Reading Bugs and Book Worms

A Writer's Calendar

Compiled by
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Dedication:

To the Memory of:
Ethel Sewell, Poppy Lopatniuk
Helen Neill-Fraser and Sue Wilson

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INTRODUCTION

When I wrote *The Ultimate Birthday Book* it took me quite a long time to fill up every day of the year and I thought I wouldn't want to tackle another. But the desire to try something similar again gradually crept up on me. Will I, won't I? And then I remembered how large and unwieldy the book became and I thought I might perhaps give myself a cut off point such as 300 pages and no more.

So a partial foray … well, we'll see … excuse me for sounding like an old-fashioned nurse .. *I'll* see … Because I have moments of great curiosity. Who was someone, what did they write, where did they live, why were they popular, and so on. And then there are times when I am content to leave writers and books and do quite different things.

One of the joys in my life used to be browsing the shelves in the Reference Library, Literature, History, encyclopaedias, rows of biography … but then the library decided to remove all those books to some remote fastness where they can only be accessed by putting in a specific request for a book and waiting for fifteen to thirty minutes for it to be brought to you. The place is turning in to an Internet Lounge and the joys of browsing are disappearing. I feel sad each time I think about it. So I have been looking for ideas elsewhere …

I know a writer's calendar is the ultimate in self-indulgence (although unlike scoffing chocolates it doesn't make me fat) because the things which arouse my curiosity aren't necessarily things which arouse anyone else's curiosity. But then many things can be linked to self-indulgence, from beautiful buildings and gardens, to artwork, to new breeds of animals, to time spent learning a musical instrument, and the world may be better for that person's self-indulgence. Who knows?

J. L. Herrera
2022

I mentioned in *Lists and Labels* the slowness of England to repeal its witchcraft laws. Gerald Gaskell in *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain's Witches* documents the charges against the woman, Helen Duncan, declared a witch during WW2. The Witchcraft Act of 1735 was finally repealed in 1951.

READING BUGS AND BOOK WORMS

January 1st: Jane Marcet
Maria Edgeworth
J. D. Salinger
E. M. Forster

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Paul David Blanc in *Fake Silk* looks at the dangerous substance carbon disulfide (one carbon atom and two sulfur atoms) used first in rubber production then in textiles such as rayon. Its production had many serious side effects for the workers including sleeplessness, headaches, impotence, insanity, heart problems, loss of nerve sensations, and loss of libido. It led to an unknown number of workers committing suicide.

But he also has this to say after carbon disulfide was discovered in the late eighteenth century, "An excellent measure of carbon disulfide's marginal status can be taken from the tutorials of young Miss Emily by Mrs. B., the protagonists in the hugely successful *Conversations on Chemistry* written by Jane Marcet. Although her husband, Berzelius's collaborator Alexander Marcet, was a well-respected and highly successful chemist-physician, Jane Marcet came to be far more widely known. Her fame derived from the groundbreaking educational texts that she authored, each structured as a dialogue between a kindly, very smart tutor and her eager female charges. The publication that led off the series was *Conversations on Chemistry*. It first appeared in 1806, well before her husband's work on carbon disulfide, and went through many editions. The author added new topics as she felt they were warranted (for instance, in the tenth edition Marcet introduced material on the steam engine), but carbon disulfide, it seems, did not merit inclusion among such updates.

"*Conversations on Chemistry*, beyond the editions overseen by Marcet herself, also served as the basis for minimally altered "adaptations" published in America under the cover of other authorships. It is in one of these texts that carbon disulfide finally makes a brief appearance, Dr. Thomas P. Jones, in *New Conversations on Chemistry* (1831), lifted verbatim many sections of the original Marcet text and abridged others. One of Marcet's revisions had addressed Humphry Davy's invention of the safety lamp for coal miners (which had followed not long after her husband's work on carbon disulfide). Jones appended to this an added monologue put into the mouth of Mrs. B. as she patiently instructs Emily: "There is a curious compound of sulphur and carbon, which may receive passing notice….This sulphuret, or rather *bisulphuret of carbon* is very inflammable, acrid to the taste, and has a very offensive odor. It may be formed by passing the vapour of sulphur over fragments of red-hot coal. The fact of the existence of such a combination is all that would at present interest in regard to it."

In fact, carbon disulfide smells like rotting cabbage. But it was used as a solvent of cellulose fibre. The smell must have clung to the workers making their lives and the lives of those around them a misery. I had a frock made of rayon when I was young. Now I think of the people who made that bolt of rayon with great sympathy.

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I came upon another interesting woman writing about science in *By the Book*, a collection of interviews from *The New York Times Book Review*. Neil deGrasse Tyson from the American Museum of Natural History said, "I take this occasion to note that Agnes M. Clerke, writing in the late nineteenth century and the turn of the twentieth, was one of the most prolific science writers in any field, although her specialty was astrophysics, then a male-dominated area. Her titles include *The Concise Knowledge Library: Astronomy* (1898), *Problems in Astrophysics* (1903), and *Modern*

Cosmologies (1905).” I suspect women made good science writers precisely because they weren’t expected to know much about science. They understood the need for simplicity and clarity.

She was an Irishwoman, born in 1842 in Skibbereen in Co. Cork. She had access to her father’s small telescope but not to the education which could have created her as an astronomer. Instead she turned to studying all that was known and collecting and collating this material into books which brought astronomy to a wide readership. She died in 1907.

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While I was browsing in *The Biographical Dictionary of Women in Science* edited by Marilyn Ogilvie and Joy Harvey to find out something more about Jane Marcet I came across this intriguing entry for ‘Mary the Jewess’. “Although no books by Mary remain, and no biographical information exists, enough fragments of her writings are available to establish her historicity.

“The seething, homogenizing society of Alexandria in the first few centuries after Christ was the perfect climate for the appearance of a female alchemist. Philo’s ideas had merged with those of the mystery cults and Christianity. The liberalization in Egypt of the strict patriarchal attitudes of rabbinical Judaism toward women established an environment compatible with the existence of a female Jewish alchemist. Such an environment of magic, philosophy, astrology, and religion was appropriate for the development of alchemy.

“Mary understood alchemy to represent a fusion of the rational, mystical, and practical. Although this combination would have been impossible in classical Greece, it was not unusual in an eclectic Hellenistic society. For example, Mary is credited with inventing a three-part still, described by the alchemist Zosimos. His description notes this amalgamation of the practical, technological facet of her alchemy merging with the imagery of the “above and below” that pervaded *Hermetic* philosophy. Mary is not, however, remembered for her mystical or theoretical contributions, but for the invention or the elaboration of apparatus that proved basic for the development of chemistry: the three-armed still, the *kerotakis*, the hot-ash bath, the dung bed, and the water bath. Mary’s name was given to the latter device, the *bain-marie*, a name first used by Arnald of Villanove in the fourteenth century.

“Although as a historical person, Mary will always remain out of focus, she was important to science because she incorporated the empirical—sensory elements of science within an explanatory-theoretical framework—one of the few women in antiquity to attempt it.”

And what did that *Dictionary of Women in Science* say of Jane? Her father was “a wealthy Swiss merchant residing in London” and in 1799 she married Alexander Marcet, a doctor with an interest in chemistry, which resulted in her attending some of Sir Humphry Davy’s lectures on chemistry. She couldn’t really follow him but by dint of discussing his lectures and repeating some of his experiments she found his next lectures easier to follow.

“Since she had found discussion a useful tool in understanding chemistry, she presumed that others would respond in the same way and therefore presented her subject in the form of conversations. The three protagonists—Mrs. B., the teacher, and Caroline and Emily, the students—took part in a dialogue, in the course of which Mrs. B. expounded current ideas in chemistry. The conversation approach was so successful that Marcet continued in it numerous books.”

Though it was a time when more women were getting their writings published, Fanny Burney, Mrs Radcliffe, Jane Austen, and more, “Marcet was isolated from the mainstream of literary women because she chose science as her subject” but “her importance as a teacher was great. Through her popularizations she simplified the important scientific ideas of her time so that the layperson could understand them. Although the most conspicuous testimonial to the influence of her work comes from Michael Faraday, it is probable from the wide circulation of her books that they influenced a large audience.”

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January 2nd: Isaac Asimov
Henry Kingsley
Apollonius of Rhodes (birthdate not known)

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I can remember going to see a film about Jason and the Argonauts when I was young. Though the special effects were rather obvious I found it an exciting film. But I had no idea who wrote the original story or when or where, nor did I know that the original story was not, and still isn't, seen as a story for children, despite young adventurers sometimes being called Argonauts. Certainly the original would not appeal to children with its family trees, its geographical complexities, and although children do not mind warriors grown from a dragon's teeth being cut down they are less keen on other kinds of violence. It did not occur to us that Jason had gone to Colchis to steal the Golden Fleece. It might not have mattered to us that the guardian dragon did not survive, after all, dragons do not need golden fleeces, but we did not query the people of Colchis losing their treasure. Translator Richard Hunter says, "Whereas the story of the Golden Fleece was originally associated with a fabulous 'kingdom of the sun' in the extreme east, at least as early as the seventh century BC this kingdom was identified with Colchis in modern Georgia, where the river Phasis formed the traditional eastern boundary of the known world. Colchian civilization flourished during the classical and Hellenistic periods, and there were many trading contacts with the Greek world". (And Medea is still a popular girl's name in Georgia. While the ancient Georgians used sheep's wool when they panned for gold in their rivers.)

I remember Jason trying to sail between some rather wobbly rocks in the film and Appolonius says of this "When they had reached the narrow opening of the winding strait, tightly formed by harsh rocks on both sides, the swirling rush of water surged around the ship as it proceeded, and they voyaged in great fear, for the roar of the rocks crashing together was already a constant din in their ears and the sea-battered cliffs echoed with the noise. … As they rounded the last bend, they suddenly caught sight of the rocks opening up, and all their spirits ebbed away. Euphemos sent off the dove to race on its wings, and all of the Argonauts lifted their heads to watch. The bird flew beween the rocks which came together again with a great crash; a huge body of spray was thrown up like a cloud, the sea gave a terrible roar, and all around the limitless sky resounded. As the sea surged around the harsh rocks, hollow sea-caves boomed within, and the white foam from the thundering wave was hurled high above the cliffs."

Though Apollonius is called 'of Rhodes' he was born in Alexandria in Egypt in the 3rd century BC. Muriel Spark suggested the story inspired the later order of chivalry founded by the Duke of Burgundy in 1432, the Order of the Golden Fleece. And of course we had Golden Fleece service stations when I was young though I thought that was due to the value of Australian wool. And Spark suggests that the golden fleece always belonged to Greece. " 'The golden fleece' has had a mystical significance in the literature of the world since the third century BC. The story, although a familiar one, loses none of its charm in the re-telling. According to the old Greek legends, two young relatives of the King of Thessaly named Helle and Phrixus had so incurred the displeasure of their stepmother that she decided to kill them. She was prevented from doing so, however, by a golden ram with wings, sent by the gods to carry the boy and girl away. Helle fell off the ram's back into the sea, now called the Hellespont after her. Phrixus came safely to land at Colchis, where he immediately sacrificed the ram as a thanksgiving to Zeus. The ram's marvellous golden fleece he hung upon the branch of a tree, in a garden guarded by a fierce dragon."

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January 3rd: J. R. R. Tolkien

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Though many children read *The Hobbit* Tolkien did not think of himself as a children's writer. Yet he did write for children. He wrote and illustrated a little book *Mr. Bliss* for his children.

Mr Bliss has tall hats, a silver bicycle, and a Girabbit which is like a rabbit with a giraffe's neck. But Mr Bliss wants a yellow car so he goes out and buys one. He plans to visit his friends, the Dorkinses, but as he knows nothing about driving he runs his new car into people and their vehicles and creates chaos. One catastrophe follows another. He runs foul of some bears and has trouble with the local police. In the end he decides that motoring isn't for him and the Dorkinses "have not been particularly friendly since."

"But Mr. Bliss is quite happy, though the village children are always trespassing in his garden to catch a glimpse of the Girabbit. He drives a little donkey cart now, not a motor, and Sergeant Boffin salutes him every time he appears in the village.

"'Ow's yer little pet, sir?" says he.

"Nicely, thank you," says Mr. B., "but hard on cabbages."

Tolkien had three sons and a daughter. I wonder if they enjoyed his story and his illustrations …

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January 4th: Michele Turner
Henri Bergson (d)
James Ussher

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Eric Matthews in his *Twentieth-Century French Philosophy* said of philosopher and writer Henri Bergson: "The life of Henri Bergson straddles the division between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and his complex thought likewise marks the transition from the scientifically minded positivism of such essentially nineteenth-century philosophers as Auguste Comte, Claude Bernard, and Émile Durkheim to the more suspicious attitude towards the mathematically based physical sciences characteristic of the twentieth century. His own philosophy combined respect for mathematics and physics with a sense of their limitations as keys to metaphysical reality. His arguments make frequent reference to scientific findings, but the science in question is usually *biology*, and his account of biology itself is founded in intuition rather than mathematical reason. The atmosphere of most of his writings is that of the turn of the century, but the themes which caught his interest were largely those which were to preoccupy more recent French philosophers—the nature of the self, its essential embodiment, the assertion of human freedom against the claims of scientific determinism, the sources of moral value, change, and becoming, and the concreteness of human existence."

Just before I was reading this about Bergson I had been reading Paul Davies' *The Mind of God* in which he suggests that mathematics and physics can only take us so far. After that we must turn to metaphysics.

"Bergson's philosophy is a reaction against the scientific positivism of the nineteenth century: unlike the positivists, he regarded metaphysics not only as possible, but as the central concern of philosophy, indeed of humanity as a whole. But what he meant by 'metaphysics' shows him as in revolt, not only against positivism, but against the whole mainline tradition of Western philosophy since Plato. Metaphysicians in that tradition have held that the ultimate reality which underlies the world of sense-perception (the world of 'appearances') is timeless and unchanging, a world of Being, rather than of Becoming, a world of abstract Forms of kinds of things, rather than of concrete particulars. Access to it is by means of reason or intellect, conceived of on the model of mathematical logic (which also deals with timeless, necessary truths about general classes of entities). For Bergson, by contrast, the ultimate metaphysical reality was to be found precisely in what is alive and constantly changing, in the world of Becoming and concrete particularity, and our

mode of access to that ultimate reality was by means of what he called 'intuition' rather than by mathematical reason … Intuition is supposed to be the basis of metaphysics because intuition grasps things from the inside, and therefore *absolutely*, rather than from some merely relative point of view. In his essay *An Introduction to Metaphysics* … Bergson defines 'intuition' as 'the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible' … We are aware of ourselves 'from the inside': we do not contemplate ourselves, as we might contemplate an object, from some external point of view" but how far can we take this sense of 'inner comprehension'? We are inside ourselves but we are also inside the apparent reality of the world around us. Can we extend this *intellectual sympathy?*

Bergson won the 1928 Nobel Prize for Literature and his ideas live on; "In literature, perhaps their greatest resonance was in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which starts from the image of memory being provoked by a present sensory experience and unfolds the idea of understanding a life by retracing its past."

Hans Christian von Baeyer in *Taming the Atom* says. "There is a straight ladder from the atom to the grain of sand, and the real mystery is the missing rung," according to Tom Stoppard. "Above it, classical physics. Below it, quantum physics. But in between, metaphysics."

He also writes, "This is the central mystery of quantum mechanics all over again, the unexplainable fact that an electron can pass through two holes in a screen, or revolve in two orbits about a nucleus, at the same time."

Can *intellectual sympathy* help with such mysteries?

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January 5th: Umberto Eco
Stella Gibbons
Ngugi wa Thiong'o

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"But how come that parasites – lice, bedbugs and jiggers – who did no useful work lived in comfort and those that worked twenty-four hours went hungry and without clothes?"

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood*.

"There were some storybooks that transcended their time and authorship. Grimm, Aesop, and Andersen: I read their stories over and over again without their ever losing their appeal. They came closest to the oral tales around the evening fireside with which I had grown up. They had a common magic quality; they renewed themselves in the rereading and retelling."

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *In the House of the Interpreter*.

"Do we ever own the land? Only its use, for a time; for in the end, the earth owns us, and we return to it, our common mother."

Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Birth of a Dream Weaver*.

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January 6th: Kahlil Gibran
E. L. Doctorow
Carl Sandburg

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"Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914) is an American poet credited with inventing the cinquain poem, a twenty-two syllable, five-line poem. She died of tuberculosis in 1914 when she was only thirty-six years old. Her first book of poetry, *Verse*, was published a year later and included twenty-

eight cinquains. *Verse* sold very well in the 1920s and 1930s and again later in the century and inspired many other poets, including Carl Sandburg."

Susan Dalzell in *Poetry 101*.

So did this mean Sandburg also wrote cinquains or did she mean 'inspire' in a more general way?

Herbert Mitgang in *Dangerous Dossiers* said "Carl Sandburg, Chicago poet, Lincoln biographer, journalist and political activist, had an Army Intelligence file of six pages dating back to 1918 and an FBI file of twenty-three censored pages." He "received Pulitzer prizes for both poetry and history, was given the Medal of Freedom by President Johnson at the White House" and his "multi-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years* is surely the most popular presidential biography published in this century." But Sandburg was that fearsome thing: a socialist. He had manuscripts and research materials confiscated, wrong information went into his FBI file, he was criticized for daring to speak of Russian courage during WW2, even though the US was sending war materials to the USSR, and he was listed under C for Communists, the FBI assuming all left-leaning people were communists. "In 1964, a confidential page appeared in his file, but it is totally blacked out except for the date, June 25, 1964, and the fact that he was born on January 6, 1878, in Galesburg, Illinois. And so when Sandburg was eighty-five years old and living quietly at home in Flat Rock, North Carolina, the FBI was still tracking him and making entries in his "C" for Communist dossier."

Interesting as this is it doesn't give an insight into his poetry. He was a prolific poet, journalist, historian, even a collector of folkore (*New American Songbag*) and wrote his poetry in many styles. He also gave a great many definitions of poetry, from the serious—

"Poetry is a projection across silence of cadences arranged to break that silence with definite intentions of echoes, syllables, wave lengths."

to the light-hearted—

"Poetry is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly the air."

Adelaide Crapsey was said to have been inspired by Japanese haiku when she created the cinquain. So here is one of her cinquains:

Sea-foam
And coral! Oh, I'll
Climb the great pasture rocks
And dream me mermaid in the sun's
Gold flood.

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January 7th: David Freeman
Gerald Durrell

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"Reputations, whether true or false, die hard, and for some reason a bad reputation dies hardest of all."

Gerald Durrell in *Encounters with Animals*.

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January 8th: Wilkie Collins
Alfred Russell Wallace
Storm Jameson

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In *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher: The Murder at Rood Hill House* by Kate Summerscale: "The word 'clue' derives from 'claw', meaning a ball of thread or yarn. It had come to mean 'that

which points the way' because of the Greek myth in which Theseus uses a ball of yarn, given to him by Ariadne, to find his way out of the Minotaur's labyrinth. The writers of the mid-nineteenth century still had this image in mind when they used the word. 'There is always a pleasure in unravelling a mystery, in catching at the gossamer clue which will guide to certainty,' observed Elizabeth Gaskell in 1848. 'I thought I saw the end of a good clew,' said the narrator of Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* (1864). William Wills, Dickens' deputy, paid tribute in 1850 to Whicher's brilliance by observing that the detective found the way even when 'every clue seems cut off'. 'I thought I had my hand on the clue,' declared the narrator of *The Woman in White* in an instalment published in June 1860. 'How little I knew, then, of the windings of the labyrinth which were still to mislead me!' A plot was a knot, and a story ended in a 'denouement', an unknotting."

When I was young a 'clue' implied a clever person. 'Gosh, he's a bit of a clue' people would say but then that usage declined and disappeared. Only one kind person ever suggested I was a 'clue'. Whereas Wilkie Collins when he came to write of a clue in *The Woman in White* might well have been, in the view of his readers, a 'clue'.

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January 9th: Robert Drewe
Simone de Beauvoir

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January 10th: Peter Barnes
Lord Acton (John Emerich Edward Dahlberg-Acton)

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Lord Acton wrote that famous dictum 'Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Now I agree with the first part but the second part is more conetentious. What is 'absolute power'? What is meant by 'corrupts absolutely'? No one, not even Hitler or Stalin, existed in a vacuum. 'Absolute power' depends on a great many other people.

And what was the context? Acton was a Liberal politician, fairly enthusiastic for Gladstone, but supportive of the South in the American Civil War, believing Abraham Lincoln was a dangerous radical. He also believed that Celtic societies were static, English and Teutonic dynamic.

But the thing which surprised me was the context: he was deeply influenced by the decision of the First Vatican Council in 1869-70 to accept the doctrine of Papal Infallibility. As a Catholic he opposed it, though without success, believing that popes and royalty should never be above the law.

The second surprise was that although he wrote many articles his famous dictum came instead in a letter to his friend Mandell Creighton. What if Mandell had simply read the letter, thought 'that's an interesting idea', and then put the letter away and forgotten about it … or put it in the waste paper basket?

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January 11th: Alan Paton

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January 12th: Jack London
Jennifer Johnston
Edmund Burke (1st January Old Style)

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E. J. Payne said in 1874 of Irish politician Edmund Burke in *Burke Select Works*, "From the first he astonished: but he never attained the art of carrying a Parliamentary audience with him. He was too severe to persuade, and too bold to convince, a body to most of whom his philosophy was a stumbling block and his statesmanship foolishness." And, "His best efforts, if we except his advocacy of the cause of American liberty, are outside the policy of his party. Whiggism had small sympathy with religious freedom for Ireland, with humane and rational government in India, with

the abolition of Slavery, or with the denunciation of its own caricature in the first French Republic. We must therefore regard Burke in a light different from that of party statesmanship."

His problem was that he couldn't carry 18th century parliaments with him. My problem with his speeches and essays is that they are so prolix that at times I get lost in them.

He made this comment on slavery:

"Slaves as these unfortunate black people are, and dull as all men are from slavery, must they not a little suspect the offer of freedom from that very nation which has sold them to their present masters? from that nation, one of whose causes of quarrel with those masters is their refusal to deal any more in that inhuman traffick? An offer of freedom from England would come rather oddly, shipped to them in an African vessel, which is refused an entry into the ports of Virginia or Carolina, with a cargo of three hundred Angola negroes. It would be curious to see the Guinea captain attempting at the same instant to publish his proclamation of liberty, and to advertise his sale of slaves."

'Speech of Edmund Burke, Esq., on Moving His Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies. March 22, 1775.'

And this might resonate with modern readers:

"It is an undertaking of some degree of delicacy to examine into the cause of public disorders. If a man happens not to succeed in such an enquiry, he will be thought weak and visionary; if he touches the true grievance, there is a danger that he may come near to persons of weight and consequence, who will rather be exasperated at the discovery of their errors, than thankful for the occasion of correcting them. If he should be obliged to blame the favourites of the people, he will be considered as the tool of power; if he censures those in power, he will be looked on as an instrument of faction. But in all exertions of duty something is to be hazarded. In cases of tumult and disorder, our law has invested every man, in some sort, with the authority of a magistrate. When the affairs of the nation are distracted, private people are, by the spirit of that law, justified in stepping a little out of their ordinary sphere. They enjoy a privilege, of somewhat more dignity and effect, than that of idle lamentation over the calamities of their country. They may look into them narrowly; they may reason upon them liberally; and if they should be so fortunate as to discover the true source of the mischief, and to suggest any probable method of removing it, though they may displease the rulers for the day, they are certainly of service to the cause of Government."

'Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents'. 1770.

Edmund Burke died in 1797.

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January 13th: Michael Bond
André Rebouças
Edmund Spenser (d)

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I have just discovered that the saying 'went for a song' or 'going for a song' is thought to have a connection to poet Edmund Spenser. John Kahn in *The Cat's Out of The Bag* says, "One of the longest poems in the English language, and one of the glories of Elizabethan literature, is *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser (1552-99). It is an allegorical epic romance, written partly in honour of Elizabeth I. Spenser began writing it in 1579, planning twelve books in all. The first three were published in 1590, the next three in 1596. There were probably several other books written, but the manuscripts were destroyed when his home in Ireland was set on fire by rebels in 1598.

Each book is the length of a short novel and painstakingly crafted in the most beautiful poetry. But not everyone was impressed by Spenser's huge achievement. When Elizabeth instructed

her lord treasurer and chief minister William Cecil, Baron Burghley, to pay Spenser £500 as a reward for his work on the poem, Cecil apparently complained: 'What! all this for a song?' "

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January 14th: John dos Passos
Osip Mandelstam

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Mandelstam was actually a Polish Jew but he grew up in Russia and began writing poetry as a young man, bringing out two early books, *The Stone* and *Tristia*, and his Symbolist leanings found a home in a Russian movement called Acmeism. He married but reportedly had a number of affairs. Then his popularity and even his life were called into doubt. He recited to his friends a satirical poem he called 'Stalin Epigram' in which he called Stalin a 'peasant slayer' and also said he had 'fat fingers'. He wisely refrained from writing this down but someone reported him to the secret police and he was sent into internal exile. His wife, Boris Pasternak, and Anna Akhmatova, all spoke up for him. I wonder if he regretted not returning home to Poland. But they were successful in bringing him home. Then he was re-arrested and on his way to a prison camp he died of typhoid.

The poem I came upon in *The Vintage Book of Dissent* does not call Stalin a 'peasant slayer' though it does refer to those fingers:

We exist, without sensing our country beneath us.
Ten steps away our words can't be heard.

But where there are enough of us for half a conversation
They always commemorate the Kremlin mountaineer.

His fat fingers slimy as worms,
His words dependable as weights of measure.

The cockroach moustaches chuckle,
His top-boots gleam.

And round him a riff-raff of scraggy-necked chiefs;
He plays with these half men, lackeys,

Who warble, or miaow, or whimper.
He alone prods and probes.

He forges decree after decree like horseshoes:
In the groin, brain, forehead, eye.

Whoever's being executed – there's raspberry compote
And the gigantic torso of the Georgian.
They call it 'Untitled'.

That might have been the end of his fame as he had not committed any of his later work to paper. But his redoubtable wife Nadezhda had memorised all his poems and when it became safer after Stalin's death she wrote them down and published them. We cannot know whether she remembered them all correctly or whether he would have done more work on them—but I still think that was an amazing thing to do.

Take, from my palms, for joy, for ease,

A little honey, a little sun,
That we may obey Persephone's bees.

You can't untie a boat unmoored.
Fur-shod shadows can't be heard,
Nor terror, in this life, mastered.

Love, what's left for us, and of us, is this
Living remnant, loving revenant, brief kiss
Like a bee flying completed dying hiveless

To find in the forest's heart a home,
Night's neverending hum,
Thriving on meadowsweet, mint, and time.

Take, for all that is good, for all that is gone,
That it may lie rough and real against your collarbone,
This string of bees, that once turned honey into sun.
Osip Mandelstam. 'The Necklace'

Mandelstam said, "Only in Russia is poetry respected, it gets people killed. Is there anywhere else where poetry is so common a motive for murder?"

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January 15th: Moliere
Hugh Trevor-Roper
Juan de Herrera

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"Above all, do not forget what I have told you – simplicity of form, severity in the whole, nobility without arrogance, majesty without ostentation."

Philip II of Spain to Juan de Herrera. Herrera was a mathematician. He was also the King's architect. But I sometimes wonder what would happen if you applied those instructions to writing a book?

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January 16th: Susan Sontag

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January 17th: Anton Chekhov
Douglas Hyde
Compton Mackenzie
Al Capone

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Al Capone is a classic case of the criminal remembered and his victims forgotten. How many people could name even one of the more than 300 people Capone was involved in the killing of?

"People made fun of us for putting away a killer on such lame grounds. But it worked. Me and my boys kept him busy, preoccupied, a constant thorn in his side, while Frank Wilson slowly put together a case proving Capone wasn't paying his taxes. We got him off the street, out of Chicago. He wasted away in prison—he had syphilis, you know. He got out, but my buddies tell me

he was a broken man, barely able to dress himself or go to the toilet without help. Finally died about ten years ago. The tax charge did what we wanted. It put an end to the bloody reign of Al Capone."

Nemesis by William Bernhardt.

I don't know if the Tax Office saw itself as a victim. But this is a reminder that ill-gotten gains have a way of interesting the taxman.

Eliot Ness led the group which put Capone away. His parents came from Norway. In his book *The Untouchables*, written with Oscar Fraley, he said, "Al Capone was born in Naples, Italy, on January 17th, 1899, and his family emigrated to New York when he was a child. He abandoned school in the fourth grade and began to run the streets and frequent the poolrooms of Brooklyn.

"A natural bully, large and strong for his age, it was his inherent brutality which earned him the slicing that was to give him his nickname. At sixteen, he was throwing his weight around in a Brooklyn barbershop when a quick-tempered Sicilian barber grabbed a razor and slashed his left cheek.

"Thus was born Scarface Al."

"A wise psychiatrist, John Rickman, said that violence was the fruit of unlived life."

Peacemaking: Public and Private by Adam Curle. The problem with this is that people like Al Capone undoubtedly believed that violence was a part of living life.

"Remember, no matter how cruel and nasty and evil you may be, every time you take a breath you make a flower happy."

Mort Sahl.

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January 18th: A. A. Milne
Arthur Ransome

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January 19th: Edgar Allan Poe
Patricia Highsmith

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I found Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley* very uncomfortable, it was almost as though by reading it I became complicit in his evil, so I didn't want to read anything else she wrote. But the other day I came across her book of short stories *Tales of Natural and Unnatural Catastrophes* and thought I would try it. She uses items that were current in the 1980s, Three Mile Island, radioactive mushrooms, swarming cockroaches, surrogate motherhood, disaster for a newly independent African country. The stories are horror mixed with farce but all rather 'heavy' and pedantic. At the end I decided that Highsmith was *not* one of the world's memorable short story writers. But I was left with the thought: what was it about Patricia Highsmith's personality, life, beliefs, which drew her to her subjects?

Richard Bradford called his biography of her *Devils, Lusts and Strange Desires*. "Throughout her *cahiers* and diaries from the early 1940s until her death in 1995 she records her infanthood – roughly the period from the age of three, when she attains a sense of selfhood, to around eight – as involving a blend of fear, self-loathing and hatred for her close family, primarily her grandmother, her mother Mary and most of all Stanley." Certainly her mother and her stepfather Stanley quarreled and there doesn't seem to have been a lot of love on offer but she was given opportunities denied to many young women in the 1920s and 1930s.

And although she sometimes cultivated the image of an *enfant terrible* saying outrageous things she had many other genuine hates. "Despite, or perhaps because of, spending ten years as a

permanent resident of France, Highsmith cultivated a loathing for all Gallic customs and persons. While she occasionally displayed nostalgic feelings for her native land of America, these were aberrations from her long-standing contempt for the place. She disliked Arabs, mainly for, in her opinion, their poor standards of hygiene, but she made an exception with the Palestinian cause. It was not so much that she sympathised with this small Middle Eastern nation of the dispossessed; rather, her support for Palestine reflected her feelings about another group of people which she abhorred far more than any other: Jews.

"She regretted that the Nazis had only succeeded in exterminating less than half of the globe's Jews and even coined a term to describe their negligence: 'Semicaust'. Another of her contributions to the linguistics of genocide was 'Holocaust Inc.' In Highsmith's view the Holocaust was by parts an exaggeration in terms of the number slaughtered and an enterprise employed by Jews – Israel in particular – to exploit the collective conscience of the rest of the world and squeeze money from it. She once confessed to a friend that she enjoyed the rural areas of Switzerland, where she spent her final years, because they seemed like Europe as envisioned by the Nazis after the successful completion of the Final Solution. Jews, if they existed at all, were certainly somewhere else. And yet, three of the women to whom she declared her unbounded love were Jewish."

It has been suggested that she liked writing about psychopaths because she was one. She has been called neurotic, narcissistic and sadomasochistic. But in the the end she was merely a tired, sick old woman being cared for by people who weren't particularly keen on looking after her.

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January 20th: Clarice Cliff
Euclides da Cunha
Eugene Sue
Henry Gullett

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Brazilian writer Euclides da Cunha wrote "André Rebouças was a famous Negro engineer who was fêted by the imperial court of Dom Pedro II. On one occasion, when a white lady had refused to be his partner, Princess Isabel, the heir apparent, danced with him." He called his article 'André Rebouças with his extraordinary mind'. So who was André Rebouças of the extraordinary mind? I found him described as an engineer, a teacher, and a writer. As an engineer he was responsible for designing Rio de Janeiro's docks, as a teacher he inspired his students with visions of a more equal society, as a writer he advocated for land reform in *Agricultura nacional* (1883) and in later articles urging that ex-slaves and the rural poor be given access to land. He left Brazil in the entourage of Dom Pedro II, who was returning home to Portugal, and eventually died in Madeira.

You might be asking who was Euclides da Cunha. His famous novel *Os Sertões* revolves around the Brazilian army's war against a village called Canudos, the War of Canudos, in north-eastern Brazil. The army razed it to the ground and practically wiped out the population. I am not sure that the Brazilian army has ever picked on anyone its own size …

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January 21st: Israel Zingwill
Ernestine Hill

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"Back to the magazines; I suppose you have a copy of *Peter Pan Land and other Poems* [1916] in which Ernestine Hill's first work appeared. I have only a battered copy which I consider to be better than nothing at all. It is quite an item as it is her first published book and is under the name Ernestine Hemmings."

Walter Stone

I remember my father had an Ernestine Hill which he liked. I think it was *Water into Gold* but it may have been *The Territory*. But it was not until I came to look for something on her, and I found her *My Love Must Wait*, her imagined life of Matthew Flinders, which I thought was very good (though Miles Franklin said of it 'pity it is so inaccurate'), that I realised what a shadowy figure she was. It was not only that she wrote under several names (she was born Hemmings but later took the name Hill) or that she was a woman writing on 'men's topics' but to some extent she chose to travel in remote places and not be part of a 'literary culture'. She spent time as a sub-editor on *Smith's Weekly* and had a baby probably to Robert Clyde Packer (she called the baby Robert though he refused to acknowledge the child); she wrote *The Great Australian Loneliness* and *Water into Gold* but gradually faded from sight. Katherine Susannah Prichard said of her, "She's a strange otherwhereish creature with big beautiful eyes, a hoarse voice and curious incapacity to argue logically about anything."

The Territory rushes through history at an energetic pace, lively and interesting, so it was hard to select one small item. But here is something you might not have known. "In these first years of the century so pitiable was the condition of the blacks, whipped out of their country and wandering like pariah dogs, in disease a menace to the community, that letters were published in London *Times* crying shame on Australia. The authorities were forced to take action. Reforms were enforced from Adelaide and resented by the apathetic north. A Protector was appointed and a new Act became law. Where they had been at the mercy of every wanderer, and regarded as the property of employers, a permit was now made necessary, controlling conditions of labour. It was no longer permissible to take them a thousand miles from their homeland and leave them to die among strangers. Care of the old and the sick became a government consideration, and several missions were established. White men were not allowed to give them liquor, nor to take and abuse their women, nor to employ a woman without her man—they were also forbidden to appropriate their blankets, "which remain the property of His Majesty the King"—! Though these laws were more honoured in the breach than the observance—the poor dumb creatures knew little enough about them—they were, at least, the beginning of a recognition of human rights.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand,
Ring out the darkness of the land …

A champion of the Australian blacks, true-hearted and kind, was Lord Tennyson, a governor of South Australia and son of the poet who wrote those lines. He was a powerful ally, and stirred up a righteous public resentment of inhumanities and injustice, an outcry against atrocities. On a tour of the railway to Oodnadatta, he addressed a vast crowd of natives who greeted him with a corroboree. Wearing full dress uniform—cocked hat with cock's feathers, gold epaulettes, the gold and silver cord of office, he turned gravely to the old men in their symbolic head-dresses and cockatoo plumes:

"Heads of the native tribes," he said, "and all other natives of Central Australia. Thank you for having brought together in my honour so large a corroboree, wearing the adornment of the different peoples. I hope you will continue to preserve these marks of your tribal distinctions.

"My pleasure is great in being among you, for I come to you as representative of our great and beloved sovereign, with a deep and sincere interest in your welfare and happiness.

"I beg to assure you that we shall faithfully keep our promise of protection for you all. We shall enforce with absolute strictness the laws to guard your rights. Any native who appeals to me, or to the government through me, can appeal with the certainty that the strong right hand of justice shall guard his tribe and his liberty from the greed, the violence of selfish and evil men."

It was a championship timely and splendid, but the country was too vast and lonely for the laws to be carried out, and to that sanctuary of justice and protection for the unlettered black-fellow there was no bridge."

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January 22nd: Lord Byron
Francis Bacon

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For if my pure libations exceed three,
I feel my heart becomes so sympathetic,
That I must have recourse to black *Bohee*;
'Tis pity wine should be so deleterious,
For tea and coffee leave us much more serious.

Lord Byron. He also wrote, "Wine and spirits make me sullen, and savage to ferocity."

Lord Byron was described as 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know'. He was certainly dangerous to live with. But whereas Byron had ready access to publishers, clubs, parliament and aristocratic circles through which to pillory his wife she had no such redress. But late in life she found an unexpected champion: Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Stowe wrote a book she called *History of the Byron Controversy*. Stowe introduces it with, "The interval since my publication of 'The True Story of Lady Byron's Life' has been one of stormy discussion and of much invective." But "I have not thought it necessary to disturb my spirit and confuse my sense of right by even an attempt at reading the many abusive articles that both here and in England have followed that disclosure." … "I made it in defence of a beloved, revered friend, whose memory stood forth in the eyes of the civilised world charged with most repulsive crimes, of which I *certainly* knew her innocent.

"I claim, and shall prove, that Lady Byron's reputation has been the victim of a concerted attack, begun by her husband during her lifetime, and coming to its climax over her grave." This included a "shameless attack" in 'Blackwood's' of July 1869, branding Lady Byron as the vilest of criminals"; Stowe said, "I formed her acquaintance in the year 1853, during my first visit to England. … She was at this time sixty-one years of age, but still had, to a remarkable degree, that personal attraction which is commonly considered to belong only to youth and beauty. … Her form was slight, giving an impression of fragility; her motions were both graceful and decided; her eyes bright, and full of interest and quick observation. Her silvery-white hair seemed to lend a grace to the transparent purity of her complexion, and her small hands had a pearly whiteness."

