because "Democritus, as he is described by Hippocrates and Laertius, was a little wearish old man, very melancholy by nature, averse from company in his latter days, and much given to solitariness" but also a man interested in everything.

I was a bit taken aback when I realized just how large his book is. Not something either Peter Wimsey or Harriet Vane, unless they were wearing very large overcoats, could have slipped in a pocket! So I had the sense of rolling up metaphoric sleeves and starting in. And it is an odd book in that it is about what we would regard as a medical condition but it is not a medical book. He *does* translate his Latin but I cannot pretend that I was at home with his many classical allusions.

Burton uses that poem John White quotes from as his 'Abstract of Melancholy' by beginning it:

When I go musing all alone,
Thinking of divers things fore-known
When I build castles in the air,
Void of sorrow and void of fear,
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet,
Methinks the time runs very fleet.

All my joys to this are folly,

Naught so sweet as melancholy ... and you could be forgiven for thinking that melancholy is really rather pleasant. I had just been reading of a first cousin of my great-grandfather who came to a hotel in Bangor in Wales, said he didn't want to be disturbed as he was much fatigued, went into his bedroom and shot himself. They found with him a book of German poetry open at a poem called 'The Graves' as well as a novel by Balzac. His brother when he came from Ireland said he had been in a state of 'great despondency' and shunned his friends and relatives. But it was decided at the inquest that 'overstudy' was a cause. Burton too mentions overstudy as a cause of melancholy. What had been melancholy became despondency and now we talk regularly of depression.

But when I came upon Thomas Hood's poem 'Ode to Melancholy' I thought there is a difference between the Elizabethan Burton's melancholy and the Victorian Hood's melancholy; Ay, let us think of Him a while,
 That, with a coffin for a boat,
 Rows daily o'er the Stygian moat,
 And for our table choose a tomb ...that this suggests more of a death wish, a kind of Victorian relish in all the paraphernalia of death and mourning ...

Burton moves easily between English and Latin, he quotes Greek and Roman authors, the Bible, English traditions, in fact, he is looking at the ways that great writers from antiquity to his present day have described melancholy and its causes, or presumed causes. It would be hard to find a more thorough exploration of the things that make people sad. From the physical, the food you eat, cold, damp, illness (everything from headaches and haemorrhoids to jaundice), old age, deformity, poverty, to the mental, fear, sorrow, shame, worry, hypochondria, barrenness, solitariness, to the spiritual, possession, guilt, unbelief, he believes the health of every aspect of the body is important. In fact there is hardly an aspect of human life he does not consider. But he is not looking at it as a specific problem for a doctor but rather as a problem on which many great minds have pondered on and sought relief from.

It is hard to know what a doctor might make of his descriptions: "To the part affected, I may here add the parties, which shall be more opportunely spoken of elsewhere, now only signified. Such as have the Moon, Saturn, Mercury misaffected in their genitures; such as live in over-cold or over-hot climes; such as are born of melancholy parents; as offend in those six non-natural things, are black, or of a high sanguine complexion, that have little heads, that have a hot heart, moist brain, hot liver and cold stomach, have been long sick; such as are solitary by nature, great students, given to much contemplation, lead a life out of action, are most subject to melancholy. Of sexes both, but men more often; yet women misaffected are far more violent, and grievously troubled. Of seasons of the year, the autumn is most melancholy. Of peculiar times: old age, from which natural melancholy is almost an inseparable accident; but this artificial malady is more frequent in such as are of a middle age."

Or a dietician: "Hare, a black meat, melancholy, and hard of digestion; it breeds *incubus*, often eaten, and causeth fearful dreams, so doth all venison, and is condemned by a jury of physicians." Or: "Amongst fowl, peacocks and pigeons, all fenny fowl are forbidden, as ducks, geese, swans, herons, cranes, coots, didappers, waterhens, with all those teals, currs, sheldrakes, and peckled fowls, that come hither in winter out of Scandia, Muscovy, Greenland, Friesland, which half the year are covered all over with snow and frozen up. Though these be fair in feathers, pleasant in taste, and have a good outside, like hypocrites, white in plumes, and soft, their flesh is hard, black, unwholesome, dangerous, melancholy meat" ...

And would sufferers take his words to heart? "Inveterate Melancholy, howsoever it may seem to be a continue, inexorable disease, hard to be cured, accompanying them to their graves, most part, as Montanus observes, yet many times it may be helped, even that which is most violent, or at least, according to the same author, "it may be mitigated and much eased." *Nil desperandum* [never despair]. It may be hard to cure, but not impossible for him that is most grievously affected, if he be but willing to be helped."

The glossary is a reminder of the way meanings have changed or words fallen out of use. Here is a small taste: Abraham-men: beggars who counterfeited lunacy. Acherontic: moribund. Advoutry: adultery. Antic: a buffoon. Baby: a doll or puppet. Bangle: to fritter away. Bayard: someone blinded by self-conceit. Black guard: scullions in a great household. Cample: to wrangle. Cautelous: wary. Chitty: meagre. Cockney-like: effeminate. Conceited: witty. Cornute:

to cuckold. Defecate: to purify. Economical: pertaining to a household. Falling sickness: epilepsy. Hacker: a bully. Jet: to strut. Meskite: a mosque. Naughty: worthless. Ouch: a brooch or necklace. Peculiar: special. Pigsney: a term of endearment. Politicians: writers on politics. Prune: to preen. Scamble: to struggle. Terse: neat. Union: a large pearl.

People say Shakespeare had a vocabulary of around 20,000 words. I suspect that Burton could double that. The words just pour from his nib with a richness and fascination which carry the reader along. For example:

“A mere spectator of other men’s fortunes and adventures, and how they act their parts, which methinks are diversely presented unto me, as from a common theatre or scene. I hear new news every day, and those ordinary rumours of war, plagues, fires, inundations, thefts, murders, massacres, meteors, comets, spectrums, prodigies, apparitions, of towns taken, cities besieged in France, Germany, Turkey, Persia, Poland, etc., daily musters and preparations, and such-like, which these tempestuous times afford, battles fought, so many men slain, monomachies, shipwrecks, piracies, and sea-fights, peace, leagues, stratagems, and fresh alarms. A vast confusion of vows, wishes, actions, edicts, petitions, lawsuits, pleas, laws, proclamations, complaints, grievances are daily brought to our ears. New books every day, pamphlets, currantoes, stories, whole catalogues of volumes of all sorts, new paradoxes, opinions, schisms, heresies, controversies in philosophy, religion, etc. Now come tidings of weddings, maskings, mummeries, entertainments, jubilees, embassies, tilts and tournaments, trophies, triumphs, revels, sports, plays: then again, as in a new shifted scene, treasons, cheating tricks, robberies, enormous villainies in all kinds, funerals, burials, death of princes, new discoveries, expeditions: now comical, then tragical matters. To-day we hear of new lords and officers created, to-morrow of some great men deposed, and then again of fresh honours conferred; one is let loose, another imprisoned; one purchaseth, another breaketh; he thrives, his neighbour turns bankrupt; now plenty, then again dearth and famine; one runs, another rides, wrangles, laughs, weeps, etc. Thus I daily hear, and such-like, both private and public news; amidst the gallantry and misery of the world—jollity, pride, perplexities and cares, simplicity and villainy; subtlety, knavery, candour and integrity, mutually mixed and offering themselves—I rub on *privus privates* [in complete privacy]; as I have still lived, so I now continue, *statu quo prius*, left to a solitary life and mine own domestic discontents: saving that sometimes, *ne quid mentiar* [not to conceal anything], as Diogenes went into the city and Democritus to the haven to see fashions, I did for my recreation now and then walk abroad, look into the world, and could not choose but make some little observation, *non iam sagax observator, ac simplex recitator* [less by way of shrewd remark than of simple statement of fact], not as they did, to scoff or laugh at all, but with a mixed passion.”

He was a few years younger than Shakespeare, being born in 1577, but his vocabulary, his worldview, his outlook, his interests can be seen as those engaging the minds of men (and sometimes women) in the Elizabethan era. He too was a young man from the provinces though he spent most of his life in the relatively peaceful confines of Oxford rather than the hurly-burly of London. But his proffered reason for writing his huge sprawling erudite book seems inadequate. I cannot help wondering if his book was his excuse to sit reading quietly in libraries and studies rather than engaging with the chaos of life outside. If so, I feel a sense of kinship.

* * * * *

February 9: Brendan Behan

February 10: Boris Pasternak

Charles Lamb

John Shirley

February 11: Jane Yolen

February 12: Charles Darwin

February 13: Georges Simenon
February 14: Bruce Beaver
February 15: Bruce Dawe
Alfred North Whitehead

* * * * *

I tend to mix up Leslie Weatherhead and Alfred Whitehead. They were both English certainly and it is possible they knew something of each other's work. It may even be that their ideas slightly overlapped but I don't think I can say more than that.

*

Janet Malcolm in *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice* writes of Gertrude Stein's book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, "Gertrude Stein can entirely dispense with the fiction of humility that the conventional autobiographer must at every moment struggle to maintain. "I must say that only three times in my life have I met a genius," Stein has Toklas say of their first meeting, "and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead." "

The question there must be: what was it about Whitehead which she regarded as the seed of genius?

Whitehead was a philosopher, a mathematician, a writer on the philosophy of education, of science, of metaphysics. In him you can see something vaguely harking back to Bishop Berkeley's ideas and forward to ideas such as the Uncertainty Principle. He had Bertrand Russell as a student and they worked together on *Principia Mathematica*. He wrote books such as *Science and the Modern World*, *Process and Reality* and *The Concept of Nature*. Of *Nature* he wrote "The nature which is the fact apprehended in awareness holds within the greenness of the trees, the song of the birds, the warmth of the sun, the hardness of the chairs, and the feel of the velvet. The cause of awareness is the conjectured system of molecules and electrons which so affects the mind as to produce the awareness of apparent nature."

He believed that it is events, happenings, which we must study, not try to pin down static objects. And as objects like quarks get smaller and more elusive it is what they do rather than what they are which fascinates scientists. Is this way of looking at the world also what intrigued Gertrude Stein? Perhaps it resonated with her as she tried to use words so they were always in motion rather than sitting safe and solid and well-defined on the page.

Weatherhead was a clergyman and writer. He took the philosophy "Be relevant, be simple and be loving" as he wrote energetically. His books included *Life Begins at Death*, *The Will of God*, *Wounded Spirits: Case Histories of Spiritual and Physical Healing*, *Psychology in the Service of the Soul*, *Psychology and the Cure of Souls*, *The Case for Reincarnation* and *The After-world of the Poets: The Contribution of Victorian Poets to the Development of the Idea of Immortality*.

This is probably why I thought of Weatherhead while I was reading *The Afterlife Experiments* by Gary E. Schwartz as life beyond this life was one of his deep preoccupations. He probably would have read and re-read Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* and similar books if he had lived long enough. People I know who are interested in 'faith healing' tend to be interested in Weatherhead. But he was controversial in religious circles for a different reason.

He queried everything in the Bible. There were no settled certainties. He wanted his preaching to be both topical and timeless. People responded well to this. But there was disquiet when he suggested long held beliefs might not be founded in truth.

I do not know if Gertrude Stein ever read any of his work or whether she would have seen ‘a seed of genius’ in him. But it is interesting to watch mathematics, physics, and religion creep closer together, if in complex ways, after their long years apart.

* * * * *

February 16: Peter Porter

Iain Banks

February 17: Banjo Paterson

Margaret Truman

* * * * *

While I was reading *The Centuries of Santa Fe* by Paul Horgan I found myself thinking back to what Margaret Truman had to say about the American-Mexican War. Margaret Truman published her father’s personal writings as *Where the Buck Stops: The Personal and Private Writings of Harry S. Truman*. The President who went to war with Mexico was James Polk. “Polk was a strong supporter of Texas’ entry into the United States” and “Our annexation of Texas made Mexico our bitter enemy for a while”; the United States gave Mexico fifteen million dollars for California, New Mexico, and parts of several other states. In other words, President Polk vastly enlarged the size of the USA. It isn’t surprising that Harry Truman regarded James Polk as a great president. Abraham Lincoln regarded the war with Mexico as unconstitutional but he certainly didn’t offer to give Texas or anything else back when he became President.

There is a more fundamental question in there: did the people of Texas genuinely want to leave Mexico and become part of the United States, as Polk believed. That the US with a much smaller army had relatively little difficulty in over-running the Mexicans and going all the way to Mexico City where a treaty was signed suggests either that the Mexicans were appallingly badly led or that many people didn’t support their army for the simple reason that they thought life would be better in an American Texas than in a Mexican Texas. (General Santa Anna had ousted a previous Mexican president, he then lost Texas, lost the Mexican-American War a decade later, then sold a large slice of New Mexico and Arizona to the US for \$10 million; would the histories of both the United States and Mexico have been very different if, instead of Santa Anna, Mexico had had brilliant political and military leadership allied with a stable political structure and no coups? It is very difficult to run an effective military campaign if you are constantly looking over your shoulder ...)

As Mexicans have been crossing the border ever since it suggests either that they are homesick for their lost lands or they do believe they will have a better life in the United States.

But the image of the ‘wetback’ is rather misleading. It is the *lack* of water which kills.

Jason Kersten in *Journal of the Dead* writes, “People of every kind continue to die in the southern deserts—adventure travelers, desert lovers, nature seekers—but the kind it kills most are still the Spanish speakers. It kills them more than ever, an average of nearly four hundred a year. Their deaths are so common that they make national news only when an especially large group gets lost and wiped out while on its way to a better opportunity. The names of the places they die are now also called sectors—Del Rio Sector, Marfa Sector, El Paso Sector—divisions of the U.S. Border Patrol, which usually finds the bodies. Their stories are case files.”

*

“The Hispanic population, overwhelmingly Mexican, makes up 47 percent of New Mexico, 39 percent of California, 38 percent of Texas, 30 percent of Arizona, and 27 percent of Nevada. Hispanics are also the largest minority group in Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.”

Ann Coulter in ¡Adios, America!

Paul Sheehan in *Among the Barbarians* writes that George Johnson at the University of Michigan “estimated that the influx of ten million unskilled immigrants to America between 1980 and 1995 raised the annual output of the economy by about US\$110.5 billion, of which US\$108.8 billion went to the immigrants themselves in wages, education and welfare benefits. This left what Johnson calls ‘a trivial net gain to domestic residents’ from large-scale immigration. Even this gain was offset by the effect of immigration on internal social cohesion and on the environment.” But this begs the question: did the immigrants send that money out of the US or did they spend it on American cars, American white goods, American hamburgers? Social cohesion and the environment are thornier issues—though I am not sure home-grown Americans are good on the environment. I am just reading Diane Wilson’s *An Unreasonable Woman* about the pollution in Texas; “In 1989, an EPA study revealed that Calhoun County, on Texas’s Gulf Coast was the most polluted place in the United States.” Mexico is hardly a miracle of environmental care and protection but unskilled Mexican immigrants did not create that particular problem.

I have read that the majority of people in Los Angeles now have Spanish as their first language. (“In June 1992 the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 51 percent of the Los Angeles population could not speak English.”) So if there had been no war and no claim on Texas would there be a steady stream of Mexicans crossing into the United States—or would they all have found prosperity and happiness in a Mexican Texas?

History books, both of Mexico and the USA, naturally look at this war but it seems strangely unused as a theme in novels. Westerns, film and books, used to have someone cry ‘Remember the Alamo!’ but that too seems to have faded away. Is it because the old habit of seeing the US as the inevitable hero and certainly in the right, or if not exactly right then at least justified, has given way to doubts. Or because people have the uneasy feeling that if you take and colonise someone else’s land then sooner or later you have to deal with people who either resent that or believe you owe them something?

Of course Mexico had no more right to take Native American territory than did the Americans. But Mexicans can blame the Spanish and the Spanish can blame ... history.

And a curious little end-note: A. F. Tschiffely in his famous ride from Argentina to the USA in the early 1930s writes, “The change from one side to the other of the Rio Grande, as the Americans call it, or Rio Bravo, which is the Mexican name for the same river, is like that from night to day. In Nuevo Laredo there are no paved streets, and pools of stagnant water oblige one to pick one’s way. Most of the houses are made of wood, and cleanliness is only known as a word that figures in the dictionary. The only thing Nuevo Laredo has better than Laredo Texas is the water supply, which is excellent. Laredo on the Texas side is like a paradise when compared to the other, for the streets are all made of concrete, the houses and neat stores are of ultra-modern type, and even skyscrapers tower into the sky. The hotels, although much smaller, compare favourably with New York’s average giants, ... The land on the Texan side of the river is all under cultivation, onions, oranges, grape fruit, and different vegetables being the chief products. In fact, to-day Texas is the biggest onion supplier of the U.S. It is obvious that something must be wrong in Mexico, for although the land on the southern side of the river is exactly the same as on the Texas side, it is a semi-desert and scarcely inhabited.”

He goes on, “The majority of the landworkers are Mexicans, or of Mexican descent, and the comments I heard about them were all very complimentary. They are very hardworking and thrifty, and even a very insignificant salary satisfies them. Cheap Mexican labour makes it difficult for American hands to find work in the fields, and some day this will give rise to a knotty economical problem; in fact, Mexican labour in Texas and other border States has already

provoked serious trouble and is the basis of several bills in Congress to place all Latin-American immigration on a quota basis—aimed entirely at Mexicans.”

Apart from the fact that the wages paid to Mexican labourers must truly have been insignificant to be able to undercut desperate Americans in the heart of the Depression, it seems to sum up both the temptation and the potential disaster. Of course people looked with envious eyes at cultivated, organized, irrigated farmland, bursting with its version of ‘milk and honey’, just across the border. But no amount of initiative and planning can stop the rivers and wells and bores from running dry if too much water is taken ...

*

Margaret Truman married Clifton Daniel who became managing editor of the *New York Times*, a connection which probably helped his career, but he also seemed to have cared deeply; Gay Talese said of their first meeting, ‘To this day Daniel remembers very sharply the smallest details about her that night—her wonderful complexion, never suggested in her photographs, and the way she wore her hair, her shoes, the dark blue Fontana dress with the plunging neckline: Daniel recalling to a friend years later, “I looked down the neck of that dress and I haven’t looked back since.”’ That he also got inside information was probably just a bonus ...

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February 18: Toni Morrison
February 19: Carson McCullers
February 20: François Voltaire
Richard Matheson
February 21: W. H. Auden
February 22: Sean O’Faoláin
February 23: Samuel Pepys
February 24: David Williamson
Grant Allen
Clark Russell
Wilhelm Grimm
February 25: Anthony Burgess
February 26: Victor Hugo
Theodore Sturgeon
Elizabeth Bibesco
February 27: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Elliott O’Donnell
Rudolf Steiner
February 28: Stephen Spender
February 29: Howard Nemerov
March 1: Robert Lowell
William Dean Howells
March 2: Sholom Aleichim
Peter Straub
March 3: Edward Thomas
William Godwin
Arthur Machen
March 4: Alan Sillitoe
March 5: Lady Augusta Gregory
Mem Fox
March 6: Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Gabriel Garcia Márquez
March 7: Piers Paul Reed
March 8: Kenneth Grahame
Peter Saxon
March 9: Vita Sackville-West
March 10: Peter Tremayne
Augusto Boal
March 11: Jack Davis
Geoffrey Blainey
Ezra Jack Keats
March 12: Jack Kerouac
March 13: Hugh Walpole
March 14: Maxim Gorki
Algernon Blackwood
Pam Ayres
March 15: Robert Nye
March 16: Sully Prudhomme
César Vallejo
March 17: Penelope Lively

* * * * *

Penelope Lively wrote in *A House Unlocked*, “Of all dogmas, childcare ones are, perhaps, the most mutable. Strap the baby to a board and hang it on a convenient beam, farm it out to a wet nurse in some insanitary cottage. Deprive it of fruit and vegetables because these are bad for the digestive system – the ensuing scurvy is attributed to teething problems. Dunk it in an ice-cold bath every day in the interests of healthy development. Some earlier methods of child-rearing sound today more like child abuse. By the twentieth century those involved in childcare, the mother above all, were bombarded with advice and exhortations from successive authorities on the subject. In the early part of the century, Truby King and the Mothercraft movement dominated. Lucy had a copy of the Truby King manual – I can see its blue cover to this day, battered and stained, so evidently much consulted. The Truby King baby was fed by the clock, four-hourly and no night feeds. In between it was exposed to as much fresh air as possible, even spending nights on a veranda or porch. Those infants tactless enough to object to this regime must be left, gently but firmly, to ‘cry it out’. The emphasis was on a careful and rigorous training which would produce a biddable and well-behaved child. Manners were high on the agenda and the criterion whereby any child was judged by those in the business: ‘Quite a nice little girl,’ Lucy would say of some new acquaintance, ‘but not good manners, I’m afraid.’ Each mealtime was a ritual of saying ‘please’ and ‘thank you’, finishing up what was on your plate, and not interrupting or fidgeting.

“By the 1950s, Truby King was a dead duck, though that obsession with fresh air somehow lingered on. I can remember dutifully parking the baby in a pram in the garden in midwinter. But our mentor was Benjamin Spock. A paperback copy of his *Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* was on every thinking mother’s shelf, bringing new ideas and reassurance from across the Atlantic.” And he, in his turn, was replaced by people like Miriam Stoppard and Penelope Leach. But Truby King was both admired and made fun of in his own time. Yeatman and Sellar in *And Now all This* homed in on his fixation with babies sleeping to a rigid routine:

“And now, sweet polymorph, it is high time, according to the Mothercraft Manual, for you to re-enter the land of Polymorpheus; in short, you’ve got to go really and Truby to sleep and run over those psymbols once more to make sure you’ve got them right.

At the risk, therefore, of permanently blighting your psyche we will attempt to soothe you with a teeny-weeny psycho-lullabye, thus:

PSYCHO-LULLABYE

Hushabye Babies
(*Hush quite a lot*)—
Bad Babies get Rabies
(*And have to be shot*).
So suck the right fingers,
And dream the right dreams,
(*And don’t you wake up with
Psymbolical Pscreams!*)”

While Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in *The Long Weekend* were kinder: “Those of the lost generation who had children were determined that these must not suffer as they themselves had from their upbringing, but must have as healthy and happy a childhood as possible and be encouraged from the first to become industrious and responsible citizens of the world. As a hopeful start, ‘mothercraft’ had recently been raised to an exact science by the meticulous Dr. Truby King. It was generally felt that the muddle into which the world had got itself could not be straightened out ‘in our time’, so that the chief hope lay in the next generation.” The trouble lay in the conjunction of babies and ‘exact science’.

But do people still treat such writers as oracles and gurus—or do they turn to their peers or even to the manufacturers and advertisers of baby products?

Keith Windschuttle wrote in *The Media*, “The same type of trap is common to a number of the most successful advertising campaigns (ie. to make the watcher feel inadequate if she doesn’t respond) directed at women. One prominent recent example is that for disposable baby nappies where the new mother is made to feel guilty for using ‘ordinary cloth nappies’ which, because they allegedly leave the baby wetter, make it cry with discomfort: ‘I do hate it when she’s wet and uncomfortable’. The use of disposable nappies (expensive plastic and paper products) is claimed to keep the baby’s skin drier, thus persuading the woman that she is thereby a better mother. This sort of appeal could only work with a new, inexperienced mother like the one in the commercial. Babies do not cry because they are wet. Anyone with experience knows that babies are quite happy to slosh around in warm, urine-drenched cotton nappies for hours. The commercial is predicated on the ignorance of the young mother and her lack of competence in handling her infant, as well as her isolation from the advice of those who know about babies. This is not only a case of exploiting a vulnerable member of the community, it is also selling her a costly throw-away product whose once-only use of plastic and paper resources is more ecologically expensive than the traditional re-usable cotton product it seeks to replace.”

I’m not sure that ‘happy’ is quite the right word. But that particular horse has bolted; I have never been able to persuade any young mother to use cloth nappies.

*

A different baby care oracle is the one mentioned in *Anne’s House of Dreams* by L. M. Montgomery. Sir Oracle. Was he a real ‘expert’, the Truby King of his time, or did she create him for her own purposes? It has been suggested she took the name from Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. Gratiano says to his friend and fellow merchant of Venice, Antonio:

Let me play the fool!

With mirth and laughter let old wrinkles come,
 And let my liver rather heat with wine
 Than my heart cool with mortifying groans.
 Why should a man whose blood is warm within
 Sit like his grandsire cut in alabaster?
 Sleep when he wakes? and creep into the jaundice
 By being peevish? I tell thee what, Antonio,
 I love thee, and 'tis my love that speaks:
 There are a sort of men whose visages
 Do cream and mantle like a standing pond,
 And do a wilfull stillness entertain
 With purpose to be dressed in an opinion
 Of wisdom, gravity, profound conceit –
 As who should say, 'I am Sir Oracle,
 And when I ope my lips, let no dog bark!'
 O my Antonio, I do know of these
 That therefore only are reputed wise
 For saying nothing, when I am very sure
 If they should speak would almost damn those ears,
 Which hearing them would call their brothers fools.

But the habit of calling a supposed expert in any field an 'oracle' is well entrenched. She wrote, "Anne, in the months before Little Jem's coming, had pored diligently over several wise volumes, and pinned her faith to one in especial, *Sir Oracle on the Care and Training of Children*. Sir Oracle implored parents by all they held sacred never to talk 'baby talk' to their children. Infants should invariably be addressed in classical language from the moment of their birth. So should they learn to speak English undefiled from their earliest utterance. 'How,' demanded Sir Oracle, 'can a mother reasonably expect her child to learn correct speech, when she constantly accustoms its impressionable grey matter to such absurd expressions and distortions of our noble tongue as thoughtless mothers inflict every day on the helpless creatures committed to their care? Can a child who is constantly called "tweet itty wee singie" ever attain to any proper conception of his own being and possibilities and destiny?"

Anne was vastly impressed with this, and informed Gilbert that she meant to make it an inflexible rule never, under any circumstances, to talk 'baby talk' to her children. Gilbert agreed with her, and they made a solemn compact on the subject – a compact which Anne shamelessly violated the very first moment Little Jem was laid in her arms. 'Oh, the darling itty wee sing!' she had exclaimed. And she had continued to violate it ever since. When Gilbert teased her she laughed Sir Oracle to scorn.

'He never had any children of his own. Gilbert – I am positive he hadn't or he would never have written such rubbish. You just can't help talking baby talk to a baby. It comes natural – and it's *right*. It would be inhuman to talk to those tiny, soft, velvety little creatures as we do to great big boys and girls. Babies want love and cuddling and all the sweet baby talk they can get, and Little Jem is going to have it, bess his dear itty heartums.'

'But you're the worst I ever heard, Anne,' protested Gilbert, who, not being a mother but only a father, was not wholly convinced yet that Sir Oracle was wrong. 'I never heard anything like the way you talk to that child.'

'Very likely you never did. Go away – go away. Didn't I bring up three pairs of Hammond twins before I was eleven? You and Sir Oracle are nothing but cold-blooded theorists,

Gilbert, *just* look at him! He's smiling at me – he knows what we're talking about. And oo dest agwees wif evy word muzzer says, don't oo, angel-lover?"

Gilbert put his arm about them. 'Oh, you mothers!' he said. 'You mothers! God knew what He was about when He made you.' "

Her book came out in 1926 when Truby King was still the Oracle of childcare, though it is actually set well before his advent, and I can't help wondering if this was Montgomery's way of taking a dig at the rigid prescriptions of the experts, the 'cold-blooded theorists', and urging mothers to trust their own understanding and instincts.

* * * * *

March 18: Wilfred Owen

John Updike

March 19: Tobias George Smollett

Arthur Brooke (d)

March 20: David Malouf

Nicholas Royle

Rosemary Timperley

March 21: Thomas Shapcott

Margaret Mahy

Jim Thompson

March 22: Nicholas Monserrat

March 23: Joseph Quincy Adams

Frank Sargeson (Norris Frank Davey)

March 24: Olive Schreiner

Malcolm Muggeridge

Dario Fo

March 25: Anne Brontë

March 26: Robert Frost

A. E. Housman

Tennessee Williams

March 27: Mrs Campbell Praed

March 28: Mario Vargas Llosa

March 29: Denton Welch

March 30: Sean O'Casey

March 31: Octavio Paz

Gogol

John Fowles

April 1: Edgar Wallace

William Harvey

Truby King

* * * * *

"The *Circling* streams, once thought but pools, of blood". So wrote poet John Dryden. And the man who brought those 'circling streams' to public attention was William Harvey.

Kenneth J. Franklin writing of Harvey quotes him as saying: 'I have,' he said, 'as much right to call this movement of the blood circular as Aristotle had to say that the air and rain emulate the circular movement of the heavenly bodies.'

Warden of Merton, traveler, court official, member of the College of Physicians, writer on midwifery, researcher on eggs into chickens, embryonic development, vivisector. Some of his

material is lost. But we all know blood circulates, even if bodies aren't circular. No one could now convince anyone else that blood merely sits in pools.

It seems self-evident yet Harvey apparently did a lot of nasty things to dogs to prove his theory of 'circling streams' and according to Brian Luke in *Brutal*, "One of William Harvey's official duties, for example, was to examine women for the presence of the "witch's teat" that would be used as evidence against them by the inquisitors." Which raises the question: was he ever tempted to vivisect not only his unfortunate dogs but the women hanged or burnt for supposedly being witches?

I had not thought of medical treatments and breakthroughs as particularly lending themselves to fiction—apart from doctor/nurse romances and Robin Cook's medical thrillers—but the other day I saw *The Literary Companion to Medicine* by Richard Gordon and was curious enough to want to browse and see what kinds of books qualified and whether anyone else besides Dryden had ever been inspired by Harvey's work. It seems not. But curiously there was another William Harvey in there—though for quite a different reason.

Gordon writes, "Slimming is of literary origin. In 1863, William Banting, a London cabinet-maker, had become so fat that he needed to walk downstairs backwards. Doctor after doctor was powerless to spare him the danger of becoming wedged in the banisters. Then a throat surgeon, William Harvey, surprised the patient with a simple instruction: cut out the milk and butter, sugar and potatoes. For breakfast, Banting got four ounces of meat, or fish, or bacon, and an ounce of toast. For his dinner, an ounce or so of meat, fruit and vegetables and another ounce of toast. At tea-time, a rusk and fruit; for supper four ounces of meat or fish. He drank milkless tea, but was happily allowed several glasses a day of sherry or claret. He lost two and a half stone in nine months. He wrote in delight *A Letter on Corpulence Addressed to the Public*, which was equally delightedly seized upon by fat men and women, who could still go up and down stairs without second thoughts. 'Banting', or 'to bant', passed into the language."

I have never heard slimming called banting here but Agatha Christie in a Miss Marple story in the *Tuesday Club Murders* has a character who is banting as does Graham Greene in *Travels With My Aunt* ...

* * * * *

April 2: Emile Zola

William Holman Hunt

April 3: Reginald Hill

George Herbert

April 4: Kenneth McKenney

Margaret Oliphant

Dan Simmons

April 5: Algernon Charles Swinburne

Robert Bloch

* * * * *

Ulick O'Connor in his biography of Oliver St John Gogarty writes, "Both Bell and Gogarty shared a deep admiration for Robert Bridges and Swinburne. These two poets possessed superb metrical ears, and had resolved difficult classical metres into English equivalents. ... Swinburne was Gogarty's idol. Twice he had made a pilgrimage to Wimbledon where Swinburne lived 'armed with a laurel wreath and a sonnet fit to empty a town' to pay his respects, but each time he had been foiled by Theodore Watts-Dunton, who was literally Swinburne's warder, allowing him twopence a day for drink, and letting him out only at certain hours. Profiting by Gogarty's experience, Bell determined to try and nab Swinburne during the

short journey that Watts-Dunton allowed him to make in the afternoon between their house and the 'Rose and Crown' in Wimbledon. His purpose was to present Swinburne with a copy of his *Newdigate*. But the 'best-laid schemes ... gang aft agley', and when Swinburne saw Bell coming at him from behind a tree, he mistook him for one of the blackmailers who were continually appearing to remind him of his unsavoury past, and fled as fast as his little legs could carry him."

Gogarty may have idolized Swinburne but it didn't stop him writing, after hearing Bell's story—

And tell me all you left unsaid
About the Bard with nose as red
As cochineal enclareted.

*

Would you idolize someone with an 'unsavoury past'? Are we more forgiving of people who write things we admire? I don't think these are questions Gogarty would have asked. And I can see why he would admire Swinburne's lines such as:

When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous
Is half assuaged for Itylus,
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,
The tongueless vigil, and all the pain.

Come with bows bent and with emptying of quivers,
Maiden most perfect, lady of light,
With a noise of winds and many rivers,
With a clamour of waters, and with might;
Bind on thy sandals, O thou most fleet,
For the faint east quickens, the wan west shivers,
Round the feet of the day and the feet of the night.

Where shall we find her, how shall we sing to her,
Fold our hands round her knees, and cling?
O that man's heart were as fire and could spring to her,
Fire, or the strength of the streams that spring!
For the stars and the winds are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp-player;
For the risen stars and the fallen cling to her,
And the southwest-wind and the west-wind sing.

For winter's rains and ruins are over,
And all the season of snows and sins;
The days dividing lover and lover,
The light that loses, the night that wins;
And time remember'd is grief forgotten,
And frosts are slain and flowers begotten,
And in green underwood and cover
Blossom by blossom the spring begins.

from 'Atalanta in Calydon'.

Now I am not familiar with the allusions from Greek mythology he was probably steeped in, nor am I excited to learn that he was doing new things with poetic forms, but I can see how his images remain in the mind, and I can imagine people, and not just Gogarty, reciting his lines with pleasure.

I had a schoolboy who stammers in *The Set of the Sun* be asked to read Swinburne in class and he gets caught on that 'brown bright nightingale' but I didn't think of Swinburne as someone who delights in that kind of alliteration until I was reading the *Oxford Guide to Word Games* by Tony Augarde who writes:

"Swinburne was notorious for his use of alliteration:

O swallow, sister, O fair swift swallow,
Why wilt thou fly after spring to the south,
The soft south whither thine heart is set? ('Itylus')

He was good-humoured enough to recognize his own failing, which he parodied in a poem called *Nepheleidia* that began:

From the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn through a notable
nimbus of nebulous moonshine,
Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that flickers with fear of
the flies as they float... "

I wondered how many schoolboys in real life struggled with Swinburne ... He isn't easy to read aloud ...

* * * * *

Oh, and you wanted to know about that 'unsavoury past' rather than the beauty of lines such as 'Blossom by blossom the spring begins'?

I went browsing in *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry* (ed. Joseph Bristow) which says, "As Foucault famously observed, it was also during the Victorian period that homosexuality and heterosexuality were first classified as sexual identities. Critics in the later 1980s began to be interested in the homoeroticism of *In Memoriam*, the figuring of "the perverse" in Swinburne, and the invocation of homophilia in Hopkins. In 1990, Richard Dellamora treated the poetry of Tennyson, Hopkins, and Swinburne to show how desire between men and notions of poetic androgyny underwrite and indeed structure conceptions of art and poetry throughout the nineteenth century."

But it wasn't solely that Swinburne was homosexual. He was upsetting people for all sorts of reasons. "Wilde's poetry, like Swinburne's, presents a Hellenism in conflict with Christianity." Years before Frederick Nietzsche was calling God dead, Swinburne was writing, "Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death is upon thee, O Lord". He told students at Oxford that Queen Victoria held orgies and was having an affair with Lord John Russell which produced a bastard child. He claimed a book criticizing him called *Jonas Fisher* which came out anonymously in 1875 was by Robert Buchanan and called him a " 'multifaced' idyllist of the gutter". Unfortunately for Swinburne the book was actually by James Carnegie and Buchanan sued him, winning the libel case and £150. It comes as no surprise to learn that Swinburne was taken off the list of contenders for the post of Poet Laureate.

But Swinburne's parents, perhaps despairing of their wayward child, arranged for him to live with critic and poet Theodore Watts-Dunton. "Yet Swinburne's earlier life, notably his

frequent drunkenness and regular visits to flagellation brothels, was hardly a secret. Although it would be absurd to suggest that admirers thought the young Swinburne's behavior was necessary to the creation of poetry, it is not absurd to claim that during the 1890s the poet was widely perceived to be a special type of human being." It comes as no surprise to learn that the 1890s were known as 'the Decadence' ... but it *is* a surprise to learn that blackmailers continued to pursue him because his 'unsavoury past' was hardly a secret ...

And yet, in the days before the tabloids let alone FaceBook, perhaps there were admirers who mainly knew Swinburne through his poetry? When Alfred Noyes wrote 'In Memory of Swinburne' and included the verses—

Home to the heart of thine old-world lover,
Home to thy "fair green-girdled" sea!
There shall thy soul with the sea-birds hover,
Free of the deep as their wings are free;
Free, for the grave-flowers only cover
This, the dark cage of thee.

Thee, the storm-bird, nightingale-souled,
Brother of Sappho, the seas reclaim!
Age upon age have the great waves rolled
Mad with her music, exultant, aflame;
Thee, thee too, shall their glory enfold,
Lit with thy snow-winged fame.

—my first thought was that he was responding to the Swinburne who wrote of spring and nightingales, with just a discreet reference to his sexual proclivities, but on second reading I felt he was suggesting the 'dark cage' for Swinburne the man and 'snow-winged fame' for Swinburne the poet ...

* * * * *

April 6: Graeme Base

April 7: Gabriela Mistral

William Wordsworth

April 8: James Herbert

April 9: Charles Baudelaire

April 10: A. E.

Paul Theroux

April 11: Bernard O'Dowd

April 12: Scott Turow

Alan Ayckbourn

April 13: Seamus Heaney

Samuel Beckett

Eudora Welty

Herman Raucher

Max Harris

April 14: Thomas Monteleone

April 15: Henry James

April 16: J. M. Synge

Anatole France

Kingsley Amis

Ford Madox Brown

April 17: Isak Dinesen
Henry Vaughan
April 18: Henry Clarence Kendall
April 19: Richard Hughes
April 20: Dinah Craik
April 21: Charlotte Brontë
April 22: Henry Fielding
April 23: William Shakespeare
Halldor Laxness

* * * * *

Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* rarely gets an outing. So I've been reading it. And I was interested in what A. R. Humphreys had to say about its origins: "The play follows its principal sources – Holinshed's *Chronicles* in the second edition (1587) for most of its course, Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* for the Crammer scenes of Act V – very faithfully indeed, in a scholarly and intelligent way. Often, in fact, it is a close and capable (yet now and then cryptic) versifying of the original prose. The claim that 'all is true', and the Prologue's insistence on historical seriousness, may be reflections on another play at which *Henry VIII* seems often to glance – and to glance not too disapprovingly, though apparently eager to claim more respectful attention for its own superior status. That play is Samuel Rowley's episodic chronicle *When You See Me You Know Me*. This was written for performance at the Fortune Theatre by Prince Henry's Men, the rivals to Shakespeare's company, the King's Men. It was entered on the *Stationers' Register* on 12 February 1605 as 'the enterlude of K. Henry the 8th', and published the same year and again in 1613 (also in 1621 and 1632), with the subtitle *The famous Chronicle History of King Henry the Eighth, with the birth and virtuous life of Edward Prince of Wales*. It is a boisterous affair, fervent with patriotic Protestantism, and enlivened with clown comedy and an impetuous and formidable King.

"It offers many parallels to *Henry VIII* and in all probability influenced it. It makes much of ceremonial, state processions, fanfares, and the like. Both plays show Wolsey as the masterful Cardinal, ambitious for supremacy, imperiously free with men's rights and possessions, and alarmed by the spread of Lutheran doctrine (as also is his bigoted follower, Bishop Gardiner). Both plays present Henry himself as bluff, boisterous, and repeatedly bursting out with religious oaths and the expletive 'ha!' traditionally associated with him ... As Shakespeare's King urgently desires a son, to safeguard a kingdom 'Well worthy the best heir o'th'world' ... so likewise Rowley's had done. Rowley's Queen, Jane Seymour, dies in childbirth (as in *Henry VIII* Anne Bullen suffers almost mortally ...), and the King cites a verse about the phoenix which dies in producing its offspring (as in *Henry VIII* ... Princess Elizabeth is to be 'the maiden phoenix' succeeded by 'another heir' / As great in admiration as herself'). The Old Lady's entry in *Henry VIII*, to be rewarded for announcing the birth of an heir 'as like you [Henry] / As cherry is to cherry' ... seems to reflect a scene in Rowley when the King promises to reward whoever brings him similar news, and his court fool adds that the newsbringer must say that the baby is like its father. In both plays the King is given to terrible anger and terrifying glances, and Wolsey falls irretrievably when the King finds out the extent of his exorbitance and ambition. Some of the resemblances between *Henry VIII* and the earlier play go back to common sources in Holinshed and Foxe, but not all."

We are told that "Rowley writes entertainingly and presents a lively story with vigorous feeling. The King, for instance, goes disguised on a night foray to sample the popular life of his capital, finds himself in a sword-and-buckler fight with a robber, and is clapped into gaol by the watch. But the play is a garbled extravaganza on history, and Shakespeare's company at the

Globe, representing the highest standards of drama, would presumably wish to show how far, rising to the height of their great argument, they could outdo their competitors in the dignity and distinction with which they would display a king's life."

I'm not sure that audiences really wanted 'dignity and distinction' but my burning question was: who was Samuel Rowley?

Years ago I came upon the suggestion that Shakespeare based his *Romeo and Juliet* on an earlier play by Arthur Brooke. So who was Arthur Brooke? This week I've been looking for those two almost forgotten Elizabethan playwrights.

Samuel Rowley was a contemporary of Shakespeare's and they almost certainly knew each other. He almost certainly was an older brother to William Rowley, an actor, dramatist, poet, and pamphleteer, who is believed to have known Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Jonson, and like Dekker was an energetic collaborator with playwrights like Thomas Middleton, Philip Massinger and possibly Richard Hathaway. His *All's lost by Lust* was said to be based on a Spanish legend; he also wrote *A Match at Midnight* and *A Shoemaker a Gentleman, with the Life and Death of the Cripple that stole the Weathercock at Paules*. Samuel worked for the theatrical manager Philip Henslowe as a reader and reviser of the plays submitted but also began writing his own plays. He is known to have written *Judas, Samson, Joshua, Hymen's Holiday, or Cupid's Vagaries* which was acted at court in 1612; also *Hard Shift for Husbands* and *A French Tragedy of Richard III* which is thought to be a revision of Ben Jonson's *Richard Crookback*. But as none of these have survived their quality and their history is problematical. The DNB says, "When you see me you know me, or the famous Chronicle Historie of King Henrie VIII, with the Birth and Virtuous Life of Edward Prince of Wales, as it was played by the High and Mightie Prince of Wales his Servants; by Samvell Rovvley, Servant of the Prince" (ie. Prince Henry's company) was printed in 1605. Another play, later called *The Noble Spanish Soldier*, was revised and published by Thomas Dekker after Rowley had died in around 1633. It is thought to draw on an earlier play by John Day called the *Parliament of Bees*.

Both Rowleys were minor playwrights but William is described as having "a rare vein of whimsical humour" and Samuel's scenes of buffoonery were extremely popular with playgoers. They may not appeal to modern viewers who want to take Shakespeare and his contemporaries very seriously but it seems that Samuel and William were in high demand to 'lighten up' the more serious offerings of other playwrights. The audience, standing hours in the cold, wanted to be able to cheer and laugh and enjoy some unadulterated slapstick.

Arthur Brooke, or Broke, probably a Londoner, was of the previous generation, drowning in a shipwreck in 1563. The DNB describes him as a translator; his main work being *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Iulieit written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in English by Ar. Br. In ædibus Richard Totelli* (Totell) in 1562 which was entered in the Stationer's Register the same year as *The Tragicall History of the Romeus and Juliett with Sonettes*. "The volume is mainly of interest as the source whence Shakespeare drew the plot of his tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet.' It is written throughout in rhymed verse of alternate lines of twelve and fourteen syllables. Broke did not (as the title page states) translate directly from the Italian of Bandello, but from the 'Histoires Tragiques extraictes des Œuvres de Bandel' (Paris 1559), by Pierre Boaistuan surnamed Launay and François de Belle-Forest. Broke does not adhere very closely to his French original: he develops the character of the Nurse and alters the concluding scene in many important points, in all of which he is followed by Shakespeare. In the address to the reader Broke shows himself a staunch protestant, and deplores the introduction into the story of 'dronken gossyppes and superstitious friers (the naturally fitte instruments of unchastitie)' He also notices that the tale had already been acted on the stage with great applause. The popularity of Broke's undertaking is proved not only by Shakespeare's literal adoption of its

story, but by two imitations of it, issued almost immediately after its first publication (Bernard Garter's 'Tragical History of two English Lovers' 1565, and William Painter's 'Romeus and Giuletta' in the 'Palace of Pleasure,' 1566)."

And Brooke was sufficiently well known to be remembered; "Among George Turbeville's 'Epitaphes and other Poems' (1567) is one 'on the death of Maister Arthur Brooke, drowned in passing to New Haven.' Turbeville writes very pathetically of Broke's sudden death, and praises very highly his tale of

Julyet and her mate,
For there he shewde his cunning passing well,
When he the tale to English did translate.

Turberville describes Broke as a young man, and notes that he was crossing the seas to serve abroad in the English army." We should be grateful that Shakespeare was not caught up in any of those Elizabethan adventures that were fatal to many young men ... and others ...

Arthur Quiller-Couch said of Shakespeare, "We know for a fact that he worked upon old plays, old chronicles, other men's romances." Critics and scholars are undecided on how much of Rowley's work influenced Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* but there seems to be unanimity that Shakespeare helped himself freely to Brooke's tragic story of Romeo and Juliet—but then Brooke wasn't around to say 'I'm not sure I like what you're doing to my two young lovers'. And as the habit of 'borrowing', 'changing', 'reworking', 'revising', adding new characters, changing endings, and all the habits which would now see arms thrown up in horror, was so well entrenched in the theatrical world then it seems very unlikely he would have objected to Shakespeare's borrowing any more than he would have objected to the lesser known William Painter helping himself.

*

Shakespeare, like his fellow playwrights, helped himself freely to plots, ideas, and characters. But he does differ in one important respect. Many of his contemporaries were city men but he was steeped in the countryside. He understood growing and harvesting crops, the secret life of woodlands, the use of herbs, the wayside flowers; I very much doubt that story of him poaching a deer but I can well believe he snared rabbits, robbed birds' nests, or helped himself to windfalls in other people's orchards.

I was thinking on this when I came upon a book called *Shakespeare's Flowers* by Jessica Kerr and illustrated by someone with the very suitable name of Anne Ophelia Dowden. Kerr writes, "William Shakespeare grew up as a country boy and never lost his love for flowers. The house where he was born must have had a garden, even if a small one, with an all-important herb garden and, perhaps, an orchard at the back. The market town of Stratford was very small when Shakespeare lived there, and the wide flowery meadows, the woods, and the broad river Avon were only a few minutes' walk from his house on Henley Street." And the flowers he used were predominantly the flowers he would have known from childhood, not exotic things found in London markets or the gardens of great houses. Daisies, cowslips, primroses, crab apples, violets, fennel, rosemary and roses. "Shakespeare left Stratford some time between 1585 and 1589, perhaps in the great year of the Spanish Armada; we do not know for certain. But he came back, famous and popular, to spend his last years in the fine house with its charming garden which he bought when success came to him."

And Kerr says he wrote one play back in Stratford, *The Winter's Tale*, and his pleasure in having his own garden might explain why it is one of his most flower-redolent plays.

Excuse me now while I go away and read *The Winter's Tale* for the sake of its flowers ...

* * * * *

April 24: Marcus Clarke

Sue Grafton
April 25: Walter de la Mare
April 26: Morris West
April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft
Maurice Baring
Frank Long
April 28: Nigel Kneale
April 29: Rafael Sabatini
April 30: Paul Jennings
Alice B. Toklas
Ludwig Bemelmans

* * * * *

I picked up Tom Miller's *The Panama Hat Trail* because I can still remember my surprise when someone said that panama hats did not in fact come from Panama. He writes, "Where do Panama hats come from?"

"One might sooner ask who was buried in Grant's tomb, except that the answer is not so obvious. Panama hats are made in Ecuador.

"The major trading post for South American goods in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was at the Isthmus of Panama, the quickest and safest seafaring route to Europe and North America. Sugar, fruit, minerals, cloth, and dozens of other products passed through the Isthmus on their way to market, Ecuadorian straw hats included. In the mid-1800s gold seekers from the East Coast rushing to California picked up the straw hats on their way west, and—for those who returned home—on their way back as well. A famous woodcut from 1850 shows seven scraggly gold-rushers just returned to the East from California via Panama sitting outside the Philadelphia Mint. Each is clutching bags bulging with gold dust, and each is wearing a Panama hat. Fifty years later, workers on the Panama Canal found the locally sold hats ideal for labouring in the tropical sun and, like the Forty-Niners, named them for their point of purchase rather than their place of origin. The name stuck."

(Jason Wilson in a literary guide to *South & Central America* says "An important part of this tourist trade is the Panama hat, made mainly in Montecristi, so named because it was sold to US gold prospectors crossing the Panama canal in the 1840s. These hats are made from *toquilla*, a local palm-like fibre that has to be continuously moistened." Of course the Panama Canal came many decades after the gold-seekers; I assume he means isthmus.)

He finds that the people, mainly women, who make the hats from *carludovica palmate*, a highly skilled occupation, receive a pittance for their work. Unsurprisingly the manufacture of the hats is something young women no longer want to learn.

He also found a variety of unexpected people visiting Ecuador and writing about it. The one which surprised me was Ludwig Bemelmans.

"Ecuadorians were well-disposed toward my own task, but also wary. Too well do they remember Ludwig Bemelmans.

"Bemelmans published forty-two books, best-known among them his *Madeline* series for children. Illustrations by the Austrian-born New Yorker enhanced his writings. In Ecuador his name means foreigner-who-makes-fun-of-natives, all because of his 1941 book, *The Donkey Inside*. " 'We have a revolution here every Thursday afternoon at half-past two,' " Bemelmans quotes a native, " 'and our government is run like a nightclub. We owe some two hundred and fifty million *sucres*; but who pays debts these days?' " About the food: "The cooks are not very good in Ecuador, but then you have two of them." Of fashion and beauty: "Of all the women here, perhaps a half dozen are beautiful and four of these dress with taste." With gloved jabs,

Bemelmans mocked clerical pomposity, official hypocrisy, and anything else that struck him as ludicrous and comical.”

He also criticized the coffee. I could criticize Ecuador too. I had my camera stolen in Quito which meant I lost all my photos of Peru, we had the children’s little port of toys and lessons stolen at the border, and the bus driver from Guayaquil played music so loudly that the passengers mutinied and forced him to turn it down. Miller goes on, “He was game for adventure, both high and low, and obviously enjoyed himself: “Quito is kind of a penal colony for diplomats. In some cases they are banished to this high capital for minor indiscretions, alcoholism, badly conducted affairs of the heart or the state....This makes on the whole for a group of likeable, outspoken, and refreshing people. Not being *persona grata* with their own governments, they get along well with their hosts, tell well-flavored stories, and are usually excellent companions.”

Miller goes on to say that when *El Burro Por Dentro* was published there it caused uproar, “denounced from the pulpit and the soapbox. It was sold under the counter. “Bemelmans ridiculed us in an amiable way, but few people understood,” said author Nicolás Kingman when I met him at his bookstore. Kingman recalled that the intellectual class liked *Burro*. “It was authentic and realistic. You must understand we had many prejudices then. There was intense nationalism. It was the same year as the border war with Peru. We were very Catholic and the Church often intervened in daily life. The upper class was offended. In order to change things we needed something like Bemelmans’s book.” A commentator in Quito wrote at the time, “many Ecuadorians have had to dance the conga of pure indignation.” ”

And people in Ecuador obviously have long memories. “More than four decades after *The Donkey Inside* was published, and more than twenty years since the author’s death, a Quito bookseller told me, “I can stock Philip Agee’s book about the CIA in Ecuador, but to carry *El Burro Por Dentro* could be suicidal.” In *El Comercio*, columnist Jorge Ribandeira uses *Donkey* as a point of departure to write of changes during the intervening years.”

Miller is certain that Bemelmans loved Ecuador, as is Bemelmans’ grandson John Bemelmans Marciano who wrote *Bemelmans: The Life and Art of Madeline’s Creator* and says “Bemelmans’ photos and sketches show his fascination with Ecuador” though perhaps fascination is not quite love. Miller quotes Bemelmans: “For those who still dream, the jungles, the seacoast, the tropic isles, and the mountains of Ecuador offer all the scenery, every variety of climate, and they are the ideal proving ground for adventure and escape....” Miller says, “virtually unknown to Ecuadorians, however, are two other books Bemelmans wrote about their country: for children, *Quito Express*, about a little Otavalan boy who rides the train to Guayaquil, and *Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep*, a novel about a general living in European exile who returns to his Ecuadorian *hacienda*. In the United States, Bemelmans’s legacy can be seen at New York’s Carlyle Hotel, where his artwork still covers the wall of the bar bearing his name.”

All the mockery was not amiable, though, because Miller points out that Bemelmans urged the Quito Tennis Club to exclude Jews. “Olga Fisch recollected that the author convinced expatriate photographer André Roosevelt, a distant cousin to Franklin, to start a club called La Cucaracha Alegre (The Happy Cockroach) and not admit Jews. The club, according to Olga, went broke within a week.” As the Tennis Club no doubt excluded Indians and quite likely women it probably isn’t saying anything unexpected about the Ecuadorians but Bemelmans was a cosmopolitan man and an anti-Nazi yet there is a hint of anti-Germanism running through his life and career. Was he running away from language and culture as well as from politics and ideology? Would he have objected to Spanish Jews in the way that he possibly objected to German Jews? And I am surprised that a club could go broke in a week. Surely most new ventures take a few months at the least to see if they are going to be a success or not.

And among the curious things Miller mentions is this story from Philip Agee's book *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*. "Two elderly women approached. "We used to make our living weaving the hats here," one said, "but since Cuba stopped buying we have had no way to support ourselves. We have no family here to care for us. We are alone."

"Ecuador breaking relations with Cuba? Hadn't the CIA been instrumental in precipitating the split? In *Inside the Company: CIA Diary*, Philip Agee detailed the Agency's extensive undercover operations that drove an artificial wedge between Ecuador and Fidel. The divorce was part of a large-scale CIA effort to isolate Havana from hemispheric unity by creating friction between Cuba and all the other Latin-American countries. Some of the fallout from that operation had landed here in Febres Cordero. United States foreign policy had unwittingly eliminated straw-hat weaving in a tiny South American village. The town has never recovered."

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Given the unimportance of Cuba it is strange that Fidel Castro managed to make such a huge mark on 20th century history. Here are two little pieces I collected at some stage.

Kenneth Tynan: Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, published 28/4/1961.

Sir,—Michael Astor's letter on April 22 about the Cuban situation invites a reply: I write as one of the sixteen people whose protest against American intervention you published last week. Mr. Astor wonders how we can be so sure that the Castro regime enjoys 'solid majority support'; I can only answer that, if the recent invasion attempt proves anything, it is that our estimate of Cuban support for Castro was considerably sounder than that of the American Government.

