A WELL-WORN TRAIL

COMPILED
BY

J. L. HERRERA

Dedicated to:

The Dedicated Volunteers at
Family History Centres
who help to make the past come alive.

And with Thanks to:

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Isla MacGregor, Maggi Storr, Anthony Raymond.

Introduction

It is an odd thing but I constantly find myself surrounded by interesting little snippets and the only thing I can think to do with them is to put them into some sort of collection. Do other people find this when they are reading? Or do I read in an odd way?

Sometimes when I look at all the bits of paper surrounding me with their almost indecipherable scribbles I ask myself why I bothered to jot something down. In a world beset by problems so huge they sometimes strike me as overwhelming to make a note of something in a book which came out a hundred years ago, had its fleeting moment in the sun, then disappeared to the back of the shelf or into the rubbish bin does not seem a particularly useful pastime.

Even that old saw about studying the past to avoid its mistakes is not compelling as a reason. Regardless of what I find out no one is likely to take any notice. And in a way I think that learning from the past is not very relevant to current problems. I remember coming upon a report in an old copy of *The Mercury* headlined 'Tasmania's Pollution Problems: A Legacy of the Past' and thinking that it was both true and yet also a form of avoidance. Far from being properly resolved pollution problems tend to be piled one upon the other, just as polluted earth or rubble is merely moved from one site to another.

Yet reading and writing are their own joy. Useful or not, they give me countless hours of pleasure. So I thought I would make this a writer's calendar with a slight twist. I would specifically try to resurrect some old and forgotten books which still seem to have something to say to me and perhaps to other readers. I did think of making a rule, nothing less than fifty years old, but then I thought that might become overly restrictive. Instead I have made that just a loose guideline, nothing more.

So come with me if this is a trail you might like to explore.

J. L. Herrera
Hobart 2015.

A WELL-WORN TRAIL

January 1: Maria Edgeworth
Mary Beard
J. D. Salinger
J. Edgar Hoover

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Mary Beard, a Cambridge don who published some of her blog pieces as *All in a Don's Day*, has this to say: "David Starkey (whom I have criticised before for being a trifle inaccurate on the history of the ancient world) has been sounding off in the *Radio Times* about how 'feminised' history has become: not a development of which he is in favour." David Starkey, it seems, is troubled by Henry VIII's wives getting most of the attention. "Which is bizarre," according to him. "But what can you expect from feminised history" and so on. Well, if you marry six times those marriages *are* going to loom large in any account of a man's life. Think of a life of Liz Taylor and a paragraph given to her husbands. Readers would feel short-changed.

Beard asks, "But what does a feminised history mean anyway? Is it history for women, by women, about women?" She mentions several recent books about influential women but says, "I thought feminising history was about doing history differently, and having different assumptions about what power was. The sort of history, for example, that doesn't always start from the antics of ye olde royal family, and Tudors in tights, perhaps?"

Perhaps. But I think it means, or perhaps should mean, that we look more at what was called 'woman's sphere', what people ate, how they dressed, how they reared their children, how they treated childhood illnesses, and what impact this has on history. And I think the traditional male emphasis on battles, governance, coups, power plays, held sway so long and bored so many people that new ways of looking at history became urgently needed if history departments were not to die, unlamented. Pick up any book by someone recounting their childhood sixty, seventy, eighty years ago, and they point to the dreariness of learning battle dates. Facts overwhelmed the simple knowledge that history was about character, expectations, family dynamics. A feminised history, to my way of thinking, is one which places greater emphasis on people. As a rule of thumb: pick up a male history and it will go into great detail about armaments; pick up a female history and it will tell you about someone's health as they made key decisions. This diversion of interests is changing. Today we know that how people feel is vital to how they behave. And all historians (perhaps David Starkey is an exception) are trying to create a more rounded picture …

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Back in 1935 Wilhelmina Stitch wrote a lovely book called *Women of the Bible* which makes mere names on pages come alive. She writes of being in Geneva. " 'Look,' said my companion, 'there is H. G. Wells.' 'Where?' I inquired, my heart thumping with excitement. H. G. Wells! To think that I was actually to see this literary giant whom I had admired for so many years. But when I looked he was no giant at all! Just a very ordinary looking little man, the kind of person one sees by the score in suburban trains. Homeward-bound trains that carry quiet little husbands safely home to nagging wives and peaceful gardens. Then came the introduction. Soon Mr. Wells was speaking, and then I saw that he was not a quiet, ordinary little man at all. He *was* the giant of my youthful imaginings. He was saying something and whatever that something was it had changed his appearance completely.

To think *I* was actually talking to H. G. Wells; and that the subject of our conversation was the Bible! Whilst the orchestra was moaning and groaning, he was saying with tremendous enthusiasm that he would like to bring out a special edition of the Bible, a shorter book, retaining only that which was of historical or spiritual value.

"I wonder if he remembers. I do. And I always think of Mr. Wells' remark whenever I think of the women of the Bible, because, where these women are concerned, I have the opposite desire: to lengthen, not to shorten the Bible. To fill in; not to exclude; to elaborate rather than discard.

"The stories where the women of the Bible are concerned are so inadequate. The historians of those days were not 'women-minded'. Their attitude to women was, to say the least, casual. They were concerned, those old historians, with the *men*folk; with *their* wanderings, *their* settlements and *their* spiritual evolution. The women were wives or mothers or daughters, and there was not much parchment wasted on them."

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Henrietta Leyser introducing her *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* writes, "As an undergraduate reading history at Oxford at the start of the 1960s, it was only Richard Southern's inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor, delivered in 1961, that made me aware of what lay behind the syllabus we had to study. The discovery that history as an academic discipline was a nineteenth-century invention filled me with fascinated horror. Until then I had always assumed that the study of history, like any other subject I had ever learned, required a certain amount of groundwork, but that thereafter endless vistas of human experience lay before the student. Only listening to Southern did I discover that this was not at all what was in the minds of those who had indeed thereby managed to establish it as a respectable subject for university study. They had actually chosen to leave out 'that which is most interesting in the past in order to concentrate on that which was practically and academically most serviceable'.

"The Victorian syllabus, it hardly needs saying, had little place for women. Concentrating as it did on public life and constitutional developments there seemed to its framers barely an occasion to mention them. Even the great *Dictionary of National Biography*, begun in 1885 and designed for a wider public, could find room in its sixty-two volumes for only 3 per cent of women. All this is both well-known and being put to rights. History syllabuses, world-wide, include topics on women; the *New Dictionary of National Biography*, now under-way, has a consultant editor for women on its staff. Women are, then, no longer in danger of being left out of history; but what is not yet clear is what precisely is their place within it. What are the grounds for the study of women as a separate topic? Should women's history make way for gender history?"

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Keith Jenkins in *Re-thinking History* is part of the re-thinking process. He writes of the distinction between 'the past' and 'history'.

"1. The past has occurred. It has gone and can only be brought back again by historians in very different media, for example in books, articles, documentaries, etc., not as actual events. The past has gone and history is what historians make of it when they go to work. History is the labour of historians (and/or those acting as if they were historians) and when they meet, one of the first questions they ask each other is what they are working on. It is this work, embodied in books, periodicals, etc., that you read when you do history ('I am going to university to read history'). What this means is that history is quite literally on library and other shelves. Thus if you start a course on seventeenth-century Spain, you do not actually go to the seventeenth century or to Spain, you go, with the help of your reading list, to the library. This is where seventeenth-century Spain is — between Dewey numbers — for where else do teachers send you in order to 'read it up'? Of course you could go to other places where you can find other traces of the past — for example Spanish archives — but wherever you go, when you get there you will have 'to read'. This reading is not spontaneous or natural but learned — on various courses for example — and informed (made meaning-full) by other texts. History (historiography) is an inter-textual, linguistic construct.

2. Let us say that you have been studying part of England's past — the sixteenth century — at A level. Let us imagine that you have used one major text-book: Elton's *England under the*

Tudors. In class you have discussed aspects of the sixteenth century, you have class notes, but for your essays and the bulk of your revision you have used Elton. When the exam came along you wrote in the shadow of Elton. And when you passed, you gained an A level in English history, a qualification for considering aspects of 'the past'. But really it would be more accurate to say you have an A level in Geoffrey Elton: for what, actually, at this stage, is your 'reading' of the English past if not basically his reading of it?

3. These two brief examples of the past-history distinction may seem innocuous, but actually it can have enormous effects. For example, although millions of women have lived in the past (in Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, Africa, America …) few of them appear in history, that is, in history texts. Women, to use a phrase, have been 'hidden from history', that is, systematically excluded from most historians' accounts. Accordingly, feminists are now engaged in the task of 'writing women back into history', whilst both men and women are looking at the interconnected constructions of masculinity. And at this point you might pause to consider how many other groups, people(s), classes, have been/are omitted from histories and why; and what might be the consequences if such omitted 'groups' were central to historical accounts and the now central groups were marginalised."

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January 2: Isaac Asimov
January 3: J. R. R. Tolkien
Henry Handel Richardson
January 4: James Ussher
Louis Braille
January 5: Umberto Eco
January 6: Kahlil Gibran
January 7: Zora Neale Hurston
January 8: Wilkie Collins
Storm Jameson
January 9: Lascalles Abercrombie
Wilbur Smith
January 10: Lord Acton
January 11: Alan Paton
January 12: Jack Drummond
Edmund Burke
Jack London

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I had never heard of Jack Drummond until I came upon a book called *The Vitamin Murders* by James Fergusson. Drummond, his wife Anne and his daughter Elizabeth were all murdered in France in 1952. A local farmer was convicted but later doubt was cast on this. So was it a random killing, a psychopath, a homicidal maniac, or did someone want to get rid of the Drummonds for a reason? James Fergusson in his research came upon an interesting man, an interesting family. Drummond had been an early food scientist. He had worked for Casimir Funk who had discovered what he called Vitamine B. In 1912 Drummond persuaded him to drop the 'e'.

He wrote only one book, *The Englishman's Food: A History of Five Centuries of English Diet*. But he was the key figure in Britain's Ministry of Food in WW2, instrumental in the 'Dig for Victory' program, the man who decided which foods would be rationed and what could be imported, the man who created the nourishing 'Blitz broth' to be served from mobile canteens to people who had been bombed out, the man behind the many jingles which taught people about

nutrition and cooking and the need for a plain but balanced diet. Fergusson points out that under Drummond's firm hand people's health actually improved, despite the limitations on shopping and choice during the war.

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Fergusson also draws attention to something which famous Italian bloodstock breeder Federico Tesio pointed out: "The grass that modern cows ate was different, too. Gillian Butter, a researcher at the University of Newcastle, put it very simply: 'The faster grass grows, the more the uptake of trace elements is diluted'." So when a packet of cheese trumpets 'Added Calcium' they actually mean that they are having to add calcium because the amount of calcium in milk and therefore in cheese has gone down.

Famous Italian bloodstock breeder Federico Tesio refused to allow his young horses to graze on irrigated grass. Edward Spinola said of him, "The keynote of the farms seemed to be that "Nature knows best". The pastures were natural grasslands, for Tesio did not believe in irrigation which forces the growth of the grass and deprives it of its strength. He even went to the extent of favouring the horses' natural inclination to migrate southward during the winter by shipping his weanlings each autumn to the farms of his partner, the Marquis Incisa, in the warmer climate of the Roman countryside.

"So his colts grew up as nature intended, with plenty of freedom and exercise and good green grass, but always under his vigilant eye, for Tesio knew that the weanling of today is the race-horse of tomorrow and that training can develop but not create his qualities. As he looked over his young animals he asked one question about each: "How does he move?" If the colt seemed to run for the sheer joy of running and with the ease and grace of the race-horse, he was satisfied. If the colt was sluggish or awkward he was worried for no trainer, not even a Tesio, can win races with bloodlines alone." His record of winners from a very small number of weanlings each year suggests he knew what he was doing. But as the lives of racehorses become more and more artificial I doubt if his views influence anyone any more.

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"Hot school dinners were introduced during the War. They cost two pence, and meant every child got a hot meal at least once a day. If parents couldn't afford the cost, their child received dinners free of charge. Menus were quite static and repetitious: brown Windsor soup, mince with mashed potatoes and vegetables, followed by sago pudding. Sago was known as frog spawn and not many kids liked it, but I loved it, so was happy to get seconds and thirds."

From *Remember When …* by John Hockney.

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"And I can remember – which of my generation can't? – the particular culinary horrors of war: Woolton pie, composed of vegetables and sausage meat more crumb than sausage, and brown Windsor soup which tasted of gravy browning. And we got very tired of carrots. At one time there was a glut of them and we were showered with a plethora of Ministry of Food leaflets extolling the virtues of carrot soup, carrot casserole and carrot cake. Carrots, we were told, were particularly good for our eyes. It was because of the carrots they ate that our gallant airmen were successful in shooting down so many enemy planes. Woolton pie and brown Windsor soup featured largely in the menu of British Restaurants set up under the aegis of the Ministry of Food to provide inexpensive and healthy meals. In this I think they largely succeeded. Despite shortages and occasional real hunger the country was remarkably healthy."

From *Time to be in Earnest* by P. D. James.

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Diana Souhami's *Murder at Wrotham Hill* tells the story of a 1946 murder in England. The victim, the villain, the police, the families, the investigation, were all unremarkable. But she set it against the backdrop of rationing, of thrift, of re-using and recycling, of a 'waste not want not' world. Booklets and leaflets with titles like *Make Do and Mend* came out. "The Ministry of Food gave advice on healthy eating:

Get fit not fat on your war diet!

Make full use of the fruit and vegetables in season.

Cut out 'extras'. Cut out waste. Don't eat more than you need.

A hundred leaflets offered recipes and diet tips: how to make jam, save the fat from bacon, scoop out the marrow from bones and feed kitchen scraps to hens. 'No country in the world grows better vegetables than we do,' the Ministry wrote, 'and no country in the world cooks them worse. Keep the skins on, save the greens water for stew, steam cabbage for no more than ten minutes,' 'Hedgerow Harvest' told citizens what to do with blackberries, rosehips, elderberries and crab apples. There were others about turning the topsoil, planting seed, and growing peas, beans and tomatoes."

People turned back yards and allotments into vegetable patches. Keeping hens proliferated. "Every morning at 8.15, all through the war and after, there was a five-minute talk on the Home Service about thrift and food: Freddie Grisewood and Ambrose Heath advised on good potato dishes, and vegetables for victory. Elizabeth Craig explained how to puff your Yorkshire pudding for your toad-in-the-hole. Florence Greenberg and Mrs Arthur Webb told the nation's women how to cook a meatless Sunday dinner, make marmalade with carrots, and bread and butter pudding without butter, contrive hash from leftovers, pickle eggs, mix the fat ration with powdered milk or semolina to make it go further, use sugar beet as a sweetener, turn potatoes into flour and wash clothes without soap. Listeners were advised to ask for half a pound of broken biscuits for a fraction of the cost, or a quarter of a pound of mushroom stalks to liven up a stew."

She goes on to say, "There was a paradox to frugality and rationing. The health of the poor was improved by having more food than before the war, the health of the rich was improved by having less. Few people were overweight. Vitamins were added to margarine, and schoolchildren had a third of a pint of free milk each day and an allowance of concentrated orange juice and cod liver oil."

The Ministry of Food also 'recruited' nursery rhymes to encourage people not to be picky.

Jack Sprat
Would eat no fat
BUT …

Things were less extreme in Australia of course but the thought all this conjures up is: should we be learning lessons from that frugality? We are living in a fool's paradise of plenty, of waste, of over-eating and wrong eating, of assuming whatever exotic foods we have developed a liking for will always be easy to import, and the highly-processed foods we take as our due will always cram supermarket shelves, and we are forgetting how to eat well, thriftily and simply.

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January 13: Horatio Alger
January 14: Hugh Lofting

January 15: Hugh Trevor-Roper
Mazo de la Roche
Mihail Eminescu
January 16: Teodor Flonta

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"So Teodor I was, with an official birth certificate stating that I was born on January 16th. Grandpa Teodorea, without knowing it, robbed me of the illustrious company of names born on 15th, like Martin Luther King, Aristotle Onassis, Moliere and Erminescu, the greatest Romanian poet of all time."

So wrote Teodor Flonta in *A Luminous Future*, his book about coming to Australia. He had been born on the night of the 15th but his grandfather believed that being born at night was a bad omen so moved his birth to the sunshine of the following day.

But my question was: who was Erminescu? Was he truly Romania's greatest poet? And what kind of poetry did he write?

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"The Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade talks about home – ontological as well as geographical home – and in a lovely phrase, he calls home 'the heart of the real'.

"Home, he tells us, is the intersection of two lines – the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical plane has heaven, or the upper world, at one end, and the world of the dead at the other end. The horizontal plane is the traffic of this world, moving to and fro – our own traffic and that of teeming others."

Jeanette Winterson in *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*

Eliade is surely the Romanian writer best known in the West through his *Encyclopedia of Religion*, his writings on religion, his books about yoga; though Neil Barron in *Fantasy Literature* is somewhat dismissive of his fiction: "Two Tales of the Occult" : "Two novellas based in yogic folklore, both involving timeslips which reveal that all is illusion. In "Nights at Serampore" three Europeans become lost in the Indian jungle and play a minor part in events which happened long before; in "The Secret of Dr. Honigberger," a young student is mysteriously enabled to examine the journal of a scholar who sought the way to a parallel dimension. Interesting modern examples of credulous occult romance." But many people have found enlightenment, inspiration, comfort, new ways of looking at things through his non-fiction writings. Just the other day someone drew my attention to David Tacey's book *Edge of the Sacred* and said how inspiring and helpful she had found it. In it David Tacey writes:

"Many Australians like to imagine that they inhabit a period of history that transcends the idea of the sacred: the influential editor of the Sydney *Bulletin* wrote in 1899, 'the religious stage was one stage in human evolution, as natural as the irreligious stage which is superseding it'. An important perspective is offered by Mircea Eliade, who argues that the sacred is not a stage of human history that we have outgrown, but a crucial part of human experience that we have misunderstood by attempting to interpret it literally. Of course, the *forms* of the sacred must change through time, but Eliade insists that the idea that we have outgrown the sacred in any form is a contemporary fallacy of colossal magnitude. Contemporary scientific rationalism has led to a religious cul-de-sac, where the symbolic statements of the soul are read literally as 'outdated misinformation' or primitive science about the nature of the real world. Anthropologists try hard not to denigrate the beliefs of archaic peoples, but they see those beliefs as fulfilling a merely social or structural function, as constructs that hold the society together, and not as an authentic means of maintaining and strengthening the bond between the human and the divine. Eliade and Jung have said that no high culture has ever attempted to live without a

meaningful relation to the sacred, none has considered that the material level was an adequate basis for sustaining a healthy and coherent society. Eliade calls for a 'new humanism' that is not based on rational materialism, but assumes that the sacred is a basic category of human experience, and sees that the human cannot be separated from the nonhuman and the archetypal. According to Eliade, humanity is and will always remain *homo religious*, and human nature can only know and fulfil itself in relationship to a transcendent other."

A few theatregoers might argue for Ionesco as their best-known Romanian writer—and anyone willing to consider putting a rhinoceros in a play deserves to be remembered—but Eliade has reached people through his editorship of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, through his books on yoga, religion, and spirituality. So, I'm sure, there are more people wanting to infuse their lives with meaning than there are wanting to know if there really *is* going to be a rhinoceros on stage.

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And Erminescu or Eminescu? Mihail Eminescu 1850 – 1889 was Romania's answer to the Romantic poets elsewhere. The Britannica says of him, "Eminescu's poetry has a distinctive simplicity of language, a masterly handling of rhyme and verse form, a profundity of thought, and a plasticity of expression which affected nearly every Romanian writer of his own period and after. His poems have been translated into several languages, including an English translation in 1930, but chiefly into German. Among his prose writings, apart from many studies and essays, the best-known are the stories "Cezara" and "Sărmanul Dionis"."

That comment about his poetry seemed a very good reason to find some of it but so far I have drawn a blank. I know people say 'all you need is English' but I suddenly found myself regretting that I cannot read Romanian …

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January 17: May Gibbs
Anton Chekhov
Anne Brontë
Ronald Firbank
January 18: A. A. Milne
Arthur Ransome
January 19: Edgar Allan Poe
January 20: Tom Baker
January 21: Emma Gad

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I remember coming on the information that Emma Gad was a 'Mother' of Danish feminism. More than that I did not know. But one day I was reading this little anonymous verse—

'On A Tired Housewife'

Here lies a poor woman who always was tired,
She lived in a house where help wasn't hired:
Her last words on earth were: 'Dear friends, I am going
To where there's no cooking, or washing, or sewing,
For everything there is exact to my wishes,
For where they don't eat there's no washing of dishes.
I'll be where loud anthems will always be ringing,
But having no choice I'll be quit of the singing.
Don't mourn for me now, don't mourn for me never,

I am going to do nothing for ever and ever.'—and for some odd reason a sudden curiosity to know more about Gad came over me, perhaps because British and American and French feminists fill our landscapes and others are invisible. It also came back to me, the memory of Hans Christian Andersen's mother struggling to make a living as a washerwoman and because this involved washing clothes year round in icy streams she took to drink to dull the cold and the pain. Surely, I immediately thought, things are much better now, but are they better because of Emma Gad?

Curiously, Emma Gad doesn't immediately spring up as a feminist. Her most popular and best known writing was a book of etiquette, *Takt og Tone*. Shades of Emily Post (!) I thought. It isn't that I am *against* books of etiquette and I think that Emily Post was very sensible when she wrote, "Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use." It is rather that etiquette and feminism aren't necessarily close friends. And I suspect that many feminists would say that the expectation women would always show a sensitive awareness, particularly to men, got in the way of 'educating' (see how polite I am) men about women's needs and women's rights.

But Emma Gad *did* promote women's rights in Denmark as she was co-founder, in 1898, of the first group dedicated to supporting and helping women gain recognition and rights, the Women's Trade and Clerical Association. It came much too late for Hans Christian Andersen's mother but it was an important step forward.

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January 22: Lord Byron
Francis Bacon
Charles Morgan
January 23: Katherine Tynan
Derek Walcott
Charles Harpur
Henry John Rous

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"The three poets who dominated the middle decades of the nineteenth century were Charles Harpur, Adam Lindsay Gordon and Henry Kendall. Gordon, highly esteemed in his own day and lionised for decades after his death (there is a bust of him in Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey), is now remembered more for his colourful and tragic life than for his poetry. Kendall, too, was well thought of by contemporary critics yet today is chiefly associated in the minds of most Australians with the one favourite schoolroom poem, 'Bell Birds'. Paradoxically, Charles Harpur, largely ignored as a poet in his own lifetime, is now widely judged to have been the only substantial poet of the whole colonial century. Harpur, like Tompson, was born of convict (emancipist) parents. He spent most of his boyhood in the picturesque Hawkesbury valley of New South Wales: the influence of its beauty and serenity on him is reflected in his occasional use of the pseudonym 'A Hawkesbury Lad'. His later life was to prove stormy, unfulfilled and tragic; not a little of the blame for that lay in his own abrasive personality which alienated him from many who were originally well disposed towards him. Harpur's strongest impulse was to poetry; his ambition was to be the first person to 'tune the harp Australian'. In his poem 'The Dream by the Fountain' he expresses a sense of his poetic destiny.

I know that 'tis mine 'mid the Prophets to stand!
I feel like a Monarch of Song in the Land!

That dream was not fulfilled in his own lifetime and he died embittered and unrecognised. Of those who had thus far in Australia's history contributed to its store of poetry Harpur was the only devoted student of the poetic craft. He took as his mentors the English Romantics Wordsworth and Shelley. From Wordsworth he drew an awareness of the fundamental link between man and nature, from Shelley an intense radicalism that drove him to struggle for the creation of a more equitable society. The only widely anthologised Harpur poems have been the nature lyrics 'A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest' and 'Dawn and Sunrise in the Snowy Mountains'. Effective though they are, with their characteristically Australian images of light, space and distance, of vast skies and impressive mountains and of the heat-hushed somnolence of the bush, these lyrics would not have raised Harpur's poetic achievement above that of Kendall. The more substantial Harpur poems include several based on pioneer experiences, 'The Creek of the Four Graves', 'Lost in the Bush', 'The Bush Fire', and 'A Storm in the Mountains', the last being reminiscent of parts of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Harpur also wrote several long, complex philosophical and intellectual poems which are beyond anything achieved by the other poets of the period – 'the Tower of the Dream', 'The World and the Soul', 'The Witch of Hebron' and 'Genius Lost', a series on the English poet Thomas Chatterton."

Australian Poets & Their Works by William Wilde.

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Harpur expressed some of his own philosophy as: "I recd. some consolation the other day from a perusal of Emerson's Essay 'the Poet'. Some of the conditions he assigns as being inevitable in his lot are hard, but they must be accepted. I, at all events, have been accepting the worst part of them all my life. 'The Poet must be constant, (he says) to be thought either a fool or a madman for a long time. He must be baulked, hissed at, hooted, and be everywhere misunderstood and malignéd. All this for a long time; but in the end he shall be known to his own, who shall console him with dearest love.' Let us see.

There are many fine things in this Essay; but at the same time there is also in it, to my thinking, much transendent trash. It is my curse, perhaps, that I cannot dispense with logicalness either in poetry or criticism—no, not even in a fairy tale. The 'pure reason', as a supreme governing power, must seem like a glitter of steel through the whole fabric."

"I may be an enthusiast—I *am* an enthusiast,—but I know that a grand and beautiful reason, a mighty logical necessity is at once the cause and the sanction of my enthusiasm. And 'Right Onward' therefore, the motto of the sacred Milton, the great republican poet of England, is also mine."

Emerson begins his essay on 'the Poet' with this verse:

A moody child and wildly wise
Pursued the game with joyful eyes,
Which chose, like meteors, their way,
And rived the dark with private ray:
They overleapt the horizon's edge,
Searched with Apollo's privilege;
Through man, and woman, and sea, and star
Saw the dance of nature forward far;
Through worlds, and races, and terms, and times
Saw musical order, and pairing rhymes.

Emerson writes, “For the Universe has three children, born at one time, which reappear under different names in every system of thought, whether they be called cause, operation, and effect; or, more poetically, Jove, Pluto, Neptune; or, theologically, the Father, the Spirit, and the Son; but which we will call here the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. These stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are equal. Each is that which he is, essentially, so that he cannot be surrounded or analyzed, and each of these three has the power of the others latent in him, and his own, patent.” He goes on to say, “The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty.”

I am not sure that Harpur was particularly interested in beauty. And it is true that there is a mystical tone to Emerson’s essay. Is this what Harpur saw as ‘transcendent trash’? And yet—might Harpur have reached greater heights if he had really engaged with Emerson’s idea that a poet is more than a chronicler of events?

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“To turn from the immigrant Melville and the expatriate Burn to the currency lad Harpur and his play, the first on an Australian subject by a locally born playwright, is ironically to step from the bush into what looks like a Shakespearean Forest of Arden. *The Bushranger* is a five-act Elizabethan drama with a heavy overlay of full-blown romanticism in its brigands, haunted forests, pastoral youth and maiden, and touch of the Gothic horrors. The realities of colonial New South Wales seem almost submerged in the Shakespearean imitation. But Harpur certainly felt himself to be drawing on his own experience and stoutly defended himself in the postscript to the 1867 text in a note that directly countered the criticism of his colonial characters as ‘shadowy and unreal’, when they were the very ones ‘which I had taken direct from actual subjects from men and women, in short, that I had often talked with face to face, and whose whims and oddities I had manipulated with all the zest, and all the insight, of an observant boy’. Shakespearean quasi-tragedy of its very nature made its subject remote from ordinary life. What startled the editor of the *Sydney Monitor* was the fusing of a form which traditionally dealt in larger-than-life figures, romantically distanced in time and place, with the immediate and sordid realities of a convict bushranger in New South Wales. *The Bushrangers* looks very like a literary folly, but when it is seen as the outcome of the conflicting pressures of the moral and aesthetic requirements of verse drama and Harpur’s own direct experience, the result of the amalgam is a much more interesting play than it might seem at first glance. The identification of a real-life criminal with the romantic figure of the rebel alienated from his society by its injustices and rising to heroic stature through his rebellion is as powerful a social statement in its own way as Burn’s more specific one.”

So wrote Margaret Williams in *Australia on the Popular Stage 1829-1929*. I had not known of this side of Charles Harpur. But it is perhaps significant that his bushranger called Donohoe was later renamed Captain Stalwart which many people might have read as Starlight and it is only in the later version that he links his bushranging to the injustices he has suffered under the convict system. “Within the apparently uncongenial form of a quasi-Shakespearean tragedy Harpur has drawn the outline of an ambivalent bushranging legend which, together with an equally ambivalent contempt for authority, is a recurring theme in the drama for the next century.”

Despite all the work he put into it and although he got it published, it comes as a surprise to learn that he never managed to get it staged. He “blamed a ‘certain *soreness* on the subject of convict Bushranging’ for its rejection by the literary critics and moralists; that he would have liked to have seen it staged is evident from his wistful afterthought, ‘What a happy time was Shakespeare’s, when the only critic was a lively enjoying audience.’ ”

It is a curious thing that characters based on real life people do not necessarily come alive more readily than completely fictitious ones. And Shakespeare might not have agreed that his was a happy time. It is curious too that in that sympathy for the rebel, the outlaw, the thief, we are not actually expressing real feelings, but fictitious sympathy for fictitious bushrangers; in real life when we find our car stolen or our laptop pinched we do not say, 'Undoubtedly the thief was a deserving youth who needed it more than me.' No, we are straight on to the police and the insurance company. We only like the bushrangers who stay firmly in the past and firmly in the bush. But it would be interesting to know who were Harpur's real men and women with their 'whims and oddities' …

* * * * *

Charles Harpur (1813 – 1868) is seen as an early poet with sympathies towards Aboriginal people. We-e-ell … yes and no. In his poem 'Aboriginal Death Song' you can (just) see an expression of sympathy. When he writes of the settler Egremont and his friends out riding on their newly 'acquired' land in 'The Creek of the Four Graves' you see a poem which reinforces all the white community's fears and horrors.

"But there again—crack upon crack! And hark!
O Heaven! have Hell's worst fiends burst howling up
Into the death doom'd world? Or whence, if not
From diabolic rage, could surge a yell
So horrible as that which now affrights
The shuddering dark? Ah, Beings as fell are near!
Yea, Beings, in their dread inherited hate
And deadly enmity, as vengeful, come
In vengeance! For behold, from the long grass
And nearer brakes, a semi-belt of stript
And painted savages divulge at once

Their bounding forms!—" and the Aborigines fall upon the settlers round a campfire and brain them with "crushing strokes/ Of huge-clubbed nulla-nullas" but Egremont gets away, crosses the creek, and hides in a cave.

"Duskily visible, thereon a space
They paused to mark what bent his course might take
Over the farthest bank, thereby intent
To hold upon the chase, which way soe'er
It might incline, more surely" and
"Amongst their crowding trunks from bank to bank;
And searching thus the stream across, and then
Lengthwise, along the ledges,—combing down
Still, as they went, with dripping fingers, cold
And cruel as inquisitive, each clump
Of long-flagged swamp-grass where it flourished high,—
The whole dark line passed slowly, man by man,
Athwart the cavity—so fearfully near,
That as they waded by the Fugitive
Felt the strong odor of their wetted skins
Pass with them, trailing as their bodies moved

Stealthily on," but when they can't find Egremont they return to the dead bodies of his companions to rob and mutilate them. It would be hard to find a poem more suited to reinforcing

white fears, prejudices, and determination to rid the land of such "fiends". It would take a great many sympathetic poems to offset the sense of confirmation readers would have taken from this one poem. I assume it is his poem 'Aboriginal Death Song' which suggests he had some sympathy …

Behold, it is the camp-fire of our Brother.—
But I see only in the ring of its light
A weeping woman with a young child,
And look in vain for the gleam of a tomahawk
That but yesterday was merry in the tree-tops.

The fish-pools of the ancient river
Have lost the shadow of a skilful hand!
The well-known tracks of a flat-footed hunter
Are fast fading from the grassy hills,
And a sure spear of the tribe is broken.

There is a vacant place in the circle of the seers;
From the consultations of the wise and brave
A bold voice has gone up forever.
And a whoop that late was loud on our border
Is terrible only in the deeds of the past.

* * * * *

January 24: Ethel Turner
Edith Wharton
E. T. A. Hoffman
January 25: Robert Burns
Virginia Woolf
Rufus M. Jones
Somerset Maugham
January 26: József Pusztai
Menno ter Braak
Seán MacBride
January 27: Lewis Carroll
Hester Thrale
January 28: Henry Morton Stanley
Colette
January 29: Romain Rolland
Allan Baillie

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"In the spring we went to Gurnigel in Switzerland. The morning after we arrived, when I opened the door of our hotel room, I heard the sound of a piano. Someone down the corridor was playing Beethoven—one of the sonatas. I stood still, enraptured. This was no young girl doing her morning practicing. It must be a concert artist.

"At dinner, I noticed a distinguished-looking older man sitting at a table alone. The headwaiter told me he was Romain Rolland. An author! A real, live, famous author! I tried not to stare, but I wanted to meet him. I had read *Jean-Christophe* and some of his other books, including the little biography of Beethoven. Then I realized that it must have been M. Rolland

who was playing that sonata. The headwaiter pointed me out to him. M. Rolland sent me a message inviting me to tea in the lounge!

"Romain Rolland was a charming person, tall, a little stooped, with arresting blue eyes, which spoke of suffering. I knew that he had had to leave France because of his pacifist stand during the war. He told me he lived in Villeneuve now, beyond the Castle of Chillon, at the end of the Lake of Geneva. His sister Madeleine lived next door. She would be coming next week and I must meet her. She had studied at Oxford and spoke English. He didn't.

"I told him that I had written reviews, that I was hoping to be a writer. Very delicately, he let me know that I was not to go home and publish an article about him. I promised I wouldn't and I never did."

Daisy Newman in *A Golden String*.

* * * * *

"The reports appeared in the foreign press of August 29. On August 30 the process of destroying Louvain was terminated. On the same day an official communiqué of the German Foreign Office affirmed that "the entire responsibility for these events rests with the Belgian Government," not forgetting the usual claim that "women and girls took part in the fight and blinded our wounded, gouging their eyes out."

"Why did the Germans do it? people asked all over the world. "Are you descendants of Goethe or of Attila the Hun?" protested Romain Rolland in a public letter to his former friend Gerhart Hauptmann, Germany's literary lion."

The Guns of August by Barbara W. Tuchman.

* * * * *

Curiously although Rolland didn't want to be written *about* he was a prolific writer-about of other people. Was this modesty? Or had people written nasty things about him? I knew of him as a WWI pacifist and anti-war writer (and when the Nobel committee gave him their 1915 award were they also making an anti-war statement?) and as the author of the attractive 'memoir' *Jean-Christophe* but I didn't know that the bulk of his literary output was biography and within this it was Beethoven who bulked largest. Although he wrote about Tolstoy, Handel, and others he devoted a six-volume work to Beethoven as well as his 'little biography'. So what was it about Beethoven which attracted a man who hated war? Beethoven as a republican had first admired and then excoriated Napoleon—but not on the grounds of his military campaigns, rather he was furious with Napoleon for crowning himself emperor. He had dedicated his Eroica Symphony to Napoleon but in fury he said "He is only an ordinary man" and he tore off the original title and called it *Sinfonia Eroica composta per festeggiare il souvenire di un grand Uomo* or 'Heroic Symphony composed to celebrate the memory of a great man'. When the 'great man' was exiled to St Helena Beethoven said more kindly, "I composed the music suitable for this sad event some seventeen years ago."

Rolland explained his view that "The lives of great men are not written for the proud or for the ambitious; they are dedicated rather to the unhappy." It becomes significant that his book on a great German came out in 1918 as a terrible war dragged to its close. Few of its likely readers can have been happy …

With great sympathy Rolland chronicles Beethoven's turbulent chaotic passionate life from his miserable poverty-stricken childhood with a drunken father and dying mother, his many health problems from smallpox as a child to painful eyes and poor sight, the deafness that appeared when he was only in his twenties, colic, rheumatism, jaundice, his failure to find a partner, his constant moves from lodging to lodging, up to his death during, perhaps appropriately, a fierce thunderstorm. Beethoven, with his piercing eyes, wild hair, strident laugh,

pugnacious jaw, was clearly not the easiest of men to live with or befriend. But Rolland finds in him a man who could not only rise above suffering in a prolific and extraordinarily productive life but a man who did so with generosity, kindness, and courage … and something deeper: a belief that music could touch and ennoble something beyond the surface of humanity …

Beethoven wrote of the way he composed: "According to my usual manner of composing, even in my instrumental music, I always have the whole in my mind" and "I am not in the habit of altering my compositions when they are once finished. I have never done this, for I hold firmly that the slightest change alters the character of the composition." But he also wrote of his philosophy: "Music is a higher revelation than the whole of wisdom and the whole of philosophy….. He who penetrates the meaning of my music shall be freed from all the misery which afflicts others."

And …

"I want to prove that whoever acts rightly and nobly, can by that alone bear misfortune."

"Music ought to create and fan the fire of the spirit of man."

"I recognise no sign of superiority in mankind other than goodness."

"There is nothing finer than to approach the Divine and to shed its rays on the human race."

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January 30: Richard Brautigan

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I knew nothing of Brautigan's writing or of how he came by his reputation. But one day I noticed his novel *Sombrero Fallout* on a stall. In it, shades of Horace Walpole, a sombrero falls from the sky. How and why we never discover. The mysterious hat is described thus: "The only things known about the sombrero so far are:

1. It fell out of the sky.
2. It is size 7¼.
3. It is very cold.

Here are a few more details about the sombrero that should be of some use:

4. The sombrero is black. (Interesting that this fact had not been brought up until now.)
5. It is known that the sombrero is very cold but the exact temperature has not been revealed before. Here it is: The temperature of the sombrero is 24 degrees below zero."

The sombrero draws everyone but also becomes the focus of conflict which grows and extends to the point of absurdity. "What about the sombrero?

It easily adapted to the conditions of warfare, continuing to lie there in the street unnoticed by the town's inhabitants and miraculously safe from the martial activity going on around it.

Though millions of bullets and pieces of shrapnel and rockets and bombs were busy disturbing, killing and destroying everything in sight, the hat did not suffer a single scratch.

It just lay there totally undisturbed.

The temperature remained at zero.

The hat looked as if it were taking a siesta.

It was truly a sombrero for all seasons."

In other words Brautigan was venturing into the world of the Absurd.

* * * * *

He wasn't a remarkable writer but he turns up in unexpected places:

As a poet—

As a cult writer—Thomas Reed Whissen in *Classic Cult Fiction* defines a cult classic as more than a book you read and recommend to your friends. It is a book which, perhaps briefly, perhaps for a lifetime, obsesses you; it can influence your way of dressing and eating, the words

you use, the way you see and describe things. *It changes you*. You may change back but something of it will remain. He says of Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, "Richard Brautigan wrote *Trout Fishing in America* in 1961, but it was not published until 1967, the year of the "summer of love," and by then it was seized upon by an audience that brought to it all the political, cultural, and emotional baggage that we associate with the term "hippie." In fact, to some it is *the* cult book of the sixties, possibly because it seems to require an "altered state of consciousness" to understand what it is all about…. Written as early in the decade as it was, it also has much in common with the novels of the beat generation in its emotional and intellectual detachment, an attitude closer to the existential aloofness of the hipsters than to the idealistic involvement of the hippies."

"The secret of the book's success is quite simple. *Trout Fishing in America* was the literary equivalent of the Grateful Dead—something instantly gratifying when one was high, something requiring no context, no frame of reference other than what one supplied at the moment. *Trout Fishing* was unlike anything these cult readers had ever seen before, totally unlike the structured, boring novels they had been forced to study and analyze in high school or college. Here was a novel that seemed to be—and for the most part was—totally without plot or narrative or sustained characterization."

"Because Brautigan does not intrude upon the story or impose on it any particular slang, the book lacks any sense of the didactic, any intimation that, regardless of how satiric and political it seems, it is supposed to instruct its readers in how to think or behave. Brautigan allows the satire to emerge from his unadorned reporting of America's own internal contradictions rather than from an implied criticism of its ability to measure up to the standards of some arbitrary ideological presumption."

"Several things contributed to the phenomenal success of this extraordinary book. For one thing, the book is not at all about what it says it is about: trout fishing. Any angler who picked it up would be in for a shock. This kind of zaniness appealed to the age. Another attraction was the apparent substitution of "trout fishing in America" used in every conceivable metaphorical sense. … Another explanation for the phenomenal popularity of *Trout Fishing in America* is that it is so unapologetically self-indulgent. By claiming no right to exist, it seems to earn that right. This is an impregnable, unimpeachable, nonassailable book. It seems to belong by itself and to itself, to have nothing to do with anything *but* itself. And within itself, all is delightful disorganization. It provides a fine escape from a world where everything is perceived as being altogether too regimented and logical."

It was an accepting, observing, but also in a way an amoral book. There were a lot of things wrong with America, then as now, but Brautigan didn't write to change anything. You could change yourself, change your ideas, your way of life, your relationships, but the choice was yours. For young people in rebellion against staid Oldies, respectable, suburban, dedicated to a steady job and a nice home, it was giving them a kind of permission to be anything they wanted to be, including to just be themselves …

But is this a good enough reason to want to read, or re-read, *Trout Fishing in America*? *Who's Who of Twentieth-Century Novelists* by Tim Woods says the book is "about a parodic search for the perfect fishing spot" and I suddenly felt curious. Did Brautigan ever find his perfect spot?

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January 31: Bernard Barton
Norman Mailer
February 1: Muriel Spark

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"Miss Brodie is a fascinating character, dogmatic, unconventional, and captivating. Unshakable in her belief in herself, her omnipotence, and her plans for her girls, she rejects the commonplace conformity of dreary, middle-class life and urges her girls to do the same. In her orchestration of their lives, she has created roles for them to play. Although she loves the art teacher, Teddy Lloyd, who also returns her love, she renounces him and cultivates two of her pupils, Rose Stanley and Sandy (Stranger), to play the parts of lover and informer, respectively. Sandy sees things differently, however, and chooses to play the role of mistress herself. Sandy's views of Miss Brodie are a central focus in the novel, and the way in which her opinion of Brodie changes in the course of the work influences our perception. As a young adolescent, secure in her view of Brodie as a manipulative and ultimately evil influence, and motivated by this insight as well as by envy of her mentor, Sandy betrays her teacher, reporting her activities to the school authorities, which results in Brodie's dismissal."

Laurie Lanzen Harris in *Characters in 20th-century Literature.*

"Muriel's teachers were strict but, literally and metaphorically, 'always tending plants'. The timeless vitality of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* derives at least partly from its affectionate portrait of Gillespie's as the Marcia Blane School. Miss Brodie herself bears a strong resemblance to the woman in whose class Muriel sat awestruck as a dumpy eleven- and twelve-year-old: Christina Kay. That 'character in search of an author, whose classroom walls were adorned with reproductions of early and Renaissance paintings […] entered my imagination immediately. I started to write about her even then.' Brodie's famous remark that her girls were the 'crème de la crème' was also Miss Kay's. '[She] realized', Muriel noted, 'that our parents' interest in our welfare was only marginally cultural.' In her autobiography, Muriel conscientiously refused to complain about this lack because she did not feel disadvantaged. But when Miss Kay veered off in the middle of a sentence to discuss Corot's touch of red or the Latin root of 'to educate', Muriel discovered in herself the artist and the intellectual craving sustenance which could not be provided at home."

… "At her own expense Miss Kay drip-fed Muriel and Frances with Edinburgh's cultural life, and her effect on both was fundamental. Florrie Forde, the Charleston and the form at Musselburgh races were quite another world. Miss Kay took the girls to see Pavlova's last performance at the Empire Theatre, to contemporary poetic drama, to concerts, even to films. In class she was a magnetic performer with her dark eyes, olive skin and her passion for education, the sense of being European rather than Scottish. Education was not for her a matter of pouring information into empty vessels but of drawing out her girls' native talent.

"Muriel and Frances went with Miss Kay to hear John Masefield, recently elected Poet Laureate, read parts of 'Dauber' to a huge and appreciative audience. It was an experience which nurtured an appreciation of narrative poetry and sowed the seeds for Muriel's book on Masefield twenty years later. Another pupil was so impressed by Miss Kay's passion for all things Italian that she wondered whether their schoolmistress might have had Italian forebears" … "So did Muriel. She, too, became an Italophile and went to live there in 1967. She, too, developed a sharp mind for grammar (although not for figures). Muriel was once asked if Miss Brodie's admiration for Mussolini reflected her own feelings at the time. 'Women, particularly single women', she replied, 'adore a strong man, a liberator. There were many in those days who admired Hitler. I guess you could say […] that Mussolini was a *big* bad man and Hitler a *little* bad man. But we didn't know that then. Remember, the story is set in 1930.' She never thought of Miss Brodie as a fascist.

"It was more the style than the content of this teaching which excited and empowered Muriel: Miss Kay's mental habit of proceeding by 'dazzling non-sequiturs' rather than by logical progression. Behind everything lay the primacy of colour: 'She loved colours. She taught us to be aware of them. […] To her, colour *was* form'. Despite Miss Kay's naïve interest in Mussolini, she was profoundly anti-nationalist. They were taught (by the school ethos, not just by Miss Kay) to *listen* to what was so easy to sing, 'not to be carried away by crowd emotions, not to be fools.' This was a priceless gift, part of which, for Muriel at least, was a nascent scepticism about all systems of power and their potential for corrupting free will. … For all this, however, perhaps because of this, her teacher's spirit is reincarnated in Jean Brodie as ambiguously beneficial. The loyalty she demands of her pupils becomes an imposition. While aspiring to release her 'set' from the shackles of petit-bourgeois convention, she unconsciously claps on the even tighter irons of emotional dependency."

Martin Stannard in *Muriel Spark.*

The curious thing is that although I have read Spark's other books, or almost all, none of them made the same impact. None of them made much impact at all. Though I thought *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* was a fascinating name for a book. So I think Stannard is right to see Spark's fascination for Miss Kay and that sense of the 'ambiguously beneficial' as an essential ingredient of what I think is her best book, and certainly her best-known, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. And that's not a bad title for a book either …

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February 2: James Joyce
Ayn Rand
February 3: Walter Bagehot
Gertrude Stein
February 4: Simone Weil
James Michener
February 5: William Burroughs
W. E. Johns
February 6: Pramoedya Ananta Toer
February 7: Sir James Murray
Charles Dickens
February 8: Jules Verne
Francis Webb
February 9: Brendan Behan
Alice Walker
February 10: John Jeffery Farnol

* * * * *

"What god, man, or hero have I placed my tin wreath upon? wondered Charlotte, whose reading embraced Mr Ezra Pound as well as Mr Jeffrey Farnol. What do I expect of this relationship? How could you leave me alone with that question, Charles?"

From *Dishonoured Bones* a mystery by John Trench which came out in 1954. But although people probably remember Ezra Pound does anyone remember Jeffrey Farnol?

Perhaps. John le Carré writes in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* of a rather oddball character Jim Prideaux who comes to teach in a boys' school. "And sometimes on warm evenings from their dormitory windows they would covertly watch him at golf, which he played with a dreadful old iron, zigzag across the playing fields, often after reading to them from an extremely English adventure book: Biggles, Percy Westerman or Jeffrey Farnol, grabbed haphazard from the dingy

library." This being a John le Carré, you know he will probably prove to have been a spy, perhaps still is a spy, but his reading matter suggests he will be on the 'right side'. Moles surely don't read Biggles and Farnol will mean nothing to them if they grew up in Moscow. But did this mention have readers saying 'I wonder who Farnol was?'

*

Colin Wilson writes in *The Books in My Life*, "When I was thirteen, I worked as a newspaper boy for pocket money. The newspaper shop also had a lending library, from which books could be borrowed for a few pence a week. Often, while waiting for the newsagent to finish sorting the pile of newspapers, I would browse through the books. There was a whole set of a writer of whom I knew little—Jeffery Farnol. Apparently these copies belonged to the newsagent himself, and he warmly recommended them. He suggested that I should begin with *Black Bartlemy's Treasure*, but I thought this sounded too like a boy's adventure story—I was, after all, reading Einstein, Jeans and Eddington—and instead I borrowed *The Chronicles of the Imp*.

"From the first few sentences, I was gripped; I read it from beginning to end in virtually one sitting."

He goes on, "It begins with a young man fishing by the side of a stream. He is in love with a girl called Elizabeth (known as Lisbeth), but she has been sent away to stay in a country house—her formidable Aunt Agatha feels that she and the hero have become too friendly. But the young man—his name is Dick Brent—has discovered that the aunt has the design of marrying Elizabeth to the brother of a peer." It then goes through endless twists and turns and misunderstandings, all written in innumerable clichés. "Yet it undeniably does conjure up a warm summer day" because Farnol "loves to write about fields and rivers and the sky, and no author evokes more nostalgically the delights of the countryside."

It was a winning formula and Farnol came back and back to it, in books like *The Money Moon* and *The Broad Highway*, evoking that image of an Edwardian era in which the sun always shone and in which the hero and heroine were always decent and honourable, like the heroes of Charles Garvice, and no matter how long they took to find final happiness they never lowered their standards. Wilson says, "Their basic values were sound—they believed in honor and decency—but I find that their world is curiously stifling." There is an artificiality and a sense of inward gazing which did not prepare people for the massive changes and horrors the twentieth century was about to serve up. Readers brought up on sun shining on peaceful little streams and pretty girls in sun bonnets found it hard to relinquish that view of the world in favour of blood and mud and frozen misery.

Clive Bloom in *Bestsellers Popular Fiction Since 1900* says of Farnol, "The past becomes for the historical novelist a landscape *into* which one escapes in search of adventure. Thus the past is less a lost time than a *geographical* space peopled with individuals, where lives are more exciting than our own. In this sense the past of romantic historical novels is both more interesting than now and much safer. Yet Farnol was only too aware of how easy it is to pastiche such writing (the writing indeed from which he earned his living)." But does it matter? A good pastiche is still something to escape into. Surely?

Yet Wilson ends up with an odd kind of salute to his youthful love affair with Farnol. "Still, I have to admit that I owe Farnol an odd debt of gratitude. His sweet, demure ladies became fixed in my mind as a kind of archetype. When I met my wife Joy nine years later, I was instantly captivated by her graceful walk and pleasant voice and sweet-natured smile, and felt impelled to pursue her until she agreed to break her engagement and come to London with me. It was only later that I realized that the archetype to which she corresponded had been shaped by

Edwardian heroines, particularly those of Jeffery Farnol. So clearly, his works were by no means as unsound a guide to living in the real world as they seemed at the time."

*

Real people mention Jeffery Farnol, such as Graham Greene in his memoir *A Sort of Life* remembering a neighbour Charles Wade who had a model railway and village and "reads nothing but Jeffery Farnol", and people in fiction read Jeffery Farnol such as John Le Carré's character in *Tinker, Sailor, Soldier, Spy*. But do people *still* read Farnol?

Once you come upon a name it suddenly starts to pop up here and there. So are there any Jeffery Farnols still around? And how might they seem to a reader coming at them long after Farnol's Edwardian sun has ceased to shine? Curiously, Farnol is still an easy writer to find. The library could offer me nearly twenty titles to choose from.

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And does anybody remember John Trench? I found this mention of him in *Agatha Christie and Archeology*, "In the case of a scientific discipline the usual research into a particular background that is the mark of any good detective story is not really enough. Two novels by John Trench, a professional army officer and later an advertising copywriter, illustrate the point. Their detective hero is an archaeologist called Martin Cotterell, a pleasant, amusing, educated and well-read young man, who solves his very difficult cases astutely and ingeniously. However, archaeology takes a back seat for most of the time. Its function is first to suggest that as curator of a provincial museum Cotterell pursues no regular activity of his own, and so has plenty of leisure time for his detective work, and second to bring him into contact with his cases. In *Docken Dead* (1953) he has to give an expert opinion on a private collection of antiquities potentially on offer as a donation to his museum; in *Dishonoured Bones* (1954) he is involved in the excavations of a prehistoric grave mound which soon come to an end when a new corpse is found instead of any ancient skeletons, and this and another murder call for all Cotterell's attention thenceforth – which is fortunate for him as an archaeologist, since on the last page of the book he discovers, quite by chance, that the tumulus owes its unique structure to work carried out on it in the nineteenth century."

* * * * *

"A typical Kentish village is Dapplemere, with its rows of scattered cottages bowered in roses and honeysuckle—white-walled cottages with steep-pitched roofs, and small, latticed windows that seem to stare at all and sundry, like so many winking eyes.

Here is an air redolent of ripening fruit and hops—for Dapplemere is a place of orchards, and hop-gardens, and rick-yards—while, here and there, the sharp-pointed red-tiled roof of some oast-house pierces the green.