Stowe gave Lady Byron her anti-slavery novel *Dred* as Lady Byron shared her anti-slavery interests and in turn shared her passion for education. Stowe wrote, "Miss Martineau claims for her the honour of having first invented practical schools, in which the children of the poor were turned into agriculturalists, artisans, seamstresses, and good wives for poor men. While she managed with admirable skill and economy permanent institutions of this sort, she was always ready to relieve suffering in any form. The fugitive slaves William and Ellen Crafts, escaping to England, were fostered by her protecting care."

Women, married and single, threw themselves at Byron. He admitted to at least three illegitimate children (though not to giving them any love and care) so it was a blow to his ego when Miss Millbanke declined his marriage proposal, saying she would like to remain friends. He continued to press her for marriage, not least because as an only child she would inherit everything. She finally agreed to marry him but when he came to visit her parents he was so "moody and gloomy" she offered to end their engagement. He responded by fainting away which encouraged her to believe, wrongly, that he cared for her. But immediately on their marriage he expressed regrets

and said “now you will find you have married a *devil*!” Thomas Campbell wrote, “She brought to Lord Byron beauty, manners, fortune, meekness, romantic affection” and what Byron called “the innocence of ignorance”. She was also chaste, calm, conscientious, private, and brought up to have a passion for the things of the mind. She had never been exposed to his kind of cruel teasing. We have a much better understanding now of the damage his kind of manipulative behaviour can cause. It seems quite possible that he was bipolar which was exacerbated by his heavy drinking. Stowe wrote, “The most dreadful men to live with are those who thus alternate between angel and devil. The buds of hope and love called out by a day or two of sunshine are frozen again and again, till the tree is killed.” Byron said of himself, “For my own part, I am violent, but not malignant” though his friends said of him “He had a morbid love of a bad reputation” and his behaviour towards his wife’s family, friends, and servants strikes me as malignant. Lady Byron’s friend and former governess Mrs Clermont was pilloried by Byron as:

“If like a snake she steal within your walls,
Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;
If like a viper to the heart she wind,
And leaves the venom there she did not find,—
What marvel that this hag of hatred works
Eternal evil latent as she lurks.” Which seems all the more cruel because Mrs Clermont had no means of reply. And his poetry was another way to abuse his wife; ‘Don Juan’ “begins with the meanest and foulest attack on his wife that ever ribald wrote” and elsewhere he presents his wife as Clytemnestra who in Greek myth arranges to have her husband killed so she can run away with her lover. He also denigrates her as ‘Miss Millpond’.

“During this time, such was the disordered and desperate state of his worldly affairs, that there were ten executions for debt levied on their family establishment; and it was Lady Byron’s fortune each time which settled the account.” By the time they separated there was nothing left of her ‘dowry’.

“It was when the state of affairs between herself and her husband seemed darkest and most hopeless, that the only child of this union was born. Lord Byron’s treatment of his wife during the sensitive period that preceded the birth of this child, and during her confinement, was marked by paroxysms of unmanly brutality, for which the only possible charity on her part was the supposition of insanity. Moore sheds a significant light on this period, by telling us that, about this time, Byron was often drunk, day after day, with Sheridan. … A day or two after the birth of this child, Lord Byron came suddenly into Lady Byron’s room, and told her that her mother was dead. It was an utter falsehood; but it was only one of the many nameless injuries and cruelties by which he expressed his hatred of her. A short time after her confinement, she was informed by him, in a note, that, as soon as she was able to travel, she must go; that he could not and would not longer have her about him; and when her child was only five weeks old, he carried this threat of expulsion into effect.” In the middle of winter, on bad roads, she set out with a little baby on the long journey from London to her parents’ home in the North Riding of Yorkshire.

Byron then turned around and claimed she had deserted him and he made a habit of claiming he was writing to seek a reconciliation but instead of sending the letters to her he merely circulated them among his friends.

Her lawyers, Sir Samuel Romilly and Dr Lushington, advised her against returning to him. Divorce then was extremely hard to get, and required the case to be stated in open court. Fathers automatically were given custody of their children. “When she, under advice of her lawyers, made the alternative legal *separation* or open investigation in court for divorce, what did he do?

“HE SIGNED THE ACT OF SEPARATION AND LEFT ENGLAND.”

She maintained a discreet silence, partly because she had been brought up to keep private the happenings of private life, partly to protect her daughter, and partly to protect Byron's sister Augusta. Regency Society could wink at the hi-jinks of young noblemem: their public drunkenness, their wild driving, their seduction of servant girls, their casual by-blows, their all-night gambling, their squandering of family fortunes built on generations of hard work by their tenants, their wasting of the money or property they gained at marriage, their high-handed contempt for their social 'inferiors', their duels, but there was one crime they could not countenance: incest. We do not know just when the new Lady Byron became aware of her husband's relationship with his sister or that they'd had a daughter.

Stowe wrote, "At what precise time the idea of an improper connection between her husband and his sister was first forced upon her, she did not say; but she told me *how* it was done. She said that one night, in her presence, he treated his sister with a liberty which both shocked and astonished her. Seeing her amazement and alarm, he came up to her, and said, in a sneering tone, "I suppose you perceive *you* are not wanted here. Go to your own room, and leave us alone. We can amuse ourselves better without you.' "

Lady Byron's silence was intended to protect her sister-in-law. Byron might shrug it off but it would destroy Augusta Leigh's reputation. She remained silent about her marriage until 1830 when a collection of Byron's letters traduced her parents' reputation and she felt she had to try and restore their good name. She was only partially successful as she didn't have the literary connections or noisy partisans that the dead Byron could still claim. Stowe writes, "Lady Byron was not only a widow, but an orphan. She had no sister for confidante; no father and mother to whom to go in her sorrows—sorrows so much deeper and darker to her than they could be to any other human being. She had neither son nor brother to uphold and protect her. On all hands it was acknowledged that, so far, there was no fault to be found in her but her utter silence. Her life was confessed to be pure, useful, charitable; and yet, in this time of her sorrow, the writers of England issued article upon article not only devoid of delicacy, but apparently injurious and insulting towards her, with a blind unconsciousness which seems astonishing."

Both Byron's family and her descendants loved and admired her but the calumnies live on. Even now, Byron's bad behaviour is excused while the woman who suffered his mental cruelty is presented as 'marble-hearted', 'pharaisaical', 'cold' and unattractive. It seems a great pity Stowe's book is not more widely known.

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January 23rd: Derek Walcott
Stendahl

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I read somewhere that Derek Walcott's poems were 'strong meat' but I don't think you could say that of this poem.

No opera, no gilded columns, no wine-dark seats,
no Penelope scouring the stalls with delicate glasses,
no practiced ecstasy from the tireless tenor, no sweets
and wine at no interval, no altos, no basses
and violins sobbing as one; no opera house,
no museum, no actual theatre, no civic center
Island what else? Only the huge doors of clouds
with the setting disc through which we leave and enter,
only the deafening parks with their jumping crowds,
and the thudding speakers. Only the Government
Buildings down by the wharf, and another cruise ship

big as the capital, all blue glass and cement.
No masterpieces in huge frames to worship,
On such banalities has life been spent
in brightness, and yet there are days
when every street corner rounds itself into
a sunlit surprise, a painting or a phrase,
canoes drawn up by the market, the harbour's blue,
the barracks. So much to do still, all of it praise.

Derek Walcott's 'No Opera'. Perhaps, after all, I will seek out more of his poetry.

"I had always been fascinated by the most extreme case in point: the small Caribbean island of St. Lucia and its resident writer Derek Walcott, author of *Omeros*, an epic poem in the tradition of Homer, and winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992. … Walcott was, for all intents and purposes, the island's first writer of note. When he was awarded the Nobel Prize, he could enjoy the thought of being a laureate from a nation with only 160,000 inhabitants. Even more remarkable was the fact that he had effectively taken the island from zero to Nobel Prize in a single generation. Iceland, with a population around 300,000, boasts a Nobel Prize winner as well, won in 1955 by Halldór Laxness, but Iceland has a literary tradition that goes back to the sagas of the Middle Ages. Walcott had managed single-handedly to write his postcolonial nation into world literature."

Martin Puchner in *The Written World*.

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January 24th: Edith Wharton
Alicia Spottiswoode
Allison DuBois

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"A third poetess of the Borders is Lady John Scott, whose life nearly spanned the century, from 1810 till 1900; she was born Alicia Spottiswoode. Among her delightful songs are a version of the "Annie Laurie", and one, most fitting for this account of the Borders, called "Ettrick"; a song of youth and love, age and inevitable sorrow."

When we first rade down Ettrick,
Our bridles were ringing, our hearts were dancing,
The waters were singing, the sun was glancing …
… When we next rade down Ettrick,
The day was dying, the wild birds calling,
The wind was sighing, the leaves were falling …
… When I last rade down Ettrick,
The winds were shifting, the storm was waking,
The snow was drifting, my heart was aching,
For we never again were to ride thegither
In sun or in storm on the mountain heather.

Marion Lochhead in *Portrait of the Scott Country* goes on to say, "The lyric and elegiac note, as old almost as the land and the rivers, is heard in modern as in the ancient poetry of the Borders." She was writing of the Scottish Borders. And here is a little bit of Scottish folk wisdom, although I don't know if it originated in the Borders …

"If Candlemas be clear and fair,
The half o' the winter's to come and mair;
If Candlemas be dull and foul,
The half of the winter is bye at Yule."

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January 25th: Robert Burns
Virginia Woolf

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"The immortal Robert Burns was the first man to pay due and just tribute to the haggis – and his birthday was January 25. Many years later on another January 25 the author of this present tribute was born in the county which shelters the home of the famous strain known as the Brindle haggis of Mull."

Alexander MacLean in *The Haggis*. It is an odd thing but you only have to mention haggis and people burst into laughter. I wonder why this is. People don't howl with mirth if you mention porridge or blancmange or sausages. What special mirth-making qualities does a haggis contain?

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January 26th: Australia Day/Invasion Day
Brian Garfield

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Every year people cry Change the Date! I always go along to the rally and send a Letter to the Editor—and nearly every January *The Mercury* publishes my letter. Here is my 2018 offering:

'It is heartening to see councils, organisations and individuals around Australia supporting the campaign to change the date of Australia Day.

A national day at the very least needs to be a day of shared community and a sense of pride in the past. The more people ask what we expect of a national day and how and when it is best celebrated, the more it can both honestly reflect our history and heal old wounds.

The Rev William Woolls said at the centenary celebrations in 1888: "Think of the Aboriginals natives, or rather the remnant of them who, by the aggression of the white man, have been deprived of their lands, and means of subsistence. We, it is true, are not responsible for the deeds of the men who have gone before; but those who study the records of the past and look around for the tribes which once flourished near Sydney, Parramatta, and elsewhere, must be well aware that the blood of the black man cries for vengeance from the ground."

Now 130 years later we are still grappling with the implications of this. Changing the date of Australia Day will not resolve and heal everything, but it would be a step forward.'

'Date Change A Step In The Right Direction'

. People also suggest changing the flag but I think in another ten years people will be so familiar with the Aboriginal flag they will say. Well, why not have that as our National Flag? But I would like to make another suggestion. Let's change the names of our States. We must surely have the most boring names ever given to states or provinces on the face of the earth.

Robert Dixon in *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia* wrote: "The late Jack Stewart of the Yidinjdji tribe (tablelands local group) once explained to the writer that what Europeans called a 'tribe' was more appropriately described as a 'nation'. He explained that aboriginal Australia had many separate nations, just as did Europe (he mentioned France, Italy, Germany, and so on). He said that just as Europeans required a passport to cross a national boundary so Australians needed a local 'passport' (e.g. a message stick) to cross into the territory of another nation; without it they would be regarded as probable criminals and be liable to be killed. He said that each Australian nation had its own 'language'; this would sometimes have a degree of intelligibility with the language of the next nation, and sometimes not."

We can't redraw those tribal boundaries or resurrect the names given but surely we can make some effort to have more than South Australia, Western Australia and so on.

Look at the lovely Irish names which roll off the tongue. Mayo, Galway, Killarney, Leitrim, Roscommon, Limerick, Donegal. Or how about these ones from Colombia. Boyaca, Santander,

Bolivar, Huila, Caqueta. And then there are those interesting names from the USA. Charles Panati in *The Browser's Book of Beginnings* writes, "The study of the origins of place names is known as toponymy, a colorful and sometimes confusing science. Though a "ville" or "town" suffixing a dot on a map sounds simple enough, the influences from so many diverse sources has given toponymy high rank among etymological studies. At least half of America's fifty states, for instance, bear names derived from Indian words:"

Texas – Friends!
Illinois – The tribe of perfect men
Kentucky – The dark and bloody ground
Michigan – a great water (Mississippi – Father of Waters)
Kansas – a breeze near the ground
Iowa – the sleepy ones
Tennessee – The vines of the Big Bend
Oklahoma – The Red People
Dakota – Allied (the state was home to the Confederated Sioux tribes)

If we go by meaning it might be as well to leave Kentucky out. But there are lots more to add though some, of course, are of Spanish origin, Nevada, Arizona, California, Florida …

So I'm sure the gnomes in Canberra could get busy on this. Tribal boundaries enclosed independent nations though of course the boundaries did not coincide with the straight lines nineteenth century bureaucrats drew on maps. But I'm sure there are lovely names just waiting to be drawn out of the shadows.

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January 27th: Lewis Carroll
Mordecai Richler
Frances Glessner Lee (d)

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Carla Valentine wrote in *Murder Isn't Easy*, "Described as an old Victorian lady with snowy white hair and piercing blue eyes, Miss Jane Marple appears to be a very unlikely nemesis of criminals with her mild manners, propensity for knitting and darkly cynical mind; perhaps a tad far-fetched. But little did Christie know that one of her most famous creations would manifest in real life as a bespectacled mature American woman called Frances Glessner Lee. Ms Glessner Lee – born in the Victorian era, just like Jane Marple – was heiress to a vast agricultural fortune, and was discouraged from her interest in forensic pathology by her family. Her brother was allowed to attend Harvard, yet she was not, so she satisfied her fascination with crime by reading the Sherlock Holmes stories, just as Agatha Christie had done. After her brother's death in 1930, aged fifty-two, she finally took steps towards a career in forensics. Having inherited the family fortune, she possessed the money to fund her interests, and she is most famous for using it to create the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death. Whereas some old ladies are said to be rather clichéd in their charitable interests, and are often depicted as giving their money to donkey sanctuaries and cats' homes, Frances Glessner Lee spent her cash creating doll's-house depictions of actual murders to train investigators at the new Department for Legal Medicine at Harvard University (a department she endowed and helped to create). These intricate dioramas are tiny crime scenes she made between 1944 and 1948 and are so called because she wanted to train homicide investigators to 'convict the guilty, clear the innocent, and find the truth in a nutshell'. They are all so realistic they contain working lights, bullet holes at various angles, functioning mousetraps and accurately discoloured corpses. At the time, each one cost between $3,000 and $4,500 to create – around $40,000 in modern money! While the dioramas do draw on real cases, Glessner Lee imagined and designed each setting to resemble but not replicate the original scenes, embellishing them with

elements from her imagination and the world she inhabited. They are still in use today for training by the Harvard Associates in Police Science."

Bruce Goldfarb in *18 Tiny Deaths: The Untold Story of Frances Glessner Lee & the Invention of Modern Forensics* writes of a woman born into a wealthy family in Chicago where five companies including her father's merged to form the International Harvester Company. Goldfarb writes, "A notion persists that the young Frances didn't go to university because one or both her parents forbade it. There is no evidence for this. John Jacob and Frances Macbeth Glessner were loving, supportive parents who doubtless would have helped their daughter fulfil her dreams. As a young woman of affluence, however, it was not considered likely for Frances to be concerned about a career or higher education. She wasn't expected to work outside the home. She would never have to earn a living but could look forward to a comfortable life of leisure and wealth." And, "The younger Frances had options, but not the one that she really desired. There was only one university that she wanted to attend, only one medical degree worth pursuing, and that was beyond her grasp: Harvard Medical School did not (then) accept women as students." Instead she married Blewett Lee when she was coming up to twenty and had three children.

The first part of her eventual fame developed early: her fascination with creating miniatures. The second part: her passion for what was called Legal Medicine (Forensic Pathology) developed more slowly through her friendship with George Burgess Magrath. The USA then used coroners in most states, who were political appointees rather than professional men. She began campaigning for every state to have a medical examiner to look at sudden or violent deaths. And as she worked on the issue she became aware that there was no medical school to train such examiners. She offered money to Harvard if they would set up a Department of Legal Medicine and she began passing to them the thousands of books she had collected to form a library to support research and study. Goldfarb writes, "In January 1940, Moritz approached Lee with an unusual proposal. Would she accept the editorship of the *American Journal of Medical Jurisprudence*? It would be advantageous to have the journal associated with the Department of Legal Medicine and control over its editorial policy, but Moritz did not have the time to commit to the work. 'I know of no better place in the country for this task,' Moritz said, adding that Lee would have a free hand over editorial policy.

"The mere notion of Lee as editor of a professional journal is astounding. To be sure, she had unparalleled knowledge of the medico-legal literature, but she didn't have a university degree. Editorships were reserved for leaders of a profession. Lee's only official credential was honorary membership of the Massachusetts Medico-Legal Society and a founding membership in the New Hampshire Medico-Legal Society. A layperson, however sophisticated, at the helm of a journal would be highly unusual to say the least – particularly a woman." She turned the offer down saying she was too old. It was true that being a woman often worked against people taking her seriously but this was partly offset by the fact that she was a very wealthy woman.

Erle Stanley Gardener certainly took her seriously. "Gardener's impression of Lee was memorable. 'Because she had an orderly mind and a logical mind,' he said, 'she was able to comprehend police work in a way that enabled her to make a shrewd and accurate appraisal of individual cases as well as overall planning of what was being done and an accurate estimate of what should be done.' " and he began to incorporate more forensic details into his books. When she died he wrote, "She was a wonderful woman."

But it is for the miniatures she created, and would a man have thought of creating them, that she is best remembered. The miniatures, the Nutshells, were designed not to pose and answer questions about how someone died but rather to encourage students to develop their powers of observation and reasoning. These fascinating little boxes each containing a scene of unexplained death are now housed in Baltimore in Maryland where Goldfarb is effectively their curator. They

are not open to the public but are still used for teaching purposes. Goldfarb writes, "Articles about Lee and the Nutshell Studies that I read in print and online were riddled with errors and misinformation. She was depicted as a rich old woman who made morbid doll's houses. I knew she was much more than that. She was an agent of change: a reformer, educator and advocate. … Lee demanded that investigators relentlessly pursue the facts to determine the truth and follow the evidence wherever it leads."

It is something that many modern justice systems still do not take sufficiently seriously: "The pursuit of truth must be relentless, as Captain Lee reminds us. Scientific facts must be followed wherever they lead, to clear the innocent and convict the guilty."

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January 28th: Colette

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January 29th: Germaine Greer
Susan Coolidge

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January 30th: Shirley Hazzard
Angela Thirkell
Thomas Osbert Mordaunt (Old Style)

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The other day I saw a book of Shirley Hazzard's *Collected Stories* and was curious enough to borrow it. Written in the fifties and sixties they have young women looking for love, disillusioned older men, dinner parties, train journeys. The stories are stylish and reminded me a little of the writing of Elizabeth Bowen. Zoe Heller says of her writing "The stately rhythms of Hazzard's sentences, the epigrammatic precision of her observations, the decorousness of her glancing, ironic blows", which is true but by the time I was half way through the book I began to feel that the philosophy of a character in 'The Flowers of Sorrow'—"But we should remember that sorrow does produce flowers of its own. It is a misunderstanding always to look for joy. One's aim, rather, should be to conduct oneself so that one need never compromise one's secret integrity; so that even our sufferings may enrich us—enrich us, perhaps, most of all"—was a central theme and I began to long for a character to say "Isn't a lovely day" or "I've just had the most wonderful news!"

And yet I didn't remember her longer works as having this greyness about them. I wondered if it was my memory which was at fault. So I went back and read *The Bay of Noon*. This is set in Naples (though a character does go to the Falkland Islands in 1945 and says of it 'There's a freezing wind there that comes straight from the South Pole, and never stops blowing', poor man, except that the wind usually blows from the west not the south) and although I would not call it a happy book it is sometimes funny, sometimes touching, and does not give that sense of a grey world. Perhaps setting a book in Naples negates the grey and makes a book instead blue and green and full of sun.

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January 31st: Kenzaburo Oe
Norman Mailer
John O'Hara

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"Take the case of Jack Henry Abbot, the convicted murderer who wrote *In the Belly of the Beast*, a moving and penetrating memoir of life in prison. Realizing his exceptional talent as a writer and believing that anyone so sensitive and insightful must be rehabilitated, such literary lights as Norman Mailer campaigned to have Abbot paroled. He became the toast of New York. But within a few months of his release, he got into an argument with a waiter in Greenwich Village and killed him."

John Douglas and Mark Olshaker in *Mindhunter*.

Bill Peschel enlarges on the story in *Writers Gone Wild*. "While working on *The Executioner's Song* about convicted killer Gary Gilmore, Mailer received a letter from Jack Henry Abbott. The longtime convict, who had spent much of his time in prison reading leftist philosophy and Karl Marx, offered Mailer his insights into prison life.

Mailer was enchanted with Abbott, his long criminal record, which included robbery and manslaughter, and his criticisms of American society. He seemed the prototype of the existential outlaw hero Mailer praised in essays such as "The White Negro." He got Abbott's prison letters published, rounded up support from his literary friends and celebrities, and promised the parole board that Abbott would work for Mailer if he was released. Over the objections of prison officials, Abbott was paroled.

For a while, Abbott was the golden boy of the New York literary world. The magazines raved. He appeared with Mailer on television and was photographed by Jill Krementz, Kurt Vonnegut's wife.

But Abbott was still a crook with the hair-trigger temper. Told he couldn't use the staff restroom at a small Manhattan café, he stabbed waiter Richard Adan in the chest and left him dying on the street. Instead of finding his Jean Genet or Eldridge Cleaver, outlaws who transformed themselves into artists, Mailer had set loose a psychopath.

At Abbott's murder trial, Mailer doubled down, saying he was "willing to gamble with a portion of society to save this man's talent." This time, his influence wasn't enough to save his existential hero, and Abbott returned to prison."

Parole Boards get it wrong at times. They look at the likelihood of re-offending and the way someone has behaved in prison. They don't look at the quality of a prisoner's writing. Nor should they. Good writing does not equate with good behaviour, something which Norman Mailer should surely have understood. After all, he was very far from being a saint himself …

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February 1st: Muriel Spark

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Penelope Jardine gathered up various sketches and essays, some published, some not, and published them after Muriel Spark had died, titling them *The Informed Air*. A few thoughts from it:

—"It is impossible to know how much one gets from one's early environment by way of a distinctive character, or whether for better or worse. I think the puritanical strain of the Edinburgh ethos is inescapable, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. In the south of England the puritanical virtues tend to be regarded as quaint eccentricities: industriousness, for instance, or a horror of debt. A polite reticence about sex is often mistaken for repression. On the other hand, spiritual joy does not come in an easy consistent flow to the puritanically-nurtured soul. Myself, I have had to put up a psychological fight for my spiritual joy."

—"In July 1960 I was asked to talk on the wireless about how I became a writer. 'The Poet's House' describes an actual experience in 1944, when, during the bombing, I took refuge for a night in a house that turned out to belong to a well-known poet who was absent at the time with his wife and family. … I don't want to exaggerate the importance in itself of this incident; to most people I think it would have been interesting and perhaps amusing to find themselves lodged in the house of a well-known writer. But on me at that particular point in my life it had an intense imaginative effect. … At this particular moment my life could have taken several courses. Everyone was thinking of what they were going to do after the war. A number of lively prospects involving whole new ways of life were opening before me at that moment. But suddenly in the poet's house they all seemed unattractive beside the possibility of becoming a writer. One never knows if any particular

decision is a right or a wrong one. But whatever its value, I came to this determination, and I was filled with a feeling of freedom and complete dedication which has never left me."

The 'well-known poet' was Louis MacNeice.

—"What is boredom? It is the absence of curiosity, for one thing. In boredom, the world lacks possibility, and is pre-ordained."

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February 2nd: James Joyce

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James Joyce and *Ulysses*. James Joyce and *Dubliners*. James Joyce and *Finnegan's Wake*. But James Joyce as a poet? I had never heard or read of him as a poet. Of course most novelists, playwrights, biographers knock out the occasional poem. So there was no reason why Joyce should not have done so. The other day I came upon his *Chamber Music and Other Poems*. And *Chamber Music* (1907) was his first published book. This volume contains those poems, his second book of poetry *Pomes Penyeach* (1927), and some uncollected poems.

Though he later said he called the collection 'chamber music' to represent the sound of urine tinkling into a chamber pot, there is nothing bawdy about these poems; they are sentimental, sweet and pleasant.

The twilight turns from amethyst
  To deep and deeper blue,
The lamp fills with a pale-green glow
  The trees of the avenue.

The old piano plays an air,
  Sedate and slow and gay;
She bends upon the yellow keys,
  Her head inclines this way.

Shy thoughts and grave wide eyes and hands
  That wander as they list –
The twilight turns to darker blue
  With lights of amethyst.

('II')

From dewy dreams, my soul, arise,
  From love's deep slumber and from death,
For lo! The trees are full of sighs
  Whose leaves the morn admonisheth.

Eastward the gradual dawn prevails
  Where softly burning fires appear,
Making to tremble all those veils
  Of grey and golden gossamer.

While sweetly, gently, secretly,
  The flowery bells of morn are stirred
And the wise choirs of faery
  Begin (innumerous!) to be heard.

('XV')

Gentle lady, do not sing

Sad songs about the end of love;
Lay aside sadness and sing
How love that passes is enough.

Sing about the long deep sleep
Of lovers that are dead and how
In the grave all love shall sleep.
Love is aweary now.

('XXVIII')

This cannot be said of his later poems; among them are pieces like this:

A Goldschmidt swam in a *Kriegsverein*
As wise little Goldschmidts do,
And he loved every scion of the Habsburg line,
Each Archduke proud, the whole jimbang crowd,
And he felt that they loved him, too.
Herr Rosenbaum and Rosenfeld
And every other Feld except *Schlachtfeld*
All worked like niggers, totting rows of crazy figures,
To save Kaiser Karl and Goldschmidt, too.

CHORUS:
For he said it is bet – bet – better
To stick stamps on some God-damned letter
Than be shot in a trench
Amid shells and stench,
Jesus Gott, Donnerwet – wet – wetter.

'On Rudolf Goldschmidt' (*donnerwetter* = chaos)

The problem with the collection as a whole is that many of the pieces are the sorts of things he probably tossed off after a hard day of novel-writing and no one would bother publishing them, except perhaps as fillers, if he had not made his name as a novelist.

I understand now why I had never heard anyone write of James Joyce as a poet. Because he was a very very minor poet.

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February 3rd: Simone Weil
Gertrude Stein
Elizabeth Blackwell

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February 4th: François Rabelais
Dietrich Boenhoffer
George Ernest Morrison

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February 5th: Susan Hill
Anonymous

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The fourth verse of the anonymous anthem, 'God Save the King' (or 'Queen' as the case may be) goes:

Lord grant that Marshal Wade
May by thy mighty aid
Victory bring.
May he sedition hush,
And like a torrent rush,
Rebellious Scots to crush,
God save the King.

Even if we don't know the author I think we can safely assume he was an Englishman.

Except—it seems that comfortable assertion could be wrong. The Scottish poet James Thomson went to live in a villa at Richmond, near the Thames, and gardened, entertained, and wrote. There in company with a writer called Mallet in 1740 they wrote a masque called *Alfred* "in which appeared 'Rule Brittania' which Mallet afterwards claimed, or allowed to be claimed for him, but which there is every reason to believe was written by Thomson."

Could Thomson and Mallet in their toadying to the king have gone a step further and written 'God Save the King'? I hope not.

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February 6th: Dermot Bolger

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February 7th: Charles Dickens
David Unaipon (d)

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"In Belgrave in those years there was so much to discover, so much to explore. Once a year, David Unaipon, the Aboriginal preacher, visited us. I do not remember a word of what he said in the pulpit. I remember the talks with him after the bounteous meal Marge cooked for us each Sunday. We stood together near the trees beside the vegetable garden where my father was then preparing to start a new life as a grower of potatoes. In Belgrave there was never much light. There were the open patches in the forest, into which the light streamed, surrounded by the darkness under the trees. I thought of it later as a place where there was very little light for a man to stand up in, a place of drip and gloom. Perhaps that was yet another reason why the hymn 'Abide with Me' meant so much. In Belgrave we were sometimes like pagans singing to the sun: 'Shine through the gloom …' So there the two of us, David Unaipon and I, stood in the light. We talked to each other as fellow hunters – I was by then a trapper of rabbits to make pocket money from the sale of the carcass and the skin, and he had been a food gatherer in the years before he became a missionary for Christ to his own people. He told me how the Aborigines robbed eggs from a duck's nest, how they swam underwater until they reached the clump of reeds in which the eggs had been laid. He told me how underwater swimmers grabbed the legs of a duck, wrung its neck, and then brought it on shore to be thrown into the coals for the evening meal. He told me how they stalked the kangaroo.

His eyes glistened as he spoke, and his whole body came alive; he was a different man from the man who before lunch seemed embarrassed and ill at ease when he told the Belgrave congregation what Jesus meant to him. He mesmerised me. While he was enchanting me I became aware of another world different from the world I knew, a world of many wonders, many delights, a world of magic. It was as though the trees were persons, the birds, the possums, the earth and the sky – everything – were all one. I became aware also of what I learned later to call 'otherness'. I had never felt 'otherness' in a church. I had known many other moods: awe, and the canker of doubt, the first intimations of what was to trouble me all my life (Can this be true?). But here, on the edge of the gloomy, ever-dripping gum trees I was carried away into I knew not what. His eyes, and the soft, gentle voice, live with me always. So perhaps it was not surprising that my first published work – in the *Melburnian* at Melbourne Grammar School – was to be about the Aborigines.

I did not risk uncovering in that article what had happened beside the gum trees at Belgrave. By then I had learned it was sometimes wise to hold my tongue in the presence of the philistines of Australia.

I can only hope he was with me when I wrote about the Aborigines and the white man in *A History of Australia*. In volume 6 of that work I made David Unaipon a forerunner of a great awakening in Australia, and included a photograph of him, knowing that could never do justice to the eyes and the body so brim-full of life."

Manning Clark in *The Puzzles of Childhood*.

Even if we know nothing of what David Unaipon did and wrote we do know he is on our $50 note. Or do we? In case you've never looked closely at a $50 note here is his poem 'The Song of Hungarrda'.

Bright, consuming Spirit. No power on earth so great as Thee,
First-born child of the Goddess of Birth and Light,
Thy habitation betwixt heaven and earth within a veil of clouds
dark as night.

Accompanied by furious wind and lashing rain and hail. Riding majestically upon the storm, flashing at intervals, illumining the abode of man.

Thine anger and thy power thou revealest to us. Sometimes in a streak of light, which leaps upon a great towering rock, which stood impregnable and unchallenged in its birth-place when the earth was formed, and hurls it in fragments down the mountain-side, striking terror into man and beast alike.

Thus in wonder I am lost. No mortal mind can conceive. No mortal tongue express in language intelligible. Heaven-born Spark, I cannot see nor feel thee. Thou art concealed mysteriously wrapped within the fibre and bark of tree and bush and shrubs.

Why dost thou condescend to dwell within a piece of stick?
As I roam from place to place for enjoyment or search of food,
My soul is filled with gratitude and love for thee.
And conscious, too, of thine all pervading spirit presence.

It seems so strange that thou wilt not hear or reveal thyself nor bestow a blessing unless I pray.

But to plead is not enough to bring thee forth and cause thy glowing smiles to flicker over my frame.

But must strive and wrestle with this piece of stick-pressing and twirling into another stick with all the power I possess, to release the bonds that bind thee fast.

Then shall thy living spark leap forth in contact with grass and twig.
Thy flame leaps upward like waves that press and roll.

Radiant sister of the Day, I cannot live without thee. For when at twilight and in the depth of midnight; before the morning dawns, the mist hangs over the valley like death's cold shroud. And dewdrops chill the atmosphere. Ingee Too Ma.

Then like thy bright Mother shining from afar,
Thy beaming smiles and glowing energy radiates into this frail body.
Transfusing life, health, comfort, and happiness too.

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February 8th: Jules Verne
Francis Webb

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"You will have learnt before this reaches you that I have made a fresh start in life and have taken to my old trade again. I have got charge of a vessel in the cattle trade between this place [Twofold Bay, Southern NSW] and Hobarton. The cattle belong to persons indebted to Wm. Walker & Co, and I dispose of them on their account and remit them the proceeds.

I have been for the last fortnight laying here under repair, having sustained some damage in the winter gales off Cape Howe – which is noted among coasters as a particularly stormy place. Fortunately there are neither Lloyds' agents nor Norwegian merchants here so my expenses are not very great … I am at present laying in the mouth of a small river where there is just room for a small vessel to hove down. There is no town here, although a person named Boyd whose name you have probably seen in the Sydney papers, has bought a quantity of land and is doing all he can to puff it into notice …

This letter from Jack to his father on 8 October 1844 was his first communication with home since leaving Durundur earlier that year. Benjamin Boyd was a flamboyant entrepreneur who had arrived in the colony in 1842 in his famous yacht *Wanderer*. He immediately began to build up a great commercial empire both on land and in coastal and Pacific Island trade – including 'blackbirding', the term for enforced importation of Island labour. Like many other capitalists, he became bankrupt in 1849. Several years later he and *Wanderer* mysteriously disappeared. It is believed that Boyd was murdered by Solomon Islanders. Boyd 'puffed up' his land at Twofold Bay enough to establish a township there named Boyd Town."

Lorna McDonald in *Over Earth And Ocean*, the story of the Archer family from Norway.

Boyd is very much on the nose now with people wanting to expunge his name from history and remove his statue. (Though if he had murdered white people like Ned Kelly or 'Chopper' Read they would probably rush to make a film about him.) I felt sure, though, that an Australian poet had written a long narrative poem about him and his involvement in whaling. So what was it?

It was *A Drum for Ben Boyd* by Francis Webb. And the blurb says of it, "He presents a group of strikingly different characters, whose lives have all been affected in some way by Ben Boyd. As they speak, each with the colour of his own personality and background, the story emerges, and with it the dominating and mysterious figure of Ben Boyd, who takes on an almost supernatural stature and a significance far deeper than the bare historical outline of his life would convey." And for those who have not heard of Ben Boyd they give this brief bio:

"Benjamin Boyd, a Scotsman, came to New South Wales in 1848. Possessing either unlimited wealth or unlimited credit, he invaded the financial system of the colony with amazing ease, winning over many incautious speculators, founding banks, and actually building his own town at Twofold Bay. His brief career almost ended in bankruptcy, and finally he disappeared on a lone shooting expedition at Guadalcanal. The *Oberon*, chartered to discover some trace of him, returned with a skull, which was later proved to be that of a native." (That 1848 is incorrect.)

Though Francis Webb was a troubled young man, spending time in an asylum, he brings together his speakers with great verve, as 'roving reporter', to provide a portrait of Ben Boyd. Webb brings in his central character in this way:

1842. An immense shaking of the sun
On the little flat waves of the harbour,
And a young town grown from myths at the world's end
Where the South is a swaggering fantasy, not yet sober.

Quiet are the blue-notched Heads,
Quiet the ticking of the spray—we barter
Our one grey albatross and rearing tonnage of swirl
For a leaning shore, land-birds, an officious cutter.

The *Wanderer*, swaying like a mirage
Of snow country, drifts in safely;
While all the paunchy loafers near the dockside
Gape at an apparition so wholly lovely,

Plumaged with softness, yet diamond-beaked
With purposeful bowsprits of destiny.
Trumpets and adulation here take over,
The original impact and dream rest with the sea.

And then the whole brash little empire comes tumbling down. Webb has the captain of the *Oberon* say as he holds what he believes to be Boyd's skull:

The usual dull slog through the islands with the sky quivering,
Gasping for air, the water oily and steaming,
And a pillar of squall moving here and there;
At Guadalcanal, a couple of smashed canoes
Rotted to paper-thickness; the long flat beaches
Empty of motion but shaken with wandering sounds;
Then a maddening haggle with the local savages,
Almost a gunpoint bargain, you may say,
Finally to receive this small grey shell
Streaked in places by green lines of fungus.

As I said before, he has the laugh on me,
Leans over my shoulder, mocking the thing I clutch
And poise and balance. Dead men have the power
To mock us even while we juggle their actual bones;
They have slipped clean out of illusion, and they grow—
Six feet when he died—this fellow would top a cloud!

The thing's too full of ghosts—I hate the feel of it.
Holding it is like splintering a mirror
And finding a thousand faces round your boots.

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February 9th: Arthur Stace
Brendan Behan
Anthony Hope

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Long after he died Arthur Stace is remembered and yet he only wrote one word: Eternity. He was born the fifth child of "a labourer from Mauritius". The family lived in poverty and he spent some time in care. He went to the First World War but was discharged as medically unfit, in 1919. Heavy drinking lost him jobs and as a down-and-out he was broke and unemployed when he listened to a preacher at Pyrmont in Sydney in 1930. It was a vital moment in his life. He gave up alcohol and turned to helping other down-and-out men, he visited them in the Callan Park asylum, he led open-air meetings. He said his brothers were drunkards and his sisters prostitutes but he felt his own life had been turned around. And when he heard an evangelist, John Ridley, say that he wished he could "shout eternity through the streets of Sydney" Stace felt himself drawn to do just that.

The ADB says of him, "A 'birdlike little man with wispy white hair', Stace became known as 'the Eternity Man', one of the characters of Sydney. For a while he tried writing 'Obey God', 'but it wasn't as good. Eternity makes 'em think.' " He had a wife though no children. So I wondered if he had paid work in between his perambulations around Sydney writing Eternity on the footpaths. Or did people donate to help him in his life's work?

And more than fifty years after his death people still remember him and his chalk and the word Eternity.

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February 10th: Boris Pasternak
Agnes M. Clerke
Bertolt Brecht
Paul Hamlyn
Ellen Price (Mrs Henry Wood) (d)

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Mrs Henry Wood had a best seller in *East Lynne*, one of those melodramas in print which were gobbled up by 19th century readers.

Laurie Hergenhan and Elizabeth Webby in the *New Literary History of Australia* said of melodrama: "Melodrama, a word literally meaning 'a play with music', has for most of the twentieth century been used as a term of abuse. Particularly in its adjectival form 'melodramatic', it has come to imply an event, action or person that is excessive, out of control, over-emotional. The noun originally described a type of theatrical performance which, beginning in France towards the end of the eighteenth century, came into its own as a people's theatre during the French Revolution. It was rapidly transported across the Channel and hence eventually to the new English colonies in Australia.