Our statement that the Cuban revolution has 'wholeheartedly tackled the problems of poverty, ignorance and backwardness' is taken by Mr. Astor to imply 'early aspiration' rather than 'solid achievement'. False inference: within six months of gaining power, the Castro regime had carried out a full and much-needed programme of land redistribution, and within a year unemployment and rents had been halved. In Havana alone, 37 schools had been built, as against one in the preceding 60 years. Houses have shot up at a rate of 20,000 units a year; and the state subsidies have stimulated the Cuban theatre and cinema almost to the point of dizziness. Segregation has been abolished: in sharp contrast to the Southern states of America, who profess themselves threatened by Castro's infection, Cuba today practices complete racial equality.

So much by way of information. It is no part of my brief to pretend that Castro's Cuba is a paradise. (Must a country be a paradise to be immune from foreign invasion?) It is hard to build Utopia when you are in a state of siege. Mr. Astor refers to Castro's use of censorship and arbitrary arrest; and both, I agree, are detestable. Yet both flourished under Batista: was Mr. Astor's voice raised against them then? That there has been suppression I admit and deplore; but in a state of emergency, of declared economic war and impending military conflict, a Government may be forgiven if it has recourse to censorship. (That the emergency was real can hardly be contested: the invasion has taken place.)

Unlike most Latin-American revolutionaries before him, Castro did not change his course as soon as he gathered power. Socially and economically, he did precisely what he had sworn to do: to prevent Cuban profits from flowing to America, he nationalized, and he expropriated. American companies suffered; and America at once shrieked communist, as if any movement towards a centrally planned economy, however great the need for it, were *prima facie* evidence of communist subversion. What followed was relentless hostility from the State Department, and further proof of an ancient truth: that the best way to foster communism is to condemn socialism. It was not ideology, but national survival, that forced Castro to trade with the Soviet block.

To deny America's right to intervene in Cuba is no doubt to incur the full blast of transatlantic obloquy; not to do so, however, is to condone the Russian intervention in Hungary.

If the Kennedy-Monroe doctrine is valid, the Peking Government deserves a Nobel Peace Prize for having neglected to annex Formosa. My hope is that public opinion in Western Europe, the neutral countries, and America itself can be mobilized to persuade the Kennedy Administration to reverse its Cuban policy. If another invasion of Cuba takes place a full-scale collision of arms between Russia and America may not easily be avoidable. It would be a disastrous irony if the cause of Western freedom should come to be identified with the inalienable right of the American Government to depose Fidel Castro by force of arms.”

(Following on from the disastrous ‘Bay of Pigs’ American attempt to invade came the ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’; perhaps Tynan was more prescient than he knew.)

(A curious little sidelight: “As a result of the delays, the first Spanish railway was built in one of its colonies, Cuba, the 46-mile-long line between Havana and Güines which also became the first railway in Latin America. The first sixteen miles from the capital to Bejucal were completed in November 1837, making Cuba only the seventh country in the world to obtain a railroad, predating its colonial power by a decade.” From *Blood, Iron & Gold* by Christian Wolmar. Needless to say, it was sugar which prompted the building of the rail line.)

“Earlier that year, another Florida drama had riveted Didion’s attention. In April, (2000) armed agents of the U.S. Border Patrol conducted a predawn raid on a small house in Miami to snatch a six-year-old boy named Elián González from his uncle. Protesters surrounded the home, screaming, “Assassins!” They threw bottles and rocks and were met with Mace and pepper spray.

“Months before this, the boy had been found floating in the ocean by two fishermen, who turned him over to the Coast Guard. His mother had drowned in an attempt to escape from Cuba and come to the United States. Elián’s father, in Havana, wanted him back, against the wishes of his brother. Finally, Attorney General Janet Reno ordered Elián’s uncle to give him up. He did so only at gunpoint.

“The episode reminded Didion of the Cuban exiles she’d spoken to in Miami while researching her book on that city. Many of them had come to the United States as part of Operación Pedro Pan (Operation Peter Pan) in the early 1960s, a series of airlifts, over a period of twenty-two months, evacuating more than fourteen thousand children from Cuba, under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Miami, to shield them from Castro’s revolution amid rumors of indoctrination and deportation to Russia. Parents willingly relinquished their kids to the Land of Freedom. “Many underground operatives” in Cuba “made their participation” in U.S.-sponsored anti-Castro activities “contingent upon the safety of their children,” said historian Victor Triay. “For CIA strategists, then, the children’s exodus was a preparatory gesture for what became the Bay of Pigs invasion.” In the decades of recrimination following the Bay of Pigs, the children of Pedro Pan wondered if they’d been tokens in some larger game. As Didion had written, “If you stage an ... attempt you put somebody out front.” A cover. A chit. “A front who can be silenced ...” Or who’ll remain silent out of ignorance.”

The Last Love Song: A Biography of Joan Didion by Tracy Daugherty.

And simple hat weavers in an Ecuadorian village were even less important.

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I had heard of the strange struggle between a journalist and a churchman in 19th century Ecuador, which George Pendle chronicles in some detail, but I realized I knew almost nothing about Ecuadorian writers and poets, except that one of them was at some stage a secretary to Chilean Nobel Laureate, poet Gabriela Mistral.

Oh, you would rather know about that ‘strange struggle’ than anything about an obscure poet? Gabriel Garcia Moreno became president in the late 19th century and tried to turn the country into a theocracy. (For example only Catholics could become citizens and vote.) In this he was opposed by a newspaperman, Juan Montalvo, who constantly criticized Moreno and his policies, both from within Ecuador and from exile in Colombia. When Moreno was assassinated in 1875 Montalvo crowed “My pen has killed him.” The trouble was that Moreno had also brought in many progressive ideas like education for girls and for indigenous people—and his replacement was equally dictatorial but without that strong belief in an over-arching religious aspect to the nation’s life. That particular newspaperman eventually said sadly that maybe a theocracy was better than your common-or-garden dictatorship.

But back to Ecuadorian writers ...

There are of course the many well-known writers who have focused on the Galápagos Islands, from Charles Darwin to William Beebe and Kurt Vonnegut—and Bayard Taylor on his way to California gives this little vignette: “Among the passengers who came on board at San Diego, was Gen. Villamil, of the Republic of Ecuador, who was aid to Bolivar during the war of South-American independence. After the secession of Ecuador from Columbia, he obtained from Gen. Flores a grant of one of the Galapagos Islands—a group well known to whalers, lying on the equator, six hundred miles west of Guayaquil. On this island, which he named Floriana, he has lived for the past sixteen years. His colony contains a hundred and fifty souls, who raise on the light, new soil, abundant crops of grain and vegetables. The island is fifteen miles in length, by twelve in breadth, lying in lat. 1° 30’ S. and its highest part is about 5,000 feet above the level of the sea. The soil is but from twelve to eighteen inches deep, yet such is the profusion of vegetable growth, that, as Gen. Villamil informed me, its depth has in many places increased six inches since he first landed there. The supply of water is obtained in a very singular manner. A large porous rock, on the side of one of the mountains, seems to serve as an outlet or filter for some subterranean vein, since on its base, which is constantly humid, the drops collect and fall in sufficient abundance to supply a large basin in the rock below. Pipes from this deposit convey the water to the valley. Its quality is cool, sweet and limpid, and the rocky sponge from which it drips never fails in its supply.”

But what of native Ecuadorian writers rather than Ecuadorian farmers?

The Encyclopedia of Latin American Literature edited by Verity Smith says, “It is an Ecuadorian, José Joaquín Olmedo, who is cited in numerous anthologies for writing the rousing text of the military victory against Spain which secured the independence of the colonies. His epic poem, *La Victoria de Junin, Canto a Bolívar*, 1825 [The Victory at Junin, Song to Bolivar] immortalizes the heroic deeds of Símon Bolívar and links the victorious general to the accomplishments of the traditional warrior-kings of the Incas.”

More modern writers include Jorge Carrera Andrade, Aguilar Malta, Adalberto Ortiz, Jorge Icaza, Jorge Enrique Adoum, José de la Cuadra, and Alfredo Pareja Diezcanseco. So here is a little taste: This is Carrera Andrade’s poem ‘Cada objeto es un mundo’ from his 1959 collection *Hombre planetario*, Planetary Man.

Arte poético

Comprende, comprende, comprende:
en cada cosa guiña un duende
o una da invisible se tienda.

Apresa en tus dedos la brisa
que pasa fugaz, indecisa,
No veas el mundo de prisa.

No aprendas efímera ciencia,
que es flor de la humana demencia.
La vida no es sólo apariencia.

Las aves – lección delo instante –
nos dan en su escuela volante
la clave de un mundo cambiante.
La rosa es crisol de alegría.
Te ofrece tesoros el día.
Gotea el reloj ambrosía.

Comprende y venera al objeto:
Penetra en ese orbe secreto
y sea la flor tu amuleto.

Know, know, know: / an invisible wing spreads out / or a
sprite winks from every thing. // Grasp the fleeting, undecided breeze in your fingers / Pause to
drink in the world. // Do not learn ephemeral science, / for it is a flower of human insanity. / Life
is more than appearances. // Birds – lesson of the instant - / give us in their flying school / the
key to an ever-changing world. // This rose is a crucible of happiness. // The day offers you
treasures. // The clock drips ambrosia. // Grasp and venerate the object: / enter that secret orb /
and may the flower be your amulet.

Perhaps not an insight into Ecuadorian life but something to ponder upon in quiet
moments?

* * * * *

May 1: Joseph Heller

May 2: Jerome K. Jerome

Dr Benjamin Spock

May 3: May Sarton

May 4: Thomas Kinsella

May 5: Karl Marx

Lloyd Maepeza Gina

May 6: Sigmund Freud

* * * * *

Marshall McLuhan said in ‘A Dialogue’, “I’ve read Freud and Jung and used them to
make discoveries of my own – just as any literary person has been influenced by them. For
example, Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* reveals the amazing power that all people have in
their dream life of invention and poetic discovery, that the most ordinary person in his dream life
is a tremendous poet. Most Freudians are concerned with the subject matter of this poetry. That
never interested me. I was always fascinated by the amazing ingenuity, symmetry, and
inventiveness of the dreamer. We all have these tremendous unused powers which we use
surreptitiously. We are afraid to use them in our waking lives. Except the artist. The artist uses in
his waking life the powers an ordinary person would use in his dream life. The creative man has
his dream life while awake. This is the meaning of the title *Finnegan’s Wake* mankind is
approaching that state of dreaming wide awake. Come Marconi, as environment, dream life
became art form. The old romantic dream becomes art form.”

It isn’t hard to find books about dreams and their meanings (or possible meanings) in any
op-shop but why do we have this fascination with dreams and their possible meanings? Because
our life asleep is a mysterious part of our existence, I think, one which we can neither control nor

fully understand. Our dreams take real experiences, things we've done, heard, seen, thought, felt, worried over, and turn them into complex, strange, tangled stories. This to me is the fascination (and sometimes the horror) of dreams—not the rather simplistic idea that our dreams represent hidden sexual desires or fears.

I have taken dreams that didn't seem to make a lot of sense and turned them into stories—and I am grateful for their oddness and the unsettled feeling they leave. But most dreams pass by, only remembered as small snatches, and make little impact. Perhaps that is just as well, even if our dreams are not portents of the future or unsettling glimpses into our psyches.

*

Of course we use the word 'dream' in many other ways; as things we would buy if we could, to express aspirations, to suggest wishful thinking, to hint at a surreal quality ... but 19th century Russian author, Ivan Goncharov, in his novel *Oblomov*, reminds us that day dreaming and sloth go together. The busy, the rushed, the driven, the frenetic leave their dreaming to their subconscious. But Oblomov, described as 'The Immortal Hero of Laziness', does not need to go to bed to wallow in his dreams. Though he *does* spend a lot of his life in bed.

Goncharov wrote three popular novels—*Obyknovennaia istoriia* (A Common Story), *Obryv* (The Precipice) and *Oblomov* which began life as a short story called 'Oblomov's Dream' which eventually turned into the novel—which was admired by both Tolstoy and Chekhov.

Galya Diment introducing the novel writes, "Goncharov is often referred to as one of the major Russian Realists. This formulation, however, tends to overlook the rich ambiguity of his works, the psychological complexity of his characters and the surprising sophistication of some of his literary techniques, which appear to anticipate twentieth-century Modernism. He was likewise precocious and refreshingly frank in probing both male and female sexuality and, above all, even to the modern readers accustomed to the ambiguity of twentieth-century literature, Goncharov still stands out as a great master of presenting ambivalent impulses and inextricable conflicts.

"And, yet, Goncharov's fame was slow to penetrate every corner of the globe. In 1946 Peggy Guggenheim published her memoirs, *Out of This Century*, where, appalled by the apathy and lack of zest for life in one of her former lovers, she gave him a name which was both fictitious and fictional: "Oblomov". This thinly disguised lover was Samuel Beckett, who, in turn, gladly turned the nickname into a moniker, using it to sign many of his letters. It is sad but safe to assume that very few people in the United States reading Ms Guggenheim's reminiscences at the time knew who the "real" Oblomov was. Sigmund Freud, alas, never discovered Goncharov, which some may consider a missed opportunity and others a blessing. Had he done so, Oblomov's complicated, angst-ridden, phobic and dream-obsessed personality could have easily provided a great resource for Freud's pet theories. Among other things, Freud would probably immediately seized on Oblomov as a classic example of the struggle between the ego-driven "reality principle" and the id-driven "pleasure principle"."

Oblomov lives in a small apartment with his servant Zakhar and leaves a bailiff in charge of his land with its 350 souls dependent on him.

You need sleep to dream dreams.

You need sloth to dream daydreams.

Oblomov conjures up pictures of a lovely wife, rosy-cheeked children, good food on his table, a nice apartment, an estate which looks after itself—but such dreams need effort, energy, commitment, to bring them to fruition.

So the question is—will Oblomov be content with dreaming his life away in bone-deep idleness and squalor or will he stir himself? Stephen Pearl in his notes on his translation says, "Through his creation of Oblomov and the world he inhabits, Goncharov has laid bare a

quintessential, although sometimes latent element in the Russian national temperament which has touched a nerve in generation after generation of Russian readers – a quintessence to which Ilya Ilyich Oblomov has lent his name. It is not for nothing that this word, a syndrome to which one-word translations like “idleness” or “apathy” do scant justice, has become a byword, a legend lodged deep within the folklore, consciousness and, yes, even the collective unconscious of the Russian people – *oblomovshchina*.”

J. B. Priestley in *Literature and Western Man* says of it, “Goncharov’s *Oblomov* probably had an effect upon every Russian who could read. It created—or revealed—a type everybody recognised, and added something to the nation’s knowledge of itself. As a novel it has many faults; it has little narrative interest and most of its characters are dummies; but as a ruthless study, moving inexorably through a multitude of significant details, of one man’s slow decay and final ruin—beginning with Oblomov, healthy, cheerful, well-off, the typical absentee landowner in his bachelor flat in St. Petersburg, then taking him steadily down to his death, a bankrupt dupe and hopeless sloven, with everything lost through mere indolence and ineffectuality—it has probably never been equalled in any other nation’s fiction.” He goes on to say that it “highlighted and brought deeper shadows to Russia’s familiar problem of her ‘superfluous men’, possessing good qualities but unable or unwilling to make use of them, talking and dreaming their lives away. Russian fiction throughout this age is crowded with these charming, ineffectual, maddening characters, just as it is today with laconic engineers and busy managers of collective farms.”

Opinions are divided on whether Goncharov really supported the liberation of the serfs on Russian estates but the book *can* be read as a subversive allegory on the laziness and pointlessness of the landowners. Their lack of care, interest, and concern for those tied to their estates go to absurd lengths in the character of Oblomov. And perhaps it explains why later Russians were so keen on Five-Year-Plans ...

* * * * *

Op-shops are replete with books to interpret your journeys during sleep, ‘the Secret Meaning of Your Dreams’, but the other day I came on a book called *Control Your Dreams* (by Jayne Gackenbach and Jane Bosveld); this surprised me because I had always thought of dreams as things which just came—and went. Then you woke up and said things like ‘that was a very odd dream’ or ‘thank God that was only a dream’. But the book suggests that you can actually intervene in your dreams, they become ‘lucid dreams’, in which your body is asleep but your consciousness is awake.

A variety of tribal societies came to fairly similar conclusions to the 19th century Frenchman, the Marquis d’Hervey de Saint-Denys, who wrote *Dreams and How to Guide Them*. But it wasn’t until the 20th century that there was genuine scientific interest in dreams and dreaming. Charles Tart introducing their book writes, “In 1913 a Dutch physician, Frederick Van Eeden, shared an amazing discovery with the world: you could awaken in your dreams! Instead of dreaming being a rather passive and dim-witted event, you could not only appreciate your dreams more but actively turn them into adventures to your liking, ranging from flying over the most beautiful countrysides to conjuring up an absolutely real-seeming discussion with your favorite philosopher or deceased friend. The quality of your consciousness would be *lucid*, clear, much more like the waking consciousness you are experiencing right now than typical dreaming consciousness. Even though your mind felt clear and you knew you were actually dreaming, the dream world around you would remain perfectly real to your senses.”

He goes on to say that Tibetan Buddhism had had “a detailed knowledge of developing and using lucid dreams for centuries” but Van Eeden “was one of the first Westerners to “publicly” discover lucid dreaming by sharing his knowledge through publication.” And even

then it wasn't until the discovery of REMs (Rapid Eye Movements) and their connection to the dreaming phase of sleep that people started observing and studying (and sticking electrodes into people's eyes) that dreams became more than a psychological (or theological) curiosity.

The authors suggest lucid dreams can help to improve health, diminish nightmares, and help people attain a greater sense of well-being. But there is no simple fail-safe way to have regular lucid dreams although meditation does seem one helpful pathway.

I found this all very intriguing. But I do have one question: if sleep is when our body rests then does this mean our consciousness also needs its rest—or are dreams a reminder that our conscious or sub-conscious mind does not require 'a good night's sleep'?

* * * * *

May 7: Robert Browning

May 8: Thomas Pynchon

Peter Benchley

Sloan Wilson

May 9: Patricia Cornwell

H. R. Wakefield

May 10: Monica Dickens

Karl Barth

May 11: Stanley Elkin

May 12: Edward Lear

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

May 13: Daphne du Maurier

May 14: Maria Irene Fornés

May 15: Xavier Herbert

May 16: Honoré de Balzac

May 17: Alan Ryan

May 18: Bertrand Russell

May 19: Victoria Wood

May 20: Margery Allingham

May 21: Plato

May 22: Arthur Conan Doyle

* * * * *

“There is a motley collection of stories and legends associated with most peat mosses and bogs. They feature malevolent or mischievous spirits and fairies – variously named ‘bogans’, ‘boggarts’, ‘bogles’, ‘bogies’ – which inhabit the mire. In north-west England, and also in the Isle of Man, the bogans were terrifying apparitions or spirits, often taking the form of a monstrous ram. In Cheshire and Lancashire the spirits are named ‘boggarts’ or ‘bugganes’, and are said to manifest themselves sometimes as a white cow or horse. At other times they appear as an enormous black dog with glaring, saucer-like eyes, an omen of death. This ‘monster in the marsh’ theme is charged with primitive power, and was drawn upon with enormous effect by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (a keen student of the arcane and supernatural) in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. His invocation of the huge phantom dog as the marsh creature drew upon a whole underworld of ghostly and fantastic animals that form a substantial element in British folklore. Many stories may be related to dim recollections of animal totemism dating back to Celtic times and beyond.”

Anne Ross and Don Robins in *The Life and Death of a Druid Prince*.

*

“A gigantic statue, with lion body and the head of a man, gazes east from Egypt along the thirtieth parallel. It is a monolith, carved out of the limestone bedrock of the Giza plateau, two hundred and forty feet long, thirty-eight feet wide across the shoulders, and sixty-six feet high. It is worn down and eroded, battered, fissured and collapsing. Yet nothing else that has reached us from antiquity even remotely matches its power and grandeur, its majesty and its mystery,” or what they describe in a vivid phrase as its “hypnotic watchfulness”.

“It is the Great Sphinx.

Once it was believed to be an eternal God.

Then amnesia ensnared it and it fell into an enchanted sleep.

Ages passed: thousands of years. Climates changed. Cultures changed. Religions changed. Languages changed. Even the positions of the stars in the skies changed. But still the statue endured, brooding and numinous, wrapped in silence.

Often sand engulfed it. At widely separated intervals a benevolent ruler would arrange to have it cleared. There were those who attempted to restore it, covering parts of its rock-hewn body with blocks of masonry. For a long period it was painted red.

By Islamic times the desert had buried it up to its neck and it had been given a new, or perhaps a very old, name: ‘Near to one of the Pyramids,’ reported Abdel-Latif in the twelfth century, ‘is a colossal head emerging from the ground. It is called Abul-Hol.’ And in the fourteenth century El-Makrizi wrote of a man named Saim-ed-Daht who ‘wanted to remedy some of the religious errors and he went to the Pyramids and disfigured the face of Abul-Hol, which has remained in that state from that time until now. From the time of this disfigurement, also, the sand has invaded the cultivated land of Giza, and the people attribute this to the disfigurement of Abul-Hol.’”

Robert Bauval and Graham Hancock in *Keeper of Genesis*.

Or as they say:

“Keeper of secrets.

Guardian of mysteries.”

But the puzzling question is: why did various ancient civilizations give pride of place to beings who were half man-half animal or half man-half bird?

*

Steve Jones says in his book *In The Blood: God, Genes and Destiny* that “mankind has an infinite capacity not to be surprised”. Perhaps surprise and wonder are two different responses and even if surprise soon turns to acceptance, even a sense of boredom, I would be sorry to see us give up our sense of wonder. He goes on, “Only thirty-five years before the Darwin-Wallace lecture, the first fossil ever to be identified as human had been found in a cave on the Gower Peninsula, in South Wales. William Buckland, its discoverer (and Professor of Geology at Oxford), was astonished by its antiquity. The ‘Red Lady of Paviland’ (as she was named after ochre-stained bones) must, he thought, be immeasurably ancient – perhaps as old as the Roman occupation of Britain. To Buckland, a believer in the biblical Flood, that was as far as his imagination could take him. The public agreed.

“Now the Paviland fossil (of a man, not a woman) is known to be not two but twenty-five thousand years old; scarcely different from ourselves, and dead for what seems to modern eyes only an instant of evolutionary time. The oldest fossil of a human ancestor to be found in Britain (Boxgrove Man, discovered in 1994) lived half a million years ago and is, quite clearly, a biologically distinct precursor of today’s Britons. Apart from a brief effusion of national pride at being the home of the oldest European (soon quashed by the discovery of an ancient Spaniard three hundred thousand years older) the public greeted its discovery with indifference.”

*

These are bones but what of an imprint? I found Ian Wilson's book *The Turin Shroud* quite fascinating. It may not reinforce anyone's faith, and it is debatable if Christ's Jewish followers would have kept a shroud anyway because it had been in touch with a dead body, but the book raises more questions than it answers. Claims that it was concocted by Leonardo da Vinci are not realistic because it was checked and slightly repaired after a fire in 1516 and it has provenance going back several centuries before that. But it also links in to that question of relics. We tend to be rather cynical about relics, all those teeth of Buddha or bones of a saint. And yet in grim times relics brought people great comfort and hope.

"The dimensions of the cloth are impressive: 14 feet 3 inches long by 3 feet 7 inches wide. It was created in a single piece, apart from a strip approximately 3½ inches wide running the length of the left-hand side and joined by a single seam.

"It is the imprint of the all-important "double image" that principally draws the eye. There, like a shadow cast on the cloth, is the faint imprint of the back and front of a powerfully built man with beard and long hair, laid out in the attitude of death.

"To anyone who has not seen a photograph of the Shroud before, the two figures could only appear most curious, until one understands the manner in which the image seems to have been formed—that the body was first laid on one end of the cloth, with the remaining half of the cloth then drawn over the head and down to the feet."

"The astonishing aspect of seeing the Shroud itself rather than a photograph is discovering how pale and subtle the image appears. The color of the imprint can best be described as a pure sepia monochrome, and the closer one tries to examine it, the more it melts away like mist.

"The subtlety is particularly important for anyone studying the Shroud from photographs to appreciate. Any photography—whether color stills, color television, or, more strikingly, black-and-white stills—seem to intensify the image, making it far more apparent than it is to the naked eye. In the case of color photography, this is because the reduction in scale brings otherwise diffuse elements into greater focus. In the case of black-and-white photography, by a quirk of photographic chemistry, the pale sepia (akin to yellow) registers disproportionately strongly. The main point is that, except when viewed from a distance, the image is extremely difficult to distinguish."

*

And what of the un-dead, the un-remarkable, the un-haunting, the un-otherworldly? "A far greater challenge is presented by recurrent stories of people who seem to be able to live for months or years without eating. This phenomenon is known as *inedia* (Latin for 'fasting'). Of course such stories violate common sense: everybody knows that people, and animals, need food in order to stay alive."

Rupert Sheldrake in *The Science Delusion*.

He mentions visiting a woman in India who was said to have gone 43 years without eating or drinking or producing faeces or urine. He also mentions the "Bavarian mystic" Therese Neumann (1898-1963). Blood would flow from the stigmata on her hands and feet but a day later without taking food or drink she would show no sign of being drained.

It seems extraordinary but as I thought about it ... plants need water, carbon dioxide and minerals for their nourishment, we then eat those plants for our nourishment, but what if there was a way for us to take in the needed nourishment directly from sunlight, air, water vapour ...

And in a world where many people go hungry it seems extraordinary that science has simply poo-pooed the phenomenon rather than looking to see if there is a biological reason why some people do not need food ... and whether it can be replicated ...

*

Conan Doyle was heavily criticized over the case of the Cottingley Fairies. Two young girls with access to a simple camera had taken pictures of what appeared to be fairies clustered round them in their back garden. What had started out as fun turned into a nightmare as people demanded to know whether they really had seen some fairies or not. Conan Doyle preferred to believe they had. For that he was seen as gullible, a senile old man, and other unattractive comments. Many years later professional debunker James Randi said it was obvious the pictures were faked because you could see the strings.

In their old age the two women said they had cut out pictures and fixed them on with hat pins before they took the photos.

There were no fairies.

There were no strings.

It is a timely reminder that we sometimes see what we want to see.

But there are two more curious things about the story. The girls, complete amateurs with a not-very-sophisticated camera, managed to create photos which are still a delight. And they said the last photo they took did not have their cut-outs in it and yet still seems to show a fairy. That has never been explained.

* * * * *

May 23: Margaret Wise Brown

May 24: Mary Grant Bruce

Joseph Brodsky

Aguilar Malta

May 25: Ralph Waldo Emerson

Raymond Carver

May 26: Denis Florence Macarthy

May 27: Marlys Millhiser

John Cheever

May 28: Patrick White

May 29: M. L. Molesworth

G. K. Chesterton

May 30: Julian Symons

Alan Brennert

Alfred Austin

May 31: Walt Whitman

June 1: John Masefield

Michael McDowell

June 2: Thomas Hardy

June 3: Cicero

James Hutton

June 4: Percy Lubbock

June 5: Jessica Palmer

Federico García Lorca

John Maynard Keynes

* * * * *

A number of writers have died in mysterious circumstances—Ambrose Bierce disappearing in Mexico, Pablo Neruda dying as Pinochet's coup turned Chile upside-down—but they have rarely had a book dedicated to their death. I was thinking of this when I came upon Ian Gibson's book *The Death of Lorca*.

“The amazing amount of paper wasted over this almost unique stain on Nationalist arms is typical of the Anglo-Saxon Press. When the Nationalists entered Granada the unbelievable babooneries perpetrated by the Reds made them trigger-happy as they rounded up and shot all corrupters of children, known perverts and sexual cranks. A natural reaction, considering that the week before the Reds had slaughtered and tortured anyone who was under suspicion of any sort of decency at all. Maeztu, Calvo Sotelo, Muñoz Seca, Padre Eusebio (about to be canonized) and Antonio [sic] Primo de Rivera were all killed, not for their vices but for their virtues. They were intellectuals on a higher scale, and died better than the cowardly Lorca. If the author of this poem, a better poet than Lorca, so Borges the leading South American critic points out, had not been resourceful, he would have died, like Lorca, but at the hands of the Reds.”

So wrote Roy Campbell in *Flowering Rifle, A poem from the Battlefield of Spain*. Roy Campbell was a competent poet but an apologist for Far Right Spain so I didn't think his views on Lorca were likely to shed any great illumination. But why was Federico García Lorca killed during the Spanish Civil War? Gibson basically trawls three possibilities and none of them suggest that Lorca was a coward.

He was visiting a fellow poet in Granada on the day he was arrested and taken away. “It seems that (General) Quiapo was indeed implicated in the poet's death. When Gerald Brenan was in Granada in 1949 people told him repeatedly that Lorca's death had been ordered in reprisal for the alleged assassination by the ‘Reds’ in Madrid of the Catholic playwright and Nobel Prize winner Jacinto Benavente. But the story was yet another distortion of what actually happened, for Benavente's ‘murder’ was first reported on the night of 20 August, that is to say, *the day after Lorca was shot*. What is even more significant is that the lie was disseminated in Quiapo de Llano's nightly broadcast from Seville, along with other false allegations of Red atrocities:

Amongst the delicacies which they [the Reds] have reserved for us figures that of having shot Benavente, the Quintero brothers, Muñoz Seca, Zuloaga and even poor Zamora. This is to say that these scum were determined not to leave anyone alive who excelled in anything. What must they be thinking in the civilized world of the men who have shot Benavente? When will the country recover from the loss of figures as outstanding as Benavente, the Quintero brothers and Zuloaga?

But all the ‘victims’ of Marxist barbarity named by Queipo were alive and well, and the allegations had no basis whatsoever in fact. There is no reference to the alleged murders of Benavente, Muñoz Seca, the Quintero brothers or Zuloaga in any Nationalist newspaper before Quiapo's broadcast of 20 August, and one must conclude that the fabrication was entirely a product of the General's twisted mind.”

And why would Lorca make a suitable ‘revenge’ anyway? He was not in any position of political or military power. His views were progressive but not radical. Nor was he using his pen to promote or inspire a particular course of action. He was writing poetry not tracts.

“Then there is the testimony of Trescastro's doctor, whom I met in Granada in 1971. He once brought up the subject of Lorca's death in the presence of Trescastro without knowing of the latter's involvement in it. Trescastro burst out: ‘I was one of the people who went to get Lorca in the Rosales's house. We were sick and tired of queers in Granada.’

Moreover, Trescastro boasted that he had actually participated in the killing of the poet in Víznar. One morning – probably that of 20 August 1936 – Angel Saldaña, one of the few Granada town councillors to escape the Nationalist purge was sitting in the Bar Pasaje, familiarly known as ‘La Pajarera’, when Trescastro swaggered in and exclaimed for everyone to hear:

‘We’ve just killed Federico García Lorca. We left him in a ditch and I fired two bullets into his arse for being a queer.’ ”

But there is also a problem with this. Being homosexual in conservative Catholic and machismo Spain was not something you shouted from the rooftops. It seems unlikely that people outside Lorca’s circle knew anything about his sex life. So who told Trescastro?

“It was probably inevitable that Lorca’s death should have been attributed to the Civil Guard.

His *Ballad of the Spanish Civil Guard* had become one of the most famous poems in the language and lines from it were on everybody’s tongue:

The horses are black.
The horseshoes are black.
On their capes shine
Stains of ink and wax.
Their skulls are made of lead,
that is why they cannot weep.
Up the road they come
with their souls of patent leather ...

The poem evokes the traditional struggle between the Civil Guard (founded in 1844 to suppress banditry) and the gypsies, whose lawlessness and refusal to be assimilated into Spanish society have always made them particularly odious to the authorities. In the ballad a band of forty *civiles* attacks an unsuspecting gypsy village busily celebrating Christmas Eve. But Lorca’s poem is far more than a mere concession to Andalusian local colour: for him the gypsy symbolizes the deepest elements in the human personality, the ultimate source of laughter and tears, while the brutal Civil Guard embodies the oppressive forces of ‘civilization’ which seeks to stamp out vitality and spontaneity. The poem has, therefore, a relevance far beyond the confines of Southern Spain.

The Civil Guard was offended by it. In 1936 (eight years after the appearance of the *Gypsy Ballads*) a case was brought against Lorca by a man from Tarragona who claimed that the poet had grossly insulted the force. ‘He would be satisfied with little less than my head’, laughed Federico afterwards. The poet had no difficulty in persuading the judge of his ‘innocence’, but the incident revealed the extent to which his work was capable of irritating the Spanish reactionary mentality.”

Many people believe the Civil Guard was implicated. And it is hard to believe the Civil Guard could have remained in complete ignorance of his arrest, imprisonment, and execution ...

*

“I wish I’d been on the street in Madrid on that night in 1934 when Pablo Neruda, who was then Chile’s consul to Spain, told Miguel Hernandez that he had never heard a nightingale. It is too cold for nightingales to survive in Chile.”

“Poet’s Choice” by Edward Hirsch.

I wondered who promoted this odd, and mistaken, idea? Chile runs from the semi-tropics to a windswept south. There are any number of ideal places for nightingales to flourish. Still, it is just as well that no one was silly enough to import them. Some got imported from England to Tasmania. When they arrived someone said, ‘Those aren’t nightingales—they’re blackbirds!’ So what did those idiots do instead of putting them straight on to the next boat back to England? They simply let them go and blackbirds have been a scourge in Tasmanian orchards ever since. At least Chile has been spared that ...

But there are different kinds of nightingales. Pablo Neruda. García Lorca. I know people who reverence Lorca's poetry but I am afraid I am not one of them. I try, I really do try to find the magic. The other day I was thinking on this when I came across three of Lorca's plays, *Blood Wedding*, *Yerma*, and *The House of Bernarda Alba* and he uses verse in his plays in interesting ways.

Why, shepherd, sleep alone?
On my wool-quilt deep
you'd finer sleep.
Your quilt of shadowed stone,
 shepherd,
and your shirt of frost,
 shepherd,
grey rushes of the winter
on the night-tide of your bed.
The oak-roots weave their needles,
 shepherd,
Beneath your pillow silently,
 shepherd,
and if you hear a woman's voice
it's the torn voice of the stream.
 Shepherd, shepherd.
What does the hillside want of you,
 Shepherd?
Hillside of bitter weeds.
What child is killing you?
The thorn the broom-tree bore!

(And having been picky about nightingales perhaps I shouldn't ask whether broom-trees actually have thorns or is the Spanish broom different to other brooms?)

I did feel some sympathy for the incredibly circumscribed lives the women in these three plays lived but I couldn't really make myself care about them very much. Perhaps if played by brilliant actors bringing an intensity and sense of suppressed passion to the words they would come over powerfully from the stage. But I had the vaguely disappointing sense that I couldn't find Lorca's claimed brilliance as a playwright either.

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Cyril Connolly in *Enemies of Promise* provides this reason for Lorca's death:

"The Spanish poet Lorca was shot because he fell into the power of an element which detested spiritual reality. Yet Lorca fell into those hands because he lived in Granada. Had he lived in Barcelona or Madrid he would be alive today like Sender or Alberti. But he lived in reactionary Granada, a city of the past, of gipsies and bullfighters and priests, and he made his best poems about bullfighters and gipsies. That element in him which sought the past, which drew him to the medievalism of Andalusia, contained the seed of his own death, placing him, who was no friend to priests of feudal chiefs, in a city where the past would one day come to life, and prove deadly."

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June 6: Alexander Pushkin

Ivan Goncharov

June 7: Elizabeth Bowen

June 8: Ivan Southall

Gwen Harwood
John Everett Millais
June 9: E. M. Delafield
June 10: Saul Bellow
June 11: Anna Akhmatova
Iain Sinclair
June 12: Johanna Spyri
Brigid Brophy

* * * * *

Fifty Works of English Literature we could do without by Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey and Charles Osborne has this to say about *Beowulf*: “This is one of those works of English [*sic*] Literature [*sic*] that fortunately most people always have done without, but it deserves its place here because of the comparatively recent tendency to stick it at the beginning of any English syllabus. Its merit lies not in its quality but in the difficulty of its text ... And, of course, in its dreadful length – over 3,000 lines long. ... The poem has been called ‘tough builder’s work of true stone’ (J. R. R. Tolkien), and this happy phrase does full justice to the work’s toughness of texture, aridity and stony pugnacity. Boring and unattractive as a story, pointlessly bloodthirsty but – we are always told – fundamentally Christian, *Beowulf* is a fine example of primitive non-art. Admiring comment on its poetry is about as relevant as praise for the architecture of Stonehenge. Doubtless in the eighth century it whiled away long dreary hours in Northumbrian beerhalls, but with the disappearance of Anglo-Saxon England, and with the creation of English (proper) Literature (proper), it should now be handed over to the historians or left to be picked apart by linguistic scholars. Amid all its failures should be noted its complete inability to make one feel anything except repulsion for Beowulf, its hero, and considerable sympathy for his enemies, the monster Grendel and his mother.”

*

I lent this book to various people before putting it on a stall and the curious thing was that those people all came out in tigerish defence of the particular work which they thought we *couldn't* do without. It is a curious thing, this partisanship, but I think there are a great many books I'm sure we could do without though I would now be more circumspect about mentioning them in company. Almost certainly someone would immediately protest, say I didn't know good literature when I fell over it, or look at me as though I was the last of the Philistines. Yet would it *really* matter if Shakespeare had written only twelve plays? Or Patrick White three novels? Or Wordsworth a half dozen poems?

*

Brigid Brophy certainly wrote other books. She led the fight to get Public Lending Rights for authors in Britain; she was a vegetarian, an atheist, a pacifist, a fighter for animal rights. She wrote *Prancing Novelist: A Defence of Fiction in the Form of a Critical Biography in Praise of Ronald Firbank*. Certainly Firbank gets mentioned by his contemporaries, if not admiringly then at least positively, but when I actually read his collection of stories containing ‘Valmouth’, ‘Prancing Nigger’ and ‘The Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli’ my first response was disappointment—

‘They were ringing the angelus. Across the darkling meadows, from the heights of Hare, the tintinnabulation sounded mournfully, penetrating the curl-wreathed tympanums of Lady Parvula de Panzoust.’

‘Through the open passage windows scent-exhaling Peruvian roses filled the long corridors with unutterable unrest, their live oppressive odour quickening oddly the polished assagais and spears upon the walls.’

—and my second thought was that he needed one of those editors who tell writers to cut out the purple prose and treat each adjective to the ferocity of the red pencil.

I could not conjure up any desire to read further in Firbank's oeuvre. Like Graham Greene he converted to Catholicism but his Catholics seem to regard their faith as a rather tedious domestic detail.

I don't know if Brophy wrote the critique of Beowulf or merely edited, commented, tightened or otherwise polished that segment though I suspect her husband, Michael Levey, who was Director of the National Gallery in London might have chosen to make that comparison with Stonehenge. Her own best-known novel was *Hackenfeller's Ape* which also lets her taste for irony free rein. I thought Hackenfeller, like Rockefeller, owned an ape. But no. "Hackenfeller had been (the Professor half knew, half assumed) a sober Dutchman who, exploring into Central Africa some time during the nineteenth century, had come upon a species not previously recorded. It was the same size as the gorilla, but in appearance and character nearer the chimpanzee. In captivity it moved on all fours; but in the jungle, as Hackenfeller had noted, it ran erect with its hands holding on to branches overhead. Children sometimes used a similar method when they learned to walk, but in the adult man it was forgotten until he had to relearn it in crowded buses and trains." Two of these apes live in a zoo in London where they are studied by 'the Professor' who hopes they will eventually mate. Instead he is told that the male is going to be taken to be strapped into a satellite and fired in to space. This might seem like a straightforward story of humans using animals but Brophy manages to put the reader into an uneasy viewpoint. "Radiant and full-leafed, the Park was alive with the murmuring vibration of the species which made it its preserve. The creatures, putting off timidity at the same time as winter drabness, abounded now with no ascertainable purpose except to sun themselves. Their seasonal brilliance – scarlet, sky-blue, yellow – interspersed the deep, high-summer greenness of the foliage. The ground, too hard to receive their spoor, shook beneath games that revealed a high degree of social organisation. Elsewhere the grass lay folded back, shewing where solitaires of the race had eased themselves into forms. On the gravel paths, scuffles and hoots gave evidence of courting rites; and in every part the characteristic calls of the kind lay clear and pleasant upon the vivid air." I at first thought this referred to these strange apes but these creatures sunning and courting and hooting are human ...

And in the Professor's attempts to stop the ape being shot in to space it gives Brophy many opportunities to discuss her passion for animal welfare and vegetarianism. Just a taste.

—'It seemed to him a macabre reflexion that a human body was so sacred that soldiers would break off in the middle of war to collect it and give it a solemn burial, whereas an animal's body could be mangled past recognition and still not offend the human appetite.'

—"If you must kill it!" Post mocked. "Why *must* you kill animals? You know as well as I do that Man can live perfectly healthily on a vegetable diet. Everyone knows. But we still say it's necessary to kill animals. The figures shew that you can stop hanging murderers without encouraging murder, but we go on behaving as if hanging was necessary. The last two wars brought economic ruin to Europe but we still think that war is an economic necessity."

—' "Cavemen," he said solemnly, "used to hunt animals when the animals came their way. They ran a fair risk of being killed by the animals. We on the other hand rear animals, we selectively, and if need be forcibly, breed them, and fatten them: all with no purpose in mind except to kill them in the prime of life or even sooner."

"At least," Darrelhyde said, "we kill them humanely now."

"If someone had offered to bump you off at thirty, would you have been reconciled to him on condition he did it humanely?"

Post had spoken with surprising animus: and Darrelhyde murmured: “You ought to be a vegetarian.”

“Those people make me sick!” Post retorted.

“You think they’re sentimental?”

“I think they delude themselves. Don’t they realise that if they eat lettuce the lettuce-grower will shoot the rabbits who maraud the lettuces? If they drink milk the farmer will slaughter the bull calf who can’t yield the stuff. Vegetarians indeed! They can’t get out of it as easily as that.” ‘

The Professor despairing of anyone listening to his protests breaks in to the zoo and lets Percy the male ape out. His sudden freedom goes to his head and he rushes away but then becomes lost. Eventually he finds his way back to his pen and mates with Edwina the female ape and then as the Professor tries to tempt him forth again he jostles out into the freedom of the wider zoo but he is lonely and lost among the unfamiliar paths and trees. He charges towards a familiar figure, Tom, a young man who works in the zoo. Tom thinking he is going to be attacked shoots him dead. The man who wanted Percy for the space program has him skinned. The Professor eventually goes to the space research station and discovers that a rocket with an ape on board has just lifted off. But if not Percy ... he comes to the bizarre conclusion that Kendrick inside the ape’s hide has gone on board.

“What are his chances,” the Professor asked, “of coming down safe?”

“It would infringe Security if I told you.”

“Does it matter now?”

“Not much.”

“Then tell me what you think, professionally.”

“It’ll be a shaky do.”

The Professor gets somewhat impatient and says, “Couldn’t you tell me straightforwardly, in such a way that I shall understand, whether Kendrick will come back alive?”

“He won’t,” the man says.

You could perhaps read it as a morality tale, rather than an allegory, and it does have a moderately happy ending: Edwina gives birth to another Percy and we can only hope there is not another Kendrick wanting to blast him in to space.

—but I suspect that despite its popularity and its wit she would have said with frank honesty that the world could do without her novels, Firbank’s novels, and indeed most novels ...

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June 13: Dorothy Sayers

William Butler Yeats

June 14: Jerzy Kosinski

June 15: Thomas Randolph

June 16: Isobelle Carmody

Katherine Graham

Adam Smith

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“Writer David Korten likens the modern capitalist society to cancer in a healthy body. Survival and recovery depends on the speedy creation of diverse, inter-locking, locally-based economies and societies. This, in turn, depends on allowing space for community-level experimentation in which economic and other resources are directed locally and democratically, rather than being ‘controlled by distant corporate bureaucracies intent on appropriating wealth to enrich their shareholders’. Korten calls for a transformation from global capitalism to what he

calls a system of ‘mindful markets’. This recalls the original depiction of the market economy provided by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith envisioned ‘mindful ethical cultures’ combined with economies rooted in a particular locality, with small, locally-owned companies satisfying the needs of the community in which they are based. This is almost exactly the opposite of the current system of global economics whose architects frequently, and unwittingly, cite Smith as an icon.”

David Cromwell in *Private Planet*.

And Clive Hamilton in *Growth Fetish* writes, “Economists have not always been uncritical advocates of growth. The early economists understood that their task was to explore the human condition and the progress of nations. This was, of course, the case with moral philosopher and political economist Adam Smith, whose analysis of how markets work has been so bastardised by 20th century advocates of free markets. The neoliberal Right’s cannibalisation of Smith’s work is a historical libel.”

I must plead guilty. Without ever having read the book I had always assumed he promoted the idea of unrestrained capitalism.

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There is no shortage of ‘doom and gloom’ books. I have spent this weekend reading *The End of Australia* by Vern Gowdie and *The Big Drop* by James Rickards and regardless of where such books start from they always home in on debt. Our debt, your debt, private debt, public debt, national debt, good debt, bad debt. When I was young people worked hard, saved, re-used, had fairly modest aspirations, bank managers were figures of stern rectitude who only loaned their bank’s money with, apparently, the greatest of reluctance and if they ever got bonuses we never heard about them. But then we all seemingly got richer. How? Gowdie says, “Australia’s willingness to embrace debt is the ‘miracle’ behind the stellar growth over the past 25 years.”

And David Cromwell says, “The underlying problem is that global capitalism is driven by a debt-based financial system which creates an inexorable need for the economy to grow.”

And Wolfgang Münchau in *The Meltdown Years* says, “Most financial crises involve excessive lending secured on assets with fast collapsing values.” He also quotes John Kenneth Galbraith saying, “All financial innovation involves, in one form or another, the creation of debt secured in greater or lesser adequacy by real assets....All crises have involved debt that, in one fashion or another, has become dangerously out of scale in relation to the underlying means of payment.”

William D. Cohen in *House of Cards* quotes an article in the *New York Times* of December 2006 by David Leonhardt, “Over the last few decades, the world’s financial system has endured a crisis roughly once every three or four years. There was the stock market crash of 1987, the Asian and Mexican meltdowns in the 1990s, the dot-com implosion of 2000 and, most recently, the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001. We may now be living on both borrowed money and borrowed time.”

Atif Mian and Amir Sufi in *House of Debt* wrote, “Taken together, both the international and U.S. evidence reveals a strong pattern: *Economic disasters are almost always preceded by a large increase in household debt*. In fact, the correlation is so robust that it is as close to an empirical law as it gets in macroeconomics. Further large increases in household debt and economic disasters seem to be linked by collapses in spending.” and “A financial system that relies excessively on debt amplifies wealth inequality.”

Gideon Rachman in *Zero-Sum World* wrote, “The West successfully avoided a Great Depression (in 2008) at the cost of a near doubling of public debt. It was like a family that responded to unemployment by living off its credit card. That way of life cannot go on for ever.”

And William Bonner and Lila Rajiva in *Mobs, Messiahs, and Markets* wrote, “A child born in the United States in 1900 came into the world naked and free of debt. Today, American children pop into the world and are immediately swaddled in the chains of empire and imperial debt. All their lives they will have to be paying them off—debts from bonuses paid to government employees in 1986, from bombs dropped in 2003, from boondoggles built in 1995, from checks written in 1974, from promises made to old people in 2002, from the expenses of hurricanes in 2005, and so on. The poor children will have to drag around with them the entire pathetic history of America’s financial decline.” Unless children everywhere revolt and refuse to pay the debts previous generations have rung up ... rather than piling new debt on top of old debt ... and so on ...

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“In its modern sense, liberalism is a theory of government posing as a branch of economics. Adam Smith and David Ricardo called their discipline political economy, a useful term. The “political” was dropped when the twentieth-century marriage of economics and advanced mathematics fostered the illusion that economics is a science. But the empirical underpinnings of public economics, the branches that seek to inform government policy, are often so fragile that they are better understood as ideologies.”

Charles R. Morris in *The Trillion Dollar Meltdown*.

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So if Adam Smith *wasn't* promoting unrestrained capitalism what kind of society did he envisage? It seemed to be time to tackle *The Wealth of Nations*.

And on his first page is a reminder that he was writing about a world which is gone:

“The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessaries and conveniences of life which it annually consumes, and which consist always either in the immediate produce of that labour, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations. Accordingly, therefore, as this produce, or what is purchased with it, bears a greater or smaller proportion to the number of those who are to consume it, the nation will be better or worse supplied with all the necessaries and conveniences for which it has occasion.

“But this proportion must in every nation be regulated by two different circumstances: first, by the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which its labour is generally applied; and, secondly, by the proportion between the number of those who are employed in useful labour, and that of those who are not so employed. Whatever be the soil, climate, or extent of territory of any particular nation, the abundance or scantiness of its annual supply must, in that particular situation, depend upon those two circumstances.

“The abundance or scantiness of this supply, too, seems to depend more upon the former of those two circumstances than upon the latter. Among the savage nations of hunters and fishers, every individual who is able to work is more or less employed in useful labour, and endeavours to provide, as well as he can, the necessaries and conveniences of life, for himself, and such of his family or tribe as are either too old, or too young, or too infirm, to go a-hunting and fishing. Such nations, however, are so miserably poor, that, from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or at least think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants, their old people, and those afflicted with lingering diseases, to perish from hunger, or to be devoured by wild beasts. Among civilized and thriving nations, on the contrary, though a great number of people do not labour at all, many of whom consume the produce of ten times, frequently of a hundred times, more labour than the greater part of those who work; yet the produce of the whole labour of the society is so great, that all are often abundantly supplied; and a workman, even of the lowest and poorest order, if he is

frugal and industrious, may enjoy a greater share of the necessaries and conveniences of life than it is possible for any savage to acquire.”

No modern economist would refer to ‘savages’ and I cannot help wondering if Adam Smith ever went out and wandered round the slums of Edinburgh. Yet for someone writing before Captain Philip unloaded his convicts in Sydney Cove, his style is modern and clear and accessible.

Running through his work is the theme of balance. Supply and demand, profit and loss, plenty and scarcity, import and export. These aspects could be expected to find a natural balance. But there are constant intrusions: tariffs, duties, bounties, taxes, restrictions, legislation etc.

So what words of wisdom might a reader take from his work?

—“The produce of labour constitutes the natural recompence or wages of labour. In that original state of things which precedes both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, the whole produce of labour belongs to the labourer.”

—“The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little, as possible. ... It is not, however, difficult to foresee which of the two parties must, upon all ordinary occasions, have the advantage in the dispute, and force the other into a compliance with their terms. The masters, being fewer in number, can combine much more easily: and the law, besides, authorises, or at least does not prohibit, their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen. We have no acts of parliament against combining to lower the price of work, but many against combining to raise it.”

—“No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable.”

—“Where wages are high, accordingly, we shall always find the workmen more active, diligent, and expeditious, than when they are low”.

—“It will be found, I believe, in every sort of trade, that the man who works so moderately, as to be able to work constantly, not only preserves his health the longest, but, in the course of the year, executes the greatest quantity of work.”

—“There is not, however, a more certain proposition in mathematics, than that the more (lottery) tickets you adventure upon, the more likely you are to be a loser.”

—“The price which the town really pays for the provisions and materials annually imported into it, is the quantity of manufactures and other goods annually exported from it. The dearer the latter are sold, the cheaper the former are bought. The industry of the town becomes more, and that of the country less advantageous.”

—“When masters combine together, in order to reduce the wages of their workmen, they commonly enter into a private bond or agreement, not to give more than a certain wage, under a certain penalty. Were the workmen to enter into a contrary combination of the same kind, not to accept of a certain wage, under a certain penalty, the law would punish them very severely; and, if it dealt impartially, it would treat the masters in the same manner. But the 8th of George III. enforces by law that very regulation which masters sometimes attempt to establish by such combinations.”

—“Should this root ever become in any part of Europe, like rice in some rice countries, the common and favourite vegetable food of the people, so as to occupy the same proportion of the lands in tillage, which wheat and other sorts of grain for human food do at present, the same quantity of cultivated land would maintain a much greater number of people; and the labourers being generally fed with potatoes, a greater surplus would remain after replacing all the stock, and maintaining all the labour employed in cultivation. A greater share of this surplus, too, would belong to the landlord. Population would increase, and rents would rise much beyond what they are at present.”

—“As the woollen manufactures, too, of Ireland, are fully as much discouraged as is consistent with justice and fair dealing, the Irish can work up but a smaller part of their own wool at home, and are therefore obliged to send a greater proportion of it to Great Britain, the only market they are allowed.”

—“If, when the bill (or exchange) becomes due, the acceptor does not pay it as soon as it is presented, he becomes from that moment a bankrupt. The bill is protested, and returns upon the drawer, who, if he does not immediately pay it, becomes likewise a bankrupt.”

—“It can seldom happen, indeed, that the circumstances of a great nation can be much affected by the prodigality or misconduct of individuals; the profusion or imprudence of some being always more than compensated by the frugality and good conduct of others.”

—“The colony of a civilized nation which takes possession either of a waste country, or of one so thinly inhabited that the natives easily give place to the new settlers, advances more rapidly to wealth and greatness than any other human society.”

—“To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers, may at first sight, appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers, but extremely fit for a nation whose government is influenced by shopkeepers.”

—“To propose that Great Britain should voluntarily give up all authority over her colonies, and leave them to elect their own magistrates, to enact their own laws, and to make peace and war, as they might think proper, would be to propose such a measure as never was, and never will be, adopted by any nation in the world. No nation ever voluntarily gave up the dominion of any province, how troublesome soever it might be to govern it, and how small soever the revenue which it afforded might be in proportion to the expense which it occasioned.”

—“Since the establishment of the English East India company, for example, the other inhabitants of England, over and above being excluded from the trade, must have paid, in the price of the East India goods which they have consumed, not only for all the extraordinary profits which the company may have made upon those goods in consequence of their monopoly, but for all the extraordinary waste which the fraud and abuse inseparable from the management of the affairs of so great a company must necessarily have occasioned.”

—“From the very little that is known about the price of manufactures in the times of the Greeks and Romans, it would appear that those of the finer sort were excessively dear. Silk sold for its weight in gold. It was not, indeed, in those times an European manufacture; and as it was all brought from the East Indies, the distance of the carriage may in some measure account for the greatness of the price.”

—“Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition”.

—“For though management and persuasion are always the easiest and safest instruments of government as force and violence are the worst and most dangerous; yet such, it seems, is the natural insolence of man, that he almost always disdains to use the good instrument, except when he cannot or dare not use the bad one.”

—“Nothing but exemplary morals can give dignity to a man of small fortune.”

—“The canton of Berne derives a considerable revenue by lending a part of its treasure to foreign states, that is, by placing it in the public funds of the different indebted nations of Europe, chiefly in those of France and England. The security of this revenue must depend, first, upon the security of the funds in which it is placed, or upon the good faith of the government which has the management of them; and, secondly, the certainty or probability of the continuance of peace with the debtor nation. In the case of a war, the very first act of hostility on the part of the debtor nation might be the forfeiture of the funds of its credit.”

—“When the crown lands had become private property, they would, in the course of a few years, become well improved and well cultivated. The increase of their produce would increase the population of the country, by augmenting the revenue and consumption of the people. But the revenue which the crown derives from the duties or customs and excise, would necessarily increase with the revenue and consumption of the people.”

—“The people of France, however, it is generally acknowledged, are much more oppressed by taxes than the people of Great Britain. France, however, is certainly the great empire in Europe, which, after that of Great Britain, enjoy the mildest and most indulgent government.”

—“The parsimony which leads to accumulation has become almost as rare in republican as in monarchical governments.”

—“On the 31st of December 1697, the public debts of Great Britain, funded and unfunded, amounted to £21,515,742:13:8½.”