Though Dapplemere village is but a very small place indeed, nowadays, yet it possesses a church, grey and ancient, whose massive Norman tower looks down upon gable and chimney, upon roof of thatch and roof of tile, like some benignant giant keeping watch above them all. Near by, of course, is the inn—a great rambling comfortable place, with time-worn settles beside the door, and with a mighty sign a-swing before it, upon which, plainly to be seen—when the sun catches it fairly—is that which purports to be a likeness of His Majesty King William the Fourth, of glorious memory. But, alas! the colours have long since faded, so that now, upon a dull day, it is a moot question whether His Majesty's nose was of the Greek, or Roman order, or, indeed, whether he was blessed with any nose at all."

"And thus it was that George Bellew came to Dapplemere in the glory of the after-glow of an August afternoon, breathing the magic air of Arcadia, which is, and always has been, of that rare quality warranted to go to the head, sooner or later."

So Farnol in *The Money Moon* which has its share of the language of the time: 'thrilling tenderness', 'tempestuous sobs' 'lustrous tresses', these belonging to the heroine Anthea, and more such conventions. But I can see why it was popular. The sun almost always shines. The characters, unrealistic though they may be, walk through an enchanted world. When it storms it isn't English drizzle but a plot device to bring hero and heroine closer.

So it was a disappointment to find the second book I had borrowed, *The Quest for Youth*, was just plain silly. Sir Marmaduke Vane-Temperly goes to his doctor, a very modern sounding doctor, who diagnoses boredom. Sir Marmaduke takes to the roads as one John Hobbs presumably in search of excitement. But then we meet a character who was with Nelson at Trafalgar so this is clearly not a modern romance. I expect Farnol wanted to write a swashbuckling adventure. The hero meets a Quaker girl, Eve-Ann Ash, who is running off to London with some flash cove but Eve is completely unrealistic as a Quaker. She even speaks of going to Chapel rather than Meeting, she admits to using physical violence against the dairymaids on her uncles' farm, her elopement would see her disowned by Friends … and having been saved one unsuitable relationship she then sets off to walk the sixty miles to London with the unknown John Hobbs. Everyone else can see that he is an aristocrat in disguise except Eve. He calls her 'child' so it is a surprise to learn that she is twenty-two as she behaves like a twelve-year-old. In fact Eve is presented as a demure and innocent damsel but described as behaving like a termagent. "Swift and lithe as a panther Eve sprang and, seizing the man's pistol arm, clung there; and then as they strove together, down upon moth-eaten fur cap thudded Tickler and, dropping his pistol, the smitten man fell to his knees and rolled over" and so on. Not only do they walk unchaperoned but they sound like some happy campers as they buy clothes, knapsack, donkey and tent, and it never seems to occur to Eve to ask how this simple tramp has an unlimited supply of money, Sir Marmaduke even paying seven shillings for a pot of stew, money that would have been a week's wage then. But he is equally irresponsible. When he goes out to fight a duel he makes a will leaving everything to Eve, entailed estates, tenants, buildings, staff, and I am certain his kin could get such a will overturned in a trice, probably painting Eve as a brazen hussy in the process.

Silliness is piled on silliness, impossibility follows unlikelihood, and yet you keep reading. In my case it was partly that I had gone to some trouble to borrow the book but also that Farnol *does* write with a lively pen, the sun always shines, the sunsets are beautiful, it is almost seductive to follow Lord Bountiful as he spends and spends, and you know there will be a happy ending. Not a realistic one, mind, but a happy one.

His publisher, Sampson Low, understood very well that readers turned to Farnol to escape grim reality and describes Farnol's books with that in mind: *Black Bartlemy's Treasure*, 'A stirring pirate story', *The Loring Mystery*, 'A mystery story of "Merrie England" ', *The Honourable Mr. Tawnish*, 'The rollicking days of the eighteenth century' and so on.

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February 11: Jane Yolen
February 12: Georges Simenon
February 13: Bruce Beaver
February 14: Bruce Dawe
February 15: Jeremy Bentham

I. G. Edmonds

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I came upon a copy of a Lassie book, *The Wild Mountain Trail*, on a stall and looked at the author, I. G. Edmonds, and was none the wiser. So who was I. G. Edmonds? Ivy Gordon Edmonds, 1917 – 31 Dec 2007, was American and a prolific writer of children's adventure stories, sometimes under various pseudonyms. I was inclined to think he belonged in that largely forgotten group of children's writers, reliable journeyman-type-writing but memorable only, in this case, because the books had been turned into a popular children's TV series. Who after all wrote the Bobbsey Twins, the Hardy Boys, Pocomoto, and dozens of other series, popular in their time, but overtaken by series like Sweet Valley High or Goosebumps in which the author is seemingly unimportant?

Except …

"He was the pioneer conservationist in this area. This entire national forest is really his monument. He was the one who first proposed it and fought all of us for years to get it through our thick skulls that conservation was important."

"That's right," Bob Scott put in. "It was the Forest Service men who brought us soil erosion control, watershed protection, selective cutting of timber, conservation of our national resources, and the multiple-use concept for our forests. But it was old Hardrock who was responsible for starting the drive that made this area a national forest. His is the initial credit. Fred is right. Hardrock doesn't need a monument. This forest is his monument."

And …

"I've been thinking," Paul said. "I want to be a ranger like you. I'd be doing the kind of work that would pay back Hardrock for all the time and trouble he has spent with me. This forest is what he's loved and fought for these fifty years. By becoming a ranger and working for the conservation that was his dream, I'd be doing something for him."

"That's a wonderful way to think," Stuart said. "If you really feel that way, then go back to college. Study forestry and come back here to work as a junior ranger in the summers until you graduate."

Shades of Bob Brown! Except that the book came out in 1966. Perhaps I. G. Edmonds deserves to be remembered for more than Lassie?

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"I was told by a friend who acted in a film with Lassie, the star dog, that every day they used to bring an entire wagonful of Lassies to the studio: the smiling Lassie, the scowling Lassie, the gloomy Lassie and so on, and there was a great argument when she won an Academy prize as to which Lassie should appear at the dinner to collect the coveted award."

Sir John Gielgud in *An Actor and His Time: John Gielgud* with John Miller and John Powell.

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"Next up in the line of celebrity dogs must be Lassie, with a grand total of 53 years on TV, and a UK remake of *Lassie Come Home* released in 2005.

"Rudd Weatherwax got Pal (later to be Lassie) as a payment for a debt. The actor and animal trainer ran a kennel and supplied movie dogs but he also taught regular obedience. Pal chased motorcycles and his owner sent him to be trained but then decided he did not want him back! Rudd took Pal on, curing all his behavioural problems but never did stop him chasing motorcycles.

"Around 1942, *Lassie Come Home* went into production with a female collie hired to play the lead. Pal had previously auditioned for the part but was turned down because he was not a

show Collie. Rudd went home and began training Pal to do all the trademark Lassie tricks, feeding him a special diet to bring out his coat. He auditioned for the part yet again and yet again was turned down but this time offered a role as a stunt dog.

"The script called for the lead dog to swim across a raging river, but the female show Collie would not go near the water. Now Pal got his chance! He jumped into the river, swam desperately to the other side, dragged himself out and collapsed. There was not a dry eye in the house. The director was so impressed, he said, 'Pal may have gone into the water but Lassie has come out.' All the dogs portraying Lassie have been male. Females are usually 10-15 lbs lighter and Lassie needs to be a big, heroic dog with a thicker coat. Female Collies were not ignored because they are any less intelligent – in fact, some of Lassie's own stunt doubles have been female. Pal went on to be the first in a long line of Weatherwax-bred and trained Lassies spanning over 50 years, bringing comfort and joy to characters and moviegoers alike, who delight in the dog's ability to sense danger and communicate, changing human lives for the better."

Emma Heathcote-James in *Psychic Pets.*

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One day I was in a café in St Helens which has lots of books and I noticed a copy of *Shirley Flight—Air Hostess in Congo Rescue*. I remembered another Shirley Flight book from my childhood which had her stranded in the Outback and climbing a telegraph pole to cut the wires. But I had no memory of the author or how many books were in the series or even any other titles.

So who was Judith Dale? Was she a popular author with a range of books? A writer for hire? Someone who had actually been an air hostess and thought it would be an ideal way to take a young heroine to interesting places to have adventures?

In fact there was no one called Judith Dale. 'She' was in fact 'he': Edward Reginald Home-Gall, an English writer of dozens of adventure stories for children, and son of William Benjamin Home-Gall who as 'Reginald Wray' was also a prolific writer of the Boys' Own type of story.

Thousands of girls wrote to Judy Blume. Did thousands of girls write to Judy Dale to ask about becoming an air hostess or just to say they'd enjoyed her books? I have no idea. And did Mr Home-Gall respond as Miss Dale to such queries?

But it does raise different questions. Children's books are now more likely to be 'message' books. The characters are coping with a broken home, school bullies, first menstruation, whereas the books of my childhood were pure escapism. Of course the heroes and heroines were brave and truthful but we didn't *really* believe their kinds of adventures would ever come our way. And perhaps we learnt interesting little snippets along the way, about life on a passenger plane, about jungles, about geography, so that the books were a form of vicarious living. Were we better served? Or worse? I wouldn't give up Shirley's adventures for the sake of a book about miserable families but I think there is room for both. Of course there is still adventure around but it tends to be space, fantasy, macho stuff …

I think I must try Shirley out on a twelve-year-old one day … though I suspect it is not the story but that rather preachy tone that crept into so many children's books which youngsters now would find off-putting. But the book *was* interesting because although there are 'savage tribes' and a heroic figure is a retired big game hunter the book was written on the cusp of changing ideas and attitudes. Changing ideas about race relations, about conservation, about women's abilities … And as Shirley puts on lipstick, powder and rouge, I thought 'I haven't heard anyone mention rouge in years'; it too has changed, becoming something more discreet called 'blusher'.

* * * * *

And in case you're wondering 'who wrote the Bobbsey Twins' I came upon an interesting book about the Garis family who, husband Howard and wife Lillian, wrote most of the books

under the pen-name Laura Lee Hope. Their granddaughter Leslie Garis called her memoir *House of Happy Endings* although the family's happiness as opposed to their plots was problematical. Howard Garis also produced other heroes such as Tom Swift under the pseudonym of Victor Appleton. And for younger readers the family produced 'Uncle Wiggily' which led Leslie Garis to write, "My mother expected my brothers and me to be as kind and well-mannered as Uncle Wiggily and also as energetic, successful, and well-groomed. I was being brought up on the morality of a make-believe rabbit."

The Pocomoto books were written by Rex Dixon, pen-name for Reginald Alec Martin, and the Hardy Boys by Franklin Dixon which was the pseudonym for Canadian writer Leslie McFarlane. It is almost a relief to turn to Mary Grant Bruce, Enid Blyton, or Captain W. E. Johns, and know there was a 'real' person at the other end of the chain from writer all the way through editing, publishing, selling, to the reader.

So I have one more question: did the men and women who wrote those rip-roaring adventures enjoy writing the vicarious excitement so enjoyed by young readers? Or did the lack of recognition in some way spoil it all? Mr Home-Gall could not say to a group of schoolgirls 'I am Judith Dale' without having them look askance at him …

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February 16: Peter Porter
February 17: Sandy McCutcheon
Isabelle Eberhardt
John Edson

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Broadcaster and thriller writer Sandy McCutcheon in *The Magician's Son* tells the story of his childhood and growing up in New Zealand where his parents insisted that he was their son—even though he had been adopted when he was over two and had memories of his original family. Because of their refusal to tell him the truth, by the time he actually got access to his records (which they had always had) and found his family it was too late. Both his birth parents were dead.

In one respect, I suppose he was lucky: he found a lot of siblings and relatives who were delighted to welcome him into their family and tell him all they could. Many children do not even have that consolation. I was thinking of this as I read Barbara Bisantz Raymond's book *The Baby Thief*. It deals with the long career of a woman, Georgia Tann, in Memphis, Tennessee, who virtually re-wrote the nature of adoption in the United States.

She acquired great power over the children of Tennessee under the state's Tammany Hall style boss, Edward Crump, who corrupted and frightened the state's political and legal machinery. Georgia Tann, quite simply, stole babies and sold them. Where she didn't actually kidnap them she got them by deceit and threats from poor white mothers (she wasn't interested in the children of poor black mothers) and she advertised them, sent them on approval, got them to people who had not been checked in any way—and she falsified everything about the children, when and where they were born, who their parents were, why they had become available.

She disregarded the requirement that a judge should verify that the child had genuinely been surrendered, she gained control of the Tennessee Children's Home Society, she starved children and denied them medical care, she sent children out 'on approval', she threatened adoptive parents with losing the child if they didn't pay her inflated fees, and because her agency wasn't licensed the thousands of adoptions she arranged were all illegal. Yet the state of Tennessee far from using this as a way to gain control over her callous and illegal activities simply passed enabling legislation.

If this wasn't all bad enough Raymond points to the pernicious effects she had on the whole process of adoption, particularly the changing attitude to giving everyone involved in the adoption triangle honest information. She needed secrecy to hide her theft of babies but she couched it as concern for the child. By falsifying birth records a child would be protected from knowledge of its own illegitimate birth. Or so ran her persuasive argument. Gradually it became a nationwide assumption that children were better off not knowing.

"Secrecy would be an essential hallmark of her business; she would refuse to divulge information about her adoptive placements to the Tennessee Department of Public Welfare, to Welfare Departments in states in which she placed children, and even to Fannie Elrod, her supposed boss."

And with that came the lifelong struggles of children to find their birth parents and of birth parents to try to find out if their children were safe and well. In theory this would be just a very sad story to come out of the United States but in practice this secrecy spread around the English-speaking world and did untold damage here and elsewhere.

Raymond points out that large numbers of children lived in orphanages in the nineteenth century. They were sent out to farms and businesses, they were taken by families as free labour, their lives were often lives of unremitting hard work and abuse. But they weren't denied their identity. They were foster children, not adopted children. Probably the most famous fictional one, Anne Shirley in *Anne of Green Gables*, is acquired in a way so casual that the mind of a good agency now would boggle. But Anne is not formally adopted by the Cuthberts. She always knows her history, where she had been born and the names of her parents.

Little foster children often led grim lives but they didn't spend their lives trying to track down their true identity. Of course at times they were lied to, orphanages sometimes had to give names to babies dropped on their steps, (such as the orphan/heroine in Jean Webster's *Daddy-Long-Legs*) but they mostly had records on how and when children had been brought to them. And those records often still exist. But adoption changed the way identity was managed. Falsified birth certificates were provided and it has taken long campaigns to enable children to go beyond these false certificates and find the truth.

Children need to know their genetic inheritance. They need to know their relatives. The sad case recently in the UK where a brother and sister unknowingly married must happen far more often than we know. And as more and more birth certificates leave a blank space for 'Father's Name' instead of insisting on correct information and DNA tests where a mother does not know or does not want to reveal which of her boyfriends was the father—then more and more half-siblings are likely to have children together. But the need for an identity is something much more visceral. A kind of unassuagable emptiness at the centre of life.

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Suzanne Chick in her search for her mother in *Searching for Charmian* provides a very good insight into the mind of an adopted child and the way the search spreads out to involve people of several generations. Her mother was writer Charmian Clift and she set out too late to find Charmian alive. But the book is one of the best I have read by an adopted child trying to come to terms with every aspect of the adoption process. She deftly handles three stories; her birth mother's story, her adopted parents and the life she lived with them, and her own marriage and family. She makes a very difficult juggling act look easy.

At the same time I was reading *Mommie Dearest* by Christina Crawford. She was adopted by movie star Joan Crawford as were three other children. On the surface of it they were fortunate; Joan Crawford was successful, well-off, fêted, but in reality she was an alcoholic and a control freak. Her children never knew from day to day how she would treat them. It suggests she

quite possibly was bi-polar or had other serious mental health issues which were glossed over as a star's 'temperament'.

When Suzanne Chick writes—'Toni looked at me closely. 'You're very lucky, darling,' she said, her raised eyebrows tracing dramatic triangles into her hairline. 'Very lucky. I loved your mother dearly, but I didn't see her through rose-coloured glasses. She made her choices and you were very lucky that she didn't choose to keep you.' '—she is writing of the lottery that adoption is—but she is also touching on the broader lottery that we all experience—where, when, and how we come into the family we inhabit.

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It is almost a little sub-genre of its own, the adoption story, and other examples like Robert Dessaix's *A Mother's Disgrace* immediately come to mind. These are what I might call the happy end of the genre. There are the unhappy stories such as *Delinquent Angel* about Shelton Lea, and then there are the truly horrific like some of the stories from the Stolen Generations, children who have lived out their lives without ever knowing their 'mob'.

Have things improved? When I look around at the open adoptions where everyone knows who they are and keeps in touch I cannot help but be pleased. And then every so often comes a horror story of children stolen in other countries and passed off as orphans, poor parents promised information and photos who never see or hear a word from their children again.

Yet why is adoption, the unwantedness of children, all the ambivalent feelings engendered, all the complexities of nature and identity, such a minefield? I think of places like East Timor where children were passed to childless relatives as a simple natural way of helping families and keeping the clan together (something which the Indonesian invasion and the kidnapping of children deeply damaged; children remain in Indonesian families despite the best efforts to get them returned) but I think a vestige of something else came into play in Western countries, a still prurient attitude to sex, a sense that behind adopted children is illicit sex, they are the outward and visible sign of a lack of control, of something wild and untamed and menacing.

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While I was mulling over questions about adoption and identity I came upon an interesting book called *The Children* by Jan de Hartog. It is a personal guide for American parents adopting children from Asia and although it sounds a little old-fashioned now (it came out in 1969) it must have been very useful to parents in its time. He starts by saying, "At present, the majority of Asian orphans coming to the United States for adoption are children of mixed parentage from Korea. A small number come from Hong Kong; an even smaller one, thus far, from Vietnam.

"By now, over ten thousand children from Korea have become part of American families. Most of these children are the issue of common-law relationships between Korean girls from the provinces and American servicemen. Often the parents have gone through a wedding ceremony in one of the "marriage offices" set up for this purpose in Korean cities by unscrupulous businessmen; the girl may not be aware of the fact that the procedure has no legal validity, the father certainly is. He proceeds to set up house with her and, eventually, there are children. As a rule, the termination of his service in Korea puts an end to the relationship; only in rare cases does he show any further interest in his Korean family. He may send money for a while, but this soon ceases; after that there is nothing but silence; as far as the father is concerned the episode is closed. Without its operatic trappings, the story of Madame Butterfly is re-enacted in Korea hundreds of times each year. Most Americans, if they are aware of the existence of these children at all, assume the emergency to be over, as the war ended fifteen years ago; but there are still sixty thousand U.S. servicemen stationed in Korea and many families are still being abandoned, with all that this entails in the way of heartbreak and tragedy.

"To begin with, the mother, left to feed and clothe and educate the child after the man she supposed to be her husband has left her, is ostracized by her family because her child is not only of mixed race but also, it now turns out, illegitimate. Korean family structure is very clannish and moral traditions are severe; in that paternal society, where women do not count for much anyhow, the ones who transgress, be it unknowingly, are cast out without compunction. Their children, who by their very appearance carry a stigma, face an even harder time. Their pure-blood playmates discriminate against them and physically abuse them at every opportunity. … New-born babies are frequently drowned in the river or left on the steps of churches or temples. The infants who survive are put in orphanages, where the same ostracism and contempt await them that they would have faced in the world outside. … The U.S. military and government show an unbecoming callousness toward these children, having refused to undertake any responsibility for them."

Jan and his wife adopted two Korean girls and were interviewed about this on Dutch television. "The surprising result was that nearly a thousand families in Holland applied for a similar child." At first the Dutch government said no but finally relented and allowed 450 Korean orphans into the country. And of course the next wave of mixed race children was left by the Vietnam War. But every military base, whether in times of peace or war, creates unwanted children. And for all the happy endings there were a great many more children for whom there was no satisfying life waiting even if they survived the orphanages or life on the streets.

Perhaps instead of discussing wars as dollars and cents, as manpower, as national interest, as the latest weaponry, we should discuss it solely in terms of its impact on children. It is hard to see any war being regarded as a good idea when couched in such very different terms.

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February 18: Nikos Kazantzakis
Arthur Ransome
Toni Morrison
February 19: Carson McCullers
Lee Harding
February 20: Mary Durack
February 21: W. H. Auden
February 22: Edna St Vincent Millay
Artur Schopenhauer

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"Surely F. R. Leavis's unforgivable sin was teaching the young to sneer."

So wrote Winston Graham in *Memoirs of a Private Man*. But Colin Wilson felt that there was a more serious problem in the way that philosophy and literature is taught. He wrote in *Beyond the Occult*: "For as long as philosophy has existed, philosophers have been passing negative judgements on human life. Ecclesiastes thought that all life is vanity and vexation of spirit. Plato compared human life to men chained up in a cave, forced to look at shadows on the wall. Aristotle said that it is better not to have been born, and death is better than life. The Buddha says that all life is misery and bitterness. Lucretius says that life is a treadmill that leads nowhere, a desire that never finds fulfillment. And in 1818 Arthur Schopenhauer published the longest and most comprehensive attempt so far to prove that human life is meaningless and pointless and that – as Sartre later put it – man is a useless passion. According to *The World as Will and Idea*, 'the world is my idea' and has no objective reality; our perceptions only show us illusions. The only underlying reality is a blind, obstinate will that has no real purpose and

therefore dooms us all to perpetual disappointment. One of the book's central paragraphs reads as follows:

> We saw that the inner being of unconscious nature is a constant striving without end and without rest. And this appears to us much more distinctly when we consider the nature of brutes and man. Willing and striving is its whole being, which may very well be compared to an unquenchable thirst. But the basis of all willing is need, deficiency, and thus pain. Consequently, the nature of brutes and man is subject to pain originally and through its very being. If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of desire, because it is suddenly deprived of them by a too easy satisfaction, a terrible void and ennui comes over it, i.e. its being and existence itself become an unbearable burden to it. Thus its life swings like a pendulum, backwards and forwards between pain and boredom.

The complaint is that we all change from moment to moment and have no permanent being or purpose. Even the pleasure of love, according to Petronius, is gross and brief, and brings loathing after it, a sentiment echoed in Dylan Thomas's lines:

> At last the soul from its foul mousehole
> Slunk pouting out when the limp time came

The latter is probably as good a summary as any of the philosopher's basic indictment of the world. When a man falls in love he experiences the same perception that he experiences on spring mornings and holidays and in peak experiences: the sense of *reality*, of the real value of the objects of his enthusiasm. When this collapses into a feeling of satiety and fatigue it seems equally obvious that the whole thing was a mistake, that the sex instinct, whose only purpose is procreation, lured us into this situation in order to fulfil its own dubious aims. Or as T.S. Eliot put it:

> Birth, and copulation, and death.
> Birth, and copulation, and death.
> That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:
> Birth, and copulation, and death.

Which is 'true' – the original desire, or the later feeling of disillusionment? According to most philosophers, even this question is meaningless. Neither is 'true'. We just happen to feel one thing one day and another thing another: to ask which is true is like asking whether a rainy day is 'truer' than a sunny one. The same answer applies to the question, why do we experience such a clear sense of meaning and purpose when we are in love – or even merely in a state of erotic excitement? Because the 'conjuror' has chosen to delude us for his own purposes. This is why man 'feels sad after coitus' – because he knows he has been duped again.

Now according to the view of perception that we have developed in the last two chapters, all this is simply untrue. The basic problem lies in the dullness of our senses and our brains, which reveal to us an extremely limited range of reality. And it is the 'close-upness' that deprives us of meaning. Or, as I have expressed it elsewhere, man is like a grandfather clock driven by a watchspring. Or like some enormous watermill whose stream has dried up into a narrow, sluggish flow. As William James put it in an essay called 'The Energies of Man':

> Everyone knows that on any given day there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of that day do not call forth …. Most of us feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us, keeping us below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our mental and physical resources.

And he summarizes the problem by saying that our basic problem is an inveterate 'habit of inferiority to our full self'."

We are existing, getting through the day, rather than truly *living*. But if the philosophers have failed to see the difference then what have they instead been concentrating on? What for instance has Arthur 'Miseryguts' Schopenhauer been focusing on? And am I doing him an injustice with that appellation? Certainly Jean Webster in *Daddy-Long-Legs* writes "We are getting the most dreadful lessons in philosophy—all of Schopenhauer for to-morrow." But this isn't proof. And could Schopenhauer be disposed of in one lesson? It suggests the very opposite to deep thought.

Artur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860) was born into a mercantile family in Danzig (Gdansk), a world he had no wish to enter. Collinson and Plant in *Fifty Major Philosophers* say, "He traveled widely in Europe, developed a tendency to 'brood over the misery of things', and embarked on his business career with reluctance." Of course there was no shortage of real misery to brood upon, like the devastation wrought across Europe by Napoleon, but his father conveniently died leaving hin free to follow his own bent. He went to university to study philosophy and began a long career in which the heart of his study and pondering was the question of Will. He began with *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* then *The World as Will and Representation, On the Will in Nature* and *On the Freedom of the Will*. He believed we 'will' into being the world we see and feel and touch and experience and that that world is unique to each of us because that will is an expression of our inner understanding. Yet he also believed that the Will was not free. Collinson and Plant say "He was brilliant, zestful, lucid and witty, but also lonely, depressive, and often bitter." His pessimism begins to become understandable if he felt he struggled with twin dilemmas: no matter how much he tried to will a happier existence it simply didn't happen; his expression of will was not powerful enough. Indeed it couldn't happen if he was the prisoner of a will over which he had only very limited control and that will was intrinsically melancholic. Perhaps it is incorrect to relate his philosophy too closely to its author but I couldn't help wondering if his ideas would have been any different if he'd had access to a course of lithium … or perhaps a meditation class …

Wilson pulls no punches when he writes, "This is why writers like Sartre, Graham Greene and Samuel Beckett are so dangerous – they have ratified 'upside-downness' with the intellect, and their negative vision is passed on to adolescent students with all the authority of a modern classic." And this is an issue he comes back to in *The Books in My Life*, "In 1958, two years after my first book, *The Outsider*, was published, I began to write a book about the pessimism that permeates modern literature. Of course, I understood precisely how this had come about. The great Romantics of the early nineteenth century had experienced moods of ecstasy in which they became convinced that man is potentially a god. Yet they were unable to sustain this ecstasy; it disappeared, leaving them feeling miserable and tired of life. This is why so many of these

Romantics committed suicide, or died of discouragement. Writers of the early twentieth century—like T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence—inherited this problem, but were unable to find any solution. And in due course their heirs—Sartre, Camus, Samuel Beckett, Graham Greene—came to take it for granted that human life is meaningless, and that (as Sartre said) "Man is a useless passion." And now, nearly half a century later, the pessimists still dominate modern literature—it would not be unfair to say that if a writer hopes to get the Nobel Prize, he must believe that human life is futile and tragic."

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February 23: Samuel Pepys
W. E. B. Du Bois
February 24: George Moore
David Williamson
February 25: Grace Metalious (d)
Shiva Naipaul

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Peyton Place. The very name conjures up shenanigans behind respectable closed doors. Yet the woman who created the town has largely been forgotten. She wrote four books, *Peyton Place*, *Return to Peyton Place*, *The Tight White Collar*, *No Adam in Eden*, and then died in 1964 aged only 39. She had gone to live in the little town of Gilmanton, New Hampshire, in the US when her husband George was sent there as a schoolteacher. *The Times* in a rather tongue-in-cheek obituary wrote, "On the surface a homely even humdrum small community Peyton Place, after Mrs. Metalious had got behind the screen doors, was found to be a rare place for iniquity. There was drunkenness, abortion, illigitimacy, high-school sex and a trial for patricide in which a girl who has been raped in her teens by her step-father is acquitted for killing him sometime later, in self defence. It was a study which owed a little – but not much – to Sinclair Lewis.

"The unremitting emphasis in *Peyton Place* on the sexual drive as the primary human motive, which offended many of the critics, did not endear Mrs. Metalious to some of the residents of Gilmanton."

In vain did she insist that Peyton Place was a fictitious community. And when she sold the film rights for a massive $500,000 I suspect a hefty dollop of envy was added to the anger that she had, supposedly, stripped a small community's secrets bare. I wonder if she ever turned to her critics and said "If the cap fits … "

And if this is small town America in the late fifties and early sixties I wonder what she would have done with the Sexual Revolution, the Pill, Flower Power, and all the rest?

* * * * *

I came across a novel by Barbara Delinsky called *Looking for Peyton Place* in which she says in her Acknowledgements: "Gathering information on Grace Metalious was a challenge. So long after her death, precious little about her is in print. Two books, in particular, were a help: *The Girl from "Peyton Place,"* by George Metalious and June O'Shea (Dell Publishing Company, 1965) and *Inside Peyton Place: The Life of Grace Metalious*, by Emily Toth (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981). I found additional insight on Grace and her times in Ardis Cameron's introduction to the most recent edition of *Peyton Place* (Northeastern University Press, 1999). Finally, for information on Grace's childhood years in Manchester, New Hampshire, I thank Robert Perrault." So did this mean the book would be a fictionalised biography—or perhaps just a Grace-inspired look behind closed doors in a small town?

In fact the book is about a fictional town called Middle River whose inhabitants believe they were the real Peyton Place but it turns out that the town hides something much more

unpleasant behind its closed doors than cheating spouses. And throughout the book Delinsky weaves in information about the real Grace Metalious's life rather effectively.

Just a few of the little insights—

"I was always amazed by how quickly her fame faded. To hear tell, when *Peyton Place* first came out, Grace Metalious made headlines all over the country. She was an unknown who penned an explosive novel, a New Hampshire schoolteacher's wife who wrote about sex, a young woman in sneakers and blue jeans who dared tell the truth about small-town life and—even more unheard-of—about the yearnings of women. Though by today's standards *Peyton Place* is tame, in 1956 the book was a shocker. It was banned in a handful of American counties, in many more libraries than that, and in Canada, Italy, and Australia; Grace was shunned by neighbours and received threatening mail; her husband lost his job, her children were harassed by classmates. And all the while millions of people, men and women alike, were reading *Peyton Place* on the sly."

"Her story had no happy ending. As successful as *Peyton Place* was, Grace saw only a small part of the money it made, and that she spent largely on hangers-on who were only too eager to take. Distraught over reviews that reduced *Peyton Place* to trash, she set the bar so high for her subsequent work that she was destined to fail. She turned to booze. She married three times—twice to the same man—and had numerous affairs. Feeling unattractive, untalented, and unloved, she drank herself to death at the age of thirty-nine."

*

And if you are like me and remember *Peyton Place* from the TV series rather than the book you might like this little précis of the plot that Delinsky gives as an Afterword in her novel:

"The story begins in a picturesque New England town, where Indian summer has come to heat up the chilly autumn landscape. "Indian summer," wrote Metalious in her famous first line, "is like a woman. Ripe, hotly passionate, but fickle, she comes and goes as she pleases so that one is never sure whether she will come at all, nor for how long she will stay." The author walks us down the leafy streets of this seemingly peaceful suburb, introducing us to the players in her drama. On one side of the tracks, there are the wealthy Leslie Harrington and his spoiled son Rodney, as well as the good-hearted doctor Matthew Swain. On the other side, living in a tar-paper shack, is young Selena Cross and her wretched family. And in the middle class stand the book's two central characters, single mother Constance McKenzie and her teenage daughter, Allison. … Overprotected Allison McKenzie, desperate for a friend, grows close to Selena Cross, who is just as desperate to escape poverty and the clutches of her violent and sexually abusive stepfather, Lucas. Selena works in Constance McKenzie's dress shop, seeking maternal love at a time when Allison pushes her own mother away. Constance, rigid and cool, forbids her daughter to run around with boys, especially boys like Rodney Harrington, who knocks up the town's bad girl. Constance, once a bad girl herself, is terrified that Allison will end up like her—a single woman with a child born out of wedlock, forever hiding from scandal. This truth about her daughter's birth is a carefully guarded secret, until Constance begins to thaw in the arms of the new school principal, Tom Makris. Arguing with Allison, she blurts out the secret, wounding her daughter, who flees the small town, running away to be a writer in New York City.

"After four years pass, smarting from a disastrous affair with her literary agent, Allison returns to Peyton Place to attend the murder trial of her old friend Selena Cross. The girl admits to killing her stepfather and burying him in the sheep pen, claiming self-defense. But she doesn't specify what she was defending herself against, ashamed and afraid of losing her fiancé, Ted Carter. The trial turns around when Doc Swain testifies that he performed an illegal abortion for Selena, who was raped by her stepfather. This shocking admission blows Peyton Place wide

open. Unable to hide from their secrets anymore, the townspeople must stand in the harsh light of truth. For Constance and Allison, two fiercely independent women fighting to make it in a man's world, this means reconciliation and a sense of peace."

The other day I came upon *Return to Peyton Place* in an op-shop and found that it was largely Allison's story after she has her book accepted. Her novel is based on Peyton Place and upsets the town all over again. The writing is unremarkable but she bustles the story along, only occasionally taking a moment to set the scene, and she depends largely on dialogue to build her characters. My problem with the book was not the writing but that I didn't really warm to any of the characters, even the ones like Allison who are there to gain the reader's empathy. And perhaps in that is a measure of the insuperable problem Grace faced; she couldn't afford to make her characters too fully human or people would say 'that's—' and so they have the sense of stock characters about them: the ingénue, the kindly doctor, the bitch wife, the outcast …

But Grace was probably thinking of her own experiences when she wrote:

"The public loves to create a hero," Lewis had said. "Sometimes I think they do it for the sheer joy of knocking him down from the highest peak. Like a child who builds a house of blocks and then destroys it with one vicious kick."

"I don't care," Allison had cried with forced gaiety. "It's wonderful to be famous while it lasts. And I don't really care that much what anyone says about the book. I don't really care at all." But Grace like Allison in her secret thoughts *did* care.

* * * * *

February 26: Gabrielle Lord
February 27: John Steinbeck
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
February 28: Stephen Spender
February 29: Liu Shaotang
March 1: Lytton Strachey
March 2: Dr Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel)
Geoffrey Grigson

* * * * *

I can remember reading *The Lorax* to my boys. It isn't Dr Seuss's most famous book but I always thought it combined story and message very well. And for some reason I liked it that he rhymed Erie and smeary. And I obviously wasn't the book's only fan; President Lyndon Johnson asked for the manuscript and original drawings to be donated to his collection. The other day I came across this little postscript in *Slow Death by Rubber Duck* by Rick Smith and Bruce Lourie:

"Lake Erie's resurrection was astonishing enough that it resulted in edits to one of the timeless classics of children's literature. *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss was based on the state of pollution in the United States in 1971. It's a tale of environmental warning and features the Once-ler—a greedy character who cuts down Truffula trees so he can use the silk tufts to knit highly lucrative Thneeds. Thneed sales are so successful that he builds a factory and invents a machine to cut down four trees at a time. The Lorax, a mossy, tree-dwelling creature that looks like a cross between Santa Claus and Oscar the Grouch, speaks out to defend the trees and the ecosystem of which they are part. But the Once-ler will not be deterred. He continues until the last tree is cut, and his production comes to an abrupt end. The environment in which the Once-ler and the Lorax live is left barren and polluted.

"In the original text Seuss included the line "I hear things are just as bad up in Lake Erie." Fourteen years after the book was published, Seuss was contacted by two scientists with the Ohio Sea Grant program, who updated him on the success of the Lake Erie clean-up. While the line

was removed from subsequent copies of the text, it remains in the DVD release of the TV special."

*

Robert L. Short wrote a book he called *The Parables of Dr. Seuss* and looked at this story from a Biblical perspective; "so people commenting on *The Lorax* have generally fastened on its obvious good—its lessons about good environmental practices—and they have walked away from the story apparently feeling that it has little more of importance to tell us. The story is seen primarily as a morality tale, a cautionary preachment about pollution and conservation and corporate greed. These are the story's obvious goods, its moral goods, a knowledge requiring nothing related to revelation. Or, as Horatio could say to his friend Hamlet, "There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave/To tell us this" (1.5.124).

"But doesn't *The Lorax* go deeper than this? Is there not something in it beyond these obvious moral lessons, something that remains hidden? I think so. In the first place, such a one-dimensional merely moral interpretation leaves far more questions about the story than it bothers to answer. For example, as the story's narrator himself asks:

What *was* the Lorax?
And why was it there?
And why was it lifted and taken somewhere…?

Our problem would seem to be that it never occurs to us to look more deeply into Dr. Seuss.

If you look deep enough you can still see, today,
where the Lorax once stood
just as long as it could
before somebody lifted the Lorax away."

You can see the symbolism. The old Once-ler. The last seed. The Lorax ascending. And the mysterious Somebody. Does it makes a good story better? It certainly gave me the impetus to return to the book …

*

"Twenty-seven publishing houses rejected *A Story That No One Can Beat* during the winter of 1936-37. The most frequent explanation was that it was "too different" from other children's books. Composition in verse was not in vogue, editors said, and fantasy wasn't salable. Ted argued that it wasn't fantasy, since Mulberry Street was real and its parade derived from his recollections of Springfield street life. But the editors' complaint that enraged him was that "no moral or message" could be found in his book, nothing aimed at "transforming children into good citizens." He roared across his studio at Helen: "What's wrong with kids having fun reading without being preached at?"

On the blustery day he learned of his twenty-seventh rejection, Ted fought back frustration and anger and decided to return to his apartment, stage a ceremonial burning of the now tattered manuscript, and get back to cartooning for adults. As he walked grimly along Madison Avenue, he was hailed by Mike McClintock, who had been a year behind him at Dartmouth.

"What's that under your arm?" McClintock asked.

"That's a book that no one will publish. I'm lugging it home to burn."

McClintock smiled. Three hours earlier he had become juvenile editor of Vanguard Press. "We're standing outside my new office," he said. "Come on up and let's look at it."

Half an hour later McClintock took Ted in to meet James Henle, president of Vanguard Press, and Evelyn Shrifte, an editor who later succeeded him. Henle agreed to publish the book. "But," he said, "you've got to give me a snappier title."

That morning's encounter did much to consolidate Ted's life-long fealty to luck. The *Judge* magazine cartoon that led to the lucrative Flit alliance had been discovered by the right advertising man's wife as she waited at the wrong hairdresser's salon. This time, Ted said later, "if I had been going down the other side of Madison Avenue, I'd be in the dry-cleaning business today."

From *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel* by Judith and Neil Morgan.

The book's name was changed to *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street*; Vanguard printed 15,000 copies and it came out in September 1937. From being a popular creator of witty one-liners, cartoons, slogans and stories for adults, Geisel was now on his way to becoming a best-selling children's author.

He died in 1991.

* * * * *

March 3: Edward Thomas
Arthur Machen
March 4: Charles Dibdin
Tim Costello
March 5: Gerardus Mercator
Austen Henry Layard
Howard Pyle
March 6: Agnes Smedley (d)
Elizabeth Barrett Browning
March 7: Eilis Dillon
Nance Donkin
March 8: Bramwell Booth
Oliver Wendell Holmes Jnr.

* * * * *

Bramwell, son of the better known William Booth, had married, and his young wife Florence had agreed to look after a Rescue Home for prostitutes, mere girls, who were constantly being brought to the Army's attention in the East End. In the course of her work Florence discovered that in civilised England, with its culture and wealth and imperial power, young girls were actually bought and sold. Bramwell was incredulous, but he agreed to go out '*incog*. and wander about some neighbourhood and see things for myself.'

"Three weeks later a striking scene took place in Bramwell's office. He had been 'wading through a sea of sin and defilement, my heart sickened and appalled,' and now he had turned for help to W. T. Stead, the great editor of the powerful *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead listened as the City Chamberlain, a lawyer friendly to the Army, explained the legal position of the 'White Slave Traffic', with all its ramifications on the Continent. A converted brothel-keeper and three or four girls, only one over sixteen, were brought in and put through their stories. 'When the girls had withdrawn,' recalled Bramwell, 'there was a pause, and I looked at Stead. He was evidently deeply moved. Raising his fist, he brought it down on my table with a mighty bang, so that the very inkpots shivered, and he uttered one word, 'Damn!' This explosion over, I said, 'Yes, that is all very well, but it will not help us.' Then they prayed together for an hour and a half, the important editor and the humble Salvationist, and Stead went out to get the facts 'in such a form that we can publish them'.

"The revelations which followed shook England to the depths and brought violent persecution to the Army, but led to a change in the law. It also led Stead and Bramwell to the dock of the Old Bailey. To prove their allegations they had actually bought a girl – 'a child of fourteen,' wrote Stead, 'beautiful and innocent as the day, brought to you to be ruined – willingly – yes, for she wants money for her mother who is lying ill … It made my heart bleed. £10 for the price of her shame.' But the law, not caring to follow up the scores of criminals who had bought and sold children, prosecuted the reformers.

"After a trial of twelve days, Stead was sentenced to three months in gaol. Bramwell was acquitted on lack of evidence. ''Ere, old cove,' shouted a Cockney loafer to a Salvationist in another part of London. 'I'll tell yer what'll cheer yer 'eart. Bramwell ain't guilty!' "

From *A Fistful of Heroes* by John Pollock.

*

"They say William Booth's daughters in early Salvation Army days, preached in pubs and made strong men quake and weep."

On the Side of Angels by John Smith.

*

"Professor Peter Packer Pollinger, to the amazement and delight of everyone, brought out a book on Fiona Macleod with such insight into the odd dual nature of William Sharp that Professor Pollinger's colleagues looked at him with new attention. But he continued to puff through his mustache and grew, if anything, more vague and petulant. He delighted Kate by informing her one day that he had been reading the poetry of Sara Teasdale and that it was perfectly obvious no such person had ever existed. She was the alter ego of Vachel Lindsay. He had made a profound study of their imagery and was prepared to defend his thesis.

"I don't suppose," he said, puffing, "that you know *her* poem about the daisies and the asters."

"As a matter of fact," Kate smilingly said, "I do."

"Well, you see," Professor Pollinger went on, "the secret's there. Daisies and asters are both carduaceous plants, having, that is, discordant and radiate heads. But one appears to supply simple answers and the other shares its name with a biological phenomenon of achromatic substance found in cells which divide themselves by mitosis."

"They do?" Kate said. "I mean, it does?"

"Naturally. The aster originated in China, that is to say the Orient, never hot for certitude but full of the rhythm of life. The daisy originated in Europe, with its chief religions of simple answers and the simplistic beauty of its natural world. Both sides of the same person."

"But," Kate began, "there is a great deal of clear evidence that …"

Amanda Cross in *Poetic Justice.*

Vachel Lindsay is one of those names which come up in anthologies but no one seems to take very much notice of. So what of Lindsay the man and the poet … and why might anyone want to discover in him a split personality, a secret life, an alter ego? And, for that matter, who was Sara Teasdale and did she have any kind of relationship with Lindsay? Lindsay was in love with Teasdale but never proposed, apparently believing a poet's life is too penurious and too insecure. She married another man but continued to write and publish her own poetry. Lindsay, a doctor's son, was immensely popular at the beginning of the 20th century. He saw himself as a 'performance poet', writing poetry to be sung or chanted and later identified with the poets of the American Midwest, even being dubbed the 'Prairie Troubador'. He married and had a son and daughter so perhaps he had ceased to long for Sara Teasdale. But then perhaps not. He felt

himself to be a failure, his poetry was no longer attracting an audience, and he committed suicide in 1931 by the very painful means of drinking Lysol.

The Vachel Lindsay (1879 – 1931) poem we had in our books at school was 'General William Booth Enters into Heaven' which went:

Booth led boldly with his big bass drum.
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
Walking lepers following, rank on rank,
Lurching bravos from the ditches dank,
Drabs from the alleyways and drug fiends pale—
Minds still passion-ridden, soul-powers frail:
Vermin-eaten saints with mouldy breath,
Unwashed legions with the ways of Death—
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Every slum had sent its half-a-score
The round world over. (Booth had groaned for more.)
Every banner that the side world flies
Bloomed with glory and transcendent dyes.
Big-voiced lasses made their banjos bang,
Tranced, fanatical, they shrieked and sang:
"Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?"
Hallelujah! It was queer to see
Bull-necked convicts with that land make free.
Loons with trumpets blowed a blare, blare
On, on upward thro' the golden air!
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Booth died blind and still by faith he trod,
Eyes still dazzled by the ways of God.
Booth led boldly, and he looked the chief,
Eagle countenance in sharp relief,
Beard a-flying, air of high command
Unabated in that holy land.

Jesus came from out the court-house door,
Stretched his hands above the passing poor.
Booth saw not, but led his queer ones there
Round and round the mighty court-house square.
Then, in an instant all that blear review
Marched on spotless, clad in raiment new.
The lame were straightened, withered limbs uncurled
And blind eyes opened on a new, sweet world.

Drabs and vixens in a flash made whole!
Gone was the weasel-head, the snout, the jowl!

Sages and sibyls now, and athletes clean,
Rulers of empires, and of forests green!
The hosts were sandalled, and their wings were fire!
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)
But their noise played havoc with the angel-choir.
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Oh, shout Salvation! It was good to see
Kings and Princes by the Lamb set free.
The banjos rattled and the tambourines
Jing-jing-jingled in the hands of Queens.

And when Booth halted by the curb for prayer
He saw his Master thro' the flag-filled air.
Christ came gently with a robe and crown
For Booth the soldier, while the throng knelt down.
He saw King Jesus. They were face to face,
And he knelt a-weeping in that holy place.
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

Well, it might tell you something about William Booth but I am not sure that it would make you rush out to find more of Lindsay's poems. Yet Vachel Lindsay was popular in his day—as was Sara Teasdale. Rita Dove in an interview with *The Writer's Chronicle* December 2011 about the collection she had put together, *The Penguin Anthology of 20th Century American Poetry*, says, "Sometimes, in other anthologies, Sara Teasdale doesn't make the cut; critics think her poems too obvious and even sentimental, yet "There will Come Soft Rains" is one of the most insidiously beautiful and powerful antiwar poems to come out of the First World War. Plus, as my foreword reminds us, she was ten years younger than Robert Frost yet died thirty years before him, so we'll never know how she may have evolved as a poet if she had lived longer."

*

Vachel, the stars are out
dusk has fallen on the Colorado road
a car crawls slowly across the plain
in the dim light the radio blares its jazz
the heartbroken salesman lights another cigarette
In another city 27 years ago
I see your shadow on the wall
you're sitting in your suspenders on the bed
the shadow hand lifts up a Lysol bottle to your head
your shade falls over on the floor

'To Lindsay' by Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg mentions Vachel Lindsay in several of his poems but it was hard to know what drew him to Lindsay. Sympathy perhaps.

*

St. John Ervine wrote the chapter on General Booth for *The Great Victorians* and says William Booth didn't have much respect for his father describing him as "a Grab, a Get," who only entered heaven by "the skin of his teeth." His mother Mary Moss was partly Jewish. Their son … "At the age of thirteen William Booth was taken from school, because of his father's

financial misfortunes, and bound to a pawnbroker. The apprenticeship humiliated him, nor could he ever mention the occupation in his later life, although, through it, he had obtained a knowledge of poverty-stricken people which was invaluable to him."

William married Catherine Mumford a frail young woman who had suffered curvature of the spine as a teenager and had a life of chronic ill health; she also had eight children in thirteen years. She was obviously a remarkable woman. She preached herself and gained a following as an evangelist. But it was their understanding that the greatest attraction for poor people in over-crowded dirty lodgings was the local public house which led to the way they developed their first mission in London. Religion had to compete with places which were lively, well-lit, and warm. They started up the East London Christian Mission and "The Salvation Army was formally called by that name on June 24, 1880 although it had informally borne the title for several months before." Booth grew into a tough rather dictatorial man fixated with sin and envisaging himself as leader of a fighting force. But he brought life and liveliness, even gaiety into drab and unhappy lives. "He was fortunate in his associates, as he was fortunate in his wife and his children." His sons Ballington and Herbert and his daughter Catherine eventually left the Army and his daughter Emma died in a railway smash in the USA. His son Bramwell eventually took over leadership of the new church which continued to grow and spread … and change …

* * * * *

March 9: Keri Hulme
Jean-Dominique Bauby (d)
David Garnett
Vita Sackville-West
March 10: Frances Trollope
March 11: Jack Davis
March 12: John Aubrey
Jack Kerouac
March 13: Alberto Manguel
March 14: Maxim Gorki
March 15: Jean Ingelow
Hesba Brinsmead
March 16: Caroline Herschel
César Vallejo
Margaret Weis
March 17: Penelope Lively
March 18: Wilfred Owen
March 19: William Allingham
March 20: David Malouf
March 21: Thomas Shapcott
March 22: Louis L'Amour
March 23: Joseph Quincy Adams
March 24: Olive Schreiner
March 25: Anne Brontë
Paul Scott
March 26: Richard Church
A. E. Housman
March 27: Kenneth Slessor
Rosa Praed

March 28: Mario Vargas Llosa
March 29: Sigurdur Magnusson
Denton Welch
March 30: Sean O'Casey
March 31: Andrew Lang
Andrew Marvell

* * * * *

'Are there any fairies there?' asked Emily wistfully.

'The woods are full of 'em,' said Cousin Jimmy. 'And so are the columbines in the old orchard. We grow columbines there on purpose for the fairies.'

Emily sighed. Since she was eight she had known there were no fairies anywhere nowadays; yet she hadn't quite given up the hope that one or two might linger in old-fashioned, out-of-the-way spots. And where so likely as at New Moon?

'Really true fairies?' she questioned.

'Why, you know, if a fairy was really truly it wouldn't *be* a fairy,' said Cousin Jimmy seriously. 'Could it now?'

From *Emily of New Moon* by L. M. Montgomery.

"I'm telling ye." Judy nodded her clipped grey head mysteriously. "The less ye do be belaving the colder life do be. This bush now … it was nicer whin it was packed full av fairies, wasn't it?"

"Yes … in a way. But their magic still hangs round it, though the fairies are gone."

"Oh, oh, ye belaved in thim once, that's why. If ye don't belave in fairies they can't exist. That do be why grown folks can niver be seeing thim," said Judy sagely. "It's pitying the children I am that niver have the chanct to belave in fairies. They'll be the poorer all their lives bekase av it."

From *Mistress Pat* by L. M. Montgomery.

Andrew Lang's fairy books used to be an institution. Writers remember them in their childhood reading such as

—"The books on the nursery shelves which interested me most were *The Little Duke* by Charlotte M. Yonge (the memory of this book returned to me when I was writing *The Ministry of Fear* and when I revised the novel after the war I inserted chapter headings from *The Little Duke*), *The Children of the New Forest* by Captain Marryat, the Andrew Lang Fairy Books, the E. Nesbits"—

Graham Greene in *A Sort of Life*.

—"Meanwhile the fairy tales my mother read came from Andrew Lang or the Brothers Grimm – Grimm by name, grim by nature. We were wholly unfamiliar with the Children of Lir, Cuchulainn, Queen Maeve, Deidre of the Sorrows, or any of the other robust beings who dominated the Celtic tradition."

Peter Somerville-Large in *An Irish Childhood*.

Lang's fairy books were named for colours; The Blue Fairy Book, The Pink Fairy Book, the Lilac Fairy Book and so on. Lang 1844 – 1912 was born in Scotland but spent most of his literary life in London. His first fairy book, the Blue one, proved so popular he did eleven more. Gillian Avery says of them, "Andrew Lang's coloured fairy books are still to be found in most good collections of children's books. Some of us have battered copies of the Blue Fairy Book, the Olive Fairy Book, or one of the many others, inherited perhaps from a grandparent, or picked up from a secondhand bookshop. Or we may have the revised and re-illustrated post-war editions.

From 1889 until 1913 Lang's collections of tales appeared annually at Christmas, until his name became so inseparably linked with fairy stories that a vast number of his readers thought he had actually composed them himself." Kathleen Lines says "Lang's fame as editor of the 'colour' fairy books was widespread even in his lifetime. More than this, he was even supposed by many to have 'made up' the stories – a charge he had constantly to deny." The books were compilations. Lang was fascinated by folk lore and collected stories from around the world, from as far afield as Japan, India, Armenia, Hungary and Scandinavia. So it isn't quite true that he never sought tales from the Celtic tradition (stories like 'The Fairy Nurse' and 'The King of the Waterfalls' are certainly Celtic) but he was looking for stories for children rather than myths for adults. I would see the stories of Cuchulainn and Queen Maeve as epics for grown-ups. Though people might argue over their basis in fact I certainly wouldn't see them as 'fairy' tales …

Jack Zipes in *Victorian Fairy Tales* says, "Lang was not an innovative writer. His contributions to folklore and literature lie in his ability to preserve the traditional aspect and optimism of the folk tradition and literary texts." He saw oral folklore as the bridge between literature and anthropology. But perhaps he was too kind a man to really excel at either literature or anthropology? He once wrote, "I hate cruelty; I never put a wicked grandmother in a barrel and send her tobogganing down a hill."

Lang did create a few fairy stories himself and I've just been reading them in *The Gold of Fairnilee and other stories*. He gives little space in his edited fairy tales for setting, atmosphere, or character; narrative is everything. But in his own stories he dwells at some length on the lands of the Scottish borders. And his fairies are not sweet or kind. They are motivated by malice, mischief, and even melancholy. He presents an old song of appeasement:

If ye call me imp or elf,
I warn you look well to yourself;
If ye call me fairy,
Ye'll find me quite contrary;
If good neighbour you call me,
Then good neighbour I will be;
But if you call me kindly sprite,
I'll be your friend both day and night.