"Melodramas, together with pantomimes, are the most characteristic forms of nineteenth-century English theatre. Both, originating in various ways from dumbshows, are distinguished by an emphasis on spectacle, music and movement rather than dialogue. Both make a stronger appeal to an audience's senses and emotions than to its intellect. As other types of popular entertainment—films, radio and television—have been created in the course of this century, they have progressively taken over melodrama's forms, themes and audiences. While few people now regularly visit the theatre or even the cinema, millions watch episodes of such television melodramas as the American serial *Dallas* or the Australian mini-series *Return to Eden*. So melodrama and the melodramatic remain important modes of the modern imagination.

"The continuing appeal and the critical condemnation of melodrama both appear to derive from its particular presentation of reality. While its central characters must remain sufficiently human to enable some audience identification, they speak and behave in ways which are often far removed from the everyday. The world of melodrama has sometimes been compared with the world of a dream: it draws on 'real life' but shapes this material according to conventions of its own. Its audience becomes involved in the action but is, at the same time, aware of these conventions and their fictionalizing effects. So, as Ien Ang has observed, melodrama aims at emotional rather than empirical realism."

East Lynne was one of those improbable *Peyton Place* types of novel, like *Lady Audley's Secret*, which, yes, was designed to pull at the heart-strings, not have readers say 'this doesn't make sense'. And Mrs Wood like other 19th century writers was interested in both the supernatural and crime. She collected stories of the supernatural and wrote other novels such as *The Mail-Cart Robbery* and *The Red Court Farm*.

I am always interested in women writers of the past but I wasn't sure that I wanted to go out and hunt down *East Lynne* …

Nor was Thomas Hardy. Talking with Frank Hedgcock he is recorded as saying: "I asked him what he thought of the women-novelists. Hardy thought they were too numerous and had too great a share of public attention, to say nothing of the monetary rewards. Miss Braddon, Mrs Humphry Ward, Ouida, Sarah Grand, Marie Corelli had all written best-sellers. He had forgotten how many thousand copies of Mrs Henry Wood's *East Lynne* had been sold, but it was something prodigious. And the book had been refused by George Meredith for Chapman and Hall; and quite rightly; but probably the publishers had been disappointed when they saw its subsequent success. It only showed that a man of Meredith's intelligence and refinement was not the best of readers when it was a question of judging a popular work. The only woman writer for whom he (Hardy) had any respect was Mrs Craigie (John Oliver Hobbes), who was both wise and witty."

(As quoted in James Gibson's *Thomas Hardy: Interviews and Recollections*.)

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February 11th: Mabel Ester Allan

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February 12th: Charles Darwin
Philippa Pullar

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February 13th: Judith Rodriguez
Georges Simenon
Thomas Osbert Mordaunt (d)

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Peter Fleming in his travel book of his journey from Beijing to India *News from Tartary* writes, "In the cultural history of the expedition Dzunchia marks the closing phases of what may be termed the Leblanc-Simenon period. The blessed Urechs had given us, on parting, a substantial paper-backed supply of the works of MM. Maurice Leblanc and Georges Simenon. In the tent and on the march both the former's hero (Arsène Lupin – *gentleman-cambrioleur*) and the latter's (Inspector Maigret) were our inseparable companions; the one romantic and superhuman, the other plausible and earthy. We fought each other for these books and dreaded the day when they would be finished. As each was jettisoned the influence of French detective fiction spread gradually throughout the caravan, and it was no uncommon thing to see a Mongol stalking along with the lively cover of *La Demoiselle Aux Yeux Verts* stuck in between his forehead and his fur hat to form an eye-shade, while the dramatic pages of *Le Fou de Bergerac* stuffed up the holes in several pairs of boots. The only other form of literature the Mongols can ever have seen was prayer-books in their own lamaseries: if they thought that our books were prayer-books too we must have struck them as very sacrilegious people."

I assume they were reading the books in French. I also assume that part of the books' attraction was the mention of all that delicious French food while they traveled on iron rations.

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February 14th: Neil Davis

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Tim Bowden wrote *One Crowded Hour Neil Davis Combat Cameraman 1934-1985* and he said, "Neil Davis wrote the last two lines of Mordaunt's verse in the flyleaf of every work diary he kept in Southeast Asia from 1964 to 1985. He told me it was his motto, and summed up his philosophy."

Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife,

Throughout the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name.

By Thomas Osbert Mordaunt, (1730—1809), thought to have been written during Britain's involvement in the Seven Years' War of 1756—1763.

Mordaunt, the son of Charles Mordaunt and Anne Scroup, was a soldier who wrote a poem he titled 'The Call'. It dealt with a young man off to one of Albion's wars and expecting to be killed and thinking of the young woman he loves, Delia, and her grief for him when she hears of his death. It was a 14-stanza poem, first published in Edinburgh, but it is only the 11th verse which gets singled out.

For a long time the poem was thought to be by Sir Walter Scott as he had quoted that verse in *Old Mortality* but just attributed it to Anon even though he undoubtedly knew Mordaunt was the poet. Finally giving 'The Call' its rightful author in the 20th century can bring Mordaunt neither riches nor attention but he might like to 'know' that his words still get quoted.

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February 15th: Bruce Dawe
A. N. Whitehead

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"It is the business of the future to be dangerous." A. N. Whitehead.

"Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains." A. N. Whitehead.

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February 16th: Peter Porter
Hal Porter

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February 17th: A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson
Ruth Rendell
Chaim Potok

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Men from the British Empire couldn't wait to rush off to South Africa, including from these shores, to fight the Boers. Some of them gradually became tired and disillusioned with the war. It is a habit wars have. One such was Banjo Paterson.

Peter Fitzsimons in *Breaker Morant* wrote: "Even before leaving South Africa he had broken cover enough, in his last missive before departure, to get a couple of pertinent things into the august pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The Boers are certainly bearing out the prediction of Olive Schreiner who stated to the writer at Capetown quite early in the war, that after we got to Pretoria they would begin to give trouble. One cannot help admiring [Boer] pluck and determination. All the stories about Boer savagery are nonsense. To the eye of an English globe-trotter they, no doubt, seem very rough and uncouth, and so would a lot of Australian back-block settlers, but, as matter of fact, the Boers are a very commonplace lot of farmers and settlers. The local grocer, and feed merchant, and commission agent, and blacksmith have shouldered their Mausers and gone out into the laagers; the parsons have remained behind, and, as a rule, they preach defiance to the last.

And now that he is back on home soil, embarking on a lecture tour, there is no reason to hold back. But will the audience feel they are getting their money's worth if he doesn't deliver up jingoism, and instead gives the real situation?

'Those anxious for the truth,' *Truth* observes of his lecture, 'were in a great minority.'

Certainly, he is welcomed cordially enough by the small crowd, but the fact that he is 'painfully nervous', presages something of that which is to come. For, from the moment he launches into his lecture, it is obvious that he is *not* here to simply bury the Boers.

As a matter of fact, despite what you might have heard, many of the enemy have distinguished themselves by their sheer humanity in dealing with the British wounded. Why, he saw with his own eyes what happened when a severely wounded British soldier fell to the ground in a battle outside Heidelberg, his lifeblood pouring out of him. Abandoned by his own men, he obviously only had minutes to live, if that.

'But a Boer saw him, and walked down to him; and the British force, deciding that his only object could be to rob the wounded man, straight way opened a hot fire on the Boer. But the Boer waited long enough to bind up the man's hurt, and save his life. Then he stood erect, and walked back from the hot fire, scatheless.'

It is a polarising account, and for good reason.

'He had the most fatal faculty of telling the truth,' the correspondent for *Truth* will report. 'Though this was warmly welcomed by many, it was resented by most, and "a frost," began to be writ large over the enterprise. Fancy a man, in this jingo-cursed age, being found honest enough and brave enough to say that he had a poor opinion of the English Tommy, and believed him very much inferior…He described Kitchener as a bully, A BRUTE, AND A BLUNDERER…

'We take this opportunity of congratulating him upon his work, and of telling that section of the public which loves the truth that they cannot do better than patronise the few remaining which Mr Paterson is to deliver. "Banjo," here's to you!'

Ah, but Banjo Paterson has even a lot more than this to come and is already working on a poem which he will soon get published – in England of all places. It is a complete refutation of the war, and a finely aimed slap to all those who have supported it from the start.

And next let us join in the bloodthirsty shriek, Hooray for Lord
Kitchener's 'bag'!
For the fireman's torch and the hangman's cord – they are hung
on the English Flag!
In the front of our brave old army! Whoop! The farmhouse blazes
bright.
And the women weep and their children die – how dare they
presume to fight!
For none of them dress in a uniform, the same as by rights they
ought.
They're fighting in rags and in naked feet, like Wallace's Scotchmen
fought!"

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February 18th: Toni Morrison
Len Deighton

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I knew Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature. I knew she wrote much-acclaimed books. But I knew nothing about her. I just assumed she had a miserable Southern childhood in a family not far distant from slavery. But it turned out to be more complex than that. Jenni Murray in *A History of the World in 21 Women* wrote, "Toni Morrison was not Toni Morrison from birth. She was born Chloe Ardelia Wofford, in Lorain, Ohio. The 'Toni' came from her choice, at the age of twelve, to take the baptismal name Anthony – Saint Anthony of Padua – when she became a Roman Catholic. She told me during an interview in 1992, just before she was

awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, that she'd taken the name Morrison when she married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect, in 1958. It was what women were expected to do.

"She intended to use her own name, Roni Wofford, when she published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970, but she forgot to tell the publisher in time. The cover had already been designed and printed. She was stuck with the name of a husband from whom she'd been divorced for six years. Morrison has never really revealed why she left her husband but has hinted that he had hoped for a more subservient wife. 'He didn't need me making judgments about him,' she once said, 'which I did. A lot.' She has never married again.

"Morrison was the great-granddaughter of a North American Indian and the great-granddaughter of Alabama slaves." The second part did not surprise me but I was curious: how did that 'North American Indian' come into the family? She grew up in Lorain which was a small steel town without any segregation. She said of it: 'Everybody was either somebody from the South or an immigrant from East Europe or from Mexico. And there was one church and there were four elementary schools. And we were all, pretty much until the end of the war, very very poor.

'My neighbours were from – my mother's neighbours who brought her stuffed cabbage – what used to be called Czechoslovakia. So that I'm not at all a person who has been reared or raised in a community in which these racial lines were that pronounced. Occasionally, as children, we might figure out how to call somebody a name, and they would figure out how to call us. But … it was so light. It was so fluffy. I didn't really have a strong awareness of segregation and the separation of races until I left Lorain, Ohio.'

It wasn't until she went to Howard University in Washington that she came face to face with segregation. It doesn't say much for the USA that a small town in Ohio was more tolerant than the nation's capital.

While she was on my mind I came across her book of articles, *Mouth Full of Blood*. Her subjects were mostly predictable and understandable. But here is an unexpected little anecdote: "I want to describe to you an event a young gifted writer reported:

"During the years of dictatorship in Haiti, the government gangs, known as the Tonton Macoutes, roamed about the island killing dissenters, and ordinary and innocent people, at their leisure. Not content with the slaughter of one person for whatever reason, they instituted an especially cruel follow-through: no one was allowed to retrieve the dead lying in the streets or parks or in doorways. If a brother or parent or child, even a neighbor ventured out to do so, to bury the dead, honor him or her, they were themselves shot and killed. The bodies lay where they fell until a government garbage truck arrived to dispose of the corpses—emphasizing that relationship between a disposed-of human and trash. You can imagine the horror, the devastation, the trauma this practice had on the citizens. Then, one day, a local teacher gathered some people in a neighborhood to join him in a garage and put on a play. Each night they repeated the same performance. When they were observed by a gang member, the killer only saw some harmless people engaged in some harmless theatrics. But the play they were performing was *Antigone*, that ancient Greek tragedy about the moral and fatal consequences of dishonoring the unburied dead."

It seemed to be the moment to find and read *Antigone* …

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February 19th: Carson McCullers

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C. Alan Joyce and Sarah Janssen in *I Used to Know That Literature* wrote, "Had network television been in business in 1940, it might have produced an early installment of the reality show *Big Brother* by training its cameras on the fascinating artistic and social experiment known as February House. Dreamed up (literally) by headstrong, idiosyncratic George Davis, the fiction

editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, February House was an experiment in communal living by some of the most notable names of the time, many of whom pooled their funds to live in a huge four-story walkup in Brooklyn Heights."

Among those who lived there were W. H. Auden, Benjamin Britten, Gypsy Rose Lee, Jane and Paul Bowles, and Carson McCullers.

"One of the original tenants, McCullers moved in, partially to expand her circle of friends outside of her troubled marriage. She became known in the house for cooking her signature dish "Spuds Carson," made from potatoes and any other leftover food she could find. Her creativity at February House wasn't limited to the kitchen—it was there that she laid the groundwork for *The Member of the Wedding* and *The Ballad of the Sad Café*."

I have just been reading her *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and there is certainly plenty of preparing and eating of food in it. It is a sad book with people such as the deaf-mute Mr Singer, Biff Brannon at the New York Café and Doctor Copeland living narrow lives in a small town, and a partially segregated black and white community with few people finding much excitement or satisfaction in their lives. But I wondered if there was more food in *The Ballad of the Sad Café* …

In fact there is less. Miss Amelia Evans, a tall tough lady who also owns a secret still, owns the café in a small dull town. (I suspect all McCullers' towns are small and dull.) A hunchback Lymon Willis turns up claiming to be a relative and she takes him in. He helps her in the café. "Early that morning Miss Amelia had put a notice on the wall of the front porch reading: Chicken Dinner – Twenty Cents Tonite."

"For in order to come to the café you did not have to buy the dinner, or a portion of liquor. There were cold bottled drinks for a nickel! And if you could not even afford that, Miss Amelia had a drink called Cherry Juice which sold for a penny a glass, and was pink-coloured and very sweet. Almost everyone, with the exception of Reverend T.M. Willin, came to the café at least once during the week."

Everything seems to be going well but then Marvin Macy comes back to town. He was briefly married to Miss Amelia but she was glad to see the back of him and he'd been some years in prison. Now he fights Miss Amelia, knocking her down, then persuades Lymon to help him loot Miss Amelia's house, destroy her still, take her most precious possessions, then disappear. Miss Amelia locks herself away in her house and lives out her life as a recluse. She gets someone to board up the café and the town drops back into its former lethargy and its "soul rots with boredom."

And what of February House? Richard Davenport-Hines writing about Auden quoted Golo Mann: "He (Auden) kept order in the house. There were two coloured servants, who cleaned and cooked the meals – formal, heavy meals which were eaten in a gloomy basement with plush-covered furniture. If anyone was late, Auden did not conceal his disapproval. Expenses were covered in accordance with a complicated system thought out by Auden … Once a week there was a 'bill-day', announced with a certain satisfaction by Auden at breakfast time; afterwards he went from room to room collecting payment." So did Carson cook when the servants had time off?

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February 20th: Mary Durack

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February 21st: W. H. Auden

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W. H. Auden wrote to a group of young poets in New York with this advice: "Try to think of each poem as a letter written to an intimate friend, not always the same friend. But the letter is going to be opened by the postal authorities, and if they do not understand anything, or find it difficult to wade through, then the poem fails."

I am not sure about this. The sort of people who open your mail or tap your phone are not the sort of people, I suspect, who read much poetry. And then there is the funny story about the FBI file on J. K. Galbraith which had 'doctrinaire' misinterpreted as 'doctorware' which in turn became 'Dr Ware'. The mysterious Dr Ware was never found. But can you imagine what some officials would make of your poem?

Richard Davenport-Hines in *Auden* said, "Always the destination of his journey was exceptional. 'From this nightmare of public solitude,' he asked in his great prose poem on the limitations of the artist, Caliban's speech in 'The Sea and the Mirror', 'what relief have you but in an ever giddier collective gallop…toward the gray horizon of the bleaker vision…what goal but the black stone on which the bones are cracked, for only there in its cry of agony can your existence find at last an unequivocal meaning and your refusal to be yourself become a serious despair?' "

I am not sure what the postal officials would make of his black stone …

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February 22nd: Fay Weldon
Seán O'Faoláin
Edna St Vincent Millay

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February 23rd: Samuel Pepys
Norman Lindsay

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February 24th: David Williamson
George Moore
Horace (birthdate not known)

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"Horace, that old Roman poet and philosopher, prayed for a garden. He said, "This was among my prayers: a piece of land not so very large, where a garden should be and a spring of ever-flowing water near the house, and a bit of woodland as well as these." And I might pray for such a place though I know I will never have a stream or spring or a bit of woodland to call my own and even if I had them how could I call them mine? Gardens belong to no one. A garden is a real place imagined and, with time and care, an imagined place made real."

Patrick Lane in *There is a Season*. He goes on: "I can see old Horace, long poems poking from the folds of his toga, tottering around among his prized irises, his ordered olive groves, and stopping a moment to stare at the petals of the Cretan ebony he brought three years before from the dry hills south of Knossos. He reaches up and touches a branch of ripening olives in the grove just east of the catacombs where the Via Apia cuts in a cruel line toward the blue hills of his Roma. Testicles of the sun, he thinks, Orphic bags of light."

Horace was a soldier and a clerk. He wrote his *Satires*, his *Epodes*, his *Odes*, his *Epistles*. So why is he thought of as a poet of the garden? Well, when he was probably in his late thirties he acquired a small farm in the Sabine Hills north-east of Rome, and he found his house and garden a source of delight. This may explain why some of his Odes turn up in anthologies of garden poems.

Lawrence Durrell wrote a long poem he called 'On First Looking into Loeb's Horace'; it begins: I found your Horace with the writing in it;

Out of time and context came upon
This lover of vines and slave to quietness,
Walking like a figure of smoke here, musing
Among his high and lovely Tuscan pines.

All the small-holder's ambitions; the yield
Of wine-bearing grape, pruning and drainage
Laid out by laws, almost like the austere
Shell of his verses—a pattern of Latin thrift;
Waiting so patiently in a library for
Autumn and the drying of the apples;
The betraying hour-glass and its deathward drift.

…
Here, where your clear hand marked up
'The hated cypress' I added 'Because it grew
On tombs, revealed his fear of autumn and the urns',
Depicting a solitary at an upper window
Revising metaphors for the winter sea: 'O
Dark head of storm-tossed curls'; or silently
Watching the North Star which like a fever burns

Away the envy and neglect of the common,
Shining on this terrace, lifting up in recreation
The sad heart of Horace who must have seen it only
As a metaphor for the self and in perfection—
A burning heart quite content in its station.

…
Who built in the Sabine hills this forgery
Of completeness, an orchard with a view of Rome;
Who studiously developed his sense of death
Till it was all around him, walking at the circus,
At the baths, playing dominoes in a shop—
The escape from self-knowledge with its tragic
Imperatives: *Seek*, *suffer*, *endure*. The Roman
In him feared the Law and told him where to stop.

Horace died in 8 BC.

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February 25th: Frank Slaughter
Karl May
Anthony Burgess

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Arnold Schwarzenegger talked about his childhood reading to Pamela Paul at *The New York Times Book Review*: "But I have to say that Karl May wrote my favorite stories. He was a German who had never seen a real cowboy or Indian, but somehow he wrote fantastic stories about this wise Apache chief named Winnetou and his cowboy friend Old Shatterhand. The stories taught me a powerful lesson about getting along despite differences, but more importantly, they opened up my world and gave me a window to see America. I still don't understand how Karl May was able to paint such an incredible picture of something he had never seen, but I do know that the cowboy stories immediately captured my attention and made me interested to learn everything I could about America."

Lloyd Rhys in *Jungle Pimpernel*, his account of Jean de Bruijn's guerilla campaign in Dutch New Guinea during World War Two, writes, "For security reasons the members of the parties now took new names. "Oaktree" members adopted those from Karl May's American-Indian stories which had been one of the joys of de Bruijn's youth. He became Winnetou, Gout Old Shatterhand, and so on. Overweel, as leader of the "Crayfish" party, was called Tarzan."

Tarzan of course was familiar to most Australian children but did we ever come across Karl May or was he largely a writer for European children? I had no memory of seeing his books … and then seven of them came into Vinnies one day … but, alas, they were all in German …

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February 26th: Victor Hugo
Christopher Marlowe (chr)
Jean Bruller Vercors

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"The first clandestine novel to be published by the Resistance, *Le Silence de la mer* by Vercors (1942), accepted that such honourable, cultured Germans were present in France, but alerted the French to the dangers of believing that such a musical German was typical of the occupiers. Behind him were the Nazi fanatics, enemies not just of France but of the humanism within the German tradition of Goethe and Beethoven. The novel initially disturbed several resisters by the sympathetic portrait of the musical officer in question, Werner von Ebrennac, but it was just this sympathy which made the officer's discovery of the true nature of his own leaders such a powerful end to the novel. Taking a German rather than a French person through the realization that it was a Nazi occupation and not a benevolent German one was more than a literary device. It brilliantly served the necessities of Resistance propaganda, but it also registered a reality which historians have since endorsed in full. There were major divisions of attitudes and intentions within the German occupation, but the Nazi politics and ideology, though not in obvious control from the start, were soon in a position of dominant power even if their influence was unevenly exerted throughout France. The Vercors story is as much a document as a novel."

From *Occupied France: Collaboration and Resistance 1940-1944* by H. R. Kedward.

Vercors was the pen name of Jean Marcel Bruller, son of a Hungarian Jewish father, who co-founded *Éditions de Minuit* during WW2 which published his clandestine novel. He survived the War and continued to write. But he never quite recaptured the success he had had with *Le Silence de la mer* though he did write a sympathetic historical novel about Anne Boleyne.

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February 27th: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Lawrence Durrell
John Steinbeck

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"Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them and pretty soon, you have a dozen."

John Steinbeck.

John Steinbeck wrote the screenplay which became the movie *Viva Zapata!* He included commentary on Mexican history, traditions, and habits. Emiliano Zapata was born in the southern province of Morelos in the time of the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship. He married Josepa Espejo. He had a drunkard brother Eufemio. Diaz encouraged big landowners to take over the land of poor peasants forcing them into a form of debt slavery. Madero in the north and eventually Zapata in the south

fostered and led rebellion, eventually toppling Diaz and making Madero president but his second-in-command Huerta had him murdered and grabbed power. This saw renewed struggle; Carranza and Pancho Villa in the north and Zapata in the south. But Carranza saw Zapata as a threat and determined to get rid of him. He set a trap which Zapata knew was a trap but saw no choice but to go to meet Carranza's emissary …

But an old *curandera* (healer, wise woman, witch) who had known Zapata all his life claimed that Zapata did not die then.

Steinbeck was clearly fascinated by Zapata, writing, "The story of Emiliano Zapata is one of the strangest I have ever come across. It is strange in that, even as it was lived, it has the qualities of literature and of folklore."

He gives the last word to the old woman: "He is there. I have seen him. Why you can hear his horse on the wind at night. You can hear his spurs in the summer rain. He is there always. He fooled them, and they are afraid of him. We know that he is always near, our beloved tiger."

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February 28th: Robin Klein
Stephen Spender
Michel de Montaigne

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"Those who attempt to put poetry on a pedestal only succeed in putting it on the shelf."
Stephen Spender

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February 29th: The Unknown Author

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In *Fontanka 16: the Tsars' Secret Police* (Fontanka 16 was the headquarters of the Secret Police, the Okhranka) Charles A. Ruud and Sergei A. Stepanov look at whether the secret police in Russia had any role in creating or disseminating *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. They write, "Many historians today contend that the Okhranka did target the Jews collectively as revolutionary conspirators at the turn of the century, and, as a prime piece of evidence, they point to the fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, whose precise origins remain a mystery. But, even as no concrete evidence has come to light about when, where, and by whom their drafting took place, solid data on the actual publication of the Protocols before the revolution explode the thesis of Okhranka involvement. Only six different printings are known in Russian before the revolution, merely one of which can remotely be linked to the government. These, along with the documented censorship decision in 1905 on the infamous Nilus edition, provide convincing evidence of non-involvement by the Okhranka or any other government agency."

They go on to say, "the bibliographical findings used here are those of Boris Nicolaevsky, who examined all six separate versions. Nicolaevsky first cites an undated, unsigned hectographed copy of a manuscript in Russian written by three different hands that he found, missing some pages, in the rare books collection of the Lenin Library. Its title read: "The Ancient and Continuing Protocols of Meetings of Zionist Elders"; below it appeared the subtitle: "The Root of Our Impoverishment." On the basis of textual evidence, Nicolaevsky judged it to predate every printed version that he found."

The published versions were:

—P. A. Krushevan who printed it in his St Petersburg newspaper *Banner* in August and September in 1903. He titled it "The Jewish Program for World Conquest".

—S. G. Nilus in 1905 tried to publish "The Triumph of Israel, or the Coming of the Anti-Christ as a Political Possibility (The Protocols of the Meetings of the Elders of Zion)1902-1904" as a small book but the Moscow Committee on Press Affairs said it could only be published as part of

a bigger book. He added it to a book he had written in 1902 and had it printed at the press of the Red Cross at Tsarskoe Selo in 1905. He said he had acquired the manuscript in 1901 and that it was "an extract copied from a thick book in a Zionist archive hidden in France and explained that it had somehow been stolen from the Freemasons by an unidentified woman."

—In the same year a brochure titled *The Root of Our Misfortune* was printed on presses of the St Petersburg Military District. This was largely a copy of the 1903 publication except that it blamed the "Elders of Zion of the Universal Society of Freemasons".

—In 1906 G. Butmi, "a leading member of the anti-Semitic Union of the Russian People", brought out the Protocols as *Accusatory Speeches. Enemies of Humanity* published by the St Petersburg Institute for the Deaf.

—In 1911 and again in 1917 Nilus republished his 1905 material though using different titles. This time he used a Russian Orthodox press at the Troitsky-Sergeevsky Monastery.

"These six are the only known printings of the Protocols in Russian prior to the Bolsheviks' assumption of power" and none of these printings had wide circulation. But the authors then look at various people who claimed to have seen, read, touched, questioned the manuscripts including Princess Radziwill and in 1921 an F. P. Stepanov claimed that he acquired in 1895 from a neighbour A. N. Sukhotin "a handwritten Russian manuscript that he understood to be a translation of a French-language copy of the original Protocols." He claimed to have given a copy to Nilus in 1897.

"Proof that the Protocols were a forgery rested on an entirely different kind of evidence in a series of articles in The Times of London in August 1921. The newspaper's Constantinople correspondent argued that striking similarities, too many for chance, showed conclusively that the Protocols were based on an 1864 political tract by French lawyer Maurice Joly that expressed, in the voice of Machiavelli, despicable political practices that the reader could readily associate with Emperor Napoleon III. The correspondent, whose name was Graves, demonstrates how alike are the words of Machiavelli in Joly's satire and the words of the Elders of Zion in the Protocols." And in 1938 V. I. Burtsev, in his book *Protokoly zionskikh mudretsov* took it further doing a line-by-line comparison to show the connection.

And there the matter seems to rest. We still don't know who adapted Joly's satire or to what ends.

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March 1st: Robert Lowell
Lytton Strachey
Georgi Markov

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Robert Lowell in his *Selected Poems* wrote very dense story-telling poems of home, family, places. But I liked a simpler poem of his: 'Water'.

It was a Maine lobster town —
each morning boatlands of hands
pushed off for granite
quarries on the islands,

and left dozens of bleak
white frame houses stuck
like oyster shells
on a hill of rock,

and below us, the sea lapped

the raw little match-stick
mazes of a weir,
where the fish for bait were trapped.

Remember? We sat on a slab of rock.
From this distance in time,
it seems the color
of iris, rotting and turning purpler,

but it was only
the usual gray rock
turning the usual green
when drenched by the sea.

The sea drenched the rock
at our feet all day,
and kept tearing away
flake after flake.

One night you dreamed
you were a mermaid clinging to a wharf-pile,
and trying to pull
off the barnacles with your hands.

We wished our two souls
might return like gulls
to the rock. In the end,
the water was too cold for us.

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March 2nd: William Lanney (d)
Tom Wolfe

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Made in Australia ed. by Jim Kable has a laconic piece called 'What the Scientists did to William Lanney' by jas h. duke:

A man called William Lanney lived in
Hobart in 1868
He was a sailor by trade
He was black
He was the last male survivor of the
Oyster Cove Community
(there were also two older women,
Mary Ann and Truganini)
All the rest had been slaughtered by
the whites in one way or another

At that time there was much interest
Among those who called themselves

scientist
In races and racism
Representatives of the Tasmanian Society
and the College of Surgeons
Wrote letters to the Government
And to the Hobart Mercury
Saying that the bodies of the last
surviving blacks
Should not be buried
But handed over to qualified scientists
For close examination

On 2nd March 1869 William Lanney
suddenly died
He had a heart attack while drinking in
the bar of the Dog and Partridge Hotel
While friends of his immediately saw
the Premier, Sir Richard Dry
And received assurances that the body
Would be decently buried

William Lanney was taken to the morgue
While the funeral arrangements were
being made.
Dr Crowther, a prominent member of
the College of Surgeons,
broke into the morgue with two confederates,
sawed off William Lanney's head,
replaced it with the head of a white man
called Ross who had recently died
and made off
When Lanney's friends came to collect
the body
they were outraged
But the head could not be found
Lanney was buried without his head in
Saint David's Cemetery
after a large funeral procession,
mostly of sailors

That night two parties of scientists,
one from the Royal Society under
Dr. Stockell, the other from the
College of Surgeons under Crowther
collected with picks and shovels
Stockell's party reached the cemetery first
and dug Lanney up,
while Crowther and his men arrived to

find an empty grave
Lanney was taken back to the morgue
where his skin was cut off
and his body cut up into little pieces
In the interest of science
Also in the interest of science
Stockell eventually made Lanney's scrotum
into a tobacco pouch.

And various other pieces of him
were passed to other men of science
as souvenirs
Crowther and his gang arrived at the
morgue and broke in
but there were only litte fragments
of Lanney left
The next day these were put in a cask
and buried again,
this time in the Campbell Street Cemetery
Lanney's head was never recovered

In time there was a judicial inquiry,
all witnesses were examined,
Stockell and Crowther defended their actions,
Lanney (they said) was a member of an
inferior race,
a proper subject for scientific study,
and they got away with it
Crowther was dismissed from his hospital
position, but that was all
Grave robbing and mutilation of bodies
were praiseworthy actions
when carried out by scientists

Eventually Mary Ann and Truganini
died too
Truganini's skeleton was put on exhibition
in a museum
She had asked to have her body dropped
into some deep part of the sea
This didn't happen till 1976
The scientists declared they owned her
and it took a hundred years to loosen
their grip

No one cut up any scientists to examine
them closely,
Do you think that White Australia learnt

any lessons?

Move over Burke and Hare. Perhaps William Lanney was fortunate in his friends. But the reason why this particularly resonated was the current campaign to remove or deface statues. William Crowther stands peacefully in Franklin Square. So should he be moved, blown up, or defaced? The trouble is—if you remove such artifacts from the past a piece of history tends to disappear with them. Would it not be better to add a plaque to that statue to say 'William Crowther was guilty of grave robbing, mutilation, and the illegal disposal of a body'? Or perhaps it could simply be ignored because—how many people actually look at plaques on statues?

This is a question Margaret MacMillan engages with in *The Uses and Abuses of History*. She says, "Our faith in history frequently spills over into wanting to set the past to rights through apologies and compensation for past actions." Then she asks, "Is it healthy, though, for societies to apologise for things that were done in different centuries and under different sets of beliefs? Politicians and others have been quick to make all sorts of apologies, even when it is difficult to see why they need feel any responsibility – or what good an apology would do. The pope apologised for the Crusades. The daughter of the British poet John Betjeman apologised to a town near London for a line in one of his poems which read, "Come friendly bombs and fall on Slough/It isn't fit for humans now". In the 1990s, President Bill Clinton apologised for slavery and Tony Blair for the Irish potato famine. A descendant of the famous Elizabethan freebooter and slaver Sir John Hawkins wore a T-shirt reading "So Sorry" while he knelt in front of a crowd of locals in Gambia." (I couldn't help wondering if the Gambians apologised to their compatriots in the Americas for their ancestors selling them to Hawkins.)

"In Canada, successive federal governments have been apologising and in some cases paying compensation for policies carried out – however distasteful they may be to us now – by their properly constituted predecessors. The practice leads to some interesting questions. Canada used to charge a head tax on immigrants coming from China. Its intent was undoubtedly racist, to discourage "Orientals" from settling in the country. But does present-day Canada have to pay recompense to the descendants of those who chose to pay the head tax? Would it make more sense to use funds for the community as a whole rather than for individuals? How much is enough? Sadly, there have been some unedifying squabbles among different groups claiming to speak for Chinese Canadians about how any government money ought to be distributed." She goes on to say, "Canadian governments have recently indulged in such attempts to refashion the past, over the interning, for example, of particular ethnic groups in wartime. In both world wars, Canada interned those it regarded as enemy nationals. In World War I, it was at war with Austria-Hungary, and many of the Ukrainians living in Canada came from within its borders. Perhaps they had left because they did not like Hapsburg rule; perhaps some of them still felt loyal to the old Emperor. In August 1914, a Ukrainian bishop in Winnipeg urged the men of his flock to head into the United States so that they could make their way home to fight for Franz Josef. Should the Canadian government at that time have taken a chance on their loyalty to their new home? It chose not to and so interned them. The British and Australian governments took a similar view when they interned their German subjects, even though many had been resident for decades."

The list could go on and on. But I think a useful rule of thumb is: are people still suffering because of past actions? If so, some form of redress is needed.

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March 3rd: Edward Thomas
Manning Clark
'Seely Regester'

Ronald Searle

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"You do not seem to have noticed the queer relationship between man and earth in Australia – how he treated her as a harlot, frenziedly raping her for her wealth; wool, gold and wheat. No wonder his conscience is uneasy."

Manning Clark.

"Anxiety about environmental damage is intensified by the religious relationship with the environment and its creatures. It is seen as 'wounding' and is responded to emotionally. No one who has witnessed the response, particularly of older Aborigines, to the sight of unexpected damage to the landscape, for instance by bulldozed tracks or test pits could doubt the obvious pain it engenders."

Aboriginal Autonomy by H. C. Coombs.

It is an awkward question when you come to consider it. Who gave the Government control over what lies under the ground? (Or on top of the ground for that matter.) Whether it be gold or oil or water or iron ore. You might say the Voters. But they don't have ownership of the underground resources and no Government has ever asked the Voters to give them that right to own and control. So you might say the Crown owns what lies underground. But you come up against the same question. Who gave the Crown ownership of gold seams? The simple answer would seem to be: No one did.

And if no one did—how then can the Government claim to own the world beneath us?

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March 4th: Alan Sillitoe

Beatriz Guido (d)

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Beatriz Guido was an Argentinian novelist. I have just been reading her *End of a Day*. It deals with a wealthy cultured family in 1950s Argentina, the Praderes, Alejandro, Sofia, and their children Jose Luis and Inés, with their town house, their land, their lovely furniture, servants, membership of the prestigious Jockey Club, and their beloved estate Bagatelle, three hours from Buenos Aires; "Jose Luis felt like saying, 'Now they want to expropriate our lands, Bagatelle. You too must have heard about Bagatelle, the most beautiful ranch in the province of Buenos Aires, in Guerrero. The building is a Norman castle which you can see from the road to Mar del Plata; it has a deer park, polo fields—what doesn't Bagatelle have?'"

Inés and her brother save a young anarchist Pablo Alcobendas who has been wounded by the police and hide him in the attic. Alejandro accepts the post of ambassador to Uruguay from the Peron government. He despises the regime but sees it as necessary to save Bagatelle. Uruguay is full of Argentine exiles, both open and hidden, and he realises he is supposed to monitor these people. Sofia is relieved to be away from the tensions of Argentina. "She recited *La Leyenda Patria*:

"Look, from Uruguay's surf,
beloved Uruguay,
strange lightning strikes
and, breaching the dark nestling clouds,
cuts a path through the forgetful night…"

and assured them she was happy.

"When did you take up reciting poetry?"

"It's just that Montevideo has romantic memories for me—I could talk in verse all the time. One of the Aliagas was a friend of Herrera Reissig. Don't forget, too, that on the Aliaga side of the family we're romantic revolutionaries."

Alcobendas, back to his planning, says, "I belong to a cell of ten university students. Ever since we lost our student contacts, and with Zavala and Gibaja hiding in the country, we've been dealing with phantoms. Sometimes there's a call, or some terse, vague messenger who leaves us in doubt as to whether he's with us or against us—like the one who brought us together. At other times, a bargeman or smuggler who takes us to a hippodrome, or a beach at Entre Rios." His friend says "The day Peron falls we won't find a single Peronista. But afterwards … after a few months."

But Alcobendas is caught and tortured by the Peronist regime and it is Jose Luis who tries to find him and save him. He succeeds; Alcobendas is dumped alive by a roadside but he has been castrated. Alejandro back on a visit to Buenos Aires has his house looted and burned by Peronist thugs and dies in the fire. The Peronists then move in on Bagatelle stamping almost everything 'State Property'. Their maid Antola says, "They've already named it 'The Park of the Rights of the Aged'. The stupid sharecroppers thought they were going to be given their farms as a gift."

Sofia and her children and the belongings they have been allowed to keep flee to Paris.

And Alcobendas? "He decided to face the leaders of La Fraternidad, Juan Bardugli, Victor Moressi, and Merlo's brother.

"He went to the secret headquarters in Santos Lugares, near the sheds of the Sección Alianza over a bowling alley in Bonifacini Street. He had to know the dates, hours, the exact last time the men were seen; to find out what had happened. All he had were obscure phrases reviving fear and, worst of all, ideological doubts. The families he had visited had accepted him, but in a confused way, finding themselves asked to oppose a government which spoke of fighting the same interests they were against. 'They have achieved their goal,' Pablo thought; 'Fear combined with plenty'—he again recalled Aníbal Ponce—'is the most powerful weapon of dictatorships.' He wasn't taken in by the "Fubistas-Marxists" who had surrendered to Peronism during the "sixty days" and paid for it later with their lives and exile. Fascio, fascio was the real meaning of Peron's dictatorship. San Martín and Bolivar had used the word "fascio" and warned against what was now happening. He was ashamed to remember his naïve high-school paper written on the letters exchanged by these two men before they met in Guayaquil.