—“On the 5th of January 1775, the funded debt of Great Britain amounted to £124,996,086,1:6¼d.”

—“Sugar, rum, and tobacco, are commodities which are nowhere necessities of life, which are become objects of almost universal consumption, and which are, therefore, extremely proper subjects of taxation.”

—“The blacks, indeed, who make the greater part of the inhabitants, both of the southern colonies upon the continent and of the West India islands, as they are in a state of slavery, are, no doubt, in a worse condition than the poorest people either in Scotland or Ireland. We must not, however, upon that account, imagine they are worse fed, or that their consumption of articles which might be subject to moderate duties, is less than that even of the lower ranks of people in England. In order that they may work well, it is the interest of their master that they should be fed well, and kept in good heart, in the same manner as it is his interest that his working cattle should be so.”

It would be incorrect to say he doesn't believe in growth. He does. He also believes in colonialism and slavery. But what does he have to say about debt? He dwells on public debt which was predominantly accrued because of war and the costs of keeping the military. But although he looks at taxes and other imposts on private individuals and households it wasn't a preoccupation. Ordinary people could borrow from family or friends but had little access to other kinds of loans. If they were desperate they would most likely go to a pawnbroker. I don't think Adam Smith could ever have envisaged the modern free-for-all.

He ends on what might be seen as a prophetic statement:

“If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute towards the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Great Britain should free herself from the expense of defending those provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil or military establishment in time of peace; and endeavour to accommodate her future views and designs to the real mediocrity of her circumstances.”

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Judith Wright in *Born of the Conquest* writes, “What could the ecological economist prescribe in our present situation?”

Coombs (H.C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs, former head of the Reserve Bank) summarises these prescriptions:

1. We must halt population growth, reduce it, and stabilise it at an ecologically safe level.

2. We must modify resource use so as not to threaten the survival of other species.
3. We should limit the use of scarce resources, ideally using only those which can be renewed indefinitely or recycled perfectly.
4. We must control the emission of waste products to a safe level, particularly those of a kind or produced on a scale likely to affect the ecological balance.”

And he goes on to say:

- a. Human beings are living to a significant degree on a heritage of non-replaceable resources.
- b. Producers of many products are obtaining these resources, and others for whose replacement or recycling special measures are necessary, at prices which do not ensure equilibrium between their long-term demand and supply.
- c. Some forms of production involve costs of a kind which fall on persons other than those producing or consuming the goods concerned.
- d. And ‘such social costs are rarely charged against the producer or consumer’.

Thirty years later, far from following any of these prescriptions, we are still on a wild consuming spree. To me, it seems a potent reminder that there are all kinds of debts. And while we float along on a sea of monetary debt which we cannot repay it seems even more dangerous that we float along on a sea of ecological debt that we have no way of repaying. And if we promote ‘growth’ as a solution to the former we take both society and the planet into even deeper debt to the latter.

* * * * *

June 17: Henry Lawson

June 18: Gail Godwin

George Essex Evans

June 19: Salman Rushdie

James I/VI

June 20: Lillian Hellman

June 21: Jean-Paul Sartre

Ian McEwan

June 22: Erich Maria Remarque

Henry Rider Haggard

Julian Hawthorne

June 23: Winifred Holtby

June 24: Ambrose Bierce

Raymond John Bailey (hanged)

June 25: George Orwell

June 26: Colin Wilson

John Blackburn

June 27: Lafcadio Hearn

Robert Aickman

June 28: Jean Jacques Rousseau

Luigi Pirandello

Norman Lewis

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The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy edited by Jonathon Rée and J. O. Urmson, has under Gender:

“ ‘Gender’, as distinct from ‘sex’, is whatever there is to being male or female that cannot be attributed to innate bodily differences. Sex, we are told, is biologically given; gender is socially constructed. But opinion differs as to where sex stops and gender starts. For many feminists, gender is malleable without limit; but others question this conception of free-floating gender, and also challenge aspects of the Western philosophical tradition on which it rests.

The idea of gender as transcending bodily sex differences is of course a modern one. But it has its roots in traditional philosophy, with its aspirations to the transcendence of body by mind and consciousness; or of the passivities of nature by autonomous will. And the concept of gender also has links with the traditional philosophical concept of the person. Gender transcends sex. But for those feminists who rest claims to sexual equality on the supposed fundamental sameness of men and women, it is itself transcended by personhood. As persons, what sex we are is not essential to us. The rational mind is neither sexed nor gendered.

The idea of the sexless soul, which reinforces the idea of gender as changeable, goes back to Plato’s discussion of the female guardians in book five of the *Republic*. The sexual equality of the guardians rests on their sameness of soul, which co-exists with bodily difference. Women should be given the same education as men, to fit them for the same social roles. But in *Emile* (1762) Rousseau claimed that Plato had really excluded femaleness from the Republic: the female guardians did not really have female gender. Modern feminists have often seen this pattern repeated in women’s access to institutions and professions structured around men. In reaction to the disappearance of female gender into a supposedly gender-neutral norm, there was a trend in subsequent feminism towards an affirmation of female difference. This was accompanied by a move to bring gender closer to sex, repudiating the philosophical assumptions implicit in the picture of gender as ‘free-floating’, especially Descartes’ model of the mind-body distinction.”

The same *Encyclopedia* says, under Rousseau, of his book *Émile*: “”His next book, *Émile* (1762), the greatest of all writings on education, had an even wider and more lasting effect. It held that education should not curb or discipline the natural tendencies of the child but encourage them to grow and blossom. Teaching should come not from books and verbal instruction, but by example and direct experience of people and things. The family, not the school, is its proper field; and love and sympathy, not rules and punishments, the tools for the task.” Presumably he was not extending this freedom to girls who, in 1762, rarely got any school education whatsoever.

And further: “Some feminists also argue that social arrangements should reflect the different relations of the sexes to the biological facts of reproduction. Such versions of feminism echo Rousseau’s insistence that male and female are different ways of being human, and that female reproductive capacities are central to the difference. They believe in ‘taking biology seriously’, highlighting the connections between femaleness and nurturance, and then arguing that the philosophical dichotomy between mind and body deludes us into advocating the fundamental sameness of men and women.

“Although such feminists are at pains to distance themselves from biological determinism, they continue to construe the relations between gender and sex in causal terms. The problem, however, is to see what there is to ‘sex’ that can provide the cause or ground of the approved forms of social arrangement. How do we know where the biological facts end and the social construction of nurturance as female begins? A merging of cultural and biological facts of reproduction is of course exactly what we should expect, if we do repudiate the sharp dichotomies inherited from the philosophical tradition. But to the extent that they do merge, the idea of sex as grounding gender becomes confused.

“An alternative approach has been to see gender as the human response to the fact of sex

differences, rather than their causal product – as our enactment of sex differences, our response to their significance. This view seeks to expose as illusory the Kantian ideal of personhood that transcends sex difference, in favour of seeing gender as integral to personhood. But this view also has difficulty in identifying the natural facts to which gender is supposedly the truthful response.

“We seem to have here a conceptual impasse. We can think of gender as floating free of sex. But then femaleness either disappears into a human norm, which coincides with socially constructed maleness, or it survives only as a complement to the essentially human. Alternatively, we can try to affirm femaleness by bringing gender closer to sex; but this may only perpetuate and rationalize existing sexual stereotypes, by naturalizing them.

“A possible way out of this impasse is to see gender as neither a causal product nor a response to pre-existing difference, but an expression of power, with no existence independent of the dominance of men over women. According to this view, what is fundamental is the political fact that maleness is the standard with reference to which both sameness and difference are judged: sameness means being the same as men; difference is being different from men. Hence a feminist affirmation of what differentiates women from men is fraught with problems. For women to affirm difference is to confirm their powerlessness.

“Some feminist philosophers have argued that the philosophical tradition has helped form this identification between maleness and the human norm: that philosophical ideals of reason, autonomy and personhood have privileged maleness as transcending and excluding the feminine; and that female gender has been constructed by those exclusions. But if the philosophical tradition has contributed to our present quandaries about sex and gender, it also offers resources for rethinking sexual difference; and from this perspective many of the old philosophical debates take on new dimensions.

“For example, much of the contemporary dissatisfaction with our ways of thinking of sex and gender focuses, as we have seen, on Descartes’ view of the mind. But on a Spinozistic view of the mind—body distinction, sex differences would reach right into the mind. The mind, for Spinoza, is the ‘idea of the body’. As ideas of differently sexed bodies, minds would have to be sexually differentiated. But does that commit us to a distinction between male and female minds? Why should the idea of a male body be male, any more than the idea of a large body is large? But the claim is not ludicrous. The idea of a large body reflects the ‘powers and pleasures’, in Spinoza’s phrase, of such a body. And to the extent that the powers and pleasures of bodies are sexually differentiated, it will be appropriate to speak of male and female minds. A female mind will be one whose nature, and whose joys, reflect those of the female body.

“Moreover, there is for Spinoza a continuity between the individual body and the socialized body. The powers of bodies are enriched by good forms of social organization, which foster the collective pursuit of reason. They are also diminished by bad forms of social organization, and by exclusion from good ones. If we take seriously the implications of Spinoza’s theory of the mind, female minds will be formed by socially imposed limitations on the powers and pleasures of female bodies.

“On this way of looking at sex difference, there is no sexless soul, waiting to be extricated from socially imposed sex roles. But nor is there any authentic male or female identity, existing independently of social power. With gender there are no brute facts, other than those produced through the shifting play of the powers and pleasures of socialized, embodied, sexed human beings.”

I was only going to put in the paragraph which mentions Rousseau but gender and sex and their relationship is very much in the news and I found this entry thought-provoking. Encyclopedias grapple with the question of non-sexist language. Dictionaries usually use

‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’ interchangeably but this isn’t how the words are being used in the community particularly the LGBTI community; which isn’t to say that most of us are really very much the wiser—even after reading this scholarly effort to grapple with the issue. We probably need some completely new words. We can create new words for the cyber world but we seem to be stuck with those old ones like Mankind and He-or-She ... So if femaleness is invariably subsumed into the spoken and written aspects of maleness is there still a space where maleness and femaleness are irrelevant? Do I have gender-free dreams, I wonder?

*

Carlos Fuentes wrote a novel *The Campaign* set in Latin America at the time of the struggle for independence from Spain. His ‘hero’ Baltasar is a young ‘loose cannon’ in Buenos Aires who begins his troublesome career by abducting a white baby and replacing it with a black one but he manages to set the curtains alight with the candles and burns the baby to death. And where might he find this unfortunate black baby there? Well, he says there were 30,000 slaves in Buenos Aires at that time. So quite a few black babies and not a lot of people caring much about their fate.

He sees himself as a revolutionary inspired by, among others, Rousseau. “He left Buenos Aires carrying little baggage. A wicker suitcase, an umbrella, and three or four of his favourite books: *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, *The Social Contract*, *The Confessions*, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*.” This struck me as I had just been reading *The Reveries* and, in fact, he refers to Rousseau throughout his book as an influence.

So before there was a Karl Marx to influence revolutionaries did people turn to Rousseau?

Great Thinkers A-Z (Julian Baggini and Jeremy Stangroom) says of Rousseau, “Despite his pessimistic view of society and his hope that a revolutionary age could be prevented, a decade after his death Rousseau’s writings inspired many of the leaders of the French Revolution. The same characteristic zeal that had led the *encyclopedistes* to reject Rousseau’s philosophy has been found inspirational by many who have shared his sense of outrage at the inequalities present within their own societies. Fidel Castro is said to have carried a copy of *The Social Contract* throughout his days as a revolutionary.”

The popular image of Rousseau is of someone espousing freedom, including freedom from personal responsibilities, but how close is this either to his life or to his writings?

Jean Webster in *Daddy-Long-Legs* has her heroine write, “If I have five children, like Rousseau, I shan’t leave them on the steps of a foundling asylum in order to insure their being brought up simply.” So did Rousseau have five children—and did he leave them on the steps of a foundling asylum? Well, yes, it seems so. He went to Paris from Switzerland and took up with a young woman, Therese Levasseur, who sewed for a living. He wasn’t interested in marrying her or acknowledging his paternity and instead pushed for the children to be left at a foundling hospital because according to his *Confessions*, “I trembled at the thought of intrusting them to a family ill brought up, to be still worse educated. The risk of the education of the foundling hospital was much less.” From there the children disappeared from human ken, probably dying and being thrown into the mass graves such institutions favoured. That he might have believed such a place would give his children any affection, attention, sense of identity, good food, let alone any education worth the name suggests he never looked further than the front steps.

It is interesting that Rousseau tends to be talked about in regard to his influence on others rather than for himself. For instance Richard Tarnas in *The Passion of the Western Mind* writes:

—With the advances of scientific and philosophical knowledge, the modern mind could no longer base religion on a cosmological or metaphysical foundation, but instead it could base religion in the structure of the human situation itself—and it was through this decisive insight that Kant, following the spirit of Rousseau and of Luther before him, defined the direction of

modern religious thought. Man was freed from the external and objective to form his religious response to life. Inner personal experience, not objective demonstration or dogmatic belief, was the true ground of religious meaning.

—From the complex matrix of the Renaissance had issued forth two distinct streams of culture, two temperaments or general approaches to human existence characteristic of the Western mind. One emerged in the scientific Revolution and Enlightenment and stressed rationality, empirical science, and a skeptical secularism. The other was its polar complement, sharing common roots in the Renaissance and classical Greco-Roman culture (and in the Reformation as well), but tending to express just those aspects of human experience suppressed by the Enlightenment's overriding spirit of rationalism. First conspicuously present in Rousseau, then in Goethe, Schiller, Herder, and German Romanticism, this side of the Western sensibility fully emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and has not ceased to be a potent force in Western culture and consciousness—from Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hölderlin, Schelling, Schleiermacher, the Schlegel brothers, Madame de Staël, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Hugo, Pushkin, Carlyle, Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and onward in its diverse forms to their many descendants, countercultural and otherwise, of the present era.

—On the Romantic side, as in Rousseau, Goethe, or Wordsworth, there was an impassioned striving for conscious unity with nature, both poetic and instinctual. On the scientific side, man's immersion into nature was realized in science's description of man in increasingly, and then entirely, naturalistic terms. But against the harmonious aspirations of the Romantics, man's unity with nature was here placed in the context of a Darwinian-Freudian struggle ... the early Romantic sense of harmony with nature underwent a distinct transformation as the modern era grew old. Here the Romantic temperament was complexly influenced by its own internal developments, by the sundering effects of modern industrial civilization and modern history and by science's view of nature as impersonal, non-anthropocentric, and random. The overdetermined result was an experience of nature almost opposite from the original Romantic ideal: Modern man now increasingly sensed his alienation from nature's womb, his fall from unitary being, his confinement to an absurd universe of chance and necessity. No longer the early Romantic's spiritually glorious child of nature, late modern man was the incongruously sensitive denizen of an implacable vastness devoid of meaning.

I tremble when I think what influences the Romantics actually took from Rousseau. That children are a nuisance? William James in his *Principles of Psychology* wrote, "There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed. Rousseau, inflaming all the mothers of France, by his eloquence, to follow Nature and nurse their babies themselves, while he sends his own children to the foundling hospital, is the classical example of what I mean. But every one of us in his measure, whenever, after glowing for an abstractly formulated Good, he practically ignores some actual case, among the squalid 'other particulars' of which that same Good lurks disguised, treads straight on Rousseau's path."

Though this implies that the 'mothers of France' as well as its revolutionaries were all reading Rousseau—and taking from him what James read into him. But a contemporary reader of his work, Mary Wollstonecraft, could muse, "Rousseau exerts himself to prove that all *was* right originally: a crowd of authors that all *is* now right: and I, that all will *be* right." But she could also be scathing in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. "Women are, therefore, to be considered either as moral beings, or so weak that they must be entirely subjected to the superior faculties of men.

"Let us examine this question. Rousseau declares that a women should never, for a

moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a *sweeter* companion to man, whenever he chooses to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indications of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions, because, with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be impressed with unrelenting rigour.

“What nonsense! when will a great man arise with sufficient strength of mind to puff away the fumes which pride and sensuality have thus spread over the subject! If women are by nature inferior to men, their virtues must be the same in quality, if not in degree, or virtue is a relative idea; consequently, their conduct should be founded on the same principles, and have the same aim.”

*

And it doesn't help that any 'Noble Savages' (a la Rousseau) left always seem to be sitting on oil reserves or forests of valuable hardwoods ... and therefore must be moved forthwith and mostly end up as part of that anonymous mass called the 'urban poor' ... Their only consolation might be that they don't have Rousseau around to determine what education, if any, should be their portion.

* * * * *

June 29: Antoine de Saint-Expury

June 30: Czeslaw Milosz

July 1: George Sand

July 2: William Le Queux

July 3: Franz Kafka

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

July 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne

July 5: George Borrow

July 6: Pierre Benoit

July 7: Robert Heinlein

Lion Feuchtwanger

July 8: Richard Aldington

* * * * *

Richard Aldington and his wife H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) belonged to that poetic movement called Imagism. Imagism did not continue as a movement much beyond the 1920s (and even then there were complaints that it had become Post-Imagism rather than seeking to be true to its credo) though it has influenced many poets since and Pound formed the Vorticists as a more extreme form of Imagism. It can be seen as a revolt against those very wordy nineteenth century poems of Tennyson and his ilk. Pound summed up Imagism's objectives as:

'Use no superfluous word, no adjective which does not reveal something...

'Go in fear of abstractions...

'Use either no ornament or good ornament...

'Don't chop your stuff into separate iambs. Don't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin every next line with a heave...'

*

'He was very deeply concerned for others. He once told me that he has always felt disturbed and unhappy that a contemporary of his at Harvard, Conrad Aiken, had had so little success as a poet. "I've always thought that he and I were equally gifted, but I've received a large amount of appreciation, and he has been rather neglected. I can't understand it. It seems

unjust. It always worries me.”” Stephen Spender writing in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and his Work* ed Allen Tate.

Did Conrad Aiken simply get overlooked? Did other critics and readers not share Eliot’s opinion of Aiken’s poetry? Or did Aiken set out to annoy and ridicule those who might otherwise have been his peers, readers, and supporters?

He wrote a poem he called ‘Ballade of Worshippers of the Image’:

Ezra Pound, Dick Aldington,
Fletcher and Flint and sweet H.D.,
Whether you chirp in Kensington
Or Hampstead Heath, or Bloomsbury;
Birds of protean pedigree,
Vorticist, Cubist, or Imagist,
Where in a score of years will you be,
And the delicate succubae you kissed?

You, of the trivial straining fun,
Who ape your betters in mirthless glee;
You, whose meticulous clear lines run
In hideous insipidity;
And you, forsooth, who shinned a tree
To keep with the gaping moon your tryst,
Where in a score years will you be,
And the delicate succubae you kissed?

Idols and images, every one,
Crash down like ancient theory;
Where is the Vortex under the sun
That spins not always emptily?
Cease these jeers at minstrelsy,
You, who perish and are not missed,
For where in a score years will you be,
And the delicate succubae you kissed?

L’Envoi

Pound, though your henchmen now agree
To hail the Prince in the Anarchist,
Where in a score years will you be,
And the pale pink dream blown mouths you kissed?

It may not have endeared him to the people who could have helped his reputation and career.

*

Norman Holland said of H.D.: ‘H.D. was above all a poet of the thingness of things.’ But reading several of her pieces in Peter Jones’ collection *Imagist Poetry* I could see something in them that came closer to haiku than traditional English poetry. For instance:

Wind rushes
Over the dunes,
And the coarse, salt-crustured grass
Answers.

(from 'Hermes of the Ways')

Can the spice-rose
drip such acrid fragrance
hardened in a leaf?

(from 'Sea Rose')

And it is perhaps worth remembering that the West became enamoured of many things Japanese in the late nineteenth-century. But she also wrote lush Greek-inspired poems such as 'Priapus (Keeper-of-Orchards)':

I saw the first pear
As it fell.
The honey-seeking, golden-handed,
The yellow swarm
Was not more fleet than I,
(Spare us from loveliness!)
And I fell prostrate,
Crying.
Thou hast flayed us with thy blossoms;
Spare us the beauty
Of fruit-trees!

The honey-seeking
Paused not.
The air thundered their song,
And I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn
God of the orchard,
I bring thee an offering;
Do thou, alone unbeautiful
(Son of the god),
Spare us from loveliness.

The fallen hazel-nuts,
Stripped late their green sheaths,
The grapes, red-purple,
Their berries
Dripping with wine,
Pomegranates already broken,
And shrunken fig,
And quinces untouched,
I bring thee as offering.

As well as more laconic yet still Imagist works such as 'The Walls Do Not Fall' which begins:

An incident here and there,
and rails gone (for guns)
from your (and my) old town square:

But she then turns to the colours and images that remain:

mist and mist-grey, no colour,
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare
pursue unalterable purpose

In fact I enjoyed the poems of both Aldington and H.D. in *Imagist Poetry* and I couldn't help seeing how deeply we had accepted Imagist ideas and made them mainstream; the poems did not seem avant garde, unusual, strange, controversial. So it becomes hard to step back into a world where lyric poetry provided the benchmark of 'What is a Poem' ...

And the poems of Imagists were almost brutal in their brevity.

Such as Richard Aldington in 'Living Sepulchres'

One frosty night when the guns were still
I leaned against the trench
Making for myself *hokku*
Of the moon and flowers and of the snow.
But the ghastly scurrying of huge rats
Swollen with feeding upon men's flesh
Filled me with shrinking dread.

Or 'Evening':

The chimneys, rank on rank,
Cut the clear sky;
The moon,
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus –

And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink.

And, come to think of it, the First World War probably pushed along the process of cutting verbiage from poems. Poets had less leisure, less paper, less opportunity. Readers had less willingness to wallow, verse after verse, in awfulness ...

*

Tim Woods in his *Who's Who of Twentieth-Century Novelists* says of Richard Aldington. "A founder poet of the Imagist movement around 1912, notable for its free verse and vivid images, he befriended Ezra Pound and married the Imagist poet Hilda Doolittle in 1913 (they divorced in 1937), and his *Complete Poems* was published in 1948. Serving with the infantry during the First World War, he became a noted novelist who depicted the horror of the conflict; although after the war, disillusioned with the British literary scene, he moved to France and lived as an expatriate. Indeed, his post-war writings are deeply pessimistic, such as the firsthand account of the war in his most significant novel *Death of a Hero* (1929), which is partly autobiographical and depicts the alienating impact of war on civilian life."

And he says of Hilda Doolittle: "she is perhaps best known as 'H.D.', after Pound wrote 'H.D. Imagiste' on one of her poetry manuscripts. Her reworkings of Judaeo-Christian religion and Hellenic cults, especially *Helen in Egypt* (1961) and the major long poems written during the Second World War, later collected as *Trilogy* (1973), are significant achievements." She was briefly engaged to Ezra Pound and later left Richard Aldington, probably because she discovered she preferred the company of women.

* * * * *

I just came upon a different aspect of Richard Aldington as writer. Nicholas Rankin wrote in *Churchill's Wizards*, "Twenty years after his death in 1935, T. E. Lawrence came under attack from Richard Aldington, a writer and critic disillusioned by WWI and determined to attack any class-bound romanticism that camouflaged its horrors. Richard Aldington's *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry* indicts T. E. Lawrence as a fraud and a fantasist; what it lacks in accuracy, it makes up for in invective. *Lawrence l'Imposteur* (as it was called on first publication in Paris) caused a furore when it came out in England in 1955, and a powerful cabal, headed by Basil Liddell Hart, first tried to suppress, then denigrate it.

"One man who read Richard Aldington's book attentively (especially the chapter about Lawrence's sexuality) was Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, DSO, the WWI deceiver who by then was a white-bearded old gentleman in his seventies. From 1957 to 1964 Meinertzhagen published four books apparently drawn from the transcriptions of his seventy-six volumes of diaries including *Kenya Diary*, *Army Diary* and *Middle East Diary*. Just as he was becoming a forgotten figure, he constructed his own larger-than-life legend, full of swaggering violence. Yet he was mostly famed as a bird man." The trouble was, Meinertzhagen, though awarded and lauded by ornithological societies in Britain and America, had stolen specimens from public and private collections around the world.

"Nor was it only birds. Knox pointed me towards a critique published in 1995 by J. N. Lockman. This focuses on twelve entries relating to T. E. Lawrence in Meinertzhagen's *Middle East Diary 1917-1956*. It shows that those entries were not contemporaneous, but were inserted into the typescript after 1955 when the author had read Aldington's book. These entries were all disparaging to Lawrence's manhood, and are clearly Meinertzhagen's belated revenge for the way Lawrence had described him in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, as a man 'who took as blithe a pleasure in deceiving ... as in spattering the brains of a cornered mob of Germans'."

John Lord and Peter Hathaway Capstick wrote admiring biographies of Meinertzhagen, Mark Cocker gave him the benefit of the doubt, but Brian Garfield called his book *The Meinertzhagen Mystery: The Life and Times of a Colossal Fraud*. "Thus the whirligig of time brings its revenges. Lawrence's reputation is to a great extent restored, but Meinertzhagen is exposed for what he was."

And it does seem unfair to pick on Lawrence who did not seek fame and adulation and certainly wasn't responsible for the colossal blunders of WWI; the blunders and folly and callousness which probably contributed to Aldington's cynicism and decision to live outside England and its literary coteries.

* * * * *

- July 9: Anne Radcliffe
M. G. ('Monk') Lewis
Dean Koontz
Mervyn Peake
- July 10: Marcel Proust
Carl Jacobi
- July 11: Alexandr Afanesev
- July 12: Pablo Neruda
- July 13: John Clare
Isaac Babel
David Schow
Stephen Laws
- July 14: Irving Stone
- July 15: Iris Murdoch

July 16: Christopher Koch
Lancelot Andrewes
July 17: Christina Stead

* * * * *

“The secret of joy is to be nobody.” So wrote Christina Stead in *Cotter’s England*.
At first I thought ‘Oh yes!’ but then I realized it needs to have a small addition:
“The secret of joy is to be CONTENT to be nobody.”

I was thinking of this when I came upon John Kenneth Galbraith’s book *The Culture of Contentment* but he was not looking through my eyes. His contented people are those who are doing well and don’t want anything changed. It is about self-interest, self-regard, self-satisfaction, ‘I’m okay, so don’t change anything’. And he sees this attitude as dangerous, not least because it encourages a short-term view of important issues. Why do anything about global warming if I’m okay today and will probably be okay tomorrow. To go without, or pay more taxes, so that unknown people in the future will be okay ... well, the culture of content and complacency says ‘who cares about them’. He also raises an important conflict which I had not previously considered: in theory companies and businesses are run to make money for their shareholders. But in practice they are run by managers, from CEOs down to floor managers, who are not interested in that nameless mass called ‘shareholders’ but are concerned about their own promotions, bonuses, commissions, pay-rises, perks and privileges. They are the ones who make the decisions. They change products, go offshore, sack workers, take on debt, arrange an advertising blitz, cut corners, cheat customers ... and in some cases leave the shareholders whistling in the wind for a return of a few cents in the dollar when the company goes bankrupt. They walk away with their entitlements. This fundamental conflict seems to be essential to the way capitalism does business. And he sums it up bluntly in his *The Economics of Innocent Fraud*, “No one should be in doubt: Shareholders – owners – and their alleged directors in any sizable enterprise are fully subordinate to the management. Though the impression of owner authority is offered, it does not, in fact, exist. An accepted fraud.”

There are people who stay famous, as themselves, for their achievements. Christina Stead has done fairly well. People remember her. They mention *The Man Who Loved Children* or *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*. Beethoven, Mozart, Shakespeare have all managed to retain both a sense of personhood and a list of things done.

There are the vast bulk of people like me who remain nobodies, achieve nothing memorable, and are reasonably content. (I am not quite sure how you rate contentment so I have erred on the quiet side.) Then there are the nobodies who are not content with their status and run naked across cricket pitches or say bizarre things on FaceBook or, at their worst and thankfully rarest, kill people for the sake of being publicly branded a Monster.

And then there are the people who have achieved something which lives on after them while they are totally forgotten. Many people I would think have sung the lovely hymn ‘Abide with Me’ but could you discuss the H. F. Lyte who is given as its author? Probably not.

The only reason I can is that I came upon him in an unexpected way.

*

He also wrote a poem he called ‘Agnes’ which Francis Palgrave put in his *Golden Treasury*.

I saw her in childhood—
A bright, gentle thing,
Like the dawn of the morn,

Or the dews of the spring:
The daisies and hare-bells
Her playmates all day;
Herself as light-hearted
And artless as they.

I saw her again—
A fair girl of eighteen,
Fresh glittering with graces
Of mind and of mien.
Her speech was all music;
Like moonlight she shone;
The envy of many,
The glory of one.

Years, years fled over—
I stood at her foot:
The bud had grown blossom,
The blossom was fruit.
A dignified mother,
Her infant she bore;
And look'd, I thought, fairer
Than ever before.

I saw her once more—
'Twas the day that she died;
Heaven's light was around her.
And God at her side;
No wants to distress her,
No fears to appal—
O then, I felt, then
She was fairest of all!

As Palgrave also includes his 'A Lost Love' it suggests he was fond of Lyte's work or that he felt Lyte was symbolic of the many poets who wrote endlessly of Fair Women and Lost Loves. In Lyte's case he may have used a popular theme to express his own sense of loss.

Henry Francis Lyte was an Irish curate who came to the parish in Wexford of the Reverend Simon Little. Simon had suffered severely in the 1798 Uprising against the English, losing most of his belongings. His daughter Jane eventually married a man called Philip Horneck, one of her father's parishioners. But the Hornecks had suffered even more. The family had originally come to England from Germany where the first famous preacher in the family, Anthony, is buried in Westminster Abbey. But a century later several of the young men in the family went to Ireland and became farmers. Unfortunately for them they still looked very German, tall blonde men with blue eyes with a German name and clearly to be regarded as loyal to George III. One of the brothers who had come over, Philip, was killed and three of the sons of his brother George were killed (accounts vary slightly) as well as a son-in-law as the fighting raged around Vinegar Hill. George's son Philip married Simon's daughter. But the families'

misfortunes did not end there. Philip's son George became a clergyman whose son Anthony died as a young man and his daughter Ellen died in childbirth and her baby son grew up to be killed in WWI.

Lyte left Little's parish not because of a disagreement, Little seems to have been a kind and forgiving man, but because of his own chronic poor health. The tragedies which he must have come to hear in his parish make his enduring hymn so much more poignant.

Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, Who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy Presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, Grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

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July 18: Clifford Odets

Laurence Housman

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Frances Farmer wrote in her autobiography *Will There Really Be a Morning?* "It was Percy (Elias) who introduced me to Clifford Odets, and I was immediately attracted to the playwright. He was brittle and snapping, and even though our conversation was brief, a little more than a curt nod in fact, just meeting him had a deep effect on me. I managed to stand within earshot of his voice most of the evening hoping to pick up the crumbs of his opinions on art, music, and, especially, the theater.

"He was a brilliant playwright, surrounded by a fascinating conglomerate of skilled professionals. Very quickly I realized that this party was much like ours had been at the university. The people were, of course, more confident, more exaggerated, and certainly more theatrical, but the same forces propelled us, and I felt comfortable with them.

"I'm sure I went unnoticed that evening, especially to Clifford, for during our later intimate relationship, he claimed no recollection of having met me. That night, it was Percy who made me feel an attractive and an integral part of the atmosphere, and when the party finally

broke up, he took me back to my roominghouse and made a date to see me to the ship the following day.”

Odets does not seem to have been the ideal partner for an unstable young woman who later had a serious nervous breakdown. And she says of that ‘conglomerate’ known as The Group, “In spite of everything and regardless of the personal frustrations, I was, for a while, a working part of the theatrical legend. I lived and worked with heroes, but I can now look back on the Group Theater dispassionately and recognize the flaws and tawdry maneuverings that went on within the cult. It was eventually destroyed by these flaws. In principle, it vehemently denied the capitalistic system yet sought it as a bed partner. It scoffed at money, but stooped to anything in order to acquire it. When the chips were down, art was not the high and mighty God. Plain cash talked.

“Unrealistic though it might appear, the shock of having my faith in the theatrical ideology shaken was the first and heaviest blow leading to my smashup. And perhaps such a total commitment would appear naïve and even foolish to a layman. Nevertheless my hopes and my Valhalla had always been with the Group, and when I was finally shocked into realizing that I had been nothing more to them than a rung on a ladder, I lost faith in almost everything else. My artistic id was clobbered to shreds, and the emotional trauma that climaxed the relationship with Odets finished the job.”

She was not the only person to believe that Hollywood was the home of cash and tat and the New York theatre scene was the home of serious innovation and art—nor the only one to become disillusioned.

“His ardent and bold attachment, his promise of marriage ended with a wire to my hotel which read, “My wife returns from Europe today, and I feel it best for us never to see each other again.” That was the last I ever heard from him.

“He was a man who had sought me out and who had convinced me that my place was on Broadway. He had mocked and belittled my marriage and had done everything a man could do to convince a woman that he was in love with her.

“The profession knew what had gone on between us and everyone had been waiting in the wings, so to speak, for the last laugh. It came when he jilted me. It seemed that I was the last to know that his “love” had been nothing more than a well-planned effort to keep me involved in the productions. I was good box office, and I was needed in that respect. I can admit only that I was still naïve enough to be hoodwinked.

“Odets was a strange, almost ugly man, but he was everything I could ever imagine, at that time, admirable in a man. He was a fiery, fascinating intellect with strange sexual drives, and I reacted like a smitten schoolgirl. I believed in him passionately, and I was radical in my defense of his work. I drowned myself in his doctrines and political theories, and had he not severed the affair, I probably would have followed him to his far-left politics.”

“Odets maneuvered me as he would a character in one of his plays. He toyed with my attitudes and reactions. He was a psychological button-pusher, able to crush me with a word or sweep me into ecstasy with a gesture.

“One moment he would marvel at my brilliance and minutes later he would curse me for my stupidity. Sometimes, locked with me in his apartment, he would plead like a schoolboy for love and favors, and then, suddenly and with insulting accusations, he would assault me as though I were a streetwalker.

“From the time he first singled me out and asked me to appear in *Golden Boy*, I was mesmerized. The serpent beguiled me and I did eat. He would insult me in front of everyone, belittling my performance, and he was satisfied only when he had reduced me to tears and sent me sobbing to my dressing room.

“There were times after such incidents when he would not speak to me for two or three days. At other times, he would force his way into my dressing room and make a great point of not only locking the door behind him, but further securing the room by propping a chair under the doorknob, and then he would tear off his clothes and scream his love and need for me with all the fire and passion of a Rococo Thespian. He would threaten to take his life and mine, unless I loved him. The fact that I was genuinely attached to this man compelled me to try to gratify his physical appetite. His sexual behavior was a complicated maze of weird manipulations. He would deftly maneuver me to a point of fulfillment, then withdraw and mock what he termed my base and disgusting desires. After searing my feminine spirit in this bed of humiliation and degrading me in every possible manner, he would begin again with the shyness of an innocent lad and explore me with tender fascination.

“This was no ordinary man. He was a creature who pried open the psyche with the intention of sticking it with pins. I cannot say that I loved him; a more apt description would be a passionate hatred coupled with a physical fascination. Whatever it was, it did much to destroy me.”

She may not have been the best guide to Odets but I did feel that whatever her own problems she was an honest and uncompromising person—indeed her difficulty in compromising and ‘going with the flow’ may have helped to lead her to a breakdown. In her time with Odets she turned to alcohol to help her cope with his extraordinary and volatile changes of mood and behaviour. And alcoholism was one of the factors which saw her committed against her will to the appalling world of a state-run mental asylum.

So how did other people see Odets?

And did his plays reflect this seemingly sadistic and split personality?

He wrote *Waiting for Lefty*, *Awake and Sing!*, *The Golden Boy*, *The Big Knife*; plays seen as gritty Depression Era realism. And of these *Waiting for Lefty* is the best known.

Thornton Wilder was very critical of early twentieth century drama. “Finally, my dissatisfaction passed into resentment. I began to feel that the theatre was not only inadequate, it was evasive; it did not wish to draw upon its deeper potentialities. I found the word for it: it aimed to be *soothing*. The tragic had no heat; the comic had no bite; the social criticism failed to indict us with responsibility. I began to search for the point where the theatre had run off the track, where it had chosen – and been permitted – to become a minor art and an inconsequential diversion.” He blames this on the rise of the middle class. “When it is emerging from under the shadow of an aristocracy, from the myth and prestige of those well-born Higher-ups, it is alternately insecure and aggressively complacent. It must find its reassurance in making money and displaying it.” So hard-hitting real life dramas were not wanted. “They thronged to melodrama (which deals with tragic possibilities in such a way that you know from the beginning that all will end happily) and to sentimental drama (which accords a total license to the supposition that the wish is father to the thought) and to comedies in which the characters were so represented that they always resembled someone else and not oneself.”

Yes, it takes confidence and a sense of being worthwhile no matter what to be able to laugh at yourself or at people very like yourself.

But I am not sure that Thornton Wilder’s plays such as *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* with their sense of ordinary people doing ordinary things was sufficient to wean people away from melodrama. And indeed there is nothing wrong with melodrama, just not as breakfast, dinner, and tea. It is a bit like seeing people live on a steady diet of thrillers. It can make ordinary life seem quiet and dull by comparison. And by putting the excitement on unreal people ‘out there’ it can lead to a kind of disassociation between the real and the pretend. Soothing? Yes,

perhaps, because at heart you know these are not real people living real lives so you do not need to invest any real emotions in their dramas.

Still, no one can call *Waiting for Lefty* soothing. The mind boggles! So Wilder's strictures may have borne fruit in the play-going world.

The Oxford Dictionary of Plays, edited by Michael Patterson, says of *Waiting for Lefty*, "Written to express the discontent of workers in the Depression, Odets here created the first notable piece of American agitprop theatre, a form that had been popular with revolutionary groups in Germany and Russia in the 1920s and early 1930s and was to see a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. In vain does one look for subtle characterization or complex debate. The point is to offer stark alternatives – here between acquiescence in an unjust capitalist system and a socialist alternative. Scene 5 was later omitted. The use of 'plants' in the audience inviting spectators to participate actively in the performance anticipates the Forum Theatre of Augusto Boal." (Augusto Boal was the Brazilian founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed which invited audience participation.)

Harry Fatt is the head of the New York taxi drivers union and at a meeting of the members he urges them to accept the miserable pay on offer so as to keep their jobs. The other men say they should wait for their firebrand of a spokesman Lefty Costello and while they wait they share stories and experiences. "News comes that Lefty has been murdered by company gunmen, and the meeting erupts in calls for a strike."

Francis Fergusson writing about the American stage for *The Anchor Review* ('Beyond the Close Embrace') in 1955 says of Odets' play *Awake and Sing* "the play ends with a vaguely leftish call to action which has little to do with the rest of the play—a cliché of the moment tacked on in bewilderment. But there is so much life and warmth and vivid human character in the play, so much "promise" that the fundamental weakness seems to matter little. In *Golden Boy*, some eight years later, the problem of form and meaning has become acute. The realistic medium of the dialogue is beautifully controlled and composed in the detail, but the thesis is trite, and the plot is perilously close to the empty effectiveness of the well-made play."

This seems to suggest that plays with a strong message tend to be weak on character, plays with good characters tend to tack on a weak message, and well-made plays are largely devoid of any message at all.

Mark Fearnow in *The American Stage and the Great Depression* suggests that the world of books and theatre and movies was split into three main ways of addressing a miserable present: the optimists who believed things would get better, which included many Hollywood films with their happy endings and books like Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* which was a best seller; the sense of a nostalgic return to a simpler more traditional life where people cared more and small God-fearing communities minded out for one another; and the sense of the bizarre, the grotesque, the horrible, which could make audiences forget the present while not asking them to believe in what they were seeing. Fearnow writes, "The thirties are, of course, famous in dramatic literature classes for the labor plays that were part of the decade's temporary animation of the American Left. Plays like *Waiting for Lefty* (Clifford Odets, 1935) or *Days to Come* (Lillian Hellman, 1936) presented no "civil war" between their own parts. For all their denunciation of the miseries of the present, the left-wing dramas of the thirties tended to be resolute in their convictions (capitalists are evil, workers are good) and supremely optimistic in their proffered solution: "Strike!". "The future, the future" the Marxist hero intones, no less frequently than did Buckminster Fuller. "Maybe we'll fix it," says Ralph in Odets's *Awake and Sing!* (1935), "So life won't be printed on dollar bills."

We tend to think people were watching gritty ‘telling it like it is’ dramas but in fact people in hard times would prefer to go to something light and lively like vaudeville or bizarre like *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Plays like *Waiting for Lefty* were popular because they were basically optimistic. They were suggesting there were answers and resolutions. And it is interesting that the scene Odets later dropped, Scene 5, was the one where they discussed Karl Marx and *The Communist Manifesto*. Did Odets simply believe it wasn’t a very good or effective scene? Or was he making his peace with an America, indeed a Hollywood, obsessed with capitalism and the American Dream? It is interesting that Odets was one of the few old lefties to be ignored by Senator McCarthy in his determination to root out anything he saw as Un-American and Red. Perhaps Frances Farmer was right to see Odets and many of his fellow playwrights as being half-hearted in their espousal of socialist solutions ...

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July 19: Gottfried Keller

Victor Kelleher

July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith

July 21: Ernest Hemingway

M. P. Shiel

July 22: Stephen Vincent Benét

Jeffrey Konvitz

July 23: G. W. Reynolds

July 24: Coventry Patmore

E. F. Benson

Robert Hood

July 25: Elias Canetti

Brian Stableford

July 26: George Bernard Shaw

M. J. Harrison

Poppy Lopatniuk

July 27: Hilaire Belloc

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‘No one ever wrote a good book in praise of the Inquisition’, said George Orwell in ‘The Prevention of Literature’. Perhaps not. But Hilaire Belloc did his best to write a ‘good’ book about the Counter-Reformation which gave renewed strength and life to the Inquisition.

I liked some of Belloc’s poems for children but had never read beyond his light verse. The other day I saw his *Complete Verse* in the Library and thought I would go deeper. But in an odd way there is no deeper. Although he writes on classical and religious subjects, perhaps so that he could be taken seriously by serious poets, a kind of facetiousness runs through all his work. This may be why he insisted on calling it verse rather than poetry.

John Calvin whose peculiar fad

It was to call God murderous,

Which further led that feverish cad

To burn alive the Servetus.

The horrible Bohemian Huss,

The tedious Wycliffe, where are they?

But where is old Nestorius?

The wind has blown them all away.

From the 'Ballade of the Heresiarchs'.

But far from finding Wycliffe 'tedious' I rather admire him.

How the Church was Reformed in England by Gertrude Hollis is a book for young people and includes a chapter on John Wycliffe. He was born around 1324 in Yorkshire and went to Oxford. In the wake of the Black Death there was both a shortage of priests out in the towns and villages and those who had survived in the monasteries seemed by comparison to live lives of luxury. As with other tragic events those who survived were often left better off. But Wycliffe thought all the clergy "from the pope downwards, ought to be as poor as Jesus Christ and His Apostles". He also objected to the selling of 'indulgences', the thing which infuriated Luther more than a century later. Wycliffe's followers, whom he called 'poor priests' and, later, Lollards, preached mostly in the open air. But it was his contention that people should have access to a Bible in the vernacular which created furore. Though people were used to traveling friars a Bible in English seemed to take both power and mystique out of the Church's hands. He did his own translation from the Latin and copies were written out by hand. A single copy could cost £40, a fortune then, and people would buy or barter just to get a few chapters.

Wycliffe's translation is not easy to read now but it has its own beauty. This comes from St Matthew's Gospel: "Therefore whanne Jhesus was borun in Bethleem of Juda in the dayes of king Eroude: lo astronomyens camen fro the eest to Jerusalem and seiden, where is he that is borun king of Jewis? For we han seen his sterre in the eest, and we comen for to worschippe hym."

In his early days he had the support of John of Gaunt and after his death the mother of Richard II supported him. But with their deaths and with Wycliffe's death the fury of King and Archbishop fell upon the Lollards. They could be burnt alive, according to a 1401 decree, and others were forced to wear a green patch and some were branded with a hot iron on the cheek. "One old man was punished because, when he heard the Church bell ringing, he said it was "a fair bell to hang about any cow's neck in the town," and an old woman because "she sat mum during the Church prayers," and "A certaine olde man" was brought to trial "for eating of bacon in the Lent."

Behind the question of what constitutes heresy is that eternally vexing question of freedom of speech. Monarchs traditionally ignored any such ideas but we now have it enshrined in the UN Charter. We have to constantly balance that freedom with other freedoms including the freedom of religion.

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Walter Jerrold wrote in *Norfolk and the Broads* of "the tree-grown hollow known as the Lollard's Pit—the place of an appalling number of burnings of "heretics" during more than a century and a half from 1422." George Borrow in *Lavengro* calls it the Lollard's Hole and it was still being used in the time of Queen Mary and "from the chronicle history of Norwich—the city famous for the number of its churches:—

1556. In March William Carman, of Hingham, was burnt in Lollard's Pit, without Bishop's Gate. He was charged with being an obstinate heretic, and having in his possession a bible, a testament, and three psalters, in the English tongue."

The various movements of social protest in England, from those who protested the enclosure of common land to Luddites and Chartists and Suffragettes, might not think of themselves as going back to the example of the Lollards but in fact the Lollards with their courage and their desire to have access to such basic items as 'a bible, a testament, and three psalters in the English tongue' have been a powerful underground force in English history.

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Dale Hess in *A Brief Background to the Quaker Peace Testimony* asks whether Wycliffe was a pacifist. “In England in the fourteenth century John Wyclif, Master of Balliol College, Oxford, like Valdes urged that the *Bible* be translated into the common language, and he too sent out missionaries. He also condemned war as unchristian, although he was only a conditional pacifist and would permit a ‘just’ war. Many of his followers, the Lollards, however were more radical and more pacifist than Wyclif himself. In 1395 the Lollards presented to the English Parliament the first pacifist petition ever, ‘the law of mercy, that is the New Testament, forbad all manslaughter.’ Four years later in 1399 Parliament passed a law for the burning of heretics and the Lollards were forced to go underground, however they continued to be an active movement for more than another century. Geoffrey Nuttall mentions that in the year 1421 the Bishop of London arrested nearly 500 Lollards (Nuttall, *Christian Pacifism in History ...* see also Horst, *The Radical Brethren ...*), however by that date the term ‘Lollard’ was often applied to dissenters without qualification.”

Matthew Browne in *Chaucer’s England* asks a different question: whether Chaucer had Wycliffe in mind when he was writing his *Canterbury Tales*. “Assuredly, he could only have had a superficial understanding of the man Wickliffe, and there is, in reality, not much reason for raising the question at all; for there is nothing particularly Wickliffian in any portion of his works. As for the Poor Parson standing for Wickliffe himself,—it is just possible, of course: only Wickliffe was an Oxford Professor, and not a poor priest, but Rector of Lutterworth; a man quite capable of holding his own; occupying a distinguished position in his day; befriended by John of Gaunt; and with all the instincts, not of a quiet country parson, but of a moral and theological polemic.”

He also asks whether Wycliffe should be regarded as a liberal Roman Catholic or an early Protestant; “though he protested, he did not revolt” and it was not so much church doctrines but the schism in the church which exercised him. “It was, of course, possible to remain a believer in all the doctrines of his Church, which he had believed up to that time; but he could not yield the allegiance of a subject to two popes at once—to Urban VI. at Rome, and Clement VII. at Avignon. The part which Wickliffe took with regard to the consequences of this ‘schism of the West,’ was that of vehemently rebuking the campaign in which the adherents of Pope Urban—who was the recognised Pope in England—at last engaged. Urban succeeded in inducing the English to send out an army, intended to disroot Pope Clement at Avignon; and the expedition actually set forth, though it was countermanded by Edward III., and did much mischief in Flanders. It is difficult to read Wickliffe’s appeals upon this subject, and call him even a *liberal* Catholic. He calls ‘Antichrist, putting thousands to death for his own ends, a ravening wolf, in contrast with the good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep; and declares that the help of Christ, the Head of the Church, is made manifest, in that He hath cloven the head of Antichrist in twain, and permitted the two parts to fight against each other.’ ... Wickliffe, who (without himself knowing the full scope of what he did) did so much to forward in Europe generally as well as in his own country, this idea of a free Church in a free state, was born on the banks of the Tees, in Yorkshire” and he died in 1384, aged sixty. Theologian, schoolman, writer, preacher, translator ... he gives the impression of a vigorous dynamic man, not afraid of controversy, generous with his time and resources, willing to criticize the great and powerful. There seems to be nothing of the ‘Poor Parson’ in his make-up. He was not a martyr in his lifetime but forty years after his death his bones were taken up as a warning to his followers and burnt. It might be argued that many of the ordinary people who believed in him and followed his ways and gave everything for even a few pages of his translated Bible would come closer to Chaucer’s image of a ‘Poor Parson’ ... And as Chaucer outlived Wycliffe by fourteen years it is certainly possible he

understood that many of the ‘disciples’ who came after Wycliffe were poor and lacking in influence or powerful protectors ...

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Alexander Cordell in *Requiem for a Patriot* has John Frost say:

“Much has been written since by Establishment historians anxious not to offend their political masters and with most historians ringed by the literary nose (there being no profits in history), successive recorders have been content to dilute the truth of Chartism.

“Add to this the need for governments to expound the sanctity of property and deny the possibility of public disorder in the midst of agitation, and the Chartist Rebellion first becomes a riot, then a minor disturbance of the peace, then nothing more disagreeable than a march of protest.

“Similar governmental treatment was accorded the Peterloo Massacre of 1819 when it was happy to confess to the killing of two or three people in Manchester. But, according to the newspapers of the day, the killed and wounded numbered ‘upwards of four hundred’ and evasive coroner’s inquests were held on the bodies of the slain.

“All governments being agreeably content to minimize threat to public disorder in the purpose of ‘what is good for the people’, their paid historians follow suit with commendable ambition. Similarly, lesser historians have ‘followed the leader’ in dilution of the facts of the Chartist Rebellion, and will continue, I suppose, to misinform the generations.”

The Lollards were undoubtedly seen as a threat but with hindsight, that very useful thing, if they had been tolerated, accepted, even drawn into the mainstream of religious life, how different English history might be.

The Reformation entered England officially through King Henry VIII, hardly the most admirable of vehicles and very far from the calm courage and dedication of John Wycliffe, and his daughter Queen Mary struggled to turn it back, to suppress it, to send it underground, through the ways and means that we have come to call the Counter-Reformation.

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Belloc’s ‘Cautionary Verses’ usually bring the wrongdoers to a sticky end. Were they designed to make children behave better and did they achieve this end? I doubt it. Books for children were full of morals a hundred years ago. I don’t object to morals in books. Amoral books are not my cup of tea. But the morals presented to children fell upon them like a ton weight. Books can inspire, move, change lives. But I think the books that do this are rarely the kind of ‘Do this or else—’ or more often ‘Don’t do this or something awful will happen to you’ that were written for children.

So here is one of Belloc’s verses which is merely light and funny—‘Lord Lundy’ which has the sub-title ‘Who was too freely moved to tears, and thereby ruined his political career’:

Lord Lundy from his earliest years
Was far too freely moved to Tears.
For instance, if his Mother said,
‘Lundy! It’s time to go to bed!’
He bellowed like a Little Turk.
Or if his father, Lord Dunquerque,
Said, ‘Hi!’ in a Commanding Tone,
‘Hi, Lundy! Leave the Cat alone!’
Lord Lundy, letting go its tail,
Would raise so terrible a wail
As moved his Grandpapa the Duke
To utter the severe rebuke:

‘When I, Sir! was a little Boy,
An animal was not a Toy!’

He goes into politics but his colleagues are disconcerted and annoyed by his tears, you can see the underlying theme ‘Real Men Don’t Cry’, and his career goes down rather than up, until ...

The Duke – his aged grand-sire – bore
The shame till he could bear no more.
He rallied his declining powers,
Summoned the youth to Brackley Towers,
And bitterly addressed him thus –
‘Sir! you have disappointed us!
We had intended you to be
The next Prime Minister but three:
The stocks were sold; the Press was squared;
The Middle Class was quite prepared.
But as it is!...My language fails!
Go out and govern New South Wales!’

* * * * *

July 28: Malcolm Lowry

Beatrix Potter

July 29: Eyvind Johnson

July 30: Emily Brontë

July 31: Primo Levi

August 1: Herman Melville

M. R. James

August 2: Isabel Allende

Ernest Dowson

August 3: P. D. James

August 4: Tim Winton

August 5: Ted Hughes

Conrad Aiken

Marie Belloc Lowndes

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The Housman brothers, A. E. and Laurence are remembered, but they also had a sister Clemence, who was a talented writer. So why does she not get mentioned? Was she only talented in the minds of certain passionate feminists?

She was also a very talented wood engraver, a suffragette, and wrote books such as *The Were-Wolf* (about a female were-wolf) and *Unknown Sea*. Laurence, though a popular playwright and poet has always played second-fiddle to his brother A. E. Housman, and Clemence was reduced to third fiddle or not mentioned at all. And yet—was *A Shropshire Lad* really superior to anything Laurence or Clemence wrote? Or did he simply catch the mood of a war-weary generation, nostalgic for the simple rural life which was steadily disappearing?

Clemence and Laurence lived together in London and Elizabeth Oakley wrote a book about their lives she called *Inseparable Siblings*. They were both involved in the Suffragette Movement. In fact Laurence deserves to be remembered for the support he gave Clemence and the other women. He supported her when she joined the Women’s Tax Resistance League, when she refused to be counted in the 1911 census, when she was sent to Holloway Gaol, he helped the women in their banner-making, made his home available for meetings. He and Clemence come

up in the various books about the Suffragette Movement, such as *Vanishing for the Vote* by Jill Liddington. So it comes as a surprise to learn that their brother A.E. thought they had got it all wrong and gave them no support.

After getting to the point where I rather admired Clemence and Laurence I thought it was time to go looking for some of Clemence's writing.

The Were-Wolf is a novella; H. P. Lovecraft said it 'attains a high degree of gruesome tension and achieves to some extent the atmosphere of authentic folklore'. He was probably thinking of the Norse Sagas as the story is set in a 'great farm hall' where people are busy, the men carving wood or repairing fishing nets, the women sorting eider feathers or spinning, children plaiting candle wicks. Only the small boy Rol has nothing to do but get up to mischief. "Little Rol grew tired of his puppy, dropped it incontinently, and made an onslaught on Tyr, the old wolf-hound, who basked dozing, whimpering and twitching in his hunting dreams." He then takes a tool belonging to one of the men and manages to cut himself and needs to be bandaged.

There is a knock at the door but no one is waiting outside. There are two more mysterious knocks with no sign of anyone but on the fourth knock they find an attractive young woman standing there. "She was a maiden, tall and fair. The fashion of her dress was strange, half masculine, yet not unwomanly. A fine fur tunic, reaching but little below the knee, was all the skirt she wore; below were the cross-bound shoes and leggings that a hunter wears. A white fur cap was set low upon the brows, and from its edge strips of fur fell lappet-wise about her shoulders; two of these at her entrance had been drawn forward and crossed about her throat, but now, loosened and thrust back, left unhidden long plaits of fair hair that lay forward on shoulder and breast, down to the ivory-studded girdle where the axe gleamed."