Fairyland is only a place of gossamer beauty until you take your rose-tinted glasses off. "And Randal wearied of Fairyland, which now that he saw it clearly looked like a great unending stretch of sand and barren grassy country, beside a grey sea where there was no tide. All the woods were of black cypress trees and poplar, and a wind from the sea drove a sea-mist through them, white and cold, and it blew through the open courts of the fairy castle."

* * * * *

"A sport, previously enjoyed by only a few, became a sport enjoyed by many. Cricket turned into an English institution. Schools had previously merely tolerated the game. Now the public schools led the way in championing its cause, in fact, as a necessary part of the education of an Englishman. 'Mark me,' said the Revd Edward Thring, Headmaster of Uppingham, 'cricket is the greatest bond of the English-speaking race, and is no mere game.' Andrew Lang, famous as a man of letters but also as a devoted admirer of cricket in general and Charles Kortright in particular, went further in his claims: 'Cricket is a liberal education in itself, and demands temper, justice and perseverance. There is more teaching in the playground than in the schoolroom and a lesson better worth learning.' "

Anthony Meredith in *The Demon & the Lobster: Charles Kortright & Digby Jephson, remarkable bowlers in the Golden Age* summons up an image of early cricket as something more

like a cross between cricket and lawn bowls as men bowled under-arm but women cricketers found their large skirts made this difficult and began to bowl over-arm. In 1835 over-arm bowling was made legal in men's cricket. I found it a very interesting book—which I bought solely because Charles Kortright was my grandmother's second cousin—as it provides an insight into English cricket in the late nineteenth century as the 'gentleman' amateur gradually gave way to the professional, as workers achieving Saturday afternoons off flocked to watch cricket in their thousands, as under-arm bowling or 'lobbing' gradually dwindled away to a curiosity …

Strange fascination of a wooden bat!
Weird magic hidden in a leathern ball!
Ye clutch the heart as bands of hardened steel
When baby summer calls us once again
To close-trimmed turf; we say we will not go,
    But yet we go.

Strange fascination of those all brave hours
Through which we strive to hold the twin-bailed sticks
Intact! Strange fascination when we hurl
The ball with grim exactitude until
We drop. Some laugh, they cannot understand,
    But yet we do.

Strange fascination these, that force the feet
Of age to crawl between the triple pegs once more!
Strange fascination, when the jest
Of tactless youth turns on our bulk, our years,
Our childish joy, they cannot understand,
    But yet we do.

Strange fascination these, in serried ranks
We see men sit throughout the live-long day
Content! Strange fascinations, that do build
A very world of fellowship, for those
That play. Fools laugh, they cannot understand;
    Are we fools too?

'Fascination' by Digby Jephson.

Andrew Lang as a cricket fan is believable. Andrew Lang as a prolific writer for adults, such as his book on Joan of Arc, is equally believable. Andrew Lang as well-known journalist is unsurprising. But fairy books tend to be associated with women, Cicely Barker, Pixie O'Harris, Ida Rentoul Outhwaite, so I was curious as to what drew Andrew Lang to fairy books.

"After publishing her careful report on 307 cases of 'phantasms of the dead' Mrs Sidgwick may well have felt that she had established her case once and for all. After her investigation, no cultured person could ever again dismiss ghosts as old wives' tales or delusions of credulous or over-excitable people. As another eminent investigator, Andrew Lang, pointed out, most people who have seen ghosts are not hysterics, but 'steady, unimaginative, unexcitable people with just one odd experience.' " So wrote Colin Wilson in *The Psychic Detectives* and that may explain

Lang's interest—the very ordinariness of the people having a momentary glimpse into another world.

Fairies have been reduced to airy little creatures in twee stories for children, seen as a metaphor for something not to be taken seriously, as in 'the fairies at the bottom of the garden'—yet as Wilson points out what modern researchers describe as elementals, poltergeists, undeveloped spirits able to make mischief but not able to do much more than be a nuisance, were almost certainly what earlier generations describe as fairies, elves, goblins, sprites, trolls, leprechauns and so on. Fairies, like poltergeists, appear to have been able to tap into leaking human energy and use it in limited yet often troublesome ways.

This is similar to the view Lang takes in his story 'The Gold of Fairnilee' and this realm is neither heaven nor earth but rather a kind of purgatory for lost souls, unable to truly escape and move forward but still able to meddle in human lives …

Children give up their belief in fairies when adults convince them fairies don't exist. In a way changing that belief of early childhood in gossamer wings and magical lives lived in garden flowers to a belief in the desire to create mischief by unseen unevolved unpleasant spirits is harder to deal with. I suspect this is the question Andrew Lang grappled with: how to research the nature of such elementals without removing the romance and the beauty and the belief that good matters, ideas which can enrich childhood.

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April 1: Henry Le Fanu
Edgar Wallace

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While I was looking someone up in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* I happened across an entry for a Henry Le Fanu. (This was before the Glenorchy Library got rid of their set.) Was he a writer? Was he Irish? Was he connected to Sheridan Le Fanu? Did he like to read about vampires and chilling events? The first questions are easily answered. Born in Dublin he came to Australia as a clergyman and rose steadily in the church to become Anglican Primate of Australia in 1935. And yes, he belonged to that Irish family which "shone in church, state and the arts" and he was related to Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu. But the last question is much harder to answer. Did the family share the curious tastes of their most famous son?

* * * * *

"Have you read – I've just read – Le Fanu's Carmilla, the first vampire story? It's most exquisite, delicate, beautiful; an amitié amoureuse between 2 young girls, one of whom turns out to be a vampire. It had the most erotic effect on me – more so than any book I have read for a long time. Do you think I have got a vampire complex?"

Elizabeth Bowen quoted in *Love's Civil War*.

In fact it isn't the first vampire book but this is a reminder that the best vampire stories interweave eroticism, innocence, and horror.

* * * * *

"If Dickens's ghost stories are good and of the right complexion, they are not the best that were written in his day. The palm must I think be assigned to J. S. Le Fanu, whose stories of 'The Watcher' (or 'The Familiar'), 'Mr. Justice Harbottle,' 'Carmilla,' are unsurpassed, while 'Schalken the Painter,' 'Squire Toby's Will,' the haunted house in 'The House by the Churchyard,' 'Dickon the Devil,' 'Madam Crowl's Ghost,' run them very close. Is it the blend of French and Irish in Le Fanu's descent and surroundings that gives him the knack of infusing ominousness into his atmosphere? He is anyhow an artist in words; who else could have hit on the epithets in this sentence: 'The aerial image of the old house for a moment stood before her,

with its peculiar malign, scared and skulking aspect.' Other famous stories of Le Fanu there are which are not quite ghost stories—'Green Tea' and 'The Room in the Dragon Volant'; and yet another, 'The Haunted Baronet.' Not famous, not even known but to a few, contains some admirable touches, but somehow lacks proportion. Upon mature consideration, I do not think that there are better ghost stories anywhere than the best of Le Fanu's; and among these I should give the first place to 'The Familiar' (*alias* 'The Watcher')."

M. R. James in an article 'Some Remarks on Ghost Stories' (1929).

He also says of him, "Le Fanu was a scholar and poet, and these tales show him as such. It is true that he died as long ago as 1873, but there is wonderfully little that is obsolete in his manner." And the French and Irish did not always make for an easy mix. The Protestant Huguenot Le Fanus largely identified with the Anglo-Irish segment but never quite felt at home there. But neither could they mingle, despite some sympathies, with the Catholic Irish. It is that sense of not-quite-belonging which may have given an added unease to Le Fanu's stories.

* * * * *

So how do the Le Fanus fit together? They are an interesting family, making waves in the cultural and church and legal life of Dublin. They were French Huguenots from Normandy who found sanctuary in Ireland after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. And Henry Frewen Le Fanu was just as interesting as any of them. He is a generation after Joseph, whose grandmother was a sister to Richard Sheridan, author of *School for Scandal*, and his father was Joseph's brother, making him nephew to the famous writer. He came to Australia as an Anglican clergyman eventually becoming Archbishop of Perth in 1929 and then Primate of Australia in 1935; something which West Australians took pride in despite the fact that they were at that time hoping to secede from the Commonwealth.

I was interested to read the *Australian Dictionary of Biography's* assessment of his life: "As Primate Le Fanu grasped big issues, and was forthright and liberal in his actions and pronouncements. Publicly he was purely a vocal churchman, holding that the church should be a leavening influence in the community rather than a pressure group in politics. Though he probably never considered himself a socialist, he favoured social change and propounded radical views on many social and economic questions. By 1941 he relinquished his duties as chaplain-general of the Australian forces to bishops nearer defence headquarters in Melbourne. While firmly supporting the war effort, he deplored the persecution of Communists and applauded the allies' growing accord with Soviet Russia. He was an early participant in planning for post-war reconstruction." The ADB also says of him, "Big in frame and strong in character, Le Fanu was also humble, sensitive and rather shy. He could be incisive with ready wit, but was always quick to apologize for hurt. Even when he provoked controversy, he caused little rancour. His virtues far outweighed any shortcomings. Deeply spiritual and intensely human he was an ideal Church leader in difficult times."

Now Sheridan Le Fanu's writings sometimes seem overblown, all those heaped-on adjectives, the purple prose, the feeling of drowning under the weight of his determination to present people as good or evil, but he is still readable and interesting. More importantly, I wonder if the bishop went to bed with one of his books or did he feel they weren't quite the right reading for a man in Holy Orders? And how did he respond when people said "Any relation to the man who writes about vampires?"

* * * * *

April 2: Hans Christian Andersen
Charlemagne
George MacDonald Fraser

Kenneth Tynan

* * * * *

Donald Bullough wrote in *The age of Charlemagne* "Even in the largest and most prosperous religious community books were still few and contact with other scholars was at best intermittent: hence the unique attraction of a court where both these needs were generously met. In the 780s a combination of this natural magnetic pull and the initiative of the king in summoning educated men to his court brought together scholars from many parts of Europe. Incomparably the most important among them was the Northumbrian Alcuin. When Charles met him for the second time—we do not know when or where the first occasion was—at Parma on the return journey from Rome in 781, this master of the cathedral school at York was nearly 50, a decade older than the Frankish king. He had been away from his native country only for brief periods. He may have known his Vergil well—his early enthusiasm for profane Latin literature later worried him—but he knew hardly any other Classical writer, and at this date he had almost no literary or scholarly achievement to his credit: only a few of his poems were certainly written at York. Moreover he was and remained always only in deacon's orders. It argues a remarkable percipience on Charles' part that he saw in Alcuin a man who could serve his needs. Alcuin's biography does not say specifically that the king chose him to be the teacher and mentor of his entourage, but this is certainly what he became; and later, in 800, he recorded his conviction that the summons to the Frankish court was his destined vocation, which had been prophesied by a holy man in his youth. Evidence of originality in his writings is hard to find and he cannot be numbered among the more creative of the scholars who gathered round Charles, except perhaps in the field of liturgy. He had instead a rare gift for friendship, which was not broken when personal contact stopped but was maintained and even strengthened—like all true Christian relationships—by prayer as much as by correspondence; and he never forgot what he had learned from his teacher at York, that 'one learns in order to teach'. Hence he was a transmitter of the learning of greater minds than his own, skilled in bringing out the best in his contemporaries and in inspiring the younger generation to rise to greater heights than their masters. He took up residence at the itinerant royal court in 782 and, apart from two visits to England in 786 and 790-3, only left it to live the last years of his life (796-804) as abbot of St. Martin's at Tours. Such was his impact on those he helped to educate in those years that for three-quarters of a century men were proud to remember that they were the pupils or pupils of pupils of Alcuin."

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In *Stories behind the Traditions and Songs of Easter* Ace Collins writes: "If ever a man listened to Christ's directives and took them to heart, it was Theodulph of Orleans. Born in 760 in Italy, Theodulph was of royal blood. As a child he enjoyed wealth and protection not afforded to most people during those times. Theodulph also had the benefits of education and a staff of servants at his beck and call. In today's language, he had it made. Yet despite living in a world that demanded nothing of him, Theodulph heard a call stronger than the lure of luxury and power. After reading Jesus' challenge to the rich young man, Theodulph gave up his money, property, and title and surrendered his life to the Lord's service.

Overnight the former nobleman joined the ranks of the commoner as a priest. In this capacity he sought out the poorest of the poor, feeding them while he shared the story of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. His devotion to "the least of these" made him incredibly popular with the region's people and an enigma to the royals whose lifestyle he had once shared. Yet just as these men and women of privilege did not forget Theodulph, he did not forget them. In fact, he constantly looked to them for the funding needed to provide for those in dire circumstances.

As he continued his mission in God's service, Theodulph migrated to a monastery in Florence, Italy. The twenty-one-year-old priest's passion for living out Christ's directives toward the poor caught the eye of one of the world's most powerful men. Charlemagne ordered Theodulph to come to his castle. After their meeting, the ruler appointed the priest as the Bishop of Orleans and moved him to France. Though again affiliated with the ruling class, Theodulph still devoted most of his time to the sick, the orphans, the poor, and the lost. For the next thirty-seven years, Theodulph was the bridge between the royal family and the country's poor.

Because of Theodulph's influence, Charlemagne took an interest in not just feeding the people of his kingdom but educating them. Under Theodulph's guidance, priests across France set up schools devoted to reaching the children of poor families. For the first time, common people enjoyed a privilege once reserved for only the elite. Such was his status that Theodulph had only to ask, and the financing for God's work was set in motion. Yet when Charlemagne died, Theodulph, who had so closely followed the steps of Christ, found his life suddenly mirroring that of Paul.

France's new ruler, Louis the Pious, was intimidated by Theodulph's power. He felt the bishop's popularity and influence might challenge his own authority, so he charged Theodulph with treason and ordered him to spend the remainder of his days in prison. The bishop was now in his late fifties. Unable to reach out to the poor he so deeply loved, he turned to those who had lost their freedom. They became his flock. As he shared the gospel with these men, a fact became clear in his mind. The king who had imprisoned him was nothing more than a figurehead. The only real King was the one he had served since the day he had given up his title and possessions. Power was therefore not in the royal castle but in the hearts of all who believed in Christ as King. So, he reasoned, even in prison, he was still a powerful man.

In his cell, Theodulph picked up a quill and wrote his revelation in verse form. It would not only be his greatest message but also his most lasting. He taught his new song to those around him. From behind the walls he and those who worshiped with him sang out "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" with such strength and passion even the king was able to hear it.

Less than a year after writing his beautiful tribute to Christ, the bishop died. Most historians believe Louis the Pious sensed he could not quench the people's love and devotion for Theodulph by simply incarcerating him, so the only option left was to kill him. Though the good bishop was surely poisoned, "All Glory, Laud, and Honor" did not die with him. The hymn survived in his writings, and was passed on to churches across Europe."

It was translated into English and reworked by an Anglican clergyman John Mason Neale in 1851. So this is his version:

All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
Thou art the King of Israel.
Thou David's royal Son,
Who in the Lord's name comest,
The King and Blessed One.

All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.

The company of angels
Are praising thee on high,
And mortal men and all things
Created make reply.

All glory, laud, and honor
To thee, Redeemer, King,
To whom the lips of children
Made sweet hosannas ring.
The people of the Hebrews
With psalms before thee went:
Our praise and prayer and anthems
Before thee we present.

To thee, before thy Passion,
They sing their hymns of praise;
To thee, now high exalted,
Our melody we raise.
Thou didst accept their praises;
Accept the prayers we bring,
Who in all good delightest,
Thou good and gracious King.

Historians believe Charlemagne could not read or write and instead surrounded himself with people who could. I suspect that he probably had a fair idea of what was written in his name. But the thing which struck me was that the Dark Ages weren't as dark as they are still sometimes painted. Yes, there was much superstition, cruelty, discrimination, ignorance and callousness. There were also magnificent churches and cathedrals, innovative laws (including the Franks giving daughters the same rights to inherit as sons), music and poetry of power and beauty, there were social innovations, technical innovations, legal innovations, many people spoke more than one language or dialect, there were beautiful artifacts being produced, sculpture and carving, embroidery, weaving, metalwork … things of enduring beauty or grandeur, from the Book of Kells and the Bayeux Tapestry, to 'The Song of Roland' and 'Beowulf', from Rheims Cathedral to the Tower of London … how Dark was Dark …

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April 3: Washington Irving
April 4: Mrs Oliphant
April 5: Algernon Charles Swinburne
April 6: Furnley Maurice
April 7: William Wordsworth
Gabriela Mistral
April 8: Ursula Curtiss
April 9: Francois Rabelais (d)

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I came across *The Works of Rabelais* in English with illustrations by Gustave Dore in the Moonah Book Exchange and thought I would buy it for my son. My first thought was that translating Rabelais cannot have been an easy task. My second thought was that although it is

ostensibly a family history it does have, as people sometimes suggest, an affinity with Boccacio's *Decameron* …

"The occasion and manner how Gargamelle was brought to bed, and delivered of her child, was thus: and if you do not believe it I wish your bum-gut may fall out. Her bum-gut indeed, or fundament escaped her in an afternoon, on the 3rd day of February, with having eaten at dinner too many godebillios: godebillios are the fat tripes of coiros; coiros are beeves fattened in the ox-stalls, and guimo meadows: guimo meadows are those that may be mowed twice a year; of those fat beeves they had killed three hundred sixty-seven thousand and fourteen, to be salted at Shrovetide; that in the entering of the spring they might have plenty of powdered beef, wherewith to season their mouths at the beginning of their meals, and to taste their wine the better.

They had abundance of tripes as you have heard, and they were so delicious that every one licked his fingers. But, as the devil would have it, there was no possibility of keeping them long sweet, and to let them stink was not so commendable or handsome; it was therefore concluded, that they should be all of them gulched up, without any waste. To this effect they invited all the burghers of Sainais, of Suillé, of the Roche Clermaud, of Vaugaudry, without omitting Coudray, Monpensier, the Gué de Vede, and other their neighbours; all stiff drinkers, brave fellows, and good players at nine-pins. The good man Grangousier took great pleasure in their company, and commanded there should be no want not pinching for anything: nevertheless he bade his wife eat sparingly, because she was near her time, and that these tripes were no very commendable meat; they would fain (said he) be at the chewing of ordure, who eat the bag that contained it. Notwithstanding these admonitions, she did eat sixteen quarters, two bushels, three pecks, and a pipkin full. What a filthy deal of loblolly was here, to swell and wamble in her guts?

After dinner they all went rag-tag together to the willow-grove, where on the green grass, to the sound of the merry flutes and pleasant bag-pipes, they danced so gallantly, that it was a sweet and heavenly sport to see them so frolic."

And when the baby arrives his first cry is "Drink! Drink! Drink!" Stephen Greenblatt in *Learning to Curse* says, "This remarkable episode is in part an exuberant parody of classical legends of the birth of heroes" … And Lord Chesterfield in *Letters to his son and Others* says, "Rabelais first wrote a most excellent book, which nobody liked; then, determined to conform to the public taste, he wrote *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, which everybody liked, extravagant as it was." Extravagance. Exuberance. They are certainly the words to come to mind.

"Now, my masters, you have heard a beginning of the horrific history of my lord and master Pantagruel. Here will I make an end of the first book. My head aches a little, and I perceive that the registers of my brain are somewhat jumbled and disordered with the septembral juice. You shall have the rest of the history at Franfort mart next coming, and there shall you see how Panurge was married, and made a cuckold within a month after his wedding: how Pantagruel found out the philosopher's stone, the manner how he found it, and the way how to use it: how he past over the Caspian mountains, and how he sailed through the Atlantic sea, defeated the cannibals, and conquered the isles of Perles; how he married the daughter of the king of India, called Prestham; how he fought against the devil, and burnt up five chambers of hell; ransacked the great black chamber, threw Proserpine into the fire, broke four teeth of Lucifer, and the horn that was in his arse. How he visited the regions of the moon, to know whether indeed the moon were not entire and whole; or if the women had three quarters of it in their heads; and a thousand other little merriments, all veritable. These are brave things truly. Good night, gentlemen."

"He gave us also the example of the philosopher who, when he thought most seriously to have withdrawn himself unto a solitary privacy, far from the rustling clutterments of the tumultuous and confused world, the better to improve his theory, to contrive, comment and ratiocinate, was, notwithstanding his uttermost endeavours to free himself from all untoward noises, surrounded and environed about so with the barking of curs, barring of elephants, hissing of serpents, braying of asses, chirping of grasshoppers, cooing of turtles, prating of parrots, tatling of jackdaws, grunting of swine, girning of boars, yelping of foxes, mewing of cats, cheeping of mice, squeaking of weasels, croaking of frogs, crowing of cocks, kekling of hens, calling of partridges, chanting of swans, chattering of jays, pieping of chickens, singing of larks, cackling of geese, chattering of swallows, clucking of moorfowls, cucking of cuckows, bumbling of bees, rammage of hawks, chirming of linnets, croaking of ravens, screeching of owls, whicking of pigs, gushing of hogs, curring of pigeons, grumbling of cushet doves, howling of panthers, curkling of quails," and on and on.

Pantagruel was the son of Gargantua.

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To illustrate the stories may have been an easier charge than to translate them.

Winsor & Newton, advertising their paints in a copy of *The Studio* in 1955 provided this little snapshot of Gustave Doré: "The work of Gustave Doré at the age of 8. Gustave Doré began drawing at the age of two and was illustrating letters to his young friends at six. When he was eight he wrote and illustrated a home-made book dealing with the adventures of a dog named Fouilloux. … The draughtsmanship and composition are incredibly good for a child so young. When he was ten, Doré was given his first colour-box, and grabbing a white hen he painted it a bright green! He was one of the quickest and richest artists on record. He could make twenty-one splendid designs in a single morning. In a single morning he could earn £400. In twenty years he made over £280,000 (more than a million sterling by today's values)."

It is nice to know that not all artists starved in garrets!

His illustrations still influence people. Bill Bryson wrote in *At Home*, "One man more than any other fixed our visual image of what Victorian London was like: the French illustrator Gustave Doré (1833-83). … Doré's illustrative dominance was a little unexpected because he spoke barely a word of English and actually didn't spend much time in Britain. Doré's private life was slightly bizarre in that he conducted a number of torrid affairs with actresses — Sarah Bernhardt was his most celebrated conquest — but lived with his mother and for the whole of his life slept in a room adjoining hers. Doré viewed himself as a great artist, but the rest of the world did not, and he had to settle for being an extremely successful illustrator for books and magazines. He was very popular in England — for many years there was a Doré Gallery in Mayfair that dealt exclusively in his works — and is best remembered now for his dark drawings of London life, particularly for scenes of squalor along the back streets. It is interesting to reflect that a very large part of our visual impression of nineteenth-century London before photography is based on the drawings of an artist who worked from memory in a studio in Paris, and got much of it wrong. Blanchard Jerrold, the man who supplied the text for the drawings, was driven to despair by many of his inaccuracies." And I just came across this bit in a 1994 *Eremos* magazine by Peter Newall, "The landscapes Gustav Doré provided for his illustrated *Don Quixote* are fascinating. Arid, sparse, dark, and as formidable as the moon, they touch the lonely terrain of one's inner journey." It raises questions about Doré's inner journey. Was it a satisfying one?

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Rabelais was born somewhere between 1483 and 1494 in Chinon in France and went into the church but later studied medicine in Montpellier. So he wrote his bawdy stories from within

as you might say the churchyard. He dedicated them to well-known people, he went several times to Rome (and got the Pope to legitimise his two illegitimate children), but this didn't stop rumblings about censorship and banning. We don't know enough about his life, his character, or his private beliefs to unravel his desire to satirise both spiritual and temporal rulers nor what drew him to create the bawdy world of *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel* … and interesting though it might be to know more about his life and motivation I don't think it matters when it comes to the stories themselves … they simply exist … but I wonder if Doré developed a deeper insight into Rabelais as he read and re-read the stories before deciding what to illustrate and how to illustrate … and are we now interpreting Rabelais partly through the world of Doré's 'inner journey' …

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April 10: A. E. (William Russell)
April 11: Morton Sobell

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It is more than 60 years since Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were sent to the electric chair in the USA for allegedly passing atomic bomb secrets to the Soviet Union.

"At the worst of the McCarthy time, in 1953, less than twenty years later, the editor of *Holiday* magazine, Ted Patrick, asked me to go back to Ann Arbor to report the changes since the thirties. In many ways the campus was unrecognizable. A member of the Student Council told me that as a resident of a cooperative rooming house she was running into more and more people who thought she must be a Communist for not living in a privately owned house or an official university dormitory; Erich Walter, my old English professor who had become dean, told me that the FBI was asking teachers and students to inform on each other and suggested that I confirm this by talking to the current "orientation professor"; members of the Socialist Club, an anti-Communist group, said that people no longer came to the club's weekly meetings by car because a state policeman was outside taking down license numbers."

… "In the McCarthy years, a kind of unacknowledged underground mentality had permeated all kinds of places. A week or two after my *Holiday* piece on Michigan came out, Ted Patrick asked me to write still another about anything I wished. Since I did little magazine writing, I thanked him but almost automatically declined. A few days later came another request, and then another, until I finally did manage to write a short memoir of life in Brooklyn in the thirties, which he duly published. Years later, after Patrick's death, I learned the reason for his strange persistence. The advertising department of the Pontiac division of General Motors had warned Patrick that Pontiac would cancel all its advertising in *Holiday* if they ever published another piece by Arthur Miller. As it turned out, my second piece did not dry up the Pontiac account, but the air in those days bristled with such threats, and I regretted being unable to congratulate Patrick for his defense, particularly courageous at the time, of editorial integrity."

So wrote playwright Arthur Miller in his autobiography. He also said of his play *The Crucible*, "Business inevitably began falling off in a month or so, and Kennedy and Beatrice Straight would shortly leave for films. The rest of the cast insisted on playing even with little or no pay, especially after one performance when the audience, upon John Proctor's execution, stood up and remained silent for a couple of minutes, with heads bowed. The Rosenbergs were at that moment being electrocuted in Sing Sing. Some of the cast had no idea what was happening as they faced rows of bowed and silent people, and were informed in whispers by their fellows. The play then became an act of resistance for them" …

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Although I had heard of the Rosenbergs I didn't know that a third person, Morton Sobell, went on trial with them. He begins his book *On Doing Time* like this:

"On April 5, 1951, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were both sentenced to death, and Morton Sobell to thirty years imprisonment. They had all been tried and convicted of a single count, conspiring to commit espionage.

"On June 19, 1953, despite worldwide protests, the Rosenbergs were executed, and Sobell imprisoned on Alcatraz. After more than eighteen years behind bars, he was released from the federal penitentiary at Lewisberg, Pennsylvania, on January 14, 1969."

The thing which astonished me in that, and I feel I should print it in capital letters, is that they weren't charged with possessing atomic bomb secrets, they weren't charged with espionage, they weren't charged with treason. They were charged with CONSPIRING. In other words the court only had to make this husband and wife and a friend, all of whom were Jewish, look furtive and dangerous. It didn't have to produce facts. And apart from the fact that no one *has* ever proved that they possessed knowledge of the USA's atomic bomb program or that they were passing secrets to the Soviet Union the two people who come out of the whole sorry saga in the best light are the two women involved. Ethel Rosenberg who was a housewife (and don't say 'Ah, but you don't know what dangerous things housewives are!') and acted with dignity and decency throughout the trial, and Sobell's wife Helen who unwaveringly supported him, tried to stop the execution of the Rosenbergs, and raised their children during his long incarceration.

In *On Doing Time* Sobell is clearly disturbed about what he saw in the trial. " "In your own interest," the judge told Ethel in his most paternal tone. But this was still only the beginning. I don't know how Julius stood it, watching his wife torn apart by this one-two combination of judge and prosecutor, working in tandem; I think I would have screamed—"stop it, you jackals." Sobell says, "In 1956, Judge Jerome Frank, of the Second Circuit Court of Appeals, wrote: "No one who legitimately exercises the constitutional privilege ought to be so placed that he must subsequently justify it to a jury." But that wouldn't be said for another five years, and in the meantime judge and prosecutor were both telling Ethel that in her own best interest she must justify having exercised her constitutional privilege.

"It was a wonder that through it all Ethel remained calm and collected, never once becoming emotional. (A famous actress who portrayed her in the Broadway production of *Inquest* became melodramatic at this point, but the truth was stranger than the reconstructed drama.) The cross-examination of Ethel in that court-room was the most dramatic episode I had ever seen—on stage or off: a confrontation between a victim and two inquisitors of the Establishment, rather like a modern Greek tragedy. Manny Bloch who should have helped balance the struggle was mostly ineffective. Only occasionally did he raise a dignified objection, mainly, it seemed, as a matter of record. Manny was really Julius's lawyer; Alex Bloch was supposed to be Ethel's lawyer. But that was a farce; could it have been that he was the restraint Manny felt, when he should have screamed about what was being done to Ethel?"

Sobell says soberly, perhaps in an attempt to be fair, "My firm belief in the good faith of our attorneys, whatever other defects they may have had, prevents me from feeling that they meant to hurt us. They were not betrayers, but they were miserably understaffed and at times, frightened, harried, and incompetent. Against these lone practitioners was arrayed the full might and the unlimited resources of the government bent on obtaining a conviction, and the huge weight of a manipulated "public opinion." "Great" criminal lawyers have many skilled assistants and investigators to do their research. No such eminent lawyer would touch this case in 1951. In fact many left-wing lawyers who were far more competent than ours shunned this case as if it were the plague; such were the times."

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Of course other famous people, besides Arthur Miller, have written or spoken about the Rosenbergs. Two that I've found are Sylvia Plath in *The Bell Jar* and E. L. Doctorow in *The Book of Daniel*. Doctorow's most famous book was *Billy Bathgate*, the story of a young orphan, a streetwise punk, who becomes involved with gangster Dutch Schultz. Now I am quite willing to believe in Billy's intelligence, clearly it has helped him survive, but I was less willing to believe in his 'reality'. Would the real Billy have said, "The trouble may have been in part his build, which was short-necked and stolid. I think now that the key to grace or elegance in any body, male or female, is the length of the neck, that when the neck is long several conclusions follow, such as a proper proportion of weight to height, a natural pride of posture, a gift for eye contact, a certain nimbleness of the spine and length of stride, all in all a kind of physical gladness in movement leading to athletic competence or a love for dancing. Whereas the short neck predicts a host of metaphysical afflictions, any one of which brings about the ineptitude for life that creates art, invention, great fortunes, and the murderous rages of the disordered spirit. I am not suggesting this as an absolute law or even a hypothesis that can be proved or disproved; it is not a notion from the scientific world but more like an inkling of a folk truth of the kind that seemed reasonable enough before radio. Maybe it was something that Mr. Schultz himself perceived in the unconscious genius of his judgments because up to now I knew of two murders he had personally committed, both in the region of the neck, the throttling of the Fire Department inspector, and the more viciously expedient destruction of a West Side numbers boss who was unfortunate to be tilted back in a chair and having himself shaved in the barbershop of the Maxwell Hotel on West Forty-seventh Street when Mr. Schultz found him."?

So this week I have been reading them to see just what they said and how they incorporated this sad event into their novels.

Plath begins *The Bell Jar* with:

"It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenbergs, and I didn't know what I was doing in New York. I'm stupid about executions. The idea of being electrocuted makes me sick, and that's all there was to read about in the papers – goggle-eyed headlines staring up at me on every street corner and at the fusty, peanut-smelling mouth of every subway. It had nothing to do with me, but I couldn't help wondering what it would be like, being burned alive all along your nerves.

I thought it would be the worst thing in the world."

"I kept hearing about the Rosenbergs over the radio and at the office till I couldn't get them out of my mind. It was like the first time I saw a cadaver."

"I knew something was wrong with me that summer, because all I could think about was the Rosenbergs and how stupid I'd been to buy all those uncomfortable, expensive clothes, hanging limp as fish in my closet, and how all the little successes I'd totted up so happily at college fizzled to nothing outside the slick marble and plate-glass fronts along Madison Avenue."

And later Esther says, 'Isn't it awful about the Rosenbergs?'

To which her friend says, 'It's awful such people should be alive.'

But the Rosenbergs only have those brief mentions to a) set the time when Esther comes to New York to work for *Ladies' Day* magazine and b) to tell the reader that Esther is a sensitive young woman.

But I was reminded of a friend mentioning that she thought it was good that someone had got interested in an issue because he needed something to think about besides himself. That is the thing about the novels about very young people; the unrelieved self is interesting to other young people because they are constantly comparing their experiences with that of the fictionalised experiences they're reading. But when you come back to such books much later they tend to seem merely tedious and self-indulgent; you want the wider context, you want supporting characters that are more than names on a page. I think this is why I feel both sympathy and disinterest in Sylvia Plath: because she never really moved beyond the unrelieved self.

The Book of Daniel is quite different. In it the Rosenbergs are re-created as Paul and Rochelle Isaacson and after their electrocution they leave behind a son Daniel and a daughter Susan. The book suggests someone with a camera, sometimes zooming in for a close-up, sometimes giving the long detached view. He encourages a sense of sympathy and understanding but I found it hard to like Daniel perhaps not least because I kept thinking 'this is ersatz sympathy', 'this is ersatz understanding', 'I don't know if this gives me any insight into the real lives of those children left behind' … 'I don't know if I would have liked those real children' … Perhaps fiction isn't the best way to handle an agonising true event?

He provides an idea on the background: "Many historians have noted an interesting phenomenon in American life in the years immediately after a war. In the councils of government fierce partisanship replaces the necessary political coalitions of wartime. In the greater arena of social relations—business, labor, the community—violence rises, fear and recrimination dominate public discussion, passion prevails over reason. Many historians have noted this phenomenon. It is attributed to the continuance beyond the end of the war of the war hysteria. Unfortunately, the necessary emotional fever for fighting a war cannot be turned off like a water faucet. Enemies must continue to be found. The mind and heart cannot be demobilized as quickly as the platoon. On the contrary, like a fiery furnace at white heat, it takes a considerable time to cool."

Except that the war fever had had years and years to cool. Perhaps *that* is the problem.

Doctorow also has a character say, "Your folks didn't know shit. The way they handled themselves at their trial was pathetic. I mean they played it by *their* rules. The government's rules. You know what I mean? Instead of standing up and saying fuck you, do what you want, I can't get an honest trial anyway with you fuckers—they made motions, they pleaded innocent, they spoke only when spoken to, they played the game. All right? The whole frame of reference brought them down because they acted like defendants at a trial. You dig?"

Sobell was friends with both Julius and Ethel. "Our worst fears of the turn of events back in the States seemed realized. Julius's arrest was announced jointly by the Attorney-General and J. Edgar Hoover, from Washington, as if it were an event of great national importance—a political event. Since the start of the cold war, many accusations of treason and espionage had been loosely flung around. Elizabeth Bentley had made the headlines over the years with a lot of wild stories of espionage committed by government officials in fairly high positions." And, "Picking up the newspaper on the morning of August 12, I found Ethel Rosenberg's picture on the front page, with the announcement that she too had been arrested and charged with being part of the atom bomb conspiracy. I rushed back to the apartment to tell Helen. It left us speechless and frightened. What was there to talk about? Poor Ethel, poor children, where could they get help? What madness was there back home that could lead to such a situation?"

They had all spent time in the Communist Party during the Depression years. It was a natural assumption to make: if capitalism could lead to poverty and misery and mass

unemployment then perhaps communism was the answer. But they now found themselves in uncharted territory and they entered it with terrifying naivete. Not only their own ignorance but the more frightening ignorance of the lawyers they approached who did not want to take on a case which would effectively pit them against the government and public opinion. They were poorly served by their lawyers, by the justice system, by the media, by a nation which promoted itself as the Land of the Free.

"Let's face it, America, faking evidence is old hat, not only in this country, but all across the world. We just aren't brought up to think in these terms.

"When I was a boy on the way to school in Baltimore one morning, I found that every telephone pole had a new poster tacked to it. They were fake photographs of Maryland's distinguished United States Senator Millard Tydings arm in arm with the chief of the American Communist Party, Gus Hall.

"There was an investigation and it found that the composites emanated from Senator Joseph McCarthy. Tydings, known as "the Judge" in the Senate, had been asked by the Senate to head up an investigation into McCarthy's charges of communism in government, and McCarthy's own misuse of campaign funds. McCarthy hated Rydings for his straightforward and honest decency, something McCarthy did not understand. So he faked the pictures to try to defeat Rydings in an election in Maryland."

From *Killing Kennedy* by Harrison Edward Livingstone.

But trying to stop someone getting elected is not as serious as sending them to the electric chair. I can understand people being afraid of change, of feeling that life is whirling away out of control, that the changes being imposed willy-nilly aren't changes for the best. But was it this which drove Joseph McCarthy? He was afraid of the new post-war America? Or had his attitudes been formed much earlier on? I came upon these two insights into the world of conservative American Catholicism and I wondered if McCarthy's ideas had been formed in the pressure-cooker created by Father Coughlin in the 1930s.

"During the 1930s, when anti-Semitism in the United States was on the rise, Charles E. Coughlin, a young Roman Catholic priest, was its most prominent spokesman. He is now seen as the father of 'hate radio'. Every Sunday afternoon he broadcast a sermon from the pulpit of a small church in Royal Oak, Michigan which was listened to by Catholics gathered around their radio sets across the nation. He received an average of 80,000 letters a week, more than the President, and in 1933 a national poll voted him the 'most useful citizen of the United States'. His message was simple: Jewish bankers – referred to by the euphemism 'international bankers' – ruled the world and were to blame for the Depression and the rise of communism. Jewish interests were leading America into the war. In 1936 the Vatican tried to curb his activities but his bishop supported him and it was not until 1940 that he was taken off the air. He continued to publish his right-wing journal, *Social Justice*, until 1942 when the Federal Government stepped in and threatened to charge him with sedition."

From *Jack Kerouac* by Barry Miles.

"Much more dangerous and certainly more able were Father Coughlin, the radio priest, and Huey Long, the Senator from Louisiana. Coughlin was a political opportunist with a likeable personality and a flair for broadcasting; he passed from support of the New Deal to radical financial and credit policies and ultimately to opposition to any form of internationalism and advocacy of anti-Semitism and overseas Fascist regimes. In the early years of the New Deal the attention which he attracted was phenomenal. He is said to have received some 80,000 letters a

week after his broadcasts, and his weekly listening audience, estimated to be some 10,000,000 people, was the largest regular audience in the world. At one stage he claimed that his National Union for Social Justice had 9,000,000 members—a claim which was probably grossly exaggerated—but his increasingly anti-democratic sentiments and, indeed, Fascist tendencies lost him much of his following. By 1936 he was no longer a formidable political force in comparison with Roosevelt. Of the extremists Huey Long was undoubtedly the most successful and he included among his ambitions the presidency itself. Having known poverty in his youth and having won favourable publicity from his legal struggles with Standard Oil, he shrewdly calculated that he could rise to political power through a mixture of demagoguery, chicanery, intimidation and the provision of those services which the ordinary man wanted. His popularity with the voters in Louisiana, where he became Governor, was genuine for it rested upon his large-scale spending on public works, his subsidies for education, and his lowering of public service charges. At the same time he built a dictatorial and semi-terroristic regime which went far towards eliminating genuine political democracy in the State. His assassination in 1935 put an end to his ambitions but his loosely defined "Share-the-Wealth" scheme, which promised a comfortable living to every family by redistributing America's fortunes, had won support for him in areas well outside the deep south. Roosevelt's radical legislation of 1935, which included the Wealth Tax and the Social Security Act, was not unrelated to cutting the support from agitators like Long, Coughlin, and Townsend."

From *The Modern World* by Gordon Greenwood.

It must have been a heady mix for young Catholics with its ideas of wealth redistribution, power, manliness, keeping America 'pure', youthful energy untainted by Old World decadence; in fact a set of beliefs which mirrored a lot of Hitler's appeal to the young and the disillusioned. For Joseph McCarthy born in 1908 to a conservative Catholic family and therefore coming to manhood in the Thirties–was this the seductive message which formed his thinking?

* * * * *

April 12: Alan Ayckbourn
Jack Hibberd
April 13: Samuel Beckett
Amanda Lohrey
Seamus Heaney
April 14: Marjorie Bligh
April 15: Arnold Toynbee
Henry James
April 16: Kingsley Amis
John Millington Synge
April 17: Henry Vaughan
Thornton Wilder
April 18: Henry Clarence Kendall
April 19: Richard Hughes
April 20: Dinah Craik
Mary Virginia Devine
April 21: Charlotte Brontë
Gilbert Frankau
April 22: Madame De Staël
Henry Fielding
Damien Broderick

April 23: William Shakespeare

* * * * *

‘What is the point of carnality if it is not the result of a kind of burning folly, something uncontrollable and yet, in the act, controlled? If whip you must, whip like the divine Marquis de Sade, right up to the gates of death. If you must suffer, suffer like a martyr. If screw you must, screw like Casanova—’

The Old Man and Mr. Smith by Peter Ustinov.

*

“Shakespeare never actually used ‘fuck’ as a written word in his plays and poems, but he gave his audiences a bewildering number of puns on it, preferring to give them the tingle factor of decoding the double meanings.”

Filthy Shakespeare: Shakespeare’s Most Outrageous Sexual Puns by Pauline Kiernan.

The assumption being that he could’ve littered his plays with f------s if he had wanted to but he just didn’t want to. I wonder. There are three explanations for the origin of ‘fuck’ wandering around. (There may be more that I have not come across.)

1. That it was court shorthand for the charge ‘For Use of Carnal Knowledge’. As dozens of prostitutes trooped through the courts and were fined the poor old court clerks with their quill pens and inkwells naturally used such descriptions. FUCK, GBH, B&E, or their equivalents. Why write something out in full twenty times a day if a short version will be understood. But there is a curious corollary to this. Carnal Knowledge wasn’t quite the same as sex. They weren’t necessarily being charged for having intercourse, for adultery or fornication. Cecil Sharman in introducing a collection of George Fox’s letters *No more but my love* points out that the meaning of various words has changed. For instance: ‘Own’ used to mean ‘to admit’ or ‘to acknowledge’ rather than ‘to possess’; ‘Virtue’ was more likely to mean ‘power, energy, inspiration’ rather than ‘moral value’. ‘Lust’ was a desire or craving and could refer to any kind of excess or lack of control, not just sexual lust. And ‘Carnal’ meant ‘sensual, related to the body, not spiritual’ and he goes on to say ‘The word was used freely, with few of the limited and unfavourable overtones it has since acquired’. Women weren’t being charged for having sex but rather they were seen as having a knowledge of bodies, both men’s and women’s, which was treated as unacceptable, even dangerous. And given the propensity of Englishmen for being spanked in brothels it was probably just as well that the courts didn’t have to prove that they were there solely for sex. F.U.C.K. could equally well apply to stripping as to intercourse, to watching someone take a bath as to sex. It may explain the long time English fascination with peep-shows … And as Latin was used in English courts up into the 1700s it might explain people’s failure to find the word ‘fuck’ used earlier.
2. That ‘fuck’ is a development or a corruption for an Old English or Saxon word ‘fecken’ meaning ‘to strike’. The assumption in this, that those rough and bawdy Anglo-Saxons had no words for sex, strikes me as odd. But words do change down the centuries; we see the process going on all the time. Seamus Heaney though gave me pause when he suggests in his version of *Beowulf* that the Germanic tribes, like modern Germans, loved linking words together. The assumption that all our rude four-letter-words come from the Angles and Saxons and Jutes is not necessarily born out by linguistic research. They added words together, they made

words that were complex, they didn't revel in the short and blunt. If they used 'fecken' it was likely to be lengthened rather than shortened. *Beowulf* begins

Hwæt we Gar-Dena in geardagum,
peodcyninga prym gefrunon,
hu ða æpelingas ellen fremedon.

which Heaney translates as

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

And Henrietta Leyser in *Medieval Women* says, "The lack of any influence of a Christian sexual ethic among the newly converted Anglo-Saxons has been noted by Margaret Clunies Ross who has shown that in the early sources there is only one Anglo-Saxon word, *haemaed*, used for sexual intercourse, irrespective of context. Only gradually are compound words such as *unrigthaemaed* and *wohhaemaed* formed to describe 'unlawful' or 'wrongful' intercourse."

I think we have to look elsewhere for the ongoing impulse to make words short and pithy.

3. There is a third possibility on offer: the French verb 'foutre' which means 'to do'. At first glance this might not seem to have anything much to do with sex either but we know that 'do' and 'did' and 'doing' are used as euphemisms for all kinds of activities including crimes, such as doing someone or something over. It brings with it an undertone of violence and force. If 'fuck' comes from 'foutre' then it was more likely not synonymous with making love but brings with it a whiff of rape. So we may be right to see 'fucking' as a different process to 'making love' in that it defines or defined a mechanical process rather than the outcome of a deeply-felt emotion …

But all this is irrelevant to any discussion of Shakespeare's use of language unless we can be absolutely certain that the modern meaning (or one of the modern meanings; casual talk of 'fucking cars' may give linguists pause in another two hundred years) was around in the late 1500s and in widespread use. Euphemisms need something to euphemise.

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April 24: Marcus Clarke
April 25: Walter de la Mare
Anzac Day

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"The British War Office seems to have been generous in its estimates, granting Australia its military transport at a cheaper rate than Canada, and, after Gallipoli began, simply charging Australia a set cost per man per day. Nevertheless, although different figures are given by different 'authorities', by 1920 the war had cost Australia approximately £376,993,052. Of this, £262,507,829 had been raised from loans, and £71,087,125 from taxation, while £43,398,998 was owed to the British government for services and goods provided to the Australian army. With interest charged on war loans, repatriation and pension costs, the latter figure had risen to £831,280,947 by 1934."

E. M. Andrews in *The Anzac Illusion*.

P. A. Pedersen in *Monash as Military Commander* points out: "Yet the training of the corps was as unsuited to its task on the Peninsula as it was to operations on the Western Front. …

Excessive concentration on the Anzac myth, based on the spirit and dash of the Australian soldier from the time of the landing, has tended to obscure this vital fact."

Bravo Anzacs!
Rings the wide world with the fame
And glory of Australia's name,
Valiant sons of Britain true
Our great Empire praises you!

And to history shall go down
New Zealand's loyal and brave renown,
Zeal in every noble heart
Answ'ring plays a hero's part
Closer binds our Empire's tracks
Sons of Britain – brave Anzacs.

Patriotic Postcard brought out in the wake of the Gallipoli campaign.

And an estimated 40% of the Anzacs were in fact born in Britain (which then included Ireland) … One of these Britons was 'Simpson' who with his Donkey has been raised to mythic status. Graham Wilson in his *Dust Donkeys and Delusions* sets about demolishing the claims and stories that have grown up around the young man. John Simpson Kirkpatrick was born in England to two Scots-born parents, left school at twelve to work as a milkman and then went to sea, eventually ending up in Australia. He signed up, using a false name, apparently in the hope that it would give him a free passage home. Instead he ended up with an ambulance unit at Gallipoli.

So far so good. Just a normal young man with mixed reasons for enlisting. So how did the long-running 'Simpson for VC' campaign come about? Wilson sets to work to deconstruct the myth, showing it to be based on a lack of understanding, hyperbole, wrong information, wishful thinking and, occasionally, outright lies. Even the photograph and painting so often claimed to be Simpson and his donkey is in fact of a NZ private, Richard Henderson, and I wonder how his family feels seeing him regularly trotted out in support of another man? At the end of his book Wilson is left with that normal young man just 'doing his bit'. He ends his book by saying, "I have been very hard on the Simpson myth, I know. I readily admit that it is undeniable that myths and legends play a useful part in forging and maintaining a national image. … The legend of Simpson and the donkey is one of the most powerful Australian myths and, if nothing else, serves to keep the memory of Australia's military history alive, and this is no bad thing. The problem, however, as I have pointed out a number of times in this book, that the Simpson myth is now almost universally accepted as 'history', which it is not.

"Simpson himself, while he was never the suicidally brave larrikin saint that legend would have us believe, is totally blameless in the establishment and maintenance of the myth. It is not his fault that people who should have known better have worked to transform his minor contribution to the Gallipoli campaign into the defining element of the campaign and Australia's contribution. Having said this, however, the fact is that the myth of Simpson, and particularly his putative failed recommendation for the award of the VC, is just that, a myth."

But it is a peculiarly potent myth. Gregory Pemberton, reviewing an earlier book about Simpson, Peter Cochrane's *Simpson and the Donkey: The Making of a Legend*, in 1993 wrote, "To discover these facts is one thing: to publish them is another. I recall the discontent among

elderly ex-servicemen at a War Memorial history conference when Cochrane first publicly applied the blowtorch of serious historical inquiry to the Simpson legend.

"Not many years ago, the new breed of young, professional curators who were being increasingly employed at the War Memorial pointed out that the authentic and original title of a statuette, labeled in the memorial as "Simpson and His Donkey" was, as given by the sculptor, merely "A Man and a Donkey". The memorial management refused to change the title, and rumours abounded of a "left-wing campaign" to attack the Simpson legend. The curators had truth on their side, but truth is not always victorious in the face of power. The incorrect title was removed but on my last inspection several years afterwards no other had replaced it. And a larger Simpson sculpture now stands, in all its potency, outside the main entrance to the memorial."

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In *The Ultimate Birthday Book* I had the question of what books were most popular with the troops in WWI. For the English I had Nat Gould and Charles Garvice. But what of Australia? I'm sure Nat Gould was popular with the Diggers but for a second choice (and I have never come upon this precise question asked here) I think C. J. Dennis's *Ginger Mick* would have been a strong contender. Alec Chisholm wrote, "In less than six months—to 31st March 1917—sales in Australia and New Zealand alone had reached the healthy total of 42,349 copies. The authentic flavour of the story was established by the cordial reception it received from men on active service, to whom it was introduced by a "pocket edition for the trenches". William Wilde in *Australian Poets & Their Works* says, "C. J. Dennis, successful with *Backblocks Ballads* (1913) and *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke* (1915, the year in which it sold 67,000 copies), sacrificed one of his larrikin heroes, Ginger Mick, at Gallipoli. It was said that most Australian soldiers serving in France had their own pocket editions of *The Sentimental Bloke*."

But that wasn't Dennis's only contribution to WWI. There was his marching song and unofficial anthem 'The Austra—laise', where the men put their own words such as 'blooming' or 'bloody' or 'flaming' or whatever in the gaps and which had started out as a prizewinning poem in *The Bulletin* then been expanded to go in *Backblocks Ballads* and in 1915 was printed as a leaflet for the Diggers. It went:

Fellers of Australier,
  Blokes an' coves an' coots,
Shift yer —— carcases,
  Move yer —— boots.
Gird yer —— loins up,
  Get yer —— gun,
Set the —— enemy
  An' watch the —— run.

Chorus:
Get a —— move on,
  Have some —— sense.
Learn the —— art of
  Self de- —— -fence.

Have some —— brains be-
  Neath yer —— lids.
An' swing a —— saber
  Fer the missus an' the kids.

Chuck supportin' —— posts,
An' strikin' —— lights,
Support a —— fam'ly an'
Strike fer yer —— rights.

Chorus

Joy is — fleetin'
Life is —— short.
Wot's the use uv wastin' it
All on —— sport?
Hitch yer —— tip-dray
To a —— star.
Let yer —— watchword be
"Australi- —— -ar!"

Chorus

'Ow's the —— nation
Goin' to ixpand
'Lest us —— blokes an' coves
Lend a —— 'and?
'Eave yer —— apathy
Down a —— chasm;
'Ump yer —— burden with
Enthusi- —— -asm.

Chorus

W'en the — trouble
Hits yer native land
Take a —— rifle
In yer —— 'and.
Keep yer —— upper lip
Stiff as stiff kin be,
An' speed a —— bullet for
Pos- —— -terity.

Chorus

W'en the —— bugle
Sounds "Ad- —— -vance"
Don't be like a flock uv sheep
In a —— trance.
Biff the —— foeman
Where it don't agree.
Spifler- —— -cate him

To Eternity.

Chorus

Fellers of Australier,
Cobbers, chaps an' mates,
Hear the —— enemy
Kickin' at the gates!
Blow the —— bugle,
Beat the —— drum,
Upper-cut and out the cow
To kingdom- —— -come!

Chorus.

We are frequently told we can't change the flag because men went to war under it, but no one ever says we must keep this stirring song because men marched to it and sometimes had its words ringing in their ears as they died.

* * * * *

Liam Jeory and Cameron Bennett in *Foreign Correspondents* write, "Like any Kiwi lad, I was brought up on stories of the Anzacs. I knew how they fought and died at Gallipoli and I had seen the movie. But I never considered their deeds on that godforsaken Turkish peninsula to be the beginning of our sense of nationhood in the same way as my Australian friends and colleagues seemed to. When time came around to plan our coverage of the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, they seemed to assume a reverential tone, almost religious, whereas I looked forward to it as just another assignment, albeit to a particularly historic part of the world."