"Why does that word bother you?" Professor Alfredo Palacios, who gave the course, had asked him.

"Fascio means union, falange, also syndicate, and our present troubles stem from the different interpretations allowed that word."

"He remembered that as his first victory; he had made himself heard."

Alcobendas decides to stay and struggle on. But in the novel can be seen many of the confusions and conflicts which still undermine Argentine society.

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March 5th: Bookmarks

Lady Augusta Gregory

Ring Lardner

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A friend gave me an article she had saved from *Country Living* magazine, by Betty Rivera. "When Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott were enthralling Victorian readers with their Romantic writings, the bookmarks that readers used to keep their places were cherished and frequently handmade. Today, collecting Victorian and other vintage bookmarks is a pleasurable and often inexpensive pastime that reveals much about lifestyles of past eras. Marking your place in a book with one of these old bookmarks brings a new dimension to reading."

"During Tudor times, when books were rare, finely bound, and handled with care, even Queen Elizabeth made needlepoint bookmarks to use when reading her treasured volumes."

"Bookmarks lent themselves to the painting and embroidering talents of young Victorian women, many of whom were expected to be proficient in both pursuits. With skillful stitches, schoolgirls in female academies cleverly "painted" memorial or mourning pictorials, which are now highly prized by collectors. Such choice needlework embellished and personalized bookmarks that were made from scraps of silk and were further enhanced, at times, with painting and beadwork (another Victorian passion)."

"Cardboard bookmarks bearing such sentiments as "THE CROSS IS MY ANCHOR" marked many a Bible and prayer book carried to Sunday services."

I have bought books from op-shops and found bills, letters, postcards, even money in them used as bookmarks but unfortunately never anything to be 'prized by collectors'.

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March 6th: Cyrano de Bergerac
Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Ring Lardner (also given the 5th)

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I didn't know until I went looking that there were two Ring Lardners, father and son, and they were both writers. Lardner was a sports journalist but also wrote novels. Lardner Junior wrote plays and film scripts and was caught up in the hunt for Communists in Hollywood in the McCarthy era. Lardner Junior had certainly been a member of the Communist Party but he had also written material for the Ziegfield Follies so he doesn't sound like a hardline doctrinaire believer. He wrote a number of film scripts including *Forever Amber* and *M*A*S*H**.

But I actually thought his father sounded more interesting. His passion was baseball. He wrote a column about it, all his fact and fiction brought baseball in. And then in 1919 the Chicago White Sox were accused of 'throwing' their match against the Cincinnati Reds for money. Fitzgerald refers to it in *The Great Gadsby* but the effect on Lardner was devastating. It destroyed his faith in the integrity of the game he loved. And who did what and why continues to be asked. Films, books, articles, even university theses delved into the scandal.

Lardner continued to write, and his writing was admired by people as unexpected as Virginia Woolf, but his unalloyed joy in his writing was never quite the same again.

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March 7th: Piers Paul Read
Patrick Lane (d)

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In *What the Stones Remember* Canadian poet and novelist Patrick Lane chronicles a childhood in a mining town where children were brought up to be tough and callous, looking the other way when drunkenness and domestic violence occurred. Both his parents became alcoholics and he too fought a long battle with alcoholism. As well as rehab two things helped him through.

His poetry—"It was 1960, the year I began writing poetry. I began because it gave me something I didn't have in my life. I had always wanted to be an artist, a painter, but there was no money for oil paints or acrylics. Writing was cheap. I had a tiny portable typewriter, a worn black ribbon, and a sheaf of canary-yellow paper. I had a number two pencil and a pink eraser. Where the typewriter came from I don't remember. Late at night after my wife and children were asleep I would sit at the tiny kitchen table in the front of our trailer and try to turn words into poems.

"Never in my life had I tried to do anything so difficult. I knew what a good poem was. I'd read the poets, but I couldn't do what they could do. I couldn't write about daffodils and skylarks or

about Massachusetts, Black Mountain, or San Francisco. They weren't what I knew, their words were not from where I had been made. Without advice or help from anyone I wrote about what happened around me. A dead baby in a trailer, a woman who died when she tried to abort herself with a coat hanger, the sound of the rivers that coursed down the mountains I walked. A bear rummaging in my burning barrel in Avola was the subject of the first successful poem I wrote. That was in 1961. I knew it was good, but why it was good I couldn't have told you. It sounded right, that's all. It caught the night in the mouth of the north. I sent it and some others off to the Canadian Forum magazine in Toronto and they published three of them.

"My first publication and I was bitten and bitten hard. From the moment when I saw my poems in print for the first time I never looked back. After that I never stopped writing, no matter what happened. I disappeared inside words. I don't think my wife and family ever found me again. I knew what I had to do with my life. The early death of my brother Dick was three years away. My father's murder was seven years away and so was my divorce. Things were going to happen to me that would change my life forever, but the writing stayed. I had no teachers, no mentors, no education beyond high school, but I had what all artists need and that was an obsessive and total commitment to the voice I heard inside me. I think back to that time, the mills and first aid, the poverty and struggle, the joy and bitterness, and I know the only thing that kept me going, the only thing that kept me alive, was poetry."

And his love of gardens, wild and tame—"Everywhere there are the gentle nuances of plants pushing delicately into the scant warmth of a sun a bare month or so past the solstice. Even on a gray day like this the air has a smell to it, or is it just that my hands are already covered in the wet mulch of earth? I can taste the earth quickening. The irises know. So do the skimmia. Their leaves are a brighter green and the red berries on the female glow in the muted light."

"Color in a garden is not the only thing to look for. Shapes are beautiful as well. The contorted hazel in the large blue pot beside the magnolia is a maze of arabesques against the cedar fence. Catkins hang from the tips of its branches. I want to touch them each time I pass by. The hazel is lovely at all seasons but particularly in winter after the leaves fall. It is then you see the net of branches as they spiral and curve."

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March 8th: Kenneth Grahame

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March 9th: Keri Hulme

Michael (Constantine) Psellus (1018 – 1096; exact dates unknown)

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E. R. A. Sewter introducing Michael Psellus' *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers* in 1964 says, "Fifty years ago any English schoolboy who professed admiration for things Byzantine would almost certainly have been reprimanded. The Golden Age of Athens, the fifth century before Christ, was the most profitable object of study, and Roman History was respectable enough up to the reign of Hadrian; after that (had not Gibbon said so?) there followed a period of decline and fall. The miserable Byzantines were pale reflections of decadent Greeks: their art was stereotyped, lacking in inspiration, and stiff; their form of government was static and inefficient, their literature debased. *Byzantinus est*, *non legitur* was the accepted maxim. The boy's mentors probably never bothered to define the term 'Byzantine', which had long been pejorative, but in my schooldays (about that time) we knew vaguely that the ancient city of Byzantium had been founded by a Greek Byzas somewhere about 650 B.C., that it paid tribute to the Delian Confederacy, and that Constantine the Great made it the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire in the year 330 of the Christian Era. We were not encouraged to ask what happened to Rome itself; in fact, looking back on those faraway lessons on Roman History, one wonders if our teachers themselves knew or cared. Once, in an

aside, we were told that the first and last rulers of Rome were called by the same name (with a contemptuous reference to 'Augustulus') and further enquiries were dismissed as irrelevant. Obviously something dreadful had occurred in the West two hundred years after Constantine's foundation of his new capital, but many years were to elapse before my contemporaries seriously concerned themselves with the surviving half of the old Roman Empire. It was not even generally agreed whether 'East Romans' or 'Byzantines' was the correct title of its inhabitants, though most people thought of the Empire as definitely Byzantine from the time of Justinian to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, a period of some nine hundred years. However ignorant we may have been, some of us did ask awkward questions: if they were so inferior, how did those wretched Byzantines manage to survive so long after the collapse of the West? And what about Santa Sophia? And wasn't a millennium rather a long time for a sustained decline?"

In fact Psellus' history of its rulers over nearly two centuries is lively and even intimate but to some extent bolsters the view that the Byzantine empire was often saddled with inept, lazy, greedy rulers who preferred to dally with their concubines rather than concern themselves with the lives and safety of their subjects. But interestingly they permitted women to rule. The best-known of these was the Empress Theodora. Psellus said of her, "Everyone was agreed that for the Roman Empire to be governed by a woman, instead of a man, was improper, and even if the people did not think so, it certainly seemed that they did. But if one removes this single objection, one must say that in everything else the Empire prospered and its glory increased. No conspiracy whatever was formed against the government: nobody held in contempt the proclamations and orders issued by it. Throughout the Empire the seasons of the year went well, and the harvest was abundant. No Roman territory was plundered by marauding barbarians, and there was no open warfare. No section of the State was discontented; justice was maintained everywhere."

Where emperors had created problems with their profligacy Theodora created discontent with her parsimony. But she was a reminder, something the western monarchies ignored, that women could rule. Psellus also mentions the Empress Eudocia. "At this stage in my narrative I would like to say just this about the Empress Eudocia: I do not know whether any other woman ever set such an example of wisdom or lived a life comparable to hers, up to this point; I will not go so far as to say that she became *less* wise after this event, only that she lost some of her old precision: her ideas changed as she grew older. I would offer this defence on her behalf, that, even if there was some alteration in her, she did not become a slave to pleasure nor give way to voluptuous emotions. The truth is, she was very worried over her sons, and feared they might be deprived of the crown, if there was no one to protect and guide them." He calls her a "woman of steadfast character and noble spirit". And, given the lack of wisdom of many emperors, it does not seem that this eastern empire suffered for allowing women to rule.

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Dilys Powell in *An Affair of the Heart* wrote, "I looked up at the empty scaffolding and wondered how a country scorched and split by war as Greece had been from 1940 to 1949 could afford to preserve its monuments. The monuments of two pasts. One thinks of Greece as the white, classical country. But there is also the dark, gold-and-purple Greece which took its colours from Byzantium. Classical archeologists sometimes resent the intervention of this Christian, ecclesiastical past between themselves and the pagan world; I remember how at Perachora there was nothing but exasperation when a few shards of Byzantine pottery were found. But the Greeks themselves still look eastward with their Church towards lost Byzantium, towards Constantinople, still recall as the old woman muttering under the dusty scaffolding recalled an imperial age."

John Julius Norwich in *Byzantine: The Early Centuries* wrote: "Historians used to maintain that the town was founded in 658 B.C. by a certain Byzas, leader of a group of colonists from the

Greek city of Megara. They now inform us that Byzas may never have existed, and we can only pray that they are right. Magic is always best left unexplained." However it was, "The Byzantine empire, from its foundation by Constantine the Great on Monday 11 May 330 to its conquest by the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II on Tuesday 29 May 1453, lasted for a total of 1,123 years and 18 days" and he agreed that Byzantine history had been unfairly denigrated; "The long campaign of denigration seems to have been given its initial impetus in the eighteenth century by Edward Gibbon who, like all classically educated Englishmen and Englishwoman of his day, saw Byzantium as the betrayal of all that was best in ancient Greece and Rome; and it continued until well into the present century." He suggests that it was "the ease, speed and relative comfort of travel in the Levant made Byzantine monuments at last generally accessible" which promoted renewed interest in studying Byzantine history.

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March 10th: Mikhail Bulgakov (d)

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In April 1935 the American Ambassador in Moscow put on a lavish party on the theme of 'the arrival of Spring'. Apart from the waste of money it would have been a long-forgotten event—except that some of its excesses ended up in a famous book. Tim Tzouliadis in *The Forsaken* wrote, "the ballroom of Spaso House was decorated in a colour scheme of green, white and gold – with green trees, white tulips, white goats with gilded horns, and white roosters in gold and glass cages. Since Moscow was still blanketed in snow, Charlie Thayer had telegraphed south to Odessa for birch trees to be flown up and placed under sunlamps ready to burst into leaf. Lambs were ordered from a collective farm, but the Americans received sheep instead which had to be shampooed to rid them of their overpowering smell, only to be replaced by kid goats anyway. The director of Moscow Zoo agreed to loan the crazed Americans a bear cub, and took to calling up his co-conspirator Irena Wiley whenever a new animal was born: 'Do you need a giraffe, a wolf, a baby llama?' Nothing was beyond the imagination of these Americans, if the zoo director took his cue from Mrs Wiley's idea to have the ballroom floor glassed over and the space filled with water and brightly coloured tropical fish. It would make a sensational aquarium on which the Ambassador's guests could dance their hot American jazz.

"Either practicality, or an understandable uncertainty over Soviet glass manufacture, spared the tropical fish, but not the rest of the zoo's menagerie. As Ambassador Bullitt greeted his guests from the top of the stairs of Spaso House, the gilded bear cubs, kid goats and cockerels encircled the floodlit ballroom. Around them a consignment of blooming white tulips, flown in from abroad, was made to sway in the breeze by means of a concealed electric fan. While imported champagne and delicacies were laid on to satisfy the tastes of the invited guests, whose social hierarchy ranked from Max Litvinov, the tubby Soviet Foreign Minister bursting out of his white tie and tails, all the way down to Mikhail Bulgakov, the penurious writer whose wife had nervously worried about what they might wear to the grand American ball. In the event, the guests' costumes were hardly noticed amid the slides of flowers projected on to the ballroom walls and the vast nets glinting with gold powder that had been stretched across the ceiling from four marble pillars, creating a vast aviary for hundreds of chattering greenfinches on loan from Moscow Zoo.

"Naturally the animals caused a sensation. The Soviet general Aleksandr Yegorov picked up a bear-cub in his arms, only to have the bear redecorate his uniform. Yegorov left, cursing, but returned an hour later, newly resplendent, and stayed until dawn. Amid the laughter, another Red Army General, Semyon Budenny, folded his arms across his chest and started to dance Cossack style, his long waxed moustache glinting under the lights, while Ivy Litvinov, the wife of the Foreign Minister, clutched one of the kid goats to her chest, and Karl Radek, the editor of *Izvestiya*, attempted to pour champagne into the bear cub's milk bottle. Amid the lights and general

commotion, no one noticed that in the aviary above them the greenfinches were dying. When the jazz orchestra burst into 'The Star Spangled Banner', the birds had flown into a 'heart-breaking' panic, crashing into the golden nets and getting tangled in their mesh. The fortunate few who managed to escape were trapped in the house for days."

I assume there was no Russian version of the RSPCA.

"Quietly observing this celebration of American bravura, Mikhail Bulgakov would borrow a host of details for his novel *The Master and Margarita*, whose scene from 'Satan's Ball' was bewitchingly similar to the real-life American affair down to the 'green tailed parrots and white tulips' and an 'unbearably loud jazz band'. Even one of Bullitt's guests, Baron Boris Steiger, the unofficial liaison officer between the diplomatic community and the NKVD, became recast by Bukgakov as 'Baron Meigel, employee of the Spectacles Commission in charge of acquainting foreigners with places of interest in the capital'. Mikhail Bulgakov would write his masterpiece during the height of the Terror over the next three years. But the novel's principal theme of the devil's reappearance in modern-day Moscow meant that it could never be published in Russia while Stalin was still alive. The analogy was far too blatant."

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March 11th: Nancy Cato

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March 12th: Jack Kerouac
Kylie Tennant
Gabriele D'Annunzio

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D'Annunzio was the most popular writer in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century. Poet, novelist, playwright, journalist; everything he did seemed to succeed. He is credited with bringing Italy into WWI on the side of the Allies and dropping surrender leaflets over Vienna. But in the 1920s he moved away from his earlier work. Readers were not so keen on his novels with their Nietszche-like supermen, he became a supporter of Mussolini; only his poetry still kept a wide audience. But he came into my life through a quite different interest of his.

English writer Gideon Defoe wrote *An Atlas of Extinct Countries* and he includes Fiume. This may not immediately strike a chord. He says that in the aftermath of World War I "The largely Italian-speaking Fiume ended up in newly-formed Yugoslavia. US president Woodrow Wilson earmarked it as a potential HQ for the League of Nations, but the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio – flagrant self-publicist, would-be necromancer, womanizer, terrible teeth – had other ideas." (I am not sure anyone from the UK should poke fun at Italian teeth.)

Defoe presents him as a buffoon. "In September 1919, D'Annunzio drove into the city of Fiume at the head of his 'legionnaires', an ultra-violent piratical fan rabble. The Italian army – expressly ordered to stop him – gave a collective 'more than my pay grade' shrug and let him continue on his way. As an ardent nationalist, D'Annunzio's intention was to claim Fiume on behalf of Italy, but Italy – or at least the government of Prime Minister Francesco Nitti – didn't want anything to do with this circus. So, having taken the place over, he found himself in charge of his own tiny fiefdom, and set about making it a 'beacon for the world'. This translated as 'a lot of ice cream and borderline anarchy'." He presents him as a mini dictator, ordering and canceling decrees. "He decked everywhere out with flowers, because he was a big fan of flowers. If you could ignore the occasional lynching and didn't mind the endless speeches crammed with those rhetorical flourishes that dictators everywhere would soon adopt as their own, life in Fiume was a party."

The Italian government refused to back him and just wanted him out. The irony is that the city's inhabitants were largely Italian and its natural home was in Italy not in Croatia. Or perhaps as a little city-state like Monaco. D'Annunzio retired and was mostly ignored by Mussolini who

thought he had found better friends in Nazi Germany. Except for his poetry D'Annunzio was largely forgotten as the miseries of World War II crashed over the peoples of Yugoslavia and Fiume.

His poetry, described as 'sensuous', was influenced by the French Symbolists and is still attractive. His well-known 'Rain in the pinewood' ('La pioggia nel pineto') begins:

Be silent.
At the edge
of the woods I do not hear
the human words you say;
I hear the new words
spoken by droplets and leaves
far away.

Taci.
Su le soglie
del bosco non odo
parole che dici
umane; ma odo
parole più nuove
che parlano gucciole e foglie
lontane.

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March 13th: Hugh Walpole
Kofi Awoonor

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March 14th: Maxim Gorki
Geoffrey of Monmouth (?1100 – 1154; exact dates not known)

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Geoffrey of Monmouth was possibly a Benedictine monk who became Bishop of St Asaph. But he is remembered for his book *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The DNB says, "Geoffrey of Monmouth was at least fifty years of age when he was ordained priest in 1152. His literary career was already over, and its record is a brilliant one not withstanding the charges made on one side that his Cymric scholarship was faulty, and on the other that his Latinity is of vulgar order."

The DNB says of the history, "The name of Arthur outside the mythic story was an unfamiliar one in Britain, if not indeed quite unknown, when the so-called 'Nennius' was written (about A.D. 900).

"That the Breton contribution to Geoffrey's history was a considerable one must be admitted, not withstanding Welsh denials of the fact, and the acceptance by many good authorities of a theory assuming definite Cymric characteristics in the narrative. History and philology tend equally to show that whatever differences exist at present between the Welsh and Breton languages have arisen gradually since the time of Henry I, and that before his time the two peoples were virtually identical."

And, "there can be little doubt that he compiled it from the Latin 'Nennius,' still extant, and a book of Breton legends which has perished."

"The publication of the 'Historia Britonum' marks an epoch in the literary history of Europe. There followed in less than half a century after the completion of Geoffrey's Chronicle, the romances partly based upon it of the Grail, Perceval, Lancelot, Tristan, and the Round Table; and

Geoffrey's stories of Merlin and King Arthur were naturalised in Germany and Italy, as well as in France and England."

He turned "ancient British legends into respectable mediaeval Latin history" which was "a task accomplished with manifest literary skill and tact. His allusions to antecedent and contemporary writers are a proof that he was no mere monkish student eager to swallow wondrous stories, but a shrewd scholar equipped with all the learning of his age" and that he "had a charm of manner which made his society agreeable to men of high station."

So his history begins, not in Britain, but in the histories of distant peoples in the Levant. He partly used "a book of Breton legends which has perished." These stories from Brittany included the idea of "the descent of the British princes from the fugitives of Troy" which is also found "in the traditions of the Franks of Gaul". This idea was dismissed. Yet Asia Minor was also home to Celtic tribes …

Shakespeare "used his fictions through Holinshed" except that many of the myths he drew on may well have had a core of fact, including the Phoenician visits to the British Isles.

Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* wrote, "Geoffrey records that Bran and Beli (who, he says, gave his name to Billinsgate) were later reconciled, and together fought battles on the Continent. It is possible that troops from Britain served in the successful expedition of the Gauls against Rome in 390 B.C. The Gaulish leader was Brennus—Celtic kings habitually took the name of their tribal gods—and Geoffrey's confused account of subsequent Continental wars undertaken by Bran and Belin evidently refers to the Gaulish invasion of Thrace and Greece in 279 B.C. when Delphi was plundered, the chief commander of the Gauls being another Brennus. … The ultimate origin of the God Beli is uncertain, but if we identify the British Belin or Beli with Belus the father of Danaus (as Nennius does), then we can further identify him with Bel, the Babylonian Earth-god, one of a male trinity, who succeeded to the titles of a far more ancient Mesopotamian deity, the mother of Danae as opposed to the father of Danaus. This was Belili, the Sumerian White Goddess, Ishtar's predecessor, who was a goddess of trees as well as a Moon-goddess, Love-goddess and Underworld-goddess. She was sister and lover to Du'uzu, or Tammuz, the Corn-god and Pomegranate-god. From her name derives the familiar Biblical expression 'Sons of Belial'—the Jews having characteristically altered the non-Semitic name Belili into the Semitic Beliy ya'al ('from which one comes not up again', i.e. the Underworld)—meaning 'Sons of Destruction'. The Slavonic word *beli* meaning 'white' and the Latin *bellus* meaning 'beautiful' are also ultimately connected with her name. Originally every tree was hers, and the Goidelic *bile*, 'sacred tree', the medieval Latin *billa* and *billus*, 'branch, trunk of tree', and the English *billet* are all recollections of her name. Above all, she was a Willow-goddess and goddess of wells and springs. … By his triumphant supersession of Queen Belili, Bel became the the Supreme Lord of the Universe, father of the Sun-god and the Moon-god, and claimed to be the Creator: a claim later advanced by the upstart Babylonian god Marduk. Bel and Marduk were finally identified, and since Marduk had been a god of the Spring Sun and of thunder, Bel had similarly become a sort of Solar Zeus before his emigration to Europe from Phoenicia."

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March 15th: Hesba Brinsmead
Ben Okri

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Ben Okri introducing *Ten Years of the Caine Prize for African Writing* said, "When I visit the houses of acquaintances a cursory glance at their bookshelves reveals everything I need to know, regardless of what they profess.

"It is easy enough to have bookshelves weighed down with formidable rows of Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, or Henry James, and all else that has acquired the patina of the classical. It is easy enough to have a fashionable collection of Toni Morrison, Rushdie, Marquez, and all else that displays a progressive tendency, alongside the popular books of the day.

"But to have novels by Ukrainians, Iranians, Indians, Egyptians, poems by an unknown Samoan, a Dutch collection of stories, works by Kenyan, Nigerian, Jamaican novelists, plays from Portugal, Japanese elegies, all mixed in with books that reveal a healthy interest in what the human spirit is dreaming, now that is something special. For here would be a person that Goethe might have thought a citizen of the world. Here would be a person one would hope to have a friend, a person keen on humanity, fascinated by its varied genius."

People have written whole books about what your bookshelf might tell people about you. I tend to gravitate to people's bookshelves out of curiosity but I can't say it tells me what they are really like—simply because most bookshelves are a mish-mash of books inherited, books from childhood and school, books useful for work or hobbies, and books there for the pure joy of reading. Perhaps it is this last category which Ben Okri would see as an insight into a person's private world.

"Few things give a truer picture of a man's character and disposition, or of the cast of his intellect, than what he chooses to read for his own enjoyment."

Nicolas Bentley in *A choice of ornaments*.

Agatha Christie in *Murder in Mesopotamia* has Poirot seeking to understand the personality of a murdered woman by looking at her bookshelf. "In her bedroom I noticed the following books on a shelf: *Who were the Greeks? Introduction to Relativity*, *Life of Lady Hester Stanhope*, *Back to Methuselah*, *Linda Condon*, *Crewe Train*.

"She had, to begin with, an interest in culture and in modern science—that is, a distinct intellectual side. Of the novels, *Linda Condon*, and in a lesser degree *Crewe Train*, seemed to show that Mrs. Leidner had a sympathy and interest in the independent woman—unencumbered or entrapped by man. She was also obviously interested by the personality of Lady Hester Stanhope. *Linda Condon* is an exquisite study of the worship of her own beauty by a woman. *Crewe Train* is a study of a passionate individualist. *Back to Methuselah* is in sympathy with the intellectual rather than the emotional attitude to life. I felt that I was beginning to understand the dead woman."

If you are like me and hadn't heard of *Linda Condon* I can now tell you it was written by American novelist Joseph Hergesheimer and published in 1919.

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March 16th: William Mayne

WORDS

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I sometimes find myself wondering where words come from. The other day I thought why do we call hens 'chooks'? Bruce Moore in *What's Their Story?* says: "*Chook* is a word that comes from British dialect, where it was used especially in northern England and in Scotland—it is a northern form of southern *chick*. In those dialects it was usually spelt *chuck* and pronounced to rhyme either with *duck* or *cook*. It was used as a call to fowls, or as a term for a chicken or hen especially when used to children or by children. Because it is so commonly associated with children, the diminutive form *chookie* often appears. It was from much the same dialect areas, especially Scotland, that Australian English took *googie*, a child's word for an egg, and subsequently produced the variants *goog* and *googie egg*.

"Given the dialectal spelling and pronunciations, it is not surprising that the earliest evidence for the Aussie *chook* has the *chuck* spelling, although we cannot be entirely sure about

how the word was pronounced. The earliest evidence is from 1855: 'They overtook a huge and very fat hen. … They tied chuckey up in a handkerchief, and rode on.' By the 1880s, however, the *chook* spelling has taken over, and the *chook* pronunciation (rhyming with cook) rules the roost."

And here are two more curious stories, this time from *Stories and Tales of Old Lancashire* selected and edited by Cliff Hayes.

"Owing to the number of fires which were constantly breaking out in the wooden hovels, of which the towns and villages were then for the most part built, William the Conqueror made a law that at the ringing of a bell, called the *couvre feu* (cover fire), at eight o'clock all people should put out their lights and fires and go to bed. The French word developed into the English word "curfew"."

"Clogs without the irons are known as "barfoot clogs." The word "barfoot" would suggest "barefoot" but in Lancashire it denotes the lack of iron upon shoes; for instance, in the north of the county an unshod colt is called "a barfoot stag."

"Barfoot" and "cawked" (caulked) clogs are worn only by women and girls. If a man or boy appeared in the street wearing them, he would meet the same contempt that would be showered by boot-wearing men and women upon a man who wore ladies' shoes with high Louis XV. heels. And as "barfoot" clogs are the cheapest and most simple kind, the expression has passed into general use to describe poverty."

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March 17th: St Patrick's Day
Penelope Lively
Patrick Hamilton

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I remember Maeve Binchy saying an uncle of hers believed there were actually two St Patricks. This, of course, is possible. The other day I came across several interesting booklets in Vinnies including 'The Teaching of St. Patrick' by N. J. D. White and 'The Celtic Schools of Religious Learning' by Maud Bluett. Though stories about St Patrick are popular (such as banishing snakes from Ireland) I realised I'd never asked what he actually taught.

White writes, "The nature and content of St. Patrick's religious belief and practice may be gathered partly from his own writings, and partly from what we know of the doctrine accepted by the Church of the West in the early part of the fifth century A.D.

"St. Patrick's extant writings are his *Confession* and his *Letter*. These are both in Latin, and seem to have been written near the close of his life—not earlier than A.D. 450; he died in A.D. 461. To these undoubtedly genuine works we may add the ancient Irish hymn known as *St. Patrick's Breastplate*, and four Latin *Sayings*, preserved in the *Book of Armagh*."

These were not precisely books to teach doctrine but rather to expound and explain and justify. "The first thing that strikes the reader of St. Patrick's writings is the copious use he makes of Holy Scripture. His citations from it are astonishingly numerous; and he assumes a like familiarity with it in his readers. Christians were evidently encouraged, then, to read the Bible for themselves. It never occurred to any one of the faithful to call in question articles of the Creed—drawn from the Holy Scriptures by the Church, which has "authority in controversies of faith"—but, otherwise, all members of the Church, lay and cleric alike, in St. Patrick's time, read their Bibles for instruction and consolation, without any scared apprehensiveness of the danger of private judgment."

Bluett says, "Already in pre-Christian times Ireland had been famous for learning, and there seems to have been no break between the Pagan and the Christian education." And, "The sixth century, the century after St. Patrick's death, is famous for the rise of the great native saints St.

Columba, St. Columbanus, St. Finian, St. Enda and others, whom later generations looked back to as the fathers of the Celtic Church, the "twelve apostles of Erin," as they are sometimes called by the old writers." In the famous Irish schools Holy Scripture was the foundation stone but "The favourite Latin authors were Virgil (who was held to have prophesised the coming of Christ) and Cicero who was regarded as the finest exponent of the art of reasoning. The logic of Aristotle (studied chiefly in Latin translations and extracts) was highly valued because it taught the principles of sound argument, and thus provided a weapon by which churchmen might confound heretics." But Greek was known and music (though we can't know how widely known) while scientific subjects were in their infancy.

The other interesting thing is what Catholic doctrine was not then known. White says of St Patrick, "The Blessed Virgin Mary is not once named by him. She was at that time thought of as a peculiarly privileged human being, of exceptional sanctity; but nothing more." Nor was Purgatory or Limbo known. Nor indulgences. "The "secular," or parish clergy in Britain and Ireland were not compelled to be unmarried until some centuries after St. Patrick's time. He himself states, without any comment, that his own father was a deacon and his grandfather a presbyter." Rome did not enjoy the power as "the mother and mistress of all churches" which she later acquired. Nor was the doctrine of transubstantiation known as it was not accepted as dogma until 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council. And Mass was confined to Sundays and Saints' Days. Patrick's Church was a much simpler Bible-based Church.

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March 18th: Wilfred Owen
'Samson and Delilah'

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"Familiar, too, is the type of story called etiological, which leads up to the explanation of a place name. Samson kills a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, and consequently "called that place Ramath-lehi" ("the hill of the jawbone," Judges 15:17). From the analogy of such things elsewhere, the name suggested the story, not the other way around."

Northrop Frye in *The Great Code*.

And Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* wrote: "The story of his deception by Blodeuwedd recalls that of Gilgamesh's deception by Ishtar, and Samson's deception by Delilah. Samson was a Palestinian Sun-god who, becoming inappropriately included in the corpus of Jewish religious myth, was finally written down as an Israelite hero of the time of the Judges. That he belonged to an exogamic and therefore matrilinear society is proved by Delilah's remaining with her own tribe after marriage; in patriarchal society the wife goes to her husband's tribe. The name 'Samson' means 'Of the Sun' and 'Dan', his tribe, is an appellation of the Assyrian Sun-god. Samson, like Hercules, killed a lion with his bare hands, and his riddle about the bees swarming in the carcase of the lion which he had killed, if returned to iconographic form, shows Aristaeus the Pelasgian Hercules (father of Actaeon, the stag-cult king, and son of Cheiron the Centaur) killing a mountain lion on Mount Pelion, from the wound in whose flesh the first swarm of bees emerged." It seemed to be time to go back and re-read the story of Samson and Delilah. And I don't think I would have read it as a clash between matrilinear and patrilinear societies. But as Delilah is a liar and a sneak and Samson a very cruel man who kills a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass it is a relief to think that it was an expropriated story from someone else's folklore …

We know a person's strength lies in their muscles, not their hair, so the story is an allegory perhaps to point a moral, though I am not sure what moral it might be, or give us insights into a different world. So is the story included in the *Bible* to strengthen the Israelite belief in their God or

to enhance the spread of patriarchal societies at the expense of matriarchies, or to present women as devious, or because it was an already popular story, or for reasons that have now been lost to us?

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March 19th: Tobias Smollett
Hans Kung

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March 20th: David Malouf
Hafiz (birthdate not known)

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The library had two small books of the poems of Hafiz (or Hafez); one translated by Dick Davis, the other by Gertrude Bell. Bell said of him, "Shemsuddin Mahommad, better known by his poetical surname of Hafiz, was born in Shiraz in the early part of the fourteenth century. His names, being interpreted, signify the Sun of the Faith, the Praiseworthy, and One who can recite the Koran; he is further known to his compatriots under the titles of the Tongue of the Hidden and the Interpreter of Secrets. The better part of his life was spent in Shiraz, and he died in that city towards the close of the century. The exact date either of his birth or of his death is unknown. He fell upon turbulent times. His delicate love-songs were chanted to the rude accompaniment of the clash of arms, and his dreams must have been interrupted often enough by the nip of famine in a beleaguered town, the inrush of conquerors, and the flight of the defeated."

There had been centuries of turmoil, from the Mongols under a grandson of Ghengis Khan to Timur; "they overran and devastated Persia. The destruction wrought by them was very similar to that wrought by the Arab conquerors in the Roman provinces of North Africa. They raised to the ground great cities; they reduced populous and fertile regions to a barren desert by breaking down the old reservoirs and destroying the irrigating system, completely changing the physical condition of parts of the country…. The invaders completely destroyed the ancient city of Rhages, which lay at a distance of about three miles from the modern capital." And some of the local rulers also did not have the best interests of their people at heart … It is known that he had a wife and son and his grave is at Mosalla, just outside Shiraz, with a stone to say, 'God is the enduring, and all else passes away'.

One of the puzzles in his work is that so many speak of wine. "Hafiz belonged to the great sect from which so many of the most famous among Persian writers have sprung. Like Sa'di and Jami and Jelaleddin Rumi and a score of others, he was a Sufi." And while in public obeying Moslem tenets, inwardly this allowed for a love of wine.

The nightingale with drops of his heart's blood
Had nourished the red rose, then came a wind,
And catching at the boughs in envious mood,
A hundred thorns about his heart entwined. (Bell)

Of all the roses in the world
A rosy face…is quite enough for me;
Beneath this swaying cypress tree
A shady place…is quite enough for me.

May hypocrites find somewhere else
To cant and prate –
Of all this weighty world, a full
Wine-glass's weight…is quite enough for me.

They hand out heaven for good deeds!
The monastery
Where Magians live is better for
A sot like me…that's quite enough for me.

Sit by the stream and watch as life
Flows swiftly on –
This emblem of the world that's all
Too quickly gone…is quite enough for me.

See how the world's bazaar pays cash,
See the world's pain –
And if you're not content with this
World's loss and gain…they're quite enough for me.

My friend is here with me – what more
Should I desire?
The riches of our talk are all
That I require…they're quite enough for me.

Don't send me from your door, O God,
To paradise –
For me, to wait here at Your street's
End will suffice…that's quite enough for me.

Hafez, don't rail against your fate!
Your nature flows,
As does your verse, like water as
It comes and goes…that's quite enough for me. (Davis)

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March 21st: Thomas Shapcott
Frank Hardy

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Frank Hardy in *The Unlucky Australians*, his story of the Gurindji people at Wave Hill in the Northern Territory, quotes Frank Stevens: "Instead of declaring as Wards only those persons who were in need, regardless of race, the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory set out to produce a virtual Domesday Book of all Aborigines in the area … Not one employer was prosecuted for violation of the 1953 Wards Employment Ordinance although the practice was virtually universal … Generally speaking [the Commission] accepted the uncontradicted evidence given by the pastoralists … During the height of the cattle season it is not unusual for aboriginal stockmen to work fourteen hours per day, seven days per week … A short visit to almost any station employing Aborigines in the Northern Territory will present the tourist with a frightening array of such environmental complaints as acute bronchial infection, malnutrition, pre-natal and post-natal deformities, trachoma, infected ears, partial and full deafness from fly-borne infection, beri-beri, rickets and venereal disease amongst the aboriginal residents … One employer openly stated that he used the whip on Aborigines as one of his methods of industrial discipline! … The historical aspects of the forceful alienation of the cattle lands, a lengthy period of brutality associated occasionally

with attempts at genocide and the almost animalistic sexual domination of aboriginal groups by frontier type cattlemen, which even in recent years has included a sexual traffic in aboriginal girls as young as seven years of age … Since 1959, they have violated the regulations under the Wards Employment Ordinance for the provision of reasonably human accommodation and food for their coloured employees with impunity from, if not collusion on the part of, the Administration … Although pastoral managers (accepted) three hundred of their employees as being worthy of award wages and more than half of the persons interviewed considered aboriginal stockmen to be more productive than whites, no one was prepared voluntarily to pay such figures … It is not without a history of inhumanity and brutality that the colloquial term for officers of the law is translated into several aboriginal languages as "the men with the chains" … the police keep a weather eye open for "disobedient blacks" whilst European misdemeanours go unpunished …"

When Aborigines walked off Wave Hill station in August 1966 in the first mass boycott of a cattle company no one should have been surprised.

Mayse Young with Gabrielle Dalton wrote in *No Place for a Woman*: 8 August 1929. "Today we passed a trooper with a string of Aboriginal prisoners, chained together, working on the roads. It turned my stomach, to think this sort of thing still happens."

"In earlier days, the children of these unions grew up in the bush with their mothers and their families. By the 1930s, however, the Aboriginal Protection Board had the mounted police collect them. The children with white fathers were taken from their mothers, by law, when they were three or four years old, and sent to Bagot Compound or Crocker Island or Groote Eylandt missions, to be brought up as orphans." And 'orphans' were very handy to send out as unencumbered workers to cattle stations and elsewhere.

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March 22nd: Nicholas Monserrat
Billy Collins
Caroline Norton
James Patterson

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I remember when I was a child my parents had a copy of *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monsarrat and I had an idea it was about the strange monsters which live deep in the sea. It was slightly disappointing to find that it was a war book and the only monsters were the German U boats. Monserrat said of it, "This is the story—the long and true story—of one ocean, two ships, and about a hundred and fifty men. It is a long story because it deals with a long and brutal battle, the worst of any war. It has two ships because one was sunk, and had to be replaced. It has a hundred and fifty men because that is a manageable number of people to tell a story about. Above all, it is a true story because that is the only kind worth telling.

First, the ocean, the steep Atlantic stream. The map will tell you what that looks like: three-cornered, three thousand miles across and a thousand fathoms deep, bounded by the European coastline and half of Africa, and the vast American continent on the other side: open at the top, like a champagne glass, and at the bottom, like a municipal rubbish-dumper. What the map will not tell you is the strength and fury of that ocean, its moods, its violence, its gentle balm, its treachery: what men can do with it, and what it can do with men. But the story will tell you all that.