The dogs bristle and old Tyr howls and flings himself at the woman who threatens him with her axe. Even when the dog is chained securely he continues to bristle and tense. But little Rol comes forward and climbs on the young woman's knee. She introduces herself as White Fell. Trustingly he unwraps the bandage and shows her his cut still oozing blood.

A young man, Christian, coming back to the hall through the snow, sees a line of footprints going up to the door but they are the prints of a large wolf. Uneasy, he hurries inside and finds a strange woman sitting there. Only he and Tyr doubt that she is in fact a young woman. His brother Sweyn refuses to believe him and thinks his less attractive brother is jealous. Little Rol disappears soon after, then an old woman called Trella. Christian blames White Fell but Sweyn, smitten by the strange woman, is angry at his brother. They fall out and come to blows. Christian believes the family will only be safe if he can hound the woman from their home. In the process man and were-wolf fight to the death. Sweyn going to look for them, still believing his brother is completely wrong, finally comes on his dead brother and a great white wolf also dead, both bodies frozen in the snow. He finally has to face the knowledge that he, the smitten fool, put everyone in danger by his disbelief.

It is a morality tale, 'Greater love hath no man ...'. It isn't great writing but is certainly atmospheric and builds tension and intrigue. It also raises the question: with two brothers taking different stances on important issues, was Clemence suggesting in this oblique way that one of them should look beyond his initial impressions and beliefs?

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The other day I was chatting with someone in Vinnies who told me the novelist O. Douglas was in fact Anna Buchan, sister of John Buchan, author of those swashbuckling adventures like *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle*. Her novels, on the other hand, are described as pleasant family dramas, perhaps what later became known as the Aga Saga, so I thought I would like to try one.

I have just been reading her novel *The Proper Place*. It is pleasant and readable. The Rutherfurds have to leave their big house, because of declining fortunes, and move to a much smaller house. The Jacksons, a nouveau riche family, buy the big house. For both families it is a time of difficulty and adjustment.

I suspect her prolific output, *The Setons*, *Penny Plain*, *Pink Sugar*, *Ann and her Mother*, *Olivia*, *The Day of Small Things*, *Jane's Parlour* and many more would offer the same sense of a pleasant read without making anyone say 'I can't wait for her next book!'

Although she wrote about her brother and her family in *Unforgettable*, *Unforgotten* and her own life in *Farewell to Priorsford* she didn't reveal the reason behind her choice of O. Douglas as her pseudonym. Her brother had his portrait painted by Sholto Douglas, she may also have had hers done by him. And then, of course, many Scots have a Douglas in their family tree.

Yet *Unforgettable*, *Unforgotten* is an attractive memoir, even if it doesn't answer my question about O. Douglas. She says of her childhood, "There is probably nothing a child values so much as a feeling of safety, and the night-nursery was the safest, friendliest room in the whole house. To reach it, when we went to bed, meant braving a dimly lit staircase and a long landing peopled, we were certain, not only by fabulous monsters of every description, but by all the most frightening book-people. The last few yards were always a frenzied rush, with a moment of terror in case the door would not open, and then—Ellie Robbie, moving quietly about in the firelight, our beds neatly made down, with the nightgowns laid out. In winter we wore nightgowns of red flannel, and when we heard of the Virtuous Woman in *Proverbs* who clothed her household in scarlet, we felt we could picture them exactly, down to the white herring-boning on the belts and cuffs.

"Ellie Robbie was such a kind and comfortable nurse (her real name was Ellen Robinson, and her father was believed by us to be the original of the saying, 'Before you can say Jack Robinson'), that bed-time was no bug-bear to us. In fact, the last half-hour of the day was something to look forward to, for Mother was nearly always with us, sitting on the low 'nursing' chair, with the youngest on her lap, telling of what she did when she was little. Father often looked in too, and played us a tune, for, like R.L.S., he was a great performer on the penny-whistle! Sometimes he sang to us old Scots songs of which he had an inexhaustible store, or Negro songs about 'Way down South in the land of cotton,' or 'A coloured girl whose name was Nancy Till.' But what we liked best were the odd old rhymes that he had been taught as a child:

"Cockybendy's lying sick,
Guess ye what'll mend him?
Twenty kisses in a clout.
Lassie, will ye send them?"

and the long list of animals owned by one, Katie Bairdie, beginning:

"Katie Bairdie had a coo
A' black about the mou';
Wasna that a denty coo?
Dance, Katie Bairdie!"

There was one about a strange person called Aitken Drum. 'His breeks they were made of the haggis bags,' we were told, and 'his buttons they were made of bawbee baps,' and, strangest of all, 'he rade upon a razor.' "

Their father was a clergyman and she writes, "Though we liked to pretend that we had got far beyond all old-fashioned beliefs, we knew in our hearts that they were what we would always hold on to—the foundation of our lives. Our parents gave us the richest gift young people can have, the feeling of being loved and treasured beyond words, and they made it plain to us

that they cared far more that we should be good—just simple, happy good—than that we should attain to riches and honour.”

It could be said that John Buchan got both riches and honours but her own books seem to bear out this simple homely philosophy. She says of her mother, “But if J. B.’s books were beyond her, mine delighted her heart. They were as pure and almost as sweet as home-made toffee, their pages insullied by swear-words, and they were about happy comfortable people. Like Dr. John Brown’s sister she might have said, “They are very nice people—so like ourselves.”

“My mother had never heard of inhibitions, and approved strongly of reticence, so it was as well that I had neither the will nor the ability to write a ‘strong’ book. It amazes me what some writers put down on paper, and it is not that they do not get time for repentance, for they must see it in handwriting, in typescript, and in proofs.

“A critic once complained of the lack of plot in my books, and I besought J. B. to think of one for me.

“Oh yes,” he said brightly, “I’ll give you a plot. Why don’t you write about the Burke and Hare murders?”

“As if I had the sort of pen that could write about murders! It is perhaps impertinent for a person with only a very small talent to try to write at all.

“Thomas Hardy said, “A tale must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and no one of us is warranted in stopping wedding-guests (in other words, the hungry public) unless we have something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experiences of the average man or woman.”

“That shook me until I reminded myself that there are millions of people who would never dream of reading Thomas Hardy who get immense comfort and pleasure from a tale about the experiences of some average man and woman.

“Kipling sang the song of such simple tale-tellers.

“All’s well—all’s well aboard her—she’s left you far behind,

With a scent of old-world roses through the fog that ties you blind.

Her crew are babes or madmen? Her port is all to make?

You’re manned by Truth and Science, and you steam for steaming’s sake?

Well, tinker up your engines—you know your business best.

She’s taking tired people to the Islands of the Blest!” ”

And the popularity of her books seems to bear out her belief that readers can enjoy reading about ‘ordinary’ people. But she did take help from her brother at another time. “Descriptions are always a worry to me, and in *The Proper Place* I felt that to describe the drawing-room in the old house at Rutherford, with the picture framed in the panelling above the fireplace, was quite beyond my powers, so I told John what I wanted to convey and he put it into words for me. I did not feel it was cheating, because I was certain no one could mistake his writing for my wood-notes wild. I knew it was like a patch of brocade on a stuff garment, but that there was such a patch gave me great pride and satisfaction.”

As her descriptions in her memoir are attractive and often vivid I don’t think she needed to turn to her brother for help. But then, having a famous brother may at times have been somewhat inhibiting ...

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Ernest Hemingway in *A Moveable Feast* says he said to Gertrude Stein, “I liked *Sons and Lovers* and *The White Peacock*. Maybe that not so well. I couldn’t read *Women in Love*.” And that she said to him, “If you don’t want to read what is bad, and want to read something that will hold your interest and is marvelous in its own way, you should read Marie Belloc Lowndes.”

He goes on to say, “I had never heard of her, and Miss Stein loaned me *The Lodger*, that marvelous story of Jack the Ripper and another book about murder at a place outside Paris that could only be Enghien les Bains. They were both splendid after-work books, the people credible and the action and the terror never false. They were perfect for reading after you had worked and I read all the Mrs. Belloc Lowndes that there was. But there was only so much and none as good as the first two and I never found anything as good for that empty time of day or night until the first fine Simenon books came out.”

The Lodger was several times made into films and later into an opera but what else did she write? In fact there is a long list to choose from.

Her father Louis Belloc was French but her suffragette mother Bessie Parkes was a gr-gr-granddaughter of an English scientist and writer, Joseph Priestley. Although I had come upon Priestley’s name I really knew almost nothing about him, let alone the reason for anyone to say in an awed voice that he was their gr-gr-grandfather. But I just came on a mention of him in A. C. Grayling’s biography of William Hazlitt. “Joseph Priestley was an extraordinary man. Born in Yorkshire in 1733 to a devout family, he was educated at the Dissenting academy at Daventry whose wide curriculum of science, ancient and modern languages and philosophy he devoured with brilliance. Despite an uncertain start to his career as preacher and teacher – he had a bad stammer – he was appointed to a tutorship at the equally celebrated Dissenting academy at Warrington.” He brought out *The Rudiments of English Grammar* then *The Theory of Language and Universal Grammar*. He was also passionately interested in science, particularly chemistry; “he shares with Carl Wilhelm Scheele the credit for first isolating oxygen, and did the same for many other gases including nitrous oxide, nitrogen dioxide, hydrogen chloride, sulphur dioxide and ammonia. He discovered photosynthesis in 1772” but despite his growing reputation it was his support for the French and American Revolutions which embroiled him in controversy and danger. He came into conflict with the Anglican Church over his *History of the Corruption of Christianity*. He wrote in defence of intellectual, civil and religious liberties, freedom of speech and enquiry, not least because he believed God had given human beings the gift of reason so as to, scientifically and politically, create a better world. But his ideas and writings brought him notoriety and his house in Birmingham containing his laboratory and library was burnt down. Perhaps unsurprisingly he decided to emigrate and spent the rest of his life in Pennsylvania. I do see why Bessie Parkes would have been proud to have him as an ancestor. And I don’t think Marie need have felt inhibited by the greater fame of her brother.

*

I had thought Joan Aiken was the sister of poet Conrad Aiken but no, she is his daughter. But whereas he is remembered as an American poet she was born in England, “in a haunted house on Mermaid Street, Rye, East Sussex”. Tim Woods said of her, “She is most famous for her children’s fiction, and is credited as having invented the ‘unhistorical romance’, in which fairy tale is combined with romance, myth and history in fast-paced narratives of action and humour.”

Her books aren’t hard to find so I have just been reading one of her best-known ones, *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase*, which combines a 19th century England with its expectations of little girls, and an imagined England invaded by wolves. And like many books of the past it has a governess. There are in general two kinds of governesses, the nasty cruel kind and the little mouselike dabs, and this has the first kind. The two girls, Bonnie and Sylvia, find themselves caught between the horribleness of Miss Slighcarp indoors and the frightening wolves out of doors. But it is the sinister Miss Slighcarp who creates the plot and the tension. The real wolves are largely irrelevant. It is the wolves in sheep’s clothing indoors who are the true villains.

Also her novel *The Whispering Mountain* which is more in the vein of a classic quest story. This has a young Welsh boy Owen and a stolen harp but although it is lively and readable I thought young readers would probably find the story line hard to follow. I know I did.

Joan Aiken died in 2004 on the 4th of January. But she is still worth reading.

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August 6: Gerald Kersh

August 7: Alexander Laing

August 8: Hume Nisbet

Margery Lawrence

August 9: John Dryden

G. P. R. James

August 10: Curt Siodmak

August 11: Enid Blyton

Hugh MacDiarmid

* * * * *

I came upon an interesting book by Dr John MacCormick called *The Flag in the Wind* which is an account of his personal involvement with the Home Rule Movement in Scotland. There had been a rather ineffective movement limping along but in 1927 he and several other young people at the university in Glasgow formed their own group and brought new life and energy to the campaign. Scotland has achieved Home Rule; independence was defeated in a referendum by a small margin. And now with Brexit there may be a push for another referendum on independence ...

MacCormick tells the inside story of the ‘liberating’ of the Stone of Scone from Westminster Abbey and bringing it back to Scotland and the police chase after it. I wonder how the police felt when they were asked to hunt for an old lump of rock. MacCormick also mentioned something I had never considered: when our current Queen was crowned as Elizabeth II this was incorrect for Scotland and the Commonwealth because Elizabeth I had not been Queen of Scotland and certainly not Queen of Australia. The crowns of Scotland and England were not united until 1707. So our Queen is Elizabeth II of England but Elizabeth I of Australia.

And he mentions the involvement of several prominent writers with the National Movement.

Compton Mackenzie: “I had met him for the first time a few days before when he had come, quite off his own bat, from London to Glasgow to see whether he could help us. Of course, I thought then, and still do, that he was one of the most fascinating men I had ever come across. He was clean-shaven in those days and an unfortunate accident had knocked out two teeth in his upper denture. When he smiled this made him look as harmlessly sinister as Captain Hook. His conversation bubbled forth and his eagerness about our campaign was obvious. We arranged for him to come up to a meeting in the Union to speak on Cunninghame Graham’s behalf, and, although I believe it was the first time he had ever spoken politically in public, he was a great success. Unlike many distinguished people he tolerated student barracking with so friendly a manner that he soon commanded a silent audience. I think the impression which he then made contributed in no small degree to his success as Nationalist candidate for the Rectorship three years later.”

R. B. Cunninghame Graham: “No one, of course, had a more magnificent presence than he. He was tall and lithe and his moustache and beard served to accentuate the aristocratic line of his features. His oratory was of Victorian vintage but he was a master of the art. Every studied gesture added to the force of his words and though his periods were often long they never became involved. Even in his old age he had a voice which was clear and strong and could be

heard in every corner of the hall without the help of loud-speaking equipment, which he heartily despised and would always wave away with an imperious lift of hand and arm.

His speech that night was a great declaration of faith in the future of Scotland and an affirmation of his own personal dedication to the cause of self-government. Thereafter, by unanimous consent, he was made President of the National Party and until his death in 1936 he was always at our service for every big meeting. I came to know him extremely well and the more I saw of him the more deeply I admired him. He possessed all the finest qualities of a Scottish aristocrat, made all the more vivid by the air of a *hidalgo* which he had inherited from a Spanish ancestress.

I think he was out of sympathy with the times in which he lived. As a young man a brilliant career was opening up for him but he threw up his seat in Parliament and became one of the leaders of the working-class movement, having even been arrested for his part in leading a dockers' procession during a strike in London. Although he would have called himself a Socialist in those days, he was the most completely individualistic man I have ever known. His brilliant writings followed no set fashion. They were neither essays nor short stories but were like the distilled quintessence of the conversation of a delightful mind. Early in life the impoverishment of his family had compelled him to sell the ancestral home at Gartmore near Aberfoyle, and I think he always felt foot-loose after that break with the past. ... He was the true type of the wandering Scot, soldier of fortune and philosopher combined, and though he died in distant South America, by his own wish his body was brought home to be buried on Inchmahome on his beloved Lake of Menteith. The coffin was carried into the little church of Port of Menteith, draped in the ... tartan of the Grahams, and there his many friends and all the country-folk from round about took farewell of him. Then with a piper in the prow playing "The Flowers of the Forest" his body was rowed across the loch to the island where Mary of Scotland had spent the happiest days of her childhood. The wanderer, who had (wandered) so far and in so many strange places where no white man had ever been before, had at last returned home."

(And, curiously, he is associated with another great wanderer. He wrote the Introduction to that classic of travel, *Tschiffely's Ride: Being the Account of 10,000 Miles in the Saddle through the Americas from Argentina to Washington*. He begins by saying, "I have always held that the distinction some people make between instinct and reason is false, and that all animals reason and that all men have instinct." I suspect that he was as interested in the horses as he was in the rider.)

Hugh McDiarmid: "I think one of the people who alarmed him was C. M. Grieve who as Hugh McDiarmid is now widely recognized as one of Scotland's greatest poets. Grieve had joined our platform and in characteristic manner had hurled contempt at everything English. Although I have no doubt that he has done invaluable work in the field of Scottish literature I am certain that C. M. Grieve has been politically one of the greatest handicaps with which any national movement could have been burdened. His love of bitter controversy, his extravagant and self-assertive criticism of the English, and his woolly thinking, which could encompass within one mind the doctrines both of Major Douglas and Karl Marx, were taken by many of the more sober-minded of the Scots as sufficient excuse to condemn the whole case for Home Rule out of hand."

* * * * *

NZ writer Maurice Shadbolt wrote a memoir he called *One of Ben's*, Ben Shadbolt being his ancestor transported to Tasmania, and he gave this curious little insight into Hugh McDiarmid:

“There was a literary dinner in the Balkan hotel, Sofia’s best. The guest of honour was the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid. Expelled from the Communist Party twice in the 1930s, he had joined again in 1956, after the Krushchev denunciation of Stalin and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, when all but fools were bidding the Party goodbye. MacDiarmid may not have been a fool, but he was possibly the last distinguished Western writer left with loyalty to the Party, the last who could be feted with safety in Eastern Europe. In celebration of the bicentenary of Robert Burns’ birth he had been making regal progress through Czechoslovakia, Romania, and finally Bulgaria. His idiosyncracies and past ideological wavering were forgotten. Bulgaria’s literary bureaucrats had been wining and dining him for a month or more. Their hope was that MacDiarmid might come up with fresh English versions of Bulgaria’s national poet Hristo Botev (1848-1876); versions which would not only establish Botev as a great if neglected Balkan poet, but also give Bulgaria larger standing in world literature. It was a tense time. His hosts were anxious. After some weeks perusing prose cribs of Botev provided by a team of translators, MacDiarmid hadn’t come up with a line. He was still being primed for the task. There were toasts to Scottish literature, to Bulgarian literature, to the memory of Hristo Botev and Robert Burns and Scotland’s reigning bard.

Kevin and I sat opposite MacDiarmid, Vasil Popov between us. I leaned across the table to MacDiarmid and asked how he was finding Hristo Botev.

‘You really want to know?’ he asked.

I said I did.

‘Well, for one thing,’ he said, ‘he’s no bloody good.’

‘Botev?’ I said faintly. I hoped my question had been misunderstood.

‘Who else?’ he said. In case I hadn’t heard right the first time, he said, ‘No bloody good at all.’

Most Bulgarians at the table didn’t hear or didn’t understand MacDiarmid’s Scottish accent; riot was a possibility. Vasil, however, had understood enough to be suspicious.

‘What is that Scottish man saying?’ he asked me.

‘I think he is saying that past translations of Botev have been no good,’ I lied.

‘He said more,’ Vasil argued.

‘Only that he is in difficulty with Botev,’ I said.

‘Because Botev is no good?’

‘Because he is afraid he cannot do Botev justice.’

Vasil was not to be placated. ‘Botev was a great, great poet,’ he said. ‘Greater than Robert Burns. Greater than this ridiculous Scotsman too.’

That might have ended the matter. MacDiarmid, however, hadn’t finished. He leaned confidentially across the table and said to me, ‘It’s no use telling Bulgarians, of course.’

‘Telling Bulgarians what?’ I asked.

‘That the bugger’s no bloody good. He’s a national icon, not a poet.’

This time Vasil heard every word. The honour of his homeland was at risk. Botev, after all, wasn’t just a poet. He had been a nationalist, a revolutionary, and had died in the fight to free his countrymen from Turkish rule. With this and much else in mind, Vasil began to rise belligerently above the table. His large fists were clenched, but MacDiarmid was oblivious to peril. Kevin and I rose too, more or less pinioning Vasil between us. With his free hand Kevin raised his glass. With great poise he proposed, ‘To Bulgarian and Scottish friendship.’

Diners rose enthusiastically to the toast. We persuaded Vasil to resume his seat. Sight of MacDiarmid, however, only produced a new head of steam.

‘This Scotsman is shit,’ he said. ‘He must be thrown out of Bulgaria.’

‘Not tonight,’ I suggested.

‘Why not tonight?’ he said.

‘Come,’ I pleaded.

Vasil again stood with grievous bodily harm in mind. As before Kevin and I rose too, wedging him tight between us and cramping his style. While our trio held firm Kevin lifted his glass. ‘To Bulgarian and New Zealand friendship,’ he suggested.

No one was willing to gainsay that either. We manoeuvred Vasil to a seat at a distance from Scotland’s living treasure. The evening passed with no further drama. Unaware that his brush with Bulgarian letters had been all but terminal, McDiarmid had to be helped home. So did almost everyone else.

The night had a serendipitous sequel. McDiarmid was never to produce fresh English versions of Botev. Kevin would. His lean, elegant lines suggest that Botev was indeed a poet of power and distinction. Perhaps not a great European poet, but better than most. Something the same might be said of Hugh McDiarmid.” (Kevin was Kevin Ireland.)

I am not sure I could do justice to any poet via ‘prose cribs’ but I couldn’t help wondering if McDiarmid was incurably honest, incurably in possession of a death wish, or one of those people who love stirring for stirring’s sake.

So what kind of poetry did MacDiarmid write? David Daiches said that “in Scotland the “Lallans” poets from Hugh McDiarmid to Sydney Goodsir Smith have been distilling a lyrical magic that combines the evocativeness of the best early nineteenth-century poets with the discipline and fine control of the severest of the moderns.”

It is a God-damned lie to say that these
Saved, or knew, anything worth any man’s pride.
They were professional murderers and they took
Their blood money and impious risks and died.
In spite of all their kind some elements of worth
With difficulty persist here and there on earth.

‘Another Epitaph on an Army of Mercenaries’

And, curiously, our poetry book at school in Queensland contained a poem by MacDiarmid. I do not think the Queensland Education Department can have known of his Communist Party membership—

I love my little son, and yet when he was ill
I could not confine myself to his bedside.
I was impatient of his squalid little needs,
His laboured breathing, and the fretful way he cried,
And longed for my wide range of interests again,
Whereas his mother sank without another care
To that dread level of nothing but life itself
And stayed, day and night, till he was better, there.

Women may pretend, yet they always dismiss
Everything but mere being just like this. (‘The Two Parents’)

—or, no matter how carefully they looked, they couldn’t find any left wing message in his poem.

But I can’t honestly say I have found his ‘lyrical magic’ either. Perhaps I need to keep looking.

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August 12: Robert Southey

August 13: Ridgwell Cullum
A. A. Phillips
Les Hiddins

* * * * *

Frank Dempsey in *Old Mining Towns of North Queensland* writes, “Ghost stories were one of Alf’s pet subjects. He spoke of quinkan, the local Aborigines’ word for ghost. He told us of one quinkan which reputedly caused the death of one man and drove another insane. This particularly nasty spook had already achieved notoriety before it appeared at the camp of a fossicker, Ah Lin. Its act consisted of appearing at the edge of a campfire’s glow in the shape of a sinister man with cold, death-like eyes. Ah Lin said that he had once stood up from his campfire, and had seen this apparition staring at him. He told Alf: ‘Me soolem dog; dog come back cly all asame piccanin. Me say to ghost, “You flighten dog but you no flighten Ah Lin!” ‘ The game old Chinaman then rushed at the ghost to grapple with it, but his arms locked around nothing. ‘All asame smoke,’ he told Alf.

Three days later Ah Lin died. Old Chinese fossickers and the local Aborigines firmly believed he had brought death upon himself by audaciously grabbing the quinkan.

They also believed that the same quinkan had driven another old Chinaman crazy, and caused him to come down to Maytown from his camp up the river, with the intention of stabbing members of Mrs Parsons’ family with whom he had been friendly for years. The old chap was trussed up for the night before being taken to the police at Laura.

One night as Alf was walking along a road near Maytown, an Aboriginal woman whom he recognised, passed him carrying a lighted paperbark torch. When this ghostly lady walked into the Aboriginal camp down the river, the occupants all went bush in one rush. By some mysterious means the local Aborigines already knew of her death in Laura that same day. Alf was amazed when the time of her death was verified.

Many strange stories are told by bushmen of Aborigines having immediate knowledge of events occurring far away. Roy Savage, of Edmonton, told me such a tale.

Back in 1938 Roy was the Cooktown-Bloomfield mailman. The round trip took four long days with pack-horses. One night while camped at Jubilee Creek, Roy noticed an old Aboriginal gazing up at the sky, in the direction of Bloomfield. When Roy asked why, the greybeard volunteered the information, ‘That old Annie longa Bloomfield, she been die awright.’ Like Alf Munn, Roy was amazed to learn, on his arrival at Bloomfield next day, of the death the previous evening of an old Aboriginal woman named Annie.”

Les Hiddins in *Tarnished Heroes* reminds his readers that tomb-robbers were not only active in Egypt and other far away places. He writes of the area around Mount Moffat in Queensland’s Carnarvon Gorge. “Silent sentinels of rock – giant sandstone rock formations – stand guard everywhere. Their names give a fair idea of what they’re like: Cathedral Rock, the Chimneys, the Duchess, Lot’s Wife, Marlong Arch and The Tombs.

“You can see why the area was so important to the Aboriginal people. For a start, the distinctive features, diverse plants and animals, and good water supply must have provided well for both their material and spiritual needs. The Tombs especially must be one of the most spiritual sites in the landscape. It’s a large sandstone outcrop. Over the eons, as it was formed, trees became caught up in the conglomerate mass. Eventually, they rotted away, leaving long, almost perfectly cylindrical tubes in the rock.

“Over the centuries, the Aboriginal people perfected a way of wrapping the remains of their dead in the bark of the local acacia or wattle, called budgeroo. The inner bark of the plant appears to have preservative qualities. The old-time people stripped the rough fibrous outer

surface from the thick bark and tightly wrapped the remains of their dead in it. The wrapping was so tight, it almost provided a vacuum seal – which was another aid to preservation. The tightly bound tubes were then slid into the ancient holes left by those primeval trees. Use of the area for burials has been traced back at least 7000 years – so no wonder it scored its present white feller name – The Tombs. Unfortunately, those same white blokes pretty much marauded The Tombs. At one time there must have been thousands of bodies laid to rest in that sacred place, but, by the turn of the century – actually around the time the Kenniff thing came to a head – there was virtually nothing left, apart from the plentiful and distinctive rock art which, today, at least can still give us some idea of how special the place once was. What happened there is called vandalism in the name of research.”

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The Chinese were not only at risk from Europeans and indigenous people, they were also at risk from their fellow Chinese. This story comes from Canada, from *Ghost Towns of British Columbia* by Bruce Ramsey. Mine manager J. B. Hobson came north from California in 1906 to the mine known as Bullion, bringing with him his Chinese cook Chung Kee You, also known as Sam Lock. “Almost immediately he got into difficulties with the Highbinders of Quesnelle Forks, a particularly vicious tong, whose *forte* was blackmail. Under great pressure, Sam resisted all attempts by the tongsmen to force him to join, and was frequently threatened with dire consequences if he didn’t. The tong had a man planted in the camp, a dining room servant by the name of Chew Hong, and frequently the two nearly came to blows.

“At 4.30 p.m., as the men were turning to the camp from the Pit, they could hear screams coming from the boarding house. Rushing into the building, they found Sam Lock, a bread knife in hand, standing over the blood-covered figure of Chew Hong.

“May your evil spirit stay in your bones until they rot,” Sam Lock was screaming at the body, repeating the curse over and over as the men pulled him away from the prostrate figure.

“Sam Lock had been the friend of everybody in the camp, and there was nobody who wanted to see him turned over to the law. The elderly Chinese slipped away into the forest to hide, and at Cedar Point on Quesnel Lake, he built a semi-underground refuge. A reward of \$300 was posted by the Provincial Police for his arrest, and although many men knew where he was hiding, and supplied the fugitive with food, their lips were sealed whenever the police were in the vicinity.

“As for Chew Hong: the miners took the battered body and buried it in the tailings of the mine, and with him to his grave went the dreadful curse, “May your evil spirit stay in your bones until they rot.”

“Hobson was coming up the Cariboo Road from Ashcroft when he heard of the man-hunt for his faithful servant, and although many pressing problems awaited him at the camp, he dropped these to secure legal help for his friend of many years.

“The offer of a \$300 reward proved too tempting to a settler who lived near the mine; he told police where Sam Lock was hiding.

“The accused came up for trial at Clinton the following October, but the case was set-over until May, and then to October, 1907, when he was found guilty.

“On December 6, 1907 Sam Lock paid for his crime on the gallows at Kamloops, but in the meantime, the tide at the Bullion had turned, and some of the men thought back to the curse and the burial of Chew Hong and wondered.”

Hobson died without seeing any benefit from his years of hope and hard work, there were troubles between owners and putative owners and the mine failed to make anyone rich until a Vancouver engineer realized that vast amounts of water were needed to produce small amounts of gold. “And finally, the Bullion simply ran out of gold and closed down. In time, the buildings

will vanish, but the great Pit, an awe-inspiring wonder of man's genius for extracting the wealth of nature from the ground, will remain for ever and ever."

It might be more correct to say that ghost towns and abandoned pits are memorials not to "man's genius" but to man's habit of sucking a place dry and moving on ...

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Les Hiddens is better known as 'the Bush Tucker Man' with his knowledge of edible things in apparently inhospitable country, and writer of interesting books such as *Explore Wild Australia*, but he was also fascinated by the possibility that a group of shipwrecked Dutch sailors in the 1700s had formed a settlement and survived and inter-married. He wrote, "It seems likely that there might have been a settlement of Dutch people in this area (i.e. the Hermannsburg area) well before the British or the Germans arrived. One of the German missionaries, Pastor Kemp, gave a paper at the Royal Geographical Society in about 1880 saying that a lot of the Aboriginal people who came into the mission already had Biblical names. You have to ask yourself – where would those Aboriginal people have heard those names?"

"The first anthropologist to come this way, Baldwin Spencer, who was here in the early 1890s with the Horn Expedition, commented on the number of Aboriginal people with blond hair. That too could support the theory that there had been Dutch settlers here at an earlier stage. Well, we're still looking into that one."

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August 14: John Galsworthy

August 15: Sir Walter Scott

Edith Nesbit

August 16: Georgette Heyer

Jeremy Leven

Dame Mary Gilmore

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Dame Mary Gilmore wrote a book of reminiscences, *Old Days, Old Ways* in which she remembers the innovative ways family and neighbours made do. Plates made out of bark, cutlery whittled from wood, dolls made from large nails, a cradle made from a packing case, "besides snuff and "nailrod" for smoking and chewing, there was opium. Quite a good deal was used in a different way. It came in as a result of the opium war against China under Gordon. I have not the figures, but it will be remembered that the great owning and exporting London interests, wanting a market for their Indian product, forced opium on China. As it was at the same time much used in England, English people brought the custom here. The Chinese who came to Australia became the usual source of supply, for China, having been forced to take more than she wanted, was glad of Australia as an outlet." Station owners and shepherds became addicted. Women were given it at childbirth, people used it "pretty much as we take aspirin nowadays".

Medicines were found in the bush. "The wild hop made yeast; the "sarsaparilla" made naughty little boys good by clearing their "over-crowded" blood; the bottle-brush soaked in soft water yielded syrup for sore throats and colds; the wattle-bark the aborigines had taught us to make into a tan lotion for unbroken burns and scalds; the eucalyptus (also native teaching) made vapour in pits, or in bed, for chills and pains; the pine, too, was inhaled, and sometimes went as a flavouring into the home-made treacle beer."

She is better known for her part in the Australian settlement in Paraguay and for her writings on labour and working conditions for *The Worker* but I am always interested in the insights she gives into Aboriginal life in the 19th century. For example, she writes of the Rev. William Ridley "who wrote on the language, songs, traditions and laws of what he always called "The Australian Race," that is, the aboriginals. As a friend of my father he was welcome at my

grandparents' place. In the compilation of his book my father assisted him, for he not only was fluent in Waradjerie, but he had a knowledge of a coast and of a mountain tongue as well, besides having Gaelic as his native tongue. The Gaelic stood him in good stead as a collaborator with Mr Ridley, for, he always said, there was a greater affinity in poetical expression as well as in modulations between Gaelic and the native tongues than between these and English. "English was blunter," he used to say, "and without the very fine shades of sound and meaning needed to translate accurately." So he translated first into Gaelic and from the Gaelic into English."

She mentions the Barron Falls massacre from which only one young Aboriginal boy survived (and I wonder what his life was like living with that sense of loss) but also a number of interesting facts she gleaned growing up including the way Aboriginal tribes trained interpreters. Boys were sent to live with neighbouring tribes until they became proficient in their language and customs. Such messengers were respected when they carried news and information, helped in arranging intertribal marriages and rapidly spread the knowledge of European arrivals.

She also writes, "when I asked my father why we could not get fish as formerly he said, "When the blacks went the fish went:" meaning that the habit of preserving the wild was destitute in the ordinary white settler." "Beside the fish, where there were deep valleys, running water and much timber, the natives invariably set aside some parts to remain as breeding-places or animal sanctuaries. Where there were plains by a river, a part was left undisturbed for birds that nested on the ground. They did the same thing with lagoons, rivers, and billabongs for water-birds and fish. There once was a great sanctuary for emus at Eunonyharenyha, near Wagga Wagga. The name means "The breeding-place of the emus"—the emu's sanctuary. The one-time fish-traps on the Darling, the Murrumbidgee, and the Lachlan all indicated sanctuary; the small fish would escape, or could multiply beyond the rocky maze that formed the trap or balk; the large remained within the fishing area. When on the lower side the fish were plentiful, and the upper part required a rest, keystones were lifted, or put in if they had been lifted, and sanctuary was moved over the barrier.

"Pregan Pregan Lagoon at North Wagga Wagga was a sanctuary for pelicans, swans, and cranes, and the land between it and the Murrumbidgee was a curlew sanctuary. ... The law of sanctuary in regard to large or wide breeding-grounds, such as Ganmain and Deepwater, where once there were miles and miles of swamps (as also down near Deniliquin), was that each year a part of the area could be hunted or fished, but not the same part two seasons in succession." But she watched the pelicans disappear, swans, ducks, and emus dwindle away. And the blacks themselves were dispersed, moved, killed, or succumbed to introduced diseases. "No sanctuary was proclaimed, so the wild went—as it went in England, in France, in China, and everywhere else where machinery and a written code came with a conqueror."

She wrote this in 1934. Now we have National Parks. But they aren't breeding-sanctuaries. They are for us to enjoy what remains of the wild.

She also says, "The aboriginal power to count or compute in his native state was as great as our own. The methods are different, that is all. I have seen partially trained native stockmen give the exact number of cattle in a group or mob up to four or five hundred almost without a moment's hesitation; yet authorities on the black continue to tell us that the aboriginal only counted to ten or thereabouts. My father's description of their method of reckoning was that they used the half-decimal five instead of the decimal ten, and with the addition of hands and feet could make any number required."

"I have not seen the Guaranis count the stars, but as a child I saw the aborigines do it many a time, and the smallest of them could beat me at it. I used to number by our arithmetical progression, and being small would lose my count and my place in the heavens at about three or

four hundred; but the little aboriginal children of the same age still kept on counting group-thousands. And what scorn they felt for my stupidity in not being able to keep up with them even a reasonable part of the way! I have heard my father say that the elders numbered all the stars, plotting the heavens out in fields; and that no matter what star he might point to, they could not only tell him the surrounding number visible to him, but the number that only by having their location pointed out, and focusing on them when told where they were, he could see.

“To know and number the stars was a part of the training of the children, and it began in infancy. The heavens were as much the clock and chart of these people as roads, time-pieces, and calendars are ours. But the ordinary white man who counted to a hundred and then notched a stick because otherwise his mind lost the place, could not conceive of a method of reckoning other than his own. So he said of what he could not grasp, that “the aborigines could not count.”

When she learned their way of counting and took it in to the class room the teacher asked how she could add so quickly. She showed the teacher how she learned by groups rather than progression. “Unconsciously I had carried into the school the method of the blacks; to the so-called educated the accuracy and speed of the so-called ignorant.” This same sense of groups and area was used in tracking; rather than simply following a line or track, the Aboriginal tracker was effectively mapping an area as he walked.

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It was the horrors of north-western New South Wales rather than Mary Gilmore’s south-west which created uproar. “While on the Namoi he (Alexander Paterson, Commissioner of Crown Lands) was told that two of George Bowman’s stockmen had been killed on Terry Hie Hie when they tried to seize two Aboriginal women, so he rode across to confirm it, admiring the feed on the way but regretting the lack of water. Then he rode north to the Big River, as the Gwydir was called when it reached the plains, where two more men had been killed. An intelligent Aboriginal boy who spoke fair English said three white men lived with the Aborigines and incited the raids.

“No search was made for the white men. Major Nunn rode up from the Hunter with a squad of mounted police and shot enough Aborigines to keep them quiet for a while.” So the white rush to take land went on unabated according to Eric Rolls in *A Million Wild Acres* until nemesis ... “In the midst of the money troubles another calamity that eventually rocked the whole Colony overtook Henry Dangar: the vile massacre in June 1838 of the forty or fifty remnants of a tribe of Aborigines on Henry Dangar’s Myall Creek station north-east of Bingara on the edge of New England.

“The mountain Aborigines were originally helpful to the stockmen. They directed them to good land and water. Relations soured when stockmen and shepherds stole women or wantonly destroyed the remarkable wallaby nets knotted out of Kurrajong fibre.” In retaliation Aborigines speared sheep and cattle. Yet those living on Myall Creek did not realize they were living on borrowed time. “In June when Hobbs, Dangar’s superintendent, left for a few days, a party of stockmen picked up pistols, guns and swords and rode to where the Aborigines were making camp near one of the huts.” The men tied up men, women and children and led them away. “Where there was plenty of dead timber to burn them, the stockmen slashed their heads off with their swords. ... Next day they rode the mountains in search of the rest of the tribe that had been away. They gave no sound reason for the massacre. It was suggested they might have been ordered to clear the run of Aborigines.”

It was what happened next which made this massacre different. “Governor Gipps, appalled, brought the stockmen to trial and in doing so appalled the squatters. Few of those associated with squatting had not killed Aborigines. Henry Dangar engaged three counsel to

defend them and opened a subscription list to pay the fees. Money poured in. Nevertheless seven of the stockmen were hanged. Nobody, black or white, had thought it possible.”

Then Rolls writes laconically, “But settlement never slackened.” Yes, the English Crown had wiped out thousands of years of Aboriginal possession at the stroke of a pen. Now men were keen to take physically what their monarch had taken symbolically—and every step of the way involved loss. Sometimes it was a different kind of loss. Where the Barwon meets the Darling “the Aborigines had built the intricate Brewarrina fisheries, four hundred metres of stone walled paddocks as wide as the river with entrances to trap fish swimming upstream or downstream. The paddocks led to a maze of smaller yards and ended finally in cul-de-sacs with big stones at the narrow entrances to be rolled across after the laughing splashing crowd drove the fish in. It was a ceremonial ground and a feasting ground whenever muddy freshes set big numbers of fish moving.” But the paddle-wheel steamers put on the river damaged the system and now the river is lacking not only fish but water.

Mary Gilmore came back to this issue in *More Recollections*. It has been queried as to whether the things she heard at secondhand, rather than as a witness, were reliable. But there seems to be a fair bit of corroborating evidence from other sources. She wrote, “In preparation for the coastal massacres, all those whom I heard telling of them said it had been decided by the land-owners to wait for the fishing season, with its gathering of corroborees and the coming down to the valleys of the big mountain tribes. This meant an exceptional body of people to operate on at once. Poisoned water and poisoned sugar had been the chief silent means of destruction Sometimes poison was mixed with the sugar and rationed out; sometimes cold tea was served out, or left in billy-cans and quart-pots at places where families would find them ... on stations and farms a boiler of treacle would be made, poisoned, and then served out as a treat to the poor unsuspecting people who had joyously helped stir and make it. They were given tastes to win their confidence; then at the last moment the lot was poisoned. Besides the poisoning, great hunting parties were formed by land-owners. With dogs the blacks were rounded up, and either shot where they stood, or driven into the swamps and rivers and drowned. The last method was pursued in Victoria and within my own memory in the Riverina. The value of this method was that it disposed of the bodies, for they floated out to sea. If there were no sea, the bones sank in the mud and were buried. Yet in at least one case in Western Victoria, floods long after, washed up the scores of broken skeletons and scattered them on farms. Only as late as 1924 a woman wrote me from a Victorian locality saying her people still found skulls washed up there after a rise in the river.”

She then goes on to tell another dreadful story, passed on. “It was a little girl perhaps ten years old She stood with her back to a small and partly hidden tree(s), her arms drawn backward from the shoulder-blades round the trunk, her hands tied behind it One thing it was so hot she would not have lived more than a few days Think of the ache in your shoulder if you only lie on your arm in bed....The thirst would be the worst ... he had no rope, so he used his whip. And there she had stood — stood in the terror of a virginity regarded under native tribal law so much more strictly than that of white people; stood while the brute who had tied her there had forgotten her in other victims; stood while the ants and flies had worked their will on her; stood while thirst, torture, and the crows found her.”

And Alan Marshall wrote in *Alan Marshall Talking*, “I remember Mary Gilmore telling me once about something she remembered from her childhood, and that’s a long time ago because she was over a hundred when she died. Her people had a big station at Wagga, and she used to visit another station next to them, and she noticed all the blacks that worked there had only one eye. It amazed her, till somebody explained.

“The station owner was very highly skilled with the stockwhip—he would turn and swing it round his head and the whip would lash out like a snake and flick at anything he aimed at. Now he showed his prowess by flicking one eye out of every native that worked for him; just cracked the eye. He never touched the second eye—once a black had lost one eye he was safe.”

Language too was a casualty of massacre. “The Kamilaroi language was spoken between the Liverpool Range and the Moonie River in the north, from New England west to the Barwon. And except in onomatopoeic words like *Kukuraka*, the Laughing Kookaburra, each syllable had a meaning but, as in Chinese, two or three syllables together usually added to a new meaning. Kamilaroi was an intricate and gutturally musical language. Each syllable of a word carried equal strength. Nouns, pronouns, participles and verbs were declined by suffixes and there were more cases and more tenses than in English. There was an emphatic imperative as well as a normal imperative and also a taunting imperative. Irony was part of the Kamilaroi character.”

With the loss of language the meanings of place names were lost. But the loss went much deeper. We talk glibly of stories on Country but this is a mere faint shadow of this lost world.

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When Mary Gilmore wrote—

Lone, lone, and lone I stand,
With none to hear my cry,
As the black feet of the night
Go walking down the sky.

The stars they seem but dust
Under those passing feet,
As they, for an instant's space,
Flicker and flame, and fleet.

So, on my heart, my grief
Hangs with the weight of doom,
And the black feet of its night
Go walking through my room.

—what now seems unbearably pessimistic was her chronicle of what she saw as an unstoppable momentum of loss and extinction, that Australia's Aboriginal people were facing genocide and there wasn't the will or the ability in the nation's public life to arrest the momentum. She was wrong but it is hard to laud our politicians, media moguls, churchmen, or commercial figures for arresting that decline. Rather, I think it had more to do with Aboriginal people themselves wanting to find modes of being, even if it was an attenuated being that would sustain their continued existence. So here is her poem 'I Saw the Beauty Go' because I think she was constantly aware that what was done in the name of 'settlement', 'nation-building' and all those other fine words, maimed a rich and complex society as well as individual bodies within it

...

I saw the beauty go,
The beauty that, in a stream,
Flowed through the breadth of the land
Like the fenceless foot of a dream.

There were the kangaroos, that, in hosts,
For their bedding-down grouped at even,

Only the sound of the nibbling lips
Making the sunset steven.

Then as they stilled, and the moon
With her white cloths mantled the trees,
From the shadows beneath the mopoke called,
And the curlew made her pleas.

I saw the beauty go,
The beauty that could not be tamed;
But before it went it looked at me
With the eyes of the maimed.

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August 17: V. S. Naipaul
August 18: Nettie Palmer
August 19: Ogden Nash
August 20: Robert Herrick
 H. P. Lovecraft
August 21: Mudrooroo Narogin
August 22: Ray Bradbury
August 23: Joan Clarke
August 24: Jorge Luis Borges
 May Sinclair
August 25: Thea Astley
August 26: Eleanor Dark
 Christopher Isherwood
 John Buchan

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In *Dear Dodie: The Life of Dodie Smith* Valerie Grove writes, “One beautiful autumn day, they saw a signpost to Marple, Isherwood’s ancestral home in Cheshire. They found the house of red sandstone creating a sunset gloom about it. It was now little more than a ruin, with most of the roof gone, and the great staircase fallen into the hall. At the back, the land dipped in a dramatic ravine. Gazing at the stables and the crumbling façade, Dodie and Alec asked each other, how could he? How could he leave such a house to its fate? In fact, Isherwood had explained his hostile feelings about Marple Hall. His ancestor Bradshaw (his father was Frank Bradshaw-Isherwood, and Bradshaw was the name of his alter ego in *Goodbye to Berlin*), who presided over the court that condemned Charles I to death, had lived there, and Isherwood was convinced that Marple was haunted. As a child he had slept in a mullion-windowed nursery in the attic. One night, he arrived down in the servants’ quarters, having traversed several staircases and hundreds of yards of stone-flagged passages, and yet with his feet still warm. He said his father had carried him – but his father was away from home at the time. And when his nanny went up to the nursery she found a heavy chest had been pulled across the door on the inside; there was no way for anyone inside to get out. Another of Marple’s ghosts was a lady who had been divorced for her barrenness. Christopher’s younger brother had seen her; she came into the nursery and told him he had no right to be there. It was a house ‘full of evil’, Isherwood said. Dodie wrote and said she hoped the ghosts of Marple would turn up at his Malibu dinner parties, as she had never seen a beautiful house in such an advanced state of neglect. ‘We drove on, thinking of you very lovingly even though we shall never understand how you could leave

Marple to its fate.’ It must have been an impossible house, she recognized, but she could not understand why Isherwood so little minded its ruin.”

Perhaps he preferred to stay in California rather than think about questions of house maintenance but was there no one else in the family who cared about the old ghost-haunted house?

* * * * *

Peter Parker in his biography *Isherwood* describes the house: “A large estate on the Cheshire-Derbyshire border, Marple Hall consisted of an Elizabethan mansion and some twenty farms. Built of local sandstone in 1658, but incorporating the remains of an earlier timber-framed dwelling, the house itself was more imposing than beautiful. The most striking thing about it was the setting, for as one approached it along a drive through parkland, it seemed set in a hollow. At the back of the house, however, there was a terrace, beyond which the ground fell away sharply to the River Goyt, so that from the other side of the water it seemed to stand on an impressive sandstone bluff. The Hall had been enlarged towards the end of the eighteenth century: one half of the house had the original seventeenth-century pointed gables and long, mullioned windows, while the other had Dutch gables and tall sashes. The entrance porch, with simple Ionic columns, topped by a wooden balustrade, was placed at the point where Elizabethan met Queen Anne, and any discrepancy in architectural style was disguised beneath the ivy that swarmed over the façade.”

John Leigh in his *Lays and Legends of Cheshire* collected this verse:

High on a craggy steep there stands,
Near Marple’s fertile vale,
An ancient ivy-covered house
That overlooks the dale.

And lofty woods of elm and oak
That ancient house enclose,
And on those walls a neighbouring yew
Its sombre shadow throws

A many gabled house it is
With antique turrets crowned
And many a quaint device, designed
In carvings rude is found.

Except that the turrets were on the stable block and I suspect those elms may have fallen victim to Dutch Elm Disease.

Parker says of the interior with “dark, colour-washed walls hung with Elizabethan and Jacobean family portraits, and plain white plaster ceilings” that “Most of the furnishings were very much of the period and of good quality without being particularly distinguished – just the sort of thing one might expect in the home of a north-of-England squire.” But it did have “a couple of very well-preserved early eighteenth-century tapestries depicting classical subjects, which came from the Gobelin factory and were signed by de la Croix and de Blond, *tapissiers royaux* to Louis XIV. The low-ceilinged hall, with its flagstone floor, was something of a show-piece, with the obligatory array of weaponry, complete suits of armour, stags’ heads and stained glass, hooded porters’ chairs, a long-case clock, and Jacobean chests upon which stood Chinese vases and pewter trenchers. A fine oak staircase, with elaborate urns on the newel-posts and a tapestry-hung half-landing, rose out of the hall to the first floor. The dining room was furnished

with heavy oak chairs of the seventeenth century, typical of the region, and there was a handsome library with glass-fronted bookcases, panelling and a fireplace, all in the Gothick style. The drawing room had Gothick windows and contained a highly decorative pink marble fireplace, its mantelpiece supported by caryatids, brought back home from his travels in Italy by Isherwood's Uncle Henry. Also on the ground floor were the panelled Oak Parlour and, at the back of the house, a conservatory."

* * * * *

Perhaps things went wrong for the Isherwoods—

I came across an unexpected mention of them in the *Tasmanian Ancestry* magazine in an article by Roger Jennans called 'The Case of the Town Clerk Who Absconded'. John Kenyon Winterbottom was a successful solicitor who became a partner in a bank and mayor of Stockport in Cheshire. But Winterbottom was running up huge debts, an extraordinary £30,000 of them. It isn't clear just why. He doesn't appear to have had a second family hidden away, nor to be a gambler or a drunkard, although he undoubtedly liked the finer things of life. "More seriously it became known that while dealing with the estate of a man named John Isherwood of Marple Hall Winterbottom had forged signatures, received a payment of £5,000 from a life insurance policy and not transferred the money to Isherwood's wife and daughters."

Mr Winterbottom absconded and it took several years before he was found in Liverpool. At his trial he unexpectedly pleaded 'Not Guilty'. "He had for several years been authorized as the confidential agent of the Isherwood family. Perhaps he saw his actions as legitimate within that role. But it seems he was unable to appreciate how it would appear to others that he had signed in the names of Mrs Isherwood and her daughters; had received and used the money; and had given a false explanation of why they were having to wait for payment."

He was found guilty and sentenced to transportation. Many kind people wrote to ask that transportation be commuted to imprisonment in England—which suggests that his spendthrift ways were accompanied by a charm of manner—including Elizabeth Isherwood who was concerned for Mrs Winterbottom and the family.

Winterbottom nevertheless was sent to Norfolk Island then to Hobart. But he was spared hard manual labour, being given clerking work, and when he became a free man he was appointed town clerk in Hobart. But his old habits of 'careless accounting' reasserted themselves and he was found guilty and sentenced to two years in jail. Winterbottom died in Hobart in 1872.

—So did the Isherwoods ever get back that £5,000 which would have gone a long way in the 19th century to keeping Marple Hall in repair?

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—but it still didn't seem sufficient reason to let a fine old house go to ruin. And more so given the numbers of people desperate for housing of any kind. The house was inherited by Henry Isherwood who married Beatrice Bagshaw but he was homosexual and he left the marriage and transferred the house to his nephew Christopher who didn't want it and was in America and who transferred it to his brother Richard who was also homosexual and equally unenthusiastic about the house. Richard offered it to the local council who said no. After three more years of vandalism and weather damage the council reluctantly took it over in 1957, demolished it, and built Marple Hall School.

This seems to have been the fate of many manor houses. I just came on the strange story of Lord Garvagh. The family were Cannings, related to a British prime minister, and had built Garvagh House and village in Northern Ireland. The third Lord was born in London, married, had a son Leopold, went traveling in Norway and Iceland which resulted in his book *A Pilgrim in Scandinavia*—and then something went terribly wrong. In the 1901 census he is living with some second cousins of my grandmother's, the Ushers, and is described as being of 'Upsetted

Mind'. In 1911 he is still there but is described as 'Lunatic'. He died in 1915 and Garvagh House followed him to ruin, demolition, and the building of a school. Isaac William Usher was a doctor though whether that is why Lord Garvagh was sent to live in his house I am not sure ...

After reading Victor Marsh's *Mr Isherwood Changes Trains* I wondered if Christopher's decision to embrace Vedanta Hinduism influenced his decision. It was not that he was about to forego all comforts to lie on a mat like an ascetic holy man on a Californian footpath but the role of landlord, stately home owner, constant seeker of funds to fix leaking roofs and hustler after bank loans to restore rotting timbers would not have been a congenial one.

If the house was genuinely haunted I can only hope its ghosts have found more hospitable accommodation. Though I am not sure that ghosts ever find 'Malibu dinner parties' their ideal 'home away from home' ...

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August 27: Theodore Dreiser
Ira Levin

August 28: Sheridan Le Fanu
Johann von Goethe
Edward Burne-Jones

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Thomas De Quincey in his essay 'Suspira de Profundis' writes of that strange thing, the Spectre of Brocken, so what I asked *was* the Spectre? He says, "This very striking phenomenon has been continually described by writers, both German and English, for the last fifty years. Many readers, however, will not have met with these descriptions: and on *their* account I add a few words in explanation; referring them for the best scientific comment on the case to Sir David Brewster's "Natural Magic." The spectre takes the shape of a human figure, or, if the visitors are more than one, then the spectres multiply; they arrange themselves on the blue ground of the sky, or the dark ground of any clouds that may be in the right quarter, or perhaps they are strongly relieved against a curtain of rock, at a distance of some miles, and always exhibiting gigantic proportions. At first, from the distance and the colossal size, every spectator supposes the appearance to be quite independent of himself. But very soon he is surprised to observe his own motions and gestures mimicked; and wakens to the conviction that the phantom is but a dilated reflection of himself. This Titan amongst the apparitions of earth is exceedingly capricious, vanishing abruptly for reasons best known to himself, and more coy in coming forward than the Lady Echo of Ovid. One reason why he is seen so seldom must be ascribed to the concurrence of conditions under which only the phenomenon can be manifested: the sun must be near to the horizon, (which of itself implies a time of day inconvenient to a person starting from a station as distant as Elbingerode;) the spectator must have his back to the sun; and the air must contain some vapour—but *partially* distributed. Coleridge ascended the Brocken on the Whitsunday of 1799, with a party of English students from Goettingen, but failed to see the phantom; afterwards in England (and under the same three conditions) he saw a much rarer phenomenon, which he described in the following eight lines. I give them from a corrected copy: (the apostrophe in the beginning must be understood as addressed to an ideal conception):

"And art thou nothing? Such thou art as when
The woodman winding westward up the glen
At wintry dawn, when o'er the sheep-track's maze
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze,
Sees full before him, gliding without tread,
An image with a glory round its head:
This shade he worships for its golden hues,

And *makes* (not knowing) that which he pursues.”

Of course it is the undead figure of Faust rather than any German Spectre who will always be associated with Goethe. And it was Goethe’s family rather than spectres and reflections, though perhaps all children are reflections, which urged me to look at aunts, uncles, fathers, mothers ...

* * * * *

“The literary influence of Aunts in the Age of the Empire has, to my way of thinking, not been adequately investigated, and it was clearly of major importance. The children of colonial administrators were placed in the care of aunts at Home in much the same callous fashion as Spartans are said to have left their newborn sons on the roof overnight to see if they were fit to survive.”

Tom Sharpe introducing *The Best of Saki*.

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‘War needs a lot of uncles,
And husbands, and brothers, and so on:
Someone must *want* to kill them,
Somebody needs them dead.’

Chris Wallace-Crabbe writing in his poem ‘Other People’ about his four uncles killed in the First World War.

The literary influence of uncles remains to be written about.

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Aunts, or more particularly great-aunts, were on my mind when I came upon this and so it resonated. The literary influence of great-aunts on me may not be the start of a great book. But whereas aunts are everyday sort of figures great-aunts are those mysterious creatures in old black-and-white or sepia photographs, often wearing bizarre things like huge picture hats or long ostrich-feather boas. Many of my great-aunts had died before I was born so one day I thought I would go looking for something on them, the great-aunts by blood, the great-aunts by marriage, and it was a fascinating journey. Many of them, and I am well-endowed with a grand total of twenty-five great-aunts, lived unexceptionable though unremarkable lives but still interested me for other reasons.