"During 1914 and 1915 bitter feeling grew in Ireland owing to the broken pledges of the British Premier, especially as regards Irish troops. In the retreat from Mons the second battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers had fought a gallant rear-guard action, and had nearly been wiped out, while waiting for orders that never arrived. There would not have been such bitterness in Ireland if only the British Press had given a modicum of praise to Irish regiments for the benefit of the families who had sent their sons to fight in France and on the far-flung frontiers of the British Commonwealth. The most flagrant example of injustice was the failure to give recognition to the heroic actions of the 10th Irish division, which lost most of its effective troops in the disastrous expedition to Gallipoli in 1915. At Suvla Bay in the Dardenelles on August 15 the 'Pals Battalion' of the Dublin Fusiliers, as it was called, was virtually annihilated, and on that day perished eight of the dearest friends I had known at St Stephen's Green School in Dublin and at Shrewsbury.

"The departure of the 'Pals Battalion' and other Irish troops from Dublin, the Bacchic kermesse and the sad parting at North Wall which I had witnessed, lives for me today in the great first act of Sean O'Casey's play, *The Silver Tassie*. My main reason for accompanying the 'Pals Battalion' to the boat was to say farewell to my oldest school friend, Paddy Tobin, but there were many others, including school companions and masters.

"The needless slaughter of the Irish troops in Gallipoli was scarcely an encouragement to the British recruiting campaign in Ireland, nevertheless the Irish continued to enlist, and

Redmond was able to announce proudly in January 1916 that 150,000 Irishmen were serving with the colours."

Walter Starkie in *Scholars and Gypsies*.

Will Ireland be making much of the centenary of Gallipoli? Will they be claiming it as the moment when they became a nation? No. Will New Zealand? Probably not. Which might suggest we remain more British, even more English, than we realise. Or is it recognition that pleasant though multiculturalism is a country needs a point of 'togetherness' and Gallipoli has been chosen to carry this additional burden?

And why Gallipoli? Why not Federation? Helen Irving in *To Constitute a Nation* writes, "'Make yourself a united peple', said Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales, at the first Federation Conference in 1890: 'appear before the world as one, and the dream of going "home" would die away. We should create an Australian home … We should have "home" within our own shores'." And "National sentiment, said Tasmania's Attorney-General, Andrew Inglis Clark, 'will go on and grow in the several colonies whether we now assist or not in giving it that political independence or autonomy which it craves for, and which it deserves'."

Pointing out problems with our Constitution, which was the blueprint for Federation rather than Federation itself, does not remove the underlying belief that for the separate colonies to federate was ultimately good for the colonies and good for their people. People were proud of the fact that a group of separate colonies had been able to come together, peacefully and harmoniously, to form a nation. And if Federation had not happened then there would have been no Anzacs. There would undoubtedly have been Victorians and New South Welshmen, Queenslanders and Tasmanians at Gallipoli. But no Anzacs.

* * * * *

Chris Masters included in his book *Not for Publication* an essay he called 'The Man Who Will Not March'. "There is so much the accepted sources can try to hide, so much they presume too harsh for our tender ears. When you go to the battalion associations and the like, they understandably direct you to interview the officer, who can sometimes seem the most pompous and boring person they could find.

"If you were not careful you would be steered into the captive arms of people who had defined their lives through their military experience and were missing an important perspective. They were not bad people. They clearly felt their own duty to keep it safe, to preserve and protect the reputation of the living and the dead. Between competing ambitions to have their stories remembered and kept to themselves there is an uncleared minefield. Negotiating it has been difficult, one of the toughest jobs I have undertaken, because I felt a duty too, that put us at odds.

"I felt that if I am going to report on these old battles we can't sanitise them as we used to. The old reasons—avoiding bringing comfort to the enemy and additional suffering to the living—are no longer so strong. And we should not depict war as adventure.

"We want to remember and retell all that makes us proud. But it is dangerous to pretend we were all heroes, that no one ran from battle, we made no mistakes, we are a warrior race, ten feet tall and bullet-proof. We are ready for, in need of, a more balanced and less hygienic accounting of history.

"Somewhere along the way I was told something that stopped me dead. One time when preparing the annual Anzac Day reports and marvelling at the large turnout I was told of the equally large number who were not there. Obviously many don't turn up because they are too frail, but it seemed a large number had never marched and never joined Returned Services clubs, battalion associations and the like. To me getting the balance and a broader perspective meant

trying to find some of these people" … which brought him to various reasons for men not being there.

The most obvious one was that veterans didn't want to relive memories which still hurt and distressed them many years later. The old veteran who had inspired the piece talked of his horror when he killed a young Japanese lad in hand-to-hand combat and the young man was crying for his mother. After he had killed him he realised the young man had already been wounded when they first grappled.

Men didn't want to be reminded of what they saw as cowardice, of bad decisions they had made, even the accidental shooting of their mates, or the bad decisions and sheer bloody-mindedness of others. " 'One bloke up in New Guinea accidentally revealed at an intelligence briefing that his officer had not been in a scouting party like he was supposed to. The bloke, a good young private, a scout, was not dobbing or trying to get anyone in trouble. He did the right thing because the officer was giving a flawed account of the enemy positions and he knew that was dangerous.

'The next day he was sent out by the officer to check the same ground. On his own. It was criminal. But he made no complaint, not even to us. I can still see him hoofing off down a bush track without a word. We never heard from him again, and I could not look at that officer or think about him again without seeing a murderer. So what happens when you run into that swine of an officer on Anzac Day? My oath, it would be hard for me not to want to floor a lot of them.' "

Men who had desk jobs were sometimes made to feel inferior when up against big fit men used to manual labour. And the things which made for good soldiers … " 'In a war, some of the best soldiers were the worst people … They are worshipped for behaviour that would be otherwise seen as psychotic. … So that is hard to live with too, for so many awful people to be lauded.' "

Michele Turner when she was collecting background material for her book *Telling East Timor* came upon a letter written by Lt. Col. A. Spence in which he wrote (15/7/1942) from Timor, "Recently the Platoon Commanders of 2 Ind Coy have made a careful survey of all men under their control. As a result, this HQ now has to hand, lists of soldiers who are considered unfit for Ind Coy work. A few are of such bad character that they are useless as soldiers and continually deserving of serious punishment which cannot possibly be applied to them in an area where no troops or facilities are available for detentive duties." However, many Australian officers were very open about the killing of civilians. Lt. Colin Doig in *A History of the 2nd Independent Company & 2/2 Commando Squadron* says without apology, "There was no satisfaction at all in killing natives, also it was a fruitless task; what were a few hundred or thousand of them out of the hundred thousand native men in the colony?"

It isn't clear what precisely Lt. Colonel Spence was referring to but Australian soldiers in East Timor did commit rape, theft, and murder. Sometimes war time actions weighed on men's minds, the things done to civilians, leading to suicide later or nervous breakdowns, what one old veteran called 'the many emotional wrecks who were hidden away after the war', and legion are the men who became alcoholics to blot out memories. Other men had breakdowns because they felt they had let down their mates, their battalion, their country. When Tasmanian Vietnam vet Joe Gilewicz was shot dead by police because he had come back a psychotic wreck no one rushed to remember him on Anzac Day.

Chris Masters' has his 'Man' say, 'I am glad we have chosen 25 April, you know, Gallipoli, to remember, because it makes us reflect on more than the victories. But I still think a lot of people are confused about the march. I am confused. Is it for the sake of remembrance, reunion,

commemoration or triumph? If I was sure we marched for what I came back to, for the life I have shared with my wife and my kids, I might give it a go." He never did. Nor did his family.

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April 26: Artemis Ward
April 27: Mary Wollstonecraft
Cecil Day-Lewis
Ludwig Bemelmans
April 28: Terry Pratchett
April 29: Rafael Sabatini
April 30: Sir John Lubbock Avery
Paul Jennings
May 1: Joseph Addison
Marie Corelli
May 2: Alan Marshall
May 3: Norman Thelwell
May 4: Marele Day
May 5: Karl Marx
May 6: Harry Golden
Harry Martinson
Theodore H. White
May 7: Robert Browning
A. E. W. Mason

* * * * *

Dorothy Sayers says of Harriet Vane in *Gaudy Night*, given a long story about a curious incident with a clock, people assuming that a writer of detective fiction must be interested in clocks; "It gave her pleasure to inform Miss Mollison that Mr. A. E. W. Mason had hit on the same idea earlier." A. E. W. Mason used to be mentioned in passing by other writers, his books used to turn up at times on stalls, but I never got around to reading any or wondering just what the mysterious incident with the clock may have been—until the other day I came across a reprint of his novel *The Four Feathers* and bought it, assuming it was a mystery.

In fact he began his career in the late nineteenth century writing mainstream novels and this one is about a young man Harry Feversham who is accused of cowardice. Three military men send him three feathers to designate him as a coward; to these his fiancée adds a fourth. Harry, instead of telling them what he thinks of their hypocrisy, disguises himself as a Greek and goes to the Sudan where Britain is in the middle of one of its interminable colonial wars and there he shows his initiative and his courage. The book is a reminder of various kinds of courage: moral courage, courage in the face of disaster and disability and disappointment. But I came away from it with a great feeling of relief that we have moved beyond that idea that courage in warfare is the only kind of courage that matters.

* * * * *

I was a little confused but this is a different Mason and I assume no relation. "New Zealand's first gropings towards finding its own voice came with the Auckland poet, R. A. K. Mason, in the 1920s—the same time as Slessor and the Lindsay group in Australia were flaunting their Nietzschean naughtinesses and galloping like paroled satyrs along to the *Bulletin* office. Young Australians were experiencing something of the strength in unity that a new movement gives; Mason was learning to live as he would continue, and eventually die—a loner.

There were none to recognize him at home, and the sales of his first privately printed collection, "In the Manner of Men", were so insignificant that he bundled most of the edition together and flung it off the Auckland wharf to express his despair.

Understandably the influence most usually detected in his work is the pessimistic and Stoical note of A. E. Housman; though New Zealanders have been quick to find a note of Mason's and their own isolation shot through however much of the plumage was borrowed.

Garrisons pent up in a little fort
with foes who do but wait on every side
knowing the time soon comes when they shall ride
triumphant over those trapped and make sport
of them …

a poem which ends (for all that its title is "Sonnet of Brotherhood")

And if these things be so oh men then what
of these beleagured victims this our race
betrayed alike by fate's gigantic plot
here in this far-pitched perilous hostile place
this solitary hard-assaulted spot
fixed at the friendless outer edge of space.

If this should be thought overly-severe on his own neighbourhood, Mason's vision of the Mother country was no lighter; which may have had something to do with the fact that, though ignored at home, he did achieve some success in the wider world. Perhaps his poem, "Latter-Day Geography Lesson" frightened British editor, Harold Munro, into including it, as an unlikely prophesy, in his anthology, *Twentieth Century Verse*.

In the 1920s, when the sun was still trying feverishly, and without avail, to set on the spreading red areas of the globe, Mason poetically might be frightening, but, thankfully, easily enough passed off as a Cassandra.

She held, quoth the Eskimo master
ten million when her prime was full
from here once Britannia cast her
gaze over an Empire vaster
even than ours: look there Woking
stood, I make out, and the Abbey
lies here under our feet *you great babby*
Swift-and-short do—please—kindly—stop—poking
your thumbs through the eyes of that skull.

Today, the subject of Mason's poem seems much more plausible—the passage of 50 years has witnessed the dismembering of the former Empire; science has made mass destruction a possibility more to be feared than natural disaster, though history has not yet placed those powers in Eskimo hands.

For New Zealand, Mason pioneered the field in wedding a modern out-look to the purposes of poetry, and in showing that the Muse was a big and lively enough lass to compass within her arms the attitudes of the dissident and the outsider. But it could be argued that Mason's particular vision was one too bitter, and too pessimistic to carry him through the early stages of his own outsiderness.

By the time others were ready to join him in the field in the 1930s, Mason was well toward becoming a spent force. When his *Collected Poems* made their first appearance in 1962, there were many younger New Zealanders who imagined the author to have been dead for some time.

He did not die in fact until last year, and though New Zealand's cultural officialdom came to the party in his last years, awarding him a Burns scholarship at Otago University, it appears that the earlier fires had burnt out."

Louis Johnson in *Poetry Australia* 1972.

I came upon another of Mason's poems in an anthology: 'Judas Iscariot'.

Judas Iscariot
sat in the upper
room with the others
at the last supper
And sitting there smiled
up at his master
whom he knew the morrow
would roll in disaster
At Christ's look he guffawed—
for then as thereafter
Judas was greatly
given to laughter
Indeed they always said
that he was the veriest
prince of good fellows
and the whitest and merriest
All the days of his life
he lived gay as a cricket
and would sing like the thrush
that sings in the thicket.

So was Mason a loner by choice—or there simply weren't any other writers and poets round for him to meet and talk things over with and have a bit of a grumble over their country's remoteness from the world's poetry scene?

* * * * *

C. K. Stead in *Kin of Place* devotes a chapter to Mason and, unexpectedly, draws attention to a mystic quality in his writing. "Such a 'natural momentum' as Mason achieves very early can only be *made*, one feels, by a seasoned campaigner. Thus my immediate supposition that the urgency comes from a pressure not of Mason's own making may be reasonably supported. And one may add that a poet who learned young to make such a style at will – if such were conceivable – might be expected to maintain it, and not to cease writing lyrics as Mason did twenty years ago. In this sense Mason seems to me a poet without a craft, a poetic medium rather than a maker of poems, a man who has been the victim of poetic occasions and a poet who is a victim of the failure of those occasions."

He provides this illustration, and if there is substance to his belief, it might also explain why Mason eventually gave up poetry: "In a very early poem, 'Old Memories of Earth', the initial intention seems to have been to make a statement asserting that earth is our only home, that there are no gods and no afterlife. But Mason's instinct is to embody dramatically what he sets out to deny. Thus the gods and the afterlife take on a reality equal with the earth-bound denial. A meaningful ambiguity is generated. The second stanza, for example, speaks of those who claim memories of some other world.

Perhaps they have done, will again do what

they say they have, drunk as gods on godly drink,
but I have not communed with gods I think
and even though I live past death shall not.

The gods are so strongly evoked that the 'I think' comes naturally to temper the denial; and the possibility of living 'past death', followed by the strong 'shall not', completes the ambiguity. This is a process which occurs in a number of poems. 'In Perpetuum Vale', for example, *as statement* denies consciousness after death. Yet Mason's poetic instinct is to dramatize the voice – and the voice is that of the dead man. The poem is thus ambiguous, and richer than its intention."

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May 8: Thomas Pynchon
Sloan Wilson
May 9: Sir James Barrie
May 10: Ivan Cankar
Karl Barth
Olaf Stapledon
May 11: Camilo José Cela
Sheila Burnford

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"When I was five my father read *The Incredible Journey* to me. It's a wonderful story about a Siamese cat, a bull terrier and a golden retriever, set in the wilderness in Canada. They travel some two thousand miles through rugged terrain to find their owners. There's a heartbreaking episode where Tao, the cat, is caught up in a horrendous flood. The chapter finishes with the golden retriever lifting its snout to the moon and howling in despair because Tao has gone. I wept my eyes out, and my father said, 'Well, if you want to know what happens, then you'd better read it.' Four days of begging him to read the story to me didn't get anywhere, so I started reading."

Fabian Dattner quoted in Susan Mitchell's *Tall Poppies Too*.

My Aunt Betty was very fond of this book, though very critical of the Walt Disney movie made of it, but I realise now that I was under the impression it was a true story. Animals *have* made amazing treks, hundreds and even thousands of miles to get home, but Sheila Burnford's story is fiction. Her two dogs and one cat set out across the Canadian wilderness to return home and a key part of the attraction of the book is the landscape the animals cross. Burnford writes, "This journey took place in a part of Canada which lies in the northwestern part of the great sprawling province of Ontario. It is a vast area of deeply wooded wilderness – of endless chains of lonely lakes and rushing rivers. Thousands of miles of country roads, rough timber lanes, overgrown tracks leading to abandoned mines, and unmapped trails snake across its length and breadth. It is a country of far-flung, lonely farms and a few widely scattered small towns and villages, of lonely trappers' shacks and logging camps. Most of its industry comes from the great pulp and paper companies who work their timber concessions deep in the very heart of the forests; and from the mines, for it is rich in minerals. Prospectors work through it; there are trappers and Indians; and sometimes hunters who fly into the virgin lakes in small amphibious aircraft; there are pioneers with visions beyond their own life span; and there are those who have left the bustle of civilization forever, to sink their identity in an unquestioning acceptance of the wilderness. But all these human beings together are as a handful of sand upon the ocean shores, and for the most part there is silence and solitude and an uninterrupted way of life for the wild animals that abound there: moose and deer; brown and black bears; lynx and fox; beaver; muskrat

and otter; fishers, mink and marten. The wild duck rests there and the Canada goose, for this is the fringe of the central migratory flyway. The clear tree-fringed lakes and rivers are filled with speckled trout and steelheads, pike and pickerel and whitefish.

"Almost half the year the country is blanketed with snow; and for weeks at a time the temperature may stay many degrees below zero; there is no slow growth of spring, but a sudden short burst of summer when everything grows with wild abandon; and as suddenly it is the autumn again. To many who live there, autumn is the burnished crown of the year, with the crisp sunny days and exhilarating air of the Northland; with clear blue skies, and drifting leaves, and, as far as the eye can see, the endless panorama of glorious, rich, flaming colour in the turning trees."

Burnford, a Scot who went to live in Canada, provides a gripping story but I felt she let the reader down towards the end. She intimates that the animals have come to the most dangerous part of their journey but instead of following them she detours round the claim and focuses instead on the humans involved. We never find just why that last leg of the journey is so fearsome. Had she simply run out of invention? Got tired of the story? Gone over her set word limit? I don't know.

But the thing which struck me about the story is that the animal tales which work best are those which combine animals with landscape and atmosphere. *Tarka the Otter* is fiction. *Ring of Bright Water* has real otters. But both books are effective because they are more than an animal story. Gavin Maxwell wrote other non-fiction books such as *The Rocks Remain* but I never found the flashes of magic that *Ring of Bright Water* contains. True, the book also makes the reader uneasy: for all the otters flown safely out of the Iraqi marshes how many other otters died during capture or transportation? But his other books simply don't spark. They meander, they are dull, they are poorly constructed. It is as though he believes a mention of otters will always carry his books through and that simply isn't true.

As I pondered on this I thought it *does* hold for the best animal stories. *Black Beauty* grips when the grim life of cab horses in the cold and fog of London is catalogued. *Greyfriars Bobby* is as much a story of 19th century Edinburgh as of a little dog. *Man-Shy* is both a cow and a landscape. James Herriot set his wonderful pen-portraits of animals into the Yorkshire landscape of farm, village, and moor. Fiction or non-fiction isn't the issue. The best animal stories provide vivid portraits of the animals. They also succeed in surrounding those animals with beautifully-drawn presentations of the world, the atmosphere, the landscape, in which their lives are embedded.

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May 12: Leslie Charteris
James Bacon
Tony Hancock
May 13: Jane Taylor

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I had never heard of Jane Taylor until I came upon an article about her in *Tasmanian Ancestry* and thought 'What a remarkable woman!' And she had an unexpected connection to Australia. Dick Hutchinson writes: "Two of Jane's sons emigrated to Australia, Deighton in 1860 and his younger brother Alfred in 1865. The former married a Miss Rachel Henning in March 1866 but there were no children of the marriage and nothing is known of Alfred's subsequent life and no direct descendants of Jane have been traced in England or Australia. None of the descendants of her brothers and sisters who have to date been traced, had any knowledge of that remarkable lady.

During her lifetime Jane was so well known in the nautical world that when naming her, it was never considered necessary to add any description of what she did. Her professional reputation was high. In 1854, Professor Airy reported to Rear Admiral F. W. Beechey, the first Superintendent of the Marine Division of the Board of Trade, that Mrs Taylor had offered her support when he was defending the credibility of his system of compass adjustment, following the loss of the emigrant ship *Tayleur*, Beechey replied:

Mrs Janet Taylor's letter must be most gratifying. I rejoice. She is a very sensible person. …

On 5 February 1870, the following tribute appeared in the *Athenaeum*—a popular journal of Literature, Science, the Fine Arts, Music and Drama:

Mrs Janet Taylor

The past week's obituary records the departure of a remarkable person. Mrs Janet Taylor was a mathematician of the first class and as such to be commemorated by the side of Mrs Somerville. Mrs Taylor was less universally cultivated and less admirable in exposition than the latter-named lady and was little known by the outside world. We have been assured however, on fair authority that her logarithmic tables are correct and complete in no ordinary degree and it was her singular occupation to prepare young men for the sea by her tuition in the higher branches of mathematics.

There does not occur to us a more quiet and a more singular union of rare powers of will and knowledge especially in a woman. Mrs Taylor lived at the extreme east end of London among her pupils and clients, we believe that she was as gentle and simple in herself as she was versed in the abstruse sciences which she professed. Perhaps some surviving relative or friend may be able to throw light on the life and labours of one who was as extraordinary from her acquirements of knowledge as from her social reticence."

At least they didn't attribute her intelligence to her 'masculine mind'! But what exactly made Mrs Taylor remarkable? Her father ran a little private school for boys. "It was extraordinary that the fourth daughter, Jane Ann born in 1804, not only received tuition in mathematics but also was allowed to share in the theoretical navigation tuition, which her father gave to fee-paying pupils." After her father's death in 1821 "Jane elected to persevere with the theoretical navigation studies which she had initiated with her father and acquired a knowledge of mathematics which enabled her to comprehend fully the principles upon which all calculations, including that of a ship's longitude by the 'lunar distance' method, were based." Eventually she "decided to enter the highly competitive and exclusively male preserve of nautical education and is believed to be the only English lady to have done this, either before or since."

Jane was lucky in her marriage to George Taylor Jane. (He dropped Jane from his name so his wife would not be Jane Jane.) He was a widower with three children and supported her when she opened an academy for merchant navy officers. "In October 1833, Jane published her first textbook entitled *Luni-Solar and Horary Tables*. This contained her initial attempt at tables 'to reduce the lunar distance' calculated under her supervision from a formula which she herself had derived. The book sold well and the general press was full of praise."

"As the next step in her personal crusade, Jane, in 1834, patented an ingenious invention which she called a Mariner's Calculator. This could be described as 100 years ahead of its time. She had a prototype made which was sent to the Admiralty for testing. Her invention would combine an instrument of double reflection to be used for measuring the altitudes of or distances between heavenly bodies with a mechanical means of solving spherical triangles. This removed the necessity of calculations. I have obtained a copy of the patent and it appears to be a very exacting and complicated instrument."

For the next thirty years she ran her academy, updated her first book (which ran to seven editions), brought out twelve editions of her *Epitome of Navigation*, as well as other books on her subject. She also translated useful French material into English. In 1860 she received a Civil List pension and she died in 1870. "During her lifetime Jane was so well known in the nautical world that when naming her, it was never considered necessary to add any description of what she did."

Dick Hutchinson was quite right. She was a remarkable woman.

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And why did her Australian connection excite me? I felt certain I had come upon Rachel Henning in another context, as either a diarist or letter-writer, so I went looking to see if memory served me right. Rachel Henning, born in Bristol in 1826 to an Anglican clergyman, emigrated to Australia in 1854. She didn't like her first experience of Australia and went back to England but re-emigrated in 1861 and in 1866 she married Deighton Taylor who had a timber business. Together they bought a farm near Stroud in the Hunter Valley. Michael Dugan and Anne Gunter in *Women Make Australian History* say simply: "Rachel Henning is remembered for the letters she wrote to her family and friends. These letters, observant, witty and shrewd, are an important source of knowledge of life in rural Australia during the middle years of the 19th century. In 1959, 45 years after her death, Rachel's letters were published in a book called *The Letters of Rachel Henning*."

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There was also another writer called Jane Taylor but she found her little bit of fame (and little is the operative word) in a very different sphere. She wrote the nursery rhyme 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star'. I didn't realise that it has a number of verses but after the one which children still sing it goes on:

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle, all the night.

Then the traveller in the dark,
Thanks you for your tiny spark,
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.

In the dark blue sky you keep,
And often through my curtains peep,
For you never shut your eye,
Till the sun is in the sky.

As your bright and tiny spark,
Lights the traveller in the dark,—
Though I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

This Jane, too, was a Londoner. She (1783 – 1824) and her sister Ann brought out *Rhymes for the Nursery* in 1806 and found they had an enduring success on their hands. And because of them we still think of stars as 'twinkling' …

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May 14: Louis Verneuil
Sverre Arnes
May 15: Xavier Herbert
Edwin Muir
May 16: H. E. Bates
May 17: Dorothy Richardson
May 18: Bertrand Russell
May 19: Moisés da Costa Amaral
May 20: Honoré de Balzac
Margery Allingham
J. L. Carr

* * * * *

Byron Rogers wrote a book he called *The Last Englishman*. Roland Chambers also wrote a book and titled it *The Last Englishman*. The first one is subtitled *The Life of J. L. Carr*. The second one is subtitled *The Double Life of Arthur Ransome*. In theory a double life could be more exciting to read about than a single life—though undoubtedly more difficult to live. But the puzzle is why both books should be titled The *Last* Englishman. After all, there are some 30 million Englishmen around and a similar number of Englishwomen.

But Rogers and Chambers were obviously drawn to that quality in the writing of both men which they saw as quintessentially English. Many Englishmen are still writing books but they are, even when they deal with the past, writing from a multicultural and international viewpoint. They are surrounded by people from the Caribbean, Africa, the Indian sub-continent, the Commonwealth. They cannot recapture that mindset which put England at the centre and everything English as being something natural and shared in its naturalness.

Byron Rogers says of his decision to use that title: "I approved of the values of a man who loved churches and history and cricket, who could quote poetry and the St James Bible by the yard, and *believed* in Magna Carta for God's sake, invoking this as a defence in a court case in his last book. If Carr had any illusions, these had to do with the commonsense and innate decency of ordinary Englishmen; his heroes were forgotten men, like those in the early seventeenth century who were ridden down when they spoke out against the enclosing of common land by the rich.

"He hated London, big business, public men, all bureaucrats, 'experts' and TV producers, many of whom receive their come-uppance in his novels. In these, if he spoke for anyone, it was for what Chesterton called the Secret People, the people of provincial England, 'a world,' wrote D.J. Taylor in a review of Carr's last book, 'kept alive not only by human decency, but by frustration'. And, in his case, by the past. He understood the past; he knew what footsteps had led up to him, and, in his odd way, was the most moral writer of his time."

His novels included *A Month in the Country* and *The Harpole Report*.

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I went looking for anything of Arthur Ransome's, half expecting to find *Swallows and Amazons* and instead found his story in that series called *Great Northern?* The Great Northern Diver is a bird nesting in the Scottish Hebrides and I quite enjoyed the story. Christina Hardyment in *Arthur Ransome and Capt. Flint's Trunk* says of *Great Northern?* "In a new ship, the Norwegian pilot boat *Sea Bear*, the Swallows, Amazons, Ds and Captain Flint sail around the Hebrides. Dick discovers a rare nesting pair of Great Northern Divers in the unfriendly territory of the Gaels. He makes the mistake of telling a ruthless egg-collector about them. They all spend the rest of the book trying to stop the egg-collector shooting them. On the last page the young

Gael who has observed them with distant interest raises his hand in farewell – and so must we. It was the last book about them that Ransome completed."

Children now would quite likely find it too slow but I had a different problem with it. *It has too many children*. Nancy and Dick and John and Roger and Susan and Peggy and Dorothea and Titty … I never really got them all sorted out, partly because some are distinguished by their interests, rather than their personalities, others are just there as part of the background. I pondered on this. After all the Secret Seven books are full of children but I've never heard anyone complain that there are too many of them. I think Ransome needed to put them in because they had been in previous books but this time he simply found he didn't have enough for them to do. They might as well be part of the furniture.

There is The Arthur Ransome Society which puts out a newsletter *Mixed Moss* and can be contacted via The Secretary, The Arthur Ransome Society, The Abbot Hall Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 5AL England. Do they get queries from all over the world or does Ransome have a niche following among elderly people who remember his books nostalgically from their childhoods?

Hardyment in her book tries to link children, boats, places and events to real events and people in Ransome's life. I have mixed feelings about this exercise. Sometimes it can make the books seem more vivid and interesting. At other times it seems to undermine them as a genuinely creative act. But the interesting thing here is that she isn't elderly so her book is a reminder that Ransome continues to have fans and readers for his children's books fifty years after his death.

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But what about that double life, I can hear you asking. Ransome had a very normal English life until he got married and had a daughter. Then, probably to escape an increasingly incompatible marriage, he went off to Russia and managed to get himself some journalistic work—just as it was boiling up to the Russian Revolution in 1917. He fell in love with Trotsky's secretary Evgenia Shelepina which helped him gain the acquaintanceship if not the friendship of a number of leading figures including Lenin. This set alarm bells ringing in London where the government supported the White Russians. Had Ransome become a Bolshevik and, if so, was he now a security risk, even a traitor? It remains unclear to what extent Ransome who always described himself as non-political went beyond sympathy and interest. But his connections made him briefly notorious. With the Reds finally firmly in power the British government gave them reluctant recognition as the 'legitimate' government and interest in Ransome faded. He eventually came back to Britain with Evgenia and after many years of waiting his first wife agreed to a divorce.

But while he was still in Russia he had bought himself a boat. Chambers writes, "*Racundra's First Cruise*, half of which was written while at sea, is the obvious precursor to *Swallows and Amazons*: episodic, anecdotal, nautical, and thanks to the prose discipline Ransome had earned through six years of journalism, shorn of all unnecessary verbal baggage. Technically, it owes a great deal to an established genre, epitomized by maritime classics such as E. F. Knight's *The Falcon on the Baltic*, just as all Ransome's experiments in writing had been grounded in established genres – the poetic essay for *Souls of the Streets*, the gothic novel for his *Elixir of Life*, or, in the case of *Old Peter's Russian Tales*, the sweetened folklore of the Victorian nursery. *Racundra* is primarily a story of adventure and discovery, appealing by virtue of the unspoken assumption that anybody with sufficient wit, daring and material resources could undertake similar adventures for themselves. Ostensibly, it is a straightforward account of a month's cruising on the Baltic, balancing the practical details of seamanship with a romantic account of exotic islands and natives, shot through with references to the favourite books of

Ransome's childhood: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*."

Back in England he had the idea of turning this experience into fiction. He combined his love of boats with the energetic family of a childhood friend, children he later referred to as those "Armenian brats", and the story almost began to write itself. "Within two weeks, Ransome had fifty pages. Hammering away at his desk, occasionally getting up to chortle and rub his hands, the entire adventure came to him with extraordinary ease. His children would be English children playing English games. There would, of course, be pirates, a great deal of *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*, maps, signals, navigation, daring plots and equally daring counter-plots. Halfway through the book he would introduce a rival crew – the 'Amazons', who flew the Jolly Roger – and not to miss out on the fun, he wrote himself in as 'Uncle Jim' or 'Captain Flint', a 'retired pirate' of exactly his own age, balding, filthy tempered and struggling to finish a book. These things conjured themselves so rapidly that Ransome could hardly keep up with himself. Captain Flint would be the Amazonian Nancy and Peggy Blackett. He would fall out with Captain John. Things would go awry in all kinds of different ways, and then would be made straight again. Above all, it would be an unmistakably British novel. Distant lands would be gestured at, but Ransome, both as author and veteran of foreign affairs, had come home."

Yet Ransome was a dismal failure as a father to his daughter Tabitha. Perhaps that, too, might be seen as quintessentially English. But the last of a breed … ?

* * * * *

'English children playing English games' … Possibly, like me, you just conjured up images of hopscotch, French cricket, hide-and-seek … but while I was reading Graham Greene's memoir of his childhood *A Sort of Life* I realised I had never heard of some of the games he mentions. He says: "The games we played were: *French and English*. This was a garden game of conflict, but I can remember none of the rules which must have dated back to the Napoleonic wars. It was played by Charlotte Brontë in her childhood.

Hunt the Thimble. A special treat in the drawing-room when there were aunts and uncles about. At Christmas there was always an enormous number of Greene aunts and uncles, since my mother and father were first cousins of the same name, and a great many of them were unmarried and available.

Tom Tiddler's Ground. Played in the garden on the croquet lawn. A game of trespass. 'Here I come on Tom Tiddler's ground, picking up gold and silver…'

The Ocean is Agitated. This was played on Christmas Day when the cousins came to tea. It was a kind of musical chairs. One person promenaded round the circle calling out the name of a fish which had then to rise and follow. 'The ocean is agitated by a shrimp … by a shark … by a sardine' and finally 'The ocean is agitated by all the fish'. Then came 'The ocean is calm' and there was a scramble for chairs. I didn't care for this game. Even at an early age I found the chant ridiculous.

Hide-and-Seek in the Dark. This was a game containing the agreeable ingredient of fear, and we played it on the ground floor and first floor of the School House with all the lights out and in the big school hall during the holidays.

Hunt the Slipper. We played this rarely, but always at Christmas.

Musical Chairs. This was a ritual part of the Christmas Day tea-party, when the rich Greenes joined us from the Hall. On such occasions we would play in the old school hall, and I don't think anyone enjoyed it except perhaps the aunts and uncles.

General Post. Played on the same occasion, and with as little pleasure. Party games never seemed like real games (which were games without adults). They were obligations like going to church.

There were Charades, too, and Dumbo Crambo, a kind of charade without dialogue, and a game called Clumps, which had been played in my father's childhood.

I have the impression that such games are becoming as obsolete as the street games described by Norman Douglas. Certainly I played none of them with my own children, for games like this demand a large family."

* * * * *

At first glance it is hard to see why a book like Carr's *A Month in the Country* was popular with both readers and critics. It is a very *quiet* little novel. But perhaps this blurb for Richard Askwith's *The Lost Village* provides a clue: "the English village is plainly dying. The unaltered rhythms of village life, as experienced with little variation by generations past, have all but vanished. But not without a trace … they exist in living memory, in the voices of men and women for whom the old ways were life-shaping realities."

It is 1920 and a young man, Tom Birkin, has survived the War and got himself a job uncovering an old mural in a country church in Yorkshire. He says, "Then I set off half-heartedly, as best I could sheltering my spare clothes (which were in the straw fish-bass) under my coat. The lane was where the map had said it ought to be. And there was the single building; it turned out to be a dilapidated farmhouse, its bit of front garden sulking behind a rusting cast-iron fence. A dog, an Airedale, dragged on its chain, howled half-heartedly and ran for shelter again. After that, there was a couple of hen-huts collapsing amongst nettles in the decaying orchard. The rain made a channel from my trilby down my neck and one handle of the fish-bass gave way. Then I turned the corner of a high hedge and was in an open pasture. And there was the church."

He has no money and sleeps in the belfry while he sets to work to uncover the medieval mural. But not everyone sees him as a worthwhile expense and he wonders if he should be required "to justify the ethic of our labour? Our jobs are our private fantasies, our disguises, the cloak we can creep inside to hide." Perhaps. But local people can't necessarily see the value in revealing what may be a not very good old mural simply because of its antiquity. Whereas, all the time he works on it, he is trying to share something of the feelings and thoughts of the original artist. "What I'm really getting at is that it's not all that easy to find your way back to the Middle Ages. They weren't us in fancy dress, mouths full of thees and thous, quoths, prithees and zounds. They had no more than a few entertaining distractions to take their minds off death and birth, sleep and work and their prayers to the almighty father and his stricken son when things got too awful. So, in my job, it helps if you can smell candles, guttering in draughts, petitioning release for souls in purgatory, if you can see their smoke trailing amongst images, threading nave arcades, settling on corbels and bosses, blackening stone too high for the cleaning women to get at."

The mural includes a medieval depiction of hell, something which he feels he has experienced on the Western Front, but he manages to make a new hell for himself—by falling in love with the vicar's wife Alice Keach. Understandably he tries to extend the work even though everyone else can see that it is finished. And he accepts the inevitable. It is time to go. His month is up. "We can ask and ask but we can't have again what once seemed ours for ever – the way things looked, that church alone in the fields, a bed on a belfry floor, a remembered voice, a loved face. They've gone and you can only wait for the pain to pass."

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May 21: Elizabeth Fry

Harold Robbins
May 22: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
May 23: Pär Lagerkvist
Elias Ashmole

* * * * *

Lucien Maury said of Lagerkvist "In the world of Swedish and Scandinavian letters, Lagerkvist occupies, as poet and thinker, a position of eminence which has long been recognized by his compatriots and by the educated public in the countries which adjoin his own. To paint the portrait of this remarkable man, whose work takes rank with the most significant productions of contemporary Scandinavia, is as tempting as it would be difficult."

Maury translated Lagerkvist's novel *Barabbas* but although worth reading as an imaginative re-creation I didn't think it was sufficient for the Nobel Prize for Literature Lagerkvist won in 1951. So what else did he write?

Sweden's crime writers have gained the limelight and it is tempting to believe that it is the best Swedish writing available. While I was pondering on little known names, at least little known here, such as Sigrid Undset, I came upon *A History of Swedish Literature* edited by Lars G. Warme and realised just how little I knew about Swedish writing so this week I have been browsing …

Warme says he is "considered one of the pioneers of Swedish modernism". Lagerkvist had gone to Paris in 1913 and become interested in the exciting new trends in art and tried to incorporate some of these ideas such as Cubism into his writing. But it was World War One which made most impact on him, "What a wave of brutality has broken over us, devastating, transforming!", and his novels, poems, and plays became increasingly bleak. For instance the history says of his 1915 novel *Iron and Men*, "The effect is a commentary on the mechanisms of war in general. The bloody, inhuman nature of war is a product of technological advancement and the invention of new and terrifying war machines. Vulnerable human flesh is effectively contrasted with hard and destructive iron." But a slightly more positive note crept into his post-war plays. He tried to bring his ideas to bear not only on his subject matter but to every aspect of theatre, saying: "Stage scenery should not merely create a mood or a realistic illusion; it should spring from the imagination of the artist as a meaningful component of the work of art."

His 1920 play *The Eternal Smile* is described, "The dead sit around in an infinite sea of darkness, alone or in small groups, and spend eternity going over their experiences in life. One among them rises and suggests that they band together to seek out God and demand of him an explanation of life's confusion and anguish. When the legions of the dead find God, he turns out to be an old man sawing wood. He humbly explains that he has not meant anything in particular with life. He simply wanted people not to have to be satisfied with nothing. A note of consolation is struck in connection with the children that God claims to have created when he was feeling happy. The innocence of the child at play brings out the eternal smile and an acceptance of the manifold richness of life."

But this mood didn't last. "Earlier than most writers of his generation, he was disturbed by the events in Hitler's Germany that led to the Second World War. The First World War had inspired in the young author feelings of anguish, futility, and hopelessness. The mature Lagerkvist took up the cause of humanistic ideals and their defense in the face of Nazi barbarism. His campaign against Nazi ideology pervades his literary production throughout the 1930s and part of the 1940s." He then turned to exploring questions of good and evil, often within a Biblical context. *Barabbas*, his 1950 novel, belongs in this phase.

It "tells the story of the criminal who was released in Christ's stead. Barabbas is a rough and brutal denizen of the darkness who is momentarily dazzled by the light that surrounds Christ when he first sees him. Barabbas witnesses the crucifixion and becomes obsessed with the figure of Christ. Doctrines such as "Love thy neighbor" are foreign to Barabbas, however, and he is perplexed by the calm, spiritual happiness of some early followers of Christ. Beset by doubts, he cannot overcome his fear of death. At the end of the novel he finds himself in Rome and becomes involved in spreading a fire that he has heard was set by the Christians. He is imprisoned and condemned to be crucified. In the figure of Barabbas, the man who felt himself both drawn to Christ and repelled by him who both wants to believe and demands rational "proof," Lagerkvist offers a spiritual self-portrait; at the same time, Barabbas could be seen to represent the existential dilemma of modern man."

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May 24: Mary Grant Bruce
May 25: Jamaica Kincaid
Ralph Waldo Emerson
May 26: Edmond Goncourt
Lady Mary Wortley Montague

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I had heard of the Prix Goncourt as a major French literary award but had never asked just how it got its name. While I was hunting in my box of scraps and scribbles I came upon several pages from an illustrated encyclopaedia someone had given me. It didn't say what the book was it had been removed from (or perhaps the book had fallen apart) and I couldn't see, just browsing through it, why those pages had been significant. No name jumped up at me. But it did have this to say: '**Goncourt**, **de**, family name of brothers Edmond (1822-96) and Jules (1830-70), French novelists and social historians. They wrote in collaboration until Jules died of syphilis. Self-absorbed and wealthy, they saw themselves as having a literary and artistic mission. Their joint works include *Art of the Eighteenth Century* (1859-75) and the naturalistic novels *Soeur Philomne* (1861) and *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864), but they are famous for the often malicious *The Journal of the Goncourts* (1836-40). Edmond (1822-96) wrote the novels *La Fille Elisa* (1877) and *Les Frères Zemganno* (1879). The Prix Goncourt, France's top literary award, was provided for in his will.'

In fact read anything about late nineteenth century French letters (not that thing that Jules obviously didn't wear) and you will come upon a mention of the Goncourts.

The Oxford Companion to Literature in French edited by Peter France says of the Goncourts, "Novelists, historians, men of letters, and authors of the famous *Journal*, which provides a fascinating, frank, personal (and often biased) view of their age and an invaluable source of anecdotes and portraits of contemporary figures for the period 1851 – 1896." But the *Companion* then goes on to something the encyclopaedia didn't mention. "Supreme aesthetes, highly neurotic, utterly misogynist, with refined tastes and a mania for collecting *objets d'art*, the Goncourt brothers devoted their whole lives to art and literature. They developed together a distinctive, impressionistic style, called *écriture artiste*, achieving a remarkable symbiosis in their collaboration, writing as one until the death of Jules."

In their writings they returned again and again to the theme of the shrew, the selfish woman, the idea that artistic men were destroyed by greedy materialistic women. As neither of them married they weren't writing of their own experience. So was their misogyny sparked by sympathy for male friends and relatives? Was it their lifelong determination to revenge their

father in some way? Or was late nineteenth-century French life simply so steeped in anti-women attitudes that they were writing their age into their books?

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May 27: Rachel Carson
Dashiell Hammett
Sidney Keyes
May 28: Patrick White
Thomas Moore
May Swenson
Ian Fleming

* * * * *

Quentin Crisp wrote in *Resident Alien*, "Miss West ascended the throne in a decade when moralists grew on palm trees in Hollywood. She was compelled to use considerable skill to imply what she was forbidden to say. Proof of her greatness lies in the fact that the line, 'Come up and see me sometime,' has passed for ever into the folklore of filth because of her delivery of the phrase — which, in itself, contains not one word that a nun would be reluctant to utter."

Maxine Kumin in an article on May Swenson for *The Writer's Chronicle* says, "Lesbian poetry is now so much a part of our culture that we take it for granted. But think of the lengths Swenson went to to stay in the closet all those years. And even after its social acceptance, Swenson held herself apart from being identified with women who love women. Still, encrypted for safety's sake, poems like "Poet to Tiger" come down to us now with a delicious inventiveness, full of a resilience and charm they might not otherwise have had."

Swenson was born into a Swedish family in Utah who had become Mormons. She graduated from the Utah State Agricultural College in 1934 and set out for New York, escaping from what she decried as the rigid patriarchal culture of the Mormon Church. In New York she found any kind of writing job she could and began to write poetry. Kumin says of her work "Quirky, witty, eccentric, physical, and metaphysical, Swenson's poems seize the obvious and shake out the hidden surprises" and she goes on to say "Whether it's dragonflies, birds or bees, a dandelion, or a lizard, her sure voice brings rhyme, slant rhyme, assonance, and consonance to meld with an amazing kinetic energy. For example, take this highly accurate, deliberately suggestive description in "The Couple:" "A bee / rolls in the yellow / rose. Does she / invite his hairy / rub?// He scrubs / himself / in her creamy / folds, a bullet, soft, imposes / her spiral and spinning, burrows / into her dewy / shadows."

* * * * *

I looked for more of Swenson's poetry but she was particularly fond of visual poetry, poems which took interesting shapes on the page, something which is rather difficult to reproduce exactly. So I have chosen out a more conventional but interestingly topical poem, 'Landing on the Moon':

When in the mask of night there shone that cut,
we were riddled. A probe reached down
and stroked some reserve in us,
as if the glint from a wizard's eye, of silver,
slanted out of the mask of the unknown—
pit of riddles, the scratch-marked sky.

When, albino bowl on cloth of jet,
it spitted its virile rays,

our eyes enlarged, our blood reared with the waves.
We craved its secret, but unreachable
it held away from us, chilly and frail.
Distance kept it magnate. Enigma made it white.

When we learned to read it with our rod,
reflected light revealed
a lead mirror, a bruised shield
seamed with scars and shadow-soiled.
A half-faced sycophant, its glitter borrowed,
rode around our throne.

On the moon there shines earth light
as moonlight shines upon the earth …
If on its obsidian we set our weightless foot,
and sniff no wind, and lick no rain
and feel no gauze between us and the Fire,
will we trot its grassless skull, sick for the homelike shade?

Naked to the earth-beam we will be,
who have arrived to map an apparition,
who walk upon the forehead of a myth.
Can flesh rub with symbol? If our ball
be iron, and not light, our earliest wish
eclipses. Dare we land upon a dream?

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May 29: André Brink
T. H. White
Pamela Hansford Johnson
May 30: Julian Symons
May 31: Phyllis Bottome
Patsy Adam-Smith
Judith Wright
Walt Whitman
June 1: John Masefield
June 2: Barbara Pym
Thomas Hardy
June 3: Allen Ginsberg
June 4: Elizabeth Jolley
Percy Lubbock
June 5: Adam Smith
Richard Scarry
June 6: Alan Seymour
June 7: Elizabeth Bowen
June 8: Ernst Enno
Marguerite Yourcenar
June 9: Bertha von Suttner

E. M. Delafield
June 10: Saul Bellow
Peter Wesley-Smith
Martin Boyd
Terence Rattigan
June 11: Ben Jonson
Anna Akhmatova
June 12: Sir Oliver Lodge
June 13: Dorothy Sayers
W. B. Yeats
June 14: Harriet Beecher Stowe
June 15: Thomas Randolph
June 16: Joyce Carol Oates
June 17: Henry Lawson
John Wesley
June 18: Michel Quoist
Robyn Archer
Rosemary Dobson
June 19: Salman Rushdie
Patricia Wrightson
Blaise Pascal
June 20: Anna Laetitia Barbauld

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"The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs. Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female, when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I became acquainted with her poetical works long after in Enfield's Speaker; and remember being much divided in my opinion at that time, between her Ode to Spring and Collin's Ode to Evening. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her "Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations," is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's Sermons."

From William Hazlitt's lecture 'On the Living Poets'.

I doubt if many women would want to be described as a 'very pretty poetess' but 'ingenious and sensible' would probably pass muster. Except that his next sentence might imply that she had taken her idea from someone else. I am not sure about Mr Barrow but he might be Isaac Barrow. More importantly, would Mrs Barbauld's poems and essays appeal to a modern audience or would they seem impossibly florid, twee, or platitudinal?

She was born in Leicestershire into a Unitarian family with a strong interest in providing quality education for Dissenting families. (I have found it suggested that some of the colleges and academies set up for students of Dissenting families, who were barred from the Establishment's universities, actually provided better education; I don't know if anyone has done exhaustive research in this area.) Mrs Barbauld, born Aikin, certainly had a father and brother who were erudite and interesting, her brother John's sons going on to careers in medicine, science, and architecture. This may explain why she, though interested in many of the important subjects of the day such as ending slavery, wasn't particularly interested in the first stirrings of the Women's

Movement or a sense of solidarity with women writers. She brought out books of poetry, books for children, pamphlets, she was an editor and magazine writer; the DNB says her "conversational powers were remarkable, and she was a graceful and graphic letter writer." She married a clergyman of French origin, Rochemont Barbauld, who became increasingly unstable and eventually had to be restrained after attacking her. I wondered whether his mind had been disturbed by the chaos of the French Revolution. She wrote a poem she called 'On the Expected General Rising of the French Nation in 1792' which has as its final verse:

Then be thy tide of glory stayed;
Then be thy conquering banners furled;
Obey the laws thyself hast made,
And rise the model of the world! Possibly they were both disappointed in the way things developed in France …

She also called a poem 'The Rights of Woman' which ends:

Then, then, abandon each ambitious thought;
Conquest or rule thy heart shall feebly move,
In Nature's school, by her soft maxims taught
That separate rights are lost in mutual love. Which was an idea she possibly came to see as unrealistic when her husband had to be taken away to an asylum …

My own feeling from a brief foray into her writing was that she could have been a very attractive comic poet, allying humour with realism, if she hadn't been brought up to believe that real poetry was high-minded poetry expressing high-minded principles. In 'Washing Day' she writes:

Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozin smiled on burning coals;
But never yet did housewife notable
Greet with a smile a rainy washing-day.

And her poem 'The Mouse's Petition to Doctor Priestley Found in the Trap where he had been confined all Night' begins:

Oh! hear a pensive captive's prayer,
For liberty that sighs;
And never let thine heart be shut
Against the prisoner's cries.

For here forlorn and sad I sit,
Within the wiry grate;
And tremble at th' approaching morn,
Which brings impending fate.

If e'er thy breast with freedom glowed,
And spurned a tyrant's chain,
Let not thy strong oppressive force
A free-born mouse detain.

I wonder if Dr Priestley relented and let the mouse go? And 'pretty poetess' is a little misleading though I am quite willing to believe that her poems for children *were* 'pretty' …

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June 21: Jean-Paul Sartre
John Skelton (d)

Henry Tomlinson
June 22: Erich Maria Remarque
June 23: Winifred Holtby
June 24: Anita Desai
June 25: George Orwell
Erskine Childers
June 26: Colin Wilson
June 27: Emma Goldman
Helen Keller
June 28: Luigi Pirandello
June 29: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Lydia Pender
June 30: Czeslaw Milosz
July 1: Dorothea MacKellar
July 2: Herman Hesse
July 3: Franz Kafka
July 4: Nathaniel Hawthorne

* * * * *

Kathleen Lines introducing *The Faber Book of Greek Legends* writes, "When the American novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, sat down in the summer of 1851 to write the Greek 'baby stories' (which as he wrote he tried out on his eight-year-old daughter and five-year-old son) he was concerned about making the 'old legends so brimming over with everything that is abhorrent to our Christianized moral sense' suitable for children. The immediate popularity of his very free retellings in *A Wonder Book* (1951) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853), owe their continued success with children to his art as novelist and storyteller, but little remains in these much embellished tales of the native tone and atmosphere of Greek mythology. Hawthorne turns Pandora and Epimetheus, Europa and her brothers, and Proserpina into children and takes the details of food and suchlike from his own time. In *A Wonder Book* he creates a house-party of children to hear the tales told aloud, and the invitation to listen, in one instance is, 'be still as so many mice … and I shall tell you a sweet, pretty story of a gorgon's head.' The books soon became children's 'classics' in their own right, and are still available in several editions."

Thomas Bulfinch followed with *The Age of Fable* in 1855, Charles Kingsley brought out *The Heroes* in 1856, more retellings followed including some by Andrew Lang, and the 20th century has seen a myriad of versions. So should I look for the originals of the stories Hawthorne retold? Or be satisfied with 'sweet, pretty' stories? I am not averse to sweetness and prettiness in stories. But I cannot help wondering how a gorgon's head would lend itself to sweetness and prettiness. Perhaps the implication that the world will be a happier place without gorgons in it? Or might children have seen gorgons as some sort of prehistoric beast?

* * * * *

The other day I picked up Beatrix Potter's Jemima Puddleduck and was surprised to find it was someone else's retelling of her story. I wondered why. No one could suggest that the words were too difficult or archaic. But the job of retelling, adapting, expurgating, shortening, simplifying is almost a sub-industry in the publishing world. And I have mixed feelings about it. Undoubtedly it helps by introducing young readers to classics and famous stories long before they are capable of reading the originals. Undoubtedly there is value in expunging the sheer nastiness, meanness and cruelty in some well-known stories. But it does lead, sometimes, to a

sense of disappointment with the original. And it can lead to the feeling: why bother with the original now that I know the gist of the story, its characters, how it ends?

But there is a curious question in there. We had a shabby old copy of *Tanglewood Tales* when I was young and 'sweet' and 'pretty' are not adjectives I would associate with it. Does this mean that Hawthorne was comparing his versions with far blacker, bleaker, more horrible versions that had been around in *his* childhood?

* * * * *

July 5: George Borrow
July 6: William Hooker
Verner von Heidenstam
July 7: Robert Heinlein
July 8: Fergus Hume
Richard Aldington
July 9: G. W. Rusden
Mervyn Peake

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I had not heard of George William Rusden until I came across Henry Reynolds' mention of him in Marion Halligan's *Storykeepers*—and he says he started out with a very negative expectation of Rusden as a historian. "I can remember my surprise even now although it was thirty years ago that I first read G.W. Rusden's three-volume *History of Australia* published in 1883. At the time I was beginning to work on the history of Aboriginal-European relations and was reading widely among the literature of the various Australian colonies in the hope that I could develop some understanding of the development of an historiographical tradition prior to the twentieth century.