Then the ship, the first of the two, the doomed one. At the moment she seems far from doomed: she is new, untried, lying in a river that lacks the tang of salt water, waiting for the men to man her. She is a corvette, a new type of escort ship, an experiment designed to meet a desperate situation still over the horizon. She is brand-new; the time is November, 1939; her name is H.M.S. *Compass Rose*.

Lastly, the men, the hundred and fifty men. They come on the stage in twos and threes: some are early, some are late, some, like this pretty ship, are doomed. When they are all assembled, they are a company of sailors. They have women, at least a hundred and fifty women, loving them, or tied to them, or glad to see the last of them as they go to war.

But the men are the stars of this story. The only heroines are the ships: and the only villain the cruel sea itself."

The problem was that I just couldn't get very interested in the men or the story. And cruel seems unfair to the sea. It never asked men to come in ships and fight across its turbulent surface.

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March 23rd: Frank Sargeson

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March 24th: Olive Schreiner
Dario Fo

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Fo is a generation after Pirandello and took on his mantle of successful Italian playwright. Fo, artist, actor, mime, comedian, playwright, had his greatest success with *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (*Morte accidentale di un'anarchico*). He said of the play's genesis: "A few days before Christmas eleven years ago – on 12 December 1969 – a bomb exploded in the Agricultural Bank in Milan. It was a massacre – more than 16 dead. The anarchists were immediately blamed for the slaughter. One of them, Giovanni Pinelli, having been taken to police headquarters, flew out of the window on the fourth floor. The police declared that Pinelli had committed suicide after having been convinced that the real culprits were no other than Valpreda, Garganelli, and the other members of the Milan group.

"Ten years later, at Catanzaro in Southern Italy, the trial resulting from the slaughter in Milan came to an end. Three fascists were condemned to prison for being materially responsible for the crime. One of them, Giannettini, turned out to be an agent for the Italian secret police; it was thus confirmed beyond all doubt that the instigators of the crime had been the organisations entrusted with the 'protection' of the Italian state. The instigators, as was clear from the sentence of the court, were to be found among the upper ranks of the military and political institutions. Ministers and generals were brought into court – but it all ended, as usual, in a great smoke-screen. Generals and ministers were first condemned and then acquitted. It was only the criminal 'labour force' that went to prison.

"Today, at the beginning of the 1980s, things are clearer. But when the play was first staged in Milan, in the shed of an old factory transformed into a theatre – the Capannone of Via Colletta – the view of almost the entire population, thanks to the 'magnificent' information work carried out by the national and international media, was that the massacre was to be attributed to subversive groups of the extreme left.

"Our intervention, as the La Comune collective, was therefore, above all, an exercise in counterinformation. Using authentic documents – and complete transcripts of the investigations carried out by the various judges as well as police reports – we turned the logic and the truth of the facts on head. But the great and provocative impact of this play was determined by its theatrical form: rooted in tragedy, the play became farce – the farce of power. The public who came to the theatre – progressive students, workers, but also large numbers of the lower middle classes – was overwhelmed by the grotesque and apparently mad way in which the play worked. They split their sides laughing at the effects produced by the comical and at the same time satirical situations. But as the performance went on, they gradually came to see that they were laughing the whole time at real events, events which were criminal and obscene in their brutality: crimes of the state."

The play, owing something to the Theatre of the Absurd, is set in a police station where the man called the 'Maniac' has been arrested for impersonation 'Twice as a surgeon, three times as a bishop, army captain, tennis umpire' to which he points out 'I have never actually been convicted'. He plays the key role of turning the police investigation into a farce while becoming their in effect prosecutor. When the police go out of the room he throws files out of the window. When they are not looking he hides a tape recorder. And by making fun of them he also brings out the grim reality of the suspect's death.

He says, quoting the police, 'Towards midnight, the anarchist, seized by a "raptus"…still you speaking… 'seized by a "raptus" threw himself out of the window, thus ending his life upon the pavement below.'

Superintendent: Right.

Pissani: Exactly right.

Maniac: What is a raptus? Bandieu, in his authoritative work on the subject, states that a 'raptus' is a crisis of suicidal anguish exhibited by a sane person when provoked by a violent anxiety. Right?

Both: Right.

They agree with things which are the opposite to what they had claimed in their reports.

Pissani: We had our suspicions, however. For a start, the suspect was the only anarchist railway worker in Milan.

Superintendent: So it was simple to deduce it was him.

Maniac: Of course. Of course. It's self-evident. So as it was undoubtedly the case that a *railway worker* must have planted the bomb in the *railway station*, then we can also assert that the famous bombs in the *law courts* must have been planted there by a lawyer, the one at the Agricultural Bank by a bank clerk or a cow, whichever takes your fancy, and the bomb at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier undoubtedly perpetrated by a corpse.

Constable: Absolutely.

A young journalist, Maria Felletti, turns up and tries to ask questions. The police get taken into even greater tangles as the farce grows. But the audience is never allowed to forget the grim reality. The Maniac claims to have a bomb. Which he then explodes but—

Maniac: However the drama critics won't go along with that – I mean we can't have the ultra-left hooligans winning hands down like that. Surely a good reformist like Maria Feletti must ensure that decency and the rule of law prevails. So let's see that version.

But the police realise she now knows their dirty little secrets—so they handcuff her to the window and flee the room.

I can see why people flocked to the play. And I can see why the Italian police weren't fussed on it …

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March 25th: Anne Brontë
A. J. P. Taylor
Frances Glessner Lee

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Anne Brontë is not precisely forgotten but she is overlooked in favour of her sisters Charlotte and Emily. Yet her novels *Agnes Grey* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* were very well-received in their time. Less successful was the poetry book she brought out with her sisters under the names Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell, which is a reminder that choosing what were seen as male names didn't guarantee success. So what of Anne as a poet? I came across her little piece 'Lines Composed in a Wood on a Windy Day':

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring

And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;
For above and around me the wild wind is roaring,
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky.

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray;
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing,
And hear the wild roar of their thunder today!

I think of the Brontës as surrounded by moors but I am glad to know they also had woods … or were the woods like the ocean somewhere else?

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March 26th: Robert Frost
A. E. Housman
Patrick Lane

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Robert Frost wrote some thought-provoking lines:
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out
'Mending Wall'
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
'The Road Not Taken'
We love the things we love for what they are.
'Hyla Brook'

Frost is seen as a kind of 'farmer-poet' writing of mowing, ploughing, apples, grass, blueberries, but as I was reading a selection of his poems I was struck by how often he refers to snow, ice, wind, dark winter nights, and bare trees, so I thought I would like to include a poem about snow:

The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree

Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I rued.
'Snow Dust'

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March 27th: Rosa Praed
A Mysterious Author

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"The most mysterious pseudonymous figure of all (unless, of course, you believe that the works of Shakespeare were written by somebody else), using a name determinedly sexless and faceless, was B. Traven, whose B, like the S in President Harry S. Truman, probably stood for nothing. Investigative journalists spent many fretful months, even years, trying to determine the true identity of the author of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. Was he Ret Marut, a German actor and anarchist who had disappeared? If he was, who had Ret Marut been? Could he really be Otto Feige, from Brandenburg? And who was Hal Croves, who turned up at a meeting the film director John Huston had fixed with Traven, saying he was Traven's representative? Was this, in fact, Traven/Marut/possibly Feige? The speculation helped to build an even bigger audience for Huston's film of *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* than it might have commanded without it. And then, who was this new mysterious figure – a man who said he was Traven Torsvan, and who seemed to be getting 'Traven' 's royalty payments? Was he Traven/Marut/Feige/Croves as well? Before anyone could extract an answer, he joined the ranks of the disappeared. Nearly fifty years on from the death of a man (Hal Croves) who may have been all of them, nobody really knows."

David McKie in *What's in a Surname?*

So I ran all those names through Family Search. Feige came up in Germany but not Traven or Marut. Croves too was a rare name. But I finally came upon a Traven Torsvan Croves dying of prostate cancer in Cuauhtemoc Ciudad in Mexico on the 27th March 1969. He was born in Chicago in the USA in around 1901 to Burton Torsvan and Dorothy Croves. The certificate said Occupation: writer. Nationality: Mexican by naturalization. It also gave him a wife: Rosa Elena Lugán. And I found two daughters for them. Elena and Maria. On the 8th of September 1953 a Traves Torsvan flew from Mexico to Paris. Traves seems likely to be a misreading of Traven which would suggest that Traven Torsvan was the name on his passport. And when he died a number of US papers noted the death of a B. Traven: The *Trenton Evening Times*, The *Charleston News and Courier*, The *Arkansas Gazette*, The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and The *Daily Advocate* in Connecticut. So it begs the question: was his wife in league with him to fudge things or had he prepared notices to go out before he died? And in 1989 The *Boston Herald* noted the death of Basil Creighton said to have translated Vicki Baum, Hermann Hesse and B. Traven. So was he the man who brought out early books in German supposedly as B. Traven or was this his father or someone else? It seems very unlikely he was ever a German anarchist.

Is all this material definitive? Probably not. He obviously enjoyed playing round with identities. But I am sure more can be found out about him if anyone is sufficiently interested.

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March 28th: Wei T'ai (birth date unknown)

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"Poetry presents the thing in order to convey the feeling. It should be precise about the thing and reticent about the feeling, for as soon as the mind responds and connects with the thing the feeling shows in the words; this is how poetry enters deeply into us. If the poet presents directly feelings which overwhelm him, and keeps nothing back to linger as an aftertaste, he stirs us superficially; he cannot start the hands and feet involuntarily waving and tapping in time, far less strengthen morality and refine culture, set heaven and earth in motion and call up the spirits."

Wei T'ai. 11th Century.

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March 29th: Maurice Christopher Hollis

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March 30th: Seán O'Casey

Anna Sewell

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"You cannot put a rope around the neck of an idea; you cannot put an idea up against the barrack-square wall and riddle it with bullets; you cannot confine it in the strongest prison cell your slaves could ever build."

Sean O'Casey

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March 31st: Andrew Lang
Andrew Marvell

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Andrew Marvell is remembered for those often quoted lines:
The Grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.
'To His Coy Mistress'.
No. They get eaten by … a contemporary of Marvell, Patrick Cary wrote:
For God's sake marcke that *Fly*:
See what a poore, weake, little Thing itt is.
When Thou hast marck'd, and scorn'd itt; know that This,
This little, poore, weake *Fly*
Has killed a *Pope*; can make an *Emp'rour* dye.

Behold yon *Sparcke of Fire*:
How little hott! how neare to nothing 'tis!
When thou has donne despising, know that this,
This contemn'd *Sparcke of Fire*
Has burn't whole Townes; can burne a World entire.

That crawling *Worme* there see:
Ponder how ugly, filthy, vild Itt is.
When Thou hast seene and loath'd itt, know that This
This base *Worme* Thou doest see,
Has quite devour'd thy Parents; shall eate Thee.

Honour, the *World*, and *Man*,
What Trifles are they! Since most true itt is
That this poore *Fly*, this little *Sparckle*, this
Soe much abhorr'd *Worme*, can
Honour destroy; burne *Worlds*; devoure up *Man*.

So who was Andrew Marvell? He was an MP for Hull in north-eastern England. But it is hard to get a feel for what he really believed. He was a lukewarm supporter of Cromwell and a lukewarm supporter of Charles II. And as he never married I wondered why he needed a mistress if indeed he had one and why he had no wish to turn her into a wife and give her the respectability she could expect as Mrs Marvell …

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April 1st: Jan Wahl
Wangari Maathai

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Wangari Maathai was a Kikuyu woman from Kenya who became the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize for Peace. She credited her family's support for helping to get her an education

as the key point to her childhood. And education did help her to rise in both academia and politics. But it was a very hard road, even so, with social discrimination and imprisonment. She called her autobiography *Unbowed* which seemed a very suitable title.

But it was her concern for the environment in Kenya which eventually took her to Oslo. She could see how the land in Kenya was increasingly being degraded, its trees cut down, its soils eroded. In 1977 she started the Green Belt Movement which would, she hoped, "work at the grass-roots, national and international levels to promote environmental conservation, to build climate resistance and empower communities, especially women and girls; to foster democratic space and sustainable livelihoods" and she began through the auspices of the National Council of Women there, going on to raise money internationally. She began by urging villagers to plant trees native to Kenya, not exotics, so they wouldn't disappear.

I was interested to read her words: "The Green Belt Movement is able to provide tools for the women and these tools are very important for the communities because many agricultural communities don't have tools to deal with simple tasks. Wheelbarrows and spades become extremely useful. The minute you put wheelbarrows there even the men come to be a part. They want to be involved in the work. As soon as you have a wheelbarrow you hear men say, 'Ah, this is fantastic.' "

I hope the men didn't collar the wheelbarrows and leave the women to carry things on their heads! But her legacy is not the wheelbarrows but the more than fifty-one million trees village women have planted in Kenya.

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April 2nd: Hans Christian Andersen
Sir John Squire
Sue Townsend
Good Friday (2021)

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I read that there was a minor earthquake in Jerusalem in the year 33 AD on the day Jesus died. But do we really know for sure that it was the year 33 AD? And do we know it was an earthquake? Duncan Steel in *Eclipse* wrote: "But what of the *end* of the mortal life of Jesus, when he was crucified in his thirties? When did that melancholy event take place? Various commentators have discussed how the range of possible dates can be restricted, based upon facts mentioned in the Gospels, such as the temporal relationship of the Crucifixion to the Passover. Because Passover is at full moon, and the Crucifixion was on a Friday, only certain dates are feasible, 7 April in AD30 and 3 April in AD33 being the chief candidates.

"The essential clue of an eclipse was missed until quite recently. In 1983 Colin Humphreys (now at Cambridge University) and Graeme Waddington (of Oxford University) recognized that the date of the crucifixion might be identified in this way. They noted that in various places in The Bible, and other early written accounts, allusions are made to the Moon being dark and 'turned to blood' when it rose in the evening after the crucifixion, which sounds like a lunar eclipse. Mention is also made of the Sun being darkened earlier that day. This may have been caused by a dust storm raised by the *khamsin*, a hot wind from the south which blows through the region for about 50 days commencing around the middle of March, in accord with the expected time of year. Such dust storms and their sun-dimming effects are well-known.

"Under such circumstances – a lunar eclipse whilst there was much dust suspended in the air – one would expect the Moon to appear the dark crimson of blood. With that in mind Humphreys and Waddington computed the dates of all lunar eclipses possible [and] visible from Jerusalem between AD26 and AD36. And they found one on 3 April AD33, one of the two possible dates

mentioned above, occurring as the Moon rose a couple of hours after Jesus died, in accord with the Gospels."

I also read that scientists have queried the dating system derived in the 6th century by Dionysus, believing it is 4 to 6 years out. This would mean that Jesus was born between 6 and 4 BC and died between 27 and 29 AD. At first glance this seems strange. A date is a date. A year is a year. Isn't it? But when you realize that there was no one dating system then, Romans, Egyptians, Jews, Phoenicians, and just about everyone else, had their own system. The leap year was accepted by the Romans though there was argument as to whether a day should be added every 3 or every 4 years, but Jews and Greeks used a 354 day year with occasional additions. Some systems used a 13 month lunar calendar. Some people didn't worry about years at all, being content to go from one season to the next or one full moon to the next. And every calendar depended on a stable civil society. When this broke down adding days to the calendar as needed didn't always happen. And so the confusion becomes clearer.

It was the dating of Easter which led to so much research. I came upon this:

Maud Bluett in 'The Celtic Schools of Religious Learning' wrote, "Arithmetic and Astronomy found their way into the curriculum chiefly because they taught the means of finding Easter. This was a matter of great importance in the early Church, especially after the year 463 when Rome adopted a new cycle of 532 years to calculate the recurrence of the full moon, but the Celtic churches refused to change. The advantage of the controversy was that it led to an intensive study of the Greek scientific writers by the Irish scholars, and much mathematical calculation in order to support their opinions." "The study of Greek almost disappeared in Europe in Mediaeval times, but it was never wholly discontinued in the Irish schools."

F. H. Kinch in 'The Story of St. Columbanus' wrote, "The Irish Rule of Columbanus differed in many respects from the custom of the Roman Church. The Irish method of computing Easter was said to have been derived from the East, and it so differed from the Rule of the Western Church that one Church might be celebrating the Easter festival while a neighbouring one was still in the middle of the Lenten fast." St Columbanus wrote to Pope Gregory on this subject, "As the Roman Catholic historian, Dr. Lanigan, says, "He strenuously defends the Irish system, and requests his (Gregory's) decision on the question, *telling him, however, that the Western Churches, meaning those of Britain and Ireland, will not agree to anything contrary to the authority of St. Jerome,* whom he considered as having approved of the calculation on which it was founded." The spirit of vigorous independence (which we are sometimes told did not exist) stands out prominently in the words of Dr. Lanigan which I have italicised."

So who was Dionysius? According to David Ewing Duncan in *The Calendar* he was an abbot in Rome, Dionysius Exiguus 'Little Dennis', born around 500. "Described as a Scythian – one of a barbarian people who a century earlier had been driven south by the Huns from their ancient home in the Caucasus – little is known about Dionysius other than his work on the calendar and on one of the first collections of official Catholic rules known as canons. He knew Boethius and Cassiodorus, but was probably older. Late in life Cassiodorus remembered him fondly as a brilliant scholar with a great fluency in translating Greek and Latin. Also an accomplished mathematician and astronomer, in 525 – the year Boethius was executed – Pope John I (d. 526) asked him to calculate the Easter date for the next year. At the time this was part of an effort by the Roman church to wean itself from its sister church in the East, who long had treated the science of determining Easter like some arcane pharaonic secret, a mystery understood only by those steeped in the tradition of Aristarchus and Claudius Ptolemy. With a wave of his Latin quill Dionysius changed all this, ending the long hegemony of Alexandria by co-opting their formulas and methods, freeing Rome at last from the time lords of this ancient city of stargazers."

He began by updating the 19 year lunar cycle computed by the Alexandrian bishop Cyril "extending it for another 95 years, from 532 to 627." "One flaw in Dionysius's system was the impossibility of matching up the seven-day week, in which Sunday fell, mathematically with a 95-year period of 19-year cycles. Obviously seven does not divide into 95, which meant this table was still not entirely accurate as a predictive tool. A mathematician in Aquitaine named Victorius figured out a solution to this problem c. 457 by figuring out that Easter dates repeat themselves every 532 years, 532 being a number divisible by 19 and by 7. Apparently Dionysius was unaware of Victorius's discovery."

"Dionysius's contribution to our calendar went far beyond the pedestrian task of calculating another 95 years of Easters. When he published his tables he included a reform that was little noticed in his own day but now affects virtually everyone in the world: the system of dating known as *anno Domini* (AD), 'the year of our Lord' – which many people now call the *common era* (CE)."

I didn't realize that Rome was then dating its years from the year the Emperor Diocletian became emperor. So in Dionysius's time AD 531 was only 247 *anno Diocletiani*. As Diocletian had been a persecutor of Christians Dionysius changed his dating to begin with the birth of Christ. We don't know where he got his date for Christ's birth from and historians do not agree when Christ was born. St Matthew said he was born in the time of Herod the Great who died in 4 BC, if that dating too is correct, (though there were other Herods who could have become conflated by the time Matthew brought the disparate pieces of his story together), other historians put the birth earlier or later. Dionysius wrote on his Easter tables *anni Domini nostri Jesu Christi*, the years of our Lord. His system gradually spread; most European countries beginning to use it, though Spain did not 'convert' till the 1300s. "Christians did not use the inverse of *anno Domini*, BC (for 'before Christ') until 1627, when the French astronomer Denis Petau apparently became the first ever to add BC to dates while teaching at the Collège de Clemont in Paris."

Does it actually matter if we are now in the year 2017 rather than, the year 2021? I don't really think so.

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April 3rd: Reginald Hill
Washington Irving

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Washington Irving created the story of Rip Van Winkle but who was Irving and what else, if anything, did he write? James Elroy Flecker wrote 'Inscription for Arthur Rackham's 'Rip Van Winkle' which is a reminder that Rip Van Winkle had a life in art and folk lore. While I was pondering on whether to hunt down a copy of *Rip Van Winkle* I came across the beginning of his story in A. J. Coles' *Thought in English Prose*. "In the same village and in one of these very houses (which, to tell the precise truth, was sadly time-worn and weather-beaten), there lived many years since, while the country was yet a province of Great Britain, a simple good-natured fellow, of the name of Rip Van Winkle. He was a descendant of the Van Winkles who figured so gallantly in the chivalrous days of Peter Stuyvesant, and accompanied him to the siege of Fort Christina. He inherited, however, but little of the martial character of his ancestors. I have observed that he was a simple good-natured man; he was, moreover, a kind neighbour, and an obedient hen-pecked husband. Indeed, to the latter circumstance might be owing that meekness of spirit which gained him such universal popularity" and so here we have a man loved by children and dogs, who would never refuse to assist a neighbour and who had the universal sympathy of women, other than his wife. But "The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labour." His farm is over-run by weeds, its fences are falling down, and "his cow would either go astray, or get among the cabbages" and so "In a word, Rip was ready to attend to anybody's business but his own; but as to doing family duty, and keeping his farm in order, he

found it impossible." So this is a man certainly happy to sleep his days away but you will have to read the book to find out why and how he sleeps for a hundred years. Because the children using Mr Coles' book only get asked questions like 'Can you see any reason why a man is likely to learn "patience and longsuffering" from a wife's curtain lecture than from a sermon?' and 'Pick out phrases in the second and third sentences of paragraph 3 which support the statement "It could not be from want of *assiduity* or *perseverance*" ' and ' "A simple good-natured fellow" What examples are given in this extract of Rip's good nature?'

"Writing her memoirs almost seventy years later, Edith recalled that her father's copy of Washington Irving's *Alhambra*, spurred her desire to tell stories. Its closely printed pages, heavy black type, narrow margins, and rough-edged yellow sheets set her off 'full sail on the sea of dreams.' She paced the floor of hotel rooms, book in hand (often upside down, as she did not yet know how to read), 'making up' stories and turning the book's pages in rhythm to her own voice. Parents and nurses spied on her activities through keyholes, her mother trying to copy down the rush of words that spilled from the little redhaired girl."

Shari Benstock in *Edith Wharton Abroad*.

Reginald Nettel in *Santa Claus* writes, "The custom of baking St Nicholas cakes was known also in the New World, and there was gift-bringing at the New Year, when the 'baker's dozen' rule was observed. When Washington Irving wrote his *Knickerbocker's History of New York* in 1809 he made much of the original Dutch settlers in Manhattan. For New York had previously been New Amsterdam and a Dutch settlement. Washington Irving made the Dutch the aristocrats of New York society, and wrote of their ancient customs, among which was the observance of St Nicholas's Eve. Here we are told that the ship which carried the first immigrants to Manhattan was called the *Goede Vrouw* and for figurehead a statue of the saint wearing a broad-brimmed hat and wide breeches." But there was a problem for anyone wanting to use the book as a guide to history and ancient customs: "Washington Irving wrote with his tongue in his cheek; *Knickerbocker's History of New York* is satire; supposed to have been written by a venerable Dutchman named Diedrich Knickerbocker."

More straightforward as a record was Irving's *Sketch Book*. "*Knickerbocker's History* was read by Sir Walter Scott, who delighted in it, and was pleased to meet the author when Irving first visited England in 1820. Now Washington Irving wrote his *Sketch Book*, which contains that remarkable description of Christmas festivities in Bracegirdle Hall, Yorkshire, and the *Sketch Book* was published at the author's expense by a man named Miller who shortly afterwards failed in business. What better turn then could Sir Walter Scott do Washington Irving than to introduce him to his own publisher, John Murray?

Murray published the *Sketch Book* and it was a success."

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April 4th: C. (Cecil) Day Lewis

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C. (Cecil) Day Lewis was one of the 'Macspaunday' poets, W. H. Auden, Louis MacNeice and Stephen Spender. This was not a group or a school or a movement but just four friends who all wrote poetry. Lewis has not lasted in the way Auden has. Samuel Hynes called him 'a decent minor poet' and after reading his *Collected Poems* I would agree with that.

But C. Day Lewis is remembered for two other reasons; he wrote mysteries which were popular in their time under the pen-name of Nicholas Blake and he was father of the actor Daniel Day Lewis. He was born in Ireland, lived in England, and loved Italy. He said of Italy in 'The Homeward Prospect'.

Italy was the sun that awoke me, the hand that opened
A window and released me into a new playground.
I spread my wings on her basking stones, with her bells I quivered,
Then sipped the violet mountains and the lilies of her valleys:
On dome after dome alighting, pirouetting through grave arcades,
Dithering over the fruit in a marketplace ….

Day Lewis wrote, "Modern poetry is every poem, whether written last year or five centuries ago, that has meaning for us still". His poems are rarely obscure but they are at times pretty stodgy. The theme, the idea, the story in his poems often gets lost in verbiage. I couldn't help thinking that his subjects might better have made short stories. Perhaps the influence of those other poets was to persuade him that poetry is more important or a better way to reach people. And this way might not have been best for him …

So after reading hundreds of his poems did any stand out? The odd thing was that they didn't. I think he is seen at his best in his short poems. Long sequences led to waffle.

Oh hush thee, my baby,
Thy cradle's in pawn:
No blankets to cover thee
Cold and forlorn,
The stars in the bright sky
Look down and are dumb
At the heir of the ages
Asleep in a slum.

The hooters are blowing,
No heed let him take;
When baby is hungry
'Tis best not to wake.
Thy mother is crying,
Thy dad's on the dole:
Two shillings a week is
The price of a soul.

'A Carol'

Cry to us, murdered village. While your grave
Aches raw on history, make us understand
What freedom asks of us. Strengthen our hand
Against the arrogant dogmas that deprave
And have no proof but death at their command.

Must the innocent bleed for ever to remedy
These fanatic fits that tear mankind apart?
The pangs we felt from your atrocious hurt
Promise a time when even the killer shall see
His sword is aimed at his own naked heart.

'Lidice'

And a slightly longer one:

In a shelter one night, when death was taking the air

Outside, I saw her, seated apart – a child
Nursing her doll, to one man's vision enisled
With radiance which might have shamed even death to its lair.

Then I thought of our Christmas roses at home – the dark
Lanterns comforting us a winter through
With the same dusky flush, the same bold spark
Of confidence, O sheltering child, as you.

Genius could never paint the maternal pose
More deftly than accident had roughed it there,
Setting amidst our terrors, against the glare
Of unshaded bulb and whitewashed brick, that rose.

Instinct was hers, and an earthquake hour revealed it
In flesh – the meek-laid lashes, the glint in the eye
Defying wrath and reason, the arms that shielded
A plaster doll from an erupting sky.

No argument for living could long sustain
These ills: it needs a faithful eye, to have seen all
Love in the droop of a lash and tell it eternal
By one pure bead of its dew-dissolving chain.

Dear sheltering child, if again misgivings grieve me
That love is only a respite, an opal bloom
Upon our snow-set fields, come back to revive me
Cradling your spark through blizzard, drift and tomb.

'In the Shelter'

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April 5th: Algernon Charles Swinburne
Arthur Hailey

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April 6th: John Pepper Clark
Shota Rustaveli (birth date not known)

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I was browsing in a *Lonely Planet Guide to Georgia, Armenia & Azerbaijan* and I came upon this intriguing snippet: "The conversion of Georgia to Christianity in the 4th century led to an explosion of religious literature, the earliest surviving Georgian text being the 5th century *Martyrdom of Shushanik* by Iakob Tsurtaveli.

"Following King David the Builder's unification of the country in the 11th and 12th centuries, literature flourished alongside the other arts in what is often termed the Georgian renaissance. The most significant work was Georgia's national epic poem*, The Knight in the Tiger Skin* by Shota Rustaveli, who is believed to have been Queen Tamar's treasurer. Every Georgian can quote lines from this work, the story of the knight Tariel's devotion to Nestan-Darejan which shows how love and friendship can overcome evil."

I assumed someone at sometime had translated it into English so was it readily available? Alas no. Or only at great expense. So for the moment the knight and his world must remain in my imagination rather than my bookshelf.

The *Lonely Planet Guide to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan* also speaks about translations.

"There have been several English translations of the Georgian national epic poem, *The Knight in the Tiger Skin* by Shota Rustaveli, though they will probably be hard to track down outside the country. The most remarkable is the late 19th century translation by Marjory Wardrop, who taught herself the language from a Georgian bible and later became a friend of the writer Ilia Chavchavadze (Wardrop's brother Oliver was the first British diplomatic representative in Georgia). Her version, published in 1912, is entitled *The Man in the Panther Skin*. More recent translations are by RH Stephenson, Katherine Vivien and Venera Urashadze."

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April 7th: William Wordsworth

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"There's no reason why poets should look like anything in particular. Wordsworth resembled a horse with powerful convictions; Chesterton was wholly Falstaffian; Whitman was as strong and hairy as a goldrush prospector. The fact is, there's no such thing as a poetic type. Chaucer was a Government official, Sidney a soldier, Villon a thief, Marvell an M.P., Burns a ploughboy, Housman a don. You can be any sort of man and still be a poet. You can be as conceited as Wordsworth or as modest as Hardy; as rich as Byron or as poor as Francis Thompson; as religious as Cowper or as pagan as Carew. It doesn't matter what you believe; Shelley believed every lunatic idea under the sun. Keats was certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections."

Edmund Crispin in *The Moving Toyshop*.

But his character does seem to believe a poet will be a man at least, not Mrs Browning. Though he does say, "Poetry's a visitation, coming and going at its own sweet will." So I assume he believes women can be visited. The real problem with this idea is that it suggests you must wait to be visited.

And of course the most powerful convictions most horses have is to get home to their stable and a full manger. Wordsworth seems to have shared that conviction.

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April 8th: Ursula Curtiss

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April 9th: Lord David Cecil

Sun Tzu (birth date not known)

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Tom Butler-Bowdon wrote, "*The Art of War* came into being when Sun Tzu was asked by the king of Wu, Ho Lu, to compose a work encapsulating his warrior wisdom. Sun Tzu, or Sun Wu as he is also known, was a real person. Born around 544 BCE, a native of the Qi state (now Shandong province), he was a contemporary of Confucius during the "Spring and Autumn" period when northern China was essentially a collection of warring states. His father had been a general and his grandfather a provincial governor. By his early 30s he had became known as a brilliant military strategist, leading the armies of Wu (the smallest of 13 states at the time) to great victories. Such "masters of war," translator EF Calthrop notes, "were in no sense patriots but professional strategists, continually changing their employer." Yet this very independence and objectivity were the source of their wisdom and prowess.

"The impact of *The Art of War* on warfare in China could be compared to that of Machiavelli's *The Prince* on politics in Europe and the West. The Chinese king Qin Shi Huang, for instance, adopted the book's principles to unite China, and centuries later Chairman Mao would use it for a similar purpose.

"Its influence transcends its original time and place. The *Sonshi* (or Sun Tzu), as it is known in Japan, was brought there as early as the 8th century, and later played an important role in Japan's unification. It was reputedly core reading for Napoleon in his European conquests, and in more recent times, American generals Douglas MacArthur and Norman Schwarzkopf, along with the Vietnamese general Vo Nguyen Giap, noted their debt to the book. It remains on the syllabus in military colleges around the world."

So what of Sun Tzu's thoughts? He said, "To all nations War is a great matter. Upon the army death or life depend: it is the means of the existence or destruction of the state.

Therefore it must be diligently studied."

And of those who lead those armies: "If the officers be angry, it is because the soldiers are tired, and slow to obey.

The killing of horses for food shows that the enemy is short of provisions.

When the cooking-pots are hung up on the wall and the soldiers turn not in again, the enemy is at an end of his resources.

Exceeding graciousness and familiarity on the part of the general show that he has lost the confidence of the soldiers.

Frequent rewards show that discipline is at an end.

Frequent punishments are a sign that the general is in difficulties.

The general who first blusters, and then is obsequious, is without perception.

He who offers apologies and hostages is anxious for a truce.

When both sides, eager for a fight, face each other for a considerable time, neither advancing nor retiring, the occasion requires the utmost vigilance and circumspection.

Numbers are no certain mark of strength."

And a thought from me: when will human beings realise that killing each other is barbaric and not befitting a supposedly intelligent species.

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April 10th: A. E.
Paul Theroux
Pamela Redmond

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I noticed Pamela Redmond had written a book about Ageing and then I noticed that Robert Dessaix had written a book about Ageing and then I thought 'perhaps this is the way of the future, hundreds of books about Ageing filling the bookshop shelves' and then I thought 'I do not think I want to read books about Ageing.' I think I would rather just age and read books in which age is not particularly important …

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April 11th: Bernard O'Dowd
Illuminato Checchini (d)

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"Organizer of Catholic associations and promoter and founder of credit unions and healthcare insurance programs for farmers and craftsmen, Illuminato Checchini (also known under his artistic pseudonym as Stefano Massarioto) was one of the most well-known men of his time in the Veneto region. Little more than a peasant, in the 1890s he achieved such popularity among the people of the countryside that his arrival in a village was often accompanied by the ringing of bells

and by parties organized in the piazzas with improvised triumphal arches. He is a controversial and much-discussed personality even today. The peasants of his day loved him, while the liberal and anticlerical bourgeoisie could not abide him. In those years Checchini blazed an utterly unique trail of self-transformation, beginning as a barely educated negotiator and consultant for small property owners and peasants and emerging as an indefatigable storyteller, a moral guide to peasants, a country orator and writer in dialect with a rare knack for incisive political commentary, and an author of books, articles, and almanacs that for long periods were the principal springboards of discussion at the traditional *filò* gatherings." His Massarioto's Almanac was selling 50,000 copies a year in Italy. He died in 1906.

Roberto Italo Zanini in *Bakhita: From Slave to Saint*.

The book is of course about the Sudanese woman Bakhita who was captured and sold as a slave and eventually ended up in Italy where she became a nun. "The Western side went to the Americas but we tend to forget "The Eastern side", which comprises the Horn of Africa, including Sudan and Chad and the neighbouring regions to the west as far as the high valley of the Niger River, was in the hands of the Arab slave trade, which exported to the Middle East (the Arabian Peninsula) and served the houses of the rich Muslim North Africans, Turks, and Egyptians who lived in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and the Nile River valley as far as the city of Khartoum … The slave trade was a flourishing business, around which, at a certain point in time, the entire Ottoman and Islamic economy turned. When the British banned the slave trade in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was not by accident that commerce came to a standstill and the entire Nile region fell under British control. In opposition to this ban and subsequent British supremacy, the fundamentalist revolution of the Mahdi erupted in 1881."

Though we remember names like William Wilberforce we rarely think of the people who spoke out against the 'Arab slave trade'. Who, for instance, has heard of Ignatius Pallme? When I went looking I found he was called 'a Bohemian explorer' (and spelled Palme) but he only seemed to be a footnote in other people's narratives. Surely he deserves better than that?

Walter A. Fairservis in *The Ancient Kingdoms of the Nile* wrote, "Egyptian and Turkish excesses in the Sudan were of such scope as to shock the civilized world. The Sudan was looked upon as a source of revenue in which slaves were a chief asset. The black tribes of the south were especially valuable to the slavers and raiding accelerated as never before. In 1837, Ignatius Pallme, a Bohemian who had lived for some time in Egypt and knew Arabic, took a journey into Kordofan to determine the feasibility of commerce with more distant points in the Turko-Egyptian realm. His account of the slave trade as he saw it carried on in Kordofan remains a classic of human horror. Some of his observations bear repeating.

"Pallme describes a raid in the Nuba hills where a number of agricultural tribes had their villages. The villagers resisted desperately but superior weapons defeated them:

"But now, indeed, in vengeance terrific: neither aged men nor the infirm, neither helpless women and children, nor, indeed, the baby unborn are spared, every hunt (hut?) is plundered, the property of the unfortunate besieged either pillaged or destroyed, and whosoever falls into the hands of the destroyer with his life is carried down into the camp as captive. When the Negroes see that resistance is no longer of avail, they frequently prefer suicide, unless prevented, to slavery; and thus it often occurs that a father rips the abdomen of his wife, then of his children, and lastly murders himself, to avoid falling alive into the hands of the enemy.

"The greatest sufferings are not surmounted, and many of these unhappy men would prefer death inflicted by their own hands to the dreadful fate which awaits them, if they were acquainted with their lot beforehand. They now have to suffer every description of ill-treatment from their

tormentors; blows with the butt-end of the musket, bayonet wounds, and stripes with the whip, are the ordinary modes of encouragement adopted to arouse the energies of those miserable beings, who, exhausted by physical or moral suffering, may happen to sink. Pity is unheard of in these transports, and as personal interest is not engaged for the preservation of one of these unhappy wretches, or to prove it an advantage, the only consideration is to render their escape impossible. The Djelabi treat their slaves with more humanity, because their personal interests are implicated, for each slave may be considered a capital to them, and they, consequently, do all in their power to preserve life, at least, and thus to avert a loss. The Turks, on the other hand, who have no considerations of this description to attend to, treat their prisoners far worse than they would beasts. As soon as they have collected from three to six hundred, or perhaps a thousand slaves, the convoy is sent with an escort of native troops, and of about fifty men, regulars, under the command of an officer to Lobeid.

"To prevent flight, a *Sheba* is hung around the neck of the full-grown slaves; it consists of a young tree about six or eight feet in length, and two inches in thickness, forming a fork in front; this is bound round the neck of the victim so that the stem of the tree presents anteriorly, the fork is closed at the back of the neck by a cross-bar, and fastened *in situ* by straps cut from a raw hide; thus the slave, in order to be able to walk, is forced to take the tree in his hands, and carry it before him. No individual could, however, bear this position for any length of time; to relieve each other, therefore, the man in front takes the log of his successor on his shoulder, and this measure is repeated in succession. It amounts to an impossibility to withdraw the head, but the whole neck is always excoriated, an injury leading often to inflammatory action, which occasionally terminates in death. Boys from ten to fifteen years of age, who could not carry the sheba, are handcuffed together by wooden manacles. The instruments are applied to the right hand of the one and the left of the other, above the wrists, where they are fastened by straps; they are somewhat excavated to admit the hand, but generally fit so closely that the skin is excoriated, and malignant ulcers are the result; but even if the hand were to mortify or drop off, no alleviation of the sufferings of the individual would ensue, for the fetters are not taken off before the arrival of the convoy at Lobeid. Some of the boys are fastened together in couples by straps applied round the upper part of their arms. It may, therefore, easily be imagined how difficult progression is rendered to these poor sufferers, and what tortures they have to endure on this march. In addition to these trials, they have to bear with most miserable fear, and further ill-treatment, should their strength fail them, or should they become too weak to proceed. Children under the age before-mentioned, women, and old men, are marched singly, and unfettered. Many a mother carries her infant, born but a few days before, at her breast, and must even take two or three of her children, who may be too young or too weak to walk alone, in her arms, or on her back. Old and infirm men who can scarcely creep along with the aid of a stick, the sick, and the wounded, are taken in the middle, between their daughters, wives or relations, and thus slowly dragged onwards, or even carried by turns. If one of these unfortunate beings happens to remain behind the ranks, he is immediately stimulated to increased activity by blows with the butt-end of the musket, or flogged on with the whip. Should even this encouragement fail, and when several of these poor wretches cannot possibly proceed any further, ten or twenty are bound by the hand with a rope, the one end of which is attached to the saddle-bow of a camel, and thus those who are half dead are dragged onwards; even if one of them happen to sink no mercy is shown, but the fallen man is trailed along the ground and not liberated, even should he breathe his last, before his arrival at the stated place of rest."