My great-uncle Jack Colgan’s first wife, my great-aunt Elizabeth, was an army nurse during World War One. My great-aunt who was Esther Caroline Levi Montefiore before her marriage had Eliazar Montefiore, a founder of the Art Gallery of NSW, as her grandfather. My great-aunt Belinda Clarke taught at a girls’ school in Uruguay. Two stories I heard from her time there was that the mail would come in a small boat from which it was hurled on to the beach; I wonder if all the letters and parcels survived? And when she came to go home to Ireland she found she couldn’t take her earnings out of Uruguay. Her sister, my great-aunt Kathleen was in charge of the Latin curriculum for NSW schools. As Latin was under threat I wonder if she saw herself as fighting a fierce rearguard action or did she accept the decline with fatalistic calm? I was intrigued to find my great-aunt Molly’s Irish grandmother was a Sheridan. I immediately had images of playwrights a la Richard Brinsley Sheridan or horror stories as in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. ... But great-aunt Molly intrigued us for a different reason when we were kids. She lived in Brisbane and regularly had a blue rinse put through her hair. We had never before seen anyone with blue hair and we wondered why she would want blue hair. And then there was my mysterious great-aunt Gertie. She came to Australia, taught for a couple of years in Fremantle, took the boat back to Ireland but, so the story goes, in South Africa she became involved with a cad who tricked her out of her money, no one is sure whether he married her first or not; my granddad, her brother, gave her some money when he stopped over there on his way to Australia

and she used it to get to New Zealand where her sister Rachel and brother-in-law William Higgins lived for a while in Marton where he designed a number of buildings which still grace the town. But Rachel and her husband and son packed up and eventually moved to England. Gertie had also moved on. No one, now, seems to know what happened to her or where she went. It is the hope of my life, not perhaps a literary hope, to find Gertie and, with luck, find she eventually had a happy life.

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Fathers did much better than Aunts in the literary stakes. Here is just one recorded memory. “His father, whom I’ve only seen in photographs (stolid, white-haired, a marvelous Levantine face), had taken the family out of Armenia at the time of the first Turkish massacres, had stopped en route in Bulgaria, where my father was born and the family ran a sort of general store, and then three years later headed for England. My father was the youngest brother. The other brothers had all gone into the family business, or anyway into business. My father was supposed to do the same; went to a second-run boarding school called Malvern; and then, in a final fling at career responsibility, or trying to please his parents, went off to the University of Edinburgh to study to be a doctor, got fed up after three months, quit, and headed down to London. He wrote book reviews. Journalism. Some pieces for a new magazine called ‘The New Age’. *The London Venture*. He knew he had something. He didn’t know what at first – it was Lawrence, he said, who nudged him into the kind of fanciful writing, the kind of fanciful vision that eventually formed books like *The Green Hat* and *May Fair* and *Young Men in Love*. He used to go down to the country to visit Lawrence, he would tell me. When he was very young, and deferred to Lawrence greatly. (Lawrence, in fact, later wrote him into *Lady Chatterley* as Michaelis.) He would bring him stories that he was working on, and read them aloud to Lawrence, who would offer his advice. For quite a while, before *The London Venture*, he had been trying to write ‘realistic’ Bennett-type stories, and hadn’t been having much success. One week-end, he showed Lawrence a new thing he had working on, a romantic, highly stylized fable about a girl (which later became one of the sketches in *The London Venture*). Lawrence, with all his didactic authority, said that Dikran should obviously stop trying to imitate Arnold Bennett, and should write fantasies. Or something like that. My father, at any rate, was always pleased to say that it was Lawrence who turned him towards his particular style, probably because it was partly true (Lawrence, I think, did take a genuine interest in him), but more probably because he liked to have been to some degree friends with these titans he so much admired, the serious literary men, the Lawrences and Wellses and so on.”

From *Exiles* by Michael J. Arlen.

And then, of course, there are mothers. Ordinary mothers, famous mothers, unknown mothers, literary mothers. Bruno Bettelheim writes in *The Uses of Enchantment*: “I mentioned before that, ideally, the telling of a fairy story should be an interpersonal event into which adult and child enter as equal partners, as can never be the case when a story is read to a child. A story of Goethe’s childhood illustrates this.

“Long before Freud spoke about id and superego, Goethe from his own experience divined that they were the building blocks of personality. Fortunately for him, in his life each of the two was represented by a parent. “From father I got my bearings, the seriousness in life’s pursuits; from mother the enjoyment of life, and love of spinning fantasies.” Goethe knew that to be able to enjoy life, to make the hard work of it palatable, we need a rich fantasy life. The account of how Goethe gained some of this ability and self-confidence through his mother’s telling him fairy tales illustrates how fairy tales ought to be told, and how they can bind parent and child together by each making his own contributions. Goethe’s mother recounted in her old

age:

“Air, fire, water and earth I presented to him as beautiful princesses, and everything in all nature took on a deeper meaning,” she reminisced. “We invented roads between stars, and what great minds we would encounter...He devoured me with his eyes; and if the fate of one of his favorites did not go as he wished, this I could see from the anger in his face, or his efforts not to break out in tears. Occasionally he interfered by saying: ‘Mother, the princess will *not* marry the miserable tailor, even if he slays the giant,’ at which I stopped and postponed the catastrophe until the next evening. So my imagination often was replaced by his; and when the following morning I arranged fate according to his suggestions and said, ‘You guessed it, that’s how it came out,’ he was all excited, and one could see his heart beating.”

“Not every parent can invent stories as well as Goethe’s mother—who during her lifetime was known as a great teller of fairy stories. She told the stories in line with her listeners’ inner feelings of how things should proceed in the tale, and this was considered the right way to tell these stories. Unfortunately, many modern parents were never themselves told fairy tales as children; and, having thus been deprived of the intense pleasure, and enrichment of the inner life, that these stories give to a child, even the best of parents cannot be spontaneous in providing his child with what was absent from his own experience. In that case, an intellectual understanding of how meaningful a fairy tale can be for his child, and why, must replace direct empathy based on recollections of one’s own childhood.”

I wondered if she would like to have had a name rather than simply be known to posterity as ‘Goethe’s mother’? So I went looking.

Frau Goethe was Catharina Elisabeth Textor when she married Caspar Goethe and they had Johann as their first child and then Cornelia but none of their later children survived to adulthood. They were a family of modest origins moving up in the world. Nicholas Boyle in *Goethe: The Poet and the Age* writes, “Goethe summarized what he owed to his parents in some famous lines—part of an epigram on his own *unoriginality*—which demonstrate the fine equilibrium he attained in his affection for them:

Von Vater hab’ich die Statur,
Des Lebens ernstes führen,
Von Mütterchen die Frohnatur
Und Lust zu fabulieren.

My father gave me his build, his earnest conduct of life, my mother dear her happy nature and fondness for storytelling.

We should not, however, let the more spectacular character of the gifts Goethe attributes to his mother’s influence mislead us into the view of a later caller on Catharina Elisabeth: ‘Now I really understand how Goethe became Goethe.’ Her exuberant but maternal temperament, her love for the theatre and theatricals (and actors and authors), her combination of household practicality (which did not extend to financial matters) and open emotionality, her genuine storytelling ability and her excitable, and unbelievably heterographic, style in letter writing, her unaffected lack of respect of persons, her willingness to embrace anyone, whether a dowager duchess or a penniless scribbler, bringing news of her son, her old-fashioned trust in Providence, rather than any specifically Christian hope, and her impatience with theological innovators—these are all characteristics we find echoed in her son, even when they are muted or reversed by an approximation to his father, and they are characteristics which exercised a powerful attraction on German literary men of her own and later generations. The Golden Age of her life was the period of the Storm and Stress in Frankfurt in the 1770s when her house was, as she said, ‘from

top to bottom stuffed full of *beaux esprits*, who might stay up half the night, gossiping, arguing, reading, improvising. Wieland, Merck, Lavater, they were all ‘dear son’ to her, for they were all friends of her one son, and to all of them she was ‘Mother Aya’, from the name of the mother of the Four Sons of Aymon, in the popular German version of that old French romance. (That Caspar Goethe took over this nickname into his account-book is another sign of his affectionate receptivity.) Perhaps in her imaginative temper and artistic leanings we can see traces of her descent from Lucas Cranach the Elder. Her avalanche of love and admiration, doubtless founded her son’s magnificent self-confidence, but it cannot have been easy to live with, and once he had entered adulthood it threatened the very autonomy it had established. Goethe’s relationship with his mother cannot be presented just as an idyll. After he had left Frankfurt, Goethe, in thirty years, visited her only three times ever again—although a lively correspondence continued between them—and she was never seriously invited to Weimar: that was *his* world, and it shows the strength in what might otherwise seem an over-demonstrative character that Catharina Elisabeth accepted the parent’s lot of being left behind.”

* * * * *

August 29: Robert Weinberg
 John Williams
 August 30: Mary Shelley
 August 31: William Saroyan
 September 1: Arthur Upfield
 Edgar Rice Burroughs
 September 2: Eugene Field
 September 3: Sarah Orme Jewett
 Lennie Lower
 September 4: Mary Renault
 Joan Aiken
 September 5: Arthur Koestler
 September 6: Elizabeth Massie
 September 7: C. J. Dennis
 John Polidori
 September 8: Siegfried Sassoon
 W. W. Jacobs
 September 9: Cesare Pavese
 Phyllis Whitney
 September 10: Cyril Connolly

* * * * *

Julian Mitchell writes in his play *Another Country* which is set in an English boys’ school early in the 20th century and which is full of a deep homoerotic ambience:

Cunningham: Curious little man, Swinburne. A gnome. Wonderful red hair, but the head too big for the body. The sordid truth will come out eventually, I suppose.

Bennett: What sordid truth is that, Sir?

Cunningham: He never got over being swished at Eton. Obsessed with it all his life. Harold Nicolson tries to make out it’s all exaggerated, but it’s not. Not at all. I’ve seen some of the letters, and I can tell you — hot stuff.

Bennett: Why would Mr Nicolson want to conceal it, Sir?

Cunningham: Oh, ambition — wouldn’t you think? One doesn’t get on in the Foreign Office by publishing dirt about eminent men of letters. Mild scandal, yes. But not dirt.

Menzies: Why does he write about Swinburne at all, if it’s so awkward?

Cunningham: If you ask me, he's secretly intrigued. He started with Verlaine, you know — then Tennyson, then Byron. There's a lot of very thin ice there. Of course, Harold's very nippy on his skates. But I rather think we'll find him giving up literature now he's going into politics. You can get away with much more at the FO than you can in the House of Commons.

Bennett: I'm going into the FO.

Cunningham: Are you? Well, it's an excellent way of seeing the world, if you can stand all the ghastly dinners with the other diplomats.

Bennett: I hadn't thought of that!

Devenish: Have another ghastly muffin.

Cunningham: No thank you!

'The experiences undergone by boys at the great public schools, their glories and disappointments, are so intense as to dominate their lives and to arrest their development. From these it results that the greater part of the ruling class remains adolescent, school-minded, self-conscious, cowardly, sentimental and in the last analysis homosexual.'

Cyril Connolly in *Enemies of Promise*; quoted at the beginning of Julian Mitchell's *Another Country*. It actually comes in his memoir *A Georgian Boyhood* but this is published as a package with *Enemies of Promise*. And it actually begins, 'It is a theory that the experiences undergone—' So it isn't quite clear whose theory or whether Connolly fully subscribed to it.

Alan Bennett wrote in his diary for 29 May 2007 (collected into *Keeping On Keeping On*): "A biker delivers some proofs from Peters Fraser and Dunlop, and as I'm signing for them, asks what's my opinion of Cyril Connolly and why is it he's less well thought of than, say, twenty years ago. Because he's not long dead is the short answer and also, I suppose, because the literary scene has changed, with no one critic presiding in the way Connolly and (to a lesser extent) Raymond Mortimer did.

"The only time I met Connolly was in 1968 – when my first play, *Forty Years On*, was in Brighton on its pre-West End tour. He was mentioned in the text, where it was implied he was quite short, as I'd thought he was – simply I suppose from his face, which was that of someone small and chubby. He came round to the stage door to show me that he was of average height. An almost legendary figure to me through my reading of *The Unquiet Grave*, he then sent a postcard asking me to lunch in Eastbourne but I pretended it hadn't arrived as I was too shy to go."

I am sure Alan Bennett, who is gay and lives with a man called Rupert Thomas, would have read *Enemies of Promise* though Bennett was probably equally critical of the big boys-only schools like Eton and Harrow, perhaps for different reasons. But the thing that struck me is that 'the literary scene *has* changed'. If Connolly wrote that now there is a good chance he couldn't get it published, not because people have suddenly decided such schools are wonderful places but because he implies that homosexual men are 'cowardly' and 'adolescent'. I don't think people mind being called 'self-conscious' but men have trouble being seen as 'sentimental'. These days he would probably be heckled if not howled down at literary festivals, those wonderful bastions of free speech, and he might even get death threats.

* * * * *

The other day I picked up a very tattered copy of *Famous Detective Stories* from the 1950s and this one had an ad for a book called *The Way To Be Happy* by Lawrence Gould which "tells us that nearly all of our troubles are the results of our failure to grow up emotionally" and I immediately wondered if it was being advertised in that medium because of the implication that

most criminals have failed “to grow up emotionally”. Probably not, as the magazine had ads to teach you ‘hillbilly guitar’ and to sell you the ballads of Henry Lawson, but it seemed to be a question worth asking.

And Cyril Connolly himself went through, agonies is probably too strong a word but doubts certainly. And even on the eve of his marriage, according to his biographer, Clive Fisher, “After the Blakistons had gone, Connolly sent his old and now married friend (Noël Blakiston) what was almost the last of the intense and vivid letters which had been the vehicle of their romantic friendship: ‘The trouble is that I’m emotionally homosexual still ... Every Englishman, don’t you think, is really contemptuous of women – the sanctity of the smoking room is always at the back of his mind.’ ”

I went to an all girls’ school for two years and I suspect there was an important difference. Certainly some girls had thrills and crushes on other girls or members of staff but boys were ‘out there’ waiting for the moment when school ended. And if you couldn’t go out then they were brought in. I can remember being asked, times without number, which Beatle I liked best. I always said Paul though I wasn’t a fan. But I did witness the strange response of girls seeing them only on a small black-and-white TV but screaming and oohing and carrying on. I cannot imagine boys responding to Little Patty or Dusty Springfield in that way. It was harder for many boys to fight free of an atmosphere in which girls might feature but they were, when all was said and done, an inferior species and marriage was one of those things you avoided for as long as you could.

Clive Fisher goes on to say: “In *Enemies of Promise* Connolly had advanced this genre by portraying the most famous of all English schools with eloquent ambivalence and without recourse to fiction or substantial disguise. If he had not specifically said that Eton and schools like it were in any sense unjust, he had deduced a theory which nevertheless constituted a serious and lingering charge, the ‘Theory of Permanent Adolescence’, which asserted that the triumphs and despairs which public-school boys experienced were so intense as to eclipse all later achievement and in many cases even to retard their development. In itself that was neither serious nor surprising; but those triumphs and despairs centred around repressed desire, redundant and elaborate etiquette, jostling for fickle favour and the muddy conflicts of the games fields. It is significant that within two years of the publication of those views, both George Orwell, in *Coming Up for Air*, and Henry Green in *Pack My Bag* had made charges almost identical with Connolly’s. Valentine Cunningham, appraising the trend many years later, noted: ‘Once it had been formulated so memorably, Connolly’s “Theory” had the ring of truth.’ ”

In *Pornography: The Longford Report*, the British Enquiry into the pornography industry in Britain there is mention of a Headmaster of a Boarding School for Boys aged 11 to 18 who “had become aware that something was going on in a particular school house during the course of a completely unrelated investigation. He discovered that the small boys had repeatedly been subjected to sexual assault by the bigger boys. New boys had been held down by groups of second-year boys and masturbated by them or forced to masturbate each other, or taken to the toilet for oral masturbation. A first-year boy had been held down and submitted to buggery. The 12-year-olds were forcing this on the 11-year-olds and in turn were put through the same treatment by older boys who had taught and encouraged them to pass it on.”

That particular principal acted but how common was this in boys’ boarding schools? Though I don’t think Cyril Connolly was writing about this kind of obvious abuse but rather about a more subtle atmosphere of homoeroticism in many such schools. It is much harder to respond to an atmosphere than an action—and equally it is much harder to fight free of an atmosphere ...

Connolly also looked at it in terms of its influence on literature, and on 'promise'. "Many writers have been homosexual or gone through a homosexual period and, although from a literary standpoint it is enriching, they must grasp the limitations of homosexuality and plan production accordingly. Thus a male homosexual, if cut off by his attitude from experience with women, will have a certain difficulty in depicting them. This is not of consequence if he is, for example, a critic or a poet who works at that intense and sublimated level at which passion is general and the object of such passion without importance. But many writers are neither poets nor critics, and for novelists, short-story writers, and playwrights, difficulties arise. Thus homosexual novelists who are able to create mother-types and social mother-types (hostesses) and occasionally sister-types (heroines) have trouble with normal women and may often make them out worse or better than they are. They are forced to describe things they know little about because so much of life is concerned with them. Courtship, marriage, childbearing, and adultery play a major part in existence, a knowledge of the relations between men and women is essential to a novelist, and a comparison of, say, *War and Peace* with novels written by less normal authors will show how few acquire it. The heroine of *War and Peace*, Natasha, is a delightful creature, but she is capable of leaving her hero and running away with a man whom she does not love, after a single meeting, because he looked at her in a certain way. But she remains delightful because Tolstoy continues to find her lovable for being human. If Natasha had been one of Proust's heroines he would have turned her into a monster, she would have been analysed till nothing remained of her but lust and self-interest.

"Nor is Proust's system of giving the male characters in his life girls' names and putting them as girls into his novel satisfactory. Their real sex protrudes and they have no plausible relationships with other characters in the books (Albertine is unreal when she confronts Charlus or Swann or the Duchesse de Guermantes; there is an ambiguous cloud over her relations with the author), and they are incapable of child-bearing, home-making, husband-cheering, or any of the drabber functions of woman. There is no solution for these problems. Nothing, for example, will make the two amorous young girls in *The Importance of Being Earnest* either young or amorous. The homosexual writer, until we can change society, must construct his books so as to avoid situations where a knowledge of such women is required, just as stammerers avoid certain words and substitute others. Otherwise the equipment of the homosexual writer: combativeness, curiosity, egotism, intuition, and adaptability, is greatly to be envied."

He goes on to say "The homosexual is unable to treat of a section of the life of human beings but in return he is free from the limitations of that life" and "The homosexual avoids domesticity, he pays a price but pays it with his eyes open, the normal author walks into a trap." As Connolly sees domesticity, along with early success, as a key 'Enemy of Promise' this probably makes sense but I wonder how writers now would respond to his views?

In *Enemies of Promise* Connolly asks: "(1) What will have happened to the world in ten years' time? (2) To me? To my friends? (3) To the books they write?" It is the third question he engages with. What makes a book last and what makes a writer last.

Among his 'enemies' are over-production, the need to live off writing can produce a string of pot-boilers rather than memorable books, and its opposite: under-production, where a writer is overlooked because he doesn't follow up his first success. The need to have a day-time job can be detrimental, teaching or journalism can encourage writing which is straightforward and clear but lacks subtleties and allusions. One reading and you've got the story. Changes in style and fashion. Topicality. Class. Politics. That understandable fear that political passions turn books into polemics and ideas into propaganda. Then there is religion "for an intellectual, joining a church implies regression, it is a putting on of blinkers, a hiding under the skirts of one of the

great reactionary political forces of the world and the poet drawn to the confessional by the smell of incense finds himself defending the garotte and Franco's Moors. Art becomes a means not an end to the churchman as to the politician." Then there is love and the way it can take over a life, even if the object of love is not demanding. And even worse, domesticity; in his famous phrase "there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall."

And "Of all the enemies of literature, success is the most insidious. The guides whom we have quoted, whose warnings come through to us from various parts of the field, are unanimous against this danger. Pearsall-Smith quotes Trollope. 'Success is a poison that should only be taken late in life, then only in small doses.' " Failure can make people give up—or try harder. Success can give encouragement or confidence. But it can turn the reclusive writer into an in-demand speaker with little time to write. It can seduce with material goods. It can encourage complacency. It can promote poorly-thought-out sequels, series characters who grow tired and dull, books which don't get enough time to simmer because of the demand by publishers, bookshops, public ...

"Often the public is taken in by a book because, although bad, it is topical, its up-to-dateness passes as originality, its ideas seem important because they are 'in the air'. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Dusty Answer, Decline and Fall, Brave New World, The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Fountain, Good-bye, Mr Chips* are examples of books which had a success quite out of proportion to their undoubted merit and which now reacts unfavourably on their authors, because the overexcitable public who read those books have been fooled. None of the authors expected their books to become best-sellers but, without knowing it, they had hit upon the contemporary chemical combination of illusion with disillusion which makes books sell."

And what do you write as your encore ... and is 'illusion with disillusion' the key ingredient?

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September 11: O. Henry
Jessica Mitford

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Jessica Mitford made her name with books like *The American Prison Business, The Trial of Dr Spock* and her wry look at the funeral business, *The American Way of Death*, in which she gives the cost of an average American funeral in 1961 as around \$1,450; so it's expensive to be born, expensive to die, and so, perhaps, we could all save money by doing neither? But in her book *The Making of a Muckraker* she tells some of the background to her stories and gives her tips for investigating a subject. She writes, "I think I began to think of myself as a muckraker when *Time*, commenting in its press section on the Famous Writers School Fracas, called me "Queen of the Muckrakers." I rushed to the dictionary to find out what I was queen of, and discovered that "muckraker" was originally a pejorative coined by President Theodore Roosevelt to describe journalists like Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, who in his view had gone too far in exposing corruption in government and corporate enterprise." Yes, politicians do prefer to keep a lot of things hidden. "Thus the *Oxford English Dictionary* says "muckrake ... is often made to refer generally ... to a depraved interest in what is morally 'unsavoury' or scandalous." (I fear that does rather describe me.) In the *OED* supplement of 1933, "muckraker" has come up in the world a little bit and is now defined as "one who seeks out and publishes scandals and the like about prominent people." And by 1950 additional respectability is conferred by *Webster's New International Dictionary*, defining "muckrake" as "To seek for, expose, or charge, esp. habitually, corruption, real or alleged, on the part of public men and corporations."

“As a consequence of my *Time*-bestowed sovereignty, I was invited to teach a course in muckraking at San Jose State University, and later at Yale. These were workshop sessions in which my students undertook actual investigations of “corruption real or alleged” in their college or community. Together we explored techniques of research, how to conduct interviews, how to put the results together in readable form.”

Among her tips are to grade your questions: start with Kind queries and gradually get to the Cruel questions. And one I would not have thought of: trade magazines. These and things like in-house journals that only circulate among ‘like thinkers’ tend to be franker than those written for the general public.

But there seems to be a difference between tabloid journalism which lives on scandals, usually involving sex, investigative journalism which is interested in getting at the truth of rumours and stories, and ‘muckraking’ which is prepared to do whatever it takes, legal and sometimes illegal, to expose the underbelly of the corporate and political world. The lines overlap. But it is interesting that the term ‘muckraking’ has never become fashionable here. What we now call tabloid journalism used to be called ‘*Truth* journalism’ and similar names; the famous newspaper of the Norton family being notorious for the number of sex scandals they found or made up. (It does raise the question: why did John Norton choose to call a newspaper *Truth*? Was it a ploy to get people to believe the barely believable?) So have investigative journalists been fierce in keeping their trade unsullied by claims that they are only ‘muckrakers’?

Mitford writes, “Finally we should explore the question, Does muckraking really accomplish anything, or does it at best lead to reforms that merely gloss over the basic flaws of society? Lincoln Steffens, originator of the genre and author of the pioneering *Shame of the Cities*, eventually came to take a dim view. “He was now certain that muckraking in itself had run its course and led to no solutions,” writes Justin Kaplan, Steffens’s biographer. “Muckraking, it seemed, had only been a way of shouting at society, and this was pointless, especially now that one had to shout louder and louder to get people to listen, much less to do something.”

She goes on to say, “What of today’s muckrakers? Ralph Nader is probably the leader in exposing misdeeds of the giant corporations. At least his loud shouts have succeeded in creating a nationwide awareness of consumer fraud, ranging from unsafe cars to dangerous and over-priced prescription drugs, thus educating a whole generation of consumers as to their rights, and to the possibilities of organizing and fighting back through the courts and legislatures.”

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Someone had put a book in the rubbish (because its spine was coming off) and I rescued it to see if I could repair it because it had the intriguing title *The News Twisters*. Its author, Edith Efron, wrote of the US, “It is legally required of broadcasters that their political coverage be bipartisan and neutral. The standards for such neutrality have been set forth in a Federal Communications Commission code known as “The Fairness Doctrine,” and have been sanctioned as compatible with the First Amendment by the Supreme Court. Strangely, however, no analytical method has ever been devised which would permit either the FCC, or the networks, or any private citizen to check systematically on the neutrality of the nation-wide news services. Over the years, political storms have blown up over individual stories and individual programs which were charged with supporting one side of a political controversy. For lack of a coherent theory of bias and a simple analytical method, such cases have always been determined in favor of the networks, provided these programs included even a symbolic amount of “contrasting” opinion. In the theoretical void which prevails, the Fairness Doctrine is virtually unenforceable.”

It does not surprise me that no one has come up with a way to determine neutrality and objectivity in news coverage. The usual methods, looking at column inches, air time, choice of

subjects, choice of commentators and so on, all have their place. But a tone of voice can suggest anything from sarcasm to disbelief to wry amusement to regret. How should that be measured?

Then she goes on to say something I found strange.

“The First Amendment gives the press the right to be biased.”

She enlarges on this: “Press freedom is not commonly stated in this form, but such is the case. *The New Yorker Magazine* on December 6, 1969, summed up this aspect of the First Amendment with lucidity. “There is nothing in the Constitution that says the press has to be neutral. Nor, for that matter, is there anything that says it has to be objective, or fair, or even accurate or truthful, desirable though these qualities are. For who is to be the judge? The press is simply free, and its freedom, like any other freedom, has to be absolute in order to be freedom. It is free to print any information it wants to print, *and to write from any point of view whatever.*” (Italics mine).”

But

“Broadcast news is explicitly denied the First Amendment right to be biased.”

So a newspaper can print biased news but a radio station cannot broadcast biased news?

Gay Talese wrote an essay he called ‘The Kingdoms, the Powers, and the Glories of the *New York Times*’ in which he says, “nobody today knows whether people make news or news makes people ... When the press is absent, politicians have been known to cancel their speeches, civil rights marchers to postpone their parades, alarmists to withhold their dire predictions. ... News, if unreported, has no impact; it might as well have not happened at all. Thus the journalist is the important ally of the ambitious, a lamplighter for stars. He is invited to parties, is courted and complimented, has easy access to unlisted telephone numbers and to many levels of life. He may send to America a provocative story of poverty in Africa, of tribal threats and turmoil—and then he may go for a swim in the Ambassador’s pool.”

The question of bias goes along with the question of power. Talese writes, “James Reston delivered the eulogy of Orvil Dryfoos. It was a beautifully composed portrait of the publisher, revealing touching insights into the man’s mind and ideals. Reston recalled that in the city room on election night, 1960, Dryfoos was the first man to “sense that we had gone out on a limb for Kennedy too early and insisted that we reconsider. And again in 1961,” Reston continued, “when we were on the point of reporting a premature invasion of Cuba, his courteous questions and wise judgment held us back.”

“This last point seemed to carry just the slightest sting for the New York editors. *They* had planned to play up the Bay of Pigs invasion plan, but Dryfoos, agreeing with Reston that it was not in the national interest, had the story toned down and had eliminated from it any phraseology stating that the invasion of Cuba was immanent. (Three years later, in June of 1966, after the power had shifted within the *Times*, Clifton Daniel would make a speech at the World Press Institute in Minneapolis that would get back a bit at Reston: Daniel would say that the Bay of Pigs operation “might well have been canceled and the country would have been saved enormous embarrassment if the *New York Times* and other newspapers had been more diligent in the performance of their duty,” and he would also report President Kennedy’s later concession to Turner Catledge: “If you had printed more about the operation you would have saved us from a colossal mistake.”)”

Wilfred Burchett in *Passport* wrote, “My conception of reporting may seem somewhat unorthodox—perhaps some would say heretical. As members of human society I believe reporters should regard their responsibilities as being above contractual obligations to editors, and their own personal interests. A simple illustration: a child being beaten to pulp by a bully. A reporter who rushes to record the scene with camera and tape-recorder might succeed as a journalist, but he fails as a human being. His first responsibility is to rescue the child. A reporter

is not an electronic computer digesting dispassionately the facts with which he is confronted. He is endowed with reason and conscience bequeathed by many centuries of human experience. He cannot remain coldly aloof and objective when basic human issues are involved. My concept of reporting is not just to record history but to help shape it in the right direction.”

The difficulty comes with the imbalance of power. Replace ‘bully’ with a bikie gang, the Indonesian Army, an inflamed mob, and clearly you will end up with a child and a reporter both beaten to a pulp. Recording the scene may be the only realistic response. When Max Stahl filmed the Dili Massacre in 1991 he clearly could not have stopped those Indonesian soldiers. But his film eventually helped change the dynamics of the power relationship ...

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“Trend journalists in the 1980s were not required to present facts for the same reason that ministers aren’t expected to support sermons with data. The reporters were scripting morality plays, not news stories, in which the middle-class woman played the Christian innocent, led astray by a feminist serpent. In the final scene, the woman had to pay – repenting of her ambitions and ‘selfish’ pursuit of equality – before she could reclaim her honour and her happiness. The trend stories were strewn with judgemental language about the wages of feminist sin. The ABC report on the ill effects of women’s liberation, for example, referred to the ‘costs’ and ‘price’ of equality thirteen times. Like any cautionary tale, the trend story offered a ‘choice’ that implied only one correct answer: take the rocky road to selfish and lonely independence or the well-paved path to home and flickering hearth.”

Susan Faludi in *Backlash*. There is an irony in that the two-income couple had greatly increased spending power; the stay-at-home mum hunted out the bargains, the cheap cuts, mended, re-used, spent only a fraction on make-up and clothes ... But I am always reminded of the power of words. To choose one over another can give an article a completely different slant.

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“The muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens, who exposed Tammany Hall-style corruption in American cities a century ago, defined “privilege” as the essential problem of corruption. What Steffens meant by “privilege” was that those with money get access to government resources; those who don’t pay up or go without. This is why corruption has to be taken seriously: privilege skews the way the state assigns its resources.”

Alex Kerr in *Dogs and Demons: The Fall of Modern Japan*.

Robert D. Putnam in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* wrote, “at the end of the nineteenth century, critics of social Darwinism gradually gained the upper hand both intellectually and (increasingly) politically. “At the turn of the century,” reports historian (Nell Irvin) Painter, “Americans came increasingly to feel that society needed to be democratized to ensure everyone a decent chance for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

“This philosophical U-turn was triggered in part by the revelations of muckraking journalists—Jacob Riis, whose *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) portrayed the tragic conditions in slum tenements; Lincoln Steffens, whose *Shame of the Cities* (1904) censured urban squalor and government corruption; Ida Tarbell, whose exposes in *McClure’s* magazine (1904) attacked the depredations of the Standard Oil trust; Upton Sinclair, whose *The Jungle* (1905) decried abuses of immigrant laborers; and others.”

Putnam also says, “The most powerful strategy for paleometeorologists seeking to assess global climate change is to triangulate among diverse sources of evidence. If pollen counts in polar ice, and the width of southwestern tree rings, and temperature records of the British Admiralty all point in a similar direction, the inference of global warming is stronger than if the cord of evidence has only a single strand. For much the same reason, prudent journalists follow a “two source” rule: Never report anything unless at least two independent sources confirm it.”

*

But sometimes people, all of us including me, simply take what we hear and don't ask the simple question: how do I know this is true?

Politicians, journalists, diplomats, commentators repeated *ad nauseum* that there were 40 schools in East Timor when Indonesia invaded and that therefore the Indonesians were doing a wonderful thing by building schools to make up for this deficiency.

"By the Indonesian account the number of schools grew from 47 elementary, 2 middle and 1 high school in 1974 to 579 elementary, 90 middle and 39 high schools and 3 colleges in 1992." ICJ. Australian Section.

James Dunn in *Timor: A People Betrayed* said there were 456 elementary schools in East Timor by 1974.

And a couple of minutes with the *Britannica Book of the Year* would have shown:

Timor. Schools. (1959); primary 108, pupils 7,020, teachers 302; secondary 3, pupils 290, teachers 23.

And 1961-62, Primary, pupils 10,060, teachers 309; secondary, pupils 238, teachers 27; vocational 49, teachers 6. Even this was modestly praiseworthy given the devastation visited on East Timor in World War II with every population centre bombed or ransacked.

Now if there were already 108 elementary schools in East Timor by 1959 to suggest there were only 47 in 1975 beggars belief.

In fact by 1975 there were over 400 elementary schools in East Timor. Of course some of them were very small with few resources but even the poorest and most remote were sometimes lucky enough to have dedicated and caring teachers.

I remember going to the Agricultural College near Baucau in 1971 and wandering through the classrooms (the boys were outside playing sport) and each room had a large portrait of a man above the blackboard. I asked someone who this was. He looked at me in astonishment before saying 'Salazar!' Clearly my own education was deficient when it came to anything outside the British Commonwealth ...

But my point is that we are at the mercy of the media so its integrity, its fact-checking, its honesty and its care matter if we are going to have a truthful picture of the world with which we must engage. And the media is at the mercy of governments, owners, advertisers, politicians, spin doctors, and many other forms of pressure unless it brings great rigour, care, and integrity to the business of news collecting and presenting ...

And then there is the problem of nationalism. We want our actions to be presented in a good light to us, the Australian people, and to the rest of the world. I just came across Karl James in *Double Diamonds* about Australian commandos in WW2 who points out that the story of the 'Krait' where Australian commandos sneaked into Singapore Harbour and blew up several Japanese vessels is always presented as a story of courage and initiative but what we were never told is that it had terrible consequences for local people. "There is no doubt that the raid was bold, but its consequences were also unquestionably dire. The Japanese occupying authorities in Singapore assumed local saboteurs had conducted the attack and targeted civilian Chinese, Malay and European internees and prisoners in a series of arrests, tortures and executions. Beginning on 10 October and subsequently known as the 'Double Tenth Massacre', the crackdown went on for months.

"The Japanese *kenpetai* (military police) arrested and tortured 57 innocent people, of whom 15 died as a result."

And the story of Consul David Ross in East Timor also had consequences we never heard about. He was sent by the Japanese in Dili to take a surrender note to the Australian commandos hiding in the mountains. He decided not to return to Dili but to join the commandos and be

evacuated with them. This has always been presented as an action of courage and initiative. But when oral historian Michele Turner investigated the story she found the hostages he had left behind him in Dili, his two little Timorese ‘houseboys’, were both killed in reprisal for his non-return.

And the choice of what is news is not necessarily the same for every generation. Jane Austen has been criticized for not mentioning the Napoleonic Wars. But she had neither a close relative on the ‘front line’ nor any particular insight. She only knew what was in the newspapers and magazines and her friends and relatives no doubt read the same papers. I was reminded of this when I came on the information that it was not Ned Kelly but cricket which took front page on *The Australian*. Now we tend to think the whole country was suffused by excitement, interest, fear, concern about Kelly’s ‘exploits’ but probably the majority of people round Australia then had not even heard of him.

“Most Americans take it as a self-evident truth that America has a “free press”, that the US is promoting freedom and human rights across the globe, that the rest of the world is jealous of America’s freedom and democracy, that American wealth is a consequence of ‘free trade’, that the American way of life is the best ever devised in the history of humanity and so America, in Lincoln’s famous phrase, is ‘the last best hope for mankind’.”

From *Will America Change?* by Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies. It raises that difficult question: is there such a thing as a truly free press? Can there ever be such a beastie? I can’t see how. And would we want it if we could have it?

“Although politicians have frequently relied on ghostwriters in the past, in modern times increased reliance on speechwriters raises important issues of authorship. The use of speechwriters may be seen as part of a wider process of media management ‘whereby political actors may seek to control, manipulate or influence media organizations in ways which correspond with their political objectives’ (McNair 2003:135). The role of speechwriters is to develop a rhetoric that reinforces the myths that assist in creating a politician’s image. Speechwriters only choose words that fit the politician’s image and what is important is how the politician is presented. In the world of contemporary political marketing, authorship relies on a team of skilled individuals – each with their own areas of expertise. But rhetoric can only communicate effectively when it complies with the myths of a unique political image that is ‘owned’ by the politician.

“Though modern political speeches are generally the outcome of a collaborative effort, choices of language are intended to create the myths that will legitimise the individual politician who delivers them. The political speaker is more than a mere mouthpiece in this process because ultimately he or she has the opportunity to edit the content of the speech and to improvise in its style of delivery. Though the words he or she utters may originate in the minds of invisible others, the politician is ultimately accountable for them. What is said is recorded in official sources (e.g. *Hansard*) and may subsequently be quoted back to the source who cannot deny or disown it. The role of speechwriters is, then, to support the marketing of a ‘brand’ that is created by the individual politician and therefore it is the politician who must be considered as the author of his or her speeches.”

Politicians and Rhetoric by Jonathan Charteris-Black.

John McWhorter wrote in *Doing Our Own Thing* (which has the sub-title ‘The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should, Like, Care’): “Today, a few magazines aimed at the kind of people who listen to NPR print poetry. But through the twenties,

verse was regularly scattered around even humble daily newspapers. It's one of the odder things about trawling through microfilm of dailies of the time. Little of this coy doggerel was exactly for the ages, and it was often used just to fill extra space—hungry journalists got paid for it by the yard. But this still meant that poetry was part of John Q. Public's print world in a way that it is not for today's Justin Q. Public. In 1918, Howard Dietz, later a top Broadway lyricist, wrote a review in rhyme of one of H. L. Mencken's early books: "H. L. Mencken will surprise you / With the smartness from his pen: / Read this volume, we advise you— / Read it once and then again."

"Of course, to write a book review in rhyme was a joke even then—but we don't joke much in rhyme today. And recall that "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" was introduced in newspapers—and then consider that no such narrative poem could emerge and catch on today."

He is writing about the USA but things aren't much different here. Poetry gets published but you have to go out and look for it. It doesn't get delivered to your door to be read while you drink your breakfast coffee.

Colin Thiele bemoaned this lack in his poem 'Daily Papers' in which he wrote:

Headlines full of shock and horror,
Folly, selfishness and greed,
Lurid ads—page twelve to twenty—
So you'll buy what you don't need.

Nothing here of real importance—
Not a poem or a song,
Not a moral issue grappled,
Not a move to right a wrong.

Many years ago my mother had a poem in *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba's daily, called 'The Dumping Season'—

Season of mirth and mellow heartiness!
The time when friends, long parted, meet again
and tak' a cup of kindness, as of old;
when school bells call no more, but in their place
carols ring out, and fill the heedless ears
of busy crowds in each department store;
when suitcases are packed and car-boots filled
with golf bags, picnic baskets, fishing gear
and cartons, brimmed with brightly-papered gifts.

Now is the time when pets become a bore.
We can't take Fido with us to the coast,
and boarding kennels are so dear, you know.
Anyway, now that he has grown so big
the kids don't play with him the way they did
when he was just a puppy. And besides
the cost of feeding him is so much more
than it was then. Let's take him for a drive
and drop him off near some nice homely farm.
It's likely that he'll find a happy home—
or else a car will knock him. Either way
we'll have him off our hands. There's pussy too.

Of course we meant to get our puss fixed up
but somehow put it off, and now, confound her,
she's in the family way. No time to lose;
out to the rubbish dump with her! I've heard there's lots
of rats and mice around a dump.
She'll live in comfort. Hope so, anyway.
Don't tell the kids. We'll say she's strayed away.

Okay, that's settled. Now we'd better look
at that gift-list. No one must be missed out.
This is the time of gladness and goodwill.
And so—a happy Christmas everyone.

—and a lot of people thanked her for it. It was something people had been vaguely aware of, the dumping of unwanted pets, but her poem brought their concerns into sharper focus. Not 'for the ages' perhaps but poetry *can* influence readers of newspapers ...

* * * * *

Jessica Mitford belonged to the family of Mitford girls who were mostly writers. Interestingly Edith Efron had been best friends with Ayn Rand but she later said of her: "There is no way to communicate how crazy she was." I wonder if family life for the Mitfords was a hotbed of jealousy and competition or a wonderful time of sharing, support, and cross-fertilization? I suspect they too were at times tempted to describe their siblings as 'crazy' ... particularly their sister Unity who sat adoringly at the feet of Hitler rather than writing tough 'muckraker' style exposés of Nazi Germany ...

* * * * *

September 12: Charles Grant
September 13: Roald Dahl
 J. B. Priestley
September 14: Eric Bentley
September 15: Agatha Christie
 James Fenimore Cooper
September 16: Alfred Noyes
 Andrew Sant
September 17: William Carlos Williams
September 18: Dr Samuel Johnson

* * * * *

"A few years ago, the excellent education supplement of the *Guardian* carried a series of articles under the general heading of 'Education 2000'. The writers were fairly representative of educational and political orthodoxies; much emphasis was laid upon training, skills, organisation, from contributors of the left and the right alike. The week after the series ended, there was a letter from someone who had long been engaged in some less orthodox experiments in private education; it pointed out rather acidly that not a single article in the series appeared to have contained the words 'childhood' or 'play'.

"This is a heavy indictment; an accurate one, unfortunately, as far as this (in many way admirable) series was concerned, and so a pretty accurate measure of the orthodoxies represented. What it speaks of is a profound *impatience*. Childhood, after all, is a period we've come to think of as 'latency', the time before certain determinations and decisions have to be made. But to manage such a period requires a certain confidence that the society we inhabit has the resources to carry passengers, a confidence that we know how to live alongside people whose

participation in our social forms is not like ours. It is not that the child doesn't have a share in society; but, on the whole, developed and not-so-developed cultures alike have granted that the child does not have the same kind of negotiating role in society as the adult. Hence, of course, the prevalence of rituals of transition — putting on the *toga virilis*, adolescent circumcision, bar-mitzvah ... The child is brought out of a latent or free-floating state to become a social agent like you and me. But this implies that we as adult social agents are obliged to bear with what goes before, with the indeterminacies of childhood. A society with clearly marked transitional rituals is committed to *guaranteeing* the integrity of such a period; and a society for which the education of children is essentially about pressing the child into adult or pseudo-adult roles as fast as possible, is one that has lost patience with that kind of commitment.”

Rowan Williams in *Lost Icons*.

Hester Thrale, long time friend of Dr Johnson, said of her 2-year-old daughter, Queeney, “She repeats the Pater Noster, the three Christian virtues, and the signs of the Zodiac in Watts’ verses; she likewise knows them on the globe perfectly well ... She knows her nine figures and the simplest combinations of them; but none beyond a hundred; she knows all the heathen Deities by their Attributes and counts to 20 without missing one.” Mrs Thrale wrote this in her *Family Book* of 1764. I couldn’t help wondering if Queeney’s mother was hoping to impress Dr Johnson or whether the families of intellectuals then pushed their children into these kinds of ‘party pieces’ or whether she had a very precocious daughter.

At the other end of the scale were the children who received little or no education and for whom childhood was a time of exploitation, neglect, or abuse. “From the middle of the seventeenth century until the present day, the English attitude to sex in culture became increasingly tormented and dissociated. A combination of titillation, furtive coarseness, and hypocritical prudery may be found in the work of Boswell, as a characteristic bourgeois. While no doubt most individuals honoured relationship and the family, there grew, in a large area of English culture, a monstrous split between outward gentility, and a concealed savagery, while only rare characters such as Blake spoke up for open love and honest integration. In Victorian England there was an outward suppression of any reference to sexuality. Yet rich Victorian gentlemen in London expected to be able to go to a brothel where they could violate a terrified child of eight, in a strait-waistcoat, if need be. When a famous “madame” of one of these brothels was discharged from a court hearing, her carriage was drawn by cheering officers of a Guards regiment. Josephine Baker and others strove to obtain legislation against child prostitution and other evils, in the face of vituperation and opposition, even from cultured individuals among the ruling classes of London. Yet the child victims were often turned, bleeding and shocked, into the streets.”

Pornography. The Longford Report.

Not many writers, not many *people*, speak of a childhood in which they would not change things.

“I think I was extraordinarily lucky to be born into a family about whom I have nothing but good memories. I was lonely sometimes, I suppose – feeling that I would not be successful because I was fat, for example – but that was only outside home: at home I never felt fat. At home I felt very loved and very special. My sisters, my brother and I have all remained extremely friendly and when we talk and think back on our childhood, we do so with laughter and affection, not with any sense of fear or dread. We simply think how lucky we were.”

Maeve Binchy in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Girl*.

And we still flounder around trying to decide how we should treat children and childhood. I would like to think that we have done away with the worst abuses of the past but even that isn't guaranteed. And as more and more books come out bewailing the ways in which business, from giant corporations to furtive porn-purveyors, are taking over childhood we are right to be worried ...

*

Beryl Bainbridge wrote a novel *According to Queeney* in which she takes Queeney Thrale as the person she can use to look at Dr Johnson, his life, and female companions and minions. She has Queeney say, "Though Mr Boswell and Mrs Piozzi have frequently asserted that the pet name of Queeney was given me by Dr Johnson, it is my belief that it was my dear father who first called me so. First I was his Queen Esther, then his Hetty, then his Queeney, the change taking place in about my third year."

Beryl Bainbridge writes well but I found it hard to warm to any of her characters. Only some vague sympathy for Mrs Thrale with her endless childbearing to a tedious stupid and selfish husband (and the deaths of most of her children) and all the time required to play hostess to demanding guests like Dr Johnson. The women, and several men, circle the ponderous, testy, self-centred figure of Dr Johnson and even when he isn't present there is the feeling that the characters are taking into account his ideas, his beliefs, and his wishes.

Queeney, despite her early childhood education, did not turn into either a child prodigy or an intelligent fulfilled adult. Perhaps she would have been happier just playing ...

Bainbridge writes:

" 'The inoculation against the small-pox is a success,' Mrs Thrale announced. 'Dr Sutton assures me all danger is past.'

The compliments on her daughter's prettiness – such lovely eyes, such a winsome curve to her mouth – provoked her into boasting of Queeney's more important attributes. She said, 'She knows the compass as perfectly as any mariner upon the sea, is mistress of the solar system and the signs of the Zodiac...'

'What a little marvel,' babbled Mrs Jackson.

'...and is thoroughly acquainted with the difference between the Ecliptick and Equator. She is also able to pronounce the names of all the capitals of Europe, recite the paternoster, the three Christian virtues in English...'

'A little marvel,' repeated Mrs Jackson, who had no children of her own, and was glad of it.

'...also the four Cardinal ones in Latin.' Mrs Thrale's last words were rendered almost inaudible by a tremendous clearing of the throat executed by Mr Johnson. She looked at him and saw that he was frowning, and knew the cause, for he had once told her that as a clever child he had suffered much from being put on show by his father. All the same, she saw no reason to subdue her own motherly pride. Raising her voice, she said, 'In the last few months she has learnt to recount with near perfect accuracy, the Judgement of Paris and the legend of Perseus and Andromeda.'

At this Mr Johnson gave vent to what could only be described as a warning growl. The dog Belle, wheezing at Mrs Salusbury's feet, struggled upright and waddled to the door. Taking a book from his pocket, Mr Johnson turned his back on the room.

'Do please get the child to read to us,' pleaded the silly Mrs Jackson.

'She cannot read,' Mrs Thrale admitted, and called for Queeney to be returned to the nursery."

* * * * *

September 19: William Golding

Arthur Rackham
September 20: Upton Sinclair
George Martin
Maxwell Perkins
September 21: H. G. Wells
Stephen King
September 22: Fay Weldon
Dannie Abse
September 23: Alan Villiers

* * * * *

“ ‘Mr Ford wants to hear some of your stories, Captain Jim,’ said Anne. ‘Tell him the one about the captain who went crazy and imagined he was the Flying Dutchman.’

This was Captain Jim’s best story. It was a compound of horror and humour, and though Anne had heard it several times she laughed as heartily and shivered as fearsomely over it as Mr Ford did.”

From *Anne’s House of Dreams* by L. M. Montgomery.

I had always been under the impression that the Flying Dutchman was a ship doomed to sail the oceans forever, sometimes appearing out of the fog and cloud like a ghostly shape. So did the captain imagine he was the ship itself or the captain of the doomed vessel?

But then I came upon this curious story by Alan Villiers in his book *The Indian Ocean*, “Of the three great oceans, the Indian was, upon the whole, always the most kindly to sailing-ships.” But this did not prevent it also being a place of mystery. “In the neighbourhood of the Cape of Good Hope oddities of nature are sometimes noted. The presence of the Agulhas Bank off the south-eastern tip of Africa, the meeting and intermingling of hot and cold waters brought there by currents from warm areas and from the Antarctic ice, and the disturbed meteorological conditions there generally, set up extraordinary cloud-forms and illusions. It was surely one of these which was the origin of the *Flying Dutchman* fable—that phantom ship which is doomed for ever to sail in those turbulent waters and to know no peace, and bring none to any mariners whose unfortunate eyes may fall upon its ghostly shape. The original *Flying Dutchman* was possibly nothing more nor less than a curious cloud. It is frequently said, even by sailors, that to sight the *Flying Dutchman* meant doom to a ship and all on board, but this was not the old belief when such superstitions really were important. The Dutchman himself was alleged always to put out a boat and visit ships which were doomed, sometimes sending letters to be mailed at the next port. If these were received, then the fate of the vessel was sealed, and every soul would perish. There are many myths about the *Flying Dutchman*, but there is a basis of truth in some of them. There is, at any rate, the case of the curious ship seen by H.M. Frigate *Leven* while on passage from Algoa Bay towards the Cape in 1824. The *Leven* had been accompanied by the smaller *Barracouta*, but later this vessel parted company.

“In the evening of the 6th of April,” writes Captain Owen of the *Leven*, “when off Point Danger, the *Barracouta* was seen about two miles to leeward: struck with the singularity of her being so soon after us, we at first concluded that it could not be she: but the peculiarity of her rigging and other circumstances convinced us that we were not mistaken: nay, so distinctly was she seen, that many well-known faces could be observed on deck, looking towards our ship. After keeping thus for some time, we became surprised that she made no effort to join us, but on the contrary, stood away.... At sunset it was observed that she hove-to, and sent a boat away, apparently for the purpose of picking up a man over-board. During the night we could not distinguish any light or other indication of her. The next morning we anchored in Simon’s Bay where, for a whole week, we were in anxious expectation of her arrival; but it afterwards

appeared that at this very period the *Barracouta* must have been three hundred miles from us, and no other vessel of the same class was ever seen about the Cape.”

“No explanation was ever found of this singular phenomenon.”

* * * * *

Alan Villiers in *The War with Cape Horn* writes of the dangers to the seamen on the sailing ships, the men who were washed overboard, fell from the rigging, caught infections and suffered terrible frostbite, and at times suffered all kinds of abuse. He writes, “The deliberately brutal treatment of seamen in many American ships, called hazing, designed to drive them out of the ship without their pay, is well documented in the ‘Red Record’, a sort of supplement of maritime evil published periodically in the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* of San Francisco, over a long period. The ‘Record’ was kept by a Scots American named Walter MacArthur, who had served in hellships in the 1880s. Though he lived quietly alone in San Francisco until he was well past eighty, he never forgot the brutalities of the callous buckos. For several decades, from the Eighties to the early years of the twentieth century, he compiled case histories of indefensible nastinesses perpetrated against deep-sea seamen serving in American ships, with names, dates, witnesses: but it took a long time for the appalling facts to arouse any interest ashore. It was 1915 before some abuses were corrected by legislation. By that time, many of the deep-sea ships were gone. MacArthur plugged away with his ‘Red Record’, living quietly in his later years in the Terminal Hotel on lower Market Street in San Francisco. Here Captain Harold Huycke, well-known American and international maritime historian, knew him. Files of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* are kept at the San Francisco Library and in the Maritime Museum of that city. MacArthur died unnoticed in the early 1940s.”

And then there were the many things which happened to the ships, rocks and reefs, dismasting, cargoes which shifted or burned or exploded. Some ships simply disappeared. There were insurance scams, masters who went mad, ships which became unsailable because of loss of masts, sails, rigging, and which drifted sometimes for weeks before the crews could be rescued or reach land in lifeboats. Villiers tells of a sailing ship seen completely encased in an iceberg. And he tells the story of the *Deudraeth Castle* off Cape Horn. She lost her mast in a gale but was fortunate in that another ship, the *Pass of Killiecrankie*, was able to get everyone off despite the big seas. Next day the abandoned ship was sighted by the *Scottish Isles*. “But no canvas swelled out from her yards. No one climbed into her rigging. The last glimpse he had of her showed her still rolling sluggishly like an abandoned vessel, coming up and falling off, alone by herself in the sea.

A snow squall shut her in. The *Scottish Isles* slugged on alone.”

Normally, when a vessel was abandoned, the hatches were left open so the sea would enter and quickly sink the ship so it would not become a hazard to other ships in the busy shipping lanes. But the *Deudraeth Castle* refused to sink. Months later she was sighted to the south of the Falklands, slowly sailing eastwards, uninhabited but brave in her lonely voyage. When and where she finally gave up the ghost isn’t known. But was such a ship the origin of The Flying Dutchman legend?

In *Without Trace* by John Harris there is this intriguing little snippet: “The Flying Dutchman, the story of the sea captain known variously as Cornelius Venderdecken, van der Straaten or even the buccaneer, Soortebeker—who was condemned by God to sail perpetually around the Cape of Good Hope in a ghost ship—could be explained by St. Elmo’s fire, the strange natural electric phenomenon that brushes off the tops of ships’ masts, or by the mirages that occur off that coast. The author himself has seen ships there in positions where they couldn’t possibly have been and experienced the strange steep seas off the East African coast. ... Every

sailor knows the stories and many of them even have a logical explanation. Yet the Flying Dutchman was said to have been seen quite distinctly in 1881 from the brig *Bacchante*, among whose passengers was a young man who later became King George V.”

Harris looked at a number of such mysterious disappearances. “When the five-masted schooner *Carroll A. Deering* was sighted on January 31, 1921, aground on the Diamond Shoals, off Cape Hatteras, North Carolina, with all sails set despite the stormy weather and with not a living thing on board save two cats, it started one of the classic mysteries of the sea.” He also says, “According to Alan Villiers, ships which simply disappeared leaving no trace vanished at a rate of five to 10 a year in the 16 years before 1975, and between January 1961 and January 1971, 70 merchantmen, ranging in size from very small to more than 13,000 tons, were officially posted missing at Lloyds in London.”

Where the ship itself is found there is some chance of unraveling the mystery. “In 1913 a ship was sighted off Tierra del Fuego which appeared to be totally green from masthead to waterline. This green, it was realized, was seaweed and mould. When boarded, the ship seemed to be the steamship *Marlborough*, of Glasgow, which had sailed from New Zealand in 1890 with sheep and passengers. She was literally filled with bones—those of her cargo of sheep and of her passengers. Since her log was indecipherable, it could only be assumed that an epidemic or poisoned food had killed the passengers and crew, and the sheep had starved to death.”