"Unlike many of the authors I had read I knew about Rusden in advance. He had been execrated by the historians of the 1950s and 1960s for his reactionary views and his involvement in the conflict between the upper and lower houses of the Victorian parliament. Melbourne University's Professor R.M. Crawford declared that Rusden imposed his almost ludicrously conservative bias on everything he related. His colleague, A.G. Austin, described him as the elderly conservative who wrote the reactionary history of Australia. For Geoff Searle Rusden was a member of a Victorian 'governing class' who saw themselves as a 'colonial aristocracy' who were completely untouched by the democratic sentiment of the age.

"So I knew what to expect – or rather I thought I did. I assumed that Rusden would be an extreme racist, that such views would necessarily accompany his elitist, anti-democratic, high tory stance in colonial politics.

"Nothing could have been further from the truth. The elderly conservative turned out to be a passionate defender of the Aborigines and of the Maoris as well. He saw himself as following in the tradition of the great sixteenth-century priest Las Cassas to whom he dedicated his 1888 volume *Aureretanga: Groans of the Maoris*. Like the Spaniard before him he had 'laboured in the cause of humanity'."

So what was Rusden writing? Henry Reynolds gives a few short excerpts:

—I would fain do honour to those artless qualities which have often been my sole social amusement when, week after week, I have sojourned in the bush, with no other companion than my faithful Australian, my dog, and my horse, and I bear willing testimony to the fidelity and cheerfulness which have sometimes made me think my sable companion a pattern worthy of imitation by many of his white and contemptuous supplanters.

—The former life of the scattered tribes of Australia quickly became impossible after the English appeared in any district. The settlers, for the most part as ignorant of the manners and laws of the disinherited race as any unmoved denizen of Wapping, were ready to denounce it as an encumbering tree which ought to be cut down without delay or remorse. Not making allowances for the forced impossibility of living their former life, and the powerful obstacles to their adoption of a new one, the English public soon accepted the local maxim that the Australian black was the lowest type of man. It is but just to show some of the influences which tended to crush him.

—The melancholy fact that those who are ignorant, or willfully blind, contradict the truth, or deprecate discussion of it in the hope that it, like the blacks, may die out of the land.

—The Registrar General, Mr Henry Jordan, finds no place for the aborigines in his account of the population. In his table of 'causes of death in Queensland', in 1878, 'arranged in the order of degree of fatality', Mr Jordan omitted the rifle.

—In shape, in physiognomy, and in disposition there are as wide difference amongst the Australians as amongst the lower and uncultivated class of Europeans, though they escape observation except from those who have acquired intimate knowledge on the spot … and in intelligence, good humour, and loyalty the despised black race often puts to shame the boors among the vaunting Caucasian intruders.

"The violence of the colonists was a 'great sin' which had accompanied Australian history from the early days of settlement and was still continuing as he wrote. 'But that it has been,' he declared, 'nay, even now is a sin crying aloud to the covering heavens, and the stars the silent witness, can be denied by no one who knows the course of Australian history.' Writing of the pastoral frontier in New South Wales he observed that the rule was to 'inspire terror by slaughter' and then to treat with 'contemptuous sufferance or marked ill usage the remnant of the tribe'. By the time of the Myall Creek massacre and subsequent trial in 1838 public opinion had been debauched by half a century of 'contemptuous and condoned killing of fellow-creatures'. And one of the most important consequences of the prevailing ways of thought was that information about frontier violence was suppressed, whole communities shielded the perpetrators and approved of their bloody work. Rusden felt he had a mission to expose the lies, uncover the hidden evidence, to pronounce the truth."

"Why did Rusden write such powerful black armband history? Why did he pursue his brief through 1200 pages? And why was I so surprised that the extreme reactionary in colonial politics turned out to be so radical in race politics? The most immediate answer is that at the time that I read Rusden I assumed that sympathetic engagement with the Aborigines was symptomatic of left-wing, progressive views and that racism lived comfortably with conservatism. But to understand Rusden it was necessary to move beyond these preconceptions of the 1970s."

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Redmond Barry like Rusden has been seen as a reactionary, and forever excoriated as the judge who sent Ned Kelly to the gallows. But Barry was also sympathetic to Aboriginal people, seeing the injustices when they came up in court, including the fundamentals: were they citizens, subjects, or something else, and how could they be judged by a jury of their peers when no Aboriginal person could serve on a jury? It is a reminder that people never quite fit neat stereotypes … and such stereotypes, though they have their uses, can lead you seriously astray …

So who was G. W. Rusden? Rusden, 1819 – 1903, was born in Surrey in England to a clergyman who emigrated to N.S.W. in 1835 with his young family. George William began work as a jackeroo before entering the youthful public service and rising steadily. He wrote poetry, he

wrote histories of both Australia and New Zealand, though I found him described as "conservative" and "biased", but his lifelong love was William Shakespeare and he ended his writing life with *William Shakespeare, His Life, His Works, and His Teachings* … I was curious as to what he might mean by 'teachings' but I didn't think this was very likely to give an insight into his sympathies with Aboriginal people (though you never know). Instead I came back to that young man on horseback and I thought this almost certainly brought him in touch with Aboriginal people and a sense of Australia as land and solitude and a different way of looking at things and pondering on them. You can't spend days riding behind cattle or feeling a sense of companionship with your horse and not begin to see and interpret the world through slightly different eyes …

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July 10: Aphra Behn (bap)
Mary O'Hara
John Wyndham

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When I was at primary school in the 1950s an immensely popular trilogy was Mary O'Hara's three books, *My Friend Flicka*, *Thunderhead* and *Green Grass of Wyoming*. They were American, certainly, but we could imagine a world of horses and cattle, even if buttes and canyons seemed strange and exotic. We weren't interested in the author. And in those days few authors were celebrities anyway.

The other day I came upon *Green Grass of Wyoming* in an op-shop and bought it just out of curiosity to see what I would think of it more than fifty years later. I enjoyed it. But the thing which struck me was that at 315 pages of quite small print it wasn't what you would call a small book for ten- and eleven-year-olds. Yet no one ever said 'Oh I couldn't read a book that size!'

Slow readers, fast readers, we all learnt to read. Yet it was just a little two-teacher country school which had seventy to seventy-five children in eight grades. It had few facilities. Blackboards. Big long wooden desks with five or six children to a desk and seated on wooden forms. When I began school we still used slates. We had ink and nib pens to learn to write in copybooks. There were few extras. But everyone left there able to read and write. Reading, writing, basic arithmetic, what was then called Social Studies, girls learnt to sew, boys learnt some woodwork and basketry, sport was unorganised but everybody was incorporated and had a go at rounders or cricket or games like 'Red Red Rover' or skipping. There was nothing remarkable about it. Thousands of other little country schools were much the same.

So what went wrong? Why can't ten and eleven-year-olds now with far better facilities and more attention read *My Friend Flicka* or its more modern equivalents? Or can they—but people have a vested interest in saying they can't?

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Very large amounts of ink are expended on this question. People even talk of The Reading Wars as though children's minds and classrooms have become battlegrounds. Paul Jennings writes in *The Reading Bug* "Because it is such an emotional issue, supporters of various approaches to teaching reading often become enthusiasts, and sometimes, unfortunately, fanatics." He puts the joy of reading, the joy of being read to, high on the list. But we didn't get read to much, I don't think country children did, their parents had to be up early to milk cows, they weren't sitting up late, and we only had kerosene lamps when I was small. Perhaps we would've learned to read sooner with more care and attention. I'm not sure.

And much of the argument revolves round the question of whether children should be taught by sight or by sound. This is something I've given a lot of thought to and the simple

answer is that there is no perfect, not even one right answer. Some children love playing with sounds, some children are very visual, but I think children can learn regardless of the system. It is enthusiasm, support, encouragement, and reading things which interest them which matters more.

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And now I find myself asking who was Mary O'Hara and how did she come to write her books of a ranching family in Wyoming? Mary O'Hara Alsop (1885 – 1980) was born in Pennsylvania, a descendant of its founder, William Penn, a world remote from high mountains and wild horses. It was her second husband, a Swede, who took her to Wyoming. She went to Hollywood after the end of her first marriage and worked as a screenwriter on several silent films such as *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Braveheart* and met Helge Sture-Vasa and moved with him to a ranch in Wyoming between the evocatively named Laramie and Cheyene. But these were the years of the Depression and they struggled to survive. It was her books which brought in the money, not their sheep. She eventually divorced him and moved back east. She was a talented pianist and composer and among her piano compositions was a piece she called 'Green Grass of Wyoming'.

While I was thinking more on the matter of reading I came upon a mention of her in a book called *Good Girl Messages* by Deborah O'Keefe which has the sub-title 'How Young Women Were Misled by Their Favorite Books' which suggests that girls didn't get much from O'Hara's books because the hero is a young man Ken and when he meets a young woman Carey in the third book she hasn't done anything interesting, she hasn't achieved, she isn't a role model for girls. But I think this is to misunderstand what girls took from the books fifty years ago. O'Keefe sees horses as things only rich children can aspire to. But farm children in the years before motor cycles to round up cattle or quad bikes to zoom around on very often had a pony. It might be some old thing bought for a couple of pounds and probably with a mangy tail and rough paces. But it brought the cows in, it took children to school, it patiently let children learn to ride. The horses in Mary O'Hara's books were wonderful romantic horses oozing with quality and excitement. Girls weren't reading them because they were taking ideas about boys and girls from Ken's life on the ranch. They were reading them for the horses, the mountains, the sense of space and freedom they provided in what were often their own quite limited lives. O'Keefe also mentions Anne in *Anne of Green Gables* giving up her plans to go to university to stay home and look after Marilla and saying that other people could have taken on this role (though she doesn't specify who these people might be), that Anne didn't need to sacrifice herself or her career. I would disagree. I always felt that Anne had done the right thing by the person who had given her a happy stable home and opportunities. And by spending a year teaching in a single teacher school she not only was there for Marilla, but she could save a little towards university, and she could move on with this kind of experience and maturity behind her. I enjoy looking at the things other people read into books but I am not sure that feminist academics necessarily read into books what farm children of two and three generations ago read into those same books.

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July 11: Kenelm Digby
Alexander Afanasyev
July 12: Henry David Thoreau
July 13: Fanny Burney
July 14: Gertrude Bell
F. R. Leavis
July 15: Iris Murdoch
July 16: David Campbell

July 17: Christina Stead
Isaac Watts
July 18: William Makepeace Thackeray
July 19: Gottfried Keller
Victor Kelleher
A. J. Cronin
July 20: Louisa Anne Meredith
Gregor Mendel

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"He's a crank, but an amusing one, and can be guaranteed to have somethin' startlin', or at least startlin' to us scientists. This time he's got a theory that Mendel cheated on his results and that for all these years we've been paying lip-service to a cheat as the founder of our science. What he doesn't realise is that, whether Mendel did fiddle with his results or not, there is no doubt that he was one of the first people to give a direction to the study of heredity."

R. T. Campbell in *Unholy Dying*.

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"The school textbooks which start with Mendel and his ratios have it wrong. Without Mendel, genetics would never have got off to such a flying and seemingly straightforward start, and he deserves to be honoured for his experiments. But the founders of a field, by choosing experimental systems which seem to give clear-cut answers, often also produce an appearance of simplicity which is ultimately misleading. The famous and paradigmatic Mendelian ratios are the result of rather special cases, the phenotypic expressions of enzyme pathways rather little influenced by environmental circumstance, perhaps just because they reflect relatively trivial features of that phenotype. By contrast, the expression of most genes is modified at several levels. It is affected by which other genes are present in the genome of the particular organism, by the cellular environment, by the extracellular environment and, in the case of multicellular organisms, by the environment outside the organism."

Steven Rose in *Lifelines: Biology, Freedom, Determinism*.

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So what exactly did Mendel do? David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson in *Genethics* say, "Mendel published the results of his meticulous breeding experiments using hybrid varieties of the common garden pea, *Pisum sativum*, in 1866. But the impact of his work was not fully felt in the scientific world until the early 1900s.

"Mendel shattered the popular notion that traits were somehow transmitted along "bloodlines" as diffuse, blood-borne substances that mingled together to create an offspring, in much the same way that streams of molten metal flow together to form an alloy. Essentially, Mendel's experiments followed inheritance of a number of selected physical traits – among them, stem length and seed texture and color – over generations of plants. In the course of his experiments, Mendel discovered that these inherited traits did not blend together as they were passed from parent to offspring. Instead, they seemed to be transmitted as if borne by discrete hereditary "particles" – indivisible genetic factors, borne by both male and female reproductive cells, that somehow maintained their identity while being reshuffled into fresh combinations in descendant organisms. It was not until 1909 that the scientific community came up with an enduring term for Mendel's hypothetical units of biological inheritance – genes.

"By monitoring the movement of genes, Mendel uncovered a number of intriguing statistical patterns of inheritance. First, he found that certain categories of genes seemed to exert a stronger, more decisive – or *dominant* – influence on the outward appearance of a plant than did

others. Since each pea plant contains a tandem set of genes – one set inherited from each parent – it generally possesses two possible alternative genes, or *alleles*, that determine each Mendelian trait. If the two genes are alike, the plant is called a *homozygote*; if they are dissimilar, it is referred to as a *heterozygote*. Mendel found that a homozygous parental plant with pods bearing smooth seeds invariable gave rise to smooth-seeded offspring, regardless of whether the seed texture of its mate was smooth or wrinkled. That is to say, the gene responsible for the physical characteristic, or *phenotype*, smooth seeds (*S*) was dominant over the weaker, *recessive*, wrinkled-seed trait (*s*).

"Second Mendel noticed that each gene seemed to be distributed independently of its allelic partner. The two genes in each pair of alleles corresponding to a particular trait routinely parted company, or segregated, during the formation of reproductive cells. This meant that one-half of the sperm or egg cell generated by each parent organism contained one allele and one-half contained the other, and that each reproductive cell harbored only one member of each pair of alleles.

"Finally, Mendel noted that the separation of each pair of alleles during the formation of reproductive cells took place independently of that of every other pair. Thus, each egg or sperm cell theoretically had a fifty-fifty chance of inheriting one or the other allele in each set of genes that was transmitted in Mendelian fashion.

"The surprisingly simple statistical rules that Mendel formulated to describe the pattern by which a small selection of very visible physical traits in pea plants is transmitted marked the beginning of what can only be described as a revolutionary transformation in genetics. In time, Mendel's laws would shatter the subjective, culture-bound belief systems that had shaped all earlier conceptions of heredity and draw attention to the remarkably ordered march of genes from one generation to the next. Now scientists could begin to quantify natural patterns of inheritance and explore the previously hidden behavior of genes in living organisms by tracking their visible manifestations as particular heritable traits. Scientists could also exert much more precise control over the genetic destinies of agricultural plant and animal species. At the same time, Mendel's laws offered tantalizing clues to underlying cellular mechanisms, such as the distribution of chromosomes during cell division, that were later shown to be responsible for the statistical patterns Mendel observed."

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Peter Watson in *The German Genius* writes, "Although it may come as a surprise that, with all these figures devoting their time to evolution, it should be an Englishman, Charles Darwin, who conceived the idea of natural selection, we should remember that, among the many people who set the stage for Darwin, the Viennese botanist Franz Unger stands out. Unger argued that the simpler aquatic and marine plants preceded the most complex varieties, that there must have been an original germ of all kinds of plants, that new species must have originated from already-existing ones and that all plants are united with each other "in a genetic manner." Among Unger's students was Gregor Mendel."

My image of Mendel, in simple robe with a rope round his waist and wooden clogs on his feet, seems at odds with this suggestion of a university education.

Johann Mendel was born in 1822 in what is now the Czech Republic but was then part of Austria. He came from a farming family and entered a monastery at Brno where he took the name Gregor. He does not seem to have had a religious vocation but was rather attracted by the monastery's experimental garden. And it was the monastery which sent him to the university in Vienna. Here "he was taught experimental physics by Christian Doppler (identifier of the "Doppler effect") and by Andreas von Ettinghausen, the statistician. This proved important for Mendel's ideas about plant breeding. He also studied with Franz Unger, known for his views on evolution and lectures stressing sexual generation as the basis of the great variety in cultured plants. Unger argued that new plant forms evolved by the combination of certain elements within the cell, though he was unclear as to what exactly these were."

Back at the monastery he eventually became abbot but also began his experiments with peas. Two things, his knowledge of plants and his knowledge of statistics (along with a good dollop of patience and

luck) led to his publication of *Versuche über Pflanzenhybriden* in 1866. But other people, using different plants, were unable to replicate his work and he "died a lonely unrecognized genius."

But … "Even after all this time, the coincidence in the rediscovery of the work of the botanist-monk Gregor Mendel makes for moving reading. Between October 1899 and March 1900, three other botanists—two Germans (Carl Correns and Erich Tschermak) and the Dutchman Hugo de Vries—published papers about plant biology, each of which (in a footnote) referred to Mendel's priority in discovering the principles of what we now call genetics. Thanks to this coincidence, and their scrupulousness in acknowledging his achievement, Mendel—once forgotten—is now a household name."

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(I felt sure I had come across Peter Watson in a different context and went back through my reams of interesting little odds and ends and came across this: "Despite the Taliban's high profile demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas for "religious" reasons, most of the destruction of Afghanistan has been wrought by the search for salable antiquities and manuscripts; it has continued, if not actually worsened, since the Taliban's removal from power."

From *The Medici Conspiracy* by Peter Watson and Cecilia Todeschini. This is a fascinating if distressing look at the loss, primarily, of Italy's heritage, particularly its Etruscan heritage.

All the usual suspects are there: fakes, loot, objects stolen to order, the venality of some collectors, faked or overlooked provenance, the loss of context, carelessness as when earth-moving equipment is brought in without prior research; items are deliberately broken to allow 'development' to go ahead, or cut up for ease of smuggling; items tend to travel from poor countries to rich countries and from poor farming regions to richer urban areas, and governments, auction houses, museums and art galleries, along with rich collectors, are reluctant to put money and expertise into catching the looters and traffickers. Sometimes they are even complicit with those looters and traffickers.

This was on my mind as I had just picked up a novel *Picture of Defeat* by John Harris which looks at the way both the Germans and the Allies looted Italy during and after WW2. He begins by saying "After its liberation by the Allies in 1943 following the landings at Salerno, Naples was in a very poor state of health. Called the only eastern city in the west and the place where Europe joined Africa, the city had been looted by the Germans, the British, the Americans, the French, the Poles and anyone else who happened to pass by. Italian art treasures disappeared to all corners of the globe and some have still not been found." Would countries go cheering to war if they could foresee the end results?)

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The fascinating thing in all discussions about DNA is how it came about. I have come across biologists suggesting that the earliest living organism didn't have DNA, that it too evolved, but although that would undermine or at least move the fundamental problem I'm not sure I find the idea convincing. Even the simplest most primitive of single cell organisms still have DNA. And apart from the extraordinary complexity of even the simplest DNA the very act of simple cells splitting to form new cells is as Suzuki and Knudtson point out 'breathtaking': "More than anything else, it is the breathtaking synchrony of cellular events and chromosomal dancers during mitosis that elevates this dance above other equally elegant but more mundane biological events that routinely occur during the life of a cell: the dramatic condensation of dense chromosomal rods from wisps of chromatin during prophase; the paradelike precision of chromosome alignment at midcell during metaphase; the sudden, climactic parting of two opposite waves of chromosomes during anaphase; and the final poignant pinching off of parental cell cytoplasm – along with its flotsam of mitochondria, ribosomes and other requisite cell organelles – into genetically complete daughter cells." I always come back to that fascinating imponderable: how could life *begin* with such complexity?

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It is almost a relief to go back to the apparent simplicity of Gregor Mendel and his peas.

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July 21: A. D. Hope
Ernest Hemingway

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"In 1950 the Australian Broadcasting Commission got up a series of literary talks, entitled: 'Standard Works I'd Like to Burn'. It was perhaps a rather silly title and not a very bright idea in any case, but reappraisal of established literary reputations was then very much in the air and it gave an opening which promised some lively controversy. A number of well-known literary critics were invited to take part, including myself and my old acquaintance, A.A. Phillips. He was then senior English master at Wesley College, Melbourne, and known as one of the outstanding teachers of the subject in Victoria. I was senior lecturer at the University of Melbourne. The speakers were encouraged to be provocative and to hit hard, but to keep the tone of their attacks reasonably light and amused and, as I recollect, most of us managed to do this. I chose Matthew Arnold as my butt. Arnold is not difficult to make fun of but he was a great man for whom I have a liking and respect and I am now rather ashamed of my performance which consisted mainly of scoring points rather than serious criticism."

A. D. Hope introducing *Dunciad Minor*.

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And Arnold himself was a prolific reviewer and critic in his day. Peter Ackroyd in *The Collection* says of him, "It is odd that Matthew Arnold may be the last great English critic. The stock image of the man is something like the eminent Victorian, the Inspector of Schools, that melancholy and forbidding figure who might have sat for Lear's Dong with the Luminous Nose. And it might have seemed odd to his contemporaries. At university, he was notorious for his fastidious dress and his wit. He was always laughing. Later, of course, he was to gain notoriety through his melancholy and haunting verses. But there is nothing that seems to fit the image of the great critic, none of the personal magnetism of Johnson or the representative quality of Boileau. He was and is something of an outsider, and it is just one more paradox that it is an American publisher who is providing us with the scholarly and definitive edition of his prose."

I assume though that A. D. Hope was criticising Arnold as a poet rather than a reviewer. And although his poems like 'Dover Beach' and 'The Forsaken Merman' are remembered, even quoted with pleasure, it is true that some of his longer pieces with all their exclamation marks and sense of heavy declamation do invite criticism. We are not their natural readers. Yet, interestingly, Michael Thorpe in his *Matthew Arnold* suggests Arnold wrote poetry when he was inspired by a subject, an idea, a vision, and wrote reviews, essays, and other non-fiction almost non-stop. The idea that each poem was a labour of love does enable me to go back to his work with a more sympathetic mind.

So why does Ackroyd praise Arnold as a critic? "Arnold's criticism has such an instinctive force that it is as if he were essentially writing of himself. But it evades mere self-absorption by that central instinct he had for what was and was not valuable. These essays are undeterred by literary fashion; Arnold saw things whole, and in a clear light."

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Was A. D. Hope ever sorry about excoriating other writers, fellow poets, people wanting to get a toehold in Australia's small literary world? Peter Ryan in *A Memoir* writes, "The history of tension between Australia's two most famous writers was already decades long, going back to Hope's excoriating disparagement of White's prose as pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge. White's feelings were ruffled further by the poet's published opinion that, in the long run, Martin

Boyd's novels would come to occupy a higher place in Australia's literary canon than White's. Often thereafter the Nobel Prize winner would refer to Hope as 'the slit-eyed Professor'.

"His reputation for savagery as a critic grew during his Melbourne period, though it had begun earlier. The Jindyworobak movement, especially as represented by Rex Ingamells and Ian Mudie, felt his lash. The 'Jindies' perfectly sincere desire to 'naturalize' Australian culture was led up the dead-end lane of insisting—almost—that every literary work must display its proper quota of didgeridoos, boomerangs and witchetty grubs. Their absurdities made them fair game for Hope, whose review 'Corroboree on Parnassus' produced shocked offence."

Catherine Cole in *The Poet Who Forgot*, her long correspondence with A. D. Hope, writes, "He also claimed that he avoided contacts with other writers because it would make reviewing too difficult. And well it may, for he had written one of the most scathing reviews in Australian poetry history in which he cruelly began a review of the work of Tasmanian poet, Norma Davis, with: 'The gold medal (and bar) for exuberance this year goes not to Daisy III, the thousand gallon cow, but to Miss Davis's *Cry from Tasmanian Earth*…Her poetry is a riot of facile emotion and cliché.'

"The review would trouble him 'like a wound in (my) heart', he told *The Australian's* Ann Conlon, in 1991. It would plague him all his life, (and he certainly spoke sadly of it to me and other friends) because, as David Brooks notes in the introduction to his *A D Hope: Selected Poetry and Prose*, Davis died soon after the review was published. Hope always regretted that she might have received it on her deathbed, and this regret has sometimes been cited as marking or precipitating a turning point in Hope's attitude to reviewing, and perhaps to matters far beyond it." But then she says, "I'm not so sure of that."

There are two small points I'd like to make. Patrick White, Ian Mudie, Max Harris and the others who got one of Hope's vitriolic reviews had tough hides and long experience. They knew that Hope's reviews were just one man's response. But a young writer with a first book panned by a writer they have admired may go away believing that one person's view is every person's view and that they therefore have no future in the literary world.

And White, Mudie, and their colleagues had the means to come back at Hope; their responses were assured of coverage and space in the media. A young or beginning writer has no such means and if they do find a way to say publicly they found the review unfair it runs the risk of being seen as sour grapes, that they couldn't cop fair criticism, that they should be listening to older and wiser figures, not trying to dismiss them.

How do you say honestly that you didn't see any merit in something without also saying the author therefore has no future in poetry? After all, even the most famous of poets look back on some of their early publications with embarrassment but they went on, developed, grew, were true to their potential.

And what of A. D. Hope's place in the Australian canon? There is something of an irony in that Hope may be overlooked and forgotten for the same reasons that Arnold hasn't lasted terribly well: he looked back to a poetic tradition without seeing that the movements he excoriated weren't simply aberrations that would soon pass and allow his views on poetry, strongly centred in the Dead White European Male canon, to once again be seen as the right and only road. I think he wrote some very good poems which I can go back to with pleasure … but I can also see that they already have a somewhat old-fashioned and dated aura around them.

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July 22: Tom Robbins
July 23: Alex Buzo
July 24: Lord Dunsany

E. F. Benson
Robert Graves
July 25: Elias Canetti
Josephine Tey
July 26: Aldous Huxley
George Bernard Shaw
Bernice Rubens

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"G.B.S was not only a vegetarian, but a living advertisement for vegetarianism and, to other vegetarians, its propaganda idol. Having found from his experiments in the side-street restaurants round Bloomsbury that he could make a financial saving from putting his principles into practice, he went on to recommend vegetarianism not only as a step forward in civilization but as a means of world economy. 'My objection to meat is that it costs too much,' he wrote many years later, 'and involves the slavery of men and women to edible animals that is undesirable.' He conducted his campaign with an astonishing evenness of temper. Many of his statements on vegetarianism were vivid examples of his dialectical skill.

'To-day people are brought up to believe that they cannot live without eating meat, and associate the lack of it with poverty. Henry Salt, a champion vegetarian, said that what was needed in London were vegetarian restaurants so expensive that only the very rich could afford to dine in them habitually, and people of moderate means only once a year, as a very special treat, as in Paris, where British tourists brag of having dined at So and So's with a European reputation for high prices and exquisite cookery.

'What you have to rub in is that it is never cheap to live otherwise than as everybody else does; and that the so-called simple life is beyond the means of the poor.'

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Henry Salt was an interesting man. An Englishman born in India he was an early champion of animal rights rather than animal welfare, speaking of a "universal brotherhood". His first book was *A Plea for Vegetarianism* and he returned again and again to this subject in books like *Flesh or Fruit? An Essay on Food Reform*. His famous book on Animal Rights which is credited as the founding document in urging people to move beyond questions of kindness and care to a belief that animals have innate rights was *Animal Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progess*. He turned his mind to many pressing questions including prison reform and it seems to me a pity that his name did not resonate with me in any way. Surely we need to remember those who blazed such trails and in the case of Henry Salt was an important influence on people such as Mahatma Gandhi?

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I must admit I enjoy a roast though I can certainly live without meat. But I came one day on this amusing little piece and it reminded me of the days when housewives were at times a slave to The Roast.

"The idea for a cookbook promoting the Society for the Prevention of the Quaker Roast (S.P.Q.R.) arose from Alec Davison's 'Meetings for Learning' session at YM82. Alec bemoaned the fact that Sunday dinner was too often the cause of Friends hurrying home after meeting and advocated the formation of yet another 'Fringe Group' the S.P.Q.R."

The SPQR Cook Book by Sue and Mike Collins. They also lace their cookbook with moments of nonsense …

"Elephant Stew

1 quart diced green pepper.
1/5 flagon of garlic juice.
5 gallons of vegetable oil.
9,216,004 drops of water.
1 ten year old bull elephant.
8 dozen stalks of celery.
22 yellow onions.
20 lbs potatoes.
10 bunches of carrots.
1 young rabbit.

Saw elephant into bite-sized pieces. Sauté pieces in oil until a lovely golden brown. In a large, clean garbage can or wheelbarrow, combine water, vegetables and spices. Bring to boil, add meat, cover. If no cover is available, cover snugly with heavy foil. Simmer five days. Caution do not overcook! If last minute guests arrive, add the rabbit. Check first that no-one minds a little hare in their stew.

Sorry – not tested!"

Now that would really put you off eating meat!

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July 27: Hilaire Belloc
July 28: Beatrix Potter
Malcolm Lowry
July 29: George Bradshaw
Alexis de Tocqueville
Booth Tarkington
July 30: Salvador Novo
C. Northcote Parkinson
July 31: Primo Levi
August 1: Rose Macaulay
August 2: Isabel Allende
Geoffrey Dutton
Ethel M. Dell
August 3: Leon Uris
Max Fatchen
August 4: Walter Pater
August 5: Ted Hughes
Guy de Maupassant
August 6: Andy Warhol
John Middleton Murry

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Andy Warhol became famous for painting those Campbell soup tins, he wrote books like *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* and *Popism: The Warhol Sixties*, he founded the publication *Interview Magazine*, he made a career out of being provocative and outrageous. And when he died …

"Back in the 1960s it seemed that Andy Warhol had everything—money and fame, a stellar career as an artist, a great residence and a greater studio, legions of friends and hordes of

admirers. But, unbeknown to the public, Warhol had even more than all that: he had clutter, too. Profound clutter.

"Warhol's appetite as a collector was legendary, but that was only part of the story; he was also, it seems, quite an accumulator. Much of his clutter he picked up casually—on the street or in a theater or a café or a shop he happened to pass—and much of it simply showed up unbidden, courtesy of the United States Postal Service. In that regard he was like everyone else—but on a much, much larger scale.

"His solution to the problem was no less large. From time to time he would scamper around, scoop up his clutter, and pack it into a huge cardboard box, which he would then seal and label. Ever conscious and nurturing of his celebrity, Warhol called these boxes "time capsules" (each box was marked "TC"), and he eventually accumulated so many of them that they became the very clutter they were supposed to eliminate. Today 612 of them are in the possession of the Andy Warhol Museum, in Pittsburgh; once in a while, when he can spare the time and the manpower, the museum's archivist, John Smith, will have his staff open one, catalogue its contents, and then repack and reseal it. So far the curators have gone through about a hundred time capsules, but still, Smith says, "we never know what we're going to find." A typical TC, No. 31, was most likely packed up around March of 1968; it contains books and magazines and newspapers and phonograph records and posters and postcards and letters and telegrams ("Sorry about the phone call, I'll call back when I have something to say") and notes and invitations and Christmas cards and junk mail and flyers and used plane tickets and bills and receipts and coupons and exhibition catalogues and photographs and résumés and screenplays and a couple of drawings and even a few uncashed checks. "We've found cash in some of them too," Smith says. "And contracts and agreements. Often times, going through them raises more questions than it answers."

Richard Rubin in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Gripping stuff?

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"When the Museum of Modern Art put together their 1989 Andy Warhol retrospective, the Andy Warhol Foundation sent forty-five drawings to the museum. But when the paintings went missing, the Museum of Modern Art did not contact the authorities or issue any sort of public explanation. The insurers paid out for the loss, and while a few reporters eventually learned about the missing paintings, what exactly happened to the art is still a mystery."

Ulrich Boser in *The Gardner Heist*.

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I'm not sure why I sometimes confuse Warhol with Allen Ginsberg. They didn't look the same, they didn't sound the same, one was a poet and the other an artist. They shared an era, perhaps a way of looking at the world … and Edward Sanders in *The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg* writes, "He kept everything—doodles on napkins, the 60,000 letters of friends, the 18,900 pages (and more) of journals, and just about every fragment of his time-track, so it might be interesting for someone to do a Total Biography of Ginsberg. He seemed to be asking for it with his tens of thousands of photos, his thousands of recordings and interviews, so perhaps a day-by-day bio, maybe 25,000 pages long, is what is required. That would be a Joycean endeavor. On the other hand, his final ten years would make a fine project for a biographer.

"I cannot be the one, but I have written a temporary path, with log bridges over streams and ropes down cliff sides, through the Forest Ginsberg, for your study and enjoyment."

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I noticed a book in the library on how to deal with an addiction to hoarding and wondered if hoarders actually want to cure their addiction. Is it only when they come to move house that they realise their hoarding has got out of control? Another book I've since come across has the curious title *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui*; clearly telling people what to do with 'stuff' strikes a chord. I remember moving into a house where an old couple had recently died and they had left behind things such as a large carton containing nothing but the tags and string which had come round their packets of meat but they also left behind more interesting and saleable things like boxes of old Christmas cards. I was very sorry the ABC axed its program 'The Collectors'; it wasn't the value of things which interested me but rather the reasons why people began collecting, how they went about it, how spouses and families dealt with the encroachment of old tin cans, steam engines, aprons, wind-up toys, or keyrings on the family home … So I was intrigued to come upon a book called *Behind the Scenes at the Museum of Baked Beans* by Hunter Davies.

This is a look at quirky museums, often the brainchild and passion of one person in the UK. Things like lawnmowers, fans, pencils, Laurel and Hardy memorabilia, vintage radios, and, yes, things to do with baked beans. The book is lots of fun but starting a museum to showcase and share your particular obsession is not as easy as it might seem. Nevertheless a name helps. Put Andy Warhol on the sign outside and I suspect people would flock in—but would they come to see his paintings and sketches or would they come to see his clutter from those Time Capsules?

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August 7: Dornford Yates
Sarah Harrison
August 8: Marjorie Rawlings
Sara Teasdale
Frank Richards
August 9: John Dryden
Philip Larkin
August 10: Louis Esson
Alfred Döblin

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I remember reading Döblin's famous novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* when I was trying to steep myself in a pre-war Berlin milieu while I was writing *Old Postcards*. I read his book for its setting, its way of life, but I didn't ask myself anything about Döblin as a person or a writer.

I was thinking of this recently when I came across an article in *The Writer's Chronicle* by Martha Cooley. She says, "Let's go to the city of Berlin—go there, I mean, by way of a terrific novel called *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, published in 1929 by a little-known German called Alfred Döblin. Though this book has long been deemed a modernist classic, you'd be at pains to find four people who've actually read it." And, "Just about anyone who reads *Berlin Alexanderplatz* will find the experience daunting; the narrative has the dizzying feel of a kaleidoscope. Henry James would've derided it as a "loose, baggy monster," and even native German-speaking readers find it tough, as it is studded with anachronistic Berlin slang. … *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is an Everyman's tale. Its down-and-out protagonist confronts obstacles both heartbreaking and ludicrous, and ultimately finds (sort of) a way forward. Tracing his progress (more accurately, his lurchings), the novel offers a vividly realistic depiction of life in Weimar Germany and particularly the city of Berlin, which turns out to be just as important to the novel as its human characters are."

She then sums up the plot: "Franz Biberkopf, a low-life former factory worker, emerges from prison, where he's done time for manslaughter of his girlfriend. He seeks work in Berlin, where a disastrous economic situation has everyone in perilous straits. Franz does a bit of this and that, gets hooked up with some burglars, loses an arm when his erstwhile buddy Reinhold betrays him, takes up with a young woman named Mieze whom Reinhold subsequently murders, ends up in a mental asylum, and finally emerges as (according to the narrator) a different man with the same identity papers—a man who, at the end of the novel, finds work as an assistant doorman at yet another factory.

"Sounds rather grade-B-movie-ish, yes? Indeed, the story boasts all the elements of a melodramatic crime flick, complete with molls and getaway cars. But it has elements of several biblical tales as well, including those of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Isaac, and (most of all) Job, whose voice the narrator channels from time to time. What's more, the novel is dense with allusions to other texts, and replete with German songs and rhymes, pop-culture icons of the time, advertising copy, political rhetoric, scientific jargon, and church liturgy."

The book reminded me very much of the writings of John dos Passos but Cooley says James Joyce's *Ulysses* was a major influence. She also links it to two more recent books. "Two contemporary novels provide intriguing contrasts to *Berlin Alexanderplatz*'s way of portraying a city. Each envisions an urban center in the future. Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* paint dystopic portraits of New York City and Seoul, South Korea, respectively."

Döblin was born in Stettin to a family of Jewish background but his mother moved the family to Berlin when he was ten-years-old as their father had deserted the family. Was that move to Berlin vital in his development as a writer? Perhaps. But he wasn't defined by endless books and stories and articles about Berlin. In fact his best-known book in a way was not indicative of his main subject. He wrote sci-fi, travel, essays, history. His first novel, which came out in 1915 has an intriguing title which translates as *The Three Leaves of Wang Lun*.

In a way I was inclined to think his *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was inspired by reading John Dos Passos' *Manhatten Transfer*. What Dos Passos had done for New York Döblin thought he could do for Berlin. But which came first? I did think of re-reading both books but I realised my curiosity had been piqued by a quite different book. What did *The Three Leaves of Wang Lun* refer to? Was it a treatise on tea? An ancient manuscript? A foray into Chinese philosophy? I haven't yet tracked down a copy but it seems it was an historical novel about an 18th century rebel leader in China called Wang Lun, *Die Drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*, but what his three leaves were is a delightful mystery remaining to be solved …

So why has his *Alexanderplatz* lasted when his other writings are not readily available? It is a big sprawling formless sort of novel, full of tavern life and working men, but that doesn't seem enough to grab people. I think, rather, it is that sense that it is on the cusp of change. Weimar was soon to give way to Hitler and everything, including the lives of those down-and-out, was about to change … Change almost unimaginably. Perhaps we as readers with hindsight read things into it that readers at the time of its publication would not have found there.

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August 11: Enid Blyton
Charlotte Yonge
Hugh MacDiarmid
August 12: Robert Southey
Radclyffe Hall
August 13: Mrs Robert Henrey

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Years ago my friend Eve Masterman asked me if I liked the Little Madeline books. At the time I had not read any of them. So she hurried to her bookshelf and took one out. Madeline is a little schoolgirl in Paris and although she has an impish quality she is not Just William or Ginger Meggs.

"Judy Blume so loved her library copy of the picture book *Madeline* that she hid it and told her mother it was lost." Christine Hill in *Ten terrific Authors for Teens*.

Years later I came upon Mrs Robert Henrey's book about growing up in Paris, *The Little Madeleine*:

"When Léontine saw us her lovely dark eyes lit up her face, and though she was pitted by smallpox she appeared almost pretty. The truth is that at last she was happy. Yaya, her daughter, once so thin and disfigured by want, had become grown up and good-looking. Léontine had been lucky. Her husband was at the front, she paid no rent, had the allocation of a soldier's wife, and she and Yaya earned a great deal of money. She said to my mother: 'I've been made to suffer so much from wine that I can't stand it on the table any more. When my husband comes on leave I can see he hasn't changed, that he'll never change, and so I'm broken-hearted to think that my happiness will end with the war; and yet believe me, Mme Gal, I *do* want the war to finish."

"We went off in great style, women and girls tripping along in the wake of this rejuvenated old gentleman who was bursting with joy and vanity. We drank some beer at the terrace of a café and M. Malgras gave us, the children, money to buy *croissants* at the baker's. The outing brought Marguerite back to her jolly self. Suddenly we saw coming towards us a young English soldier, fair-haired, fresh shaven, beautifully clean-looking in his khaki uniform. He was accompanied by a young Frenchwoman and the efforts he made to speak French made him still more irresistibly attractive. We all thought he was as handsome as a young god. Our eyes followed him as he passed. Our hearts beat for the love of him. Our tongues let forth a melody of praise. M. Malgras tried hard to interest us in the amazing happenings of his former bakery; we ceased to listen to him. He let slip the expression 'when I was young.' That did it. The spell departed. His shoulders drooped, his mouth sagged, his eyes lost their brightness. He became rather a silly old man."

But … "This was the first time I had seen an English soldier. I made a queer resolution, to marry an Englishman. I confided this to my mother the same evening as I was going to bed. 'The point is,' she queried, 'are they any better than ours? Men promise so much and give so little.' I did not pay great attention to her and when I dreamed that night I believe I dreamed in English!"

The real Madeleine did end up marrying an Englishman. She wrote of her first meeting, their marriage, and her arrival and work as a manicurist at a smart London hotel in *The Little Madeleine Grows Up*.

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But my belief that she either wrote or inspired the children's books was wrong. They were the work of writer and illustrator Ludwig Bemelmans. The son of a Belgian father and a German mother he went to live in Germany after his father deserted the family and from there he moved to the US and found fame with his first Little Madeline book in 1939 called simply *Madeline* about a young girl in a Catholic boarding school in Paris. He wrote six more, the last one found in his papers after his death.

I don't know what drew Judy Blume but Eve loved them because she had worked as an *au pair* in Paris just before WW2. And I suspect that Mrs Henrey took her title for her attractive memoir from that little imagined schoolgirl …

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August 14: John Galsworthy
August 15: Sir Walter Scott
Garry Disher
August 16: Georgette Heyer
August 17: Wilfrid Scawen Blunt
August 18: Nettie Palmer
August 19: Arthur Waley
August 20: Emily Brontë
Paul Tillich

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Charles Morgan wrote the chapter on Emily Brontë in *The Great Victorians* and he suggests that Emily experienced some kind of moment of ecstasy, a vision, a moment of rapture, what we would more mundanely call a 'religious experience' and that she carried this always with her, both the memory and the desire to re-experience that moment. In this sense he likens her to William Blake. He writes, "Those biographers who insist that she sickened and came near to death when separated from her moors have, I think, missed the root of her desire for Haworth. That the bleak countryside was friendly to her is true, but can scarcely have been all the truth of a hunger so imperative. She clung to her duties at the parsonage as visionary and contemplative men cling always to the discipline that they have cultivated as an enablement of their vision. The vision was her secret, but of the unconcealed life that was its condition she could write with a pleasing candour. Never did feminine genius whine less against household drudgery, for the good reason that her acceptance of it was complete and her spirit too powerful to admit it as an impediment."

Of course, without a clear presentation, in a diary, in a letter, of such a moment we cannot prove it ever happened. But the lines he quotes from her poems do seem to bolster it as a realistic possibility.

"Thought followed thought, star followed star
Through boundless regions on;
While one sweet influence, near and far,
Thrilled through, and proved us one!"—

"I've watched and sought my lifetime long;
Sought him in heaven, hell, earth, and air,
An endless search, and always wrong."

"Then did I check the tears of useless passion—
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

"And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?"

"Watcher, in this lonely prison,

Shut from joy and kindly air,
Heaven, descending in a vision,
Taught my soul to do and bear."

"Methought, the very breath I breathed
Was full of sparks divine,
And all my heather-couch was wreathed
By that celestial shine!"

It is not the writing of a woman longing for a male companion, for normal courtship and marriage; it is rather the sentiments that we find later in Francis Thompson's 'The Hound of Heaven'. But as most of us read *Wuthering Heights* and assume that that is all of Emily Brontë we need to know perhaps we miss this sense of someone who glimpsed something more but struggled to find the words to express it. So I thought I would also include a complete poem which begins very conventionally but also comes to hint at a longing for something profoundly deeper …

On a sunny brae alone I lay
One summer afternoon;
It was the marriage-time of May
With her young lover, June.

From her Mother's heart seemed loath to part
That queen of bridal charms,
But her Father smiled on the fairest child
He ever held in his arms.

The trees did wave their plumy crests,
The glad birds carolled clear;
And I, of all the wedding guests,
Was only sullen there.

There was not one but wished to shun
My aspect void of cheer;
The very grey rocks, looking on,
Asked, "What do you do here?"

And I could utter no reply:
In sooth I did not know
Why I had brought a clouded eye
To greet the general glow.

So, resting on a heathy bank,
I took my heart with me;
And we together sadly sank
Into a reverie.

We thought, “When winter comes again,
Where will these bright things be?
All vanished, like a vision vain,
An unreal mockery!

“The birds that now so blithely sing,
Through deserts frozen dry,
Poor spectres of the perished Spring
In famished troops will fly.

“And why should we be glad at all?
The leaf is hardly green,
Before a token of the fall
Is on its surface seen.”

Now whether it were really so
I never could be sure;
But as, in fit of peevish woe,
I stretched me on the moor,

A thousand thousand glancing fires
Seemed kindling in the air;
A thousand thousand silvery lyres
Resounded far and near:

Methought the very breath I breathed
Was full of sparks divine,
And all my heather-couch was wreathed
By that celestial shine.

And while the wide Earth echoing rang
To their strange minstrelsy,
The little glittering spirits sang,
Or seemed to sing, to me:

“O mortal, mortal, let them die;
Let Time and Tears destroy,
That we may overflow the sky
With universal joy.

“Let Grief distract the sufferer’s breast,
And Night obscure his way;
They hasten him to endless rest,
And everlasting day.

“To Thee the world is like a tomb,
A desert’s naked shore;

To us, in unimagined bloom,
It brightens more and more.

"And could we lift the veil and give
One brief glimpse to thine eye
Thou would'st rejoice for those that live,
Because they live to die."

The music ceased—the noonday Dream
Like dream of night withdrew
But Fancy still will sometimes deem
Her fond creation true.

'A Day Dream'

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August 21: John William Burgon
M. M. Kaye
August 22: Ray Bradbury
August 23: W. E. Henley
Edgar Lee Masters
Will Cuppy
Dick Bruna
August 24: Jean Rhys (Ella Gwendoline Rees Williams)
Sir Max Beerbohm

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Lilian Pizzichini wrote a biography of Jean Rhys which she called *The Blue Hour*. In it she paints a picture of a difficult vulnerable mentally unstable woman with a drink problem.

"The writer Ford Madox Ford was publishing all the great names of modernism in the *transatlantic review*: Joyce, Pound, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Valéry, Philippe Soupalt, as well as dozens of other unknown, up-to-the-minute writers. He was a generous impresario as well as being a highly regarded novelist and critic himself. He produced over eighty novels, which even he acknowledged was too many. He wrote one novel considered to be great, *The Good Soldier*, about a *ménage à trois*.

"The poet Ezra Pound convinced Ford to hire Ernest Hemingway as an editorial assistant. Ford had by then published scores of novels. Hemingway was a cub reporter. Ford, a generous patron of the international modernist movement who had once shared a byline with Joseph Conrad, took the young man on, expecting him to be respectful of his rank and accomplishments. His new editorial assistant called him the 'golden walrus' and reported to his friends that his breath stank like the grave. Ford was sentimental, fat and anxious, and not a hero in the Hemingway mould. He presided over chaos in the office, often creating it, and would then collapse, weeping on his secretary's shoulder.

"Although Ford was pouring his considerable energies into the *transatlantic review*, it was going under. He would have to begin another novel to pay the rent. His common-law wife and the mother of his child, Stella Bowen, pointed out in her memoir, *Drawn from Life*, that Ford needed new blood to revitalise himself and his writing. When he met Jean in the autumn of 1924, she was thirty-four, talented, lovely and helpless. A couple of months after meeting her, he began writing the second volume of his tetralogy, *Parade's End*.

"He was just the sort of man she liked: fatherly. He was not handsome, he was a middle-aged, stout English gentleman with piercing eyes and bad breath. But she thought — and he agreed with her — that he really was a gentleman."

This would seem debatable. "Ford was obsessed. Several nights a week he took the woman he loved and the woman he lived with to dinner at the Nègre de Toulouse. Jean drank Cahors wine made in the Latin quarter. Ford was sure to fill her glass when it was empty. She found his stolid attentiveness reassuring. 'Stella hates you,' Ivan Bede told her. She'd be a very unnatural woman if she didn't, Jean thought." Nevertheless she stayed in this threesome until her husband Jean Lenglet came out of prison. And her contact with Ford had the advantage that it started her on her very uncertain career as a writer. She had a flurry of early books of modest success: *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie, Good Morning, Midnight* and *Quartet*. But the one book she is remembered by, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, did not come till 1966 and she believed it had come too late to 'rescue' her. By then she had been through three marriages, had difficulties relating to people, had been charged several times with drunk and disorderly behaviour and any idea of behaving in a calm and organised manner was beyond her. The wonder of it is that she did manage to produce that one book which made her name.

I recently came upon her last book *Sleep It Off Lady* on a stall and I wondered about that suggestion that the success of *Wide Sargasso Sea* had come 'too late'. Too late physically? Becoming a literary celebrity, in demand at launches and panels and functions, takes physical strength and stamina. Too late imaginatively? Her last book which is a collection of short stories with a Caribbean flavour would seem to suggest that the well had run dry. Though the stories had their moments I felt they were potentially good stories which didn't manage to reach any heights. Something was lacking. Jean Rhys was tired and defeated and the stories, at times, mirror this …

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August 25: Thea Astley
August 26: Eleanor Dark
Earl Derr Biggars
John Buchan

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'But there is one mystery that to me has always been the most exciting in the world.'

'And what is that?' asked Rankin, while they waited with deep interest.

'The mystery of the missing,' Sir Frederic replied. 'The man or woman who steps quietly out of the picture and is never seen again. Hilary Galt, dead in his office, presents a puzzle, of course; still, there is something to get hold of, something tangible, a body on the floor. But if Hilary Galt had disappeared into the fog that gloomy night, leaving no trace — that would have been another story.

'For years I have been enthralled by the stories of the missing,' the detective went on. 'Even when they were outside my province, I followed many of them. Often the solution was simple, or sordid, but that could never detract from the thrill of the ones that remained unsolved.'

Earl Derr Biggers in *Behind That Curtain*.

"The story of the little man, sometimes a stockbroker, sometimes a tea merchant, but always something in the City, who walked out of his suburban house one sunny morning and vanished like a puff of grey smoke in a cloudless sky, can be recalled by nearly everyone who lived in Greater London in the first years of the century.

The details vary. Sometimes it was the inquisitive lady at Number Ten who saw him go by, and the invalid propped up in the window of Number Twelve who did not; while the letter which

he was about to post was found lying pathetically upon the pavement between the two houses. Sometimes the road was bounded by two high walls, with a milkman at one end and the unfortunate gentleman's wife on her doorstep at the other. In this version the wife was kissed at the garden gate and waved at from half-way down the oddly bordered road, yet the milkman saw neither hide nor hair of his patron then or afterwards.

All the stories have their own circumstantial evidence. Only the main fact and an uncomfortable impression are common to all. A man did disappear and there were reasons for supposing that he did so in no ordinary fashion. Also, of course, he never returned.

Most people know of someone who lived in the next street to the hero or the victim of the tale, but the ancient firm of Barnabas and Company, publishers since 1810 at the Sign of the Golden Quiver, never referred to the story because the little man had been their junior partner on that morning in May, nineteen hundred and eleven, when he bade a polite 'Good morning' to his housekeeper at his front door in the Streatham crescent, turned out into a broad suburban road and never passed the tobacconist on the corner, but vanished as neatly and unobtrusively as a raindrop in a pool."

Margery Allingham in *Flowers for the Judge*.

"An amusing cartoon by Keith Waite in the *Daily Mirror* depicted two Australian policemen on camels in the outback asking an aboriginal cooking a lizard over a fire: 'Lord Lucan?' Down Under in the antipodes was one of the places where Lucan was supposed to have gone to earth. In December police in Melbourne thought they had hit the jackpot when they picked up a cultured Englishman who closely answered his description. It turned out to be not Lucan but John Stonehouse, the former Labour MP and Postmaster General who had supposedly drowned in the sea off Miami. He arrived in Australia on a false passport, aiming to start a new life as British police investigated his involvement as chairman of a crashed Bangladeshi bank. He might have got away with it if he hadn't borne a passing resemblance to Lucan and stood out for being distinguished among the Aussies."