"They get neither food nor water along the way. The dead and exhausted are left to rot on the sand. But when they reach Lobeid they are parceled out to the Turkish recruits in lieu of pay and they are then expected to sell on their slaves to the merchants buying them for the Ottoman

government. They were fed only boiled grain without salt which the children and the elderly were unable to chew."

Pallme's account aroused indignation in Europe and the British and other governments made representations to Turkey which promised reforms but did nothing. In 1857 Turkey passed a law to abolish the slave trade "but again profit made the law ineffective."

Of course it was not only the Sudan which was providing large numbers of slaves. Zanzibar was a major staging post for slaves from East Africa. An estimated 10,000 were leaving every year through that island.

Edith Wharton visited Morocco in 1917 and wrote this: "While tea was being served I noticed a tiny negress, not more than six or seven years old, who stood motionless in the embrasure of an archway. Like most of the Moroccan slaves, even in the greatest households, she was shabbily, almost raggedly, dressed. A dirty *gandourah* of striped muslin covered her faded caftan, and a cheap kerchief was wound above her grave and precocious little face. With preternatural vigilance she watched each movement of the Caïd, who never spoke to her, looked at her, or made her the slightest perceptible sign, but whose least wish she instantly divined, refilling his tea-cup, passing the plate of sweets, or removing our empty glasses, in obedience to some secret telegraphy on which her whole being hung.

"The Caïd is a great man. He and his famous elder brother, holding the southern marches of Morocco against alien enemies and internal rebellion, played a preponderant part in the defence of the French colonies in North Africa during the long struggle of the war. Enlightened, cultivated, a friend of the arts, a scholar and diplomatist, he seems, unlike many Orientals, to have selected the best in assimilating European influences. Yet when I looked at the tiny creature watching him with those anxious joyless eyes I felt once more the abyss that slavery and the seraglio put between the most Europeanized Mahometan and the western conception of life. The Caïd's little black slaves are well-known in Morocco, and behind the sad child leaning in the archway stood all the shadowy evils of the social system that hangs like a millstone about the neck of Islam." (from *Edith Wharton Abroad*)

We remember people like Wilberforce but surely Ignatius Pallme deserves to be remembered too. And when did the slave trade between Africa and the Middle East (and between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa) actually end? The Arab slavers did their own capturing. The Trans-Atlantic trade depended on the willingness of Africans to capture, enslave, and sell their fellow men and women. I think there are a number of nations in both Africa and the Middle East who could do some apologising …

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April 12th: Alan Ayckbourn
Scott Turow

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April 13th: Seamus Heaney
Samuel Beckett
Josephine Butler

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"I met Seamus Heaney in person only once, at a dinner in Chicago after a reading he did for *Poetry* during my last year at the magazine. A few months later he would be dead. Meeting him was a momentous event for me, though in a way it was impossible for me to meet the man, for I knew so much of his work not simply by heart, but by bone and nerve. The poems had become authorless inside of me, so unmediated that I flinched whenever he got the cadence "wrong" in one of my particular favorites, such as the famous elegy to his aunt, "Sunlight":

There was a sunlit absence.

The helmeted pump in the yard
heated its iron,
water honeyed

in the slung bucket
and the sun stood
like a griddle cooling
against the wall

of each long afternoon.
So, her hands scuffled
over the bakeboard,
the reddening stove

sent its plaque of heat
against her where she stood
in a floury apron
by the window.

Now she dusts the board
with a goose's wing,
now sits, broad-lapped,
with whitened nails

and measling shins:
here is a space
again, the scone rising
to the tick of two clocks.

And here is love
like a tinsmith's scoop
sunk past its gleam
in the meal-bin.

It turned out that Heaney was reading *me*: galleys of a prose book I was about to publish on faith, death, pain, poetry. (We shared an editor.) My stunned silence left plenty of space for a compliment, which he smilingly declined to pay. I rather appreciated that, though at the time I couldn't say why.

"Later, in the middle of dinner, and in the middle of a conversation that had nothing whatsoever to do with religious faith, he leaned over to me and said—very quietly, he seemed frail to me—that he felt caught between the old forms of faith that he had grown up with in Northern Ireland and some new dispensation that had not yet emerged. That was trying to emerge. I had spent much of the past few years talking about this subject to audiences of one sort or another … You'd think I would have had something ready to hand … But no. Silence. Again, though it confused and disturbed me at the time, I'm glad for this glitch in the predictable.

"I do feel that there's truth in these statements about art and faith—and Heaney's work seems to me a moving example—but just as there are truths we can see only at a slant, there are truths the very authenticity of which depends upon their not being uttered."

"Outside the restaurant, Heaney and I embraced and both hoped our paths would cross again. It seemed likely, as I had never been to Ireland and was suddenly determined to go. And then, as he prepared to get in the cab with his wife, he did an odd thing. He turned around and caught my eye, then winked. There was something self-consciously paternal and literary about the gesture, edged with irony and affection both, the action of a man who had long since grown accustomed to the fact that his actions would be memorialized in the minds of others. I thought immediately and inevitably of his elegy to Robert Lowell, which ends with the two men parting and Lowell whispering—"risking," as Heaney puts it—" 'I'll pray for you.' "

Christian Wiman in *He Held Radical Light*.

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April 14th: Arnold Toynbee
James Branch Cabell

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I picked up James Branch Cabell*'s Figures of Earth* thinking he was a poet. James Blish said of him, "James Branch Cabell (1879-1958) was born to one of the most aristocratic of Virginia families, a lineal descendant of the Branches of Abingdon (Berks) and of that Sir Richard Cabell of Buckfastleigh (Devon) whom Sir Arthur Conan Doyle portrayed as 'Hugo Baskerville'. Though he held several jobs, briefly, in his youth, most of his long life was devoted to writing; his first short story was published in 1902, and at his death he was the author of more than 50 books."

"Twenty of these are tied together, more or less, as a *Biography of the Life of Manuel*—that same Dom Manuel whose entire history is told in the wise, witty and fantastic novel … The *Biography* is framed by two non-fiction books; the other seventeen volumes tell what happened to Manuel's associates and descendants after his mysterious disappearance, though Manuel re-appears as a ghost in two of them."

"To tell the long story of the Manuelites, which ends in the early twentieth century, Cabell resorted to virtually every genre in English literature. Several volumes from the *Biography* are short story collections; one looks like such a collection and gradually evolves into a staggeringly complex novel; one is a volume of verse, one is a play; one is a formal genealogy. *Figures of Earth*, which though it is the second volume in the formal order was ninth in order of composition fully reflects this virtuosity; there are, for example, no fewer than fifteen complete poems buried in it … Like Eddison, Dunsany and Yeats, Cabell made up his own mythology; but his, unlike theirs, is a capricious mixture of pure invention and of snippets of real myths from every source from the Chippewa to the Chinese."

Cabell begins his book: "They of Poictesme narrate that in the old days, when miracles were as common as fruit pies, young Manuel was a swineherd, living modestly in attendance upon the miller's pigs. They tell also that Manuel was content enough: he knew note of the fate which was reserved for him."

He goes out into the world, replete with adventures and symbolism, and finds fame and fortune. The trouble was—I could find neither wisdom nor wit in the book and I soon lost interest in Manuel.

But I was right in thinking that Cabell did write some poetry.

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April 15th: Henry James

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Henry James wrote character-driven novels and he had this to say about his characters, "the best novelist is the busiest man. It is, as you say, because I 'grind out' my men and women that I endure them. It is because I create them by the sweat of my brow that I venture to look them in the

face. My work is my salvation. If this great army of puppets came forth at my simple bidding, then indeed I should die of their senseless clamour. But as the matter stands, they are my very good friends. The pains of labour regulate and consecrate my progeny. If it were as easy to write novels as to read them, then, too, my stomach might rebel agains the phantom peopled atmosphere which I have given myself to breathe."

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April 16th: Anatole France (Jacques Antoine Anatole Thibault)
J. M. Synge
Kingsley Amis

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Years ago I sent a copy of Anatole France's *Penguin Island* to a friend who collected all things penguin. The other day I saw a copy in Vinnies and thought I would read it myself.

An ancient holy man St Maël visits an island. "The strand was deserted. Worn out with fatigue and hunger, he sat down on a rock in the hollow of which there lay some yellow eggs, marked with black spots, and about as large as those of a swan. But he did not touch them, saying:

'Birds are the living praises of God. I should not like a single one of those praises to be lacking through me.'

"And he munched the lichens which he tore from the crannies of the rocks." But as he circles the island he comes on "what he had taken for men of small stature but of grave bearing were penguins whom the spring had gathered together" and he addresses them, 'Inhabitants of this island,' said he, 'although you be of small stature, you look less like a band of fishermen and mariners than like the senate of a judicious republic.' And, 'As I went round your island I saw no image of murder, no sign of carnage, no enemies' heads or scalps hung from a lofty pole or nailed to the doors of your villages. You appear to me to have no arts and not to work in metals. But your hearts are pure and your hands are innocent, and the truth will easily enter into your souls.'

So, "Touched by their attention, the holy man taught them the Gospel."

And then he proceeds to baptize the penguins. But this creates division among the saints. Should he have baptized creatures without souls? If they were perhaps half bird half human it might be acceptable. But if only they were fully human! The Lord in the middle of this discussion of what size soul such a creature might have turns the penguins into people. And gradually the penguins begin to behave like people, not confining their quarrels to the breeding season.

" 'I see them,' said Balloch. 'They are creating law, they are founding property; they are establishing the principles of civilization, the basis of society, and the foundations of the State.'

'How is that?' asked old Maël.

'By setting bounds to their fields. That is the origin of all government. Your penguins, O Master, are performing the most august of functions. Throughout the ages their work will be consecrated by lawyers, and magistrates will confirm it.' "

And so it goes. Penguin Island is towed to the coast of France. And then comes a census, taxes, a royal family to be dissolute and devious, and finally a not much better republic. I am sure French readers read all kinds of things in to the book, which was published in 1908, such as what appears to be Penguinia's version of the Dreyfus case in which Colomban is accused of stealing 80,000 trusses of hay destined for the military.

Anatole France was the son of a Paris bookseller. He won the Nobel Prize in 1921.

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"The law in its majestic equality forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets and to steal bread."

Anatole France.

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I was reading a lovely book about Alphonse Mucha (ed. Ann Bridges), the Czech Art Nouveau artist, when I came upon this interesting sidelight: "Of the books illustrated by Mucha in 1897 and 1898, *Clio* by Anatole France deserves to be mentioned for its homogeneity of the typographical design and illustrations with the text. Anatole France was one of the visitors to Mucha's studio in the *rue du Val de Grâce*, and Mucha's appreciation of the writer's logical and sceptical mind is reflected in his illustrations for *Clio*. Although he used a number of his basic elements, Mucha created a work very different from *Ilsée*, and more remarkable than *Rama*. Published in 1900 by Claman Lévy in a limited edition of 150 copies, the book was from the beginning a collector's item. In fourteen illustrations, the artist employed the deliberate outline of the figures in his famous pale colouring without giving way to his usual urge to cover the background with ornament. One of the illustrations for the story 'Le Chanteur de Kyme' depicts Homer at the moment when he is falling off a cliff, but Mucha's interpretation implies heavenward movement more than a fall, an ascension leading to immortality rather than the tragic end of a blind bard. The emptiness of the land and sky is without precedent in the work of the artist who filled all available space in *Ilsée* to overflowing.

"Clio reflects the friendship between Mucha and Anatole France; the result is a rare affinity of text and illustrations, of the idea and its visual equivalent. The impression of the clear, pristine and solitary intellect of the author is as much enhanced by the restraint shown in the illustrations as the romanticism of the bitter-sweet love story in *Ilsée* was enhanced by the orgy of symbolic ornamentation. The typographical design of the book follows another trend of the nineties, a fashion for increasingly large margins that show off both the text and the illustrations like a rare print in a wide mat."

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Bill Peschel in *Writers Gone Wild* wrote, "Oscar Wilde raised an eyebrow at a dinner party as his friend the author Frank Harris told a story that everyone knew he had stolen from Anatole France. In the embarrassed silence that followed, Wilde purred, "Frank, Anatole France would have *spoiled* that story." "

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April 17th: Thornton Wilder

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April 18th: Henry Clarence Kendall
David Ricardo

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Bonded Through Tragedy, United in Hope is Bishop Hilton Deakin's story of how he became involved with the struggle for freedom and self-determination in Timor Leste. "My mother's character was formed by tragedy. She had a strong faith in God, a legacy of her Jewish ancestry, and of her early Methodist upbringing. As a young woman she learned to depend on it. It was her father's ancestry which was Jewish. He belonged to a family who migrated to England from Portugal some time in the nineteenth century. Ruby was a direct descendant of the British economist, David Ricardo, one of the founding figures of modern capitalist theory."

David Ricardo's family had been Sephardic Jews who had fled from Portugal to Holland and then to Britain. His economic writings are often mentioned in the same breath as those of Adam Smith though he was younger. So did this mean he was a disciple of Smith or that he came up with new or expanded economic theories? In fact he was strongly influenced by Smith. He made money by share-trading on the London Stock Exchange. And his economic model was very much *laissez-faire* capitalism.

David Ricardo's sister Sarah Ricardo married George Richardson Porter, a founder of The Statistical Society, and not to be outdone by her famous brother though she was 20 years younger she wrote *Conversations on Arithmetic*. In fact she started out with a novel*, Alfred Dudley, or the Australian Settlers* (1830) and also wrote on education. But it was her *Conversations*, influenced by Jane Marcet, which was used in schools and re-styled later as a straight textbook. And her cousin Delvalle Varley, also influenced by Marcet, wrote *Conversations on Mineralogy*.

Both Sarah and David married outside the Jewish faith, David marrying a Quaker. So it is curious that one of his descendants should be a Catholic Bishop.

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April 19th: Richard Hughes
Harold Dennis 'Dickie' Bird

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I ducked into the Salvos op-shop in the bus mall and grabbed *Dickie Bird*, thinking it was about David Attenborough's photographer of that name. But no. This Dickie Bird was a famous cricket umpire, a Yorkshireman who travelled widely though not to the remote places the other Mr Bird visited. It was quite interesting. But the thing which always intrigues me is how prolific cricket books are. I am sure they outpace books on any other sport. Is it that cricket fans are keener readers than fans of any other sport? I don't know.

The other day a bundle of old cricket books came into Vinnies. I found one a home in the library at the cricket museum and I bought one. In it Rupert Hart-Davis collected some of the writings of Neville Cardus and called it *Cardus on Cricket* (1949). Cardus, born into a poor family in Manchester, came by luck and serendipity to write on the two things he loved best for the *Manchester Guardian*, cricket and music. "In June 1919, Cardus was recovering from an illness, and W.P. Crozier, the News Editor, suggested that he should spend a few days in the open air at Old Trafford and amuse himself by writing about the cricket. In so casual a fashion was the greatest of all cricket-writers set on his way." Hart-Davis describes him: "In person he is slight, lean and spectacled; in character, ascetic, unbusinesslike and diffident."

Cardus is a delight to read but I cannot imagine a modern cricket-writer putting out anything like this: "Every summer I travel north, south, east and west to watch cricket. I have seen the game played far down in Kent, at Dover, near the cliffs trodden by King Lear. There, one late August afternoon, I said goodbye to a cricket season on a field which lay silent in the evening sunshine; the match, the last of the year, was over and the players gone. I stayed for a while in the failing light and saw birds run over the grass as the mists began to spread. That day we had watched Woolley in all his glory, batting his way through a hundred felicitous runs. While he batted, the crowd sat with white tents and banners all around – a blessed scene, wisps of clouds in the sky, green grass for our feet to tread upon, 'laughter of friends under an English heaven'. It was all over and gone now, as I stood on the little field alone in the glow of the declining day. 'The passing of summer,' I thought. 'There can be no summer in this land without cricket.' "

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April 20th: Dinah Craik
DID YOU KNOW?

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Guillaume Pitron in *The Rare Metals War* writes, "digital technology requires vast quantities of metals. Every year, the electronics industry consumes 320 tonnes of gold and 7,500 tonnes of silver; accounts for 22 per cent (514 tonnes) of global mercury consumption; and up to 2.5 per cent of lead consumption. The manufacture of laptops and mobile phones alone swallow up 19 per cent of the global production of rare metals such as palladium, and 23 per cent of cobalt. This excludes the other forty or so metals, on average, contained in mobile phones. And yet 'the product in the

hands of the consumer only makes up 2 per cent of the total waste generated over the course of the product's lifecycle', explain the authors of a French book that delves into the dark side of digital technology. One example says it all: 'The manufacture of just one 2-gram chip produces 2 kilograms of waste'— a ratio between the end product and the resulting waste of 1 to 1,000.

"And this is only the manufacture of digital devices. Operating electric grids will, of course, generate additional digital activity — and therefore additional pollution, the effects of which are becoming clearer. A documentary investigating the environmental impact of the internet traces the journey of a simple email: once it leaves the computer, it reaches the modem, transits from an individual cable to national and international exchanges, and then goes through a message host (usually in the US). In the data centres of Google, Microsoft, and Facebook, the email is then processed, stored, and sent to its recipient. All told, our email travels 15,000 kilometres at the speed of light." Perhaps 'simple' is a misnomer?

"All this has an environmental cost. 'The ADEME calculated the electrical cost of our digital activities: an email with attachment uses as much electricity as a high-wattage energy-saving lightbulb … for one hour,' explains the documentary. Every hour, some ten billion emails are sent around the world. That's '50 gigawatts, or the equivalent output of 15 nuclear power stations for one hour'. One data centre alone uses as much energy as a city of 30,000 inhabitants to manage the flow of data and run its cooling systems.

"A US study estimated that the information and communication technology sector consumes as much as 10 per cent of the world's electricity, and produces 50 per cent more greenhouse gases than air transport annually. According to a Greenpeace report, 'were the cloud a country, it would be the world's fifth-biggest consumer of electricity.' "

And then there are the satellites which require power and technology to get into space to transmit our messages. And all those power lines, undersea cables, computer terminals, tablets, smartphones, batteries. "Thus, the supposedly virtuous shift towards the age of dematerialisation is nothing more than an outright ruse, for there is no end to its physical impact. Feeding this digital leviathan will require coal-fired, oil-fired, and nuclear power plants, windfarms, solar farms, and smart grids — all infrastructures that rely on rare metals."

"But we forget that all green technology begins prosaically as a gash in the Earth's crust. This new demand on the planet replaces our dependence on oil with an addiction to rare metals."

Producing a few grams of a rare metal creates tonnes of toxic waste. But because we have sent both mining and recycling to (mostly) third world countries we have been able to ignore the environmental impacts. And in the hope that technology will always rescue us from our messes almost no one is suggesting a simple 'fewer people using fewer devices'.

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April 21st: Charlotte Brontë
John Mortimer
Ottoline (Cavendish-Bentinck) Morrell (d)

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I remember Dale Spender writing very critically of D. H. Lawrence's treatment of his women friends such as Jessie Chambers. Ottoline Morrell was known for her salons where a stream of well-known painters, poets, politicians, philosophers, writers, sculptors came, and for the kind and generous way she sought to help young aspiring artists and writers. She was an unusual woman in both looks and style and some people found her a little overwhelming. But it did not stop them taking constant advantage of her kindness and hospitality—and then criticising her behind her back.

Sandra Jobson Darroch in her biography *Ottoline* records that D. H. Lawrence was one of the worst offenders. But he did not keep his spite behind her back. He portrayed her as Hermoine in his novel *Women in Love*. "Lawrence gave Hermoine Ottoline's bizarre taste in clothes. Hermoine

wears ostrich feather hats, cloaks of greenish cloth lined with fur, dresses of prune-coloured silk, and shawls "blotched with great embroidered flowers…." Few people who knew Ottoline would have been in much doubt where Lawrence got the inspiration for the physical shell of Hermoine. Yet, if this were all Lawrence did, Ottoline might not have minded so much. What roused her to a fever of indignation was the character Lawrence put into that shell.

"In the paragraph where Hermoine is introduced Lawrence set the tone, describing her as "macabre….repulsive"; she "seemed almost drugged, as if a strange mass of thoughts coiled in the darkness within her, and she was never allowed to escape." With what seemed to Ottoline almost fiendish relish, Lawrence proceeded to build up Hermoine's tormented, twisted character. She was a demonic woman, possessed by hatred and envy, a thwarted high priestess over whom a mantle of death and poison hung. And to cap this evil portrait Lawrence portrayed Hermoine as being crazed with lust for Birkin, the chief character in the book, who forsakes Hermoine to fall in love with the heroine, Ursula. And just as it seemed obvious to Ottoline that she was Hermoine, it appeared equally clear that Birkin was a self-portrait—Lawrence—and Ursula was Frieda.

"As Ottoline sat in her boudoir at Garsington reading the manuscript it seemed to her the full weight of Lawrence's vituperation was being heaped upon her. Her dresses were described as "shabby and soiled, even rather dirty"; another outfit made her look "tall and rather terrible, ghastly"; she was incapable of decent passion and instincts. And if for a moment she attempted to seek refuge from the terrible caricature in some dissimilarity, Lawrence rudely dragged her back."

"In her memoirs she recalled her feelings at the time: "I read it and found myself going pale with horror, for nothing could have been more vile and obviously spiteful and contemptuous….I was called every name from an 'old hag' obsessed with sex mania, to a corrupt Sapphist…In another scene I had attempted to make indecent advances to the Heroine, who was a glorified Frieda. My dresses were dirty; I was rude and insolent to my guests." What particularly upset her was that Lawrence had satirized not only her but Philip, Julian, Juliette, Maria, Bertie Russell, her house and garden, and many more of her friends as well. "Oh, I read, chapter after chapter, scene after scene all written, as far as I could tell, in order to humiliate me." She said she showed the manuscript to Aldous Huxley, who was also at Garsington at the time and said that he was "equally horrified" and thought it "very very bad." She added: "for many months the ghastly portrait of myself written by someone whom I had trusted and liked haunted my thoughts and horrified me."

"She goes on to say that Desmond MacCarthy was later asked his opinion about whether the book should be published and that he had replied that it was very poor book and advised against it. Ottoline then says that Philip (her husband) took up the matter of the libellous aspects of the portrait with Lawrence's literary agents. She says Philip told them that if the novel were published he would sue for libel. Lawrence did not find anyone to publish it for several years, though whether this was due to Ottoline's threatened writs, or because it was unmarketable anyway until the war was over is an open question. Ottoline claims that when *Women in Love* was eventually published Lawrence had expunged from it—presumably because of her threats—"some of the worst scenes. But evidence that Lawrence did alter the manuscript in this way has yet to be found."

"Ottoline's reaction to *Women in Love* killed her friendship with Lawrence. … A few months later Lawrence was begging Gertler to see if Ottoline would accept him and Frieda back at Garsington but Gertler wasn't enthusiastic. Six months later Lawrence was still sour and wrote to Kot complaining about the injustice of it all."

The injustice being that he and his wife could no longer get their knees under the Morrells' table and helpful cheques in the mail!

"Lawrence had deeply offended Ottoline. She says in her memoirs: "The hurt that he had done me made a very great mark in my life." The wound took many years to heal and even as late as 1932 she was describing *Women in Love* as "that wicked, spiteful book."

There is another issue in there: when a fiction writer uses a real person slightly disguised as a fictional character he or she is saying 'I lack the imagination to realise my own characters—so I am drawing on people I know'. This diminishes the quality of fiction as creation …

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April 22nd: Henry Fielding
Louise Glück
Emily Davies

* * * * *

I had a few minutes to spare so I popped into the Hobart Book Shop and bought Louise Glück's *The Wild Iris* and then in the way such things sometimes happen I came across two more of her books in an op-shop. Glück, it seems, has won just about every award for her poetry that is on offer including the Nobel Prize. So this is what she has to to say about writing: "The fundamental experience of the writer is helplessness. This does not mean to distinguish writing from being alive: it means to correct the fantasy that creative work is an ongoing record of the triumph of volition, that the writer is someone who has the good luck to be able to do what he or she wishes to do: to confidently and regularly imprint his being on a sheet of paper. But writing is not decanting of personality. And most writers spend much of their time in various kind of torment: wanting to write, being unable to write; wanting to write differently, being unable to write differently. In a whole lifetime, years are spent waiting to be claimed by an idea. The only real exercise of will is negative: we have toward what we write the power of veto."

And she goes on to say, "It is a life dignified, I think, by yearning, not made serene by sensations of achievement."

From *Proofs & Theories: Essays on Poetry*. So how might a life of yearning be transmuted into poetry?

This is the moment when you see again
the red berries of the mountain ash
and in the dark sky
the birds' night migrations.

It grieves me to think
the dead won't see them—
these things we depend on,
they disappear.

What will the soul do for solace then?
I tell myself maybe it won't need
these pleasures anymore;
maybe just not being is simply enough,
hard as that is to imagine.

'The Night Migrations' from *Averno*.

Unreachable father, when we were first
exiled from heaven, you made
a replica, a place in one sense
different from heaven, being
designed to teach a lesson: otherwise
the same-beauty on either side, beauty
without alternative— Except

we didn't know what was the lesson. Left alone,
we exhausted each other. Years
of darkness followed; we took turns
working the garden, the first tears
filling our eyes as earth
misted with petals, some
dark red, some flesh colored—
We never thought of you
whom we were learning to worship.
We merely knew it wasn't human nature to love
Only what returns love.

'Matins' from *The Wild Iris*.

* * * * *

April 23rd: Halldór Laxness
William Shakespeare
Ngaio Marsh

* * * * *

Anthony Adeane in *Out of Thin Air*, his book about the disappearance of two men in Iceland and the resulting investigations, is a reminder that convicting people without a body is always fraught. Adeane also writes, "Halldor Laxness, the great twentieth-century chronicler of Icelandic life who would win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1955, articulated the distrust of the base in his 1948 novel *The Atom Station*. In the book the fictional Prime Minister rejects criticism of his decision to allow the Americans to build a power station in the country with the words: 'What is Iceland for the Icelanders? Nothing. Only the West matters for the North. We live for the West; we die for the West; one West. Small nation – dirt. The East shall be wiped out. The dollar shall stand.' Every single copy of Laxness's book sold on its first day in print."

The Americans gained a base in Iceland during World War 2 and the base has remained ever since. It is a habit American bases have.

Halldór Laxness wrote in *Wayward Heroes*: "Growing on the cliffs that rise from this sea – the outermost of all seas – high up on their faces, on narrow, hard-to-reach ledges, is a certain herb, whose like in fragrance, nutriment, and healing potency is not found in hayfields or gardens. This herb has a hollow stalk nearly as tall as a man, and its upper part is pliant and sweet and a cure for most ailments. Due to this herb's enticing sweetness, heathens have named it "cravewort," whereas Christians have given it the Latin name *angelica*, after the angels and archangels seated nearest the throne of Christ in Heaven."

In fact Laxness's writings are steeped in plants, birds, landscape, the natural world; his characters move to and fro across this natural world but they often seem to be the awkward and sometimes unhappy life form living over, on, above, the rest of life.

David Mitchell, reviewed for *The New York Times Book Review* column *By the Book*, said in answer to the question 'What was the last truly great book you read?' "The Icelander Halldor Laxness's *Independent People*, which I read last year on a trip to the country. Even in chapters where nothing happens, it happens brilliantly."

This resonated as I was reading *Independent People* at the time.

While I was steeping myself in Icelandic prose I came upon a book called *Poems of Today, From Twenty-five Icelandic Poets*, and realized I knew next-to-nothing about Icelandic poetry. I

don't know how representative the poems and poets were but I found the book interesting and I have chosen out three poems in case you would like a little taste of poetry from Iceland.

Icelanders are very much associated with fish so here is Jón úr Vör's 'Lean Months':

And do you remember the endless
milkless midwinter days,
the lean month's left-overs,
salted scraps soaked in the pail,
the well-house
and the simple song of pumped water,
boats in the shed
and covered with canvas,
sheep on the beach
and cold feet,
and the evenings as long as eternity,
often impatiently waiting then
for rowing weather
and fresh fish in the pot.

And do you remember
one evening at dusk
you stood on the shore with your
foster-mother. Stared with dread at the frozen rollers,
out at the fiord,
at the sky —
a small boat expected about the headland
and did not come.

And the dusk turned to deeper darkness with a sound of storm,
silence
and tears in a pillow,
and you slept alone in a bed that was much too large.

And do you remember
your joy in the depth of the night
when you woke with the touch on your head
of a horny palm
and on your cheek
the soft warm stroke of the back of a hand.
Your foster-father had come
— and kissed you as you put your arms round his neck.
And there was still a chill breath in the sea-moist whiskers.

And the next morning there was a catfish
blue on the icy doorstep,
and the sun sparkled on silver haddock-scales —
and happiness in the house of a poor man.

And the very name suggests long winters, snow, howling winds, as in ‘Winter pictures from the life of poets’ by Hannes Sigfússon:

Our passage through storm-whirled thundering polar darkness
soon at an end
on the wind-polished ice-blue pane a whitening cloud
at the eavesdropping breath of blasting winds

from warm-humoured blood to sun a swooning eternity

opens abrupt as an eye a wideawake passage
into a joyous expanse of mist and crystal
glittering vista
too keen for a naked eye that rather dips in the shine
of wind-whittled clouds drifts dreamy indulged
in gull-white feather over foam-soft gleaming ocean
into a darkening vault of other stars…

Soon blinks at us too in the deep star
after star drops on the water
winking light-signals flying horizontal flowers
a whole constellation of lights deep under our heels
approaches and we become concerned with an earth
new and alluring a fertile and teeming life.

Many years ago a cousin of my mother decided to go to university late in life and study, among other things, Old Icelandic. My mother was puzzled by this. If her cousin wanted to visit Iceland then surely Modern Icelandic would be more useful? But of course her cousin, Margaret Reeves, wanted to be able to read the sagas in their original form.

So here is poet Jón Dan writing about words in ‘Sleeping words’:

Sleeping words lie in cots
with ruddy baby cheeks and bracelets of fat;
others sit up in bed
newly awakened with spelling mistakes in their eyes,

Sleeping words float overhead
on wings of inspiration and gland-secretion,
others have settled on immaculate sheets
and carefully preen their syllables.

Sleeping words lie on pallets
with clenched fists and dagger in belt;
others play dreamily
with hangman’s rope and noose.

Sleeping words lie along benches
hiding vials of vitriol under the pillow;
others have started to smear
a poison drop at the root of the tongue.

Oh wake not the words,
Wake not the words that are sleeping.

*

Richard Fidler and Kári Gíslason in *Saga Land* write, "Halldór Laxness was a major literary figure of modern Iceland who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1955. One of his best-known novels is *Independent People*, about the struggles of crofter farming, and the unhappy attempts that the main character makes to pay for his own piece of land.

"The book spans many years. In its way it's an epic tale of how an individual confronts those with more power and wealth. But I've always loved the work's quietest and most intimate scenes. In one, a young boy wakes up and looks out from under his bed covers. The rest of the house is still asleep, and it's dead quiet. But from his bed he can see the kitchen, all the pots and pans, the cooking utensils. As he wakes up, he begins to imagine them talking, gossiping and arguing. The emptiness of the house is filled with his imagination, the secret life of pots."

In the book the key figure is Bjartur. His wife Rosa dies in childbirth, leaving him with an unwanted daughter Asta Sollilja. He is a rather surly difficult character wanting to get more sheep and more land. The men have snuff horns, they drink a lot of coffee, they are superstitious, they pride their sense of independence, they have mixed feelings about the new co-operatives being set up, they mostly give only token acknowledgement to their Christianity. As Bjartur says. "I've no time for hymns, either for the living or the dead, and never have had, as I thought you knew years ago. No hymns were written for the Jomsvikings, and yet they fell with good fame; and if memory serves me right, Grettir was avenged all the way south to Miklagard, without any hymns, and yet he was considered the greatest man in Iceland. So I see no reason why, just because a couple of womenfolk have kicked the bucket, people should start writing religion about them. I've never been particularly fond of religion, or on the whole anything spiritual." And, "Maybe they couldn't drive their Christianity into her," said Bjartur. "It would be like that fool of a minister to go and say something to her. She isn't used to having people say much to her. At home here there's always peace and quiet, you see. And as for religion itself, I can't say that I've ever done much to encourage her in suchlike studies, as, if the truth be told, I've always felt that all this Christianity was really rather a nuisance in the community, though the late Reverend Gudmundur was of course a great expert with sheep."

Whereas the old women are deeply pious, one of them reciting:

Fie upon thee, false fox,
Fare from my dwelling;
At this door Jesu knocks,
Flee hence at His telling.
Out Kurkur,
In Jesus,
Out Kolumkel,
In God's angel,
Out Ragerist,
In Jesukrist,
Out Valedictus,
In Benedictus—…

The attraction of the book is not in its characters but in its presentation of the life of a small farmer, and farming community, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and its depiction of landscapes and the natural world.

—"By the time that Term Day comes round, Iceland's splendidly patriotic grass has begun sprouting for the inhabitants with a welcome rapidity; one could almost take a scythe to the growth in the manured fields. The sheep have begun to lift their heavy heads again and hide their ribs in flesh, and the eyeless face of the carcase down in the marsh is buried in grass. Yes, life is sweet at such a time, and now, surely, is the time to marry, for all the nests of the mice in the old ruins have been pulled out and a new croft has been built. It is Bjartur of Summerhouses' croft. Stones have been carried, turf cut, walls built up, framework nailed, rafters hoisted, boards nailed for a clincher roof, range built in, chimney set in place—and there stands the croft-house as if part of nature itself."

—"Meals in the family were eaten as a rule in silence and in an atmosphere of almost furtive solemnity, as though some dark impressive rite were being performed. Each and every one huddled intently over the plate on his knees and picked the bones from his fish with a precision worthy of a watchmaker, or, holding the bowl up under his chin, swallowed his porridge with undivided attention. It was marvelous how much porridge the boy's father could guzzle in a very short time. The old woman, her back turned to the others would eat, without a knife, near the fire. For the morning meal there was always hot oatmeal porridge, black pudding, a slice of bread, the cold leavings of yesterday's salt fish, and coffee warmed up and served with a piece of sugar."

—"In spite of the mild weather there was little show of green on the hills yet, and as the possibility of sudden storms could not be excluded, the crofter had little desire to allow his sheep to wander away up to the high moors. He searched the moorland water-courses in the south and the east at regular intervals, chasing all the sheep he could find down to the lowlands. The more oppressive the silence at home, the more did he appreciate the freshness of spring with its bewitching intensity, its odour of thawing snow and snow that had thawed, of sunlit space and the promise of eternity; for the moors stand in indissoluble communion with eternity. Little by little the snow retreated before the sun, and soon there was in the air the scent of heather and withered grass and the first fresh shoots as they emerged from the drifts on the slopes. The ewes loitered among the hollows and the gullies, cropping at whatever they could find above the snow. But when least expected they would take to their heels and, rushing to the top of the gully or the hollow, would race off into the wind at full speed, into unlimited space, into eternity; for sheep also love eternity and have faith in it."

—"Those were the days when the willow twigs were budding on the heath, when the bilberry opened its fragrant flowers in red and white and the wild bee flew humming loudly in and out of the young brushwood. The birds of the moor had laid their first eggs, yet they had not lost the love in their song. Through the heath there ran limpid little streams and round them were green hollows for the cow, and then there were the rocks where the elves lived, and then there was the mountain itself with the green climbing its slopes. There was sunshine for a whole day. Mist came and there was no sunshine for a whole day, for two days. The heather-clad hummocks rose up in the mist, but the mountains were no more. The moss grew brighter in colour, the fragrance stronger and stronger; there was dew in the grass, precious webs of pearls in the heather and on the soil where the ground was bare of turf. The mist was white and airy, overhead one could almost glimpse the sky, but the horizon was only a few yards away, there at the top of the dingle. The heath grew into the sky with its fragrance, its verdure, and its song; it was like living in the clouds. The cow curved her tongue round the grass and cropped away steadily; she even stretched out for the willow twigs that hung over the brook. And the boy sat with his mother knitting on the edge of the hollow, and they listened to the cow and the grass and the brook and everything."

—"Nothing is so alluring in the autumn as to make off into the wilderness, away, away, for then the Blue Mountains gleam with a greater fascination than at any other time. The winged summer visitors of the moors have most of them flown, but the grouse has not yet left for the farms

and remains to skim the frozen peat in low flight, gurgling much, blinking an inquisitive eye. Most of the ducks have flown down to the seashore, or to the warmer lakes near the coast, for the moorland tarns are frozen over and the rivers edged with ice. Occasional ravens may be seen flapping round, croaking horribly, and this may often be an ominous sign that a sheep, dying or dead, lies somewhere in the neighbourhood. On this occasion there was still very little snow, but where the ground was bare of turf it was covered with little flat cakes of ice. In one place a fox darted behind a hummock, and an hour or two later he crossed the spoor of a number of reindeer in the snow."