But sometimes nothing is found. No ship, no people, no lifeboats, no debris, no SOS message. The US Navy collier *Cyclops* was one of these. A 10,000 ton ship launched in 1910 it disappeared while on a voyage from Brazil to the USA in 1918 carrying a cargo of manganese and coal. It had 304 people on board including the German-born but naturalized-American captain. All kinds of theories were put forward. The cargo had shifted, exploded, the ship had run into bad weather, pirates, giant sea monsters, it was to do with the Bermuda Triangle ... and because it was war time it was suggested that the captain had taken the ship to a German port or rendezvoused with a German ship—or alternatively that it had been hit by a German torpedo or mine. Many years later someone thought they had found the sunken ship but when investigated it proved to be a Greek vessel which had also gone missing. Someone looking at the *Cyclops*’ sister ships found that sulphurous coal had gradually eaten away the metal leaving frail and easily-damaged beams and struts. Could the same thing have happened to the *Cyclops*? That in heavy weather it had broken apart? Perhaps. But it didn’t explain the lack of a mayday call, the lack of debris or bodies washing up.

I am always inclined to believe in simple everyday explanations. But I still find it strange that a 10,000 ton vessel could disappear without trace.

“Frank Worsley, who was with Sir Ernest Shackleton on the 800-mile open-boat journey that brought his expedition back to safety in 1915 after his ship, *Endurance*, had been destroyed by the Antarctic ice, described how, when they went ashore on South Georgia between Cape Horn and the Antarctic, they found themselves in a strange cemetery of ships. He described a pile of driftwood, covering half an acre and from four to eight feet high in places: “...lower masts, topmasts, a great mainyard, ships’ timbers, bones of brave ships and bones of brave men. Most of it had drifted a thousand miles from Cape Horn, some of it two thousand miles or more.”

“Swept before the westerly gales onto the wild South Georgian coast, the easterly current, by some strange freak of eddies, had thrown it up in this one spot. Piled in utter confusion lay beautifully carved figureheads, well-turned teak stanchions with brass caps, handrails clothed in canvas coachwhipping and finished with Turks’ heads, cabin doors, broken skylights, teak scuttles, binnacle stands, boats’ skids, gratings, headboards, barricoes, oars and harness casks.

Nothing, he said, was identifiable because the weather had eroded paint and worn away names, but they were all from ships which must have been reported lost without trace.”

Alan Villiers began his career as a journalist with Hobart’s *Mercury* but the Tasmanian mystery which has remained with me is the one in Harry O’Day’s *Wrecks in Tasmanian Waters*:

“In June (1856) the wreck of an unknown vessel of about 200 tons was discovered on the beach at Piper’s River. As it was buried in the sand it was thought to have been there some time.” In that laconic entry is all the mystery of lost ships and lost people ...

* * * * *

September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald

Charles Birkin
Horace Walpole
Rhys Hughes

* * * * *

“I accept Jack’s Gatsby connection because he knew Edward Fuller, Fitzgerald’s neighbor on Long Island who was the inspiration for Gatsby. Fuller and Rothstein were thick in stocks, bonds, and bucketshops when Jack was bodyguarding Rothstein. And, of course, Fitzgerald painted a grotesque, comic picture of Rothstein himself in *Gatsby*, wearing human molar cuff buttons and spouting a thick Jewish accent, another reason Jack would have read the book.”

Legs by William Kennedy. Legs was Jack ‘Legs’ Diamond; a gangster in 1920s New York.

*

Many people have read things into Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* but Sarah Churchwell in *Careless People* takes this process much further. She writes, “The Hall-Mills case has, until now, been considered in relation to *The Great Gatsby* only by a handful of scholars in brief articles, and in a few footnotes, but it is my contention that this remarkable story amplifies and enriches the story of *Gatsby* in many more ways than have yet been appreciated. Everyone knows that *The Great Gatsby* offers a connoisseur’s guide to the glamour and glitter of the jazz age, but the world that furnished *Gatsby* is far darker – and stranger – than perhaps we recognize.”

Eleanor Mills and Edward Hall were married to other people but having an affair when someone murdered them both. Probably because of an appallingly inept police investigation this double murder was never solved. But it was a potent source of rumour and speculation at the time Fitzgerald was writing *Gatsby*.

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“In his *Natural History of Alcoholism*, Dr. George Vaillant defined alcoholism as a disease in which “loss of voluntary control over alcohol consumption becomes a necessary and sufficient cause for much of an individual’s social, psychological and physical morbidity.” The way in which the disease developed and its outward manifestations varied markedly from one person to another, as in the cases of Fitzgerald and Hemingway. But there can be no doubt that both of them were in the grip of alcohol, and could not shake free of it short of the grave. In their misfortune, they joined a host of American writers of the early and middle twentieth century. Alcoholism among these writers, Goodwin asserted, constituted an “epidemic.” Among others the roster includes E.A.Robinson, Dreiser, Stephen Crane, London, Hart Crane, O’Neill, Lardner, Lewis, Faulkner, Wolfe, Millay, Parker, Benchley, Thurber, O’Hara, Steinbeck, Hammett, Chandler, Cummings, Roethke, Berryman, Tennessee Williams, Inge, Capote, Saroyan, Aitken, Kerouac, Agee, James Jones, Lowell, Jarrell, Sexton, Cheever, Stafford, and Carver. Excessive drinking, it seemed clear, was an occupational hazard. According to Goodwin only bartenders had higher rates of alcoholism than writers.

“One reason for the epidemic was the epidemic itself. If all these great writers were drunks, didn’t it follow that you had to drink to be a great writer? Fitzgerald embraced that notion when he challenged a correspondent to “name a single American artist except James & Whistler [both of whom lived in England] who didn’t die of drink.” American culture came to expect such self-destruction from its artists. As the poet Donald Hall expressed it, “[t]here seems to be an assumption, widely held and all but declared, that it is *natural* to want to destroy yourself.” This pernicious doctrine encouraged young writers to emulate the Berrymans and O’Neills and Fitzgeralds by drinking themselves into insensibility while “consumers of vicarious death” sat on the sidelines and applauded. The applause, Hall felt, should be reserved for writers who survived. Self-destruction was no sure sign of genius, and genius no excuse for self-destruction.”

Hemingway Vs. Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship by Scott Donaldson.

Hemingway wrote of his first meeting with Fitzgerald in Paris in *A Moveable Feast*: “The first time I ever met Scott Fitzgerald a very strange thing happened. Many strange things happened with Scott but this one I was never able to forget. He had come into the Dingo bar in the rue Delambre where I was sitting with some completely worthless characters, had introduced himself and introduced a tall, pleasant man who was with him as Dunc Chaplin, the famous pitcher. I had not followed Princeton baseball and had never heard of Dunc Chaplin but he was extraordinarily nice, unworried, relaxed and friendly and I much preferred him to Scott.

“Scott was a man then who looked like a boy with a face between handsome and pretty. He had very fair wavy hair, a high forehead, excited eyes and a delicate long-lipped Irish mouth that, on a girl, would have been the mouth of a beauty. His chin was well built and he had good ears and a handsome, almost beautiful, unmarked nose. This should not have added up to a pretty face, but that came from the coloring, the very fair hair and the mouth. The mouth worried you until you knew him and then it worried you more.”

Their relationship never really fought free of this ambivalence and I cannot help wondering if Hemingway’s feelings towards Fitzgerald and his writings were unwittingly influenced by this unease with Fitzgerald’s appearance, that he secretly did not want to have a ‘pretty’ male friend.

* * * * *

George V. Higgins in *On Writing* says John O’Hara “admired Fitzgerald exceedingly (and, I think, excessively), managing to do this only by reminding himself regularly of the distinction between the work that captivated him and the often-insupportable behaviour of the writer who produced it. O’Hara was assisted in his performance of that balancing act by his clear-eyed awareness that he himself in his time had been a devil to live with, and was therefore obliged to tolerate intractable conduct by others (persons bent upon becoming writers had done well to begin by training members of their immediate families, and their friends, to practice the same sort of tolerance, another piece of ticklish business about which I have no wisdom to offer).”

O’Hara, Higgins says, was in awe of Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* which he had read as a young man and which he continued to urge readers to read—long after other readers like Higgins had come to see it as an unremarkable first effort; “I hesitate to call it “a novel”; “a pastiche,” maybe? “A collage”? It is becoming for a writer to persist into middle age in veneration of the stuff that seized his youthful mind and inspired him to mimicry, but it is stupid for later arrivals to accept his loyal pronouncements at face value.”

Yet first books can often offset deficiencies in structure, plot, or characterization with a youthful exuberance, naivete or quirkiness. They can have a sense of lightness, freshness, which

later books, when fame and attention has settled on the writer's shoulders, palpably lack. Later books may seem more profound, may dig deeper, may tackle bigger issue, but sometimes something is lost in that development of the writer.

Higgins goes on to say, "I bring all this up for two reasons that I think are important to the developing writer. The first is that F. Scott Fitzgerald's work is vastly overrated. The second is that the work of his loyal disciple, John O'Hara, is astoundingly underrated. The result is that Americans who would like to become writers, at the shag end of the twentieth century, get hammered in schools with the mythology that Scott Fitzgerald was a great American writer of the twentieth century (O'Hara was strident in his averments that Fitzgerald merited a Pulitzer and a Nobel far more than did Pearl Buck or Sinclair Lewis, and he was right about that), and then they go and believe it."

And then he undermines that cautious support for Fitzgerald's work by saying, "F. Scott Fitzgerald *wrote* one novel. One. Count it. One. It was a splendid novel, *The Great Gatsby*. He *published This Side of Paradise*, which was a stinker, and *The Beautiful and Damned*, which was an even bigger stinker, and he *published Tender is the Night*, which was a potentially good book that had a broken back (he rewrote the ending before it was reissued, and he still didn't have it right, and he knew it, and then he died), and after he was dead *they* published *The Last Tycoon*, which he hadn't even *finished*, not even once, before his heart attacked him."

After all those italics I wasn't sure if I wanted to go out and hunt down *This Side of Paradise* let alone any of John O'Hara's books. And curiously Fitzgerald wanted to call his novel *Among the Ash-Heaps and Millionaires* and when Maxwell Perkins demurred Fitzgerald decided to call it *Trimalchio in West Egg* and then he settled on *Gold-Hatted Gatsby*. Perhaps it was as well for posterity that Perkins' suggestion of *The Great Gatsby* prevailed.

Robert Penn Warren says Senator Huey Long was the "stimulus" behind his best-known work *All the King's Men*. Long grew up relatively poor, relatively uneducated, but steeped in both ambition and the Bible as well as biographies of rulers like Napoleon and Caesar. He was brash, "boiling with energy and of boundless ambition", he was "a wit, a deliberate vulgarian, a crusader and redeemer, an orator capable of high style or low, a philosopher of politics, and an amoral schemer." And he took the state of Louisiana on which to build his career. "Roads were foul, schools farcical, illiteracy a national scandal, per capita income abysmal and social services non-existent."

"He wasted no time on the standard demagogic appeals to the Lost Cause, the dogma of White Supremacy, or the sanctity of Southern Womanhood. He had even less time for the rhetoric of the reformer who put his trust in the goodness of human nature or the efficacy of unassisted virtue." By 1928 he was Governor and beginning to "build his roads, free bridges, schools, hospitals and university, and to establish various social services. By 1932, he was United States Senator. By 1935, by methods that would not always bear legal or moral scrutiny, he had liquidated all serious opposition in Louisiana; had centralised, to a degree never paralleled in any state, all power in, for all practical purposes, his own hands, executive, legislative and judicial; had gained a reputation that, on the mere rumor of a speech by Huey, would pack the galleries of the Senate Chamber of the national capitol; and had, by his charisma and radical economic program, made himself the only figure that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, himself no mean or compunction-bound operator, feared in the impending presidential election of 1936."

But it never came to this clash of titans. He was shot down by an unknown assailant in Baton Rouge and died on 10 September 1935.

He gave hope for work and modest prosperity during the Depression in Louisiana. That he was a power-hungry fascist-minded demagogue probably didn't matter to a lot of people desperate for jobs and incomes. What he thought and what he believed and what he did wasn't the question many people were asking.

Although Robert Penn Warren called him 'the Boss' in his novel I don't think it is the best way for a non-American (and even possibly an American reader) to gain an insight into the strange and dramatic life of Huey Long. For that I think you need to look to non-fiction. Of course *The Great Gatsby* didn't have the same straightforward basis in reality. However real its inspiration it didn't matter to history ...

Craig Raine wrote a series of literary essays he brought together under the title *In Defense of T. S. Eliot* and he includes this curious insight into Scott Fitzgerald's first novel *This Side of Paradise* which he calls "a seriously underrated novel". "The envious Edmund Wilson was the first of Fitzgerald's friends to join the chorus of friendly disparagement. For him, the novel had verve, but it was not 'about anything', was 'illiterate' and was derivative from 'an inferior model', Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street*. None of these three remarks should be accepted without reservation. As qualifications, they need qualifications. *This Side of Paradise* is indebted to *Sinister Street* – Fitzgerald mentions it by name and alludes to it – but so is Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a novel to which Fitzgerald is more profoundly indebted – indeed, more richly indebted."

So what of *Sinister Street*? Why were other writers turning to it for ideas? Raine says it came out in two volumes in 1913 and 1914 and made a sensation because of its sexual frankness. "But its real merits lay in Mackenzie's meticulously detailed rendition of childhood – teaching timetables reproduced *in extenso*; the SALVE on the doormat; a globe with a snow-storm and 'a weather-worn tin figure with a green face, blue legs and an unpainted coat'; mittens to prevent thumb-sucking. It is this spirit of unabashed accumulation which encouraged Joyce to revise *Stephen Hero*. On the one hand, Joyce felt the need for greater formal unity and omitted telling episodes (like Isabel's death from gynaecological complications) in order to focus his theme of *non serviam*. On the other hand, Joyce recognized and radicalized Mackenzie's inventory of childhood: in his more thorough account, motherese and bed-wetting find their place. Mackenzie, too, is the source for Stephen's protest to Rector Conmee after his unjust pandying by Father Dolan – an incident of which there is no autobiographical trace in Joyce's life" and he says of Fitzgerald's work that there is "influence and plagiarism" and that "it should be said that Mackenzie's undoubted originality itself derives from Kipling's portrait of an unhappy childhood in 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' ... But how much does *This Side of Paradise* owe to *Sinister Street*?"

Unless someone has actually lifted great chunks that is a very hard question to answer. That something doesn't come directly from your own childhood doesn't mean you haven't heard friends, relatives, schoolmates, talking about it.

* * * * *

Olivia Laing wrote in *The Trip to Echo Spring: Why Writers Drink*, "John Cheever and Raymond Carver are hardly the only writers whose lives were made desolate by alcohol. Alongside them come Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Tennessee Williams, Jean Rhys, Patricia Highsmith, Truman Capote, Dylan Thomas, Marguerite Duras, Hart Crane, John Berryman, Jack London, Elizabeth Bishop, Raymond Chandler – the list staggers on. As Lewis Hyde observes in his essay 'Alcohol and Poetry', 'four of the six Americans who have won the Nobel Prize for literature were alcoholic. About half of our alcoholic writers eventually killed themselves.' "

This myth is a very powerful and enduring one: that you have to drink to write, that good writers drink, that drink lubricates the imagination and makes words flow. Though Norman Lindsay said unequivocally, “Drunks do not create the basis of a national literature in prose and poetry”, in his *Bohemians at The Bulletin*. In the case of writers who developed during the Prohibition Era in the US there was probably the added cachet to their drinking: they were doing something daring, lawless, wicked, thumbing their noses at the staid, the law-abiding, the healthy, the proper, the good.

Fitzgerald was writing his Pat Hobby stories when he died. Pat Hobby was a Hollywood scriptwriter who has run out of ideas, energy, enthusiasm, and would like to be paid for doing nothing. His diet was far from ideal: “Benzedrine and great drafts of coffee woke him in the morning, whiskey anesthetized him at night.” To what extent his rather dreary life mirrors that of Fitzgerald himself I cannot say. Fitzgerald says of him, “Pat Hobby could always get on the lot. He had worked there fifteen years on and off – chiefly off during the past five – and most of the studio police knew him. If tough customers on watch asked to see his studio card he could get in by phoning Lou, the bookie. For Lou also, the studio had been home for many years.

“Pat was forty-nine. He was a writer but he had never written much, nor even read all the ‘originals’ he worked from, because it made his head bang to read much. But the good old silent days you got somebody’s plot and a smart secretary and gulped Benzedrine ‘structure’ at her six or eight hours every week. The director took care of the gags. After talkies came he always teamed up with some man who wrote dialogue. Some young man who liked to work.

‘I’ve got a list of credits second to none,’ he told Jack Berners. ‘All I need is an idea and to work with somebody who isn’t all wet.’

He had buttonholed Jack outside the production office as Jack was going to lunch and they walked together in the direction of the commissary.

‘You bring me an idea,’ said Jack Berners. ‘Things are tight. We can’t put a man on salary unless he’s got an idea.’

‘How can you get ideas off salary?’ Pat demanded – then he added hastily: ‘Anyhow I got the germ of an idea that I could be telling you all about at lunch.’

Something might come to him at lunch. There was Baer’s notion about the boy scout. But Jack said cheerfully:

‘I’ve got a date for lunch, Pat. Write it out and send it around, eh?’

He felt cruel because he knew Pat couldn’t write anything out but he was having story trouble himself. The war had just broken out and every producer on the lot wanted to end their current stories with the hero going to war. And Jack Berners felt he had thought of that first for his production.

‘So write it out, eh?’

When Pat didn’t answer Jack looked at him – he saw a sort of whipped misery in Pat’s eye that reminded him of his own father. Pat had been in the money before Jack was out of college – with three cars and a chicken over every garage. Now his clothes looked as if he’d been standing at Hollywood and Vine for three years.”

The image of the successful writer going downhill probably mirrors Fitzgerald. By 1923 he was earning \$36,000 a year; by 1929 he was earning \$4,000 for a single short story; only Sinclair Lewus was out-earning him. By the time he wrote the Pat Hobby stories Fitzgerald was getting hundred dollar advances for these stories which suggests his publisher felt sorry for the man and hoped the name would still sell these unremarkable and rather dreary stories. And if there is a moral in there somewhere it probably is: drink and Hollywood may seem glamorous when you’re young and hopeful and tasting your first successes but ultimately they destroy you.

Fitzgerald died in Hollywood in 1940 ...

Olivia Laing also says, “Chronic drinking causes more permanent disturbances in what’s known prettily as the *sleep circuitry*: damage that can persist long after sobriety has been attained. According to a paper by Kirk Brower entitled ‘Alcohol’s Effects on Sleep in Alcoholics’, sleep problems are more common among alcoholics than the population at large. What’s more, ‘sleep problems may predispose some people to developing alcohol problems’, and are in addition often implicated in relapse.”

Especially: “Both F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway suffered from insomnia, and their writing on the subject is full of submerged clues about their drinking. The two men first met in May 1925 in the Dingo American Bar on the Rue Delambre in Paris, when Fitzgerald was twenty-eight and Hemingway was twenty-five. At the time, Fitzgerald was one of America’s best known and best paid short story writers. He was the author of three novels, *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned* and *The Great Gatsby*, which had been published a few weeks before. A pretty man, with neat little teeth and unmistakable Irish features, he’d been careering around Europe with his wife Zelda and their small daughter Scottie, ‘Zelda painting, me drinking,’ he recorded in his *Ledger* for the month of April, adding in June: ‘1000 parties and no work.’

“In a way, the bingeing shouldn’t have mattered. He’d just finished *Gatsby*, after all; that perfectly weighted novel.”

Well, it surely mattered if he cared about the health and safety of his little daughter.

Laing then sings her praises for the novel. “Its great strength is its indelibility: the way it enters into you, leaving a trail of images like things seen from a moving car. Jordan’s hand, lightly powdered over her tan. Gatsby flinging out armfuls of shirts for Daisy to look at: a mounting pile of apple green and coral and pale orange, monogrammed in blue. People drifting in and out of parties, or riding away on horse-back, leaving behind some lingering suggestion of a snub. A little dog sneezing in a smoky room and a woman bleeding fluently on to a tapestried couch. The owl-eyed man in the library, and Gatsby’s list of self-improvements, and Daisy being too hot and saying in her lovely throaty voice that she hopes her daughter will be a beautiful little fool. The green light winking, and Gatsby calling Nick *old sport*, and Nick thinking of catching the train back to St. Paul and seeing the shadow of holly wreaths cast on to the snow.”

So it seemed time to go back and re-read *The Great Gatsby*. In effect, it runs on twin tracks: there is the mystery of Gatsby himself. Is he a German spy, a relative of the Kaiser or nephew of von Hindenburg, or a war hero, did he go to an Oxford college or kill a man, did he inherit his money or make it in some possibly illegal way, is his name really Gatsby. And then there is the picture of the Roaring Twenties, with its dissatisfied, drifting people, drinking, smoking, dancing half the night, parasitical Bright Young Things filling up Gatsby’s mansion on Long Island. And perhaps equally importantly they are very bad drivers in very expensive cars.

It is a sad book with people who don’t know what they want or how to go about getting it. Even those you start out thinking of as happy, like Daisy Buchanan, turn out to be part of dysfunctional marriages. And in this Prohibition era the rivers of alcohol flow unimpeded. It helps to have money but it doesn’t make people happy or contented.

I enjoyed his *Gatsby*, he has a light touch and a way with words, but is it ‘great literature’? I don’t think so.

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September 25: William Faulkner

Jessica Anderson

September 26: T. S. Eliot

September 27: Cynthia Asquith
Thomas Traherne

* * * * *

Judith Wright wrote poems about the bush, birds, insects, black-white relationships; she also wrote, quite understandably, about poets such as John Shaw Neilson. But why did she write about a mystical English poet of the seventeenth century?

Can I then lose myself,
and losing find one word
that, in the face of what you were,
needs to be said or heard?

— Or speak of what has come
to your sad race
that to your clear rejoicing
we turn with such a face?

With such a face, Traherne,
as might make dumb
any but you, the man who knew
how simply truth may come:

who saw the depth of darkness
shake, part and move,
and from death's centre the light's ladder
go up from love to Love.

'Reading Thomas Traherne'

I think there is a clue to her liking of his poems or at least one of them in her poem 'Unpacking Books' in which she writes:

Traherne said nothing had been loved as much
as it deserves. Though growing old I lament
too few answers to beauty's sight and touch,
too many words, I sit here now intent
on poetry's ancient vow to celebrate lovelong
life's wholeness, spring's return, the flesh's tune.

But this doesn't really explain what of his ideas attracted her. Just that hint. So I began to keep an eye out to see if other writers had been attracted to Traherne for his poetry, for his philosophy, his ideas, his beliefs ...

F. Sherwood Taylor in *The Fourfold Vision: A Study of the Relations of Science and Religion* writes, "I pass unwillingly over much of the work of Thomas Traherne, in whose work is the same sense of the wonder and transparency of Nature, and its kinship to his own soul.

'Tis Art that hath the late invention found
Of Shutting up in little Room
Ones Endless Expectations: Men
Have in a narrow Penn
Confin'd themselves: Free souls can know no Bound

But still presume
That Treasures everywhere
From Everlasting Hills must still appear
And be to them
Joys in the New *Jerusalem*.

We first by Nature all things boundless see;
Feel all illimited: and know
No terms or Periods: But go on
Throughout the endless Throne
Of God to view His wide Eternity;
Ev'n here below
His Omnipresence we
Do pry into, *that* copious Treasury
Though men have taught
To limit and to bound our thought.

John Hadfield in his *A Book of Beauty* includes several examples of Traherne's prose and poetry. Traherne begins his poem 'The Salutation' with

These little limbs,
These eyes and hands which here I find,
This panting heart wherewith my life begins,
Where have ye been? Behind
What curtain were ye from me hid so long?
Where was, in what abyss, my new-made tongue?
and ends it with
From dust I rise,
And out of nothing now awake;
These brighter regions which salute mine eyes,
A gift from God I take.
The earth, the seas, the light, the lofty skies,
The sun and stars are mine; if these I prize.

A stranger here
Strange things doth meet, strange glory sees;
Strange treasures lodged in this fair world appear,
Strange all and new to me;
But that they mine should be, who nothing was,
That strangest is of all, yet brought to pass.

You could interpret this as an exploration of reincarnation or, as he would more likely have expressed it, the transmigration of souls. You could see it as a paean to God's gift, the miracle of life, but I gradually felt that it was about the wonder of the inanimate becoming living, breathing, speaking, glorious life.

In his *Centuries of Meditation*, written around 1670, he gives what might be his 'philosophy of life': "You never enjoy the world aright, till the Sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world and more than so, because men are in it who are everyone sole heirs

as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you can never enjoy the world.

“Till your spirit filleth the whole world, and the stars are your jewels; till you are as familiar with the ways of God in all ages as with your walk and table: till you are intimately acquainted with that shady nothing out of which the world was made: till you love men so as to desire their happiness, with a thirst equal to the zeal of your own: till you delight in God for being good to all: you never enjoy the world. Till you more feel it than your private estate, and are more present in the hemisphere, considering the glories and the beauties there, than in your own house; till you remember how lately you were made, and how wonderful it was when you came into it: and more rejoice in the palace of your glory, than if it has been made but today morning.”

“A line of poetry written in 1684 by Thomas Traherne (1637-74) – ‘A secret self I had enclos’d within’ – is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as the first occasion in which the word ‘self’ took its modern meaning of ‘a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness’.”

Richard Davenport-Hines in *The Pursuit of Oblivion*.

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Fiona Capp wrote an attractive book *My Blood’s Country* about Judith Wright and the landscapes she lived in and drew on, the New England area in her childhood, Mount Tamborine in her married life, Canberra during her later relationship with Nugget Coombs, but doesn’t mention the more nebulous landscapes out of which Thomas Traherne drew his inspiration to, in turn, inspire Wright. Perhaps the landscape which drew her to him was the one she imagined in his head rather than the one he walked upon.

Frances Parsons wrote a little book she called *Pools of Fresh Water: A Story of Healing* about her struggle with rheumatoid arthritis. She lived in an English village called Lugwardine which isn’t a name which instantly lends itself to poetry but she says Thomas Traherne incorporated it in to one of his poems: “My story takes place mainly in Lugwardine, a small village north-east of Hereford, which sits on a hill above the river Lugg and is the home of one branch of the family of Thomas Traherne, the seventeenth-century mystical poet. Although Thomas himself did not live in the village, he commemorated it in verse:

O yonder is the Moon
Newly com after me to Town,
That shin’d at Lugwardin but yesternight
Where I enjoy’d the self-same Light.”

Malcolm M. Day did a short book on Traherne, son of a shoemaker but with relatives sufficiently comfortably off that he was able to go to Oxford and become a clergyman, “Thus an early tendency to see Traherne as a charming child who insisted upon singing his lovely but meaningless Neoplatonic songs (as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch implied in *Felicities of Thomas Traherne* ...) has been changing in the last few years to an attitude of greater respect, as the genuinely profound nature of his thought has been more fully revealed.”

But the question is surely not what Quiller-Couch thought of him but how his fellow churchmen, his bishops and archbishops, his congregations, and the other poets of his time saw his work. Day writes, “Although Traherne expressed his ideas in the language of Christianity, his thinking was dominated by the concept that ultimate reality consists of the eternal ideas of all things existing infinitely and simultaneously in the Mind of God, and this concept is the single

most significant influence upon the basically meditative structures of his work as well as upon that paralleling, repetitive rhetoric which he developed and used with great skill to express his deepest beliefs.”

And the companion question about his ‘deepest beliefs’? David Scott in *Sacred Tongues* writes, “Something must have happened to Traherne to help him see as he did, so deeply, and with profound faith in the real presence of God existing in all things. There must have been some great movement of the Holy Spirit in his life to allow him to enter into the heart of God where all is hope and light. He must have been aware of all the brutality, crime, and poverty of his own day, and was not blind and uncaring towards that. The churchwarden’s account of the parish in the time of Traherne recounts that he visited the sick and the poor of the parish. It is just that he must have been continually aware, beneath all that was transitory, of the abiding sense of the eternal glory of God. Traherne saw things and people, looked under the surface, and deeply into them, so that he could see them, as their destiny might so easily transform them. He saw them as God saw them.”

He was working on his *Christian Ethicks* when he died in 1674. But it was his *Centuries of Meditation* which was finished and known. Some of his writings were lost. Several were rediscovered in the twentieth century. David Scott wrote, “How the twentieth century came to rediscover Traherne, is a fairy tale in its own right. Someone was rummaging round in a barrow of secondhand books in London, in 1896, and came across a manuscript which was first thought to be by Henry Vaughan. On closer inspection, it turned out to be the work of Thomas Traherne. In 1967, his *Commentaries of Heaven*, another manuscript, was rescued from a bonfire in Wigan, by a man looking for spare parts for a car, and just recently, in 1997, another hidden work, *The Kingdom of Heaven*, has been recognized as by Traherne; this time it was found on the shelves of the Lambeth Palace Library.” In the *Centuries* he writes, “God is the Object, and God is the Way of Enjoying ... Eternity and Time, Heaven and Earth, Kingdoms and Ages, Angels and Men, are in him to be enjoyed. In him, the fountain, in him the End; in him the Delight, the Life, the Way, in him the Glory and Crown of all.”

Some people saw his cheerfulness as facile. Couldn’t he see the terribleness of the world around him? As he lived through the English Civil War he undoubtedly could. But he could see that the behaviour of human beings, good and very often bad, did not alter the wonder and beauty of the world they had been given.

Modern readers might find his style at times declamatory, shrill even, but there is also the sense that he wanted to go out and shout his joy from the hilltops. I don’t know if that was what drew Judith Wright but it creates a way of lifting the reader above the mundane and the everyday.

1.

Sweet Infancy!
O fire of Heaven! O sacred Light!
How Fair and Bright
How great am I,
Whom all the World doth magnifie!

2.

O Heavenly Joy!
O Great and Sacred Blessedness,
Which I possess!
So great a Joy
Who did into my Armes convey!

3.

From God above
Being sent, the Heavens me enflame,
To praise his Name.
The Stars do move!
The Burning Sun doth shew his Love.

4.

O how Divine
Am I! To all this Sacred Wealth,
This Life and Health
Who raised? Who mine
Did make the same? What Hand Divine!
‘The Rapture’

* * * * *

And what of the place Thomas Traherne mentioned in verse? I came upon a little booklet called *Lugwardine in the Nineteenth Century* by their local Historical Society. There was nothing to amplify the life of Traherne in the little flour-milling town on the River Lugg but it provided me with a curious insight in to the complexities of ‘enclosure’.

“At the beginning of the nineteenth century many tenants were still farming strips in the Common Fields in the old mediaeval way. These scattered holdings were inefficient, and wasted time and labour. Farmsteads were sometimes far away from their lands; Elizabeth Pritchard had one acre of meadow land in Upper Lugg Meadow, three acres in Hephill Field, four and a half acres in Hagley Field and two and a half acres in Hynett Field. A move to enclose land came at the end of the eighteenth century; this was done by Act of Parliament when necessary; but it touched Lugwardine only at the edges, so that by the time of the 1839 Tithe Map there were still Common Fields and Meadows.”

“There was a process of consolidation of strips by sales and exchanges throughout the nineteenth century. Management was still undertaken by the Lord of the Manor, through his court which was held “according to the custom of the manor”, and all sales and exchanges had to be recorded in the Court Book. The regulation of common grazing, maintenance of fences to keep livestock off the crops, and encroachments onto the common land were all adjudicated here, and carried out by the Bailiff, who was one of the villagers. In 1823 Joseph Wainwright was ordered at the Court Leet to throw open the land he had enclosed out of the Lord’s Waste at a place called The Cottis by taking in the whole of the Common there.”

“The old meadowlands are still farmed in common today, but in the nineteenth century the strips were scattered between the River Lugg and the parish boundary along the Little Lugg; and also all the meadow on the north-east bank, land which was the Kings Haye or enclosure in past centuries. ... The divisions are marked by boundary stones still in use today.”

“Every year from Lammas (August 2nd) until Candlemas in February, the commoners were allowed to graze cattle and horses, the numbers being allocated in proportion to the acreage held. They are known as “Lammas Lands” from this usage. As the lands were unenclosed, the old office of Hayward was reinstated in 1848. The Parish Register relates it was:

“For protecting the rights of the parishioners to the aftermath in Lug-meadow”
(The aftermath is the grass-growth subsequent to the mowing.)”

“The meadows were for growing grass from February until haymaking, and animals were kept from straying onto them. Then the date for turning the cattle, sheep and goats onto the

pasture was fixed. No one who could overwinter stock on his farm was supposed to take advantage of this. Each animal was marked with the owner's mark so that the Hay Warden could contact the owner."

"Some of the Lugg Meadows near Tidnor were used for charities. In 1723 Elizabeth Hunt left the rent of 40 shillings per annum from the meadow to ten poor widows of All Saints parish in Hereford. ... Some of the fields remained partially unenclosed, with strips of arable being held by various owners."

And they often had intriguing names.

Hither Harp being "literally harp shaped".

Wilcroft being willows around a croft.

Hagley being a "wood where hawthorns were found".

And Hephill being a "hill where hips grew".

* * * * *

September 28: Ellis Peters

Prosper Mérimée

Jorge Carrera Andrade

* * * * *

I thought I knew nothing about French writer Prosper Mérimée other than that he shared a birth date with my gr-gr-grandfather but then I discovered that he wrote the story on which Bizet developed his opera *Carmen*. Friedrich Nietzsche seems to have been fond of both Mérimée's story and Bizet's music because he writes in his *The Case of Wagner*, "With this work one takes leave of the *damp* north, of all the steam of the Wagnerian ideal. Even the plot spells redemption from that. From Mérimée it still has the logic in passion, the shortest line, the *harsh* necessity; above all, it has what goes with the torrid zone: the dryness of the air, the *limpidezza* in the air. In every respect the climate is changed. Another sensuality, another sensibility speaks here, another cheerfulness. This music is cheerful, but not in a French or German way. Its cheerfulness is African; fate hangs over it; its happiness is brief, sudden, without pardon. I envy Bizet for having had the courage for this sensibility which had hitherto had no language in the cultivated music of Europe—for this more southern, brown, burnt sensibility.—How the yellow afternoons of its happiness do us good! We look into the distance as we listen: did we ever find the sea smoother?—And how soothingly the Moorish dance speaks to us? How even our insatiability for once gets to know satiety in this lascivious melancholy!"

I also didn't know he was a drug addict or an Inspector of Historic Monuments. Richard Davenport-Hines in *The Pursuit of Oblivion* says of him, "Always oversusceptible to the opinions and antics of his friends, Mérimée understood the meaning of Stendahl's motto for the post-Napoleonic era: Hide your self. He cloaked his feelings when young under the pose of a cold, smooth, raffish and foul-mouthed cynic. With the studied and dominating diction of an actor, he protected himself with a series of segmented identities for use with his different sets of friends: his segmentations had much more ruthless control than De Quincey's. His drug usage was similarly controlled and demarcated. As a traveller in the Middle East, his experiences were relaxed, pleasurable and humorous. At Tyre in 1841 'we indulged ourselves deliciously for two days doing *kef* ... having the best view in the world from our divan and nourished by first-rate kebabs', he wrote to a Paris friend. ... In France Mérimée needed sedation to cope with the strain of living; he insulated himself from the discomfort of human feelings with the help of drugs ... Narcotics and hallucinogens for him were not a symptom of self-hatred, a way to flirt with self-destruction or a means of enhanced consciousness. They were the devices whereby a clever, self-conscious and disillusioned man deadened his aggressive resentment of the people with whom he

was professionally involved. As Inspector of Historic Monuments, Mérimée travelled France saving such masterpieces as the papal palace at Avignon or the Roman amphitheatres at Orange and Arles from vandalism or squatters. ... For many years Mérimée used laudanum to cope with the frustration of his duties as a courtier to Napoleon III ... He was required to act as a jester – writing witty sycophantic verses to the queen and performing in charades ... Mérimée feared that without laudanum he would be sterilised by irritable boredom. In later life, when he was the prey of asthma and emphysema, he shifted his preference to ether.”

Mérimée was rather fond of writing about bandits and robber barons, nothing wrong with that of course, but I always felt sorry for the women in his stories, Carmen no less. In them, you tend to feel that the ‘bad guys’ will always win through. This did not put Willa Cather off. She wrote to a friend: “You’ve read Mérimée’s “Lettres a une Inconnue”? If not, do! I love that dry, proud old chap! I like his pride, and his contemptuousness.” Did she mean his contempt for his characters? For his colleagues? For his employers?

Ellis Peters on the other hand creates a monk as her chief protagonist. Victoria Nichols and Susan Thompson in *Silk Stalkings* write, “England in the twelfth century is the setting for the twenty-one-book series (1977-1994) in which Brother Cadfael, a Benedictine monk, is the protagonist. Cadfael joined the order after an active, worldly life; now in his middle years, he is the monastery’s herbalist and is well known for his medical knowledge and healing skills. These abilities allow him to leave the monastery on occasion, often to assist his friend, Sheriff Hugh Beringar, to solve a murder. To the best of our knowledge, this series is the first to take mystery readers to a medieval past made accessible by the engaging portrayals Edith Pargeter, writing as Ellis Peters, drew.” And, “Brother Cadfael solves crimes in the harsh England of the 1100s. In his early life he had fought as a crusader, worked as a tradesman, and known—in all senses, including the biblical—many members of the fair sex. In his middle years, seeking tranquility and a place to expand his knowledge of healing and herbal remedies, he enters the monastery of Saint Peter and Saint Paul outside the city of Shrewsbury. The twenty-one-book series is filled with all the richness and machinations of the age. Using Cadfael, his brother monks, and a variety of other denizens, Peters has created a fascinating chronicle of the twelfth century.”

When I went looking on library shelves I couldn’t find an Ellis Peters but, fortunately, I have a friend who loves Brother Cadfael and she brought me three of her selection. *The Pilgrim of Hate. The Confession of Brother Haluin. Monk’s-Hood. The Confession* is set specifically in 1142 and she writes, “In the five years that King Stephen and his cousin, the Empress Maud, had fought for the throne of England, fortune had swung between them like a pendulum many times, presenting the cup of victory to each in erratic turn, only to snatch it away again untasted, and offer it tantalizingly to the other contender.” (Maud, or Matilda, had the stronger claim but many people balked at the idea of a queen on the throne; history books describe her as ‘arrogant’, the assumption being that no kings are arrogant, and that she put people offside. In the end, after years of turmoil and bloodshed, Stephen ruled although no one praises him for his rule, and Maud’s son inherited his throne and became Henry III.)

Peters retains a formal style for all her dialogue, thus avoiding the awful infelicities of writers who put modern slang and colloquialisms into the mouths of their characters from a far past. The books are written with a sure hand, set in a countryside she obviously knows and loves, and the plots are clever. When she came to write *Ellis Peters’ Shropshire* she says, “I was firmly resolved never to write an autobiography” so instead she wrote a book about her beloved Shropshire. It is as though she looked around for a way to put the places which were special to her into a series of books and decided a mystery series would have far more staying power than a travel book or a memoir.

But the particular joy for me in the books is what people ate and drank and more particularly what they used for healing (and occasionally killing).

“There’s rosemary, and horehound, and saxifrage, mashed into a little oil pressed from flax seeds, and the body is a red wine I made from cherries and their stones. You’ll find they’ll do well on it, any that have the rheum in their eyes or heads, and even for the cough it serves, too.” (*Monk’s-Hood*.)

“Hedges of hazel and may-blossom shed silver petals and dangled pale, silver-green catkins round the enclosure where they stood, cowslips were rearing in the grass of the meadow beyond, and irises were in tight, thrusting bud. Even the roses showed a harvest of buds, erect and ready to break and display the first colour. In the walled shelter of Cadfael’s herb-garden there were fat globes of peonies, too, just cracking their green sheaths. Cadfael had medicinal uses for the seeds, and Brother Petrus, the abbot’s cook, used them as spices in the kitchen.” (*The Pilgrim of Hate*.) I didn’t know you could eat peony seeds.

She creates her Brother Cadfael as a kind and compassionate man; no sign in him of pride or contempt.

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September 29: Elizabeth Gaskell

William Beckford

September 30: Truman Capote

* * * * *

“You can always hide behind the fiction label, as Truman Capote did (perhaps first) in 1966 with his “nonfiction novel,” *In Cold Blood*”.

The Art of Memoir by Mary Karr.

Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* is seen as the benchmark from which all true crime books take their standards. But I came upon this letter, published in *The Observer* on 3/4/1966 in a book of Kenneth Tynan’s *Letters*.

Sir,—On the strength of his article last Sunday, Truman Capote seems to have invented yet another new art form: after the Non-Fiction Novel, the Semi-Documentary Tantrum. Ignoring the tone of the piece, let’s look at the points he raises.

First, the minor ones. I wasn’t suggesting that Dick Hickock never tried to rape pubescent girls; merely that Capote’s allegations could not have been substantiated in court. A confidential statement to a psychiatrist is not evidence in the legal sense; and Nancy Clutter, aged nineteen, can hardly be called pubescent.

As to Capote’s disclosure that Hickock and Smith had told the cops as well as himself about other murders they had contemplated. I took it for granted that if the police had possessed such damning information, the fact would somewhere be mentioned in the book. Here, as elsewhere, it’s impossible to deduce from the text which statements are corroborated and which are not.

A couple of months ago I asked my friend Aaron Frosch, partner in the well-known Manhattan law firm of Weissberger and Frosch (120 East 56th Street, New York City), whether Capote’s allegations – if based solely on unsupported hearsay – would have been actionable, had the killers lived to deny them. Founding his answer on this assumption, he said: ‘I would doubt whether the book would have been released prior to the decease of the accused.’ He continued: ‘References in the book to the personal habits of the deceased, unless these were part of the charges against him or were true or were reported in newspapers, would be a basis for action if the accused were still alive.’

Mr Frosch, of course, is the ‘prominent Manhattan lawyer’ whose existence Capote

insultingly denies. His letter is on my desk, in lieu of 'a sworn affidavit'; but unless Capote still believes that I am concocting fictitious quotes from a fictitious source, I shall expect his cheque for \$500 within a few days. It should be made out to the Howard League for Penal Reform.

To get to more serious matters: the fact that Perry and Dick signed legal releases is quite irrelevant to my central point, which was (and is) that Capote could have done more than he did to save his friends by means of psychiatric evidence.

The day before the trial began, they were examined by Dr Mitchell Jones, a psychiatrist who volunteered his services to the defence lawyers. When asked in court whether Perry knew right from wrong at the time of the offence, he said he had no opinion. According to Dr Joseph Satten of the Menninger Clinic in Kansas, a psychiatrist highly esteemed by Capote: 'This possibly was a tactical error or a misunderstanding on Mitchell Jones's part in the heat of testifying.' (I must pause here to nail a wild misstatement on Capote's part – viz: 'Dr Satten specifically told Tynan that he could not quote from any of his (Dr Satten's) letters without my expressed permission.' I have never been told anything of the sort, nor have I ever written to Dr Satten or received a letter from him.)

Capote maintains that there were 'two psychiatrists' who knew the case 'at firsthand', the other being Dr Satten. But the truth is that Dr Satten never met either Perry or Dick. He merely discussed them with Mitchell Jones, *who was the only psychiatrist ever to interview the murderers*. I won't bother to refute Capote's naïve assumption that they must have been sane because they had high I.Q.s; but I must challenge his blithe assertion that neither was a paranoid schizophrenic. On page 245 we read of Perry: 'His present personality structure is very nearly that of a paranoid schizophrenic.' This opinion is expressed by Mitchell Jones and endorsed by Satten.

Capote speaks of my 'entirely ludicrous claims to acquaintance with a third psychiatric report on the Clutter case ... another anonymous person who doesn't exist...' The psychiatrist's name is Dr Estela D'Accurzio; a friend of Dr Satten's. She worked with criminal patients at the Topeka State Hospital and the Kansas Reception and Diagnostic Centre in 1963-64, and believes that the Clutter murderers could have won their appeal if psychiatric testimony had shown them to be paranoid schizophrenics. Capote, on the other hand, contends that 'fifty world-famous psychiatrists ... would not have done a damn bit of good', because Kansas abides by the McNaghten Rule.

He protests too much; and his plea is demonstrably frail. The McNaghten Rule can be overthrown (and often has been) by any psychiatrist prepared to state that the accused did not know the nature of his act. A typical McNaghten case was that of Ronald True, who was sentenced to death for murder at the Old Bailey in 1922, after two defence psychiatrists had pronounced him insane: he was later reprieved on the evidence of three more medical men who simply reinforced their colleagues' findings.

There are many such borderline cases in British law. American examples are just as numerous: consider the trial of Kenneth Chapin (Massachusetts, 1955), who murdered a fourteen-year-old girl, pleaded insanity and got the death penalty. It was commuted to life imprisonment after the intervention of a celebrated psychiatrist, who declared the condemned man a schizophrenic.

Where Capote is concerned, I see no reason to modify my original judgment: 'An attempt to help (by supplying new psychiatric testimony) might easily have failed: what one misses is any sign that that it was even contemplated.' The three Federal judges who turned down the appeal rightly said that no evidence had been produced to substantiate a defence of insanity. But it might have been: in which case it is not inconceivable that one or both of Capote's confidants might now be alive.

In his preface to the book, Capote expresses his thanks to the people who helped him – such as the citizens of Finney County, the staff of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, and many others. From this roll of honour there are two notable absentees. I hope Capote will not object if I repair the omission by paying tribute, on his behalf, to Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, without whose cooperation, garrulity and trust *In Cold Blood* would never have been written.

* * * * *

The days when you thought a novel was ‘made up’ and a true crime book was true and based on careful research and documentation are long gone. Now there is an ever-expanding grey area in which faction, ‘non-fiction novel’, historical fiction, and many more genres frolic, and I am not sure that Truman Capote did us all a good turn ...

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October 1: Louis Untermeyer

October 2: Graham Greene

October 3: James Herriot

October 4: Damon Runyon

Mary Braddon

Anne Rice

October 5: Václav Havel

Peter Ackroyd

Clive Barker

Flann O’Brien

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“The case of the missing postman has been a source of fascination for many creative writers, including Flann O’Brien. Though written in 1940, O’Brien’s famous novel *The Third Policeman* was not published for another seventeen years. It opens with a shocking murder and most of the activities take place in a police station. Dr Tadhg Ó Dúshláine describes it as ‘a satire on the violence, duplicity and incompetence of Irish society, inspired, in all probability by the case of the Missing Postman.’ ”

In a factual account of the case, *The Missing Postman* by Fachtna Ó Drisceoil, he says that on Christmas Day 1929 Larry Griffin went missing in the little town of Stradbally in Co Waterford. What happened was never resolved and his body was never found. Of course murders and disappearances have always been meat and drink to mystery writers. But Flann O’Brien did something rather different with this strange sad case. His ‘hero’ is beyond the grave.

* * * * *

People do simply disappear. It seems a strange thing but it happens. I have just been reading William Warren’s *Jim Thompson: The Unsolved Mystery*. Jim Thompson was the American famed for reviving the Thai Silk industry. In 1967 he made a short visit to the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia to stay with some friends on his way from Bangkok to Singapore. He was assumed to have gone out for a walk and simply ... disappeared. Hundreds of people were called in to search the trails through the jungle areas round the resort. No ransom note was received. No one claimed the reward. All enquiries went nowhere. Warren writes, “About four days after the disappearance, Charles Sheffield came home to the house we shared for a change of clothes and a brief respite; we had no telephone, and he was both working and sleeping at the silk company to be on hand for calls from Malaysia and elsewhere. As we were having a drink in the garden, he suddenly said, “What if there’s no news? Not only now, but never?” The very idea seemed absurd to me. There would certainly be some news, even if it was bad; it might take some time, I was willing to admit by then—the four days had seemed like an

eternity—but one day we would know beyond a reasonable doubt what had happened on that Sunday afternoon in the Highlands.

“I was wrong. Over the past thirty years, new theories have been proposed, old ones revised, but not a single piece of evidence has turned up to support any of them. No careless tongue or newly released secret file has broken the silence of any conspiracy, no aborigine has revealed any secret he or his tribe might have been concealing, no hiker or hunter has come across any bones in a jungle cave.” Thompson was declared legally dead seven years later and his nephew inherited but the mystery remains ...

* * * * *

More than thirty thousand people go missing in Australia every year. Most are found quite quickly. They have wandered off, forgotten where their house is, runaway teenagers get in touch again, missing children are found to be the victims of a custody battle. But there are some who are never found. I remember reading a heart-breaking story by the parents of a young man who had gone to North Queensland and disappeared. I was sorry I knew nothing and wasn't psychic. Since then I have heard a number of stories about the ever-missing. Because I do vigils for Sue Neill-Fraser whose partner Bob Chappell disappeared off his yacht in 2009 a lot of people come up and tell me sad stories of their own tragedies. I am sorry I cannot help. But it has brought home to me the amount of heartache there is out there for which there is no resolution.

I had a great-uncle who disappeared in WW2. The plane he was in, going north to Townsville, disappeared off the coast. Neither the plane nor any bodies were ever found. My memories of my great-aunt are of a down-to-earth nuggety little woman with a crooked leg (she had broken a leg when she was young and it had been set badly) who pastured her house cow round the streets of Toowoomba. I always felt she simply got on with life for the sake of the children and perhaps because people expect such things in wartime. I had a great-uncle presumed killed in WWI in France whose body was never found. Now when I think back I realize how much hidden pain so many people have had to live with.

It is a fertile field for writers. But I wonder if any book can truly capture not only the heartache but that obsessive aspect of always waiting, hoping against hope, praying, seeking.

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- October 6: G. F. Heard
Marie de Gournay
- October 7: Thomas Kenneally
Harry Knight
- October 8: John Cowper Powys
R. L. Stine
- October 9: Miguel de Cervantes
- October 10: Ivo Andric
- October 11: Francois Mauriac
Owen Brookes
- October 12: Aleister Crowley
- October 13: Chris Carter
Guy Boothby

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Brian Lowry's *The Official Guide to The X Files* says: “A unique entry in primetime television on various levels, the series follows the exploits of two FBI agents, Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), as they investigate cases that deal with paranormal phenomena. ... While the series does delve into UFOs and other bizarre goings-on, it is also balanced by often humorous banter between its leads and complex, intricate

underpinnings involving government conspiracies and cover-ups relating to the very information the agents are trying to expose. Those episodes and incidents have come to be known as the show's "mythology" and have helped define the series as much as its trademark creepiness, resulting in popular catchphrases like "Trust no one" and "I want to believe."

But who actually created *The X Files*? A man called Chris Carter, a native of Los Angeles, who began his script writing for Disney. But "Carter clearly sensed a void—and thus a window of opportunity—in the crowded primetime marketplace, which, with millions of dollars riding on each project, tends to be built on replicating success and not venturing down murky creative corridors. "You look at the TV schedule," he told Roth as they munched on their entrees, "and there's nothing scary on television." "

Not scary exactly but unsettling. And I have a problem with 'scary' on TV: it is never filmed in broad daylight. It is always twilight, dusk, evening, night time ... you always have the feeling that the monster, the alien, the mysterious being, would not be half so scary if shown in cheerful daylight and sunshine.

Not the Daleks of course, which have never shunned the light, but just about everything else ...

I enjoyed *The X Files* not because they answered difficult questions but because they *asked* difficult questions. Chris Carter said of his creation, "The X-Files stories take place in what I call the realm of extreme possibility. They have to be rooted in some sort of speculative scientific possibility or based on a progressive scientific idea. It must be believable that they could happen in the world we live in now. What if a man could hibernate and live much longer than the average life span? What if there was really such a thing as a shape-shifter? We take a little license with [the stories], but we still keep them rooted in scientific possibility."

Dorothy Sayers wrote in *Gaudy Night* when Harriet Vane is at a party of Oxford undergraduates that they mainly seemed to read her kind of mystery fiction. "A School of Detective Fiction would, Harriet thought, have a fair chance of producing a goodly crop of Firsts." Even then people wrote biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, catalogues and guides to light fiction but it is only much more recently that students could indulge themselves by researching everything from detective fiction to prime time TV and film noir under the all-embracing departments of Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Communications, even Feminist and Multicultural Studies ... But although I can see the attraction I am not absolutely convinced that these should be the focus of a university education. So when I came across a book called *Deny All Knowledge: Reading the X-Files* (ed. Lavery, Hague and Cartwright) which is a collection of essays by a number of academics, from students to professors, I couldn't help wondering if they had found a way of subsuming their liking for *The X-Files* under the guise of rigorous scholarship, their version of a 'School of Detective Fiction'.

The X-Files stories supposedly are to be found in FBI files but the question I found myself pondering upon is: are there any mysteries, strange and puzzling events, hidden away in *our* files which governments would rather we don't know about?

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October 14: Miles Franklin
Richard C. Matheson
Vernon Lee
Leslie Weatherhead

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"One day Cherie said for every *devoir* I did, and for every time I wasn't naughty, I should be given a counter, and if I got twenty counters in three days I should get a prize. I got the twenty

counters and sallied off to Hatchard's to get the prize. I chose a book called *The Prince of the Hundred Soups* because of its cover. It was by Vernon Lee, an Italian puppet-show in narrative, about a Doge who had to eat a particular kind of soup every day for a hundred days. It is a delightful story, and I revelled in it. On the title-page it was said that the book was by the author of *Belcaro*. I resolved to get *Belcaro* some day; *Belcaro* sounded a most promising name, rich in possible romance and adventure, and I saved up my money for the purpose. When, after weeks, I had amassed the necessary six shillings, I went back to Hatchard's and bought *Belcaro*. Alas, it was an æsthetic treatise of the stiffest and driest and most grown-up kind. Years afterwards I told Vernon Lee this story, and she promised to write me another story instead of *Belcaro*, like *The Prince of the Hundred Soups*."

Maurice Baring in *The Puppet Show of Memory*.

Baring was also passionately interested in music and wrote this: "About Bayreuth. Although I expected little enjoyment, I have been miserably disappointed. It is so much less out of the common than I expected. Just a theatre like any other, save for the light being turned out entirely instead of half-cock only, and the only beautiful things an opera ever offers to the eye, namely the fiddles, great and small, and the enchanting kettle-drums, being stuffed out of sight. The *mise en scène* is more grotesquely bad than almost any other opera get-up. What is insufferable to me is the atrocious way in which Wagner takes himself seriously: the self-complacent (if I may coin an absurd expression) *auto-religion* implied in his hateful unbridled long-windedness and reiteration; the element of degenerate priesthood in it all, like English people contemplating their hat linings in Church, their prudery about the name of God Surely all great art of every sort has a certain coyness which makes it give itself always less than wanted: look at Mozart, he will give you a whole act of varying dramatic expression (think of the first act of *Don Giovanni*) of deepest, briefest pathos and swift humour, a dozen perfect songs or concerted pieces, in the time it takes for that old *poseur*, Amfortas, to squirm over his Grail, or Kundry to break the ice with Parsifal. Even *Tristan*, so incomparably finer than Wagner's other things, is indecent through its dragging out of situations, its bellowing out of confessions which the natural human being dreads to profane by showing or expressing. With all this goes what to me is the chief psychological explanation of Wagner (and of his hypnotic power over some persons), his *extreme slowness of vital tempo*. Listening to him is like finding oneself in a planet where the Time's unit is bigger than ours: one is on the stretch, devitalised as by the contemplation of a slug. Do you know who has the same peculiarity? D'Annunzio. And it is this which makes his literature, like Wagner's music, so undramatic, so sensual, so inhuman, turn everything into a process of gloating. I had the good fortune (like Nietzsche) of hearing *Carmen* just after the *Ring*. The humanity of it, and the modesty also, are due very much to the incomparable briskness of the rhythm and phrasing; the mind is made to work quickly, the life of the hearer to brace itself to action."