So wrote David Gerring and Robert Brimmell in *Lucan Lives*, one of a number of books to look at the mystery of Lord Lucan. Other books include *Trail of Havoc* by Patrick Marnham, *LUCAN: Not Guilty* by Sally Moore and *Hunted* by Jeremy Scott. "The author, Jeremy Scott, denied he used Lucan as the model for his hero. Publication was delayed until a red wrapper could be printed to go round the book stating: *'The author and publisher wish to state that this novel is not based upon any real event and that the characters portrayed bear no relation to any persons living or dead.'* "

I wonder if Hobart author Heather Rose faced this problem when she brought Lord Lucan to Hobart in her novel *The Butterfly Man*. In it he has reinvented himself as a Scotsman called Henry Kennedy and lives with a Vietnamese woman called Lilli. I enjoyed the novel as a story but I couldn't believe in her Lord Lucan; he constantly explains his life to himself but not, I think, in the obsessive way a person accused of murder would be likely to. He is neither *being* a reinvented man called Henry Kennedy nor *being* an un-invented man called Lord Lucan afraid of forgetting his new persona. But it is an interesting idea. Would Hobart appeal to someone on the run? I am inclined to think not. Islands are dangerous places to go to ground. It is harder to get away if the hounds come baying over the hill. Communities are smaller and tend to know each other—or want to know where you came from and why you came and then they say 'Do you know my second cousin then? He lived near where you used to live'—

And Muriel Spark made no attempt to hide *her* Lord Lucan behind pseudonyms in her novel *Aiding and Abetting*. She says, "The seventh Earl was officially declared dead in 1999, his

body has never been found, although he has been ‘sighted’ in numerous parts of the world, predominantly central Africa. The story of his presumed years of clandestine wanderings, his nightmare existence since his disappearance, remains a mystery, and I have no doubt would differ factually and in actual feeling from the story I have told.” She has two men both claiming to be Lord Lucan seek help from a French psychiatrist …

But however the story is presented it is hard to see Lucan as innocent. He just happened to be walking past the family home, which he no longer lived in, at the precise moment when he looked in the downstairs window and ‘saw’ an unknown man struggling with his wife. He immediately went in and the unknown assailant ran off. Apart from the extraordinary coincidence in his timing there is a major problem with ‘saw’. He said he saw this happening by torchlight, as the downstairs light bulb had burnt out. The downstairs was below street level and involved a very difficult and awkward craning, even assuming the unknown man had been thoughtful enough to carry out the struggle by the window. The unfortunate nanny Sandra Rivett, probably mistaken for Lady Lucan, had been killed by repeated blows from a lead pipe. But how had the man held the pipe in one hand and the torch in the other and managed to keep Sandra there unless his first blow had felled her—in which case ‘struggle’ was a misnomer. And if he had been holding a torch then the light would’ve fallen solely on his victim. The assailant would merely have been a dark shape …

In the following years all kinds of theories, sightings, speculations, flooded in. Yet people regularly go missing, some because they are wanted by police, and it rarely makes the same impact. This case contained both murder and a title. It also contained the so-called Lucan Set, wealthy, arrogant people who behaved as though they were above the law and did not have to give the police the kind of co-operation expected from honest citizens. It also contained a professional indeed a compulsive gambler of far right tendencies. I can’t help wondering if that aspect might not be the key to where Lucan went and what he did. If he could no longer walk into casinos and clubs then he possibly looked to a different kind of gamble for sustenance …

The gamble to remain unfound.

To disappear is not all that difficult. I was thinking of this the other day when I came upon the story of another gambler who disappeared. Lt Col Rupert Beauchamp Lecky said goodbye to his wife and three children on the morning of 26th September 1957, walked out of his London house and was, allegedly, never seen again. He was facing court over his gambling debts and after he disappeared it was found he had been taking £50 regularly from his bank account. It was thought he was being blackmailed. His family said they felt sure he could work out a way to pay his debts—with time—and they couldn’t understand why he had chosen to disappear. If, of course, the choice had been his. There are some similarities, though murder seemingly did not feature in his case. The Leckys went to Ireland in the 1700s and became Quakers for a while when they lived in Co Carlow. Eventually they turned to the established church and Rupert had a traditional military career but his gambling took over his life. The reason he caught my eye was that, so far, all the people I have found with Beauchamp in their name and a connection to Co Carlow are descendants of John Beauchamp of Ballyloughrane who came there in the 1690s; he is my gr x 5 grandfather.

I don’t know that I would particularly want to try and trace Rupert and perhaps claim him as my *very* distant cousin, he sounds completely irresponsible though perhaps like Lord Lucan debonair and superficially charming, but I found myself thinking ‘if I can’t find Lord Lucan—can I come up with something to suggest Rupert’s fate?’ …

So this week I took a little time to see what I might find. Lecky was listed by Scotland Yard as a Missing Person for more than 30 years. Police hunted in England, in Ireland (where the family home at Ballykealey which he had sold to move to London is now an attractive hotel) on the Continent where Lecky had spent time during WW2 and afterwards. Everywhere drew a blank. Yet his published description is quite distinctive. He wasn't the 'insignificant little man' who disappears in detective fiction. Yet Rupert Beauchamp Lecky had disappeared into 'thin air'. I feel very sorry for his wife and daughter and two sons. The uncertainty, the publicity, the regrets, cannot have been easy to live with. As he was born in 1908 it can be assumed he is now dead no matter where he went or what he did … but the mystery remains …

And there is that other question in there: if Lecky could disappear so completely, and Lucan may well have heard the story, did it influence him in any way? Or did he simply respond to the moment, making his plans 'on the run'? And will he in old age, like Ronnie Biggs, want to come home?

* * * * *

August 27: Lady Antonia Fraser
Norah Lofts
C. S. Forester
August 28: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu
Ivor Gurney
August 29: Oliver Wendell Holmes Snr.

* * * * *

A conversation in Tess Gerritsen's *The Bone Garden* goes like this:

"Do you realize who O.W.H. is?" asked Henry. His eyes, magnified by the lenses of his spectacles, gleamed with excitement.

"You told me over the phone it was Oliver Wendell Holmes."

"And you *do* know who he was?"

"He was a judge, wasn't he? A Supreme Court justice."

Henry gave a sigh of exasperation. "No, that's Oliver Wendell Holmes *Junior*, the son! This letter is from Wendell *Senior*. You must have heard of *him*."

Julia frowned. "He was a writer, wasn't he?"

"That's *all* you know about him?"

"I'm sorry. I'm not exactly a history teacher."

"You're a teacher? Of what?"

"The third grade."

"Even a third-grade teacher should know that Oliver Wendell Holmes Senior was more than just a literary figure. Yes, he was a poet and a novelist and a biographer. He was also a lecturer, a philosopher, and one of the most influential voices in Boston. And he was one more thing. In the scheme of his contributions to mankind, it was the most important thing of all."

"What was that?"

"He was a physician. One of the finest of his age."

*

Years ago I came upon a little mention of Oliver Wendell Holmes in L. M. Montgomery's *Anne's House of Dreams* but was not aware that there were two Olivers.

'Captain Jim's tea proved to be nectar. He was pleased as a child with Anne's compliments, but he affected a fine indifference.

"The secret is I don't skimp the cream," he remarked airily. Captain Jim had never heard of Oliver Wendell Holmes, but he evidently agreed with that writer's dictum that "big heart never liked little cream pot." '

*

Now that I've looked them up …

Oliver senior was a doctor, a writer, a wit, author of several books of essays, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* (1858), *The Professor of the Breakfast-Table* (1860), *The Poet of the Breakfast-Table* (1872) and *Over the Teacups* (1891); his son became a lawyer but also had a handy turn of phrase, coming up with those famous words "clear and present danger" as the only legitimate excuse for a government to remove its citizens' right to freedom of speech, calling war "an organized bore" and what I found rather touching—saying of his marriage to Fanny Dodswell—"For sixty years she made life poetry for me".

So when I found I'd written down a couple of quotes, years ago, and not specified which Oliver—

"I think few persons have a greater disgust for plagiarism than myself. If I had even suspected that the idea in question was borrowed, I should have disclaimed originality, or mentioned the coincidence, as I once did in a case where I had happened to hit on an idea of Swift's."

"But let me give you a caution. Be very careful how you tell an author he is *droll*. Ten to one he will hate you; and if he does, be sure he can do you a mischief, and very probably will. Say you *cried* over his romance or his verses, and he will love you and send you a copy. You can laugh over that as much as you like, — in private."

—I think I can now say with confidence that Oliver Senior was the author.

* * * * *

August 30: Carmel Bird
August 31: Agnes Bulmer
DuBose Heyward
Albert Facey
September 1: Edgar Rice Burroughs
September 2: D. K. Broster
Arthur Upfield

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"It was in 1875 that the learned Abbé Jean Hyppolite Michon first sat down to list the deviations from the 'school model' people learned to copy and, being an imaginative and intelligent man, he soon discovered that these variations from the norm were related to the writers' psychological make-up. The result was an early textbook which he called *Système de Grapologie*, with observations so penetrating that a slightly revised edition has been re-issued quite recently."

How to Analyse your Handwriting by Manfred Lowengard.

* * * * *

I do not speak Greek but one day I was pondering on the extent to which we use the names of Greek letters. We talk of alpha and beta brain waves, we call university societies Phi Beta Kappa, zoologists talk of alpha males and so on. So you might like to keep this little rhyme handy.

"This is Greek, and how they spelt her—
Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta,

Epsilon, Zeta,
Eta, Theta,
Then Iota, Kappa too,
Followed up by Lambda, Mu,
Nu, Xi,
Omikron, Pi,
After that, Rho, Sigma, Tau,
Upsilon, Phi, and still three more,
Chi, Psi, and Omega's twenty-four."

From *Teach Yourself Greek* by F. Kinchin Smith and T. W. Melluish.

* * * * *

"One day at supper, Anna Ludvigovna, one of the governesses, who was fond of mystification, said that we would have a surprise this day week. Many guesses were made, amongst them that the heir to the throne would be born, and we should have three days' leave. The surprise, however, proved to be nothing so exciting. A lecture on notation of dance movements was to be given by Gorsky. We held it as a little diversion from routine, not knowing yet that the subject was going to be added to our studies. Going to the big rehearsal-room to attend the lecture was an opportunity for me to look at the old engravings that thickly covered the walls. Before the portrait of Istomina I now stood, lost in admiration. Knowing by heart the stanza of Poushkin: 'She flies like down from the breath of Æolus' made me long ago cherish a romantic vision of 'superb immaterial Istomina.' A sleek, beautiful head in a wreath of roses and nenuphars, with wistful eyes and a smile half lazy, half disdainful, embodied for me a hitherto elusive image. The lecture gave a historic of several early attempts made to find a way of writing down the movements of the body. The information that the French Abbé Tabourot was the inventor of signs for the notation of the dance puzzled me not a little. Judging by our standards, this secular pursuit was inconsistent with the cloth; and an irreverent comparison with our priest in his long cassock, trying to compose a treatise on the ballet, was in my mind.

"The present system had been evolved by one Stepanoff, now dead. Gorsky continued and completed his work. Stepanoff's system was very complete, but intricate and far from easy. To write down a movement, one had to analyse it anatomically and designate by signs like musical notes the proper action of the joints determining it. Lessons of notation were unpopular with pupils. We called them abracadabra and cabbalistics. That did not prevent my taking an interest in the subject."

From *Theatre Street, The Reminiscences of Tamara Karsavina*.

* * * * *

Eamon Duffy in a review of *The Christian West and Its Singers: The First Thousand Years* by Christopher Page in *The New York Review of Books* writes, "Sometime in the late 1020s, a choirmaster from Arezzo secured an audience in Rome with Pope John XIX. It can't have been an entirely comfortable meeting. Guido of Arezzo was no mere musician, but an austere and dedicated monk, committed to the purification of the Catholic church from the prevailing sin of simony, the buying and selling of holy things. Pope John, by contrast, embodied everything Guido disapproved of. Romanus of Tusculum, as he had been before he became pope, was the brother of his predecessor Benedict VIII, and the younger son of a family of Roman robber barons who had kept the papacy in their pocket for generations. John had been elevated from layman to pope in a single day, and had probably bought his election. If Guido had misgivings about all that, however, he buried them, for he needed the Pope's endorsement for what was to prove one of the epochal inventions of Western civilization.

"As Christopher Page shows in this fascinating book, for almost a thousand years before that meeting in Arezzo, singing had been integral to Christian worship and hence to Christian identity. But Christian song existed only in the memories and mouths of its singers. With many local variations, the church in the West had long since evolved a common core of prescribed Bible readings, antiphons, psalms, and hymns specific to the time of day, the passage of the liturgical seasons, and the feasts of the saints. But the books that transmitted this daily, weekly, and annual cycle contained only words. Since there was no reliable system of notation to record the sound of singing, the music of these ancient chants was passed from singer to singer as it had always been, painfully acquired by endless repetition, liable to be lost, and subject always to the vagaries of happenstance, the lapse of memory, and the tastes and idiosyncrasies of individual choirmasters."

But what Guido had brought was "an invention to change all that. Like other earlier musical theorists, he allocated a series of letters to the rising notes of the singing voice. Guido then prolonged these letters above the text to be sung by tracing a series of four horizontal lines across the page. The "mode" of the melody—in modern equivalents, and very roughly indeed, the key signature and starting pitch—was indicated by a clef sign on one line colored red or yellow. The other lines were often simply scratched with a point into the parchment of the book, but the sequence of notes or neumes strung out along these lines enabled the singer to repeat the identical sequence at the right pitch on every reading, even though he had never heard them sung by anyone else."

The Pope was impressed but it took a long time for this idea of notation to spread and over time it was developed and became more complex. Yet, "Children still learn to sing using Guido's sequence of letters—ut (do), re. mi, fa, sol, la—and in a slightly modified form his system of lines, the stave, provides the fundamental framework for the composition and transmission of most Western music. The stave not only facilitated the acquisition of tunes without tears; in the longer run, it made possible the creation of elaborate polyphony. Tallis's forty-part motet *Spem in Alium*, Bach's B-minor Mass, the symphonies of Beethoven, Mahler's Ninth—all would have been inconceivable without the pious ingenuity of Guido de Arezzo."

J. Cuthbert Hadden in *Master Musicians* adds to it "he made his pupils sing to a melody so arranged that each line began with the note it was used to represent:

Ut queant laxis	**Fa**muli tuorum
Resonare fibris	**So**lve polluti
Mira gestorum	**La**bii reatum"

So there you have your Ut, (later Do) Re, Mi, Fa, So, La … the only trouble being that those lines seem to sum up laxatives and fibroids and rectums rather than beautiful music. I hope the Latin means something *quite* different.

The other early innovator was Franco of Cologne in around 1200 and Hadden says of him, "Before Franco's day there was no way of clearly representing time in musical notation; no way of showing, for example, the difference between a note which should be four beats long and one which should be two beats. It is difficult to imagine such an inconvenience now, and we have to thank Franco for saving us from it. The breve (seldom seen) and the semibreve come down to us from him, though he called them the "brevis" and the "semibrevis." He invented "rests" too; and he was the first to divide time into what we call "dual" and "triple." Dual time has two beats in the bar, as in a polka; and triple time has three beats, as in a waltz. Franco made this distinction before anybody else did; and he had a quaint idea that all church music should be written in triple time because its three beats correspond with the Holy Trinity, three persons in one God."

* * * * *

Then there was Louis Braille, the frail blind saddler's son from Coupvray in France. He wasn't the first person to experiment with some form of raised lettering so blind people could read. But as Lennard Bickel writes in *Triumph over Darkness*: "The Braille code withstood all challenge. The versatility, the adaptability of the beautifully simple system—little changed from the early years when Braille worked towards its perfection—remained, as it does today, unsurpassed. The decision of the British council had undoubted influence on the meeting of the World Congress held in Paris in 1878, when delegates, not only from France and Britain, but also from Denmark, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Holland, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland, voted that Braille should be the accepted code for education of the blind."

* * * * *

So why have I put down these intriguing little bits about developing and interpreting notation for music and dance under Arthur Upfield? I am tempted to go on and probe the mysteries of ciphers, of handwriting, of Braille, of different alphabets, where will it end—but it was a little mention of the mysterious noughts and crosses that bushmen left for each other in Upfield's *Death of a Swagman* which got me thinking.

Upfield describes the simple system, which looks to the uninitiated like an abandoned game of noughts and crosses, this way: "Marshall studied the now familiar picture."

There is then a diagram of noughts and crosses: XOX on the first line, O crossed out then X on the second, and XXO on the third, but there are curious little additions to the lines across and down. "Observe closely that game of noughts and crosses," urged Bony. "The assumed players did not complete it, for there is neither a nought nor a cross in the centre of the left-hand section. See the position of the ticks and the little curved lines and the dot at the right extremity of the lower horizontal line. These additions to the game itself are done but roughly as though carelessly by a player when pondering on his move to be. Consider the number of variations which could be made with the crosses and the noughts and the small additions. Why, one could concoct a cipher with such material. And that, my dear Marshall, is just what it is."

"You can read this cipher?" he asked, less as a question than as a statement.

"I can read it," claimed Bony. "I have seen that cipher on homestead gates, on telephone posts, and burned on chips of wood or bark and left in the vicinity of homesteads and near small townships. There is one on the gatepost just the other side of the town dams which states that you are not a hard policeman but are given to charging swagmen in order to get work done by them whilst in custody.

"The cipher is used by only the genuine swagmen. As you are aware, a goodly proportion of the men travelling these outback tracks are honest station hands looking for a job, or going back to a job from a bender at a wayside or town hotel. There is, however, a minority of swagmen, better known as sundowners, who never work and who must walk hundreds of miles in the year tramping from station homestead to homestead, where they obtain rations or a handout. It is this minority who have evolved the noughts-and-crosses cipher to leave information for others of their class.

"You see how it goes. A sundowner arrives at a gate in the fence enclosing the homestead area or the township area. He looks for a cipher on that part of the gate or telephone post which the road user would never see, telling him that the station cook is generous, or that the station owner should be avoided.

"Mind you, that cipher is not now universally used, and with the passage of time it has become more complex, so that it is almost as difficult to read by one familiar with the original cipher as it is to read fortunes from the cards. However, to revert. That particular example scrawled on the door at Sandy Flat hut comprises a statement both clear-cut and definite."

"Go on," urged Marshall. "How do you make it all out?"

"It would take a long time to explain, and the necessity doesn't arise now. I will, however, point out a few simple things. The semicircle at the left extremity of the top horizontal line means meat. The quarter circle connected to the top horizontal line and the left-hand perpendicular line means dead or death. The short line drawn at an angle at the top of the right perpendicular line represents brought—brought to this place. And the V at the bottom of the same line represents police, or a policeman's helmet. And so on and so forth, including the positions of the noughts and crosses.

"A most important meaning, or message, is conveyed in the central square, where the cross is overlaid by the nought, or the other way around. That is the clear danger sign: get out, clear out, don't be seen hereabouts. In effect the cipher reads: 'A dead body has been brought to this hut for the police to find. Danger. Clear out. Touch nothing.' "

When Marshall again looked up from studying the photograph, he said admiringly:

"Where did you learn it all?"

"Oh, from a swagman who thought I was another of his clan. To proceed. We may presume that the man who scrawled that game of noughts and crosses on that door had seen someone take the body of Kendall into the hut, and then had watched that somebody kill one of Kendall's ration sheep, catch the blood and pour it on the floor about the head of the man, and hang the carcass in the meat house. The first part of my presumption I adopted when first I saw that photograph, the second was yesterday when I learnt that a fresh and uncut carcass of a sheep was hanging in the meat house the following morning. Scott supports the second part. He says that, in his opinion, the sample of blood he scraped from the floor of the hut where the body lay is animal blood, not human.

"Recall. The drawer of the game of noughts and crosses states clearly that a dead body was brought to that place. He doesn't state that a dead body is in it. It was brought there. Therefore he must have seen it brought there, and most likely he saw the face or recognized the figure of the man who carried it into the hut. However, I am breaking away from fact to supposition when I say it is likely that the watcher recognized the man who brought the dead body and placed it in the hut."

Have I intrigued you sufficiently to want to go out and find a copy of *Death of a Swagman*?

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September 3: Lennie Lower
September 4: Mary Renault
Richard Wright
September 5: Richard Trench
September 6: Elizabeth Ferrars
September 7: C. J. Dennis
September 8: Siegfried Sassoon
W. W. Jacobs
September 9: Phyllis Whitney
September 10: Peter Lovesey
Margaret Gifford
Cyril Connolly
September 11: D. H. Lawrence
James Thomson
September 12: Michael Dransfield
H. L. Mencken

Louis MacNeice
September 13: Sherwood Anderson
J. B. Priestley
September 14: Eric Bentley
September 15: Agatha Christie

* * * * *

"What on earth are you doing?" demanded Tuppence, as she entered the inner sanctum of the International Detective Agency—(Slogan—Blunt's Brilliant Detectives) and discovered her lord and master prone on the floor in a sea of books.

Tommy struggled to his feet. "I was trying to arrange these books on the top shelf of that cupboard," he complained. "And the damned chair gave way."

"What are they, anyway?" asked Tuppence, picking up a volume. "*The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I wouldn't mind reading that again some time."

"You see the idea?" said Tommy, dusting himself with care. "Half hours with the Great Masters—that sort of thing. You see, Tuppence, I can't help feeling that we are more or less amateurs at this business—of course amateurs in one sense we cannot help being, but it would do no harm to acquire the technique, so to speak. These books are detective stories by the leading masters of the art. I intend to try different styles, and compare results."

"H'm," said Tuppence. "I often wonder how those detectives would have got on in real life." She picked up another volume. "You'll find a difficulty in being a Thorndyke. You've no medical experience, and less legal, and I never heard that science was your strong point."

"Perhaps not," said Tommy. "But at any rate I've bought a very good camera, and I shall photograph footprints and enlarge the negatives and all that sort of thing. Now, *mon ami*, use your little grey cells—what does this convey to you?"

He pointed to the bottom shelf of the cupboard. On it lay a somewhat futuristic dressing-gown, a Turkish slipper, and a violin.

"Obvious, my dear Watson," said Tuppence."

When Agatha Christie wrote her Tommy and Tuppence book, *Partners in Crime*, she brought in a light-hearted re-use of fictional detectives including her own Hercule Poirot; they pretend to be the famous characters of other Golden Age mystery writers. Some I was familiar with but some were a mystery. Yet they were obviously household names when she wrote the book as she sees no need to tell the reader who they were or why she was bringing them in. For example:

—'We are the brothers Okewood! And I am Desmond,' he added firmly.

Tuppence shrugged her shoulders.

'All right. Have it your own way. I'd as soon be Francis. Francis was much the more intelligent of the two. Desmond always gets into a mess, and Francis turns up as the gardener or something in the nick of time and saves the situation.'

So who were the brothers Okewood? Charles Osborne says in *The Life and Crimes of Agatha Christie*, "As no attempt has previously been made by writers on Agatha Christie to identify all of the crime writers parodied in *Partners in Crime*, the following table which lists them all may be of interest" and he says, "Valentine Williams (1883-1946), writing as Douglas Valentine. The Oakwood brothers appear in *The Secret Hand*, also entitled *Okewood of the Secret Service*". And Nigel Cawthorne in *A Brief Guide to Agatha Christie* says "Tommy and Tuppence decide to tackle the case in the manner of Francis and Dennis Okewood from *The Man with the Clubfoot* by Valentine Williams".

—'An old suit of your clothes, an American hat and some horn spectacles.'

'Crude,' said Tommy. 'But I catch the idea. McCarty incog. And I am Riordan.'

'That's it. I thought we ought to practice American detective methods as well as English ones. Just for once I am going to be the star, and you will be the humble assistant.'

'Don't forget,' said Tommy warningly, 'that it's always an innocent remark by the simple Denny that puts McCarty on the right track.'

So who were Riordan and McCarty? Osborne gives their author as Isabel Ostrander (1885-1924) and says they appeared in *McCarty Incog.* Tommy McCarty was an ex-cop and Dennis Riordan had been a fireman.

—'You may have forgotten the fact, but I was once a clergyman's daughter myself. I remember what it was like. Hence this altruistic urge – this spirit of thoughtful consideration for others – this – '

'You are getting ready to be Roger Sheringham, I see,' said Tommy. 'If you will allow me to make a criticism, you talk quite as much as he does, but not nearly so well.'

So who was Roger Sheringham? Roger Sheringham was the brainchild of Anthony Berkeley who used him in several books, *The Wychford Poisoning Case*, *Top Story Murder* and *Murder in the Basement*.

* * * * *

Around the same time Victor Gollancz brought out *Famous Plays of To-Day* (1930) and I was surprised to find that none of the writers meant anything to me. It was perhaps a humbling reminder of the ephemeral nature of fame—or perhaps Gollancz saw things in these plays which other people didn't. But that second idea is debatable. The plays when they were put on had actors who were already known or became household names, like Laurence Olivier, so after reading the plays (and finding them interesting), I pondered on those forgotten playwrights and what else they wrote and why they have been forgotten.

Journey's End by R. C. Sherriff
Young Woodley by John van Druten
Many Waters by Monckton Hoffe
The Lady with a Lamp by Reginald Berkeley
Such Men Are Dangerous by Ashley Dukes
Mrs. Moonlight by Benn W. Levy

And while I was pondering, in the happy way that such things happen, I came upon a book called *Great Modern British Plays* chosen by J. W. Marriott and brought out by Harrap in 1929 which included Ashley Dukes' 'The Man With a Load of Mischief' and Reginald Berkeley's 'The White Chateau' but also gave me more playwrights whose names also meant nothing to me. But apart from reminding me that there is probably a whole interesting world of worthy-to-be-remembered plays out there it also raises the question as to why publishers were suddenly rushing out collections of plays with words like 'Great' and 'Famous' in the title. Was it because talking pictures were coming in and the theatre felt a need to assert itself against the seduction of actually hearing celluloid heroes *speak* …

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I came upon Kenneth Tynan's *A View of the English Stage 1944 – 63* and wondered if those playwrights had gone on to do lasting work. But the only mention was this: "Must it again be urged that Britain is the only European country with a living theatrical tradition which lacks a national theatre; and that the public money which gave us a visual library, the National Gallery, is

needed just as vitally to provide (in Benn Levy's phrase) a 'living library' of plays?" But reading that you wouldn't know whether Levy is an actor, writer, director, entrepreneur …

I don't know that I would've wanted Tynan in the wings when I put on my new play; he is savage but also at times very funny. The trouble is—his humour is almost always at the expense of actors, directors, writers, set-designers …

He does mention several plays and playwrights that aren't part of the everyday. For instance did you ever think of Graham Greene as a playwright? He sums up Greene's *The Potting Shed* in an imaginary Q & A between a theatre critic and a psychiatrist:

P. (*controllingly*): Tell me about the play. Force yourself back into the theatre. Slump now as you slumped then in D16.

C. (*in a hoarse whisper*): Graham Greene wrote it. It began with the death of a famous atheist, head of a rationalist clan. Greene made them out to be a bunch of decrepit puritans, so old-fashioned that they even enjoyed the company of dowdy dullards like Bertrand Russell. But fair enough: Greene's a Catholic, and the history of Catholicism shows that you can't make an omelette without breaking eggheads. Anti-intellectual jokes are part of the recipe. At first I thought I was in for a whodunit. The old man's son – Sir John – was kept away from the death-bed because of something nameless that had happened to him in the potting shed at the age of fourteen. There were clues all over the place. For one thing, he had recently lost his dog…

P. (*shrewdly*): Dog is God spelled backwards.

C. : The same crude thought occurred to me, but I rejected it (pity my complexity) as being unworthy of the author. How wrong I was! The hero's subsequent investigations into his past revealed that we were indeed dealing not with a whodunit but a God-dunit. He had hanged himself in the dread shed, and demonstrably died. And his uncle, the priest, had begged God to revive him. Make me an offer, haggled the Deity. My faith in exchange for the boy's life, said the priest: and so the repulsive bargain was struck. The boy lived, and uncle lost his faith. My first impulse on hearing these farcical revelations was to protest by the only means at my disposal: a derisive hiccup. But then I looked about me and saw row after row of rapt, attentive faces. *They were taking it seriously!* And suddenly, in a blaze of darkness, I knew that my faith in the theatre and the people who attend it had been withdrawn from me.

P.: But why?

C.: You may not now remember the theatre as it was ten years ago. It seemed on the brink of renaissance. I was one of many who were newly flushed with a great conviction. We recklessly believed that a theatre was a place where human problems could be stated in human terms, a place from which supernatural intervention as a solution to such problems had at long last been ousted. Drama for us was an affirmation of humanism, and its basic maxim was not: 'I died that you may live,' but: 'I *live* that you may live.' *The Potting Shed*, financed by two normally intelligent managements at a highly reputable theatre, shot us back overnight to the dark ages.

P.: But what Gibbon? 'The Catholic superstition, which is always the enemy of reason, is often the parent of the arts'?

C.: Art that is not allied with reason is today the enemy of life. And now you must excuse me. You have kept me in bed long after my usual time for getting up. And I have a first-night to attend. The play, I understand, is a fearless indictment of a priest who refuses to accompany a murderer to the scaffold because of stupid, heretical, rationalist doubts about the efficacy of prayer to bring the man back to life. The bounder will no doubt be shown his error. Meanwhile (*he takes a deep draught of red-eye*), here's to good old G.G.! Who said the Pope had no

divisions? (*He departs, half-clad and half-cut, to perform in a spirit of obedient humility the offices laid down for him by providence and the Society of West End Theatre Managers.*)

I wonder what Graham Greene thought of this as a review? And it seemed to me that humanism can become as limiting as depending on Divine Intervention—which is probably why the theatre then forewent Reason for the joys of the Absurd.

* * * * *

So my mystery playwrights—what of them? Ashley Dukes sets 'The Man with a Load of Mischief' in a 'wayside inn' of the same name. J. W. Marriott says of Dukes, "In his fascinating little book *The English Drama* Mr H. F. Rubinstein observes: "The Round Head, metamorphosed in the High Brow, has already discovered the importance of not being Shavian, and a new cause invented by Gordon Craig has attracted many zealots by its mystery and its unpopularity. … Two poet-playwrights, Clifford Bax and Ashley Dukes, harking back to old æsthetic values, show signs of having fallen under its spell. … In *The Man with a Load of Mischief* Dukes reflects the revolutionary ardour of a Beaumarchais through a surface of polished euphuism."

He goes on to say, "Mr Ashley Dukes has been a dramatic critic for nearly twenty years, and has frequently expounded his theories of drama. "Some writers for the theatre, like the impressionistic painters of the end of the last century, now seek to give the essentials, rather than the details, of dramatic action and portraiture. … These are methods of approach (or, as actors sometimes say, of 'attack') that differ fundamentally from the naturalistic method, and contain within themselves the seed which comes to flower in dramatic style. The will to style is a blind impulse of the theatre which may be given direction by the playwright."

"Such a playwright is Mr Dukes himself, a stylist who, while stressing the importance of words, takes stance in militant opposition to what Mr Drinkwater has called plays of hearsay.

"*The Man with a Load of Mischief* is a dramatic poem in prose which it is interesting to compare in theme and treatment with *By Candlelight*, adapted by Captain Harry Graham from the German of Siegfried Geyer. Mr Dukes' adaptation of a French war-play under the English title of *No Man's Land* had a run at the St Martin's Theatre, and his adaptation of a German play, *Such Men are Dangerous*, was produced by Mr Matheson Lang at the Duke of York's Theatre. The author has also made a stage version of *Jew Süss*."

A runaway carriage, its horses frightened by a body swaying on a gibbet, is stopped by a nobleman following and everyone ends up at the nearby inn. It at first suggests a play of chivalry and romance but the nobleman describes the rescued lady to his lackey as 'a pretty parasite, a prince's mistress' and it gradually becomes clear that the nobleman was not opportunely on the spot but was pursuing that runaway mistress. It was as dangerous then to spurn a prince as it is now to flee a violent spouse. Yet all seems calm, the lady at first seems to accept even express her gratitude but we soon find she understands very well the predicament she is in.

She asks him frankly, "Now why did you follow me?"

NOBLEMAN: There is a code of honour that imposes silence in such affairs.

LADY: I have heard of it. A man's code. It decrees that women shall not be spoken of, but only marketed.

NOBLEMAN: Protected, madam.

LADY: Protected, if you like it better. A man's code, with one chief commandment.

NOBLEMAN: And that is?

LADY: Thou shalt not be made a laughing-stock.

NOBLEMAN: Excellent.

LADY: A runaway wife makes a fool of her husband. A runaway mistress makes her lover farcical. On such occasions men put their heads together, solemn as church owls, and mumble

their precious code of honour. I know, my lord. While women curtsey to them and thank them for their chivalry.

NOBLEMAN: Is this a war of the sexes?

LADY: And what if it be? Oh, I am not one of the wives who sit and wait for favours! Or even one of the mistresses who aspire to be wives, with one hand on their deed of settlement and the other on the cradle. You need not trouble to protect my name. When I give I give all for nothing. I am free of your property laws.

NOBLEMAN: Yet the fortunate man who has once pleased you has his pride to consider.

Bested in his attempt to get her to agree to return to her spurned lover the nobleman turns to darker measures; he will compromise her maid and his man will compromise the lady and thus give her no choice if she wants to keep some reputation but to come back to her unwanted prince. Though the maid plays her part we are on shifting sand when it comes to the lackey. Is he simply doing his lord's bidding or is he genuinely sympathetic? Did they know each other in the past long before they got caught up in the lives of the rich and powerful? Will she maintain her strong desire to escape or ultimately be drawn back into the web from which she tried to free herself?

There is an odd clue. The nobleman says soon after he reaches the inn, "Who would have guessed our fate this morning? Two nodding horses, two nodding horsemen, and the fortune of the road. How many milestones have I passed to-day—and each of them the grave of an hour lost in travelling! How many crazy loads of hay, and rosy farmers in their market-carts, and great full-bellied corn-stacks, and feathered elms like striding cockerels! I was sick of meadowsweet and buttercups, I was surfeited with rich acres. The world is very coarse: Nature disgusts me."

Later the man says to himself, "A woman wished me pleasant dreams. This echo from the stillness—this babble of a sleeping world! On every hand men whisper love. Set ears to earth and hear them murmur: "I love you," "Do you love me?" "You are mine and I am yours." Still they sleep and spin through nothingness. Shall we whisper so—we who have met in the night? Are we sleepwalkers? Shall we march at every passion's call? Shall we weave a pretty cloak of words and kisses? Shall we lift a mask or two of trickery, only to meet another mask behind? It is a mask that brings us face to face. The masks divide, the masks unite, and we are still in darkness. We grope through labyrinths of self, our fingers grasping thorns, our voices echoed by a wall. We seek for hands and not for lips."

The nobleman, we soon learn, is a dissembler. But the soliloquoy on his man's part suggests both an intelligent man and also a man who would be disinclined to accept his master's view that "The grand discovery of the Renaissance—if we are to call it a discovery—was the goodness of man. The prime delusion. The new Serpent in Eden. Since that sop was thrown to man's conceit the creature has strutted in his garden like a peacock on holiday."

It is an intriguing and quietly dramatic play so I wondered how it was received when it played on the London stage. Even more intriguing is the question of who gets remembered, re-found, re-done, hailed as an unfairly forgotten playwright or novelist. Why is one play, apparently as interesting and dramatic as another, lost and another found? Why were those mystery writers not re-published when others from the past continue to turn up as Golden Age successes in re-prints and Large Print versions?

* * * * *

Agatha Christie is certainly not forgotten as a playwright but she is forgotten as a serious novelist. Perhaps it would be truer to say that she never became known as a straight novelist. Dorothy Hughes in a chapter titled 'The Christie Nobody Knew' in H. R. F. Keating's *Agatha Christie* says, "Everyone knew the Agatha Christie who created Hercule Poirot. She was the clever Christie, the one who thought up all manner of intricacies to tempt the attention of the

reader and of the little Belgian detective. Almost as many knew the Mrs Christie who wrote of Miss Marple, illuminator of the English village, a lady in the complete sense of the word, genteel and imperturbable. In later years she would become a part of the Christie self-portrait. There were many who knew the Christie who, more or less as a pastime, wrote of that bright young couple, Tuppence and Tommy. And certainly, known to all her admirers was the Christie of centre stage, she who proved a writer could be at one and the same time equally successful as a playwright and as a novelist.

"There was yet another Christie whom nobody knew, or so few as to amount to almost nobody. This was Mary Westmacott. Even today, and even in book circles, there are more who do not know than who do know her true identity.

"Agatha Christie became Mary Westmacott in 1930 to write an unmystery novel, *Giant's Bread*. It caused rather less than a sensation. Four years later, Mary Westmacott tried again. Her second novel, *Unfinished Portrait*, like the first, made little to no imprint on the literary annals of the season."

So she wrote no more unmystery novels for ten years then in 1944 she brought out *Absent in the Spring*, a little gem of a novel, and followed it with *The Rose and the Yew Tree* in 1947. Again they roused little interest but in 1952 she wrote *A Daughter's a Daughter* and in 1956 *The Burden*. Then she gave up on trying to interest the public with a different kind of book and accepted that they were essentially a failed experiment.

Hughes writes, "Why? Why the waste of six unusual books, six fine books, six books which encompass some of the best of Christie's writing? There is no reason why anyone should pay a lick of attention to my answer to my question. True, it comes from a good many years of observation of the way of books. But it is no more that a personal opinion.

"In my opinion then, Mary Westmacott's work was mishandled."

It was promoted as 'women's fiction'. And although it is more likely to appeal to women rather than men 'women's fiction' is used as shorthand for romance and these books, though they contain aspects of love stories, are not romances. So the books lost out doubly. Buyers who thought they were getting a sophisticated Mills & Boon were disappointed. Readers who knew Westmacott and Christie were the same person expected dead bodies to intrude and were no doubt disappointed when they didn't. But the books are themselves and should not need to be marketed as anything beyond themselves. For those readers who *did* want something more they have in the books a greater insight into Agatha Christie the woman than any of the mysteries offer but despite the celebrity status of some writers I'm not sure that this is what most of her readers were looking for. And she presented herself as a quiet retiring ordinary woman, not a figure of glamour or scandal.

But Hughes' summing up is still a good reason to go and seek those titles out. "These are works in which Christie is trying to fathom herself and those who were a part of her world. The stories are the revelations of a woman of perception, a woman who is searching human emotions to preserve and heighten moments which must be remembered. She is writing of men and women whose dreams bleed when pricked, who are not beset by the gods or the fates, but who are made bereft by human frailties and a wanton expenditure of the loving heart."

And there is a further disconcerting thought tucked in there. If Agatha Christie had not already had the success of her detective stories would she even have got her Westmacott novels published at all? Because non-publication would have been a pity.

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September 16: Wilfrid Burchett
September 17: William Carlos Williams

September 18: Dr Samuel Johnson
September 19: William Golding
Michael Noonan
September 20: Upton Sinclair
Henry Salt

* * * * *

"A station wagon maneuvers along the blacked-out Gran Via, skirting the ripped pavements and shell holes. It moves without lights, slowly, cautiously. At the end of the thoroughfare it turns right and crawls through the shattered streets leading to Casa del Campo. This is no longer the city under siege – it is the battle zone itself.

The night is suddenly convulsed. Great sheets of light flash through the sky. The silence is shredded by a deafening cannonade that sickens the ear. The pavement trembles like a living being seized by fear.

In the orange-red glare of an exploding shell the station wagon lurches to the side of the street, then speeds forward as if there is no longer need for caution. Soon it is roaring into Casa del Campo, the Royal Park, heading straight for the trenches which are pin-pointed in the darkness by the blaze of guns and the sounds of battle.

This is Madrid on the night of December 23, 1936.

"The Christmas season has come, but Madrid lies in darkness, under curfew, stabbed by the enemy's steel-sheathed forces. Soon, perhaps, if the moon cuts through the clouds, the bombers will come, filling the sky with their angry snarl.

Today the enemy's shelling began promptly at four in the afternoon; the shells droned methodically into the streets, searching out the most densely populated districts. At dinnertime it began again, continued for an hour, precisely at the moment men and women filled the streets on their way home from work. "We are saving Spain from Bolshevism," say the communiqués issued at Burgos and written in Berlin; to "save" Spain the traitor generals are destroying Madrid.

During the noon hour a crowd of workers on the Gran Via listened to one of their leaders report on the war. From the meeting the volunteers marched directly to the trenches in Casa del Campo. Their guns were old, but their songs were new and their faces shining. This afternoon the women in the working-class district of Cuatro Caminos bore the brunt of the shelling, some losing a home, some a roof, some a bed, some a child; but tonight the women of the working class labor behind the men from their own streets, digging defenses in the frozen earth and carrying the banner of their new emancipation: WE WOULD RATHER BE WIDOWS OF HEROES THAN WIVES OF SLAVES!

Madrid! Gored, bloodied, shaken, betrayed … but defended. For thirty-seven days the city has been fighting for its life. Now, on the thirty-seventh day, the idea of defense is as natural and automatic in the lives of the people as eating and sleeping. "We must decide whether we will be hammer or anvil," a speaker cried the other day at one of the great political rallies held despite the bombers. The audience understood, and cheered wildly. It understood; for as long ago as the February days of the Frente Popular electoral victory the Madrileño cast himself in the role of hammer, with history as his anvil and Spain to be forged anew. Now the hammer is on the anvil, and at Burgos the generals are trying to discover where their easy victory went astray."

From *The Scalpel The Sword* by Ted Allan and Sydney Gordon, a biography of Canadian doctor Norman Bethune.

Upton Sinclair is now remembered almost solely for his 'muckraking' exposé of the Chicago meat trade *The Jungle* of which he said "I aimed at the public's heart and hit its

stomach." In fact he was a prolific writer churning out books from a socialist perspective and written in a plain unadorned style. He looked at all kinds of subjects, from oil to self-help co-ops, war-mongering, big business, the American Civil War, the costs of marriage and the profits of religion, even mental telepathy, and his own experience of curing illness by fasting. He wrote various pamphlets for his campaign to become Governor of California including his ideas on how to end poverty—and when he lost he wrote *How I Got Licked and Why*. He also wrote a children's story *The Gnomobile*, about two gnomes Glogo and Bono, for his granddaughter.

The other day I came upon his novel *¡No Pasaran! A Novel of the Battle of Madrid*. In fact most of the story is set in America where young and apolitical Rudy Messer is turned down by a girl and goes wandering round the streets and gets caught up in the police dispersal of a rally trying to stop the export of weapons to Franco's Fascists in Spain. He befriends a young Jewish man Izzy Bloch who has been wounded by the police and is gradually drawn into an understanding of what Depression poverty really means and he starts to attend meetings. Rudy works for his uncle, a comfortably-off German factory owner whose family are supporters of the New Germany Hitler is creating, and his gradual interest in politics and ideas of the Left do not go down well. Eventually he is disowned and, naturally, goes off to Spain with Izzy to fight in the International Brigade. It has the disadvantages of Sinclair's writing in that the characters are too often merely mouthpieces for ideas rather than strongly drawn characters in their own right. But I found myself quite sympathetic to Izzy and Rudy. The book came out in 1937—before Madrid fell to Franco and when hope was still strong …

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At the same time I came upon a book by Ernest Hemingway with the title *The Fifth Column*. When I opened it, to my surprise I found it was a play. I had never thought of Hemingway as a dramatist and I don't think this was the play to change that view. He said of it "This is only a play about counter-espionage in Madrid. It has the defects of having been written in war time, and if it has a moral it is that people who work for certain organizations have very little time for home life. There is a girl in it named Dorothy but her name might also have been Nostalgia. Perhaps it would be best now for you to read it and for me to stop talking about it. But if being written under fire makes for defects, it may also give a certain vitality."

The play mostly takes place in the Hotel Florida in Madrid where Philip Rawlings is based. He says of himself "I'm a sort of second-rate cop pretending to be a third-rate newspaperman" and the play revolves around him. He is a strong and authoritative figure, perhaps too much so, because the other characters sort of fade into the wallpaper. But the real problem with the play, and which might explain why, despite Hemingway's fame, he didn't get it produced in his lifetime, is that it is mostly talking. People come and go, a man gets shot, there are distant sounds of shelling, but basically people just go on talking …

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A lot of civil wars have come and gone but the Spanish Civil War has a curiously tenacious hold on history. Is it because of the 'names' we associate with the war?

Robert Colls wrote in *George Orwell English Rebel*, "Like Priestley and Chesterton, Hemingway was one of those writers whom Orwell never gave his full attention but with whom he had a lot in common. Both men had lived in the same area of Paris in the 1920s; both were anti-Fascist and anti-Communist, not party men but pro-Republican and pro the masculine virtues too, not only in their lives but in their prose. When they speak, you listen. When you listen, it is in that man-to-man, democratic way that so impressed Thomas Paine in revolutionary America in 1776 and Orwell in revolutionary Spain in 1937. That said, while Orwell served in a trench on twopence a day, Hemingway was in and out of Spain (five times), staying at the Hotel Florida

courtesy of the North American Newspaper Alliance on a dollar rate of $500 a cable. He even had a chauffeur (in Madrid he had four), and his girlfriend Martha Gellhorn had a direct line to the White House. All the same, man (and girlfriend) could really write. Although Orwell affected disdain for Hemingway's tough-guy prose, it is hard to believe he did not learn from it. Years later, when they were both serving as newspaper war correspondents, they met briefly in Paris at the Hotel Scribe, an incident that the American felt obliged to inflate as time went by."

And D. J. Taylor in *Orwell The Life* writes, "Barcelona, Orwell discovered, was full of foreigners. By this stage in its progress the Spanish war had rapidly developed into the *cause célebre* of contemporary international politics. Something of the passions it stirred can be glimpsed in Nancy Cunard's assemblage *Authors Take Sides on the Spanish War*, published as a *Left Review* pamphlet in the autumn of the following year. Of the 148 contributors, the vast majority took the government side, while only five – among them Edmund Blunden and Evelyn Waugh – offered responses that could in any way be construed as pro-Franco. (A last-minute intervention from George Bernard Shaw beginning 'In Spain both the Right and the Left so thoroughly disgraced themselves in the turns they took in trying to govern their country before the Right revolted that it is impossible to say which of them is the more incompetent…' had to be filed under 'unclassified'.) The general tone was set in a statement from Brian Howard, an exemplary 1920s aesthete now ablaze with recently acquired political consciousness: 'A people, nearly half of whom has been denied the opportunity to learn to read, is struggling for bread, liberty and life against the most unscrupulous and reactionary plutocracy in existence … With all my anger and love, I am for the people of Republican Spain.' Orwell later acquired sufficient knowledge of the realities of Spain to hold the convenors of *Authors Take Sides* in the deepest contempt, but the fervour that such publications reflected lay at the heart of pro-Republican feeling, sending thousands of in some cases absurdly youthful volunteers off to Spain to fight for the Communist-run International Brigade."

Although the conflict is, and was, frequently presented as a class conflict, Taylor writes, "However one may have conceived the Spanish war – a defence of democracy, a test of national self-determination in an age of power politics, an opportunity for social revolution – the issues at stake were rarely clear-cut. Orwell himself admitted to Anthony Powell that the sides native Spaniards fought on depended largely on the part of Spain in which they lived."

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'Madrid, June 19, 2011' by Pete Hay begins:

1. Plaza de la Puerta del Sol

The plaza is a whirl of colour,
microsystems in mosaic.
A land-art riot of trim, huddled tents.
A blue billow of tarp slashed
with a tracery of lines.
A Metro ticketer smeared in slogans,
messages, anguish, defiance.
A forest of portaloos
standing, no-nonsense, in the sun.

NO HAY PAN
PARA TANTO
CHORIZO

There were 300.
Police arrived with eviction on their minds.
Fingers flew over keyboards
and folk drifted in, a trickle, a tide,
flotsamed with sleeping bags, grit,
and the ghosting of political ideas
long thought expunged by the firing squads
of the Generalisimo.
A wilderness of democratic animation.
Don't drink alcohol.
No public sex – this is not Woodstock.
Businesses give food.
Committees to clean, communicate, deal with the law.
Sol becomes home to thousands.
Real Democracia Ya!

FREE PALESTINE

VIVA LA RUMBA

We are without bread, jobs, hope.
We are not goods in the hands of politicians and bankers.
Down with Europe.
Down with corruption.
Down with politicians who only serve the imperious market.
Down with politicians…
If you won't let us dream we won't let you sleep.

EL CAPITALISMO
NO SE REFORMA
SE DESTRUYE

Carlos III on his horse,
caparisoned in the banners of change.
You want to know what is happening here?
Ask the man on the horse.

POLITICO!
AGRAVANTE PARA
DELITOS DE
CORRUPCION

The citizens of Sol are old, but more often not.
Clusters cohere, hive apart as amoebae.
Bandanas, bare chests, tank tops, dreds
shuffle along in shapeless dance.

A conga line shakes its banner at the traffic:

CONTRA LAS REDADAS POLICIALES
RACISTAS Y XENOFABAS

Open assembly. Direct action. No violence.
Anarchists. Trots. Separatists.
Laughter. Energy.
Theatre of the Absurd.
Everywhere voices raised.
An intoxication of ideas in electric exchange.

AQUI COMIENCA LA REVOLUCION!

This poem gave me a vivid sense of modern Madrid drowning under unemployment and youthful anger. I sent Hay's book *Girl Reading Lorca* to my son who had been in Madrid as the economy nosedived and he said Hay had caught the mood well. And yet, ghastly as the Spanish Civil War was and miserable as the financial meltdown has been, I am always conscious of the greater horror. Spain fell upon the Americas, ripping apart communities, killing and destroying, carting away priceless treasures to be melted down into anonymous gold bars, feeding unique writings and artifacts into the flames, and leaving its people to struggle as second-class citizens and mourn their lost heritage.

Civil war, unemployment, and chaos were things the Spanish visited upon themselves.

And that is the curious thing.

I once came upon the statement that civil wars are more 'pure', more admirable, because they are about ideas whereas invasion and conquest beyond a nation's borders is more likely to be fuelled by greed for territory and resources.

When I look at Spain, at Syria, it is hard to find any idea that shines pure and bright. A not-very-good-government is replaced after massive bloodshed, horror, trauma and material destruction, by another not-very-good-government.

Is any government worth a life?

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September 21: Mathew Prichard
Edmund Gosse
Shirley Conran

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"The play, *The Mousetrap*, was given to my grandson. Mathew, of course, was always the most lucky member of the family, and it *would* be Mathew's gift that turned out the big money winner." So wrote Agatha Christie in *An Autobiography*. She had predicted that *The Mousetrap* would run for eight months. Instead it has run for more than fifty years. But Mathew did not start out lucky; his father was killed in WW2 when he was only a baby. It was a loss that no theatrical success could ever make up for. But the comparison is interesting. Christie gave her daughter Rosalind, Mathew's mother, the film rights to *Witness for the Prosecution*. She would have made more if she'd received the performance rights as it is still played regularly on stage but I don't think there has been a film since the one with Marlene Dietrich—although I am sure Rosalind did quite well out of that. And I just came upon another of Christie's gifts, in *Agatha Christie and Archaeology*, where Charlotte Trümpler writes, "In spite of her hard work on the sites, she paid

for her own board and lodging and her travel expenses, and she also supported the excavations as an anonymous sponsor. In Nimrud she made financial contributions to the team's food, and she paid for her colleagues' holiday excursions. Sometimes she donated the rights of a detective story to the excavations."

Sometimes I read books where the author makes a thing of giving some of the profits to charity but in a way giving the rights to a piece of work is more generous. It may be published once and forgotten … then again it may be published and re-published and translated and turned into plays and TV dramas and Hollywood epics …

It is a curious question: who benefits from the work of a writer's imagination? Where it is a straightforward gift to one person it doesn't matter. They may make something of it. They may throw the boxes of old paper away as a nuisance. But where an inheritance is divided it can become fraught when one novel remains in print or is set as a high school text or a play continues to be played or is taken up by a film company—and other parts of the inheritance slip out of print, are overlooked and gradually forgotten.

I heard a story of a woman who published a children's book she'd written and illustrated in the thirties. She left boxes of unsold books when she died. Her family put them aside. But then they noticed a copy going for a thousand dollars on Amazon years later. Her book had become rare and desirable. So the family, whenever they needed help to pay school bills, simply took out a book from those boxes and sold it online. I hope they remembered the old lady with affection and gratitude. And they could so easily have said 'Who will ever want these books?' and left them at an op-shop or thrown them away …

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Most of us do not expect to inherit a valuable manuscript or the film rights to a best seller. But sometimes we are given the pleasure of a dedication.

Alex Buzo in *The Young Person's Guide to the Theatre* says, "Sometimes there is more sub-text in the dedication than in the actual play." If there is, we are usually blind to it. Why did someone choose out this friend rather than that friend? Why did they remember one family member and no others? And where the person is hidden behind a nickname it is a very private dedication …

I am fortunate enough to have received a dedication: 'For RB and JH'. I do not think it has ever stopped anyone in their tracks and made them wonder 'Who were RB and JH?' and certainly not in the way that people have pondered the dedication in *Dracula* and asked 'Who—or what—was Hommy-Beg?'

* * * * *

Mathew Prichard wrote, "Nearly seventy years ago a shy but successful authoress, Agatha Christie, met a young enthusiastic archaeologist, Max Mallowan. Their marriage, which lasted nearly fifty years, was a very happy and successful one, and during it both archaeology and detective fiction were huge beneficiaries. There were important finds in northern Iraq, which were enshrined in the magnificent book *Nimrud and its Remains*, not to mention countless articles, lectures and exhibitions that my grandfather wrote and supervised. And, of course, there were over sixty detective novels, plays and short stories, some of the most famous of which used settings in the Middle East that Agatha knew so well from her visits there. There can be few marriages that have been so productive in terms of both scholarship and pure entertainment."