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April 24th: Robert Penn Warren
Marcus Clarke
Anthony Trollope

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David Lodge in *Lives in Writing* said of Trollope, "Anthony Trollope published his first novel in 1847 when he was thirty-one, and went on to write forty-five more, and some stories, before his death in 1882, an average of two books a year over thirty-five years. For the first twenty years of this prolific literary career he had a responsible full-time position in the Post Office, supervising and improving the postal service in various regions of Ireland and England. He was also a keen horseman, and seized every opportunity to hunt until age restricted him to merely riding. After he moved back from Ireland to England he was an active member of several London clubs, including the Atheneum and the Garrick. When he finally resigned from the Post Office he immediately took on the editorship of a magazine, and later he stood unsuccessfully as Liberal candidate for Beverley in a general election. If he had become a Member of Parliament we can be sure he would have continued to write novels. How he achieved such an astonishing output of books while leading such a full life was revealed in his posthumously published *Autobiography*. 'According to the circumstances of the time,' he wrote, 'I have allotted myself so many pages a week. The average number has been about 40. It has been placed as low as 20, and has risen to 112. And as a page is an ambiguous term, my page has been made to contain 250 words.' For many years he made a practice of rising at 5.30 in the morning, spent half an hour reading over the previous day's work, and then wrote till 8.30, with his watch in front of him, aiming to produce 250 words every quarter of an hour, or 10,000 words per week, before going off to his day-job. The totals he actually achieved were meticulously recorded in a ledger. His work for the Post Office entailed a good deal of travelling by train, and instead of reading a book he would continue writing one of his own, using a pencil and a home-made writing board, to be transcribed later by his wife. When he made long journeys by sea, privately or on official business, sometimes as far as the West Indies, Australia and New Zealand, he always had the ship's carpenter construct a writing desk in his cabin and made good use of it."

"What began as a self-imposed discipline became a habit, and eventually an addiction. Trollope simply couldn't stop writing."

It might explain the faint sense of stodge which permeates his writing but then Graham Greene set himself to write 500 words a day, later down to 300, so it could be instead that he had a stodgy imagination. But I have a different problem with him.

"We didn't say a word, but some afternoons I read to Anne. I read the first book I had laid hand to the first afternoon when I found I couldn't sit there any longer in that silence which bulged and creaked with all the unsaid words. It was the first volume of the works of Anthony Trollope. That was a safe bet. Anthony never upset any equilibriums."

Robert Penn Warren in *All the King's Men*.

Perhaps not in his books. But on his visit to Australia he said that those responsible for getting rid of the Australian Aborigines should do so quickly and 'humanely'. He may have been parroting things he heard and read. And they were no doubt many and did not bother to add 'humanely' to their diatribes.

"Self-defence is the first law of nature. The government must remove the natives – if not, they will be hunted down like wild beasts and destroyed." *The Colonial Times* 1831.

Or

The Reverend John West writing of the Tasmanians: "their appearance is offensive, their proximity obstructive, their presence renders everything insecure. Thus the muskets of the soldiers, and those of the bandits, are equally useful; they clear the land of a detested incubus."

There is an important place for discipline in the writing life—novels do not write themelves—but Trollope took it to extremes. And I wonder how his wife felt as she faced yet more pages of scribbled story?

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April 25th: Walter de la Mare
Lillian Beckwith

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Lillian Beckwith in *The Hills Is Lonely* wrote: "The acquisition of the Gaelic is, I believe, a necessity for those who wish to lead a full life in the Hebrides, and accordingly I purchased a Gaelic grammar and set myself the task of mastering the idiosyncrasies of that much exalted tongue. Languages have never been my strong point but having the advantage of actually residing and conversing with natural Gaelic speakers, I estimated that by the end of three months I should have achieved a reasonable degree of fluency.

" 'It's quite easy to learn,' encouraged one of the accepted scholars of the village when he heard of my intention. 'The Gaelic is pronounced exactly as it is spelled so you will not find it half so difficult as other languages.'

"I was enormously cheered by his words and was tempted to cut my estimate to six weeks, but the discovery that 'Cnoc' was pronounced 'Crock', 'Dubh' as 'Doo' and 'Ceilidh' as 'cayley' convinced me that his statement had been somewhat misleading. When I found that a simple phrase like 'I have a cat' is in the Gaelic distorted to 'A cat is at me' I felt that I must double my original estimate and, even so, doubted whether I should ever realise that to say 'The dog is at me' indicated possession and not attack."

And then Gaelic has no neuter. "A shoe for instance is a 'she', while a coat is a 'he'. The professions are all masculine, though the noun 'work' is feminine. (It is easy to understand the significance of this when one has lived in the Hebrides for a short time.) The circumstance that an object might be feminine in the English language yet masculine in the Gaelic added to the confusion, as did the complications of soft and hard consonants and shortened vowels; and when I heard of cows with calves at foot being referred to as 'he' I began to doubt very much whether anyone among the Bruachites was capable of classifying sex with any certainty.

"This use of either the masculine or the feminine gender persisted among the crofters even when speaking English, and I was frequently considerably agitated on hearing remarks which seemed to suggest all manner of nefarious or ludicrous practices."

And then there was the weather. "Previous to commencing the study of Gaelic I had noticed that the inhabitants always seemed to be slightly nonplussed by my formal English greeting of 'Good morning!' or 'Good evening!' Naturally I used 'Good morning' as a salutation, not as an

observation on weather conditions, and I was not to know then that in such matters the Gael believes in being specific. In my anxiety to say the right thing I asked Morag to tell me the Gaelic way of wishing people 'Good day'. She, taking me literally, taught me to say 'He Breeah', a phrase which, I later learned to my dismay, meant 'It is a good day', in the sense that 'the weather is fine', and it was singularly unfortunate that for practically the whole of that season there were no days when 'He Breeah' could have been called a suitable greeting. Through rain and cold, through wind, hail and snow, 'He Breeah!' I called gaily, and received in reply politely bewildered 'He Breeahs' from dejected figures whose boots squelched wetly and from whose sou'westers the rain streamed steadily. 'He Breeah!' I greeted the embittered roadman as he sheltered in his inadequate little hut from the merciless flurries of sleet which swept incessantly up the valley. 'He Breeah!' I hailed startled milkmaids as, blue-fingered and red-nosed, they huddled miserably under the cows' bellies, seeking refuge from the torrential rain.

"The villagers accepted my misuse of the phrase with amused tolerance and were unfailingly complaisant, as is their way, but my suspicions were at last aroused when one old soul, battling homeward against a fierce north-westerly gale, her sodden cape billowing wildly in spite of her effort to restrain it, returned my 'He Breeah' promptly and then added conscientiously, 'But there's a fearful lot of wet along with it now, isn't there?' That night I learned to say 'He Fluke' (it is wet) and 'He Fooar' (it is cold) and by so doing ensured the finest spell of warm dry weather that the Island had experienced for some years."

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April 26th: Morris West
Anita Loos
Ghosts

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Ghosts became immensely popular in the 19th century. I don't know if anyone has ever studied their rise to fame. Certainly I had never pondered on where the Elizabethan playwrights found their ghosts—though they proved to be useful props—until I read E. F. Watling's introduction to the Roman writer Seneca's *Four Tragedies and Octavia*. The tragedies are *Thyestes*, *Phaedra*, *The Trojan Woman* and *Oedipus*. It is not known for sure whether Seneca wrote *Octavia*.

Watling looks at the Elizabethan translators of Seneca and writes, "His (Jasper Heywood's) introduction of the ghost of Achilles is typical of a tendency which was to persist in the professional theatre; Seneca, it is sometimes said, was responsible for the Elizabethan dramatists' addiction to ghosts; in fact, there are only two ghosts in his *dramatis personae* – Tantalus in *Thyestes*, and Thyestes in *Agamemnon*; or three, if we count Agrippina in *Octavia*. Other apparitions, as those of Achilles and Hector in *Troades*, and Laius in *Oedipus*, play an important part in the story, but remain off-stage. The Elizabethans used their ghosts more freely, but often more subtly, as (apart from the obvious examples in Shakespeare) in Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. This begins with the arrival of a ghost from Hades, but his role is not merely to create an atmosphere of awe and menace; he is on the contrary an amiable and rather puzzled ghost" and he suggests their borrowing goes beyond their use of ghosts. He draws on a 19th century study, *The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy* by J. W. Cunliffe, to point out other uses of Seneca.

"Seneca wrote (*Agamemnon,* 116): *per scelera simper sceleribus tutum est iter* ('the safe way through crime is by [further] crimes' – a somewhat woolly epigram in the first place, meaning 'the safe way to get away with, or cover up, crime…')"

He gives this list:

The safest path to mischiefe is by mischiefe open still.
Studley
The safest passage is from bad to worse.

T. Hughes '*The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1587) which draws heavily on Seneca.

Black deed only through black deed safely flies.

Marston '*The Malcontent*' (1604) ("to which the next speaker replies: Pooh! *Per scelera marvel sceleribus tutum est iter*!")

Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

Shakespeare '*Macbeth*' (1605)

The ills that I have done cannot be safe
But by attempting greater.

Ben Jonson '*Catiline*' (1611)

Small mischiefs are by greater made secure.

Webster '*The White Devil*' (1612)

One deadly sin, then, help to cure another!

Massinger '*The Duke of Milan*' (1620)

"And beside the picking of Seneca's brains by quotation and imitation, the general tone of Senecan rhetoric was infused into English drama, even in contexts where it was least appropriate. … "It was all to the good; the language of Elizabethan drama would not have reached its height of poetic eloquence without the infusion of the classical voice – the Ovidian mythology and the Senecan rhetoric. It is not necessary to see direct borrowing from the Latin in every reminiscent line or phrase; the voice and the manner became naturalized in the English theatre; the invocations, hyperboles, geographical similes and mythological parallels, proliferated out of the compost-heap. When Shakespeare wrote

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?...

he may not have known that he was producing another version, perhaps the best yet, of a figure employed twice by Seneca and before him by Sophocles. A passage in *Thyestes* may have run through many variations before it became Lear's

I will do such things—
What they are yet I know not – but they shall be
The terrors of the earth.

The parallels are so frequent that the translator of Seneca must have the curious feeling that he is trying out English constructions which Shakespeare and Marlowe will later improve upon."

And Moses Hadas in *The Stoic Philosophy of Seneca: Essays and Letters* appears to endorse this view. "Bookish people know that Seneca has a large responsibility for the configuration of Elizabethan tragedy" and "Though he is immediate heir to the Greeks and uses their modes of expression, mythology, and literary canons, he is not a Greek at all, not even a bad Greek; it would be more accurate to call him a bad Elizabethan" and "Superficially the tragedies look Greek: the plots and personages are Greek, the dialogue is in iambic and the choruses in lyric meter, the unities are observed, and the length and general form of Greek tragedy are closely imitated. But they are essentially closer to Shakespeare, and not merely because they are stark and rhetorical and use witches and ghosts and clanking chains … Seneca's affinity to the Shakespearean rather than the Greek mode may be exemplified by his concept of history as a single directed totality rather than as a congeries of events in which temporal relationships are irrelevant." And then he makes a curious statement: "Certain traits in Seneca's character and his works are doubtless due to his persistent valetudinarianism; we may speculate that if Seneca had had a robust constitution Elizabethan tragedy might not have been so strained and passionate."

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April 27th: Mary Wollstonecraft
Edward Gibbon

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April 28th: Robert Anderson
Ian Rankin
William Dunbar (birthdate not known though it has been suggested that it was linked to the appearance of a comet)

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William Dunbar belongs in that 15th/16th century flowering of Scottish writers, Robert Henryson, Gavin Douglas, Sir David Lindesay, James VI/I and several of his predecessors, Richard Holland, Andrew Wyntoun and others, who drew on both Chaucer and French writers, but also looked to create something distinctively Scottish. Though we don't know much about Dunbar's life we do have his verses published in 1508.

But there is an obvious problem—

Loun lyk Mahoun, be boun me till obey,
Theif, or in grief mischief sall the betyd;
Cry grace, tykis face, or I the chece and sley;
Oule, rare and yowle, I sall defowll thy pryd;
Peilet glad, baith fed and bred of bichis syd,
And lyk ane tyk, purspyk, quhat man settis by the!
Forflittin, countbittin, beschitten, barkit hyd,
Clym ledder, fyle tedder, foule edder, I defy the.

From 'Flyting of Dunbar and Kennedie'

—but although I could see something of the style of John Skelton I had to look for a simpler poem.

Quha will behald of luve the chance,
With sueit dissavyng countenance
In quhais fair dissimulance
May none assure;
Quhilk is begun with inconstance,
And endis nocht but variance,
Scho haldis with continuance
No serviture.

Discretioun and considerance
Ar both out of hir govirnance;
Quhairfoir of it the schort pleasance
May nocht indure;
Scho is so new of acquentance,
The auld gais fra remembrance;
Thus I gife our the observans
Of luvis care.

It is ane pount of ignorance
To lufe in sic distemperance,
Sen tyme mispendit may avance
No creature;
In luve to keip allegance,

It war als nys an ordinance,
As quha wald bid ane deid man dance
In sepulture.
'Inconstancy of Luve'

—the glossary helps: quhilk = which, quhairfoir = wherefore, scho = she, war = aware or worse, etc—reading it aloud helps—but I could not really enter this world of 500 years ago.

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April 29th: Rafael Sabatini
Knud Andersen

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"Because the field of mammalogy is so enormous Oldfield Thomas employed several associates, the most brilliant and prolific of whom was Knud Andersen, a Dane who specialised in classifying bats. Between them, Oldfield Thomas and Andersen would do the pioneering work on the mammal fauna of the Solomon Islands.

"Andersen was every bit as gifted and dedicated a taxonomist as Oldfield Thomas, and his 1912 compendium on the fruit-eating bats, Megachiroptera, is still the standard work. During World War I he was researching a widely anticipated companion volume—a complete classification of the Microchiroptera, or insectivorous bats. These bats account for almost a quarter of all living mammal species, so this was a mammoth task. Judging from his many preliminary publications in various scientific journals he had almost completed it by the end of 1918 when he vanished from the face of the Earth. The only clue to what had happened was contained in his last publication, and it was irritatingly uninformative. The article dealt with the classification of the leaf-nosed and false vampire bats. It was submitted to the journal by Oldfield Thomas because, he said, 'Dr Knud Andersen…expects to be absent from his scientific work for some time.'

"Rumours swirled around the museum in the years following Andersen's disappearance. Some opined that he had committed suicide in despair at leaving the manuscript of his *magnum opus* on the insectivorous bats on the train while on his way to work. Others said that he had been a spy for the Hun during the war and, fearing discovery, had fled the country. Whatever the cause, it was universally agreed that his disappearance was a scientific tragedy. To this day nobody has attempted what he so nearly accomplished, and so the world still lacks a volume dedicated solely to an comprehensive classification of the Microchiroptera."

Tim Flannery in *Among the Islands*. But the story doesn't end there. Oldfield Thomas eventually died in London and his desk was simply left; "But then, in the late 1960s, John Edwards Hill was appointed curator of mammals. Like Andersen, Hill was a bat expert and, curious, to see if he could discover anything about the fate of his illustrious predecessor, he turned the key in Oldfield Thomas's long-untouched desk drawers. When I met Hill in the 1980s he told me that he was astonished to discover therein a letter, which bore directly on Andersen's mysterious disappearance."

"The letter John Edwards Hill found in the desk was in Andersen's handwriting and addressed to Oldfield Thomas. In it the Dane confessed that his life was a mess. He had married a dipsomaniac whose love affair with the gin bottle had become unbearable and, while on a visit to Budapest to study bats preserved in the natural history museum there, he'd fallen in love with an exotic dancer. He left his gin-soaked wife only to discover that while the dancer was happy to enjoy his company on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday, she could not elope with him as he had hoped because she was seeing a German count on the other days of the week. Broken-hearted, the greatest chiropteran expert who ever lived vanished. I wonder whether he leapt, despairing, into the Danube, or retreated to some secluded European village to make a garden—and never think of bats again. Unfortunately, the trail goes cold at the letter and we may never know."

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April 30th: Sir John Lubbock Avebury
Annie Dillard

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"Why people want to be writers I will never know, unless it is that their lives lack a material footing." Annie Dillard wrote in *The Writing Life*. But what did she mean by a 'material footing'? 'Down to earth' rather than 'Up in the clouds'? Or did she mean 'material' literally?

"The materiality of the writer's life cannot be exaggerated. If you like metaphysics, throw pots. How fondly I recall thinking, in the old days, that to write you needed paper, pen, and a lap. How appalled I was to discover that, in order to write so much as a sonnet, you need a warehouse. You can easily get so confused writing a thirty-page chapter that in order to make an outline for the second draft, you have to rent a hall. I have often "written" with the mechanical aid of a twenty-foot conference table. You lay your pages along the table's edge and pace out the work. You walk along the rows; you weed bits, move bits, and dig out bits, bent over the rows with full hands like a gardener. After a couple of hours, you have taken an exceedingly dull nine-mile hike. You go home and soak your feet."

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May 1st: Guido Gezelle
Joseph Heller
Ignazio Silone

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I came upon this snippet in an old encyclopaedia: Guido Gezelle 1830-99 was a Flemish lyric poet and priest-journalist. He was disapproved of by the state and the church for his Flemish nationalism, which is revealed in poetry such as *Kleengedichtjes* (1860) and *Laatste verzen* (1901).

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says of him, "He worked to inspire his students with his religious, poetic, and Flemish-nationalist idealism. His romantic views clashed with the opinions of the higher clergy, however, and in 1860 he was transferred to Bruges." In Bruges he was appointed a Professor of Philosophy at the Anglo-Belgian Seminary. "From roughly 1877 until his death his output of poetry was constant. In 1881 he founded and edited *Loquela* (1881-95), a philological review, and in 1886 he published a masterly translation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem *The Story of Hiawatha*. In March 1899 he became chaplain of the English convent at Bruges, where he died." He spoke English, visited England, even wrote several poems in English, but, "Gezelle shows stunning originality and virtuosity in his use of language and imagery, yet his expression however mystical or experimental, remains linguistically rooted in the west Flemish dialect."

I bought Paul Vincent's collection *Poems of Guido Gezelle* so in case you've never come across Gezelle here is a taste of his poetry:

How happy is the poor bird when
He, tied up for so long,
May open up his wings again
And skywards wing in song!
How happy is the baby trout
That, caught up in my net,
Exhausted, dying, now let out,
Plops back into the wet!
How gladly hums the golden fly
Escaping from the gloom,
When I release him by and by
From hands that were his tomb!

My soul knows not such perfect joy,
But is seven times as blest,
When tired and empty I enjoy
A verse within my breast.-
Within the bird's own realm of air
And spaces cool and free,
Myself am lost, I know not where,
When poetry comes to me;

Hoe blij is de arme vogel toen
hij, lange lang geboeid,
weêrom zijn vlerk mag opendoen
en in den hemel roeit!
en hoe is 't arme vischken blij,
dat, in mijn net gepakt,
half dood gesperteld, los van mij
weêrom in 't water smakt!
het gouden vliegsk' hoe blijde ruischt
het, werk- en worstelensmoe,
wanneer ik zijn gevange, mijn vuist,
ontluikend opendoe!
Zoo blij en is mijn ziele niet,
maar zeven maal zoo blij,
wanneer ik, moet en mat, geniet
een dreupel poesij.-
in 't vrij bewind des vogels en
in 't koele ruim daarvan,
en 'k weet niet waar ik nog al ben
wanneer ik dichten kan:

From 'A Drop of Poetry'

Hang a sash above the crown,
of the skylark,
of the skylark,
hang a sash above its crown,
before you catch and tie it down.

When it climbs, tired of the cage,
it will not fly,
it will not fly,
when it climbs, tired of the cage,
and cut its head and heart in rage.

Oh, one's freedom is so sweet …
golden cages,
golden prisons:
oh, one's freedom is so sweet …
better free – than gold replete!

Hangt nen truisch hem over 't hoofd,
van de leeuwerk,
van de leeuwerk,
hangt nen truisch hem over 't hoofd,
eer gij hem de vrijheid rooft.

Als hij rijst, de kevie moe,
dan vliegt hij,
dan vliegt hij,
als hij rijst, de kevie moe,
niet zijn hoofd en hert ten bloe'.

Ah, de vrijheid is zoo zoet …
gouden kevie,
gouden kerker:
ah, de vrijheid is zoo zoet …
liever vrij – als alle goed!

'Hang a Sash'

They're flying high, in flood;
they're dropping deep, in ebb;
they're weaving, up and down,
their whitest winterweb.

Their winterweb will now,
a linen without stain,
upon the maiden lap
of mother Earth remain.

Ze varen hooge, in 't vloe;
ze dalen diepe, in de ebbe:
ze weven, heen en weêr,
hun' witte winterwebbe.

Hun' winterwebbe zal,
dat lijnwaad zonder vlekken,
den zuiverlijkein schoot
van moeder Aarde dekken.

From 'Winter Midges'

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May 2nd: Alan Marshall
Edith Œ Somerville
Jerome K. Jerome

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David Marcus introducing *Irish Short Stories* said, "it (i.e. the Irish short story) had not only a father, but a mother as well. The father was George Moore (and it is perhaps characteristic of that smooth-tongued charmer that he was himself the first to claim fatherhood – what's more, to claim it

long before there was any child on the way); the mother was (were?) that remarkable writing team of Edith Somerville and Martin Ross."

A. Norman Jeffares in *A Short History of Ireland's Writers* said of their writing: "The idiosyncratic speech is original and the witty dialogue arises naturally from the comic situations which gain their force from the detached almost dead-pan style of narration. This is the comedy of manners given a new ambiance, a world where social gradations are minute and highly complex but where horses, their performances – and their prices – can have a levelling effect. The stories, however, are not only superbly funny but reflect the awareness of country people of the serious side of life. … Comedy is, almost of necessity, captured in the writings of Somerville and Ross, but they continue to capture it with compassion, for their detachment was balanced by a delight in vigorous life, catastrophes and all."

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May 3rd: May Sarton

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May 4th: Marele Day

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May 5th: Karl Marx
Henryk Sienkiewicz

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Margaret Maison in her survey of 19th century religious novels, *The Victorian Vision*, wrote, "They are of the company of the Swiss professor Henri-Frédéric Amiel, whose *Journal Intime*, published in 1882 and translated by Mrs Humphrey Ward in 1885, shows the spiritual paralysis of the idealist sceptic, unable to find either the inward peace for which he craves or the motive power necessary for effectual decision and action. Perhaps their most outstanding representative in fiction is the hero of Henryk Sienkiewicz's famous novel Without Dogma (which appeared in 1891 and had its first translation from Polish into English in 1893), a man whose scepticism debars him from all firm convictions and leads him through a dreary life of failure to suicide. The soul of the reluctant unbeliever is laid bare in this brilliantly analytical novel, and Sienkiewicz's hero is unquestionably the leader of that unhappy band of spiritual cripples who yearn for the Celestial City but are unable to take a single step in its direction, men who have the will to believe but not the capacity, heroes of a painful spiritual drama, their tragic flaw being their powerlessness to believe the ancient dogma."

I had not heard of Sienkiewicz or his novel but when I went looking I found he was famous in his time (and is undoubtedly remembered in Poland) because he won the 1905 Nobel Prize for Literature and his novel *Quo Vadis* was turned into a well-known film.

Peter Ustinov in *Dear Me* wrote, "I had been contracted to play in the film *The Egyptian*, and I was looking forward to acting with Marlon Brando, who was one of the stars along with Victor Mature, Jean Simmons, Michael Wilding, and other famous names. I had already appeared in a view of ancient Rome seen through Polish eyes in *Quo Vadis*, by Sienkiewicz, and now I was about to indulge in a view of ancient Egypt as conceived by a Finn, Waltari."

It raises a curious question: does ancient Rome appear differently to Polish eyes than to, say, Australian eyes?

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May 6th: Sigmund Freud
Rabindranath Tagore
Gaston Leroux

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"By 1917, Christie had written some poems and short stories, a few of which had been published. And then after reading *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* by Gaston Lerouxs, Christie thought she would try to write a detective novel herself, and said as much to her sister, Madge. But Madge, a more successful writer than Agatha at the time, stated that it would be very difficult, and bet her that she wouldn't be able to do it. It was not a formal bet, but nonetheless it spurred Christie to write."

A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie by Kathryn Harkup.

Simon Caterson said of Fergus Hume's famous novel *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab:* "By his own account, published, as the preface to the revised 1896 edition of *The Hansom Cab*, Hume wanted to make his living writing plays but could find no theatre manager who would even look at his work. Hoping to make his name in another branch of writing, he asked a local bookseller 'what style of book he sold most of'. The reply was the detective novels of the French writer Emile Gaboriau (1833-73) which feature Monsieur Lecoq, whose murky past, eccentric habits and genius for deduction make him a forerunner of Holmes and countless other fictional sleuths.

Hume set about buying up Gaboriau's books, studied their method and became 'determined to write a book of the same class; containing a mystery, a murder, and a description of low life in Melbourne.' His plotting, however, is much tighter than Gaboriau's somewhat digressive narratives."

Gaston Leroux, Emile Gaboriau. Given their influence on a best-selling book and a best-selling writer, it seems surprising that their books, other than Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera*, are hard to find. And the other surprise is the idea of so many 19th century Melburnians busy reading a largely-forgotten French author.

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May 7th: Robert Browning

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May 8th: Thomas Pynchon

Marquis of Pombal (Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo) (d)

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C. R. Boxer in *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415 – 1825* wrote: "There is a well-known story that on one occasion King Joseph was considering a proposal by the Inquisition that all 'New Christians' in his realms should be compelled to wear white hats as a sign of their Jewish blood. Next day Pombal appeared in the royal cabinet with three white hats, explaining that he had brought one for the King, one for the Grand Inquisitor, and one for himself."

"It was the Marquis of Pombal who did more to break down the ecclesiastical colour-bar against Indians than did the Papacy and the Propaganda Fide combined. His first move was the promulgation of the celebrated decree of 2 April 1771. This edict informed the Viceroy of India and the Governor-General of Moçambique that henceforth the Asian and East African subjects of the Portuguese Crown who were baptised Christians must be given the same legal and social status as white persons who were born in Portugal, since 'His Majesty does not distinguish between his vassals by their colour but by their merits.' Moreover, and this was something unprecedented, it was made a criminal offence for white Portuguese to call their coloured fellow-subjects 'Niggers, *Mestiços* and other insulting and opprobrious names' as they were in the habit of doing.

"When little was done to implement this, Pombal wrote to the viceroy in Goa in 1774, "Your Excellency must arrange matters in such a way that the ownership of the cultivated lands, the sacred ministries of the parishes and the missions, the exercise of public offices, and even the military posts, should be confided for the most part to the natives, or to their sons and grandsons, irrespective of whether they be lighter or darker in the colour of their skins. For apart

from the fact that they are all equally the vassals of His Majesty, it is likewise conformable with Divine, Natural, and Human Laws, which under no circumstances allow that outsiders should exclude the natives from the fruits of the soil where they were born, and from the offices and Benefices thereof. And the contrary procedure gives rise to an implacable hatred and injustice, which cry out to Heaven for condign satisfaction."

"The emancipation of the 'New' Christians and the drastic curtailment of the powers of the Portuguese Inquisition were directly due to Pombal, who could stomach no tyranny but his own which he exercised in the name of the Crown. In 1773 he induced King Joseph to promulgate two decrees, abolishing the requirement of 'purity of blood' as a condition for office-holding, and sweeping away all forms of discrimination between 'Old' and 'New' Christians."

Yet he is more likely to be remembered for his re-building of Lisbon after the great earthquake which virtually leveled the city on the 1st of November 1755 and the style of architecture he promoted known as Pombaline. This was designed to withstand further quakes so no building could be higher than four storeys, and the redesigned city was to be safer, more hygienic, allowing light and air into what had once been narrow crowded alleyways, and with such style that it created a beautiful city. But he also deserves to be remembered for his efforts to try and end racial discrimination in the Portuguese empire.

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May 9th: J. M. Barrie
Alan Bennett

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"Nothing, as you know, can overtake an untruth if it has a minute's start."

"Anybody can turn up Genesis, but it needs an able-bodied man to find Ezra."

James Barrie in *The Little Minister*.

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May 10th: Monica Dickens
Olaf Stapledon

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I came upon Monica Dickens' memoir *An Open Book* and realized she was a great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens. I had not made the connection when I had come across her 'pony' books. After all, Dickens is a reasonably common name. Her mother's family was French and German. She worked as a domestic, a cook-general, then as a nurse and in an aircraft workshop during WW2, then she married an American naval officer. It was a publisher, Michael Joseph, who asked her to write a book about her experiences as a cook-general.

"How did one write a book?

The first thing was to have something to write with. I bought exercise books and new pencils. Writing is easier when you don't know how difficult it is. I wrote *One Pair of Hands* in three weeks, sitting in the corner of the drawing-room sofa, with people coming in and out, and arguing, and polishing the fire dogs, and having tea, and playing the piano and making jokes.

Michael Joseph had given me only one piece of advice. When I asked him, as we shook hands under the Daphne du Maurier dream picture, 'How do I – I mean, how *do* you write a book?' he had said, 'Don't be afraid. Imagine that something extraordinary has happened to you. You're coming into a roomful of people you know quite well and saying, "Do you *know* what happened to me?" "No, what?" "It was like this." And you tell it.'

'Oh listen,' he said in the narrow hall, opening the front door on to Bloomsbury Street, 'Don't worry about how to write. Just write.'

Nowadays, when people whose friends tell them that they write such good letters and ought to write a book, write me one of their good letters to ask me how it's done, I pass on Michael's advice. Just write.

That may be fairly irritating to them, if they are hoping that I will divulge some magic clue that has kept me in business all these years."

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May 11th: Salvador Dalí
Krishnamurti
Mort Sahl

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Dalí was an intriguing painter although I am not sure I would want his paintings such as 'The Putrified Donkey' on my walls.

He wrote a memoir he called *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*. Dawn Ades in her biography of the Catalan painter looks at influences on his development. "Dalí was not struck with Surrealism with the sudden force of a revelation as, say. Tanguy was, and also on the way in which he was to bring an entirely new kind of visual Surrealism to the movement rather than following orthodox Surrealist practices like automatism; when, eventually, he separated himself from the Surrealist movement in Paris he replaced the accepted 'surrealist ancestors' with others of Spanish and Catalan origin, like Gaudí, and Ramon Lull, a thirteenth-century Catalan mystic who was also a favourite quarry and inspiration for Foix."

(She says of Foix: "Foix is not only the best and best-known Catalan poet of his generation, but the one most consistently interested in the visual arts. Although he stayed clear of manifestos and public demonstrations, he belonged to the group of young writers in Barcelona who were in the avant-garde of Catalan cultural activity and who collaborated on the review published in Sitges, *L'Amic de les Arts*.")

She also writes, "By far the most important friend and influence for Dalí at this time, though, was the Andalusian poet Federico García Lorca. Their friendship lasted until Lorca's death during the Spanish Civil War in 1936 at the hands of a Falangist firing squad, although without the intensity of their early relationship. Lorca was a vivid and powerful personality, and eventually the more timid but fanatical Dalí felt the need to shake himself free. But in 1925 and 1926 Lorca was a constant visitor at the Dalís' family house. Enthralled not only by the adolescent painter, but also by the 'baroque body and grey soul' of the olive trees at Cadaqués and by the severe clarity of the Catalan landscape, 'eternal and actual, but perfect', as he wrote in a letter, he published the first of his Odes, 'To Salvador Dalí', in the *Revista de Occidente* in April 1926."

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May 12th: Edward Lear
Florence Nightingale

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Michael Montgomery in *The Owl and the Pussy Cats* says that although Lear is remembered for his *Book of Nonsense* it was his artwork which funded his travels and his living expenses. Most of us have only seen the comic drawings he did to illustrate his verse but he did landscapes and portraits which he sold for £10 and upwards. Montgomery writes, "After many years of hard grift, during which he was 'adopted' by William Holman Hunt, the leader of the Pre-Raphaelites, he began to earn some serious money from his large oil paintings – one was recently sold in New York for close to a million dollars – but as soon as he had done so he was brought back to where he had started by his own unfailing generosity to those he felt more deserving than himself"; his sales were just as well as he had sold the copyright to his *Book of Nonsense* for £125 so that its endless reprints brought him no income.

But Montgomery's key theme seems to be that far from being homosexual he was endlessly attracted to women.

He writes, "As Fortescue wrote only a few days after their first meeting (in 1844), 'He is very friendly and *getonable* with … I don't know when I have met anyone to whom I took so great a liking.' Indeed, it was these three" (Fortescue, Baring and Lushington) "that Edward asked to be remembered to with his dying breath.

"It was on this slender basis that the impression somehow took root these relationships carried implications of homosexuality. One biographer even went so far as to make this the governing thesis of her book and opened it with a chapter on Lushington, which included such tendentious conjectures as 'Lear was surely now [in 1849] in love with Lushington', and 'If Lake Phonia [in Greece] had witnessed the commencement of Lear's and Frank's love, the plain of Messene…saw its flowering'; her imagination seems to have been carried away by the vivid panorama of a Greek springtime. Even more laughably, when Edward, always the most sympathetic of men to the young, took under his wing a 17-year-old neighbour whose mother had just died and whose father had run off with the maid, we are informed that 'Lear fell in love with young Hubert', although it is at least conceded that 'while Hubert may have shared Lear's bedroom he never shared his bed.'

"If any advances were ever made, they would have been much more likely to have come from Lushington than from Edward himself – Lushington while at Cambridge had been a member of the Apostles, that secret society notorious for these proclivities – but there is nothing to suggest that anything of the kind occurred even when the two were later holed up together in Corfu for some years; indeed, Edward ever afterwards complained of the steady decline in their friendship since those first carefree days of their Greek tour as Lushington revealed himself to be a near-pathological depressive. Over and above all that, it has to be remembered that all three of Edward's friends went on to achieve high office, which they would never have done if the slightest whiff of such scandal (as it would have been, given the prevailing mores – and indeed law – of the times) had attached itself to them.

"As for Edward himself, the evidence is all the other way, in that he regularly referred in his diaries with horror to the day when at the age of ten he suffered molestation at the hands of a visiting cousin, aided and abetted by an elder brother, and in 1872 he marked the date, April 8th, with the entry 'It is just 50 years since he did me the greatest Evil done to me in my life.' His most recent biographer, the late Peter Levi, broke with tradition and stated firmly that 'there is no evidence whatever of homosexuality in his life', but just how deeply the canard has taken root may be judged by a remark made to me only last year when I disclosed that I was working on a new book on him 'Oh yes, didn't he have a taste for young Greek shepherds?' It is high time that it was nailed and put to rest for good."

It has become the fashion to believe that any man who did not marry must have been homosexual. In fact Lear's diaries and letters are littered with his attraction to various women, including Emily, wife of Lord Tennyson, so the question is rather: why did he never propose marriage to any of the women he obviously loved? Montgomery's answer is simple. Lear was an epileptic which he had managed to keep hidden. (And in the 19th century epilepsy was not understood and was often seen as a form of insanity.) But he couldn't hide a seizure from a wife and he was afraid of passing it on to any children he might have.

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May 13th: Daphne du Maurier
Marquis of Pombal

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Daphne du Maurier is famous for *Rebecca* but the other day I came across her small booklet called *Come Wind, Come Weather*. This was a collection of stories she wrote during World War II to encourage people to find in faith and unselfishness and helping others ways through fear and stress. She introduced her stories with: "When the present war started the first thought of nearly every man and woman throughout this country, and the other countries concerned, was "How is this war going to affect *me*?" This thought, if not particularly gallant, was a natural one, because our present civilisation and way of living have so influenced human nature that our own personal problems are more vital to us than the problems of other people. This outlook has developed widely during the present century, and we have only to recollect the national slogan of some few years back—"Safety First"—to realise how great is the gulf between the twentieth century and, for example, the sixteenth.

"It is difficult to imagine Drake and Raleigh and Sir Philip Sidney talking about "Safety First." The Pilgrim Fathers, starting across the stormy Atlantic from Plymouth Sound, knew no such war cry, and Oliver Cromwell, to the best of my belief, gave a very different order to his Ironides. I do not for a moment suggest that these men were better than the men of our present century. They were often cruel, coarse, and had unpleasant personal habits; but there was a certain selfless gallantry about them that makes our own caution a poor thing in comparison. Life to them was an Adventure and a Hazard, not a business of stocks and shares and going one better than the Joneses who live next door. They lived and loved and fought and died, they had faith in the destiny of their country, and they had faith in God. … I believe that the old English spirit is not dead. … The present danger has come upon us as a challenge. Are we going to discover once again the old fundamental values, truth, honesty, selflessness, and learn "to give" instead of the inevitable "to get"? These are the only qualities that will give us courage and help us to endure. Tanks and aeroplanes, guns and ships have failed men in the past and in the present, but the weapons of the spirit have enabled them in the past, and will enable them again, to survive any disaster."

"In the following stories I have tried to show how ordinary men and women, like you and me, have faced up to the challenge of war and change, and how they have overcome their troubles." She includes stories of evacuated children, missing people, family conflicts, rationing and shortages, and crossing traditional barriers of class and occupation. And why did she choose that title? "The dismal slogan of "Safety First" will be thrown aside, and in our hearts and on our lips will ring the old battle hymn of John Bunyan, who three hundred years ago saw this England torn and divided in a bloody civil war.

"Who would true valour see
Let him come hither,
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather… "

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May 14th: Maria Irene Fornés
Tom Wolfe (d)

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I had always vaguely thought that Tom Wolfe had simply come up with an intriguing title when he called his novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities* but it seems his title has a long pedigree.

"The term "Bonfire of the Vanities," popularized by Tom Wolfe's novel of that name, is a translation of *brucciamento delle vanità*. Savonarola held two such events in Florence, on February 7, 1497 and February 27, 1498. Some modern historians keep to the dating system of their fifteenth century sources, for whom the New Year began in March, so that they give the bonfire years as

1496 and 1497. In both cases, the date of the bonfire coincided with Carnival, just before the beginning of Lent.

Paul Harris's account of the first fire in *The Rule of Four*, is historically accurate. A list of vanities compiled from eyewitnesses comprises wigs, veils, cosmetic colors, perfumes, mirror, and the like; books of music and harps, lutes, cithers, bagpipes, cymbals, horns, and other instruments of uncertain identification; books of poems, both Latin and Italian, including works by Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch, and other "indecent" writings; paintings of beautiful figures showing much immodesty; beautiful ancient sculptured figures of Florentine and Roman women; sculptured portraits by the great masters such as Donatello and others; and all indecent paintings and sculpture and prints. A Venetian merchant offered 20,000 ducats to buy the whole lot before it was burned, but the Signoria turned him down.

After the second bonfire, public opinion turned against the friar. Although there was no crime or sin of which he could be justly convicted, a kangaroo court caused this public nuisance to be tortured, hanged, and burned. The whole episode is a depressing one, and nobody comes out of it very well.