At one time I thought Laurie Lee was a woman and Vernon Lee a man. In fact it is the other way around. Laurie Lee sounds the sort of name a woman would choose to write under but in fact Laurie Lee, though much indebted to the women in his life, seems always to have made sure he was known as the Head of the Household. He was a talented photographer (as in his book of photographs, *Two Women*, about his wife Kathy and his daughter Jessy), artist, musician, poet—but it was his memoir *Cider with Rosie* which made him famous and if not rich at least comfortably off. When I read it many years ago it didn't make much impression on me but I went back to re-read it after reading Valerie Groves' biography *Laurie Lee: The Well-Loved Stranger* and got much more out of it. But it is still one of many many memoirs of people born around WWI and growing up in the 1920s and 1930s.

I enjoyed the folk lore, the rural superstitions, the sense that this world of credulity was even then passing away (though perhaps to be replaced by different kinds of credulities) as in:

“Jones’s terrorist goat seemed to me a natural phenomenon of that time, part of a village which cast up beasts and spirits as casually as human beings. All seemed part of the same community, though their properties varied widely – some were benevolent, some strictly to be avoided; there were those that appeared at different shapes of the moon, or at daylight or midnight hours, that could warn or bless or drive one mad according to their different natures. There was the Death Bird, the Coach, Miss Barraclough’s Goose, Hangman’s House, and the Two-Headed Sheep.

“There is little remarkable about a two-headed sheep, except that this one was old and talked English. It lived alone among the Catswood Larches, and was only visible during flashes of lightning. It could sing harmoniously in a double voice and cross-question itself for hours; many travellers had heard it when passing that wood, but few, naturally enough, had seen it. Should a thunderstorm ever have confronted you with it, and had you had the presence of mind to inquire, it would have told you the date and nature of your death – at least so people said. But no one quite relished the powers of this beast. And when the sheep-lightning flickered over the Catswood trees it was thought best to keep away from the place.

“The Bulls Cross Coach was another ill omen, and a regular midnight visitor. Bulls Cross was a saddle of heathland set high at the end of the valley, once a crossing of stage-roads and cattle-tracks which joined Berkeley to Birdlip, and Bisley to Gloucester-Market. Relics of the old stage-roads still imprinted the grass as well as the memories of the older villagers. And up here, any midnight, but particularly New Year’s Eve, one could see a silver-grey coach drawn by flaring horses thundering out of control, could hear the pistol crack of snapping harness, the screams of the passengers, the splintering of wood, and the coachman’s desperate cries. The vision recalled some ancient disaster, and was rehearsed every night, at midnight.

“Those who hadn’t seen it boasted they had, but those who had seen it, never. For the sight laid a curse upon talkative witnesses, a curse we all believed in – you went white in the night, and your teeth fell out, and later you died by trampling. So news of the phantom usually came second-hand. ‘They sin that coach agen last night. ’Arry Lazbury sin it, they says. He was comin’ from Painswick a-pushin’ ’is bike. ’E dropped it, an’ run ’ome crazy.’ We committed poor Harry to his horrible end, while the coach ran again through our minds, gliding white on its rocking wheels, as regular as the Post.”

Perhaps it came from haunting memories of a real tragedy and Bulls Cross, a ragged, wild place, up above the busy life of the valleys, seemed to invite, with “its hollows and silences” such memories. The Hangman’s House, too, an old dank derelict house where the local hangman had once lived was similarly uninviting and a place to encourage fear.

But what was it about Lee’s memoir which eventually sold it in the millions? Hundreds, thousands, of good memoirs come on the market. Sometimes it is word of mouth or a good review, but books are usually bought by the title, the cover, the author’s name, the blurb, and I suspect many people bought it simply on its title. It conjures up apple orchards and wild roses in hedgerows, cool drinks after heavy work bringing in the hay, nostalgia, something passing ... and this resonated with English readers after the awfulness of war and rationing ...

Lee himself wrote uncompromisingly of war’s awfulness beginning his ‘A Moment of War’ with

It is night like a red rag
drawn across the eyes

the flesh is bitterly pinned
to desperate vigilance

the blood is stuttering with fear

...

The mouth chatters with pale curses

the bowels struggle like a nest of rats

the feet wish they were grass
spaced quietly.

Yes, writers don't usually give enough attention to a soldier's bowels. I suspect a great many men were more concerned with what their bowels were threatening than what the enemy might be planning ...

*

And Vernon Lee ...

I had always thought Ivy was a female name. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it was far more likely to be a male name. And probably the best known Ivy was Ivy Lee. John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton in *Toxic Sludge is Good for You: Lies, Damn Lies and the Public Relations Industry* says of him, "Ivy Lee was one of the first consultants to offer the service of corporate image-building." He worked for several big US companies to stave off anti-trust actions. "Lee invented the public relations specialty that is today known as "crisis management": helping clients put the best possible "spin" on a bad situation." Instead of trying to hide derailments, fires, disasters, he would invite reporters to come and see for themselves. "Company executives thought Lee was crazy, but they changed their minds after they discovered that his "open" strategy won them more favorable coverage than the old approach."

This probably has its limits. But it is human nature to be suspicious as soon as things are covered up, hidden away, and CEOs and MPs can't provide an honest answer. And given some of Lee's clients and their brutal activities it had its limits even then.

WWI gave PR a patriotic gloss and a financial and promotional boost as well. "Ivy Lee's publicity program for the Red Cross helped it grow from 486,000 to 20 million members and raise \$400 million by the time the war ended. The Creel Committee also used the time-tested tactic of feeding wartime hysteria with fantastic atrocity stories depicting the Germans as beasts and Huns."

There is something of an irony in this. Or perhaps the old adage that 'business is business' and you don't have to like your clients so long as they pay well. "Many historians and industry insiders consider Lee the "father of public relations," an honor he would probably hold without challenge if his reputation had not been tainted by scandal near the end of his career."

In 1933 he was hired by Max Ilgner of I. G. Farben at \$25,000 a year. Ilgner was part of the 'Circle of Experts of the Propaganda Ministry' and was convicted as a war criminal at Nuremberg. Lee met Hitler, Goebbels, von Ribbentrop (whom he advised to speak on American radio; what the American public would have thought of this remains a mystery) but in 1934 he was charged with being a Nazi propagandist. His claim that he was simply 'sizing up' Hitler and the Nazis was not accepted. Eventually Congress passed the Foreign Agents Registration Act. It was a 'toothless tiger' and by then Lee was dead. The curious thing is that so much attention was

paid to Lee's activities even though the American government seemed to be blind to other activities of the new government in Germany.

But Vernon Lee was a classic case of a female writer (Violet Paget) choosing to write under a male pseudonym (Vernon Lee) as a way to be taken seriously by male editors and publishers. This is interesting because her best known book, *Hauntings*, a collection of stories of mysterious people and possession was seen by more sophisticated readers as having lesbian undertones. Did editors and publishers pick up on this vein of homoeroticism or did they simply assume this was evidence of male fantasizing? Vineta Colby, an expert on 19th century women novelists, wrote *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*.

And perhaps she was taken more seriously as an art and literary critic as Vernon Lee?

David Lodge in *Language of Fiction* writes, "Tribute should be paid, also, to Vernon Lee's rather neglected pioneering book, *The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology* (1923), which considering its date, is a remarkable achievement, full of useful insights and suggestions, and which includes what are probably the first examples in English criticism of close, methodical analysis applied to narrative prose." He also says, "Underlying all Vernon Lee's criticism we can detect a prejudice against omniscient narration and in favour of Jamesian 'presentation'; against 'telling; and in favour of 'showing'." I am not sure if most of us ever consider Jamesian 'presentation' but legion are the writing guides which urge writers to 'show, don't tell'. Do we owe it all to Vernon Lee?

Dodo Press has reprinted her *Hauntings* and I bought a copy which says of her, "Vernon Lee was the pseudonym of the British writer Violet Paget (1856-1935). She is known mostly for her supernatural fiction. She also wrote essays and poetry. She contributed to *The Yellow Book* and was a follower of Walter Pater. Her literary works explored the themes of haunting and possession. She was responsible for introducing the concept of empathy into the English language. Empathy was a key concept in Lee's psychological aesthetics which she developed on the basis of prior work by Theodor Lipps. Her response to aesthetics interpreted art as a mental and corporeal experience. This was a significant contribution to the philosophy of art which has been largely neglected. Additionally she wrote, along with her friend and colleague Henry James, critically about the relationship between the writer and his/her audience pioneering the concept of criticism and expanding the idea of critical assessment among all the arts as relating to an audience's (or her personal) response. She was a strong proponent of the Aesthetic movement. Among her famous works are: *A Phantom Lover* (1890), *Hauntings* (1890), and *Art and Life* (1896)."

In her introduction to *Hauntings* she says you can discern a 'real' ghost story because it is "about a nobody, its having no point or picturesqueness, and being, generally speaking, flat, stale, and unprofitable." Whereas 'fictional' ghosts are exciting and dramatic.

But the curious thing about *Hauntings* is that it didn't strike me as having 'lesbian undertones' but rather that Lee was fascinated by Italy in a kind of love-hate relationship, by art which has a place in every story, and by strange, strong-minded, even dangerous women, regardless of whether they are rich or poor, from important families or a shipwrecked waif. Now I am fascinated by strange and dangerous women from the past, both real and fictional, but I have seen that as part of the struggle to disinter women who did not conform with the restrictive norms imposed by men, by the church, by society. Some of them still loved men, and broke taboos to be with the ones they loved, some loved women but did not necessarily see it as sexual, some loved themselves and held most other people in vague contempt. Some were in love with religion, with Christ, some loved their children and would go to any lengths to keep and save and protect them. Some loved images, sometimes of beautiful unattainable men. Some loved ideas and struggled to make their ideas known

Her stories build up tension by a small accretion of seemingly unimportant details—until you get to the point where you feel something must ‘break’. For example, the backgrounds she chooses have their own faintly sinister undertones.

“I am very susceptible to such impressions; and besides the sort of spasm of imaginative interest sometimes given to me by certain rare and eccentric personalities, I know nothing more subduing than the charm, quieter and less analytic, of any sort of complete and out-of-the-common-run sort of house. To sit in a room like the one I was sitting in, with the figures of the tapestry glimmering grey and lilac and purple in the twilight, the great bed, columned and curtained, looming in the middle, and the embers reddening beneath the overhanging mantelpiece of inlaid Italian stonework, a vague scent of rose-leaves and spices, put into the china bowls by the hands of ladies long since dead, while the clock downstairs sent up, every now and then, its faint silvery tune of forgotten days, filled the room; —to do this is a special kind of voluptuousness, peculiar and complex and indescribable, like the half-drunkenness of opium or haschisch, and which, to be conveyed to others in any sense as I feel it, would require a genius, subtle and heady, like that of Baudelaire.”

‘Oke of Okehurst’

But she also occasionally wrote in a wryer vein:

“Another of Dionea’s amusements is playing with pigeons. The number of pigeons she collects about her is quite amazing; you would never have thought that San Massimo or the neighboring hills contained as many. They flutter down like snowflakes, and strut and swell themselves out, and furl and unfurl their tails, and peck with little sharp movements of their silly, sensual heads and a little throb and gurgle in their throats, while Dionea lies stretched out full length in the sun, putting out her lips, which they come to kiss, and uttering strange, cooing sounds; or hopping about, flapping her arms slowly like wings, and raising her little head with much the same odd gesture as they; —’tis a lovely sight, a thing fit for one of your painters, Burne-Jones or Tadema, with the myrtle-bushes all round, the bright, white-washed convent walls behind, the white marble chapel steps (all steps are marble in this Carrara country) and the enamel blue sea through the ilex-branches beyond. But the good Sisters abominate these pigeons, who, it appears, are messy little creatures, and they complain that, were it not that the Reverend Director likes a pigeon in his pot on a holiday, they could not stand the bother of perpetually sweeping the chapel steps and the kitchen threshold all along of those dirty birds...”

‘Dionea’

And another Lee comes to mind, an imagined one: Annabel Lee. I suspect Edgar Allan Poe was attracted to the name simply because it is an easy one to rhyme. And like many of his poems and stories it is about death and the way death, particularly of the young and beautiful, haunts and refuses to let go.

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
of my darling—my darling—my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea—
In her tomb by the sounding sea.

* * * * *

October 15: C. P. Snow

Friedrich Nietzsche

* * * * *

Ghost Colonies by Ed Wright has this unexpected story: “Inspired by racist beliefs and the romantic notion of the German *Volk*, anti-Semite schoolteacher Bernhard Förster set off to South America with his wife, Elisabeth, and a small group of fellow travellers to establish an Aryan paradise. Unfortunately for this motley crew, the wild animals, insects and microbes of the Paraguayan jungle weren’t aware of the new arrivals’ racial superiority and it didn’t take long for the colony to founder. Faced with the rising disgruntlement of his ill-adapted settlers, Förster retreated into booze and self-pity, leaving his Elisabeth to run the show. After her husband died from a self-administered overdose in a San Bernardino hotel room, Elisabeth returned to Germany to look after her mad brother, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, while some of her poorer colonists were stuck in Nueva Germania, condemned to generations of subsistence farming in a place they didn’t want to be.”

Bernie believed in *Der Volk*, a simple agrarian lifestyle, and he founded the Deutscher Volksverein party in 1881. This was not a success but he met and married Betty in 1885 and the two of them thought that Paraguay which was crying out for energetic settlers would be the ideal place to put a racially pure ‘back to the land’ commune into practice. Bernie was on record as saying ‘The true German is a fighter, a thinker and a poet’ but not, unfortunately, in his case, a ploughman, timber-cutter or herdsman. The Paraguayan government granted them 20,000 hectares and Bernie and Betty and a few other German families set off to create a New Germany. It was to be run on Spartan, hierarchical, vegetarian, non-mixing lines. Walter Kaufman writes of him, “Wagner was a doctrinaire vegetarian, and Nietzsche’s brother-in-law, Bernhard Förster, copied Wagner’s vegetarianism along with his anti-Semitic ideology; so did Hitler. Nietzsche wrote his mother about Förster: “For my personal taste such an agitator is something impossible for closer acquaintance....Vegetarianism, as Dr. Förster wants it, makes such natures only still more petulant”.” But the settlement was never successful and they took to hunting wild animals in the forests and trading with the local people.

Bernie disappointed with the failure of his ideas took strychnine in 1889 and died, leaving Betty in charge. The group limped along, gradually abandoning one cherished idea after another. Nueva Germania still exists as a little hamlet in Paraguay but it was one of the least successful German settlements there.

Friedrich Nietzsche called his sister a ‘vengeful anti-Semitic goose’ which seems a bit rich, coming from someone who had idolized Richard Wagner and as he was descending into the late unpleasant stages of syphilitic dementia it was kind of her to even consider nursing him. He hadn’t been sympathetic to her, her plans, her struggles in Paraguay, or the loss of her husband.

But there seems to be one vitally important message in there that Hitler and many people before and since have not heeded: you can plan on paper till the cows come home, you can idolize *Der Volk* and an imagined simpler life, but no plan when moved to the messy imponderables of real life ever goes quite the way you have planned. (Paul Raffaele in *The Last Tribes on Earth* says the Indonesian army is used to prevent transmigrants in Irian Jaya/West Papua from leaving their designated area, “soldiers guarded the trucks they were loaded onto to make sure none ran away to Jayapura”, and I remember an oil driller there telling me transmigrants fought to get back on transport planes to go ‘home’ while thousands of such transmigrants have fled Kalimantan, detailed in gruesome detail in Richard Lloyd Parry’s *In the Time of Madness*; it seems *lebensraum* is not always a happy experience for the unwanted poor.) Betty unlike Freddy lived long enough to meet Hitler. Unfortunately she doesn’t seem to have told him, out of her own unhappy experiences, that little German Utopias dotted all over eastern Europe and Russia were so much pie in the sky and that he would be better to stop fighting and do some thinking and try some poetry ...

Nietzsche was fond of writing aphorisms and epigrams. Such as:

— ‘*Readers’ bad manners.*— A reader is doubly guilty of bad manners against the author when he praises his second book at the expense of the first (or vice versa) and then asks the author to be grateful for that.’

Aphorism 130

— ‘*The worst readers.*— The worst readers are those who proceed like plundering soldiers: they pick up a few things they can use, soil and confuse the rest, and blaspheme the whole.’

Aphorism 137

— ‘*Value of honest books.*— Honest books make the reader honest, at least by luring into the open his hatred and aversion which his sly prudence otherwise knows how to conceal best. But against a book one lets oneself go, even if one is very reserved toward people.’

Aphorism 145

A great deal of ink has been expended on discussing how anti-Semitic Nietzsche and his writings actually are and what influence they might have had. But the thing which struck me as I browsed in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* was that *he didn’t like women*.

— ‘Woman learns to hate to the extent to which her charms—decrease.’

Epigram 84

— ‘Women themselves always still have in the background of all personal vanity an impersonal contempt—for “woman”—’

Epigram 86

— ‘In revenge and in love woman is more barbarous than man.’

Epigram 139

— ‘Woman, for example, is vengeful: that is due to her weakness, as much as is her susceptibility to the distress of others.’

Ecce Homo

— ‘May I here venture the surmise that I *know* women? That is part of my Dionysian dowry. Who knows? Perhaps I am the first psychologist of the eternally feminine. They all love me—an old story—not counting *abortive* females, the “emancipated” who lack the stuff for children.— Fortunately, I am not willing to be torn to pieces: the perfect woman tears to pieces when she loves.— I know these charming maenads.— Ah, what a dangerous, creeping, subterranean little beast of prey she is! And yet so agreeable!— A little woman who pursues her revenge would run over fate itself. — Woman is indescribably more evil than man; also cleverer; good nature is in a woman a form of degeneration.— In all so-called “beautiful souls” something is physiologically askew at bottom; I do not say everything, else I should become medi-cynical. The fight for equal rights is actually a symptom of a disease: every physician knows that.— Woman, the more she is a woman, resists rights in general hand and foot: after all, the state of nature, the eternal war between the sexes, gives her by far the first rank.’

Ecce Homo

O Dio, O Somme bene, or come fai
Che te sol cerco e non ti trovo mai.

O God, O Supreme Good, why do I
Seek Thee and do not find Thee.

Lorenzo de Medici

But the most famous quotation from Nietzsche is probably his ‘God is Dead’ which comes in his 1882 book *The Gay Science*: “The greatest recent event – that ‘God is dead’; that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe. To those few at least whose eyes – or the *suspicion* in whose eyes is strong and subtle enough for this spectacle, some kind of sun seems to have set; some old deep trust turned into doubt: to them, our world must appear more autumnal, more mistrustful, stranger, ‘older’. But in the main one might say: for many people’s power of comprehension, the event is itself far too great, distant, and out of the way even for its tidings to be thought of as having arrived yet. Even less may one suppose many to know at all *what* this event really means – and, now that this faith has been undermined, how much must collapse because it was built on this faith, leaned on it, had grown into it – for example, our entire European morality. This long, dense succession of demolition, destruction, downfall, upheaval that now stands ahead: who would guess enough of it today to play the teacher and herald of this monstrous logic of horror, the prophet of deep darkness and an eclipse of the sun the like of which has probably never before existed on earth? Even we born guessers of riddles who are so to speak on a lookout at the top of the mountain, posted between today and tomorrow and stretched in the contradiction between today and tomorrow, we firstlings and premature births of the next century, to whom the shadows that must soon envelop Europe really *should* have become apparent by now – why is it that even we look forward to this darkening without any genuine involvement and above all without worry and fear for *ourselves*? Are we perhaps still not too influenced by the *most immediate consequences* of this event – and these immediate consequences, the consequences for *ourselves*, are the opposite of what one might expect – not at all sad and gloomy, but much more like a new and barely describable type of light, happiness, relief, amusement, encouragement, dawn ... Indeed, at hearing the news that ‘the old god is dead’, we philosophers and ‘free spirits’ feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement, forebodings, expectation – finally the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; finally our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger; every daring of the lover of knowledge is allowed again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; maybe there has never been such an ‘open sea’.”

Peter Watson in *The Age of Atheists* writes, “Toward the end of March 1883, Friedrich Nietzsche, then aged thirty-nine and staying in Genoa, was far from well. He had recently returned from Switzerland to his old lodgings on the Salita delle Battistine but this brought no immediate relief from his migraines, stomach troubles and insomnia. Already upset (but also relieved) by the death the previous month of his erstwhile great friend the composer Richard Wagner, with whom he had fallen out, he came down with a severe attack of influenza for which the Genoese doctor prescribed daily doses of quinine. Unusually, a heavy snowfall had blanketed the city, accompanied by “incongruous thunderclaps and flashes of lightning,” and this too seems to have affected his mood and hindered his recovery. Unable to take the stimulating walks that were part of his routine and helped his thinking, by the 22nd of the month, he was still listless and bedridden.

“What added to his “black melancholy,” as he put it, was that it was four weeks since he had sent his latest manuscript to his publisher, Ernst Schmeitzner, in Chemnitz, who seemed in no hurry to bring out this new book, entitled *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. He sent Schmeitzner a furious letter of reproach, which brought an apologetic reply, but a month later Nietzsche learned the real reason for the delay. As he said in a letter: “The Leipzig printer, Teubner, has shoved the *Zarathustra* manuscript aside in order to meet a rush order for 500,000 hymnals, which had to be delivered in time for Easter.” This rich irony was not lost on Nietzsche, of course. “The realization that his fearless Zarathustra, the ‘madman’ who had the nerve to proclaim to the

somnambulists around him that ‘God is dead!’ should have been momentarily smothered beneath the collective weight of 500,000 Christian hymnbooks struck Nietzsche as downright comic.”

“The response of the first readers of the work was mixed. Heinrich Köselitz, Nietzsche’s friend, who by long tradition was sent the proofs to read and correct, was rapturous, and he expressed the hope that “this extraordinary book” would one day be as widely distributed as the Bible. Very different was the reaction of the typesetters in Leipzig, who were so frightened by what they read that they considered refusing to produce the book.

“The world has never forgotten—and some have never forgiven—Nietzsche for saying “God is dead,” and then going on to add that “we have killed him.” He had actually said that before, in *The Gay Science* published the previous year, but the pithy style of *Zarathustra* attracted much more attention.”

Hymnbooks may not convulse the world but then they rarely damage it, unless you think in terms of trees felled, but there is no agreement on Nietzsche’s influence. Did his loud proclamation ‘God is dead’ damage the moral universe in which he lived and which he bequeathed to the German people? Did he encourage a sense of a moral vacuum? That there were no longer any absolutes in right and wrong? German soldiers went off to WWI carrying *Thus Spake Zarathustra* but it isn’t clear what they took from it. Generations have debated whether he changed lifestyles, encouraged racism or sexism, whether he had any influence on Hitler’s thinking ... or was he simply articulating an already existing and powerful current of thought ... I think John Carroll in *The Wreck of Western Culture* would see it as part of a long process as he writes, “Nietzsche’s significance to the story of the rise and fall of humanism is as the last humanist philosopher. He is also significant for introducing the psychology of guilt into the analysis of Western decadence. In particular, he stresses that increasing levels of instinctual repression have progressively reduced confidence in the *I*, have inhibited the will, and have cultivated the intelligence as an agent of rancour. As a consequence, humanity has become tired of itself, hypersensitive to pain, obsessed about comfort, unadventurous, and lacking much desire for anyone or anything.”

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Oliver St John Gogarty would send interesting snippets he found on to James Joyce who sometimes then incorporated them in his novels. One of these was the man who said ‘I am an Atheist, you know, I am an Atheist.’ To which Gogarty replies ‘Yes. What does that mean?’ The man says, ‘You know, I don’t believe in God.’ To which Gogarty replies ‘No. And what is God?’ The man avoids answering this by saying every fool knows what God is.

If someone says they don’t believe the globe is warming or the climate is changing and they then get asked ‘So what is global warming?’ they could probably give a coherent and sensible answer. But every possible answer anyone might give to the question ‘What is God?’ is not only going to be widely various but it is also going to go off into metaphysical realms. It raises the curious question: can you say you don’t believe in something if you have real difficulty in defining what it is you don’t believe in? And can you speak of death when you are puzzling over exactly what it is you believe has died?

* * * * *

And on a lighter note: Utopias and their more humdrum cousins, the *lebensraum* colonies, made their horrid appeal to Hitler with his plans for German settlements dotted all over Poland, the Ukraine, and further afield, just as the Indonesian government pinpoints the places to dump people all across West Papua, but the working out of utopian settlements has also appealed to fiction writers, not least German writers. I have just been reading *Imperium* by Christian Kracht in which August Engelhardt seeks to create his little utopia in German New Guinea at the beginning of the 20th century. He will be free there to grow his hair long, to be a nudist and a

vegetarian. He plans to live on coconuts. “After having adjudged all other foodstuffs unclean by process of elimination, Engelhardt had abruptly stumbled upon the fruit of the coconut palm. No other possibility existed; *Cocos nucifera* was, as Engelhardt had realized on his own, the proverbial crown of creation; it was the fruit of Yggdrasil, world-tree. It grew at the highest point of the palm, facing the sun and our luminous lord God; it gave us water, milk, coconut oil, and nutritious pulp; unique in nature, it provided humankind with the element selenium; from its fibers one wove mats, roofs, and ropes; from its trunk one built furniture and entire houses; from its pit one produced oil to drive away the darkness and to anoint the skin; even the hollowed-out, empty shell made an excellent vessel from which one could manufacture bowls, spoons, tankards, indeed even buttons; burning the empty shell, finally, was not only far superior to burning traditional firewood, but was also an excellent means of keeping away mosquitoes and flies with its smoke; in short, the coconut was perfect. Whosoever subsisted solely on it would become godly, would become immortal. August Engelhardt’s most fervent wish, his destiny in fact, was to establish a colony of cocovores. He viewed himself at once as a prophet and a missionary. For this reason did he sail to the South Seas, which had lured infinitely many dreamers with its siren song of paradise.”

But like so many plans for utopias amid blue seas and clean sands and palm trees it proves dangerous for the dreamer. Physically dangerous. Mentally dangerous.

“Engelhardt really does want to explain himself to his guest, he wants to convey to him everything he has realized, really everything, but now the proper moment has passed. And so he keeps mumbling to himself, pacing back and forth in his dwelling: even Nietzsche ate his own excretions toward the end, after his breakdown in Turin, it’s the great circle, the Möbius strip, the wheel of fire, the Kalachakra—only Nietzsche in his benightedness wasn’t able to think the matter through to its conclusion, he never had to experience these continuous years of hunger; Engelhardt is here among unfortunate cannibals who have evolved away from their natural, God-given instinct, dissuaded from it by the missionaries’ blather, yet everything is actually so incredibly simple; it is not the coconut that is the actual sustenance of man, but man himself. The original man of the Golden Age lived off other men, ergo, the one who becomes godlike, the one who returns to Elysium refers to himself as: *God-eater. Devourer of God.* And Engelhardt reaches for the coconut shell wherein he has kept his severed thumb, carefully brushes off the salt, and bites into it, crunching the bone to pieces with his teeth.”

* * * * *

October 16: Oscar Wilde

T. D. Allman

October 17: Les Murray

C. H. B. Kitchin

October 18: Heinrich von Kleist

October 19: John le Carré

October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge

October 21: Ursula Le Guin

Patrick Kavanagh

October 22: Doris Lessing

Graham Joyce

October 23: Gore Vidal

Robert Bridges

October 24: Evangeline Walton

Denys Baker

Marghanita Laski

October 25: Thomas Babington Macauley

John Berryman

Geoffrey Chaucer (d)

October 26: Christobel Mattingley

October 27: Dylan Thomas

October 28: Joe Lansdale

October 29: John Keats

Henry Green

Marjorie Bowen

* * * * *

John Keats began his poem 'The Terror of Death' with:

When I have fears that I may cease to be

Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,

Before high-piléd books, in charact'ry

Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripen'd grain;

so was he speaking for many creative people? Or was it that dreadful understanding that he was going to die while he still longed for the strength and time to write the many poems that teemed in his brain? I understand the feeling. I lie in bed and ideas come to me constantly. Maybe they wouldn't translate into a good story. Maybe they are better kept as ideas to wander round my mind late at night. But sometimes there is that feeling: will I have written the things I most want to write, or feel most called to write, by the time I die?

*

Every Writers Handbook devotes space to recording ideas, finding ideas, turning ideas into stories. There is the expectation that you will not want to be a writer unless you already have a 'teeming brain' but that you need some help to organize your thoughts and turn them into memorable prose or verse and perhaps let them play out on stage. Some writers keep an Ideas Book, some make notes on cards, some talk endlessly about what they are going to write ...

I don't think writer's block is about a lack of ideas, I think all brains teem, but it is that No Man's Land between thoughts swirling in your mind and the expression of them in an ordered and readable way on the page or screen ...

I have just been reading *Creative Lives* by Penelope Hanley in which she looks at twenty-two well-known Australian writers who have papers archived in the National Library. I thought this might give me some ideas on how they harvested their 'teeming brains'. It is curious, or perhaps it is natural, but it is their lives, their families, and their childhoods which provide the most fertile sources of inspiration.

Patrick White said, "My mind is a rag-bag which sometimes produces a novel after much laborious piecing—nothing more." A 'teeming brain', a 'rag-bag' ... and then having plucked an idea where do you go next? Hanley writes of Kylie Tennant: "In 1935, when she was 23, Tennant won the *Bulletin's* S.H. Prior Memorial Prize for her first published novel, *Tiburon*. To research it, she had worked as a barmaid, sold newspapers, walked hundreds of miles, waitressed and lived in the slums of Sydney's Surry Hills. She lived alone in garret rooms or dingy flats and once paid 2/6d rent for a room in a house built in 1860 where there was only one tap—in the backyard. Amidst all this activity she found time to marry teacher and writer Lewis Rodd.

"In the winter of 1938, in order to research *The Battlers*, Tennant went out on bush and country roads for six months by horse and cart like many other unemployed, homeless people searching for work and food. She left her husband at home, dressed as a boy and camped by the side of roads, sometimes living on nothing but tea and cigarettes for days on end. The trouble

was, she had no experience of horses when she set off, her belongings in a big-wheeled wooden cart, to go from Sydney to Young via Bargo, Mittagong and Queanbeyan. When Tennant harnessed her cream-coloured horse, Violet, to go on each stage of their journey, the horse jibbed and tried to dash the cart off bridges or into ditches, and kept trying to go back to Sydney.

“It was at Leeton, where Tennant had taken a job as a ‘waitress and skivvy’ at a boarding house, that her horse Violet came to a sad end. Tennant had been lent a stable and a drover had shown her a new way of tethering horses. She produced a slip knot, left the horse tied up in the stable and hurried back to serve dinner. During the night Violet pulled back on the knot and strangled herself. ‘I mourned her terrible end, killed by my own incompetence.’”

I think if my own rag-bag mind tossed up such difficult ideas I would throw them straight back, not try to glean them.

*

“If people asked him – as they frequently did – why he had become a writer, Martin usually answered that as he spent most of his time in his imagination it had seemed like a good idea to get paid for it. He said this jovially, no giggling, and people smiled as if he’d said something amusing. What they didn’t understand was that it was the truth – he lived inside his head. Not in an intellectual or philosophical way, in fact his interior life was remarkably banal. He didn’t know if it was the same for everyone. Did other people spend their time day-dreaming about a better version of the everyday? No one ever talked about the life of the imagination except in terms of some kind of Keatsian high art. No one mentioned the pleasure of picturing yourself sitting in a deckchair on a lawn, beneath a cloudless midsummer sky, contemplating the spread of a proper, old-fashioned afternoon tea, prepared by a cosy woman with a mature bosom and spotless apron who said things like ‘Come on now, eat up, ducks,’ because this was how cosy women with mature bosoms spoke in Martin’s imagination, an odd kind of sub-Dickensian discourse.”

One Good Turn by Kate Atkinson.

Keats had a passionate admirer in J. B. Priestley who was determined to destroy the sickly sentimental glow in which Keats is still enclosed. “John Keats was the youngest of these great romantic poets, but he was the first to die, in 1821 at the age of twenty-six.” When his first book was rubbished by reviewers, far from going in to a decline, he met it with “The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted” and I think this is true. The youthful imagination is different, not least perhaps because it is still guided by aspirations and a sense of wish fulfillment.

Priestley goes on to say, “there is a likeness to the younger Shakespeare of the poems ... There is the same wide and deep sensuality, the same richness, the same attempt to express fairly common thoughts and moods with the utmost felicity.” He goes on with, “the poetry achieves its own originality, and even profundity, through this richness, this wonderful felicity of image and phrase, its unusual evocative quality, its undertones and overtones. Keats’s great lines, like Shakespeare’s, haunt the memory, and he soon became one of the most frequently quoted of English poets.”

“He is indeed too often considered in terms of his tragic-comic love-affair, his tuberculosis, his melancholy flight to Italy, his grave in Rome, as if he were a sentimental schoolgirl’s idea of a romantic poet. But the poetry itself, his letters, his life in its factual details, show us a very different sort of man, immense if shadowy in his promise, solid and enduring in his performance, brief though it was. And there is not a more attractive figure in all the annals and legends of this Romantic Age than young, for ever young, John Keats.”

* * * * *

October 30: Paul Valéry
Gertrude Atherton
Peter Dodds McCormick (d)

* * * * *

You may be like me and say “Peter who?” and look blank. But in fact he is the most important songwriter for patriotic Australians. He wrote ‘Advance Australia Fair’. He arrived from Scotland on 21st February 1855. He was a schoolteacher for many years in Sydney but more importantly for posterity he was an energetic writer of songs.

The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* says of him, “Both ultra-Scottish and ultra-patriotic, McCormick was honorary secretary of St Andrew’s Benevolent Society, a founder of the Caledonian Society and, after its merger, of the Highland Society of New South Wales and of the Burns Anniversary Club. His greatest interest, however, was music: he was precentor of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales and organized many church choirs. He conducted very large choirs such as the 10 000 children and 1000 teachers at the 1880 Robert Raikes Sunday school centenary demonstration, and 15 000 schoolchildren at the laying of the foundation stone of Queen Victoria’s statue.”

It does beg the question of exactly what was the focus of his patriotism. He “published about thirty patriotic and Scottish songs; ‘The Bonnie Banks o’ Clyde’, ‘Advance Australia Fair’ and others became very popular.” ‘Advance Australia’ was first sung by Andrew Fairfax at the St Andrew’s Day concert of the Highland Society on 30th November 1878 where the *Sydney Morning Herald* described the music as ‘bold and stirring’ and the words as ‘decidedly patriotic’. He had the music and four verses published by W. H. Paling & Co. Ltd. It was sung by a choir of 10 000 voices “at the inauguration of the Commonwealth”, played by massed bands at the naming of Canberra as the capital, and he received £100 from the Federal Government for it in 1907.

“On 1 August 1913 McCormick described how he came to write the song: after attending a concert at which national anthems were sung he ‘felt very aggravated that there was not one note for Australia. On the way home in a bus, I concocted the first verse of my song, & when I got home I set it to music. I first wrote it in the Tonic Sol-fa Notation, then transcribed it into the Old Notation, & tried it over on an instrument next morning, & found it correct ... It seemed to me to be like an inspiration, & I wrote the words & music with the greatest ease’. On 3 September 1915 he formally registered his copyright.”

This would seem to be a very good ‘provenance’ for McCormick and his song but, “After his death sporadic attempts to have ‘Advance Australia Fair’ proclaimed Australia’s national anthem succeeded in 1974. Subsequently a descendant of John Macfarlane (d. 1866) claimed that Macfarlane had originally composed the music and written the first verse. Some musicologists consider the tune to be based on a typical ‘wandering melody’, a theory given some credence by McCormick’s ease and method of composition. It seems, however, that there is little doubt that McCormick was responsible for ‘Advance Australia Fair’—certainly his contemporaries accepted his bona fides.”

* * * * *

Were Scotsmen particularly fond of writing patriotic songs? Another famous song, designed to stir the blood of listeners, was ‘Rule Britannia’ and it came from Scottish poet James Thomson.

“When Britain first, at Heaven’s command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land,

And guardian angels sung this strain.
‘Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;
Britons never will be slaves.’

James Thomson (1700 – 1748) was a prolific poet but not, I wouldn’t have thought, an admirer of the Hanoverian kings. So the curious thing when I looked at the poem again from this perspective is that it was probably not intended as a bit of English jingoism but rather to remind people of those who came before Romans and Saxons and Normans, lumped together as the Britons. England referred to Scotland at times as North Briton but did not regard itself as South Briton. So was Thomson cloaking some subversive support for the Scots beneath his dramatic lines?

To my surprise, he *was* a fervent supporter of the Hanoverian kings, angling for a place at court and currying favour as best he could. And yet it *is* a subversive song. And perhaps in a post-Brexit future people will fight over who has the right to call themselves Britons and sing this stirring song ...

* * * * *

October 31: Dick Francis
Mary Freeman
November 1: David Jones
Stephen Crane
Edward Said
November 2: Odysseus Elytis
November 3: Martin Cruz Smith
Ludovic Kennedy

* * * * *

“In cases I have studied in depth and others which I have known about, the principal cause of miscarriages has been the same; the arranging and presentation of false evidence by the police rarely to frame a man whom they know to be innocent (though this has happened) but rather to secure a conviction about those whom, because of the pressures to obtain results, they have deluded themselves into thinking they are guilty; and in this crude way to ensure, as they see it, that justice is done.”

Ludovic Kennedy.
“Justice is too important to be left to the judiciary.”
Ludovic Kennedy.

Some time ago my brother happened to mention he had been reading a book called *The Most Dangerous Detective* about Glen Patrick Hallahan. In the way that such things happen I came upon him not long afterwards in Matthew Condon’s *Three Crooked Kings*. Hallahan, based in Mt Isa, was credited with solving what was called The Sundown Murders. Thyra Bowman, her daughter Wendy, a family friend Thomas Whelan, and two dogs were on the road to Adelaide from a remote station, planning to meet up with husband Peter and their other daughter Marian when they arrived. But they never arrived. Their bodies, along with the two dead dogs, were found and a man-hunt was immediately under way. A man called Ray Bailey was arrested in Mt Isa. He, his wife and his young son had come there looking for work as he was a carpenter by trade. Why he would want to kill three strangers, what his wife and son were doing while he carried out mass slaughter, whether he as a small man could have overpowered three people and two dogs—all these questions were glossed over. Police had their man.

“Bailey would reveal at his trial that on the night before his interrogation by Hallahan and Bauer he was locked in a padded cell and ‘woken every half hour by a torch being flashed in the trap and if I did not move they came in and woke me’.

‘During the next morning, I could hear my wife crying downstairs. I told them where I had been and what I had been doing, but they just kept on questioning me and didn’t seem to believe me. By midday I was in such a state I didn’t know what I was saying.

‘I also asked to see a lawyer but Hallahan said I was not allowed to speak to anybody ... even my wife ... my wife was about six weeks’ pregnant and she had a miscarriage while she was at Mount Isa.’

Hallahan would tell the court that Bailey had confessed to his own father-in-law that he had committed the murders. Bailey said this was untrue. Hallahan said he had no notes recording the confession.

As Hallahan gave evidence, Bailey reacted from the dock: ‘He’s telling lies. Tell the truth, that’s all I want.’ He cried as he remonstrated.

Despite Bailey’s claims of innocence, legal doubt lingering over his alleged confession, and allegations in court that police mistreated Patricia Bailey in order to get to her husband, he was found guilty of the murders and sentenced to death. A subsequent appeal was heard and dismissed.

Bailey was hanged on the morning of 17 June 1958, the last man to suffer such a fate in South Australia.

Author Peter James, who analyses the trial evidence in his book *The Sundown Murders*, concludes: ‘If it is only a partly accurate record of Bailey’s time in the Mount Isa watchhouse, it could represent the first occasion that brainwashing techniques were successfully used in the state of Queensland to get a murder confession.’ ”

Hallahan was the man of the moment, promoted out of Mount Isa, and off to Brisbane. Condon suggests he suffered remorse. Not enough perhaps to come out and apologise. But it is the curious question: the ghost of the dead, the remorse of the living ... and the possible tainting of places by violence and cruelty ... how seriously should we believe?

Of course wanting a conviction is only one reason for miscarriages of justice. Incompetence, ambition, racism, sexism, and sometimes that police are not knowledgeable enough to investigate within a certain milieu. For example, SD Harvey in *The Ghost of Ludwig Gertsch* tells the story of a young man who inherited, possibly via a forged will, the substantial assets of his lover Roger Claude Teyssedre in Sydney and was soon after murdered. No one was charged and the police investigation was a miracle of sloppiness, incompetence, assumptions, and confusions, made worse probably because they were all at sea in the world of Sydney’s ‘gay scene’. If it had been forty years earlier they would probably have used sledgehammer tactics but this was the 1990s and they tiptoed round the case like the man through the tulips and got precisely nowhere. It suggests that if there is no justice in this world then there is only the possibility of a haunting from the next ... or remorse felt by the perpetrator ...

It is a curious thing. Remorse. But it is debatable whether Hallahan really did feel remorse. He supposedly told Shirley Brifman, prostitute and madam, who was probably killed by police, that he was taking marijuana to help him deal with his ‘remorse’ and that he thought he knew who was probably responsible for the murders. If so, it was very limited remorse. He continued his corrupt activities and tried to create a major conduit for bringing heroin into Queensland from Thailand via Papua New Guinea. It is only small consolation to read in Matthew Condon’s *Jacks and Jokers* that he and his partner-in-crime John Edward Milligan seem to have been incompetent and inept as drug barons. And then Condon in *All Fall Down*

writes, “Incredibly, Hallahan, former detective and one of the original members of the fabled Rat Pack from the late 1950s and into the 1960s, had secured a position as a senior insurance fraud investigator with the financial institution (SGIO).” I am not sure that the old adage about not being able ‘keep a good man down’ fits. This was in 1986.

Equally importantly miscarriages of justice depend to some extent on their milieu. Evan Whitton in *Trial by Voodoo* says, “A new Queensland Premier, the Country Party’s George Francis Reuben (Honest Frank) Nicklin, 62, took office in August 1957 after 25 years of Labor Government. A new Police Commissioner was to be appointed in January 1958. On the Labor policy of alternating Catholics and Freemasons in the post, it was the turn of a Catholic, Jim Donovan, who happened to be honest, but the outgoing Government of Vincent Clair Gair was heavily identified with the Catholic Church, and it was thought that Nicklin might break with tradition. If so, the corrupt head of the Criminal Investigation Branch, Francis Erich Bischof, 53, a Freemason, would be strongly favoured, and his appointment would necessarily leave a vacancy as head of the CIB.

“Bischof had expressed the view that police who refused to fabricate evidence were no use to him. I have that information from a lay brother in the Catholic Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Brother James (McMahon), who had it from his brother, Constable Tom McMahon, who had it from Bischof. Lawyers call that hearsay upon hearsay, and English law would not admit it as evidence in a court. However, in the circumstances, and weighing it with other data about Bischof, I have no doubt it is true. It appears that two detectives who were sound on the Bischof Principle were Inspector Norwin (Norm) Bauer, 51, the Masonic Grand Master in Queensland, who was in charge of the Cloncurry district which took in Mt Isa, and Glendon Patrick (Glen) Hallahan, 24, a Catholic and the youngest detective in Queensland, who was in charge of the Mt Isa CIB.”

... “At his trial in Adelaide in May 1958, Bailey made an unsworn statement from the dock claiming that police had concocted his ‘confession’ but he was found guilty. The Liberal and Country League Premier, Hon Thomas Playford (1896-1981), a yokel of a type otherwise exemplified by Henry Bolte in Victoria and Honest Frank Nicklin and Johannes Bjelke-Petersen in Queensland, had been kept in office since 1938 by a ruthless malapportionment: country areas had a minority of the population but two-thirds of the seats in the lower House. One consequence was that South Australia was a serious hanging state; 40 per cent of those found guilty of murder were executed. Bailey was hanged in July 1958.” (I have come on three different dates for Bailey’s execution but the correct date, according to the newspapers of the time, was the 24th June.)

This did no harm at all to certain careers. “Bischof was appointed Commissioner on 30 January 1958; Bauer was appointed head of the CIB; Hallahan was shortly transferred to Brisbane.” The harm it might have done to their psyches is not quantifiable ...

* * * * *

American poet Alice Duer Miller wrote in her long poem ‘The White Cliffs’ ...
Heard soft on the staircase a slow footstep creeping,
The ear of the living—the step of the dead.

A different kind of trial by voodoo might be an attempt to contact the dead. *The Afterlife Experiments* by Gary E. Schwartz is essentially a work-in-progress, running experiments to see if the survival of consciousness can be proven beyond doubt. But Schwartz also makes mention of an interesting survey based on the love and care people felt they had received from their parents and how it impacted on their health outcomes—

“We created four possible subgroups based on their college ratings: (1) father and mother both rated high; (2) father rated high, mother rated low; (3) father rated low, mother rated high; and (4) father and mother both rated low.

“For those men who rated both their parents high in love and caring while they were in college, about 25 percent had a confirmed diagnosis of physical disease thirty-five years later. The diseases included cancer, heart problems, high blood pressure, arthritis, and asthma.

“However, for those men who had rated both of their parents low in love and caring, 87 percent had a diagnosed disease thirty-five years later.

“Not surprisingly, of men who rated one of their parents high and the other low, approximately half had a diagnosed disease in midlife.

“The higher their perception of parental love, the healthier their lives. And we found that these patterns were independent of family and genetic history of disease, death, and divorce history of parents, as well as the smoking and marital histories of the men themselves. None of these familiar, well-established risk factors could explain the findings obtained.”

Schwartz thought that love might be a protective factor even when people did things like smoke cigarettes.

And he has this interesting speculation—

“Historically, courts have selected juries without ever asking questions about the beliefs of the candidates’ *deceased* relatives concerning prejudice, the death penalty, and other opinions related to a given case. But an interesting question arises: If the deceased can hear the trial, is it okay for the jurors to be open to receiving opinions from their deceased loved ones during the jury deliberations? And might those contributions help jurors more consistently find the path to the truth of guilt or innocence?

“In addition to instructing jurors not to discuss the trial with friends or relatives, will judges advise juries not to confer with deceased friends and relatives about the case? Or might they, on the contrary, *insist* that jurors attempt to communicate and seek advice from the departed?

“Deceased people will have been witness to crimes, especially if they are the victims in cases of murder. If scientifically documented and licensed mediums become accepted in the future, then theoretically a medium’s account of the deceased’s testimony regarding the crime could be considered by the court. This sounds like science fiction; in fact, some imaginative sci-fi writer has probably used just this premise.

“A victim’s afterlife testimony could be a critical factor in determining the conviction or acquittal of the defendant, especially if the testimony could be obtained scientifically and validated independently by multiple certified mediums.

“The living soul hypothesis has implications for sentencing, as well. If life after life exists, we can no longer presume that the death penalty is society’s worst punishment. And, just as there are victim’s family rights, the courts would have to decide to what extent the deceased’s rights should help determine an appropriate punishment. The victim might not be in a hurry to see his murderer in the afterlife. The ultimate punishment—the death penalty—might need to be reconsidered, not just in regard to its appropriateness for the defendant but from the viewpoint of the deceased victims.”

I would like to see jurors asked if they have heard any rumours about the case before they sit in judgement. But it seems unlikely anyone will ask them to consult a medium. Yet if this can throw any light on what has happened where there is contention, a lack of evidence, a lack of a body, conflicting stories, it does seem worth exploring ...

* * * * *

Ludovic Kennedy wrote in *A Presumption of Innocence*, “I have a profound admiration for the Scottish legal system, which is one of the ornaments of Scotland; not only because I think it is a superior system to that of England, especially as regards the criminal law, but also because for 250 years it has helped to preserve—institutionally more than any other single factor—the identity of the Scottish nation. Will it not be diminished, people ask me, if it has to admit that it made a mistake? The answer is no. What will diminish it is if, when mistakes are made, it is thought that efforts will be made to cover them up. A law that people can have faith in is one big enough to admit mistakes, on the rare occasions they occur, and then endeavour to correct them.”

* * * * *

November 4: Eden Phillpotts

November 5: Ella Wheeler-Wilcox

Alex Hamilton

November 6: David Lindsey

November 7: Albert Camus

Eric R. Kandel

November 8: Bram Stoker

November 9: Ivan Turgenev

November 10: José Hernández

Oliver Goldsmith

Robert Arthur

Neil Gaiman

* * * * *

Oliver Goldsmith may not be much read now but he had signal successes with his novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, his poem, ‘The Deserted Village’, and his play, *She Stoops to Conquer*. It is not given to everyone to succeed in three different avenues of literature. And more so for someone who lived a vague and rather chaotic life, never apparently sure where he was going or what he should be doing. And although I had always seen him as a very serious writer it struck me when I came upon a collection of his work that he could also be very amusing:

Thanks, my lord, for your ven’son; for finer or fatter
Ne’er ranged in a forest, or smoked in a platter.
The haunch was a picture for painters to study,
The fat was so white, and the lean was so ruddy;
Though my stomach was sharp, I could scarce help regretting
To spoil such a delicate picture by eating:
I had thoughts in my chamber to place it in view,
To be shewn to my friends as a piece of vertu;
As in some Irish houses, where things are so-so,
One gammon of bacon hangs up for a show;
But, for eating a rasher of what they take pride in,
They’d as soon think of eating the pan it is fried in.

From ‘The Haunch of Venison’; the lord being Lord Clare.

John Trott was desired by two witty peers
To tell them the reason why asses had ears;
“An’t please you,” quoth John, “I’m not given to letters,
Nor dare I pretend to know more than my betters;
Howe’er, from this time, I shall ne’er see your graces,

As I hope to be saved!—without thinking on asses.”
‘The Clown’s Reply’

Logicians have but ill defined
As rational the human mind:
Reason, they say, belongs to man,
But let them prove it if they can.
From ‘The Logicians Refuted’

Good people all, with one accord,
Lament for Madam Blaize,
Who never wanted a good word—
From those who spoke her praise.

The needy seldom pass’d her door,
And always found her kind;
She freely lent to all the poor—
Who left a pledge behind.

She strove the neighbourhood to please
With manners wondrous winning;
And never follow’d wicked ways—
Unless when she was sinning.

At church, in silks and satins new,
With hoop of monstrous size,
She never slumber’d in her pew—
But when she shut her eyes.

Her love was sought, I do aver,
By twenty beaux and more;
The king himself has follow’d her—
When she has walk’d before.

But now, her wealth and finery fled,
Her hangers-on cut short all;
The doctors found, when she was dead—
Her last disorder mortal.

Let us lament, in sorrow sore,
For Kent Street well may say,
That had she lived a twelvemonth more—
She had not died to-day.
‘An Elegy’

*

Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain,
With grammar, and nonsense, and learning;
Good liquor, I stoutly maintain,

Give *genus* a better discerning.
Let them brag of their heathenish gods,
Their Lethes, their Styxes, and Stygians;
Their *quis*, and their *quæ*s, and their *quods*,
They're all but a parcel of pigeons.
Toroddle, toroddle, toroll.

When Methodist-preachers come down,
A-preaching that drinking is sinful,
I'll wager the rascals a crown,
They always preach best with a skin full.
But when you come down with your pence,
For a slice of their scurvy religion,
I'll leave it to all men of sense
But you, my good friend, are the pigeon.
Toroddle, toroddle, toroll.

Then come, put the jorum about,
And let us be merry and clever;
Our hearts and our liquors are stout.
Here's the Three Jolly Pigeons for ever!
Let some cry up woodcock or hare,
Your bustards, your ducks, and your widgeons;
But of all the birds in the air,
Here's a health to the Three Jolly Pigeons!
Toroddle, toroddle, toroll.

'Song' sung by Tony Lumpkin in *She Stoops to Conquer*.

I hadn't known who was 'Tony Lumpkin' when I came across old Mrs Knox referring to her nephew as 'Tony Lumpkin' in *The Irish R.M.* when I was young. And Goldsmith referred to his muse Mary Anne Horneck as his 'Jessamy Bride', a phrase Virginia Woolf also uses. But time goes on and such usages are lost and forgotten. Does it matter? Will they be replaced by vivid new descriptions? Or will we lose a richness in our lives and reading?

And perhaps I was wrong to think that Goldsmith is not much read now, although his statue is still on the tourist trail for visitors to Dublin. I just picked up a book in the library called *Ill Fares the Land*, by Tony Judt, because I was intrigued by the title. In fact, it comes from Goldsmith's poem 'The Deserted Village';

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

And I was intrigued to discover that several relatives and family connections donated to help create the Goldsmith Memorial in front of Trinity College in Dublin. The statue was created by sculptor John Henry Foley in 1864 and there are two statues there, a confident Edmund Burke looking across to a pensive Oliver Goldsmith. It has been postulated that it was designed to suggest he was proof-reading or pondering upon one of his manuscripts. It is equally possible that Goldsmith, who had to work for his board at TCD and was looked down upon by his fellow students and tutors, might be thinking he would like to have been placed in a more congenial location.

“You can preach a better sermon with your life than your lips.”

Oliver Goldsmith.

* * * * *

November 11: Feodor Dostoyevsky
November 12: Janette Turner Hospital
G. M. Hague
November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson

* * * * *

My grandmother had *The Pocket R. L. S. being favourite passages from the works of Stevenson* and it contains the poem:

We travelled in the print of olden wars;
Yet all the land was green;
And love we found, and peace,
Where fire and war had been.

They pass and smile, the children of the sword—
No more the sword they wield;
And O, how deep the corn
Along the battlefield!

But Stevenson in his *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes* uses that same poem to begin his chapter ‘The Country of the Camisards’ and underneath it puts the name W. P. Bannatyne. Was this a pseudonym he sometimes used? Did he put in someone else’s poem which was later assumed to be his? Was it a misprint? Was there a W. P. Bannatyne?

Travels with a Donkey is light and lively and quite interesting—but I don’t think I would sell any donkey I owned to Stevenson. He clearly had issues with his reluctant donkey which, understandably, had no particular wish to traverse the French countryside carrying his luggage. Stevenson writes, “It will readily be conceived that I could not carry this huge package on my own, merely human shoulders. It remained to choose a beast of burden. Now, a horse is a fine lady among animals, flighty, timid, delicate in eating, of tender health; he is too valuable to be left alone, so that you are chained to your brute as to a fellow galley-slave; a dangerous road puts him out of his wits; in short, he’s an uncertain and exacting ally, and adds thirty-fold to the troubles of the voyager. What I required was something cheap and small and hardy, and of a stolid and peaceful temper; and all these requisites pointed to a donkey.”

“Father Adam had a cart, and to draw the cart a diminutive she-ass, not much bigger than a dog, the colour of a mouse, with a kindly eye and a determined under-jaw. There was something neat and high-bred, a quakerish elegance, about the rogue that hit my fancy on the spot.”

He buys the donkey for sixty-five francs and a glass of brandy and christens her Modestine. But not only is he ignorant about camping and traveling, he knows very little about donkeys. When she sees no reason to hustle along a man tells him to beat her severely, which he does. “I promise you, the stick was not idle; I think every decent step that Modestine took must have cost me at least two emphatic blows. There was not another sound in the neighbourhood but that of my unwearied bastinado.”