His words about his grandmother are understandable but I was interested to see that he regarded his step-grandfather, Max Mallowan, as his grandfather. His mother later remarried but I would like to think that in the wake of his loss of his father he also had Max to provide him with some of a father's affection and interest …

I would like to think that of all children who lose a parent to war …

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And Nimrud, poor Nimrud, has now been reduced to Remains …

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September 22: Murray Bail
Rosamunde Pilcher
September 23: Alan Villiers
September 24: F. Scott Fitzgerald
September 25: Jessica Anderson
Charles Robert Maturin
William Faulkner

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"Maturin was an Irish clergyman who wrote plays and novels, notably *Melmoth the Wanderer*, a masterpiece of the gothic style. The patronage of Byron and Sir Walter Scott helped him achieve a certain literary recognition, but it did not free him of his perpetual financial difficulties, which were largely the result of an act of kindness in standing security for a bankrupt relative.

"When Maturin did get a bit of money however, he spent it flamboyantly. The ceiling of his house in Dublin was painted with clouds, and scenes from his novels were reproduced on the walls.

"It was Maturin's joy to see his wife, who was a great beauty, well turned out, but he also insisted on her wearing layers of rouge and more than once ordered her back to her dressing table for a thicker application. Maturin's own dress was dictated by a desire to show off his fine figure to good effect. He favoured a huge greatcoat tossed gracefully over his shoulders and tight pantaloons to display his legs. He wore net stockings and evening clothes even when fishing.

"Maturin loved music; he had a good voice and claimed to be 'the best dancer in the Established Church'. In Dublin he held quadrille parties several mornings a week. Morning, noon and night were all one to him: the sun never penetrated his perpetually closed shutters and he lived by artificial light.

"Maturin liked to be surrounded by people while he was working. When he was under the influence of the muse, he would stick a wafer on his head as a signal that he should not be disturbed. At other times, conversation could go on as usual around him and he merely ensured that he should not take part by covering his mouth with a paste made of bread and water.

"He was tremendously absent-minded, sometimes even in matters that he cared deeply about, such as dress. He often made social calls in his dressing gown and slippers or went out wearing one boot and one shoe. He loved parties, but was likely to turn up a day early or late. And he sent his great novel, *Melmoth,* to his publishers as a stack of several thousand out-of-order, unnumbered pages."

Catherine Caulfield in *The Man Who Ate Bluebottles and Other Great British Eccentrics*.

It was fellow-writer James Clarence Mangan who told the story of seeing Maturin walking along York Street "exhibiting to the gaze of the amused and amazed pedestrians whom he almost literally encountered in his path, a boot upon one foot and a shoe on the other."

Clearly he found a very sympathetic and insightful publisher. So I was interested to learn more about the book, if not its author (who like Sheridan Le Fanu descended from French Huguenots, his grandfather Gabriel Jacques Maturin succeeding Jonathon Swift at St Patrick's cathedral as dean but the family suffering something of the sense of divided loyalties which other Huguenot families felt; Maturin's grandson becoming a follower of Cardinal Newman), and what

of that obedient wife? And does *Melmoth* still turn up in anthologies of the Gothic? Or anthologies of Irish writing?

The simple answer is yes: it is easily available as a reprint as an Oxford World Classic. But that is probably about the only easy thing about it. John Melmoth is a student at Trinity College Dublin and his uncle, suspicious, eccentric, miserly, is dying. So far, so good. But the young man inherits more than he bargained on when he takes and reads an ancient crumbling manuscript. I found the book described as 'claustrophobic' but the very dense wordy style is extremely confusing. It wasn't that it induced a sense of being closed in but rather that I often felt like someone lost in a maze. If you can imagine setting forward with Faust on one shoulder and Ahaseurus the Wandering Jew (or more precisely the Wandering Christian) on the other to find an earlier Melmoth caught up in the Spanish Inquisition but wandering off into stories of family troubles and inheritances gone wrong … The one thing I took from Maturin's torrent of Gothic verbiage is that he had a horrified fascination with Spain, Spanish Catholicism, and the Spanish Inquisition.

And what of young John Melmoth back in Dublin? He finishes the manuscript and is confronted by Melmoth the Wanderer who has bargained with the Devil for an extra one hundred and fifty years of life. The Wanderer cries 'Mortals─you are here to talk of my destiny, and of the events which it has involved. That destiny is accomplished, I believe, and with it terminate those events that have stimulated your wild and wretched curiosity. I am here to tell you of both!─I─I─of whom you speak, am here!─Who can tell so well of Melmoth the Wanderer as himself, now that he is about to resign that existence which has been the object of terror and wonder to the world?─Melmoth, you behold your ancestor─the being on whose portrait is inscribed the date of a century and a half, is before you'─ But the Wanderer, like someone leaving Shangri-La, after frightening the young man into 'delirious terror', crumbles into extreme old age and death … As a curiosity it is worth reading. As a book which undoubtedly influenced later writers in the Gothic tradition it has some interest. But as a way to while away a summer afternoon I think I would rather go to one of its distant cousins like *Dracula* or some of Le Fanu's short stories …

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And Mrs Maturin, who had been Henrietta Kingsbury─what did she think of Melmoth, rouge, and poverty? She had been a well-known singer but it is her sister Sarah who perhaps made a greater mark, becoming the grandmother of Oscar Wilde … Nevertheless Mrs Maturin seems to have taken her eccentric husband in her stride and coped cheerfully with the vicissitudes of their up-and-down life …

* * * * *

September 26: Joseph Furphy
T. S. Eliot
September 27: William Empson
September 28: Kate Douglas Wiggin
Herman McNeile ('Sapper')
September 29: Elizabeth Gaskell
September 30: Truman Capote
October 1: Henry St John Bolingbroke
Annie Besant
October 2: Roy Campbell

* * * * *

Time was when a poet was deemed *rara avis*;
Now they babble on bough like the merle or the mavis.
One or two in a lifetime was all very well;
But who's to keep pace when some sixty break shell?

James Rhoades

When I came upon that little piece I immediately thought of Roy Campbell and his sarcastic jibes at other writers but possibly his cynicism grew with age. And I always feel awkward when I laugh. Funny, yes, but I find myself thinking 'I might be the butt of the jibe. One of those also-rans … '

"The poet Roy Campbell, born in 1901, was a son of the influential and respected Durban family of Dr Sam Campbell. Roy was a larger-than-life character, an exuberant rebel and romantic, who came early to his prime as a poet of great gifts. In 1924 his poem 'The Flaming Terrapin' was hailed in Britain and America as well as at home. Returning from a brief episode at Oxford, he determined to create a literary and also political periodical. He was enabled to do this through the patronage of Lewis Reynolds, the young son of a wealthy sugar family. Campbell and his wife and baby were invited by Reynolds to live on his estate in a simple beach cottage at Sezela, south of Durban."

J. D. F. Jones in his book about Laurens van der Post, *Storyteller*.

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Van der Post in his old age and long after Campbell had descended into alcoholism and died (in 1957) remembered walking with Campbell one evening: "It was a lovely early Spring night, cloudless, cool and clear, and to soothe the restless little Anna, Campbell suggested that we walk up and down on the beach. I remember even at one stage making little fires at the side of our walk to keep her amused. But the night was dominated for me by a full recital from beginning to end, of Campbell's poem, 'Tristan da Cunha'. After weeks of struggle he had at last got it ended to his liking … As we walked up and down in the dark along the beach, Campbell at moments seemed to me to be in danger of dropping Anna, because he wanted so much to follow his habitual custom of waving his hands almost like a Zulu when he spoke … The sound of his voice was caught up in the sound of the great swell of the Indian Ocean breaking on the beach, sending its wash powerfully in our direction, so that the foam and the spray came out of the dark with a wonderful sort of unworldly glow … the sound was covered with such a sheen of quicksilver water that it became a mirror for the universe above, and we walked trampling the stars and the Milky Way under our feet … When at last Campbell came to the end of his long lyrical poem, I was really in tears … It was a moment in my life which has never dimmed."

So how does his poem about the little island in the South Atlantic end?
Now in the eastern sky the fairest planet
Pierces the dying waves with dangled spear,
And in the whirring hollows of your granite
That vaster sea to which you are a shell
Sighs with a ghostly rumour, like the drear
Moan of the nightwind in a hollow cell.

We shall not meet again; over the wave
Our ways divide, and yours is straight and endless,
But mine is short and crooked to the grave:

Yet what of these dark crowds amid whose flow
I battle like a rock, aloof and friendless,
Are not their generations vague and endless
The waves, the strides, the feet on which I go?

Anthony Thwaite in *Twentieth Century English Poetry* wrote, "Roy Campbell's poetic personality was vigorous, masculine and prolific. Born in South Africa, where he raged against the philistinism and provincialism of the country, he became something of a deliberate philistine himself when he came to England, and raged equally fiercely against what he considered to be the effeminacy and inbred cosiness of English literary life. As a Roman Catholic and an almost Yeatsian believer in 'nobility' and 'aristocracy', he was one of the few writers in Britain to support Franco's cause during the Spanish Civil War, and the only one actually to fight on Franco's side. 'The Georgiad'. a satire on English literary personalities of the early 1930s, made him one set of enemies, and such lyrics as 'Hot Rifles' and 'Christ in Uniform'–seeing the war in Spain as a holy crusade against the infidel–made him another. Yet he was so open in his combativeness, so almost child-like in his hates and enthusiasms, that his satire hardly ever seems sour or rancorous."

Campbell moved further and further to the right as he got older and I am not sure if I would've liked him in person (he had a habit of using his fists when he got into an argument) but I do still like some of his poems. For instance 'Horses on the Camargue' still gives a great sense of wild freedom. It begins:

In the grey wastes of dread,
The haunt of shattered gulls where nothing moves
But in a shroud of silence like the dead,
I heard a sudden harmony of hooves,
And, turning, saw afar
A hundred snowy horses unconfined,
The silver runaways of Neptune's car
Racing, spray-curled, like waves before the wind.
Sons of the Mistral, fleet
As him with whose strong gusts they love to flee,
Who shod the flying thunders on their feet
And plumed them with the snortings of the sea;
Theirs is no earthly breed
Who only haunt the verges of the earth
And only on the sea's salt herbage feed—
Surely the great white breakers gave them birth.

And although I think of him writing books about horses, zebras, birds, he also wrote 'people' poems such as 'Zulu Girl' which are still worth reading.

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October 3: James Herriot
October 4: Mary Elizabeth Braddon

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'I thought Miss Braddon the most wonderful novelist who had ever lived, and was anxious to get back to *Lady Audley's Secret*. Bella, who was now eighteen, had given it to me for my birthday in May, and, this being the end of July, I had still not exhausted its glories and was racing through a third reading.'

All the Day Long by Howard Spring.

'Blackouts occurred often in KL. And they were never opportune. In February 1909, the Spotted Dog was plunged in darkness an hour before a performance of *Lady Audley's Secret* was due to start. The club, used to these emergencies, simply set out candles and resolved to press ahead. But the city was in darkness, too, and at curtain time, the audience consisted of just two people. The recital was cancelled. Lady Audley could relax; at least until the lights were restored, her secret was safe.'

Murder on the Verandah: Love and betrayal in British Malaya by Eric Lawlor.

'Confident in his magnificent system, Deputy Chief of Staff General Waldersee had not even returned to Berlin at the beginning of the crisis but had written to Jagow: "I shall remain here ready to jump; we are all prepared at the General Staff; in the meantime there is nothing for us to do." It was a proud tradition inherited from the elder, or "great," Moltke who on mobilization day in 1870 was found lying on a sofa reading *Lady Audley's Secret*.'

Barbara Tuchman in *The Guns of August*.

Do you get the impression that everywhere you went someone was reading *Lady Audley's Secret*? And if they were—what then was the secret of the book's success?

* * * * *

Mary Braddon had an interesting connection to Tasmania. Her brother Edward had gone to India but later came to Tasmania and set up in business. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. Obviously that someone thought he had the sort of business skills which would help Tasmania's fledgling parliamentary system.

An interesting article in *Tasmanian Ancestry* called 'A Passage from India—Anglo-Indians in Tasmania' by Shirley Foster mentions him. Strictly speaking he wasn't Anglo-Indian but a mere bird of passage. "Edward Braddon, a federalist who was knighted in 1891 and Premier from 1894 to 1899, made an important contribution to the development of the state as did other Anglo-Indians, their wives and descendants. They were involved in agricultural societies, sporting clubs and community affairs."

And of course—politics. Edward Braddon was the longest-serving 19th century premier, holding the job from 1894 to 1899. He has the electorate of Braddon named after him and he also gave his name to a curious thing called the Braddon Clause. When Federation was being vigorously discussed it was suggested that the colonies hand over the collecting of Customs and Excise to the proposed Commonwealth. But this was a major earner for them and they weren't keen. Braddon suggested that the Commonwealth return three-quarters of the monies raised (or use them to pay off state debts) and that this would be reviewed in ten years time. The states agreed and six separate colonies became one nation. The problem was: the proposed federal government had no power while they were separate colonies. But ten years later the federal government had become a powerful centralising body while the states could no longer bend Canberra to their will. In the meantime Braddon had died but it didn't stop state politicians criticising him. His compromise was even described as the Braddon Blot!

Given Edward Braddon's prominence did this mean that everyone who could read in nineteenth century Tasmania was reading the exciting and mildly scandalous *Lady Audley's Secret*? Perhaps whispering behind their hands 'Did you know the Premier's *sister* wrote it?' It was serialised, it was printed and re-printed, it was a nineteenth century publishing phenomenon. So are there dozens of old copies still kicking around?

I don't know about dozens but the library tracked down a 2003 reprint for me.

The book is a Sensation Novel rather than a Gothic (though Bruce Murphy also lists her in *The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery*), she doesn't pile on the Gothic adjectives like Le Fanu in *Uncle Silas* … but she does infuse her setting with a faint feeling of unease …

"A fierce and crimson sunset. The mullioned windows and the twinkling lattices are all ablaze with the red glory; the fading light flickers upon the leaves of the limes in the long avenue, and changes the still fish-pond into a sheet of burnished copper; even into those dim recesses of briar and brushwood, amidst which the old well is hidden, the crimson brightness penetrates in fitful flashes, till the dank weeds and the rusty iron wheel and broken woodwork seem as if they were flecked with blood.

"The lowing of a cow in the quiet meadows, the splash of a trout in the fish-pond, the last notes of a tired bird, the creaking of waggon-wheels upon the distant road, every now and then breaking the evening silence, only made the stillness of the place seem more intense. It was almost oppressive, this twilight stillness. The very repose of the place grew painful from its intensity, and you felt as if a corpse must be lying somewhere within that grey and ivy-covered pile of building—so deathlike was the tranquillity of all around."

But the book shares something with many 19th century Gothics. It requires the villain, in this case Lady Audley, to be touched by the devil's hand. She has been born poor and her mother has been put away in an asylum. She goes out to work as a governess. She attracts a young man, George Talboys, whose father casts him off for marrying beneath him. George, not liking a life of poverty, abandons his wife and baby son and goes off to Australia where he eventually makes his fortune on the goldfields. His wife, to provide for herself and her child, changes her name and goes out to work again. She attracts the eye of Sir Michael Audley, in his fifties, and although she doesn't pretend love she agrees to marry him. I suspect many women placed in that situation of not knowing whether their lawful husbands were alive or dead made similar dangerous choices. She hears that George is returning by boat and arranges for a neighbour who is dying to be buried under her name. Unfortunately Sir Michael's nephew, Robert Audley, was good friends with George Talboys who turns up first at his father-in-law's expecting to simply take up marriage where he so casually left off, then to visit Robert at Audley Court. Here he meets Lady Audley privately and goads her with her faithlessness. She pushes him and he falls down the old well. But her maid Phoebe Marks has seen this and she and her husband Luke blackmail Lady Audley into setting up and constantly providing for them in a country inn. Unbeknown to Lady Audley Luke Marks knows that George Talboys survived the fall into the well.

But she, beset on all sides, with two blackmailers, with Robert Audley who is convinced she has done away with his friend, with her need to supply money to her father and her young son, resented by her grown-up stepdaughter Alicia, and living always with the fear that she has inherited her mother's 'taint', ends up burning down the inn while Robert Audley is staying there. It doesn't help her. He escapes and tells Sir Michael that his wife is a bigamist. The drunkard Luke Marks tells Robert of how ungraciously Lady Audley paid over the constant demands for hush money (as though she should be expected to respond to such demands with kindness and friendliness) and Robert has Lady Audley incarcerated in a lunatic asylum where she eventually dies. Robert marries George's sister Clara and Braddon ends her story with "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace."

I assume nineteenth century readers liked it because they saw the Scarlet Woman getting her Just Desserts, though Murphy says, "Some Victorian critics took Braddon to task for "immorality" and for making crime seem attractive", but it left me with pity rather than

repugnance for Lady Audley. She isn't a likeable character but I was struck by her terrible 'aloneness'. There is no one she can trust, no one she can turn to for wise counsel, no one who sees her simply as an unfortunate woman living by her wits and looks who has got herself into a situation from which she can see no way out except death, no one who doesn't want something from her and no one who seems to understand that many women living in a world where they had so few options made the choices which would make their lives easier and more comfortable even if those choices weren't always legal.

Lady Audley is described as cunning but she is the hunted animal at bay.

And I wonder how Mary Braddon felt as she put her lively pen to the page—as she lived with a married man, John Maxwell, whose wife was in an asylum. Did Lady Audley help to assuage her own secret feelings of guilt or doubt? Did she console herself with the knowledge that she had not taken that dangerous step which would put her beyond the law? To be a mistress was legal. To be a bigamous wife was illegal.

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October 5: Vaclav Havel
October 6: William Tyndale
Henry Fitzgerald "Gerald" Heard
October 7: Thomas Kenneally
October 8: John Cowper Powys
October 9: John Lennon
October 10: Harold Pinter
October 11: François Mauriac
Ethel Mannin
October 12: James McAuley
October 13: Guy Boothby
October 14: Miles Franklin
Katherine Mansfield
October 15: P. G. Wodehouse
Michel Foucalt
October 16: Oscar Wilde
Edward Ardizzone
October 17: Les Murray
Elinor Glyn
October 18: James Truslow Adams
October 19: Sir Thomas Browne
October 20: Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Dr Joyce Brothers

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George Abrams in *That Man* about Revlon's founder Charles Revson tells how the company came to sponsor the quiz show 'The $64,000 Question' back in 1955 and found many people with unexpected knowledge. 'And then there was Joyce Brothers, a psychologist from Manhatten.

'Dr. Brothers was a fairly attractive, though certainly not charismatic contestant. Her category was boxing. She had studied the *Ring Magazine* book of statistics from A to the proverbial Z. She knew everything about everything to do with boxing. The producers were overjoyed. Here was a female contestant savvy about a sport only men were supposed to know, and on top of that, professionally she was a practicing psychologist of obvious intelligence.

‘In the isolation booth, without hesitation, she answered the questions tossed to her by master of ceremonies Hal March. She climbed from the basic $64 plateau to the highest of them all. On the evening when she finally was ready for the $64,000 top prize the world waited, as breathless in suspense as we all were.’ (This must be put down to hyperbole: most of the world did not have TV in 1955.) ‘For the fact is, no one at Revlon, nor at EPI (the production house) wanted Dr. Joyce Brothers to win. By the time she had reached this highest plateau we were, to use Martin Revson’s expression, “fed to the ass with her.” She had proven a dull, flat contestant without personality. A robot reciting ring statistics.

‘In the pre-production meeting in Martin Revson’s office the Wednesday following her attainment of the $32,000 prize level, there was a general agreement that she had become a “lousy” contestant.

‘“There must be some question you can ask her that will knock her off,” Martin pleaded to Steve Carlin, the show’s producer. “Hey, we can’t do that,” said Harry Fleischmann, president of EPI. Martin persisted.

‘The following Tuesday night, I entered the well crowded CBS-Studio 52 to find Martin Revson already there. He looked at me and smiled the smile of the complacent cat.

‘“Steve has a question he says she’ll never answer in a million years,” he whispered in my ear.

‘And so he had.

‘When Joyce Brothers stepped into the booth, a dramatic hush fell over the audience. This was the big night and the first woman ever to try for the $64,000 prize. Hal March began by asking her what appeared to be a not too difficult question in the light of her past responses. She was given a three part question — the first part asking her to name the winners of a number of major prizefights over a 50-year period. She answered that question in 1, 2, 3 order and without even hesitating. The second question asked her to name the round in which these decisions had occurred and what the decisions were — knockouts, TKO’s, draws. She answered that question, rapidly, and almost too easily.

‘Martin turned to me in the front row looking disgusted. Then came the third and final question. I looked into the control booth at Mert Koplin, the director of the show, and he was as intense as anyone I have ever seen. The final question, the one which would decide whether Dr. Joyce Brothers would win $64,000. The silence in the studio was tomb-like. While she paused, thinking of the response to the question — “Now, Dr. Brothers, name the *referees* in each of these bouts.” — the special music, suspenseful music, played as all eyes watched the contestant in the isolation booth.

‘Then came the moment. Hal March, almost expecting failure, asked, “Do you have the answer, Dr. Brothers?”

‘Bang, bang, bang. The answers — the correct answers — came through the microphone as Hal March nodded his head with each response. “Yes … you’re right, Dr. Brothers … You’ve just won $64,000!” The studio went wild. Martin turned to me and said, “Shit!” ’

Quiz shows came under intense scrutiny with claims of rigging, contestants fed answers, and general skulduggery. But Joyce Brothers had won fair and square, and in a hostile environment, and took her money and her new-found fame out into the marketplace and made herself a household name as a columnist and adviser, spending forty years with *Good Housekeeping* and writing *What Every Woman Should Know About Men* (perhaps drawing on her encyclopaedic knowledge of the very male sport of boxing) and a book about widowhood. And I assume, though Abrams doesn’t say so, that boxing also gained from all the publicity and razzle-dazzle.

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Of course there had been quiz shows on the radio and at functions and parties—we played versions of them in family gatherings with games like 'On My Trip to China' or trying to remember all the items on a tray—but TV gave them a major boost. Got a slot to fill in. A quiz show! A few questions. Some nice prizes. Lots of flashing lights. A cheering audience. An assistant very scantily dressed. The slot is filled!

That question—should a successful contestant have charisma—seems an unfair one. To be both a personality and a brain is asking a lot of someone who comes on to the set without training. The TV station may have run through the way their particular game show works but they haven't trained the contestant in how to play to the cameras. And most contestants, I suspect, are too nervous anyway to show to best advantage.

And the other side of the equation is not about the contestant trying to come up with a right answer but about the people behind the scenes who try to pick questions which will interest the audience. Because people continue to watch if they can sometimes get the answers right themselves. Too hard and everyone falls by the wayside. Too easy and people don't respect the contestants. Sometimes they get someone involved with an encyclopaedia company to do the choosing. Sometimes the questions are picked by anonymous backroom people. But while I was pondering on the choosing of questions I found myself wondering just how challenging it is to do this for a long-running show.

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The other side of the equation is the contestant and her knowledge. Where did Joyce Brothers turn to find her encyclopaedic knowledge of boxing? I assumed to newspapers and magazines as there was no internet and the celebrity industry, with its endless biographies and memoirs, was only taking its first tentative steps. Or did she depend solely on *Ring Magazine*? I looked on library shelves to see how prolific books about boxing might now be. And I was curious enough to borrow two: *Facing Ali* by Stephen Brunt about the men who faced up to Muhammad Ali in his career, and *Boxing's Strangest Fights* by Graeme Kent.

So here are two small snippets from Kent's book:

The two most famous bare-knuckle fighters in 19th century America were John Morrissey and Yankee Sullivan. "Sullivan was even more villainous than Morrissey but not as cunning. He was born near Cork but as a young man was transported to Botany Bay in Australia for theft. He escaped by stowing away in a boat carrying cargo to New York. For a time he scraped a living as a bare-knuckle fighter and earned enough to open a disreputable saloon in the Bowery."

When the two men met Morrissey won but depended on some shonky official decision-making and then the police caught up with them both for "engaging in an illegal bout". Sullivan later managed a fight in which one man was killed. He was pardoned but continued with his criminal activities. "The authorities were just as lax in California, but the citizens were less easily cowed than those in New York. San Francisco in particular had received a large intake of time-expired or escaped convicts from Tasmania, most of whom soon reverted to type. The largest gang became known as the Sydney Ducks. On at least four occasions the town was ravished by fires, deliberately set so that mobs could use the confusion to loot and pillage. In 1851, enraged by the lack of results coming from the law, citizens set up the Vigilance Committee to combat crime.

"Sullivan had been charged with others as 'a disturber of the peace of our city, destroyer of the purity of our elections, active member and leader of the organized gang which has invaded the sanctity of our ballot-boxes, and a perfect pest to society.' " While in jail waiting to be run out of town he bled to death. "It was a sad end for a bad man but a good fighter who, in his prime,

had been described as ‘as strong as a lion, as gay as a lark, with a free conscience and a cheerful spirit.’ ” Clearly people would’ve preferred his conscience to be a little less free.

“Back in the 1920s, the famous writer Paul Gallico, who later published *The Snow Goose*, was a young sports writer. He allowed himself to be persuaded by his editor to enter the ring with Jack Dempsey, then preparing for a contest. The idea was that Gallico would write a piece about what it was like to face the mighty champion in a sparring bout.

“Unfortunately some evil-minded person whispered to Dempsey that the well-built but peaceful Gallico was in reality an up-and-coming young fighter from Canada determined to gain a reputation at Dempsey’s expense. Dempsey flattened Gallico with his opening punch.”

I have an unease about boxing. My granddad was a successful amateur boxer in Queensland winning a gold medal way back in 1907. I know people say that it gives underprivileged boys a start and that it channels aggression into safer ways. But although broken noses and split lips heal brains are precious things and to deliberately pummel and shake and knock them around seems to me irresponsible.

So what drew Joyce Brothers to boxing? And how did she feel about her success and the fact that she had won when the show wanted her to lose? The irony is that it was apparently the show itself which suggested she take boxing as her subject and she went away and used her photographic memory and probably a very real desire to make money and show that women can be knowledgeable about a predominantly male sport to do her homework. Her flat and cautious demeanour may have had more to do with the fact that boxing *wasn’t* her subject …

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October 21: Ursula Le Guin
October 22: Doris Lessing
Thomas Hughes
E. Phillips Oppenheim

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“Daniel (Macmillan) wished to publish books that would help men to resist whims and caprices. Of all the novels that he published, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, by Tom Hughes, was most quintessential of him. This famous story of the eponymous hero’s school career at Rugby under the headmastership of Thomas Arnold is a didactic tale against sin, vice, idleness and cruelty. Yet, whereas Arnold himself was an oppressively sombre man, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* for all its moralising is a hopeful and not a dark book. Hughes himself was a working barrister, a plain and jolly man, with a real though narrow talent. To an ideal extent the book was a collaboration between its author and its publisher. When denouncing to F. D. Maurice the frivolous, ignorant, idle and selfish behaviour which was demoralising Britain, and insisting on the need for truth, vigour and beauty in daily life, Daniel had extolled Arnold as a man whose beautiful example would uplift the nation. The idea of a novel in praise of Arnold’s beliefs delighted him. Hughes consulted Daniel repeatedly about his text before its completion: Daniel in turn excised the words ‘damn’ and ‘infernal’ throughout, and turned ‘beastly’ drunk into ‘inhumanly’. The book was an immediate success. It sold 11,000 copies in the seven months after publication in 1857, bringing its author royalties of £1,250 in that period alone. Daniel’s purpose in publishing it, and that of Hughes in writing it, was to do good. Their object was to condemn ‘too much over-civilisation, and the deceitfulness of riches’, to encourage the proper valuing of a good man for his own sake. Tom’s father discouraged class exclusiveness: ‘the village boys were full as manly and honest and certainly purer than those in a higher rank’. The book’s message was Christian to its roots and reflected Daniel’s own sense of himself as ensnared in a battle between extremes of good and bad. Arnold had identified the task of schooling as the making of

good, obedient future citizens. ‘If he’ll only turn out a brave, helpful, truth-telling Englishman, and a gentleman, and a Christian, that’s all I want,’ Tom’s father thinks to himself. ‘It makes you feel on the side of all the good and all the bad too,’ Tom reflects after taking the sacrament at his Confirmation. ‘Only there’s some great, dark, strong power, which is crushing you and everybody else. That’s what Christ conquered, and we’ve got to fight.’ Muscular Christians, for whom *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* was a text, deplored scepticism as a morally reckless attitude for which the only antidote was energetic manliness: Hughes himself went ‘mad’ on seeing the sybaritic luxuries of Paris and wanted ‘to smash some of the mirrors on the boulevards and to punch the heads of some of the little coxcombs who sit sipping and smoking all along the Café fronts’.”

Richard Davenport-Hines in *The Macmillans*

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“Partly by accident, partly by subtle and profound design, English educators of the second half of the nineteenth century evolved the idea of organizing sport for the purpose of training the character of their pupils. At Rugby, during Tom Brown’s schooldays, there were no organized games. Dr. Arnold was too wholeheartedly a low-church social reformer, too serious-minded a student of Old Testament history, to pay much attention to a matter seemingly so trivial as his boys’ amusements. A generation later, cricket and football were compulsory in every English Public School, and organized sport was being used more and more consciously as a means of shaping the character of the English gentleman.”

Ends and Means by Aldous Huxley.

Though as Tom Brown ends up as captain of Rugby’s cricket eleven and they play a team that comes down from London the question might be: how organized was organized? Have we simply exchanged bottom-up organizing for top-down organizing? And with what results for ordinary people participating?

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Tom Brown’s Schooldays is a curious book. It is quite unlike the miserable schools and boys of Dickens which, quite rightly, roused the public’s ire. And Tom unlike most children actually wants to go to school. “And now, Tom, my boy,” said the Squire, “remember you are going, at your own earnest request, to be chucked into this great school, like a young bear with all your troubles before you—earlier than we should have sent you perhaps. If schools are what they were in my time, you’ll see a great many cruel blackguard things done, and hear a deal of foul bad talk. But never fear. You tell the truth, keep a brave and kind heart, and never listen to or say anything you wouldn’t have your mother and sister hear, and you’ll never feel ashamed to come home, or we to see you.”

He arrives at Rugby; “Tom’s heart beat quick as he passed the great school field or close, with its noble elms, in which several games at foot-ball were going on, and tried to take in at once the long line of grey buildings, beginning with the chapel, and ending with the school-house, the residence of the headmaster, where the great flag was lazily waving from the highest round tower. And he began already to be proud of being a Rugby boy, as he passed the school-gates, with the oriel window above, and saw the boys standing there, looking as if the town belonged to them” and he finds the blackguards waiting in the form of Flashman and his fellow bullies. He plays football, learns some Latin and Greek, goes swimming and bird-nesting, lives on a great deal of beer and cheese and bread, gets into trouble, saves a new boy from being bullied, and gradually under the influence of Dr Arnold and the deeply Christian boy Arthur becomes less of a scamp and more of an honest scholar and truthful boy.

But the reason why I found the book odd was in its structure. For nearly a quarter of the book it is about Tom and his family in the countryside with curious details of country lore and country traditions. It is in effect two books in one—a short book, often written in the present tense, about English village and farm life set around Hughes' beloved Vale of the White Horse—and a much longer book written as a boy's school story and extolling the virtues of Rugby School and Doctor Arnold and the good Christian life.

*

Hughes writes, "It is no good for Quakers, or any other body of men, to uplift their voices against fighting. Human nature is too strong for them, and they don't follow their own precepts. Every soul of them is doing his own piece of fighting, somehow and somewhere. The world might be a better world without fighting for anything I know, but it wouldn't be our world; and therefore I am dead against crying peace when there is no peace, and isn't meant to be. I'm as sorry as any man to see folk fighting the wrong people and the wrong things, but I'd a deal sooner see them doing that, than that they should have no fight in them."

Curiously Hughes' daughter Mary became a Quaker. *Christian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends* says of her: "Mary Hughes (1860-1941) was a daughter of Judge Thomas Hughes (author of 'Tom Brown's Schooldays') who was associated with Charles Kingsley, Frederick Denison Maurice and the Christian Socialists. She was born and reared in a house representing the best influences of Victorian England, but, as her Monthly Meeting wrote of her, 'became deeply convinced that the class to which she belonged was unjustly privileged, and as a member of that class felt convicted of sins against society, and strove to expiate them by a life of service and poverty'. In her late thirties she started to live in the East End of London and 'her home for many years was the Dewdrop Inn, formerly the "Earl Grey's Castle", a public house which she took over to redeem from its former purpose'. As Howard Spring shows in the following extract she identified herself completely with those around her, sharing their poverty, their privations and their lack of opportunities for cleanliness. She joined the Society of Friends in 1918 and Friends will not forget the stirring of conscience that was felt in Yearly Meeting when her white-haired, red-cloaked figure was present."

Howard Spring said of her, "The longest journey Mary Hughes made was in spiritual conception. In her youth she…took part in work on behalf of the poor and unfortunate. You drove to that work in a carriage and when the work was done you drove back to a beautiful house…Mary Hughes was never a one for condemning the way in which other people lived their lives; she was too busy with the way in which she chose to lead her own. If she had ever consciously wondered why this way, which she saw in her youth, was not satisfactory to her, she could have found the answer…in those words *when the work was done*. It became clear to her that what she had to do could never be *done*, not even for an hour. Her life itself must be her work, but it could be her work only if it were lived in the appropriate circumstances. She didn't want to *visit* the poor. She wanted to be *with* the poor and to be poor herself…

She had no set schemes. She founded no institution. Neither did Jesus…'He went about doing good.' So did Mary Hughes…It was a question of being rather than of doing. You trusted to the contagion of goodness rather than to homily or sermon. Necessarily, such a personality, linked as it was to endless sources of spiritual strength, became a magnet, and there again one hears the echo of an old phrase: 'I will *draw* all men unto Me.' As this magnet drew the poor and dispossessed, there was plenty to do; and Mary Hughes went about the doing of it in her own idiosyncratic way…She never turned down man or woman who had duped or bamboozled her. It was in the nature of things that the world contained sinners, and she wished above all to live close to the nature of things. This she could confidently do because of her belief that the over-

riding reality is spiritual. She would have thought herself most faithless if a few sinners had shaken her…Burning with shame, radiant with love, she set her course and followed it…The whole point of her life will be missed unless we can share her faith that 'the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are unseen are eternal'. Looked at from that point of view, this shabby and sometimes verminous woman becomes one of the few, 'of whom the world is not worthy'."

*

Hughes in his panegyric to Dr Arnold has a master say, "And that's the way that all the Doctor's reforms have been carried out when he has been left to himself—quietly and naturally, putting a good thing in the place of a bad, and letting the bad die out; no wavering and no hurry—the best thing that could be done for the time being, and patience for the rest."

Matthew Arnold remembered his father Dr Arnold in a long poem he called 'Rugby Chapel' in which he said of him:

There thou dost lie, in the gloom
Of the autumn evening. But ah!
That word, *gloom*, to my mind
Brings thee back, in the light
Of thy radiant vigour, again;
In the gloom of November we pass'd
Days not dark at thy side;
Seasons impair'd not the ray
Of thy buoyant cheerfulness clear.
Such thou wast! and I stand
In the autumn evening, and think
Of bygone autumns with thee.

* * * * *

October 23: Robert Bridges
October 24: Nairda Lyne
October 25: Thomas Macaulay
October 26: John Arden
October 27: Dylan Thomas
Sylvia Plath
October 28: Erasmus
October 29: John Keats
James Boswell
Henry Green
October 30: John Bunyan (bap)
October 31: Dick Francis
November 1: David Jones
November 2: Odysseus Elytis
'Hancock's Half Hour'

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On this date in 1954 the first radio broadcast of 'Hancock's Half Hour' went to air. Two years later it turned into a TV program. But who, if not Hancock himself, actually wrote the program? I realised I had no idea.

"Writing partnerships are born in a whole manner of ways: Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, whose small-screen output includes *The Likely Lads* and *Porridge*, met at the Uxbridge

Arms, a pub in London's Notting Hill, back in 1961, three years before 'Entente Cordiale', the first instalment in the life of Terry Collier and Bob Ferris, hit our screens. Bob Larbey and John Esmonde, responsible for, among others, *The Good Life* and *Ever Decreasing Circles*, became friends while on a school trip in Switzerland. Although Bob was three years ahead of John at Clapham's Henry Thornton Grammar School, they discovered they were 'both loonies … who had lots in common, including a crass schoolboy humour.' Other friendships evolve from working together. A year after Jimmy Perry was cast in a cameo role for a 1966 episode of *Hugh and I*, a sitcom directed by David Croft, he was offered the chance to play Reg Varney's uncouth brother in *Beggar My Neighbour*; while taking a break during rehearsals, Perry approached Croft with a script he'd written titled 'The Fighting Tigers' and asked him if he'd read it. Within months *Dad's Army* was born.

None, however, can match the unusual circumstances in which Ray Galton and Alan Simpson's partnership came into being during the late 1940s: both were patients at Milford Sanatorium, a TB hospital, set amid the Surrey countryside."

Richard Webber in *Fifty Years of Hancock's Half Hour*.

*

Kenneth Williams in his collection of diary entries *Back Drops* mentions *Hancock's Half Hour* with which he had a long association.

— "I remember visiting Tony Hancock in hospital and finding the bed covered with books by Leibnitz, Nietzsche and Bertrand Russell. He said, 'I'm trying to discover the purpose of it all. Have you ever thought, Kenny, what if there's no point to existence at all? What if there's no one up there? Sometimes I think it's all a joke.'

'Well, in that case,' I said, 'you must try and make it a good one.'

'Oh, that's just evading the issue,' he said, and went on to talk about the fictitious line we draw between subjectivity and objectivity. It's weird how people love definitions and labels; yet they so often turn out to be spurious – like the Motorist and the Pedestrian. Both labels are invalid; when the motorist gets out of his car he becomes a pedestrian and vice versa.

It's like the man searching under the lamp-post. A policeman asks what he's lost, and the man tells him he's dropped a coin 'over there', pointing to a spot in the darkness. 'Then why aren't you looking there?' asks the policeman.

'Because this is where the light is.'

— "Various phone calls congratulating me on the show last night. My fears about an alien audience were unjustified. Flushed with success, I descended to the hotel bar for a celebratory drink, where I bumped into my old chum, Bill Kerr. He greeted me affectionately, then ruined it all by saying: 'We're the last of Hancock's Half-Hour, Kenny. Tony's gone, Sid's gone, Hattie's gone, there's only the two of us left.' I felt as though I were teetering on the brink of the grave myself.

We talked about the time we walked through Kensington Gore with Tony on the way to his flat, and how a bus had stopped and the driver had called out, 'Hello Tone', before getting down to shake Tony by the hand. The cars behind started hooting at the parked vehicle. Drivers alighted to protest, then, recognizing Tony, they all besieged him with handshakes and requests for autographs. Bill said, 'That must have been one of the biggest traffic jams that never had anything to do with a road accident.'

— 'To the studio for another *Parkinson Show* where he asked me about working with Tony Hancock. I said that much had been written about his morbidity and as Australia was the country in which he had taken his life I didn't want to dwell on that side of his career. I chose instead to tell them about a delightful occasion at a packed Camden Theatre, when we were recording the

radio show *Hancock's Half-Hour*. Halfway through the producer announced, 'We've lost the line to Broadcasting House. Will you fill in with some other material and we'll return to the script when we get the line back.'

Tony said to Sid James, Hattie Jacques, Bill Kerr and myself, 'You go off into the wings and each take a turn, running on doing interruptions.'

The first one was Bill Kerr, who ran on and said, 'I went to Smithfields and got a pound of meat for only fivepence.'

Tony: 'You got a pound of meat for only fivepence? What was it, mutton?

Bill: 'No, rotten.'

Then I came on sprinkling 'woofle dust' saying, 'I am sprinkling woofle dust to kill the wild elephants.' Tony was supposed to say, 'But there are no wild elephants round here,' to which I was to say, 'No and this isn't real woofle dust.'

I came on and pranced about the stage, miming throwing the woofle dust about, and he said nothing. The audience started giggling and eventually I went close to him and said, 'Ask me what I am.'

'We all know what you are,' said Tony and got the biggest laugh of the evening."

*

One of Galton's and Simpson's episodes was 'The Missing Page' which went to air on the 26th February 1960. "Hancock is engrossed in the murder mystery, *Lady Don't Fall Backwards* which he has borrowed from the library. Even Sid, a reluctant reader, is anxious to establish the identity of the murderer, so both are incensed when they discover that the final page is missing. Desperate to find out who committed the murder, they search for another copy of the book, but the hunt is equally frustrating."

This episode always resonated with me as I remember getting a book from a stall, getting to the final denouement, all fired up to know who was the murderer and how—and finding the last couple of pages missing. I have at times picked up other books and found missing pages since then but none has ever quite dismayed me as much.

And yet, looked at soberly, shouldn't I have sufficient imagination to create my own ending? In theory. In practice it is like investing time and energy in something and then finding it is wasted time.

There is an abiding image of comedians as gloomy melancholic people, if not actually suffering from severe depression. How true I cannot say as I don't think anyone has ever done a survey. But what of comedy writers? My own impression is that the funniest writers are rarely gloomy people. Occasional moments of gloom, yes, but people battling depression, no. It is perhaps significant that Galton and Simpson, despite their long period of hospitalisation, were survivors. They were creators and creation is ultimately an affirmation of life, sanity, and happiness. Tony Hancock struggled to bring that sense of creation to the most perfect of performances. And he always struggled with the belief that he had failed himself and failed his material …

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November 3: Conor Cruise O'Brien
Oodgeroon Noonuccal
November 4: Eden Philpotts
Joe Ackerley
November 5: Ella Wheeler Wilcox
November 6: Lucy Aiken
November 7: Albert Camus

November 8: John Duns Scotus (d)
Margaret Mitchell
Bram Stoker

* * * * *

We know the outline of John Duns Scotus's life: he was born in 1265 or 1266, probably in the small town of Duns in Scotland. He was ordained on the 17th March 1291 and he travelled widely, Oxford, Paris, Cologne, Rome, and died on the 8th of November 1308 in Paris. So why do we remember him? After all, there were any number of travelling monks, pilgrims, mendicant friars, medieval philosophers …

The lectures he gave in the universities of Europe were gathered up and published, though this was incomplete when he died, and they reached and influenced a wide audience. I came upon a book called *Duns Scotus on Divine Love* put out by a study group, Vos, Veldhuis, Dekker, Den Bok and Beck, at the University of Utrecht, and I felt drawn to get a glimpse into his thinking.

"The ethical necessity to love God above all is for Scotus the cornerstone of his solution to the 'classical' problem of Christian ethics: the problem of love for God, for our neighbors and for ourselves. He argues that not only love for our neighbor, but first of all love for ourselves, is a necessary implication of love for God. In this way it becomes clear that love for God is the unifying principle not only of relations between human beings, but also of each human being's relation to himself."

This sounds so simple but it is immediately fraught with seemingly insurmountable questions. If by loving the manifestations of God, such as a glorious sunset, can we be said to be loving God? We may say we *like* our neighbours or more modestly that we wish them no harm. But if we saw them as part of God, unique, precious, but another manifestation of God, would we see it differently? And loving ourselves? Freud and the ego now come between Scotus and the 21st century. We now equate self-love with having a big ego and shy away from the thought. But again I think we are looking at it in too limited a way. The editors say of his beliefs "Our love for God cannot be a private love. It is a shared love." Intrinsic to love are the concepts of freedom and goodness. This creates the image of a vast swirling universe of love; a modern kind of Dark Matter of love in which we cannot help existing … and yet we can use that freedom to attempt to distance ourselves, to reach out … to something else. Scotus believed that "all possible decisions by God are necessarily good" … so that even when we use that freedom to think and do and say things which are judged evil we still haven't escaped our place within that "shared love"; we only think we have.

I can remember struggling with this idea, though in a more limited way, in a poem:

Clouds riven, late sun catching
Bare branches.
Rain drops, lustre-bright,
Neatly spaced.
    People in the space that's self;
    People neatly ranged about the fire,
    Charged with intimations.
    Conversing.
A question tossed around the semi-circle:
What is God's greatest gift?
I never say God, says one, but gift, hmmm …
This, another says, friends gathered,

While it storms outside.
A sense of sharing, offered,
But fearing the sound of sentiment.
The senses, a man says.
Someone rises, throws on another log,
Pokes up a stream of sparks.
Beauty, he adds. Fun. Laughter. Hope and
Kindness. The way they overlap and underlie.
No, says an older woman.
The greatest gift is Evil.
The lightness of this time evaporates,
Leaves a sense of combat.
We can do without evil, we've got
Anger, doubt, frustration,
Boredom, folly—isn't that enough?
But—don't you see?
Good without Evil is meaningless.
Those things are Evil gathering up
Its troops, hardening into place,
Preparing for the ultimate.
She rises swiftly,
Goes to the window.
See the rain along the bough?
Each drop neat and hung apart.
Let the sun go in, more rain fall,
Each drop will gather till its weight
Makes it fall, tells us what it is.
Good feeds on little things:
A moment of kindness,
A generous thought. Tenderness.
She pulls the curtains closed.
Blots out a luminescent dusk.
Feed things. They grow. Starve them.
Saintly forbearance, someone nods,
If there was nothing to forbear—
The fire spits; wet wood sizzling.
—no saints, no vision of a better world.
And in reaching—each step takes us closer …
But it's easy here, warm, well-fed, content.
They look around the room.
Yes, it's easy, sitting here,
To talk of Evil. A concept, not a presence.
But, don't you see, she warms her hands,
Evil makes us choose, drives us forward,
Shows us; heightens each sense,
Each step, makes us *choose*.
'Resist not evil'? And what of promises

Of victory: good over evil, final nirvana;
Repentance? They look above the mantel;
The figure with its lantern.
When God has won hasn't meaning lost its meaning?
In your theory.
Grown, certainly, in love and wisdom.
But back where you began. A deeper sense of good,
I grant, when you love your enemies;
A grander concept of living life but still …
No, she gropes, 'you too can be perfect'
We dismiss too easily, say 'that's not us' …
But perfect is the moment when we cease
To behave, we cease to need to choose,
We *know* … we've touched God,
Good and Evil cease to war within us,
Because we simply are,
We've become a part of eternal love,
Not struggling with the idea, the hope,
The comfort, the belief …
She looked into the glowing caverns of the fire,
New rain beat against the roof.
We've come home.
The others who'd been honing arguments
Feel something gather,
Relieve them of a need
To loose those lustrous fattened drops
Upon the rocks below the bough.

'Too Much Rain'

"By showing how the one disposition of love for God moves us to love not only God but also our neighbor in God – Scotus is able to avoid a view of reality divided in two levels. His thoughts do not operate within the dualistic framework of nature and supernature." The editors say that supernatural love is a gift from God, not something we can will ourselves. But Scotus gives freedom and goodness as essential parts of love. And freedom is essential for the operation of the will. He was imbued with that strongly Scottish concern with predestination, the Elect, the Chosen, and the part that will plays in determining merit; "a meritorious act is caused by the will as principal cause and by the disposition of love as second cause." The authors go on to say, "Scotus claims that the will is free with respect to both means and end."

The idea of merit has faded except perhaps in the more evangelical churches. But it explains the church's ancient development of limbo as a place for the very young children who die. They cannot have merit because they have no concept of choice and therefore their actions cannot be described as good or bad. They have not had the chance to develop merit. But the question now for us is at what age can children be truly said to understand the concept of choice and to have developed the understanding that all moral choices are good or bad or something of both. Traditionally it was accepted that reaching adulthood meant taking ultimate responsibility for choices made. Yet there is pressure on the justice system to push this back into childhood, to put young offenders in with adult offenders. But by what logic are adult offenders, people who have willed unmeritorious choices, the best people to help develop children's immature and still

deficient understanding of the concept of choice and all the implications of bad choices? If we don't believe in immortality then we are going to interpret merit in a very limited way—and merit itself has got mixed in with ideas of school reports, good decision-making and other limited concepts. But not-believing isn't the same as not-existing or not-true …

They say "the will determines itself in virtue of its freedom" but at what age might we judge children's wills to be free?

Scotus also gave much thought to the idea that theology could be seen as a science. I suspect that modern thinkers would reject that idea because ideas about science have changed. It has become a more limited concept, defined by what can be repeatedly proved. Yet it is opening out again into what was once the domain of theology. Scotus defines the perfect knowledge of God, the slightly less perfect knowledge of 'heaven', and the limited and imperfect knowledge of human beings. But in that reaching beyond traditional limitations of science we enter into the realms Scotus defined 800 years ago. From an image of a clockwork and therefore definable physical world we are now seeing that within everything there are tiny gaps and those tiny gaps both open up the possibilities for change but also for understanding, enlightenment … and, as John Duns Scotus might have said, to experience Divine Love …

"—Scotus' penetrating thought can be seen, above all, as a conceptual vindication of divine love. The essential goodness of this love pertains to reality in its widest sense, doing justice to God and creatures according to their proper natures; necessarily loving what is infinitely good and freely loving what is finitely good. Since this love calls for love, human freedom and goodness are equally constitutive for a satisfactory response."

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November 9: Ivan Turgenev
November 10: Oliver Goldsmith
Vachel Lindsay
November 11: Feodor Dostoyevsky
Kurt Vonnegut
November 12: Janette Turner Hospital
Bill Hornadge
November 13: Robert Louis Stevenson
November 14: Steele Rudd
Robert Hichens
Joseph McCarthy
November 15: William Cowper
Charlotte Mew
November 16: Michael Arlen
November 17: Auberon Waugh
November 18: Gwen Meredith
November 19: Allen Tate
Anna Seghers
November 20: Nadine Gordimer
November 21: Ada Cambridge
François Voltaire
Arthur Quiller-Couch
November 22: George Eliot
Jon Cleary
November 23: Robert Barnard

November 24: Laurence Sterne
Jacob Burckhardt
Marie Bashkirtseff

* * * * *

Jean Webster in *Daddy-Long-Legs* wrote, "We're reading Marie Bashkirtseff's journal. Isn't it amazing? Listen to this : "Last night I was seized by a fit of despair that found utterance in moans, and that finally drove me to throw the dining-room clock into the sea."

"It makes me almost hope I'm not a genius; they must be very wearing to have about – and awfully destructive to the furniture."

That incident seems to have become well-known in her time. L. M. Montgomery in *Emily's Quest* says "she knew there would be rejection slips galore; she knew there would be days when she would feel despairingly that she could not write and that it was of no use to try; days when the editorial phrase, "not necessarily a reflection on its merits," would get on her nerves to such an extent that she would feel like imitating Marie Bashkirtseff and hurling the taunting, ticking, remorseless sitting-room clock out of the window" …

I sort of tucked Marie Bashkirtseff away with the thought that I might some day try to find out why she threw dining-room clocks into the sea. And the other day, unexpectedly, I came upon a mention of her in Colin Wilson's *The Books in My Life.*

"It was in one of Shaw's prefaces that I first came upon a reference to a young Russian artist, Marie Bashkirtseff, whose posthumous diaries had caused a scandal when they were published in 1890 because she talked confidently about her genius and her determination to be a famous artist. She had died at the age of twenty-four.

"I borrowed the book from the Leicester Public Library, which possessed a first edition. (There was probably no second edition.) I gazed for a long time at her picture opposite the title page—a beautiful girl of sixteen, leaning sideways, with both elbows resting on a cabinet and gazing at the camera. I assume this is a daguerreotype. Naturally, she became the subject of my daydreams.

"Marie had been born in Poltava, in the Ukraine, on November 11, 1860, the daughter of a wealthy Russian landowner. Regrettably, her father was a philanderer who continued to sow his wild oats after marriage, so that his wife left him after only two years. So Marie was deprived of the father figure that is so essential in all young girls at an early age."

(Though it might be asked whether this particular father was of any value to his daughter. And I assume the variation in her date-of-birth is due to the variation between Russian and Western dating.)

"When Marie was ten, her mother's family set out on a grand tour of Europe—Vienna, Baden-Baden, Nice. During a later stay in Rome, she was fascinated by the great artists: Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael. Ever since the age of four she had believed she was destined for greatness; now she decided that she would be a great artist. At seventeen, she became an art student in Paris."

She worked hard at her art and in her brief career was quite successful. But she had TB and her first taste of success was doomed to be her last. Is this why she was "seized by a fit of despair"? Her journal was published posthumously so it didn't bring her the recognition she craved in life. Wilson goes on to say, "Of course what worried me most was what worried John Keats and Marie Bashkirtseff—that I might die "before my pen has reaped my teeming brain." It seemed perfectly possible that, in spite of my certainty of my own genius, I might die of some illness, or perhaps even in a street accident, before I had even glimpsed the meaning of life."

The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature says, "An entirely contrary trend in the 1890s was represented by the incipient Decadent movement in Russia. Like her male counterparts, the Decadent heroine jettisoned the Russian intelligentsias' treasured ideals of self-sacrifice to the collective good in favour of self-fulfilment, often of a sexually hedonistic kind. Mariia Bashkirtseva, a budding painter whose diary was posthumously published in 1887, three years after her death at the age of twenty-six, became famous all over Europe. Translated from the original French into Russian in 1892, the diary had an enormous impact on at least two generations of Russian women; those influenced or inspired by it included the young Marina Tsvetaeva. Echoes of Bashkirtseva's neurotic self-aggrandisement can also be heard in the powerful verse of Mirra Lokhvitskaia (1869 – 1905), who expressed a bold sexuality new to Russian women's poetry." But then for a young woman in love with life the thought of dying slowly and horribly before she had done the things she planned would probably make anyone sound neurotic …

I cannot say I ever had any glimpses of genius in my young self. Instead I look back on an anxious and tense child and teen who always hoped she would somehow just muddle through without drawing anyone's attention. It doesn't have any of the glamour and excitement of a Marie Bashkirtseff. But then—I have been very kind to the furniture.

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November 25: Brenda Niall
November 26: Charles Schulz
November 27: Frank Clune
November 28: William Blake
November 29: Louisa May Alcott
November 30: Mark Twain
Jonathon Swift
L. M. Montgomery
December 1: Max Stout
Henry Williamson
December 2: Mary Elwyn Patchett
December 3: Joseph Conrad
December 4: Thomas Carlyle
Rainer Maria Rilke
Sir Herbert Read
December 5: Christina Rossetti
Flora Thompson
December 6: Osbert Sitwell
R. H. Barham
Sylvia Townsend Warner

* * * * *

The three Sitwells were writers of some repute. Edith. Osbert. Sacherverell. They were eccentric. They praised each other's writings. They lived for other people's praise of their writing. They squabbled over money. They criticised their eccentric father Sir George Sitwell. They liked people to remember they were the children of a baronet. T. S. Eliot at one stage, accidentally or on purpose, called them the Shitwells. They knew everyone, almost, in the English literary world of the twenties and thirties and forties. They provided support to the composer William Walton and the poet Dylan Thomas among others. But were they good enough writers themselves to deserve ongoing reputations and fame?

Philip Zeigler wrote a biography of Osbert Sitwell and this seems to have been a question he asked himself—or perhaps his friends kept asking him 'Why write about Osbert Sitwell?' After all, Osbert wrote some poetry, short stories, novels, travel books and a four-volume autobiography but none of these books have set the world alight and most of us would have difficulty naming even one of them. Yet Zeigler's comments make sense:

"Is Osbert Sitwell therefore worth a book? It is a question all biographers must sometimes ask themselves, and often over the past few years I have wondered if I were writing only for my own entertainment and for a handful of kindred spirits who are happy to grub around among such disregarded fossils. The question did not worry me much — the entertainment was so great, the *dramatis personae* so bizarre, the background so rich, that I would happily have carried on even if I had known that only the smallest possible chorus of indolent reviewers would cursorily scan my work. Yet at the end, I am satisfied that Osbert *is* worth a book; not so much for what he did as for what he was. Osbert was an odd man out in many worlds; an aesthete among philistines, an aristocrat among bohemians, an Englishman among Italians. In all he played an active and conspicuous role: it was possible to dislike Osbert Sitwell, to mock him, even to despise him, but it was very difficult to ignore him."

He goes on to say, "In the 1920s the Sitwells were an inspiration for the younger generation: brilliant, provocative, inventive. Today it is easy to see that they were not Pounds, Eliots or Joyces, innovators of seminal importance, but to Evelyn Waugh or Cyril Connolly they seemed the acme of modernity, a challenge to the established values and an inspiration to all who wished to blaze a new artistic trail. In the years after the Second World War, Osbert and Edith in particular achieved a renaissance; acclaimed as the Grand Old Man and Woman of contemporary letters, still rebarbative, still claiming the cultural high ground as their rightful territory, but now bathed in the twilight refulgence reserved for relics of an earlier age. Even between these two golden periods they were never forgotten and could not safely be dismissed as inconsiderable. For forty years, mutually and individually, they were an important presence on the literary scene. Whether Osbert Sitwell can be called a major writer is a matter of definition; it can hardly be denied, though, that twentieth-century English letters would have looked very different if he had not existed."

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Osbert Lancaster was a near contemporary of Osbert Sitwell's, being about twelve years younger, but they both chose to write about upper class foibles in Britain in one way or another. The obvious difference being that Lancaster preferred to gently lampoon them in his cartoons rather than in witty prose. He certainly wrote his share of witty prose but it is his drawings of William and Maudie Littlehampton, snobs and twits, but rarely presented with the savage humour we have now almost come to expect, which probably come to mind. But then Lancaster like Sitwell undoubtedly thought of his subject matter as 'people like us'.

Curiously they are the only public Osberts I have come across. But names with a Germanic or Saxon origin became popular in the Victorian era—Osbert and Oswald, Hilda from Hildegard, Ethel from Etheldred or Ethelburga, and some had a longer life than others.

Names *are* fascinating things and in one respect I am sorry for the children who receive made-up names which come with no sense of history or tradition behind them. But in another way every name begins somewhere. We make of it what we will … or change it …

Paul Johnson in *Humorists* says of Lancaster that he "gave a visual and topographical perspective of the London intelligentsia which no photographer could supply. He did a similar personal panorama of Glyndebourne, the fashionable privately owned opera house, where patrons are still expected to "change" for the performance. And for more than half a century Lancaster

produced "pocket cartoons," mainly for the *Daily Express*, which gave accurate shape, especially in dress, hats, hair, beards and moustaches, handbags, medals, and accessories of every kind, of all the groups which gave spice and flavour to London society, from cabinet ministers and demagogues, dukes, earls, and nouveaux riches life peers, talkative clergymen and reticent civil servants, army and navy chiefs, and visiting American firemen, intellectuals, movie stars, and pop singers, and indeed everyone who briefly took a place in the daily newspaper hall of transient fame. It remains a great achievement in the English comic tradition, beautifully commemorated in a retrospect volume, *Cartoons and Coronets: The Genius of Osbert Lancaster*, compiled by James Knox."

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I had written briefly about the Elizabethan magician John Dee in another calendar but I came upon this curious connection between him and Osbert Sitwell while I was reading Sitwell's rambling and rather confusing travelogue *The Four Continents*. "In Europe, too, the Philosopher's Stone was the superstitious matrix from which ungrateful science was cut, and as late as the reign of Queen Elizabeth both science and magic were practised together. For instance, the eminent Doctor Dee, who was Queen Elizabeth's physician, and invented the pocket-watch, was highly interested in magic and practised rudimentary spiritualism. That he had in earlier years dabbled in conjuring tricks and sleight of hand had long surrounded his name with an aroma of charlatanism; but there was more in it than that: I possess at Renishaw an object claimed to be a magic speculum used by him. It consists of a flat black oval pronounced by a geologist to whom I submitted it to be 'an *Artificial Lead Glass*, whose main components are lead oxide, soda or potash, and silica'. Such glasses, he added, had been made from very early times and were quite distinct from obsidian. In fact it is a mirror of dark glass, and in its depths the Doctor and his medium, Kelly, the sinister Irishman, who always wore a black skull-cap crammed down on his head so as to hide the fact that his ears had been cropped for felony, may have gazed in order to call up spirits who would foretell the future.

"With this and other magic implements the two men made the round of the European courts, telling the fortunes of the reigning dynasts, the Emperor Rudolf and the King of France, for example. What can they have seen as the future of those strange beings, so splendid yet so sombre in ruff and doublet or in armour that they seemed to match some other element than air? Nothing, I think, for the doctor was deceived and Kelly was inventive. I have myself often peered into this same glass, wondering what might be revealed, but I have seen nothing but an infinite perspective of polished darkness and muted reflections. … Nevertheless, all writers contain within them some native and inevitable sense of, and skill in, reading the future: thus at the beginning of this book, written some six months ago, I was concerned with coming efforts to reach the moon or Mars,- and today I read that a conference has been called in London, where, as I was sure would be the case, ex-enemy and Allied scientists 'collaborated in the most cordial spirit', in order to take the first step towards space-travel: and after this announcement of their meetings, the news followed that the conveners received more than five thousand offers from men and women anxious to shake off the shackles of the earth, and to be among the first to essay such a voyage. Yet nothing of this had occurred when that first chapter was written. … But I must return, to finish for the reader the unedifying story of Doctor Dee and Kelly. For many years their collaboration continued until at last Kelly revealed that the spirits had decreed that he and the Doctor should for a time exchange wives: but this pronouncement so infuriated the good Mrs. Dee, who had for long suffered from the friendship between the two men, that she turned Kelly out of the house, and he was banished for ever … "

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Osbert's sister Edith is remembered as a poet but she also was interested in Elizabeth I, writing a book called *Fanfare for Elizabeth*. I took from it just this little illustration of that curious thing, the horn book. "She sewed, and she did her lessons,—learning the alphabet from a "delicate little horn-book of silver filigree". "In shape," wrote Mr. Walter de la Mare in *Come Hither*, "they" (horn-books) "resembled a small oblong hand-glass, with a hole through the handle; a piece of string was passed through the hole, and the horn-book was tied round the owner's waist. Fixed and fitted to one side of it was an oblong strip of parchment, card, or paper, containing the criss-cross rows (the Alphabet with a cross before A) a few diagraphs, Ah, ba, and so on, 'In the name of the Father' and the Lord's Prayer". The equally curious question is: how good was the horn book in teaching children to read?

Edith was an interesting character: difficult, generous, rude, snobbish, talented. Poetry was her first love. She wrote, "The childhood of a poet is in nearly all cases a strange weaving together of the ecstasy that the poet knows and the helpless misery that is known by a child who is lost in the unfamiliar street of a slum. He is in a foreign place, and the faces around him are dark and strange … He must suffer within his heart the mad tempests of love for the beauty of the world of sight, sense, and sound, and the mad tempests of rage against the cruelty and blindness that is in the world. But he must suffer these dumbly, for among the tall strangers there is none to understand him, and among the small strangers there is nothing but noise and buffeting. The children are terrifying to him; their eyes are on a level with his own, but they are like the blind and beautiful eyes of statues—they see nothing … " Her poetry was seen as ground-breaking, moving away from the lyricism of the Edwardian poets, and she had champions in people like W. B. Yeats. But she couldn't live from her poetry so turned to prose and brought out books like *Fanfare for Elizabeth* and *The English Eccentrics* as well as numerous articles and reviews. Perhaps unsurprisingly one of her most popular prose works was *The English Eccentrics*. She was one of them …

Although Edith was the family's poet Osbert did occasionally break out into verse. This poem he supposedly wrote on a menu in a San Francisco café:

The long war had ended.
Its miseries had grown faded.
Deaf men became difficult to talk to,
Heroes became bores.
Those alchemists
Who converted blood into gold
Had grown elderly.
But they had a meeting,
Saying,
"We think perhaps we ought
To put up tombs
Or erect altars
To those brave lads
Who were so willingly burnt,
Or blinded,
Or maimed,
Who lost all likeness to a living thing,
Or were blown to bleeding patches of flesh
For our sakes.
It would look well.

Or we might even educate the children."
But the richest of these wizards
Coughed gently;
And he said:
"I have always been to the front
— In private enterprise —
I yield in public spirit
To no man.
I think yours is a very good idea
— A capital idea —
And not too costly …
But it seems to me
That the cause for which we fought
Is again endangered.
What more fitting memorial for the fallen
Than that their children
Should fall for the same cause?"
Rushing eagerly into the street,
The kindly old gentlemen cried
To the young:
"Will you sacrifice
Through your lethargy
What your fathers died to gain?
The world must be made safe for the young!"
. . . . .
And the children
Went. …

('The Next War')

* * * * *

Philip Ziegler wrote in his biography of Osbert Sitwell, "The producer of *A Place of One's Own*, who also helped Osbert with the script, was R. J. Minney, a former editor of the *Sunday Referee*, which had published many of Osbert's articles in the 1930s. Early in 1942 the two men agreed to co-operate on a play about the last years of the ill-fated Nicholas and Alexandra, murdered tsar and tsarina of Russia. Osbert's delight in the project grew more intense as work progressed: 'The situation is extraordinarily dramatic and moving, I think,' gave way to 'It is a Wow, I think,' and a final, triumphant, 'It really is a wonderful piece of work, though I shouldn't say so.'

"Nobody else was likely to if he did not. The first considered reaction to *Gentle Caesar* came from John Gielgud. Osbert had presumably sent him a copy in the hope that he might be tempted to play the part of the tsar – he could hardly have visualised Gielgud as Rasputin. The overture was rebuffed; Gielgud said bluntly that he did not like the play, 'though I have always been attracted by the character of Nicholas and had great hopes of the subject'. The script was historically correct but there was not much else to be said for it. 'Of course it is beautifully written and the detail and much of the quality of the play are charming, but I don't really feel, except for the one curtain with Rasputin, that it is enormously dramatic.' Osbert was displeased. 'What a very tiresome letter,' he told Minney. 'What can we do now? He is quite *wrong* in what he says.'

"Gielgud was not quite wrong; indeed he could have been less generous. The script is pitted with long speeches recounting facts which must already have been well known to everybody on the stage." Not only did the play expend great efforts to explain everything but the only truly dramatic character was that of Rasputin who barely gets ten minutes. A theatre director felt it wasn't the right time, in 1942, to put on such a play and several people went further to say that the Soviet Union then an ally of Britain against Hitler would see such a play as a distinctly unfriendly act. But Osbert had great faith in the play and Macmillan's brought it out in book form in 1943 though to luke-warm reviews and when it was finally staged it flopped dismally.

"Osbert never lost faith in the play or the merits of his collaborator. There was a brief unpleasantness when Minney insisted that his name should come first on the title page of the book version but Macmillan seem to have been more put out than Osbert, who was happy with Minney's proposal that the order be reversed on their next joint play. There never was a next play, however. In mid 1943 Minney suggested that they should collaborate on a play about 'George Elliot [*sic*]. It's (a) grand idea, I think, if you can possibly bear to embark upon another before the fate of the first is known.' Evidently Osbert could not; the idea came to nothing. *Gentle Caesar* was Osbert's last attempt at a play; drama joined the novel as a line of literature where he had no further contribution to make."

My friend Anthony Raymond told me his surname was originally Minny (sometimes spelled Minney) and he had been born in a Japanese concentration camp in Shanghai to a Jewish family. I had never come across this surname until I was reading Ziegler's book and found that mention of Minney. I asked Anthony if this might be a relative—and he said, "Yes! Rubeigh James Minney was my father's second cousin! He was, I believe, Editor of the London Times; and producer of some of Charlie Chaplin's films. He is in "Who's Who"! He wrote at least 2 novels which were successfully made into films: 1. "Madonna of the 7 Moons" and 2. "Carve Her Name with Pride". His side of the family inherited the family fortune! My father's side was disinherited because my great(?)-grandfather wanted to become a fireman rather than a 'speculator/investor/business-man'! This is the story my father told me. It may be unreliable." (His father, Cyril Ezekial Minny, was the export manager for Jardine Mathieson in Shanghai which is how the family came to be caught up in the Japanese advance and interned; that in itself suggests a book waiting to be written.)

I was intrigued. Rubeigh James Minney was a well-known writer in his day and I looked to see what he had written. And the Minneys, originally a Jewish family in Baghdad, would surely have had many interesting stories just waiting to be turned into plays …

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Peter Haining wrote in *Classics of the Supernatural*:

"One of the most curious ghost movies of which a print still exists is *A Place of One's Own* filmed exactly fifty years ago in the final months of the Second World War. It was curious not just because the ghost was presented as a real figure rather than a misty apparition who appeared and disappeared at will, but because the picture was actually filmed *in a haunted house*.

"Authenticity is an element that film makers have often tried to duplicate on the screen, but *A Place of One's Own* represents one of the rare excursions where the producer, R.J. Minney, and his team decided to risk supernatural intervention. The exteriors were shot at an old house at Esher in Surrey which was reputed to be haunted by the ghost of a white lady who walked in the spacious grounds on certain moonlit nights.

"Filming began in the Spring of 1945 and for three days (and nights) the picture went ahead without any problems. But on the fourth night the production was suddenly brought to a shuddering halt — not from a ghostly manifestation, but something far more substantial and a lot

more deadly. A German flying bomb, part of Hitler's last ditch efforts to win the war, suddenly plunged out of the night sky and exploded in the garden. Fortunately, none of the film crew were working nearby, and apart from leaving a large crater in the garden, the bomb only blew in the front doors of the house. In the first hours of the following day, the props people were quickly on the location to build replicas and within a few hours the filming — like life in the rest of Britain at that time — was soon underway once again.

"The plot of *A Place of One's Own* concerned a middle-aged couple who had moved into the elegant house despite warnings that it was haunted. Accompanying them was a young companion who soon found herself being influenced by the spirit of another young woman who had died mysteriously in the house some years earlier. It required the intervention of another ghost, the dead girl's father, to restore the young companion to her former self and also return the house to its usual tranquility.

"Sadly, *A Place of One's Own* is rarely seen today, yet it represents an interesting landmark in the genre of ghost movies. Its authenticity also owes much to the fact the three principal creators were all journalists: producer R.J. Minney was the editor of *Everybody's Weekly*; scriptwriter Brock Williams was a newspaper reporter from the West country; while the director Bernard Knowles had begun his career as a photographer on the *Detroit News*. All three were making their film debuts and their background undoubtedly contributed to the film's feeling of realism."

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Osbert's writings are quite difficult to read at times; it is as though a torrent of prose comes at you and you have to battle through it to pull out the nuggets. But in his *Laughter in the Next Room* he does provide some interesting little pen-portraits of literary figures of his time. Of Lady Ottoline Morrell he writes, "With a mass of chestnut hair falling on each side of her face, with her emphatic features, and wearing a yellow gown with a very wide skirt, she resembled a rather over-life-size Infanta of Spain, and there was something, too, in her appearance that recalled the portraits of her remarkable ancestress, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, the poet." Among the lions who came to her parties was Sergei Diaghilev who wanted to meet royalty not bohemia. Lady Ottoline cheered him up by introducing him to Dorothy Brett, the painter, and whispering "That woman is sister to a Queen." So she was—to the 'Queen' of Sarawak.

Of Virginia Woolf he says he could never understand why people were frightened of her; "though there was, and I am sure she would have admitted it, a human amount of malice in her composition (and how greatly the dull-minded would have complained if there had not been!), there was very much more, and most unusual, gentleness. To the young, to poets and painters, but not to dons, she was invariably kind; kind, moreover, to the extent that, in spite of the burden of her own work and correspondence, she would take trouble for them. She would, I am aware — for I have been present — lay traps for the boastful and the blunted, and greatly she enjoyed the snaring of them (I once had great difficulty in rescuing alive a popular American novelist, whose name was at that time written as a sky-sign round the roofs of Cambridge Circus): but for the most part they deserved their fate. She possessed, too, a beautiful, clear, gentle speaking voice. Though sometimes, when many people were present, she could be seen swaying a little, preparing herself with nervous effort to say the words, to break through the reserve that lay over her, yet I have heard her dare to make a speech." Not just any old speech either but one which astonished him with its skill and apparent spontaneity.

Of T. S. Eliot he wrote, "It was then that we saw Eliot for the first time: a most striking being, having peculiarly luminous, light yellow, more than tawny, eyes: the eyes, they might have been, of one of the greater cats, but tiger, puma, leopard, lynx, rather than those of a lion

which, for some reason, displays usually a more domesticated and placid expression. His face, too, possessed the width of bony structure of a tigrine face, albeit the nose was prominent, similar, I used to think, to that of a figure on an Aztec carving or bas-relief. Though he was reserved, and had armoured himself behind the fine manners, and the fastidiously courteous manner, that are so particularly his own; though, too, the range and tragic depths of his great poetry were to be read in the very lines of his face; and though, in addition, he must have been exhausted by long hours of uncongenial work, his air, to the contrary, was always lively, gay, even jaunty."

Others that he wrote about, like Harrison Ainsworth and Ivo Charteris, have largely been forgotten. But you never doubt that Osbert was there in the thick of things with his cocktail glass and heaped up plate of savouries.

And what of Osbert? His editor Rache Lovat Dickson described him as 'pink, fair, spick-and-span, well tailored, well shorn and shaven'; an image which calls to mind someone like Bertie Wooster though undoubtedly with more brains … But I regret that Dickson did not at times encourage Osbert to greater concision …

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December 7: Willa Cather
Joyce Cary
December 8: James Thurber
Padraic Colum
December 9: John Milton
Jean de Brunhoff
Richard Llewellyn

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"The bird-haunted shore-line of Lake Naivasha was to become the setting for *Babar sur l'Île aux Oiseaux*, thanks to Joss's friends and neighbours Captain Mario Rocco and his wife Giselle, whose yarns about Congolese elephants had been the inspiration for her cousin Jean de Brunhoff's *Babar* books."

Errol Trzebinski in *The Life and Death of Lord Erroll*.

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"Around this time, (Lois) Lowry went on a date with a man named Martin Small. While they talked over coffee, Small remarked, "You have good ideas, Cornelius. When I am king I will give you a green hat." Lowry feared she was out with a very strange person, but he reassured her. He was quoting a line from a children's story about Babar, the elephant. Lowry believed that a fifty-year-old man who knew a picture book by heart must be a great guy. They have shared each other's lives ever since."

Christine M. Hill in *Ten terrific Authors for Teens*.

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Babar the Elephant has survived better than many children's storybook characters. The books were around in my youth and cartoon versions of Babar stories are still being watched by my granddaughter. So clearly the Roccos were inspiring tellers of tales or Jean de Brunhoff was able to take rough material and turn it into something worth keeping. But Anita Silvey in *The Essential Guide to Children's Books and Their Creators* gives the books a different genesis: "The inspiration for Babar came from Madame de Brunhoff, Jean's wife, who told stories about a little elephant to amuse her young children. Their enthusiasm for the tales encouraged their artist father to shape them into illustrated books, beginning with *The Story of Babar* (1933)."

Jean died in France from TB in 1937 and his son Laurent eventually took up the stories from where his father had left off and wrote more Babar books. They aren't great books, and I am yet to hear anyone quote from them, but they are a reminder that children, past and present, like small elephants.

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December 10: George Macdonald
Emily Dickinson
William Plomer
December 11: Naguib Mahfouz
Alexander Solzhenitsyn
December 12: Louis Nowra
Vasily Grossman
December 13: Heinrich Heine
December 14: Paul Éluard
December 15: Edna O'Brien
Komninos
December 16: Jane Austen
Philip K. Dick
Ludwig von Beethoven
December 17: Edith Thompson
Francis Trevelyan Buckland

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"The seventy letters and telegrams that have survived of her relationship with Bywaters are minor gems. Her range in them is impressive, her confidence startling. Some of her letters are wholly concerned with literary criticism of a sort, such as endings in fiction, the overlap between novels and life, and the presentation of character in the works of novelists such as Hichens, Chambers and Hutchinson. On other occasions she expands on her sexual revulsion from her husband and her longings for Freddy. She describes how she dreams about joining him in bed and making love; and then how he bolts downstairs to escape from her husband at the top of the landing. She records her periods to underline the intimacy of their relationship and then pretends to be shocked when her lover takes her up on it. She offers contradictory and outrageous accounts of her miscarriage(s), and follows them with meticulous descriptions of visits to the theatre, cinema and music-hall. She discusses scores of people, real and fictional, mostly, but not always, forgiving rather than censuring. She can fight like a polecat when Bywaters is dismissive of her in his replies, and at the same time be as innocent as a schoolgirl before one of his escapades. She is at her best in the recording of the quotidian happenings in her life, involving her lover in the fêtes at the Seamen's Orphanage in Wanstead Park and the Eastcote outing, as well as the routines, trials and excitements at Carlton & Prior. Most of these letters have survived. Only for this first trip on the *Morea* have the records perished."

René Weis in *Criminal Justice*.

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"There are plenty of good business-women, and not a few who are romantic escapists. The two types cannot often be found in one personality, still less often in such as Edith Thompson. Her success in business implies that she enjoyed her work, which in time gave her more responsibility and scope than her husband ever knew, and a salary at least as big as his. It brought her in constant touch with a wider and more variegated life than that of Ilford. But another and very powerful element in her nature demanded a different life altogether. She found this in her

own dreams, and in novels; and the more Ilford, and all it stood for irked her, the deeper she withdrew into this life of fancy. The case is common enough, but Mrs Thompson was a most uncommon woman, as few who have read her letters can doubt. She was the escapist *par excellence*. It has often been remarked that the published photographs of her might be the portraits of many different women. The very features appear unlike. She had that chameleon quality of the oversensitive and imaginative mind which so takes on the colour of whatever at the moment possesses it, whether reality or make-believe, that it seems to remould the face. Unhappily, in her, the mind was wholly untrained and uncontrolled. It was the mind of a child, absorbing rubbish, and worse than rubbish, as readily and credulously as the stuff of value it was quite capable of appreciating. Because, indeed, it was a very lively and intelligent mind, this inability to discriminate brought disaster. In the famous letters lies and self-deceptions are so mingled with the truth that judge and jury, taking the easiest course, appear to have assumed the lies to be truth, and much of the truth to be lies.

"Besides the extraordinarily vivid impression, for good or bad, which is all that remains of Edith Thompson the picture of Frederick Bywaters, like that of his victim, is sketchy in the extreme. Probably there was not much in him except virility and a sort of good looks. The rest was supplied by Edith Thompson's imagination. Though old in some ways for his years, he was, in fact, eight years her junior, and, being a writer, or steward, on the P. and O. liner *Morea*, he was out of England for many weeks at a time. These circumstances, menacing her with fears that he might tire of her or become estranged during their long partings, were always in her mind. There are signs towards the end that he had moments of doubt about the passionate entanglement, and it is then that she begins the obscure campaign of incitement which was to be the ruin of both of them. It is not in his favour that he kept her dangerous letters, while she faithfully destroyed his, and Filson Young, who describes him as "a virile degenerate," is not alone in thinking him capable of blackmail. When poor Mrs Graydon asked her daughter how she could write such letters Edith Thompson replied, "Nobody knows what kind of letters he was writing to me." The views of a kindly and impartial witness of these protagonists in the tragedy may perhaps be inferred from one of those marginal pencillings which are so often a clue to Spilsbury's thoughts. In his own copy of the relevant volume in the "Notable Trials" series he has marked this passage. He marked others, and as will be seen, on the whole these annotations confirm the impression that his opinion of Edith Thompson was not that of the judge and jury. It is interesting to note that for him, as for everybody else, she held the centre of the stage. There are no pencil-marks for Frederick Bywaters."

Bernard Spilsbury His Life and Cases by Douglas G. Browne and E. V. Tullett.

They go on to say that the judge, Mr Justice Shearman, described the letters as "Gush" and "This insensate, silly affection" and that he singled out authors such as Robert Hichens and W. B. Maxwell, "They write chiefly about so-called heroes and heroines, probably wicked people, which no doubt accounts for a great many of these tragedies." To which Browne and Tullett respond "Mr Hichens, Mr Maxwell, *et al*., must rightly have resented this preposterous inference." But the judge appears to have singled out Hichens' book *Bella Donna* because in it "a wife poisons her husband" and Edith Thompson had sent a copy to Bywaters. Despite Spilsbury's care he could find no evidence to uphold the idea that Thompson had put the book's theme into practice. "In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* (1951), Miss Tennyson Jesse has revealed that Spilsbury "considered Mrs Thompson guiltless of any attempt to poison her husband or in any other way to try to get rid of him."

Clive Bloom in *Bestsellers* wrote, "The *Daily News* (13 Dec. 22) noted of Edith Thompson at her trial that,

Here was Mrs Thompson, child … of a favoured age; one of those well-fed, well-dressed young women that the suburbs have produced in the last twenty years: educated up to a point; given an opportunity to realise what a wonder she is … by being allowed to hold a responsible post in commerce, and being paid a salary for it that would have made her grandmother swoon. She was now at the stage when she developed an imagination.

Then, when what she needed was God and William Shakespeare, she was given cheap sweets and Gloria de Vere.

The Thompson case is a symbol of what happens to a State which attains to a certain degree of material prosperity, but lacks a general passion for art and religion."

Reading light fiction has been blamed for many things, from failed marriages to unwanted babies, but should it be blamed for Edith Thompson's adultery or Frederick Bywaters' killing of her husband? Should any fiction be blamed? Or more particularly should writers like Robert Hichins be blamed?

I knew nothing of his writings but he was very popular in the early twentieth century. So Clive Bloom to the rescue again. "Son of a cleric, Hichens was a gifted musician but chose to travel and write, living a 'bohemian' lifestyle which took him, amongst other locations, to Egypt, which inspired his mystic tone and approach. Hichens' novel *The Garden of Allah* (1904) combined the exotic landscape of the Sahara with the enthusiasm and overheated passionate spiritualism of Marie Corelli" … A dangerous mix? John Sutherland in *Literary Lives* also looked at Hichens. "Edwardian society was alternately shocked, thrilled, intrigued, and dissolved in laughter. The jests of one generation seldom amuse the next; but *The Londoners* (1898) is still a very funny piece of pure fooling. Hichens kept his humour in its place, however, and did not allow it to interfere with the dramatic tension of his romances, or the horror of his essays in the macabre. Of these latter, the short story 'How Love Came to Professor Guildea' (in *Tongues of Conscience*, 1900) is acknowledged a small classic. His greatest success and best known novel was *The Garden of Allah* (1904) which he later dramatized. So popular was this romance of passion and conflict in the desert that he wrote from time to time other stories with a similar setting. Egypt and North Africa were familiar ground to him; he spent much of his time there, riding in the desert; and otherwise preferred the Riviera or Switzerland to any permanent residence in England. He belonged to a generation of writers eminent for good workmanlike story-telling; and to the very end his hand never faltered, although naturally there must be some loss of power and freshness in the course of half a century. He also wrote several plays, including *Becky Sharp* written for (Dame) Marie Tempest in collaboration with Cosmo Gordon Lennox.

"In 1947 Hichens published his memoirs, *Yesterday*, which illustrate his confession: 'The Edwardian age through which I lived was certainly very attractive to me.' "

So was Edith Thompson drawn to him for romance? For humour? For horror? Or just a good workmanlike piece of story-telling?

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On the surface of it, it is a puzzle why the hanging of Edith Thompson and Freddie Bywaters on the 8th January 1923 in London should have attracted so much attention. It seems a dull little story of the eternal triangle, a cuckolded husband, a wife obsessed by a younger lover, a young man who was by no means committed to his lover. Yet over a hundred thousand people signed a petition for the reprieve of Edith Thompson. Clearly they believed, as indeed seems to be the case, that she was condemned for adultery rather than murder but perhaps also because many people found the hanging of women, perhaps the hanging of anyone, repugnant. And writers of the era were deeply influenced by the case. It can be seen underlying Dorothy Sayers'

The Documents in the Case and F. Tennyson Jesse's *A Pin for the Peepshow*, though Jesse's story has much more the sense of forbidden and dangerous love. P. D. James says of Sayers' book in *Talking about Detective Fiction*, "Apart from the wish to do something new, she said she was looking forward to getting a rest from Lord Peter because 'his everlasting breeziness does become a bit of a tax at times'. The novel, *The Documents in the Case*, was loosely based on the tragic Thompson-Bywaters murder, where a dull and unloved husband is killed by the young lover of his wife, and the story is told variously through letters from a young man living in the same house as the married couple, the other participants in the story, the killer, and newspaper reports giving at length the evidence from the coroner's inquests. But Sayers knew that she hadn't succeeded in her ambition. The love affair is too tawdry and uninteresting to generate the passion necessary to provoke murder, and the novel is a depressing read."

On a night in 1922 Bywaters had been drinking in a pub and then went out to waylay Edith and Percy Thompson as they walked home. Bywaters stabbed Percy Thompson to death. Why? The question remains a mystery. Bywaters did not plan to marry Edith. He was seeing two other women. He was young and attractive to women. It seems very unlikely that he saw Percy Thompson as the impediment to his happiness. He appears to have rushed out in the hope of wounding and frightening Thompson but it wasn't a carefully planned murder. He should've done time for manslaughter—not be hanged for murder.

And Edith? The outcry was promoted by the simple fact that Edith almost certainly had no prior warning of Bywaters' wild action. It wasn't a conspiracy. And she played no part in the death of her husband. He seems to have been a hypochondriac, a pompous, rather rigid-minded man, a man who refused to agree to a divorce, but not a villain. It was said then, and the claim is undoubtedly true: she was hanged for adultery, for being the older woman, the temptress, the woman who failed to make a comfortable home for her man, a danger to young and easily influenced men—and perhaps she was hanged for her independence of mind and action. Lewis Broad brought out *The Innocence of Edith Thompson: A Study in Old Bailey Justice* in 1952 and the BBC made a program 'Hanged for Adultery' in 1973.

Weis provides a powerful story of the suffering families, not least the dashed hopes as rumours floated of a reprieve were found to be false, and of the way in which even then the families were hounded by the media. He writes of the final day, "Outside the sounds of dawn herald the 9 January. The persistent drizzle throughout the night does not deter the crowd from forming at the break of day. It consists predominantly of women. Some of them carrying umbrellas, others merely in hats and raincoats facing the forbidding red and grey structure of Holloway. A forlorn middle-aged woman has sandwiched herself into a sign saying 'Murder cannot be abolished by murder' and on the reverse side, 'If these two are hanged Judge & Jury are Murderers also'. The same spectacle is simultaneously enacted over in Pentonville. There the thronging crowd is already congesting the Caledonian Road and mounted police are on duty to clear it should there be a riot."

* * * * *

And the fact remains that Edith Thompson was convicted on the letters she wrote to Freddie Bywaters. She had destroyed his letters. He had kept hers. And they were not only the chronicle of an affair but the story of a strange and dramatic fantasy life. She lived the melodramas she loved to read. It may be that she was not sure where the boundaries between the facts of her life, the longings she felt, the drama of her love life, and the fantasy of her reading actually ran.

One of the writers she was drawn to was a now-nearly-forgotten writer called Robert Hichens who brought out novels like *Bella Donna* and *The Fruitful Vine*. So I looked to see if any of his books are still available.

The Victorian and Edwardian Collection in Launceston had a copy of *Bella Donna* but had sent their books to the museum. However the Glenorchy Library persuaded them to send it southwards briefly and this week I have been sitting in the library reading it. And I can see exactly why Edith Thompson loved it and wanted to share it. It also, I think, opens a door into her own private fantasy life.

It was first published in 1909 and remained popular into the 1920s. The central character is a divorced woman, Ruby Chepstow. "Mrs. Chepstow was a great beauty in decline. Her day of glory had been fairly long, but now it seemed to be over. She was past forty. She said she was thirty-eight, but she was over forty. Goodness, some say, keeps women fresh. Mrs. Chepstow had tried a great many means of keeping fresh, but she had ommitted that. The step between æstheticism and asceticism was one which she had never taken." Her father, a son of Lord Cheam, had been a bankrupt. "Mrs. Chepstow's life was very possibly influenced by her parents' pecuniary troubles. When she was young she learnt to be frightened of poverty. She had known what it was to be "sold up" twice before she was twenty; and this probably led her to prefer the alternative of being sold. At any rate, when she was in her twenty-first year, sold she was to Mr. Wodehouse Chepstow, a rich brewer, to whom she had not even taken a fancy; and as Mrs. Chepstow she made a great fame in London society as a beauty. She was christened Bella Donna. She was photographed, written about, worshipped by important people, until her celebrity spread far over the world, as the celebrity even of a woman who is only beautiful and who does nothing can spread in the era of the paragraph."

Chepstow divorces her for adultery and she finds herself poor again and with a ruined reputation. She uses her face and figure to survive but she is 'cut' by the people who once welcomed her.

Her nemesis is Dr Meyer Isaacson. "Patients who had been to him spoke enthusiastically of his observant eyes. His personality always made a great impression. "There's no one just like him," was a frequent comment upon Doctor Meyer Isaacson. And that phrase is a high compliment upon the lips of London, the city of parrots and of monkeys." He is thought to be "about forty".

" "Meyer" suggested Germany. As to "Isaacson," it allowed the ardent imagination free play over denationalized Israel. Someone said that he "looked as if he came from the East," to which a cynic made answer, "The East End." There was, perhaps, a hint of both in the Doctor of Cleveland Square." He is clever, artistic, musical, a lover of beautiful things, an intelligent and vital man who sees through Mrs Chepstow's attractive and graceful façade to the shallow and selfish woman inside. But she uses her beautiful voice, ("And of all her attractions her voice perhaps was the greatest") her still attractive looks, and her ostracism to draw a young friend of the doctor's. Nigel Armine is rather naïve and still clinging to youthful ideals; he feels sorry for her, he believes in her essential goodness, he believes society has treated her unfairly.

One society matron justifies this treatment by saying, 'The woman without ideals, without any feeling for home and all that home means, the one man, children, peace found in unselfishness, rest in work for others; the woman who betrays the reputation of her sex by being absolutely concentrated upon herself, and whose desires only extend to the vulgar satisfactions brought by a preposterous expenditure of money on clothes, jewels, yachts, houses, motors, everything that rouses wonder and admiration in utterly second-rate minds.' Things which Mrs Chepstow longs for … but Nigel sees her very differently. 'She may have been driven into the Devil's hands, but don't you see, don't you feel, the good in her, struggling up, longing for an opportunity to proclaim itself, to take the reins of her life and guide her to calm, to happiness, to peace? I pity that woman, Isaacson; I pity her.'

She meets the two men in London in settings of wit and sophistication, intimate little suppers at the Savoy, an artifical world which perhaps seduced Edith Thompson, the young woman in suburban Ilford, with its almost but not quite attainable glamour …

Nigel marries her and takes her to Egypt where she meets Mahmoud Baroudi, a rich Greek-Turco-Egyptian. Nigel increasingly irks her; "her husband had respect for her, and she wore his respect like a chain; Baroudi had not respect for her, and she wore his lack of respect like a flower."

"Perhaps she was born for other things—born to be a votary of Venus, but not to content any man as his lawful wife. The very word "lawful" sent a chill through her blood now. She was meant for lawlessness, it seemed. Then she would fulfil her destiny, without pity, without fear, but not without discretion. And her destiny was to emerge from the trap in which she was confined. So she believed."

Nigel writes to Meyer in London to suggest he is a happy and contented man with a loving wife bravely putting up with the discomforts of Egypt. But in his letter he writes "She packed off her French maid, so as to be quite free." Meyer finds this a very strange statement. Free for what? He begins to think about taking a short trip to Egypt.

But when he gets there he finds people saying how unwell Nigel is, that he is suffering from sunstroke, and being treated by a young American doctor. Bella Donna tries to keep Isaacson away from her husband, citing his need for peace and quiet and Dr Baring Hartley's experience of the case. Despite the protocols to be observed between doctors Isaacson is increasingly convinced that it isn't sunstroke. He believes that Mrs Armine, or someone in her employ, is poisoning Nigel with lead.

Did the story have a wider influence? Apart from helping promote a fascination with Egypt, from *The Sheik* to Howard Carter and Tutankhamen's tomb, I wondered if Bella Donna inspired anti-femme-fatale types like Dorothy Sayers' Harriet Vane who has the beautiful voice but is not beautiful. And Agatha Christie in *Death on the Nile* also has a French maid who is too observant and knowing for her own good.

While his wife is away in Cairo but planning to return Meyer Isaacson reluctantly tells Nigel the truth. Nigel refuses to believe but as soon as she returns to the Villa Androud she makes a furtive visit to Baroudi's luxurious boat … only to find he has another woman aboard.

Her powers of seduction have failed. She is growing faded, uninteresting, unwanted. Her ploys have failed to remove Nigel or entice Baroudi or convince Isaacson. There is nothing left for her but to leave. "Then she waited no longer. She made her way to the gate of the garden, passed out to the deserted track beyond, and disappeared into the darkness, going blindly towards the distant hills that keep the Arabian desert." It might be seen as a rather sordid little tale about a discontented woman—except for the skill Hichens brings to his writing, his ability to create character, setting, tension … I can understand Edith Thompson reading and re-reading it … but what ideas did she take from it? Did she, unlike Bella Donna, determine not to end up cast off and alone …

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December 18: 'Saki'. H. H. Munro
Charles Wesley
Francis Thompson
December 19: Jean Genet
December 20: Paul Brickhill
December 21: Nat Gould
December 22: Michael Massey Robinson (d)

David Martin

* * * * *

"Michael Massey Robinson, another ex-convict, was commissioned by Macquarie to write a series of birthday odes to the royal family and these were published in the *Sydney Gazette*. Robinson was given two cows for his trouble and somewhat mockingly named Poet Laureate."

Arts Management by Jennifer Radbourne & Margaret Fraser.

This doesn't suggest poetry of a high order. But Robinson *was* a colourful character and he *does* have the distinction of being Australia's first published poet. William Wilde in *Australian Poets & Their Works* says of him, "In spite of his claim to be the first Australian poet, Field was the contemporary of three other writers, one of whom was Michael Massey Robinson. An Oxford-educated lawyer, transported to New South Wales in 1798 for blackmail and pardoned in 1811, Robinson was the first poet to receive royalties in Australia, two cows from the government herd being his reward for composing odes to celebrate the birthdays of their majesties, George III and Queen Charlotte, in the years 1810-21. The celebratory odes, couched in the flowery language that marked the public-poem genre, conveyed even less of the real nature of the country or the colony than Field's verses did, a point clearly not lost on Field, as his decision to ignore Robinson's poetry indicates. The Great South Land lay, in Robinson's opinion, 'unprofitably idle' until the coming of his countrymen.

> But when Britannia's sons came forth, to brave
> The dreary perils of the length'ning wave,
> When her bold Barks with swelling Sails unfurl'd
> Traced these rude Coasts, and hail'd a new found world,
> Soon as their footsteps press'd the yielding Sand
> A Sun more genial brighten'd on the Land.

The implications are interesting, particularly in view of this present generation's emphasis on conservation. Only the inhabited, colonised land was seen by Robinson as worthwhile. Without the civilisation brought by discoverers and settlers the primitive land had no function, not even, apparently, for the poetic imagination."

Robinson was given legal work when he arrived in Sydney but for writing lampooning verses, known as 'pipes', he was sent to Norfolk Island in 1805. After his pardon he went to work as a police clerk. But his verse had to wait till 1946 to be collected up and published as the *Odes of Michael Massey Robinson*. So he was the first published poet but Barron Field had the first book of poetry published in the colony. I didn't feel I really wanted to track down his book of odes and yet I found a kind of secret inspiration that even in such an unpromising milieu his thoughts would turn to poetry. Anthologies of Australian poetry usually leap over his poems, 21st century tastes not fancying 19th century declamatory verse, unless written with great skill, great wit, or with something important to say. Yet, curiously, it is not hard to find his poems on the internet—along with details of his not-very-salubrious life. I cannot help thinking that he would enjoy this kind of posthumous fame.

He wasn't Oscar Wilde but it would be interesting to know what poems he had committed to memory before his trial and transportation and carried with him as a kind of invisible luggage to draw upon when he sat down with his own quill and scraps of paper …

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December 23: Giuseppi di Lampedusa
December 24: Matthew Arnold

Mary Higgins Clark
James Hadley Chase
December 25: Rebecca West
Suzanne Chick
Michael Sadleir
December 26: Robert Leroy Ripley
Dion Boucicault
December 27: Elizabeth Smart
December 28: Manuel Puig
December 29: Gerard Windsor
Vera Brittain
December 30: Elyne Mitchell
Rudyard Kipling
Stephen Leacock

* * * * *

Rudyard Kipling wrote in 'Rewards and Fairies':

Excellent herbs had our fathers of old,
Excellent herbs to heal their pain,
Alexanders and Marigold,
Eyebright, Orris and Elecampane,
Basil, Rocket, Valerian, Rue,
Almost singing themselves they run.
Vervain, Dittany, Call-me-to-you,
Cowslip, Melilot, Rose of the Sun —
Anything green that grew out of the mould
Was an excellent herb to our fathers of old.

*

In *The Perpetual Almanack of Folklore* by Charles Kightly I found a variety of odd little snippets of herbal lore and two things struck me about them. Firstly, how important collections of herbal medicine were before people had easy access to doctors. And secondly, how many of the herbs mentioned are still in use and seen as valuable adjuncts to modern medicine. Just to give you a little taste of what you might have read 400 years ago—

From Culpeper's *Herbal* 1653

'This herb groundsel is Venus's mistress-piece, and is as gallant and universal a medicine for all diseases coming of heat, in what part of the body they be, as the sun shines upon.'

'Alder leaves gathered while the morning dew is on them, and brought into a chamber troubled with fleas, will gather them thereunto: which being suddenly cast out, will rid the chamber of these troublesome bedfellows.'

'Ivy, whose black berries do not ripen until Christmas-time, after the hard frosts, has many medicinal as well as magical uses, and is 'a plant of Bacchus': 'The berries taken before one be set to drink hard, preserve from drunkenness … and if one hath got a surfeit by drinking of wine, the speediest cure is to drink a draught of the same wine wherein a handful of ivy leaves (being first bruised) have been boiled.'

‘An ointment being made of cowslips takes away spots and wrinkles of the skin, sun-burning, and freckles, and adds beauty exceedingly.’

‘Pleasant-smelling Wild Marjoram, also called Organy and Joy of the Mountain, is a herbal cure-all: made into a tea or infusion, ‘it strengthens the stomach and head much, there being scarce a better remedy growing for such as are troubled with a sour humour in the stomach, it restores the appetite being lost; helps the cough and consumption of the lungs; helps the biting of venomous beasts, and such as have poisoned themselves by eating hemlock, henbane, or opium. It provokes urine and the terms in women, helps the dropsy, the scurvy, scabs, itch and yellow jaundice.’

‘Wormwood cleanses the body of choler. It provokes urine, helps surfeits or swellings in the belly: it causes appetite to meat. Mix a little Wormwood, an herb of Mars, with your ink: neither rats nor mice will touch the paper written with it. Moths are under the domination of Mars: this herb Wormwood being laid among clothes, will make a moth scorn to meddle with them.’

‘In cleansing of blood hops help to cure the French disease or pox, and all manner of scabs, itch … tetters, ringworm and spreading sores, the morphew and all discolouring of the skin. Half a dram of the seed taken in drink kills worms in the body.’

‘Boiled with barley meal and laid unto them, southernwood takes away pimples, pushes or wheals that arise in the face, or other parts of the body.’

From Gerard’s *Herbal* 1633

‘The fume of the dried leaves [of coltsfoot] taken through a funnel … effectually helpeth those that are troubled with coughs and shortness of breath, and fetch their wind thick and often. Being taken in manner as they take Tobacco, it mightily prevaileth.’

‘The slimy substance of the root (comfrey) made in a posset of ale, and given to drink against the pain in the back, gotten by any violent motion (as wrestling, or the overmuch use of women) doth in four or five days perfectly cure the same, although the involuntary flowing of the seed in men be gotten thereby.’

‘Ground ivy is commended against the humming noise and ringing sound of the ears, being put into them, and for them that are hard of hearing.’

‘Rosemary comforteth the brain, the memory, and the inward senses. The distilled water of the flowers, being drunk morning and evening, taketh away the stench of the mouth and breath, and maketh it very sweet.’

‘Against summer headaches and migraines inhale the crushed leaves of yellow and white feverfew — the ‘febrifuge’, or fever-chaser. Dried, powdered and taken with honey or sweet wine, ‘feverfew purgeth by siege melancholy and phlegm, wherefore it is very good for them that

are giddy in the head, or which have the turning called Vertigo, that is a swimming or turning in the head. Also it is good for such as be melancholic, sad, pensive and without speech.'

'Mustard is an excellent sauce for such whose blood wants clarifying, and for weak stomachs. The seed taken by itself in an electuary or drink, doth mightily stir up bodily lust, and helps the spleen and pains in the sides, and gnawings in the bowels. Being chewed in the mouth, it oftentimes helps the toothache.'

'The leaves of the Bramble boiled in water, with honey, alum and a little white wine added thereto, makes a most excellent lotion or washing water, and the same decoction fasteneth the teeth.'

From William Salmon's *Herbal* 1710.

'The prepared roots of Potatoes of Virginia stop fluxes of the Bowels, nourish much, and restore Pining Consumptions: being boiled, baked, or roasted, they are eaten with Butter, Salt, Juice of Lemons and double refined Sugar, as common food: and they increase seed and provoke Lust, causing Fruitfullness in both sexes.'

From William Turner's *Herbal* 1568.

'The leek breedeth wind, and evil juice, and maketh heavy dreams; it stirreth a man to make water, and is good for the belly: but if you will boil a leek in two waters and afterwards steep it in cold water, it will be less windy than it was before. The use of leeks is good for them that would have childer.'

'The juice ought to be pressed out of tender roses, after that which is named the nail be cut away: for the part it is which is white in leaf. The rest should be pressed and bruised in a mortar in the shadow until it be growen together, and so should it be laid up for eye medicines. … It is good for the headaches, the ache of the eyes, of the ears, of the gums, of the fundament, of the right gut, and of the mother.'

'The common nature of all kinds of Poppy is to cool, therefore if the heads and leaves be boiled in water it will make a man sleep, if his head be bathed therewith. The juice of Black Poppy, called Opium, assuages aches, brings sleep, and helpeth them that have the Flux. But if a man takes too much, it taketh a man's memory away and killeth him. He that hath taken Opium hath a great sluggishness, and all the body is cumbered with a great itch. If the patient be too much sleepy, put stinking things into his nose to wake him therewith: and if his itch continue, put him in a warm bath.'

'Garlic sudden down with milk or broken and mingled with soft cheese staunceth the falling down of humours called catarrh: and so it is good against hoarseness. Three little cloves broken in vinegar and laid to the teeth are good for the teeth ache. … Garlic driveth away with his smell serpents and venomous beasts.'

From Banckes' *Herbal* 1525

'The virtue of St John's Wort is this. If it be put in a man's house, there shall come no wicked sprite therein.'

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December 31: John Wycliffe (d)
I. G. Edmonds (d)

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THE END

End Notes: I sometimes come on interesting little snippets long after writing about something so here are a couple:

"Filson Young, writing in the Notable British Trials series about Dr Crippen, a murderer who impressed everyone with his politeness and modesty, said that it was 'what we have in common with a criminal, rather than the subtle insanity which differentiates him from us, that makes us view with such a lively interest a human being who has wandered into these tragic and fatal fields'. The lively interest almost always falls short of understanding. One of my greatest friends, at Oxford and for many years after, was a pacifist, a Greek scholar, a lover of Mozart and a country doctor. He ended his life, after killing his mistress, by committing suicide. I can only think of him as a friend, as a murderer I cannot understand him at all."

John Mortimer in *Murderers and Other Friends*. I wrote about Dr Crippen in *A Final Chapter.*

The mystery of what actually happened to Juanita Neilsen is also something that exercised me in *A Final Chapter*. I came upon what might, only might, be the definitive account in *Gentle Satan, My Father, Abe Saffron* by Alan Saffron. Abe Saffron owned the Carousel Club in Kings Cross. His associate was Jim Anderson. And Anderson put Eddy Trigg in as manager of the club. Property developer Frank Theeman paid Anderson $50,000 upfront and Anderson told Alan Saffron 'I personally solved the Juanita Nielsen problem. Frank paid me and I got rid of her.' What did young Alan do with this information, apart from putting it into a book thirty-three years after her disappearance? He doesn't say.

"Juanita Nielsen went missing on the morning of 4 July 1975, when she was last seen visiting the Carousel Club for an appointment to sell advertising space in her weekly community newspaper *Now*. Anderson was very smart and sent his son that morning to the airport, where he had booked a ticket to Queensland. The son used his dad's name to board the flight and again to check into a Brisbane hotel. For all appearances, Anderson had set up a perfect alibi, because as there was no confirmation of who was travelling in those days, a cursory police check verified his story. Meanwhile, according to the word on the street, Eddy Trigg and Anderson's adopted stepson Shane took Juanita by force to a motel in North Sydney near the Harbour. Anderson,

Theeman and a police friend of Jim's were waiting at the motel, where Frank offered Juanita a substantial amount of money to back off in her attacks about his redevelopment. Naturally, Juanita was extremely angry about being kidnapped and started to scream at the top of her voice. Jim overreacted and hit her very hard, causing her to smash her head on a glass coffee table, which instantly killed her. Theeman and the policeman quickly ran from the room, leaving Anderson alone to take care of the corpse. Shane and Eddy had already been told that they could leave as their job was only to deliver Juanita to the motel and keep her quiet, which they did until the others arrived. They were eventually charged and found guilty solely of conspiracy for their involvement in the crime of kidnapping Nielsen. Alone, Anderson came up with the only solution he could think of at the time – he told me he secretly bundled Juanita's body into the trunk of his car and drove to a deserted place, cut her into pieces and put the body parts into sealed plastic bags with weights in each. Later that evening, he went out in a small boat and disposed of her remains in Sydney Harbour."

Who was that unnamed policeman there at the death of Juanita Nielsen? Was it Fred Krahe? Did Theeman's business associates start to avoid him? Did Abe Saffron really not know what had happened, given that Theeman had apparently approached him for help? A babe in arms must've seen that Theeman was at the heart of her disappearance.

And one more End Note: In *A Writer's Calendar* I mentioned that Mrs Humphrey Ward had been born in the little white house which has been incorporated in the Torquay Dry Cleaners. Since then it has become the Quilt & Pillow Factory and the little café across the road has closed. But the small white cottage is still part of the larger building. You can sit across the road in the little park there and contemplate it …