And when the beatings grow ineffective a man advises him to prick her with a sharp goad. “No more wielding of the ugly cudgel; no more flailing with an aching arm; no more broadsword exercise, but a discreet and gentlemanly fence. And what although now and then a drop of blood should appear on Modestine’s mouse-coloured wedge-like rump?”

But she begins to look a sorry sight. “Alas, there were her two forelegs no better than raw beef on the inside, and blood was running from under her tail. They told me when I started, and I was ready to believe it, that before a few days I should come to love Modestine like a dog. Three days had passed, we had shared some misadventures, and my heart was still as cold as a potato towards my beast of burden.”

But on they go through the French countryside. It isn’t really clear why Stevenson was taking this trip. There doesn’t seem anything he is particularly passionate about seeing, neither the history nor the landscape, neither the cuisine, the music, nor the language, and he is rarely complimentary about the people he meets. Perhaps like other Victorian travelers he simply wanted to prove he could do it.

(Frank Barrett writing in *The Independent* 8/6/1991 says, “hundreds of British people still come every month to follow in his footsteps” but Barrett also says, “The original journal that the young man kept of his journey – written in an Edinburgh school exercise book – reveals that he was even more cruel to the donkey than the published book shows.”)

He does “fifteen miles and a stiff hill in little beyond six hours” to St. Jean du Gard, after, “Modestine and I—it was our last meal together—had a snack upon the top of St. Pierre, I on a heap of stones, she standing by me in the moonlight and decorously eating bread out of my hand. The poor brute would eat more heartily in this manner; for she had a sort of affection for me, which I was soon to betray.”

He sells Modestine and the saddle for thirty-five francs and goes on by stage-coach. It is only when he has left her behind that he suddenly waxes sentimental. They have traveled “upwards of a hundred and twenty miles” together and “She was patient, elegant in form, the colour of an ideal mouse, and inimitably small. Her faults were those of her race and sex; her virtues were her own. Farewell, and if for ever—”

The reader can but hope that Modestine has fallen into safe and kindly hands.

*

And to answer my initial question: yes, W. P. Bannatyne was a pseudonym Stevenson used early in his career. When he became famous he either saw no need to hide behind another name—or his publishers and his public wouldn’t let him. But why did he choose that particular name? If the W. P. has a significance he never shared this with anyone but it is thought that he may have taken Bannatyne from the Bannatyne Club. This was a club set up by Sir Walter Scott in 1823 with the aim of promoting and publishing works of Scottish literature, poetry, and history. Although it was eventually closed down it is possible that the name resonated with readers looking for new Scottish poetry and prose. It may have helped Stevenson as a young writer. And there is that other thing: if you put your own poems at the top of each chapter it risks being seen as self-indulgent. If you present them as someone else’s work they may be taken more seriously. I wonder what my grandmother thought of the poem and if she knew anything of its history?

* * * * *

November 14: Steele Rudd

Robert Hichens

November 15: William Cowper

J. G. Ballard

W. H. Hodgson

November 16: Michael Arlen

Marilyn Ross

November 17: Auberon Waugh

November 18: R. J. Benson

November 19: William Golding
 John Gordon
 November 20: Nadine Gordimer
 November 21: François Voltaire
 Friedrich Schleiermacher
 November 22: George Eliot
 Jon Cleary
 November 23: Robert Barnard
 Clemence Housman
 November 24: Baruch Spinoza
 Laurence Sterne
 November 25: Harley Granville-Barker
 Elsie J. Oxenham
 November 26: Sally Farrell Odgers
 November 27: Vincent O’Sullivan
 November 28: William Blake
 Randolph Stow
 Friedrich Engels

* * * * *

It seems strange, doesn’t it, that anything Western so resented by the Chinese (often with good reason) did not extend to either the Industrial Revolution which is alive and well and turning China into the Home of Smog—or the two main critiquers of it, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. I wondered if there was something in Chinese history or experience which somehow paved the way. And the most obvious someone would be Confucius (551 – 479 BC) who preached a way of obedience to authority and deference to power. And before him came Lao Tzu who taught on the contradictions in life and our observation of them. He too encouraged a life of goodness, integrity, and obedience but not an obedience which is simply expected by seniors, elders, important people, authority ...

You might say that Engels and Marx were *not* encouraging obedience to authority, that they wanted to turn a system of the powerful and the powerless upside down. And yet the systems they inspired, deferential, obedient, puritanical, with centralized authority, have a Confucian sense about them.

*

Truthful words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not truthful. Good words are not persuasive; persuasive words are not good. He who knows has no wide learning; he who has wide learning does not know.

The sage does not hoard.

Having bestowed all he has on others, he has yet more;

Having given all he has to others, he is richer still.

The way of heaven benefits and does not harm; the way of the sage is bountiful and does not contend.

LXXXI Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*.

Go to the people

Live among them

Start with what they know

And when the deed is done

The mission accomplished

Of the best leaders

The People will say
We did it ourselves.

*

Lao Tzu is far harder to pin down. He is a philosopher of the contradictions and complements in everything. But the contradictions are underlain by a sense of gentleness, scholarship, and compassion. Confucius provides rules. Lao Tzu provides thoughts.

Julian Caldecott mentions this contradiction in *Water: Life in Every Drop*, “It’s hard to imagine philosophical traditions more at odds with one another than Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism is rational, active and dominating, while Taoism emphasizes all that is intuitive, mystical and yielding. Both seek social harmony, and harmony of mind, but by very different routes, and only Taoism explicitly seeks harmony with nature as well. Nevertheless, they and all their implications and consequences both come from the mind of one species. They represent two competing, yet subtly complementary ways of looking at the world and acting within it.” And Derek Bryce says, “Many of the Taoist texts give the impression of being opposed to Confucianism, but when Taoism and Confucianism are seen as having existed side-by-side during more than two thousand years of Chinese history, they can be considered as complementary” ...

Lao Tzu’s best known words are probably:
A tree that can fill the span of a man’s arms
Grows from a downy tip;
A terrace nine storeys high
Rises from hodfuls of earth;
A journey of a thousand miles
Starts from beneath one’s feet.

Or as it is often translated:

A journey of a thousand miles
Begins with a single step ...

But there is not absolute agreement on who Lao Tzu was, a single sage or a school of sages, or a sage and his students, or several sages generation after generation, collecting and sharing wisdom. Lao Tzu translates as ‘Old Master’. Just as both the writings of ‘David’ and of ‘Isaiah’ are now accepted as being compendiums it seems very likely that the same can be said of Lao Tzu. (Though his writings, if looking for a Biblical similarity, are most reminiscent of ‘Proverbs’, though more esoteric and more subtle in their style.) He is thought to have lived between 570 and 490 BC in the Han Dynasty; he is accepted as having had fore-runners as well as followers such as Lieh-Tzu but the seminal work, the *Tao-Te-Ching*, is always attributed to Lao-Tzu.

Brian Browne Walker in his translation of the *Tao Te Ching* writes, “According to legend, Lao Tzu was keeper of the Imperial Archives, in what is now China, during the Chou Dynasty some twenty-six hundred years ago. During a period of chaos and disorder, he elected to leave civilization and go to live out his life alone in the mountains. As he approached the gate of the city, riding on the back of an ox, he was stopped by the gatekeeper. Learning of Lao Tzu’s intentions, the man begged him to leave some written expression of his wisdom for the benefit of others. And so, the story goes, the *Tao te Ching* came into being.”

It begins:

Tao is beyond words
and beyond understanding.

Words may be used to speak of it,
but they cannot contain it.

Tao existed before words and names,
before heaven and earth,
before the ten thousand things.
It is the unlimited father and mother
of all limited things.

But intriguingly Walker goes on to say, “What is more likely is that the body of teachings now known as the *Tao te Ching* was developed over a period of two or three hundred years by five or six different sages. Some were almost assuredly women; certainly the teaching here is the gentlest and most motherly of all the world’s great books on the art of living.”

And these words of Lao Tzu seem to support this idea:
Everyone under heaven says that my Tao
is great, but inconceivable.
It is its very greatness that makes
it inconceivable!
If it could be conceived of,
how small it would be!

I have three treasures to hold and protect:
The first is motherly love.
The second is economy.
The third is daring not to be first in the world.

With motherly love one can be courageous.
With economy one can be expansive.
With humility one can lead.

To be courageous without motherly love,
To be expansive without practicing economy,
To go to the front without humility—
This is courting death.

Venture with love and you win the battle.
Defend with love and you are invulnerable.
Heaven’s secret is motherly love.

And other writers question some of the ‘received wisdom’ about Chinese dates:

“The trouble is, current archaeological evidence indicates that the Bronze Age in China didn’t get under way until nearly 1500 B.C. If the use of bronze began centuries earlier in the Tarim Basin next door, it threw into doubt the doctrine that Chinese civilization grew up quite separately from Near Eastern innovations on all fronts, that the Chinese had invented such seminal crafts as metalworking and writing entirely independently.”

Elizabeth Wayland Barber in *The Mummies of Ürümchi*.

Ben Chu in *Chinese Whispers* also looks at questions of dating. He says that Xi Jinping when he made his first address as leader said, ‘During the civilization and development process of more than five thousand years, the Chinese nation has made an indelible contribution to the

civilization and advancement of mankind.’ Chu says about this, “The idea that Chinese history extends back five millennia has been repeated so often that it is now taken for granted. It shouldn’t be. The claim is predicated on the existence of a so-called ‘Yellow Emperor’, who is said to have ruled three thousand years before the birth of Christ. As well as bringing the Chinese nation into existence, this God-like founding father is supposed to have taught his people how to grow crops, domesticate animals and even to clothe themselves.” He goes on to say, “There is no archeological or written evidence that such a figure ever existed.” He likens this semi-mythical person to figures such as King Arthur and King Priam. They might well have existed but they are not brought out as proof of anything or claimed as ‘founding fathers’ whereas “in China a myth is embedded in mainstream political rhetoric, and few Western writers have shown any inclination to challenge it.”

Of course the domestication of animals does not require an Emperor any more than men gathering students and acolytes around them to share their wisdom need that kind of ruler. Nor do they need to be artisans or scribes.

Curiously, he says this is a recent change, that up until Jiang Zemin went to Egypt in the late 1990s, and learned of, and perhaps visited, places that were much older, they had only claimed three to four thousand years of history. The Communist Party gave their nation an extra thousand years in what Chu calls “an act of international one-upmanship.”

Even the earlier claims are not well underpinned, which doesn’t mean they can’t contain some truth, just that they aren’t, so far, provable by artifacts or documents. Chu says, “The earliest written records date from the era of the Shang Dynasty in 1600 BC. ‘Oracle bones’ – the shoulder blades of oxen with a primitive Chinese script engraved upon them – appear to have been used by rulers for divining the future. As the Shang only covered a relatively small region of modern-day northern China, it is not clear why they should be regarded as the founders of the modern nation, rather than just an early people who lived within the geographical borders of the present state.”

But does a date for Lao Tzu matter—any more than a date for Isaiah? It is surely what they wrote rather than when they wrote it that influences people ...

Derek Bryce in his translation of the *Tao-Te-Ching* summarises its basic belief as:

“Before time, and throughout time, there has been a self-existing being—eternal, infinite, complete, omnipresent. This being cannot be named or spoken about, because human speech only applies to perceptible beings. Now the primordial being was primitively, and is still essentially, imperceptible. Outside this being, before the beginning, there was nothing. It is referred to as *wu*, “non-being,” or “formless,” *huan*, “mystery,” or *Tao*, “the Principle.” The period when there was not as yet any sentient being, when the essence alone of the Principle existed, is called *hsien t’ien*, “before Heaven.” This essence possessed two immanent properties, the *yin*, “concentration,” and the *yang*, “expression,” which were manifested “one day” under the perceptible forms of Heaven (*yang*) and Earth (*yin*). That day marked the beginning of time. From that day the Principle can be named by the double term of Heaven and Earth. The Heaven-Earth binomial is called *yu*, “sentient being,” which, through *te*, the “virtue of the Principle,” generates all the products that fill up the world. The period since Heaven and Earth were manifested is called *hout’ien*, after Heaven. The state *yin*, of concentration and rest, of imperceptibility, which was that of the Principle before time, is its inherent state. The state *yang*, of expansion and action, of manifestation in sentient beings, is its state in time, in some ways inappropriate. With these two states of the Principle there corresponds in the faculty of human awareness, rest and activity, or, put another way, empty and full. When the human mind produces ideas, is full of images, is moved by passion, then it is only able to know the effects of the Principle, distinct perceptible beings. When the mind, absolutely still, is completely empty

and calm, it is a pure and clear mirror, capable of reflecting the ineffable and unnameable essence of the Principle itself.”

*

“The great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was obviously the brain-child of Chairman Mao, the only man in China with the necessary imagination and political flair. But the red book of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* was compiled by Chen Po-ta, Mao’s former political secretary and a fanatical revolutionary.”

From *The Time Bomb* by Norman Barrymaine. But is that little red book still required reading or has it become a quaint, if possibly dangerous, relic?

Confucius and Marx and Mao could live together. Lao Tzu might appreciate Engels’ wish to help the working poor but I am not sure he would admire or desire revolution and bloodshed. China has moved much further away from Lao Tzu than from Confucius but every journey, backwards or forwards, must begin somewhere ...

Without stirring abroad,
One can know the whole world;
Without looking out of the window,
One can see the way of heaven.
The further one goes
The less one knows.

Lao-Tzu

* * * * *

November 29: C. S. Lewis
Louisa May Alcott
Rhoda Broughton
Ed Gorman

November 30: Mark Twain
Jonathon Swift

December 1: Max Stout
December 2: Brian Lumley
Visar Zhiti

* * * * *

Margaret King Boyes in her exploration of the music of what was then Portuguese Timor, *Eden to Paradise*, (to which she later wrote a supplement *Paradise Lost*) said she was surprised to find no lullabies used there. In a way any song sung softly to a child at bedtime can be said to be a lullaby. And listening to the actual words of some of our lullabies, such as ‘Rock-a-bye Baby’, would not necessarily make a child feel safe and content.

Nevertheless many lovely lullabies have been written, sung, murmured, extemporized, made and forgotten ...

But what of an Anti-Lullaby?

I came upon a poem called ‘Anti-Lullaby’ (‘Antininulle’) in the poems of Albanian poet Visar Zhiti:

My mother rocked my cradle,
Placed a song under my head
like a soft pillow
And bade me fair journey,
But not in a prison van.

They gave me a name,
Like a shell with a priceless pearl inside,
But not to call me
 in a harsh voice:
“Hey, prisoner!”

The road took my hand
And led me to school.
Letters – like butterflies
 landed on my shoulder.
But not to help me read
The prison regulations.

And my mother gave me brothers
So that I would not have to play alone,
She blessed me with a sister,
Tiny and cute
 with golden hair.
To wash, it would seem, my wounds with her tears
As in our folk ballads.

From this you can guess that Zhiti ended up in the prisons of Enver Hoxha’s grim creation of a Stalinist state in Albania. It was not surprising perhaps that a writer should fall foul of the dictator, many thousands of people did, but the thing which drew my admiration, apart from his courage and determination, was that he spent his prison years making up and memorizing (he wasn’t allowed pen or paper) dozens and dozens of poems. And also that although there are many grim aspects incorporated in his poems they are not grim poems. There is hope and even beauty alongside the misery and the gloom.

They also have a simplicity which suggests much more than their few words.

Time
And how it slips through my fingers
Without putting its ring on them,

And I remain simply its lover.

‘Time’

Full prisons are not an unusual aspect of many nations and many regimes but the prison camps of Albania went seemingly unnoticed by most of the world.

* * * * *

Though I have heard any number of lullabies I was intrigued by his title ‘Anti-Lullaby’. Years ago when I read Margaret King Boyes statement that East Timor does not seem to have its own lullabies I wondered if this might be true of other societies. Did Aboriginal mothers croon to sleepy children? Did lullabies take form in the Pacific Islands or the remote Andes? I came upon a mention of a book put out by USP Press called *Poru Poru, Lullabies of Solomon Islands* which would suggest that Melanesian people had lullabies and even remote tribes in New Guinea seem to have had lullabies. Strictly speaking, as my dictionary tells me, a lullaby is “a quiet song to lull a child to sleep” so it doesn’t have to be a song or poem specifically written for bed time. It is the quietness and peacefulness in it that soothes and drowns. Where the word came from isn’t known for certain but it is thought to be a combination of ‘lull’ and ‘goodbye’. We focus on the

‘lull’ but Zhiti was probably focused on the ‘goodbye’ aspect. And it may be that Margaret King Boyes who often had to depend on an interpreter was defining lullaby too narrowly.

But songs for children’s bedtime have been around for a very long time. It is nice to think that long before children got read a bedtime story they got sung a bedtime song. I came upon this one by Richard Verstegan in his *Odes* of 1601.

Upon my lap my sovereign sits
And sucks upon my breast.
Meanwhile his love contains my life,
And gives my body rest.
Sing lullaby, my little boy,
Sing lullaby, my only joy.

When thou hast taken thy repast,
Repose, my babe, on me;
So may thy mother and thy nurse
Thy cradle also be.
Sing lullaby, my little boy,
Sing lullaby, my only joy.

I grieve that duty doth not work
All what my wishing would,
Because I would not be to thee
But in the best I should.
Sing lullaby, my little boy,
Sing lullaby, my only joy.

Yet as I am, and as I may,
I must and will be thine,
Though all too little for thyself,
Vouchsafing to be mine.
Sing lullaby, my little boy,
Sing lullaby, my only joy.

And Burton Egbert Stevenson in his *The Home Book of Verse* not only devotes a whole section to lullabies (‘The Road to Slumberland’) but goes back further. He includes Robert Greene’s ‘Sephastia’s Lullaby’ from Shakespeare’s time, which includes—

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there’s grief enough for thee

—which doesn’t seem designed to send children happily off to sleep—and Richard Rowlands’ ‘A Lullaby’ from the same era:

Upon my lap my sovereign sits
And sucks upon my breast;
Meanwhile his love sustains my life
And gives my body rest.

Which raises the question of whether Richard Verstegan took and added to Rowlands’ basic rhyme or whether it was a traditional rhyme which people tweaked and changed and enlarged

And the focus on ‘rest’ made me wonder if it was tired mothers who preferred to hear a lullaby.

As well as a Sandman coming round people referred to a Dustman and I suppose the image of dust in your eyes is no worse than sand ...

Many famous writers churned out a lullaby or two, Tennyson, Scott, Blake, and unsurprisingly Isaac Watts had 'A Cradle Hymn'—

Hush! my dear, lie still and slumber,

Holy angels guard thy bed!

Heavenly blessings without number

Gently falling on thy head.

While Carolina Nairne brought in that element of nonsense that we associate with nursery rhymes,

Baloo, loo, lammy, nowbaloo, my dear,

Does wee lammy ken that its daddy's no here?

Ye're rocking full sweetly on mammy's warm knee,

But daddy's a-rocking upon the salt sea.

*

I have just been reading a delightful little book called *Malay Pantuns* collected by A. W. Hamilton. A *pantun* is to the Malay poet what a *haiku* is to the poet of Japan. Usually anonymous, like an old time ballad, it followed the quatrain form, first and third lines rhyming, second and fourth rhyming. It took, usually, an aspect of nature and used it then to allude to a human emotion or desire. Hamilton writes, "They appear as insets in Malay literature, and are in vogue as emotional assets in the composition of love letters. Whilst they replace song, they have the merit that any verse may be applied to any suitable tune."

Writing in the 19th century Isabella Bird wrote in *The Golden Chersonese* (the Malay Peninsula), "They have a good deal of poetry, principally of an amorous kind, characterised, it is said, by great simplicity, natural and pleasing metaphor, and extremely soft and melodious rhyme. They sing their poems to certain popular airs, which are committed to memory."

Hamilton goes on, "Some *pantuns* are crooned as lullabies by mothers to their children to dreamy old-world airs; others, again, are carolled in the home by growing lasses, so that no Malay is without a stock of well-remembered verses at his command.

"At the adolescent stage youths and maidens, who are allowed little or no direct intercourse, may yet voice the tender passion aloud in snatches of song which will not pass unheard and may evoke a rejoinder.

"Finally, *pantuns* are sung to musical accompaniment by players during the course of theatrical performances and by professional dancing-girls when hired by a patron on some festive occasion for public entertainment."

These *pantuns* do suggest a lullaby:

'Restless Slumber'

Tho' hot the day, I've nought to dry,

Being used to sun things on a boulder.

I've spread my mat, yet sleepless lie,

So used to slumbering on your shoulder.

Hari panas menjemur tidak,

Saya biasa jemur di batu.

Bentang tikar, tidur tidak,

Saya biasa tidur di pangku.

'Sleep the Opiate'

Fall, jackfruit, fall, if so you will,

But not on mango branches pray!
 Close, sleepy eyes, so you be still,
 And dwell not on those far away.
 Hendak gugur, gugurlah nangka,
 Jangan menimpa si dahan pauh.
 Hendak tidur, tidurlah mata,
 Jangan dikenang orang yang jauh.

They use many local items, often containing symbolism which would be lost on outsiders, such as mangosteens and durians, as well more general aspects of nature, hills, rivers, rice, coconuts, nutmegs, sugar cane, monkeys, mouse deer, swordfish, sparrows ...

Whence the dove on outstretched pinion?
 From the swamp to fields apart.
 Whence the dawn of love's dominion?
 From the eye it fires the heart.
 'Love's Commencement'

Soft-shelled crabs of mottled green,
 Are with peppers daily roasted.
 Did the woods not stretch between,
 Daily would our eyes be feasted.
 'Infrequent Meetings'

On a shelf the jering pods lie,
 Which a youth took in his flight.
 When Malacca's sea runs dry,
 Shall I break the oath I plight.
 'An Immutable Troth' ('jering' is a wild bean)

Sometimes instead of nature an aspect of history or modern life is used. For instance:

On Penang's isle the town is new,
 Where Captain Light was harbour-master.
 Pass not the old times in review,
 Lest welling tears but flow the faster.

'Departed Days' ('Captain Francis Light who founded the settlement of Penang in 1786 was buried there in the old cemetery at Georgetown; he held the appointment of Syahbandar or Port Officer'; his son Colonel Light is remembered for founding the city of Adelaide.)

Now you might like to try your own *pantun* ... Or if a *pantun* sounds too exotic perhaps your own lullaby ...

* * * * *

Australian writer Barbara Baynton, of *Bush Studies* fame, married Lord Headley as her third husband. He was a kindly eccentric, it seems, and she grew to be an imperious eccentric. Her grandson H. B. Gullett wrote, "About the time he married my grandmother the throne of Albania had become vacant and the leaders of that country, looking round for a king, had decided to offer him the job. He was of noble birth, a Muslim, a sportsman, and a gentleman. But the old boy, checking the available statistics, decided the kingship business, at least in Albania, had very little future and, to my grandmother's scorn, rejected the offer. Those who knew her considered Albania had had a most fortunate escape. As a consolation prize, certain notables of that country then gave my grandmother a fine blue sapphire brooch. They asked her to say

frankly if she liked it. This was a mistake. She replied with fulsome thanks but added that, since they asked her, she in fact already possessed a blue sapphire brooch. She would, therefore, prefer a brown sapphire. Brown sapphires are generally more prized than blue ones but eventually a magnificent stone was duly found, set, and presented. One cannot help imagining that the departing Albanians felt thankful they were not to suffer my grandmother's closer acquaintance."

Would the history of Albania have been different if Lord Headley *had* accepted? It is hard to believe their history could have been grimmer. Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer in *Albania* write, "Enver Hoxha's regime was haunted by fears of external intervention and internal subversion. Albania thus became a fortress state, its rulers determined to preserve the sovereignty and integrity not only of Albania but also of the communist system."

What Albania eventually got was King Zog the First. As Ahmet Muhtar Zogolli he was from a family of landowners in northern Albania and was one of the signatories to the Albanian Declaration of Independence in 1912. He eventually became president but on the 1st of September 1928 he made himself king. He ended serfdom in Albania but ran the country virtually as his private fiefdom with dictatorial powers. With the Italian occupation in WW2 he became a king in exile.

Could an English king have seen off the predatory aims of Albania's neighbours? Probably not. But an English king could have drawn Albania into a different orbit and given it a different focus. Would that have saved it in WW2? Probably not. Would that have saved it from becoming a fortress state? Your guess is as good as mine. But it doesn't seem very likely that Lord Headley would have run it as the fortress state that King Zog and later Enver Hoxha presided over. It is also a reminder that Albania as a nation state only dates from 1912. Is that another part of the problem? New nations have to travel a rocky road to turn declarations of independence into genuine independence and the freedoms that we believe are intrinsic to independence. And it is always tempting to believe that a strong hand on the wheel will make that journey easier ...

But people like Visar Zhati know only too profoundly that strong hands on strong wheels tend to destroy the creative life and soul of a people ...

* * * * *

December 3: Joseph Conrad

December 4: Thomas Carlyle

Rainer Maria Rilke

December 5: Christina Rossetti

December 6: Dion Fortune

December 7: Willa Cather

December 8: James Thurber

Padraic Colum

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James Thurber wrote an amusing piece he called 'How to Name a Dog'. He says, "The only animals whose names demands concentration, hard work, and ingenuity are the seeing-eye dogs. They have to be given unusual names because passers-by like to call to seeing-eyes – 'Here, Sport' or 'Yuh, Rags' or 'Don't take any wooden nickels, Rin Tin Tin'. A blind man's dog with an ordinary name would continually be distracted from its work. A tyro at naming these dogs might make the mistake of picking Durocher or Teeftallow. The former is too much like Rover and the latter could easily sound like 'Here, fellow' to a dog." A knotty problem indeed.

"Names of dogs, to get back to our subject, have a range almost as wide as that of the violin. They run from such plain and simple names as Spot, Sport, Rex, Brownie to fancy

appellations such as Prince Rudolph Hertenberg Gratzheim of Darndorf-Putzelhorst, and Darling Mist o'Love III of Heather-Light-Holyrood – names originated by adults, all of whom in every other way, I am told, have made a normal adjustment to life. In addition to the plain and fancy categories, there are the Cynical and the Coy. Cynical names are given by people who do not like dogs too much. The most popular cynical names during the war were Mussolini, Tojo, and Adolf. I never have been able to get very far in my exploration of the minds of people who call their dogs Mussolini, Tojo, and Adolf, and I suspect the reason is that I am unable to associate with them long enough to examine what goes on in their heads. I nod, and I tell them the time of day, if they ask, and that is all. I never vote for them or ask them to have a drink. The great Coy category is perhaps the largest. The Coy people call their pets Bubbles and Boggles and Sparkles and Twinkles and Doodles and Puffy and Lovums and Sweetums and Itsy-Bitsy and Betsy-Bye-Bye and Sugarkins. I pass these dog-owners at a dog-trot, wearing a horrible fixed grin.

“There is a special subdivision of the Coys that is not quite so awful, but awful enough. These people, whom we will call the Wits, own two dogs, which they name Pitter and Patter, Willy and Nilly, Helter and Skelter, Namby and Pamby, Hugger and Mugger, and even Wishy and Washy, Ups and Daisy, Fitz and Startz, Fetch and Carrie, and Pro and Connie. Then there is the Cryptic category. These people select names for some private reason or for no reason at all – except perhaps to arouse a visitor’s curiosity, so that he will exclaim, ‘Why in the world do you call your dog *that*?’ The Cryptic name their dogs October, Bennett’s Aunt, Three Fifteen, Doc Knows, Tuesday, Home Fried, Opus 38, Ask Leslie, and Thanks for the Home Run, Emil. I make it a point simply to pat these unfortunate dogs on the head, ask no question of their owners, and go about my business.”

*

“I recall still, nearly seventy years later, some of the first racehorse names that I read in the *Sporting Globe*. More than that, I recall the effect on me of my reciting those names in the way that the racing commentators recited them. So strongly do I recall the effects of some names that I am able nowadays to put out of my mind the dictionary meanings of those names and to see the clusters of images that they promoted long ago and to feel the moods connected with the images. I did not know, for example, the dictionary meaning of the word HIATUS or even whether the word was to be found in any dictionary. Whenever I saw the word above the blurred image of a racehorse in the *Globe*, I saw at once an image of a bird in flight above a deserted seashore or estuary. Not until many years later did I learn who were the ICENE or who was TAMERLANE. The word ICENE above the blurred image of a racehorse brought to mind a long silver-white robe worn by some notable female personage and the pleasant sound of the train of the robe as it swept across a floor of cream-coloured marble. TAMERLANE denoted for me a grassy pathway overhung by rows of tamarisk trees. Many names, however, failed to impress me or even repelled me. (It seemed to me then, and it seems still, that most racehorses are poorly named.) I can recall from the 1940s such drab names as LORD BADEN, CHEERY BOY, and ZEZETTE. The bearers of such names fared badly in my early imaginary races, which were invariably won by horses with appealing names.”

Gerald Murnane in *Something for the Pain: A memoir of the turf*. At least they didn’t call a horse Mummify back in the 1940s.

*

“ ‘They seem to think it’s more serious than just a check-up with Farquhar,’ I taxed her. ‘They think it’s cancer,’ she said. Aghast, I repeated the word. ‘Has the doctor confirmed it?’

‘Ach, indeed, I doubt the doctor wouldn’t know for certain yet but I’m feared it’s cancer the man has right enough. Folks was sayin’ they could smell it when he first took to his bed. There’s a kind of queer smell about cancer that there’s no mistakin’.’ ”

Lillian Beckwith in *A Rope—In Case*.

And three months later the poor man had died of cancer. As well as helping the blind, dogs are being trained to smell out cancer in humans. But is this a skill we already have but which we have neglected or perhaps so overloaded our noses with artificial scents that we would not trust them to smell a cancer?

* * * * *

Naming people and animals in fiction is an important business. Because names come with baggage. Most writer’s guides give some space to choosing appropriate names for your characters. A heroine living in 1350 is not going to be called Kylie. That kind of care. And whether to give your main characters very ordinary names like Arthur Dent or something more memorable like Sherlock Holmes ...

But I have never come upon a careful considered article on what you should call your characters’ pets. Should a strong silent hero have a cat called Fluffy? Should the ‘Bitch from Hell’ call her goldfish Benny? Should she even have a goldfish? James Bond with a pup called Rover, a horse called Peggy? I think there is a whole interesting discussion just waiting there ...

* * * * *

In the *Oxford Guide to Word Games* by Tony Augarde I came upon a game called Ghosts in which one person offers a letter, the next person adds a letter, and the last person, faced with an unwieldy clump of letters may struggle to turn them into a word. Augarde says, “Superghosts is a variation of the game, in which letters can be added at the beginning as well as the end. James Thurber was an addict of Superghosts, and he described its agonies and ecstasies in an essay entitled ‘Do You Want to Make Something Out of It?’:

I sometimes keep on playing the game, all by myself, after it is over and I have gone to bed. On a recent night, tossing and spelling, I spent two hours hunting for another word besides ‘phlox’ that has ‘hlo’ in it. I finally found seven: ‘matchlock’, ‘decathlon’, ‘pentathlon’, ‘hydrochloric’, ‘chlorine’, ‘chloroform’, and ‘monthlong’. There are more than a dozen others, beginning with ‘phlo’, but I had to look them up in the dictionary the next morning, and that doesn’t count....

Starting words in the middle and spelling them in both directions lifts the pallid pastime of Ghosts out of the realm of children’s parties and ladies’ sewing circles and makes it a game to test the mettle of the mature adult mind. As long ago as 1930, aficionados began to appear in New York parlours, and then the game waned, to be revived, in my circle, last year. The Superghost aficionado is a moody fellow, given to spelling to himself at table, not listening to his wife, and staring dully at his frightened children, wondering why he didn’t detect, in yesterday’s game, that ‘cklu’ is the guts of ‘lacklustre’, and priding himself on having stumped everybody with ‘nehe’, the middle of ‘swineherd’.

Thurber’s fascination with particular groups of letters has led some logologists to search for unusual sequences. Groups of two letters are called digrams or digraphs; groups of three letters are called trigrams or trigraphs. For example, which words include the sequences HQ, PK, XW, ADQ, EKD, GNP, PEV, SPB, and THM? Possible answers are, respectively, earthquake, napkin, boxwood, headquarters, weekday, signpost, grapevine, raspberry, and asthma. This can be turned into a game, in which a digram or trigram is chosen, and players write down as many words as they can which includes that group of letters.”

Compared to that, choosing a suitable name for your character's pet should be a doddle.

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December 9: John Hogg (bap)
John Milton
December 10: Emily Dickinson
December 11: Alexander Solzhenitsyn
Naguib Mafouz
December 12: John Osborne
December 13: Heinrich Heine
December 14: Nostrodamus
Shirley Jackson
December 15: Edna O'Brien
Sneja Gunew
December 16: Jane Austen
George Santayana
December 17: John Greenleaf Whittier
Erskine Caldwell
December 18: 'Saki' (H. H. Munro)
December 19: Jean Genet
December 20: Joseph Brennan
December 21: Frank Moorhouse
December 22: Edwin Arlington Robinson
Jean Baptiste Racine

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Maurice Baring wrote in *The Puppet Show of Memory*, "The greatest thing an actor or an actress can do is to create a poet. It used at one time to be said that Sarah Bernhardt had failed to do this. Yet the only really remarkable French dramatic poet of modern times, whose plays really moved and held the public, Edmond Rostand, was a creation of Sarah Bernhardt. The younger generation of his time, and some men of letters in France, but not all (Émile Faguet was a notable exception, and Jules Lemaître writes of his art with great discrimination), used to despise the verse of Edmond Rostand. But whatever anyone can say about the literary value of his work, there is no doubt about its dramatic value. Rostand may or may not have been a great poet or even a great artist in verse, but that he was a great poetical dramatist was proved by the only possible test—that of the rapturous enthusiasm of his audience, wherever and in whatever language his plays are performed. Since Victor Hugo, he is the one writer of our time, and the only writer in this century in the whole of Europe, who made a direct and successful appeal to the public, to the public in all countries where his plays were performed, and stirred and delighted them to the depths of their being through the medium of dramatic poetry. Surely this is no mean achievement; besides this, even among French critics, there are many who maintain that he is a genuine poet. Well, Sarah Bernhardt is in the main responsible for Rostand, for had there been no Sarah there would have been no *Princesse Lointaine*, and no *Cyrano* (for it was Coquelin's delight in *La Princesse Lointaine* which made him ask Rostand for a play), no *Samaritaine*, and no *L'Aiglon*."

Well, I know people who have gone again and again to see *Cyrano de Bergerac*, not perhaps for its poetical qualities, but certainly for the delight it provided. So if Bernhardt helped to inspire and push him forward then I am sure many people would thank her. But Baring links her to a writer I knew absolutely nothing about.

“This is one of the achievements of Sarah Bernhardt. Another and perhaps a more important achievement was accomplished before this—her resuscitation of Racine. Let everyone interested in this question get M. Émile Gahuet’s *Propos de Théâtre*. M. Faguet shows with great wealth of detail and abundance of contemporary evidence that in the ’seventies, until Sarah Bernhardt played in *Andromaque* and *Phèdre*, Racine’s plays were thought unsuited for dramatic representation. Even Sarcey used to say in those days that Racine was not *un homme de théâtre*. Sarah Bernhardt changed all this. She revealed the beauties of Racine to her contemporaries. She put new life into his plays, and by her incomparable delivery she showed off, as no one else can hope to do, the various and subtle secrets of Racine’s verse.”

It was a name I had occasionally come across but I had no idea what he wrote or when or why. So this inspired me to go and do a little research. Russian playwright Alexander Petrovich Sumarokov (1717-77) was described as ‘the Racine of the north’ because he applied “the French neoclassical style to Russian theatre”. But after reading through several of Racine’s plays, neoclassical or not, I couldn’t help finding him too cynical for my taste. Yet he must have had qualities in his writing to draw the playgoers of his time. So perhaps there was more to his writing, perhaps I was missing things. It was perhaps like wondering about the people who find wonderful literary qualities in the writing of Henry Miller. Are they looking beyond the sex and finding some brilliant writing or are they hiding their desire to wallow in vaguely pornographic writing by telling everyone there are literary gems in there if only they would take the time to look ...

But perhaps French playgoers were equally cynical?

I thought I should look a little further in to Racine’s work before turning my back on him for ever. *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*, edited by Peter France, says that Racine (1639-1699) was friends with La Fontaine, Molière and Boileau but he always had his eye on promotion within the court which may be why he transferred his plays from Molière’s company to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. He became an ‘historiographer royal’ which required him to write official history for the king and paid him well.

And France says of his plays, “The plots conform to the precepts of classicism (unity of time, place, and action), but they stand out from those of contemporary dramatists by their tense concentration on a single knot of conflict, in which a small number of characters, often interrelated, pursue their goals of love and power. These protagonists—Greek, Roman, biblical, or Turkish—are all of exalted rank, but only rarely do they live up to the standard their position demands. They range from the feeble yet demonic Néron in *Britannicus* to the strong and saintly Esther, but most often they exemplify a human nature divided against itself, weak, impulsive, cruel, self-seeking, yet aware of its degeneration from an unattainable ideal. Their existence is in striking contrast to the golden image of royalty which Racine had to paint as official historian”; and perhaps wisely he did not make his unattractive characters French or poke fun at failings within French society.

The *Companion* says, “Racine often proclaimed his debt to the Greek tragedians; in France he is their only successor.” Modern playgoers are happy to see French doctors being lampooned by Molière. I am not sure that they are very often fans of ‘the Greek tragedians’.

* * * * *

December 23: Robert Barclay

December 24: Matthew Arnold

Fritz Leiber

James Lovegrove

December 25: Michael Sadleir

December 26: Thomas Gray

December 27: Carl Zuckmayer
December 28: Alasdair Gray
December 29: Robert Lory
Norman Morrison

* * * * *

“The last summer of it came, and there was the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I could not accept the theory that this devastating act of unloosing a new weapon of war for the killing of men, women, and children was necessary to end the war. To this day I do not believe it. For I know the Orientals. According to the newspapers, the Japanese had asked for terms of surrender: they had asked, “What will you do to us if we surrender?” and to them it was quite possible that we would kill many of them and rape their women and destroy their homes. We might even have ravaged and burned the land, as Sherman ravaged and burned the South after the Civil War. If we had outlined for them exactly what we intended to do—just what we did do, which was actually extremely merciful and accomplished for the country more good than harm—they would have surrendered without the horrible example of man’s savagery shown to them at Hiroshima and at Nagasaki. We did not realize that all we needed to do was to answer their questions. This goes back to the subject mentioned more than once: we assumed that there was no racial difference between the Occidental and the Oriental. And there was and is and always will be, praise God! For it is to His honor and glory and delight that human beings should be diversified just as it is to the honor and glory and delight of a gardener that the plants and flowers in his garden should be diversified.”

Agnes Sanford wrote this in *Sealed Orders*. She then goes on to say, “So this war ended in a gloom and in a foreboding as one remembered the words of Scripture: “All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matt. 26.52).”

*

Paul Hendrickson in *The Living and the Dead: Robert McNamara and Five Lives of a Lost War* writes, “What you couldn’t have known from reading the *New York Times* in the winter of 1955 was that there was a preministerial student at a Presbyterian liberal arts college in Ohio who had been thinking hard about questions of pacifism and conscientious objection. His name was Norm Morrison and he was running on the cross-country squad and recently he had dislocated his shoulder in a game of touch football out front of the dorm and he had also recently begun meeting on Sunday mornings with a little Quaker worship group in the basement of the campus library. Friends of this idealistic and inarticulate young man said he possessed a blunt gift for action. It would be another ten years and nine months before Norman R. Morrison took the lid off the jug and poured the kerosene on his clothes and struck the match and turned himself, though not his baby daughter, into spectacular fire in a raised garden below the window of the nation’s war minister.”

His friends and his family reacted with shock and confusion. So did the broader community in the United States.

Up to a point I understand. There is a huge sense of powerlessness which encourages despair when we face our inability to stop an ongoing tragedy. We may make important decisions, we may try to influence politicians, but the happenings are *out there somewhere*. You can’t just go down the road and lie down in front of a bulldozer. Every day you face your powerlessness. Despair can turn to apathy, depression, resignation—or it can become a huge need to *do* something whether that something is effective or influential or not. I thought of doing the same thing to try to stop the ongoing murder in East Timor. But I had children. And perhaps more tellingly I lacked the courage to do anything radical. Now when I look back I wonder why I

didn't consider a hunger strike rather than immolation—

T. Ryle Dwyer wrote in *Big Fellow, Long Fellow* of the hunger strikers in 1920 including Terence MacSwiney, Mayor of Cork, “Michael Fitzgerald was the first of the hunger strikers to die, and eight days later, on 25 October, Joseph Murphy, a seventeen-year-old, died the same day as MacSwiney. Though both Fitzgerald and Murphy were on the seventy-fifth day of their fast, their deaths received very little attention in comparison with the massive international coverage given to MacSwiney. People around the world were greatly moved by his fortitude and determination. Among those who derived inspiration was Mahatma Gandhi in India, and another was Clement Attlee, the future British Prime Minister, who would be in power over a quarter of a century later when Gandhi used similar tactics in leading the Indian people to independence. Attlee was so moved by MacSwiney's gesture that he actually walked in the first part of his funeral in Britain.”

—and I know the answer to my question is Norman Morrison. His action didn't stop the Vietnam War. Nor did Terence MacSwiney change British attitudes. He could say “It is not those who can inflict the most but those that can suffer the most who will win” but there was no swift and obvious change. Instead it is probably true to say that martyrdom eats away at other people's moral certainty. They thought they were doing the right thing by their country and then they begin to have doubts.

But it was Morrison's family who walked the longest and most difficult road to understanding and forgiveness, because martyrs also need to be forgiven for what they take away. Hendrickson wrote that in 1995, “Robert McNamara came out with his own book about the war, and the response in America after six days—to quote the front page of the *New York Times*—was “broadly and almost relentlessly negative.” But what the nation's editorialists or book reviewers thought of *In Retrospect* didn't stop a forgiving woman deep in North Carolina from releasing this statement: “Thirty years ago on November 2, 1965, Norman Morrison gave his life in agony over our war in Vietnam and in a desperate hope of somehow ending it.... To heal the wounds of that war, we must forgive ourselves and each other, and help the people of Vietnam to rebuild their country. I am grateful to Robert McNamara for his courageous and honest reappraisal of the Vietnam war and his involvement in it. I hope his book will contribute to the healing process.” ”

McNamara asked if he could make use of her statement. She said he could. In what I can only see as a cynical effort to benefit from her kindness and forgiveness he used her statement to promote and sell his book.

Susan Sontag in an essay ‘Trip to Hanoi’ in *Styles of Radical Will* wrote, “Take, for instance, the notion of respect. “We respect your Norman Morrison” was a phrase often used in the ceremonial speeches of greeting made to us at each of our visits in Hanoi and in the countryside. We learned that Oanh had written a popular “Song to Emily”—Norman Morrison's youngest daughter, whom he took along with him when he went to immolate himself in front of the Pentagon. At the Writers Union, someone chanted for us a beautiful poem (which I'd read beforehand in English and French translation) called “The Flame of Morrison.” Truck drivers taking supplies along the perilous route down to the 17th parallel are likely to have a picture of Norman Morrison pasted on their sun visors, perhaps alongside a photograph of Nguyen Van Troi, the Saigonese youth who was executed several years ago for plotting to assassinate McNamara during his visit to South Vietnam. At first a visitor is likely to be both moved by this cult of Norman Morrison and made uncomfortable by it. Although the emotion of individuals is plainly unfeigned, it seems excessive, sentimental, and redolent of the hagiography of exemplary cardboard heroes that has been a regular feature of Stalinist and Maoist culture. But after the

twentieth time that Norman Morrison's name was invoked (often shyly, always affectionately, with an evident desire to be friendly and gracious to us, who were Americans), I started understanding the very specific relation the Vietnamese have with Norman Morrison. The Vietnamese believe that the life of a people, its very will, is nourished and sustained by heroes. And Norman Morrison really is a hero, in a precise sense. (The Vietnamese don't, as I suspected at first, overestimate the actual impact of his sacrifice upon the conscience of America; far more than its practical efficacy, what matters to them is the moral success of his deed, its completeness as an act of self-transcendence.) Therefore, they're speaking quite accurately when they declare their "respect" for him and when they call him, as they often do, their "benefactor." Norman Morrison has become genuinely important for the Vietnamese, so much so that they can't comprehend that he mightn't be an equally important aliment of consciousness to us, three of their "American friends." "

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But that question of different ways of thinking and seeing between East and West is virtually impossible to pin down except in very limited aspects. And as the West is Easternized and the East, to a greater extent, is Westernized, the questions become harder. And made harder by the simple fact that there is not, and never was, a single entity called East or West. Rudyard Kipling could write 'East is East and West is West and ne'er the twain shall meet' but fewer and fewer people believe that. The mind-set of an Albanian differs from that of a Swede or a Spaniard just as the mind-set of a Japanese differs from an Indian or a Filipino. Or it did. And yet despite the homogenization going on ... there are still subtle differences which leave little gaps and detours and rocky places on any shared journey.

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December 30: Rudyard Kipling

S. P. Somtow

L. P. Hartley

December 31: Holbrook Jackson

Mathilde Fibiger

John Wycliffe (d)

Frances Steloff

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'The Gotham was the ideal bookstore with dozens of literary magazines stocked on the counter up close to the front door beside the cash register and, halfway back on the right, a big table full of the newest books of poetry. On the walls were pictures of all the greats who'd read at the Gotham, including Marianne Moore and Cocteau and Dylan Thomas, some of them perched high up on a library ladder, posing above the elegant Frances Steloff (who died at 101 in 1989). Although she sold the "shop," as she called it, to Andreas Brown in 1967, she was always prowling around, sometimes urging customers to buy. She liked Oriental religions in a slightly creepy "period" way that went along with table-tapping and ectoplasmic photos, and an extensive section on Krishnamurti and the *Bhagavad Gita* was in an alcove just beyond the poetry table. Steloff, from a poor family, was self-educated. On her own, she'd turned the Gotham into a major intellectual center. I'm sure plenty of famous writers were lurking about during the hours and hours I spent there, but I didn't recognize them. Of course when you're an uninitiated kid, you're not likely to recognize literary celebrities on the hoof. You're like the Yale undergrad who (according to an anecdote of the period) saw Auden aboard the club car of the train to New Haven and passed him a note via the waiter asking, "Are you Robert Frost?" Auden wrote back, "You've spoiled Mother's Day." '

Edmund White in *City Boy*.

Steloff's Gotham was a centre, a magnet, a gathering place, legion are the writers who mention going there, but as the world of the bookshop comes under increasing pressure from on-line selling will there ever be a place like Steloff's Gotham again? I hope so. I love going in to bookshops, all that excitement waiting to be browsed in if not bought, but I can't help thinking I would also have loved to have stepped in to the Gotham and met Frances Steloff ...

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THE END

POSTSCRIPTS:

1. Graham Greene wrote a review of Alice Miller's long poem 'The White Cliffs' in which he calls her "a popular American novelist" and says she had a successful play "called *The Charm School*". "Now her short story in verse, *The White Cliffs*, has swept across the States. Eleven editions were sold in a month (it came out a fortnight after the blitz on London began), and it has been read in serial form over the wireless by Miss Lynn Fontanne. In England it deserves to have the same welcome: this simple, rather trite, but oddly moving tale of an American girl who marries an Englishman before the last War, and lives on here after her husband is killed, bringing up her son, only to find herself faced in 1939 with the problem whether to stay or go."

Its popularity was probably assured because it ends with the ringing assurance:

*I am American bred,
I have seen much to hate here – much to forgive,
But in a world where England is finished and dead,
I do not wish to live.*

People may have quibbled over that 'much to hate' but perhaps they felt forgiveness was the right response. Greene ends by saying "A war is not fought with literature, but it is fought with popular jokes and popular songs and popular verse, and Mrs Miller's poem is capable of creating the kind of legend that does move common men to action." The assumption being that less common men are not moved by popular fiction ...

2. I found this in John Allen's *Great Moments in the Theatre* (1958) and found it so interesting I thought you might also. And more so as I imagine his book is long out-of-print.

"Early in 1673 a new play was needed to entertain the king on his return from a campaign in the Netherlands. When one remembers that Molière was tired, worried, and unwell, it is almost incredible that he should have chosen to write a gay and mocking satire at the expense of the medical profession, taunting and teasing the very doctors whose skill he might have counted on to save him. The play was called *Le Malade Imaginaire*. It is not one of his greatest plays but it is one of his most adroit and amusing. Three hundred years have not withered its charm, blunted its satire, or lessened its effectiveness upon the stage.

The first performance was given on Friday 10 February, not, as Molière had hoped, before the king at Versailles but in his own theatre, the Palais Royal. The play was repeated on the following Sunday and Tuesday. The audiences were delighted; but the Faculty of Doctors

was furious and complained to the king. What Louis really thought we do not know; but from his subsequent attitude one suspects that he was becoming a little wearied of the storms of protest which so many of Molière's plays seemed to produce from one group of people or another. We simply know that about this time the king asked Molière how he got on with his own doctor (whose name was Mauvillain and of whom Molière was very fond), 'Very well,' said Molière. 'He prescribes remedies, I don't take them, and I get better rapidly.'

By the third performance his illness had taken hold on him. He knew he was nearing his end. 'How much a man must suffer before he can die,' he said. He had the greatest difficulty in getting to the end of the performance.

The play was given a fourth time on Friday 17 February. Molière was so weak that his young wife Armande and his leading actor, Michel Baron, who was then only twenty, tried to persuade him not to play. But thinking as usual of others before himself, he said:

'How can I refuse to play when the bread of so many people depends upon me?'

The theatre was full. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, the fashionable hour for play-going in those days. The curtains parted on a large, bare stage suggesting a room in a rich man's house. In the middle of the stage there was a high-backed chair in which Monsieur Argan, the imaginary invalid, played of course by Molière, was sitting.

Monsieur Argan was what we should call an extreme hypochondriac, a man who had thought himself into every conceivable illness, who was never happy unless surrounded by doctors ministering to his supposed complaints, or sampling the innumerable medicines, drugs, and possets crowded on the table beside him.

What an extraordinary performance it must have been with Molière, ill to the very point of death, playing the part of a healthy man who feigns to be ill. The rest of the cast were quick to realize the irony of the situation. It was clear to them what efforts Molière was obliged to make in his performance, and in the scene in which Monsieur Argan feigns death they watched from the wings and feared that pretence would become reality.

The play ends with a kind of burlesque charade in which Argan is accepted as a member of the Faculty of Medicine. The room is prepared for the ceremony. Eight servants enter, bearing various surgical instruments, six apothecaries, twenty-two doctors, eight surgeons who dance and two who sing, all of whom take their places according to rank. In their midst stands Argan. The scene is written in a kind of mock learned language, part-Latin, part-French. At the climax of the ritual the doctors make Argan swear three tremendous and preposterous oaths. On the third and last Juro (I swear) Molière was seized with a convulsion. He tried to disguise it by forcing a laugh. The cast, aware of what was happening, carried on with little conviction in their playing. Molière struggled to the end of the performance. In his dressing-room, lying back in a chair, he asked, as an actor would, how the performance had been received.

'Very well, sir,' said Baron, 'but you seemed to be not too well yourself.'

'True,' said Molière, 'I feel cold, ready to die of cold.'

Baron touched his hands and found them as cold as ice.

He quickly arranged for the porters to carry Molière in a sedan chair to his home in the Rue de Richelieu not many steps away.

Madame Molière appears to have been out of the house, for it was Baron who continued to look after his old master. He offered Molière some of his wife's broth.

'No,' said Molière, 'my wife's broth is like fire-water; you know how many things she puts into it. Give me a little Parmesan cheese.'

Baron did so and Molière ate it with a piece of bread.

Then he spoke again.

‘My life is finished. My wife promised me a drugged pillow to make me sleep. Let me have it now. I cannot take anything which has to be swallowed. Pills would be enough to rob me of what little life I have left.’

Then he began coughing and spitting. Baron was distraught.

‘There’s no need to be frightened,’ said Molière, ‘you’ve seen me spit before.’

Then he was racked by another fit of coughing. When it was over he asked for the solace of religion. Monsieur Baron and Armande, who had now returned, went out into the streets and found two priests who, on hearing what they were required to do, said that the author of *Tartuffe* was not a fit person to receive the Last Sacrament.

The next priest they had to rouse from bed. When they got home they found they were too late. Molière had died in the arms of two Sisters of Mercy who had been accustomed to lodge with Molière when they visited Paris in Lent. They had just returned home.

The next day Armande asked the vicar of their Parish for a Christian burial for her husband: but he refused. He said that if indeed Molière had been overtaken by a mortal illness while acting, he was to be regarded as an object of divine displeasure, and having died without the consolation of religion, he must be refused a Christian burial.

Armande was beside herself.

‘Can they offer such an insult to the memory of a man who in Greece would have been honoured with altars!’ she cried.

She then addressed a petition to Monseigneur l’illustrissime et reverendissime Archevêque de Paris, beseeching him to let her husband be buried in his parish church since he had died a true Christian and had not long since received the sacrament at the hands of one of the priests of the church of St Germain-des-Près.

Such was the hostility of the Church towards actors in general and Molière in particular that even this plea the Archbishop refused, and for four days Molière lay unburied.

Armande next addressed an appeal to the king himself, and was granted an audience. By now she was angry and distraught.

‘If,’ she is reported to have said, ‘my husband was criminal for having been an actor, it should not be forgotten that his crime was often encouraged by the king himself.’

This was not a tactful way to remind the king of the support he had given her husband’s company. Louis abruptly ended the interview, remarking that the matter did not rest with him.

He seems, however, to have done what he could, for a few hours later the Archbishop received intimation that the king wished him to find a solution for the problem which would avoid either scandal or a demonstration.

So the Archbishop gave permission for Molière to be buried in the cemetery of the Parish church of St Eustache. Two priests would be allowed to participate provided that the body was not removed at any time during the day, nor presented in any church, nor borne through the streets with the least sign of pomp, nor interred within any sacred walls, nor accorded any ceremony at any time.

Armande had no alternative but to accept these appalling conditions; and it was agreed that the body of Molière should be laid at rest behind the Chapelle St Joseph in the Rue Montmartre in ground that was set apart for the bodies of felons, suicides, and unchristened children.

At nine o’clock at night on the 21 February, with a light snow falling, the procession set forth. The coffin, hidden beneath a large pall, was carried by four priests and followed by six choirboys with candles and more than a hundred of Molière’s friends and fellow-actors bearing tapers and torches.

The road was lined with spectators. It would be agreeable to think that the people of Paris had come to pay their last respects to a man in defiance of authority. But it seems more likely that they were there to see the coffin of a reputedly evil genius to whom the church for his sins had refused Christian burial. Before the procession started Armande had leant from an upper window and thrown a large quantity of money among the crowd.

The procession moved in silence. The churchyard was crowded. In the flickering light of the torches, without a syllable of prayer from the priests who stood looking on, the coffin was lowered into the ground, where it lay for a hundred and fifty years.

And Molière's wife and friends went home.

But I daresay that if Molière has found time to look down from his abode in the Elysian Fields he may at least in part have forgiven us. He would have seen but a few years after his death that his company became the basis of the French National Theatre, then known as the Théâtre Française, or le Théâtre de Molière, but now usually called the Comédie Française: he would have seen that his plays are more often revived in France than those of any other dramatist and are highly esteemed wherever the theatre of western Europe is known and understood.

Even Louis XIV must have had his afterthoughts. When once he asked Boileau to name which writer of all his contemporaries had conferred the greatest lustre on his age, Boileau answered without hesitation,

‘Sire, c'est Molière.’ ”