Historical judgment of Savonarola tends to vacillate along with the emotions aroused by the paganism of the Renaissance. Marsilio Ficino, who had devoted his life to reconciling Hermes and Plato with Christ, acclaimed Savonarola when he first appeared in 1494, but became personally threatened as the friar ranted against humanism. The Platonic philosopher sulked in retirement until after Savonarola's death, when he was free to pin the label of Antichrist on the friar himself. To the Age of Reason, Savonarola was an example of the dangers of religious enthusiasm, both for the world and for its proponents. The Catholic Romantics of the nineteenth century, on the contrary, regarded the paganizing tendencies as the enemy of a pure, Christian Renaissance, and rehabilitated Savonarola. Now the pendulum tends to swing the other way."

Joscelyn Godwin in *The Real Rule of Four*.

So what were the vanities Tom Wolfe had in mind? It is a novel of New York (and it would put you off going there) seen mainly through the eyes and experiences of Sherman McCoy, a Wall Street bond trader, and Larry Kramer, a lawyer in the Bronx DA's office. McCoy driving his mistress from the airport takes a wrong turning and ends up on a ramp in the Bronx where someone has put a tyre on the street and two young black men approach them when he stops to remove the obstruction. His girlfriend Maria moves over to the driver's seat, afraid they are about to be robbed, and guns the car as he leaps in. She hits one of the young men a glancing blow.

From there on, it becomes a nightmare for Sherman. Because he is white and the victim black it becomes a cause célèbre with street demonstrations and the media presenting the two young black men in a very sympathetic light. As a case is mounted against him he gradually loses his once mildly luxurious lifestyle with his $650 shoes and his $1,100 chairs and his $6 million dollar Park Avenue apartment, along with his wife Judy and daughter Campbell.

It is a modern bonfire and you can read modern messages into it. If you want.

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May 15th: Charles Williams (d)
Katherine Anne Porter
Mikhail Bulgakov

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I came upon a book called *The Novels of Charles Williams* by Thomas Howard and bought it, mainly because I had never heard of Charles Williams. Howard says, "Charles Williams is a strange figure among twentieth-century writers. His work is hard to classify, since it will not fit any

category of modern criticism. Is he a writer on the occult? Has he chosen worn-out themes for his poetry? May we call his narratives novels?"

He goes on to say that Williams' novels are primarily about Grace. He introduces his novel *Shadows of Ecstasy* by saying, "*Shadows of Ecstasy* is the earliest of Williams' novels. It was probably finished by 1926, although it was not published until 1933, after four other novels were already in print. The title points us to the idea Williams had for this story. We may put it this way: every good thing in our world is a sort of hint or shadow of the joy for which we were made in the first place and which is our destiny if we do not refuse it. It is possible to refuse, and this refusal is one of the main themes we find in Williams' work." He also says, "The theme in all of Williams' works is order versus disintegration." And, "What Williams is interested in is heaven and hell; or, to put the same thing another way, he is interested in human behavior.

"This looks like a conundrum. How can we say that heaven and hell are the same thing as human behavior? If Williams really thinks they are the same thing, his imagination must be very far-fetched indeed."

But would publishers want such novels? Now they would probably say no unless you were already famous for something else. But as Williams worked for Oxford University Press for most of his life he probably had a sympathetic publisher ready to hand. And in Oxford he belonged to an informal group called the 'Inklings' which included Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. Though whether it was merely a chat or discussion group or whether it was an impetus to write and publish I don't know. "The 1930s saw a prodigious output of work. During the decade, Williams published five of his seven novels, two theological works, six biographies, three critical works, and the first volume of his series of lyrics on the Arthurian legend."

My question was simpler. Did I want to try to find a Williams' novel to see for myself? The library could not find any but the Hobart Book Shop got me *All Hallows' Eve*. I had begun a novel I called *All Hallows' Eve* myself but never finished it. So I was doubly interested to see what came under his idea.

It is a post-death novel. Other writers have done this. Think of Flann O'Brian's *The Third Policeman*. I even had a try myself in *Portrait of a Bad Marriage*. Some writers bring in angels. Others paint in shades of grey. Williams has his character Lester Furnival wandering the streets of London at first unaware that she has died when a plane crashed on her.

"Only the City lay silently around her; only the river flowed below, and the stars flickered above, and in the houses lights shone. It occurred to her presently to wonder vaguely—as in hopeless affliction men do wonder—why the lights were shining. If the City were as empty as it seemed, if there were no companion anywhere, why the lights? She gazed at them, and the wonder flickered and went away, and after a while returned and presently went away again, and so on for a long time. She remained standing there, for though she had been a reasonably intelligent and forceful creature, she had never in fact had to display any initiative—much less such initiative as was needed here. She had never much thought about death; she had never prepared for it; she had never related anything to it. She had nothing whatever to do with it or (therefore) in it. As it seemed to have nothing to offer her except this wide prospect of London, she remained helpless. She knew it was a wide prospect, for after she had remained for a great while in the dark it had grown slowly light again. A kind of pale October day had dawned, and the lights in the apparent houses had gone out; and then it had once more grown dark, and they had shone—and so on—twenty or thirty times. There had been no sun. During the day she saw the River and the City; during the night, the stars. Nothing else."

She meets with a woman she knows and while they wander the lives of her husband, his friend, his friend's love, Betty, and her strange and unpleasant expedition, go on. The barrier between life and death is permeable but only partly so. They can have glimpses of another world,

nothing more. His style at first seems rather abrupt but I gradually got used to this. The real problem, though, is that none of the characters came 'alive'. This might seem a misnomer in a novel about death but there is always the feeling that the characters are there to represent something else. Except for feeling rather sorry for Betty they might as well all be dead and wandering in a twilight world. If he wanted to show both heaven and hell in their behaviours then heaven was rather hard to find and hell was hard to believe in. It seems rather to be a novel about Purgatory and by what virtues it can be escaped.

Howard ends: "Is Charles Williams a great novelist? No. Too many questions plague the matter. But his achievement on this front is arresting at least, and his work might possibly attain the crown most sedulously wished for by all artists for their work, namely, longevity."

Given my difficulty in finding his books, Charles Williams is more a curiosity as a novelist rather than someone likely to achieve longevity.

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May 16th: Confucius/K'ung-Fu-tze (birth date not known)
Adrienne Rich

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I wondered why Alfred Doblin (Doeblin) wrote a novel with a Chinese theme. But then I came upon his book *The Living Thoughts of Confucius*, 1942.

Confucius (Latinized form of K'ung-Fu-tze) was born in 550 B.C. in the village of Tseu, duchy of Lu, now Kio-feu-Hien, Shantung. In Lu he became keeper of stores, superintendent of the herds of sacrificial beasts, married a woman from his ancestral State of Sung, and had a son Li. Later, he resigned his position as high-shepherd and busied himself with teaching. Beginning with his 27th year, he studied old laws. At the age of 51 he became chief magistrate of the city of Chung-tu, and governed in an exemplary manner. Through intrigues he lost his position. Thereupon began his great period of wandering, together with his pupils. After fourteen years' absence, Confucius returned to Lu, edited the sacred Books, and wrote the story of his homeland. He died in his 73rd year. His pupils collected his teachings, and his fame grew very slowly and with interruptions (during which his books were burned) until his teaching, centuries later, became the State religion.

"From time to time there appear on earth religions acknowledging gods and their commandments, and the existence of the beyond. A priestly caste emerges to defend the claims of these gods; the whole life of the State takes on a new and hallowed tone—Confucius's doctrine is not of this nature.

From time to time some government shines with particular splendour, the highest ranks reaching up into a cloud of glory. With the aid of willing workers the emperor, the king, and his court are soon made to seem all-powerful. The people submit to their rule. Regardless of the way it acquits itself the reigning force is highly valued as predestined, even godlike—Confucius's doctrine is not of this nature.

Heaven, government, and people are, according to Confucius's doctrine, the three supreme powers. Heaven makes the laws and general regulations for the life of man; the government receives and enforces these laws; the executives and the people live according to them. There is no place for a priestly caste, for the laws of Heaven are not based on any secret dogma; they shape themselves openly in the form of the phenomena of nature and of human society. The knowledge they contain has been handed down from past generations. Nor is there place for governments or rulers who create their own religious laws. Confucius's doctrine extracts the virtues of the religion of the divine and those of the godlike State, and the dangers of both are evaded; the all-binding law is set above the power of the government. The law itself, though, is purged of all mystery. Thus the State is managed in such a way that everyone can understand, even the lowliest commoner; those in

power are under control and a practicable moral code is created which everyone desires to uphold. The doctrine thus gains something significant for Confucius and his pupils. An authoritative position in the State is created for the teacher himself and, indeed, for a whole class of people with him, namely those who have made it their duty to study the laws and their preservation. Confucius's doctrine established between the rulers and the people a class which has, so to speak, to carry on a spiritual battle on two fronts; one against the government, which must be led in a certain direction and, in some cases, held in check; another to make education and wisdom available to the people.

Just such a class becomes characteristic of Confucius's China; it is characteristic, too, that it does not indulge in any private, scholastic activity such as that of the philosophers and some men of letters in occidental civilization. Confucius succeeded in raising it to a privileged and influential position in the State; it became the official class of scholars and philosophers. He thus attained what, over a hundred years later, Plato recognized and proclaimed as ideal and wrote down in his book, *The Republic*. Confucius and his school actually realized what the mere "intellectuals," from the prophets to the politicians, from Isaiah to Machiavelli, later so ardently desired, and they did it in a way which, in spite of all expectations to the contrary, proved lasting, more lasting than those State formations set up by later so-called realistic and war-minded reformers."

"It is said that one of his former pupils, Kin-sho, was from Tshen; Kin-sho took Confucius to see Lao-tse and it is related how the man from Lu questioned the profound old philosopher, as was his wont, about ancient customs, but had little use for his further wisdom."

"After a short time he returned to Lu and it took him fifteen years to find a position. In the meantime he taught and concentrated on the holy books of the past, the *Shih-king* (Book of Ancient Poems), *Shu-king* (Book of Historical Documents), *Yi-king* (Book of Changes), *Li-ki* (Book of Rites and Ancient Ceremonies). At long last, in his fifty-first year, he was made the chief magistrate of the town of Chung-tu; his activities there attracted the attention of his neighbours. He set up a model administration. He became assistant to the superintendent of public buildings and, finally, minister of police. (There is also mention of the position of vice-minister of agriculture.) In every position he held he performed something of importance; he brought peace to the land and even imposed severe judgment on a prominent but rebellious person in the principality, condemning him to death. So long as he was in office there were no robbers in the land of Lu. We have grounds for supposing that he was very severe in administering justice. In the whole land there was such order, "the men were careful to walk on the right of the road, the women on the left." "

He is overthrown and turns to a wandering life with pupils at times joining him. "His ideas are not of the same kind as those of Buddha or the contemporary Lao-tse, that is, not of the philosophical, more or less abstract kind with which one can found a school, a sect, or perhaps a religion. What he has to say consists of direct instruction, technical advice about the best proved methods to be employed by an "actual government." He advises the head of the State. He is a practical man, and he knows how to discuss administration, law, and military strategy, the attitude towards family, all the things which can be immediately carried out, which press for realization, and have proved worthiest in practice." He believes in the centralization of authority and underpins his teaching with the key concepts: Obedience. Duty. Virtue. Sincerity.

But with no powerful administration wanting him, he teaches, "he talks with his disciples, reads and edits the holy books, comments on the obscure book of prophecy *I-King* and writes a history of Lu."

"He was a man of solid Chinese wood. His interests were entirely directed to the arrangement of human affairs, the family and the State." He died believing no one was listening to

his advice. But slowly his beliefs were taken up, spread, incorporated into the structure of the State. Current Chinese administrations may ignore virtue but it is to some extent a Confucian State.

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Frank Clune visiting Beijing in *Sky High to Shanghai* in 1938 has this to say about the way Confucius is remembered: "we rickshawed past the glittering tiled palaces and temples of the Inner City, to an atmosphere of peace and calm at the Shrine of Confucius.

Like millions of other white men, I had frequently heard the name of Confucius, and had met pseudo-philosophers who glibly quoted his *Analects*. But I knew nothing about Confucius except that he was one of the five great religious teachers of mankind, and that his followers were even more numerous than those of Moses, Buddha, Jesus, or Mohammed.

Student Chang drew my attention to a stone tablet at the gateway of the Confucian temple. This, he said, was an injunction to all persons to descend from their horses or palankeens as a mark of respect to the sage when approaching the shrine. We descended from our rickshaws.

Passing through a side door, Chang explained that the main central door was reserved for the use of the Emperors. We entered the courtyard of the Master Teacher, in which are hundreds of stone tablets inscribed with the names and addresses of bygone generations of students who have passed their examinations in the Chinese classics, and can refute and confute from Confucious.

Entering the Hall of Great Perfection (which is also a storehouse of ancestral tablets) I gazed in wonderment at the huge teak beams of the fifty-foot-high dome, and at the marble staircase elaborately carved with dragons, near which are tablets recording the antediluvian history of China.

Chang next led me into the central shrine, the Temple of Fame, and reverently pausing, bowed before a severely simple obelisk of age-blackened wood inscribed with glowing Chinese and Manchu characters.

"This," he said, "is the Tablet of the Soul of the Most Holy Ancestral Teacher, Confucius."

Flanking the tablet were more than two hundred other ancestral tablets, commemorating disciples of the sage, virtuous men, and scholars.

We were in the holy of holies.

Confucius, whose correct name is Kung Futze, was born 2490 years ago, at Chu Fu in Shantung Province. His home was in the delta of the Yellow River, the cradle of the Chinese race, two hundred and forty miles to the south of Peking.

As a young man, he was appointed a tax-gatherer, but neglected his duties and commenced to study the classics. By his wit and brilliance he excited the envy of his elders, and was driven from his home province to wander through China as an exile.

Wherever he went he was followed by faithful disciples, to whom he taught the secrets of human nature.

When the Master was three score and ten years of age, he was in the wilderness on the hills behind his birthplace, when a hunting party near by captured and killed a unicorn. The dead beast was brought to Confucius, who mournfully said that this omen presaged his own approaching death—and the decline of his doctrines.

His death occurred soon afterwards, but his doctrines are immortal. It is almost 2500 years since the unicorn of Chu Fu was slain. Yet the teachings of Master Kung are firm in the minds of hundreds of millions throughout Asia."

And he gives "simplicity of character" and "sincerity of heart" as two basic tenets.

Clune visited the shrine in 1938 so I couldn't help wondering how Confucius has fared under China's modern rulers. And yet Confucius' focus was on human behaviour, human relations, between both the living and the dead, with an emphasis on obedience and respect. This is surely more digestible for Beijing than a focus on the transcendent nature of human beings.

"The Master said, "The wise find pleasure in water; the virtuous find pleasure in hills. The wise are active; the virtuous are tranquil. The wise are joyful; the virtuous are long-lived."

"The Communist Party banned Confucianism as reactionary during the Cultural Revolution, and Red Guards levelled Confucius' tomb. But the sage has now been rehabilitated, not least as a means of promoting obedience to authority and national pride." So what of the Confucius Institutes which have popped up all over the world? Are they devoted solely to his teaching? Clive Hamilton in *Silent Invasion* goes on to say, "While the institutes do indeed offer Chinese language training and promote Chinese culture, that is not all they do. As former CCP paramount leader Hu Jintao said, their purpose is 'to increase our Party's influence worldwide', including their leverage over the organisations that host them." Queries have been raised about these benign-sounding institutes, not least because "the contracts signed between Confucius Institutes and their Australian host universities are secret." They usually have a local director and a China-appointed director. And they have tended to push out older organisations set up by long time Chinese descendants. "Accordingly, Confucius Institutes have attracted persistent international criticism in response to allegations that they curtail academic freedom and serve China's surveillance and propaganda objectives." I wonder what happens when someone turns up just wanting to study what Confucius said and wrote?

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May 17th: QUEENS

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Early queens led dangerous lives.

"The Northern frontier may have been secure against the Ghaznavids, but it was not respected by the Mongols, who had by now moved far afield from their homeland in central Asia. Through a series of raids between 1229 and 1241 they gained control of western Punjab, and Iltutmish was powerless to stop them. On the death of Iltutmish intrigue amongst the Turks increased, although there was a stable but brief interlude when his daughter Raziyya was on the throne. A contemporary historian, Siraj, wrote:

Sultana Raziyya was a great monarch. She was wise, just, and generous, a benefactor to her kingdom, a dispenser of justice, the protector of her subjects, and the leader of her armies. She was endowed with all the qualities befitting a king, but she was not born the right sex, and so, in the estimation of men, all these virtues were worthless.

She was resented both for being a woman and for keeping the control of the realm to herself, and was finally murdered. Court intrigue continued unabated until the emergence of Balban, who rose from minister to become Sultan in 1265."

Romila Thapar in *A History of India*.

Jack Weatherford wrote *The Secret History of the Mongol Queens*. He says, "Genghis Khan sired four self-indulgent sons who proved good at drinking, mediocre in fighting, and poor at everything else; yet their names live on despite the damage they did to their father's empire. Although Genghis Khan recognized the superior leadership abilities of his daughters and left them strategically important parts of his empire, today we cannot even be certain how many daughters he had. In their lifetime they could not be ignored, but when they left the scene, history closed the door behind them and let the dust of centuries cover their tracks. Those Mongol queens were too unusual, too difficult to understand or explain. It seemed more convenient just to erase them."

"We may never find definitive accounts for all seven or eight of Genghis Khan's daughters, but we can reassemble the stories of most of them. Through the generations, his female heirs sometimes ruled, and sometimes they contested the rule of their brothers and male cousins. Never before or since have women exercised so much power over so many people and ruled so much territory for as long as these women did."

"With the official role of royal women compromised and then nearly eliminated, the empire buckled, collapsed, and died. By 1368 the Mongols had lost their lands, fled back to their stepped homeland in disgrace, and resumed fighting among themselves with even more viciousness than ever. The bickering, feuding, and raiding lasted for another century, until a new queen unexpectedly appeared around 1470. Queen Manduhai the Wise lifted up the Mongol banners that had been left trampled in the dust. She awakened the forgotten consciousness of the Mongols. She put the Mongol nation back in order, created a new government, and then, like the Mongol queens before her, disappeared back into the fog of neglect."

He also says of her: "Almost all Mongols recognize Queen Manduhai the Wise and Dayan Khan as the two greatest monarchs in the eight centuries of Mongolian history after Genghis Khan. For Mongols, Manduhai continues to symbolize the one person who sacrificed all to save her nation and thereby protect them, and for this reason they often call her simply Queen Manduhai the Wise. The earlier queens faded from public memory, but elements of their stories were folded into hers so that Manduhai Khatun became the quintessential Mongol queen, combining all the others into one persona and one lifetime.

"No matter how assiduously the censors in the centuries that followed cut the Mongolian queens from the records and altered the texts, and no matter how foreigners might scoff at their history, the people remembered. In their songs and poems, in their art, and in the names they gave their children and the stories that they told sitting around the fire at night, the Mongols preserved the memory of Queen Manduhai the Wise."

"Tamar was the first woman to ascend to the throne of feudal Georgia, and her first years as Queen were not easy.

Despite the fact that her father, Giorgi III, King David the Builder's grandson, had her crowned a co-ruler with him in 1178, on his death six years later the nobles of the council asserted their right to a say in the matter by repeating the coronation. The patriarch, Mikel Mirianisdze, forced Tamar to give him the additional post of Chancellor, and the nobility even chose Tamar's first husband, Russian prince Yuri Bogolyubsky.

The marriage does not appear to have been at all successful, and one of Tamar's first independent acts was to divorce Yuri. Her position was strengthened following the death of Mikel Mirianisdze and the arrest of a leading noble opponent, Qutbe-Arslan, who had planned to establish a state body in which the nobility alone would decide policy. In 1189 Tamar married David Soslan, an Ossetian prince who had been brought up at the Georgian court, and two years later she gave birth to an heir, Giorgi Lasha. However, Yuri had not given up hope of making a comeback, and in 1191 he led a rebellion of West Georgian nobles. Tamar's side defeated them easily.

After this the Queen was able to turn to foreign policy, which in the 12th century was mainly realized through war. Her armies were remarkably successful, winning major victories against Muslim forces at the battles of Shamkhor (1195) and Basian (1202). Georgia was at the peak of its power, and captured the important cities of Ani and Kars from the Seljuk Turks. The country received large revenues in tribute from its neighbours, and it was said that 'the peasants were like nobles, the nobles like princes, and the princes like kings.'

Georgia's strong economic and political position enabled the country to develop culturally. The greatest work of art of Tamar's reign was the epic poem *The Knight in the Tiger Skin* by Shota Rustaveli, who is believed to have been in the Queen's employ. In his work he writes that 'All lion cubs are equal, be they male or female', which could well be applied to Queen Tamar. The cave city of Vardzia grew enormously in this period, and many works of religious art were created.

Queen Tamar died in 1213. Her burial place is still a mystery – contemporary documents record that she was laid to rest in Gelafi, but there is no inscription there. In Svaneti there is a belief

that she is buried in Ushguli. One legend tells of seven knights who killed each other after burying her so that her grave would not be known, and another of a crusader who met a Georgian prince taking a royal corpse to Jerusalem."

Lonely Planet Guide to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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May 18th: Bertrand Russell
Omar Khayyam

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I doubted whether I was clever enough to tackle Bertrand Russell's books on mathematics and philosophy but then I came unexpectedly on to his forays, late in life, into fiction. *Satan in the Suburbs and Other Stories* and *Nightmares of Eminent Persons and Other Stories*. Some of those who have nightmares are imaginary people. While others existed. Dr Bowdler, for instance, has a terrible dream in which his wife manages to unlock the cupboard where he keeps his unexpurgated Shakespeare. And Stalin dreams that "The Third World War had been fought and lost. He was a captive in the hands of the Western Allies. But they, having observed that the Nuremberg trials generated sympathy for the Nazis, decided this time to adopt a different plan: Stalin was handed over to a committee of eminent Quakers, who contended that even he, by the power of love, could be led to repentance and to the life of a decent citizen."

Their gentle homilies on repentance and humility are as water off a duck's back. But Stalin finally cracks when he is faced with cocoa!

Agatha Christie had her 'Are you happy? If not, consult Mr. Parker Pyne' but the man at the heart of *Satan in the Suburbs* has a very different offer: A sign says:

HORRORS MANUFACURED HERE
Apply Dr Murdoch Mallako

The stories might be regarded as humorous horror. The blurb says, "Not very frequently does the author of such books as *The History of Western Philosophy* or *An Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* sit down at the age of eighty to try his hand at short stories. As Bertrand Russell himself says: 'I do not think that the reader's surprise…can be greater than my own. For some reason entirely unknown to me I suddenly wished to write the stories in this volume, although I had never before thought of doing such a thing.' " The puzzle is not that he decided to try his hand at fiction but why he chose those subjects to write about …

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May 19th: Edward de Bono

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Edward de Bono gave us lateral thinking. Vertical thinking is logical thinking, one thing leading to the next. Lateral thinking is 'thinking outside the box'.

He gives this example of lateral thinking: "Many years ago when a person who owed money could be thrown into jail, a merchant in London had the misfortune to owe a huge sum to a money-lender. The money-lender, who was old and ugly, fancied the merchant's beautiful teenage daughter. He proposed a bargain. He said he would cancel the merchant's debt if he could have the girl instead." (It has been the fate of girls to pay for their father's mistakes.) Father and daughter are horrified. "So the cunning money-lender proposed that they let Providence decide the matter. He told them that he would put a black pebble and a white pebble into an empty money-bag and then the girl would have to pick out one of the pebbles. If she chose the black pebble she would become his wife and her father's debt would be cancelled. If she chose the white pebble she would stay with her father and the debt would still be cancelled. But if she refused to pick out a pebble her father would be thrown into jail and she would starve."

The money-lender picks up two pebbles from his pebble path and puts them in a bag but the girl notices they are both black. Vertical thinking would suggest:

1. "The girl should refuse to take a pebble.
2. The girl should show that there are two black pebbles in the bag and expose the money-lender as a cheat.
3. The girl should take a black pebble and sacrifice herself in order to save her father from prison."

Whereas with lateral thinking … "The girl in the pebble story put her hand into the money-bag and drew out a pebble. Without looking at it she fumbled and let it fall to the path where it was immediately lost among all the others.

" 'Oh, how clumsy of me,' she said, 'but never mind – if you look into the bag you will be able to tell which pebble I took by the colour of the one that is left.'

"Since the remaining pebble is of course black, it must be assumed that she has taken the white pebble, since the money-lender dare not admit his dishonesty." So the girl and her father are saved from marriage and prison.

Kathryn Harkup wrote in *A is for Arsenic: The Poisons of Agatha Christie*: "In order to prepare for the Apothecaries Hall examination Christie was tutored in practical, as well as theoretical, aspects of chemistry and pharmacy by her colleagues at the dispensary. In addition to her work and tutoring at the hospital, Agatha received private tuition from a commercial pharmacist in Torquay, a Mr P. As part of her instruction, one day Mr P. showed her the correct way to make suppositories, a tricky task that required some skill. He melted cocoa butter and added the drug, then demonstrated the precise moment to turn the suppositories out of the moulds, box them up and label them professionally as *one in one hundred*. However, Christie was convinced that the pharmacist had made a mistake and added a dose of *one in ten* to the suppositories, ten times the required dose and potentially dangerous. She surreptitiously checked his calculations and confirmed the error. Unable to confront the pharmacist with his mistake, and frightened of the consequences of dispensing the dangerous medicine, she pretended to trip and sent the suppositories crashing to the floor, where she trod on them firmly. After she had apologised profusely and cleared up the mess, a fresh batch was made, but this time at the correct dilution."

So was Agatha Christie a great lateral thinker? Are women more likely to think laterally?

And more importantly—*can* we teach children to think and *should* we teach children to think?

Edward de Bono has an asteroid named after him. So that is where lateral thinking might lead you too.

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May 19: Margery Allingham

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May 20: Marie E. J. Pitt (d)
John Stuart Mill

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I knew nothing of poet Marie Pitt, despite her time in Tasmania, until I came across Colleen Burke's book *Doherty's Corner: The Life and Work of Poet Marie E. J. Pitt*. She was an interesting woman, born in Gippsland, she later married and lived in Tasmania, then went to Melbourne with her husband who was ill from his time as a miner. Burke said of her, "Always outspoken, Marie Pitt's personal and political beliefs were often a fiery blend of socialism, feminism and the best aspects of Christianity." She joined the young Victorian Socialist Party and was for a short time

editor of the *Socialist*. Her interests were many including women's need for birth control and equal pay.

Bernard O'Dowd said of her poetry, "She didn't get the hearing or criticism she was entitled to as a poet; that men and women her inferior are getting, because she criticised the press, the Church and the State."

So what of her poetry? I have chosen three poems
Against war: 'Australia's Tommy Atkins'.

O! we catch him young and make him a cadet,
Give him side arms, and a rifle in his hand,
Tell him bogey yarns of heroes we have met,
And the duty that he owes his native land;
He drinks it in with other things at school,
That to keep the Old Flag flying cock-a-hoop,
He must learn the art of slaughter,
Learn to spill red blood like water,
Tho' he lives in Melbourne Town or Dandeloop.

Refrain
O! Tommy, Tommy Atkins,
Will you never gather sense?
Will you never see the folly
And the scandalous expense
Of the waste of time and labour
That fits you for the trade
For the blood and thunder calling
Of the Boodle Bug Brigade?

Yes! We take him from his football and his horse,
From Tote, and Tate and snares of Mr Wren,
And we make of him a unit in the force
That has learnt the noble game of killing men.
O! he's happy as a lunatic at play,
With his buttons and his regulation suit,
When he's learnt to do his duty
For Profit, Power and Booty –
When he's learnt the god of human life is loot.

O! we tell him of the grand Union Jack,
Of the flag that speaks of Justice overseas,
How it swoops upon the lazy loafing black,
Fat and happy 'neath his laden plantain trees,
How it chains him to the mattock and the hoe,
For his sloth and shiftless folly to atone,
Till in bright anticipation,
We have grown so great a nation,
That we've lots of pauper labour of our own,

And when he's done and can't fight any more

We have him up before the local Beak,
And if he's got credentials to the fore,
We pay him half a sovereign a week.
O! he'll live on it as happy as a king,
For he knows he's done his duty like a man –
He is old and poor, and dying
But he kept the flag a-flying
For Rob and Snob and all their caravan.

Against Capitalism: 'A Tory Press Definition'.

When the Bludger Press – Boss coalition –
Has marshalled its members in line –
Tory churchmen, astute politician –
To frustrate some toilful design;
When 'tis flushed with success of annexing
Misfortune's last beggarly groat,
Dear folk, who find meaning perplexing –
That is "Co-operation", take note!

But when in their blind indiscretion
The rascals decline to be fleeced,
Forgetting the "rights of possession",
And their duty to patron and priest;
When they stand as one man and defy it,
And the boodle-bugs whimper and flee,
From the high priests and scribes comes the fiat –
That's a "boycott" dear neighbours, d'you see.

She didn't call herself a conservationist but she mourned the loss of the Gippsland forests: 'Doherty's Corner'.

There's no bush to-day at Doherty's Corner,
Only strange green hills and the glint of a far bay;
Time has come like a thief and stolen the wonder
And magic of Yesterday.

There are no fairies now at Doherty's corner,
Where dusky spider-orchids and wild white daisies grew;
Time that stilled the heart of the singing forest
Has stolen her fairies too.

Henderson's hill is green at Doherty's Corner,
But no fairy trips in the dawn or the dusk thereon,
Perhaps they died when the old black log and the bracken
And the box bushes were gone.

They only lived, maybe, in a child's dreaming,
For children walk in a twilit world of their own,
And the grown folk were ever too wise to listen
To pipes by the fairies blown.

They used to say it was wind and the bees thrumming
  Through billows of bean blossom as white as driven foam;
But I knew it was not the wind or the brown bees humming
  Heavily hiving home;

For I had heard such music there by the river
  When never a reed-head rustled and every sense was a-leap –
Under the darkened hillside…the little people
  Singing the world to sleep!

For I had heard such piping there in the low light,
  The queer half-light before the light of the moon,
All the pipes of Faery playing together
  Down by the old lagoon.

O Green Hills, O hills with your alien faces,
  Fresh as August flowers on the grass of an old grave,
Your witch gold has gone with the fairy pipers'
  Wood-song and elfin stave!

You are sad, O ye hills, with your faces lifted,
  Lit with a young delight to the ache of the far skies!
Yea, you are sad as the faith of little children
  And the sorrow of old eyes.

There's no bush to-day at Doherty's corner,
  No pipers will come with pipes skirling again
To dance for me on Henderson's hill in the moonlight,
  Or cry in the fairy rain.

It's a kind green land at Doherty's Corner,
  And new, fair children frolic its hills upon;
But once…once in the years that are half forgotten…
  Once it was Avalon.

Marie Pitt died in 1948.

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May 21st: Dorothy Hewett

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May 22nd: Arthur Conan Doyle
  Frank Baker

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Christopher Fowler in *The Book of Forgotten Authors* writes, "Alfred Hitchcock had an eye for finding writers … whose material would work visually. But who wrote the story upon which he based his film *The Birds*? Before you say Daphne Du Maurier, consider this. Thirty years before Du Maurier's short story, Frank Baker wrote *The Birds*, in which London's inhabitants were mysteriously turned upon by avian predators. Although Baker's version was longer and much more ambitious, the stories are remarkably similar, and like Du Maurier, Baker was also living in

Cornwall. Du Maurier was also Baker's publisher's cousin, so it seems reasonable that she got to hear of the book."

Baker is remembered, if at all, for his book *Miss Hargreaves*. And it like all his work showed his fondness for the supernatural and the fantastic such as his early book *Stories of the Strange and Sinister*. Not that the old lady Miss Hargreaves was sinister but she *was* awkward.

"Always be careful, my boy, what you make up. Life's more full of things made up on the Spur of the Moment than most people realize. Beware of the Spur of the Moment. It may turn and rend you."

From *Miss Hargreaves*.

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May 23rd: Margaret Wise Brown
Margaret Fuller

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Edith Sitwell wrote a book she called *The English Eccentrics* and in it she placed an American, Margaret Fuller, though eccentric does not seem the right description of her. Sitwell begins her chapter on Fuller: "On a foggy evening in the month of October, 1846, had we peered through a window into the dining-room of a certain house in Chelsea, which was filled always with a shaggy Highland-cattle-like odour of homespun materials and by a Scotch mist of tobacco smoke, we might have seen a successful dinner-party in full blast. The host was Thomas Carlyle, the guest of honour an American lady of thirty-six, Miss Margaret Fuller, the author of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* and the first editor of *The Dial*.

"This chaste, passionate, and high-principled woman, at once splendid and ridiculous, was the direct outcome of the movement towards the Emancipation of Women, a movement in which learned, trousered and vivacious ladies like George Sand made presents of themselves with the same frequency, cheapness and indiscrimination as that with which other ladies present Christmas cards. This caused them to be collected with great eagerness by sex-snobs, who, unlike all other snobs, or collectors, prefer the ubiquitous to the rare.

"Miss Fuller's principles, but not her behaviour, were derived from ladies such as these, and her friend Mr. Emerson tells us that Margaret 'Was always a most earnest, devoted, champion of the Emancipation of Women, from their past and present condition of inferiority, to an independence on men. She demanded for them the fullest recognition of Social and Political Equality with the rougher sex; the freest access to all stations, professions, employments, which are open to men. To this demand I heartily acceded. It seemed to me however that her clear perceptions of abstract right were often overborne in practice by the influence of education and habit; that while she demanded absolute equality for women, she exacted a deference and courtesy from men to women, as women, which was entirely inconsistent with that requirement.'"

She presents Fuller as plain, talkative, sentimental, noble, silly, and ultimately sad. She says Fuller fell for several young men who battened on her, getting her to give them money, one of them dumping his dog and his guitar on her, then abandoning her for younger women. Then a slightly larger than life existence came to a tragic end. Sitwell writes, "Miss Fuller's life was one mass of symbolism; even the magnificent and tragic shipwreck with which her life, together with those of her young Italian husband and her baby boy ended, was symbolic. It is impossible not to feel an embarrassed sympathy, and a kind of affection for her, since the whole record of her life leaves us with the impression of a certain nobility and uprightness, blurred over by an overheated nervous sensibility masquerading as imagination. She had a certain non-productive intellect, and considerable rectitude, but these qualities were balanced, to some degree, by her almost incomparable silliness. As in the case of nearly all remarkable women, opinions were strongly divided about her, and one hostile biographer exclaimed that her writing was 'a striking illustration

of the propensity of all strong-minded ladies to Monster Nothings'. Miss Fuller took an untiring interest in everything and everybody, including herself, and wrote that 'mine is a large, rich, but unclarified nature. My history presents much superficial temporary tragedy. The woman in me kneels and weeps in tender rapture, the man in me rushes forth, but only to be baffled.'

"Alas, this was only too true, and when Miss Fuller enquired of herself and of others: 'Who may understand me?' the answer was 'None'."

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May 24th: Mary Grant Bruce
THE HORSE

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"It may be interesting to note that the earliest known written literature of the horse is believed to come from Mesopotamia, the Hittite "Handbook for the Treatment of the Horse," which appeared inscribed on six clay tablets about 1360 B.C. The book deals with the care of the horse used for war and racing chariots. When one considers the labour involved in the production of such a work, the interest taken in the horse even then must have been great indeed."

The Observer's Book of Horses and Ponies by R. S. Summerhays.

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May 25th: Ralph Waldo Emerson
Raymond Carver
Lord Beaverbrook

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May 26th: Denis Florence MacCarthy
Edmond Goncourt

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"There are two great currents in the history of humanity: baseness, which makes conservatives; and envy, which makes revolutionaries."

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt in their *Journals*. They obviously did not have a high opinion of humanity.

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May 27th: Rachel Carson
Arnold Bennett

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Arnold Bennett set *Anna of the Five Towns*, *The Grim Smile of the Five Towns*, *Tales of the Five Towns* and *The Matador of the Five Towns* in the pottery towns of Staffordshire. In *Anna* he wrote, "Bursley, the ancient home of the potter, has an antiquity of a thousand years. It lies towards the north end of an extensive valley, which must have been one of the fairest spots in Alfred's England, but which is now defaced by the activities of a quarter of a million of people. Five contiguous towns – Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, and Longshaw – united by a single winding thoroughfare some eight miles in length, have inundated the valley like a succession of great lakes. Of these five Bursley is the mother, but Hanbridge is the largest. They are mean and forbidding of aspect", what he calls "hard-featured, uncouth" and there is the ever-present pollution, "the vaporous poison of their ovens and chimneys has soiled and spoiled the surrounding country till there is no village lane within a league but what offers a gaunt and ludicrous travesty of rural charms." In fact there were six towns but perhaps he thought five sounded better. I know there were six because I came upon a biography of famous potter Clarice Cliff who grew up in one of them, Tunstall (Turnhill), and was fortunate to work in a pottery from an early age, first as a gilder then as a 'paintress' where her talent and imagination were noticed and encouraged and her bright exciting designs became immensely popular in the grey years of the Depression. Her biographer, Lynn

Knight, wrote, "Although Bennett wrote of 'Five Towns', there are actually six, which nowadays form the city of Stoke-on Trent. Tunstall, Burslem, Hanley, Stoke, Fenton and Longton comprise a straggling line, some eight miles in length, along the belt of coal and clay that gave rise to the industry for which the Potteries are named."

'Anna' is Anna Tellwright, daughter of the cranky miserly Ephraim Tellwright. Her life revolves round home and the Methodist chapel where she meets and eventually marries the handsome Henry Mynors who is involved in the pottery trade. He takes her to visit his works. "Contiguous with the printing-shop was the painting-shop, in which the labours of the former were taken to a finish by the brush of the paintress, who filled in outlines with flat colour, and thus converted mechanical printing into handiwork. The paintresses form the *noblesse* of the banks. Their task is a light one, demanding deftness first of all; they have delicate fingers, and enjoy a general reputation for beauty: the wages they earn may be estimated from their finery on Sundays. They come to business in cloth jackets, carry dinner in little satchels; in the shop they wear white aprons, and look startlingly neat and tidy. Across the benches over which they bend their coquettish heads gossip flies and returns like a shuttle; they are the source of a thousand intrigues, and one or other of them is continually getting married or omitting to get married. On the bank they constitute 'the sex.' An infinitesimal proportion of them, from among the branch known as ground-layers, die of lead-poisoning – a fact which adds pathos to their frivolous charm."

Henry is a 'good catch' but Anna finds him lacking in sympathy for those who are not successful. She cares for one of these, the bankrupted Willie Price, who goes to Australia never knowing she cares and dies there. Anna may not have the man she loved but her father and her husband have given her wealth and comfort.

Lynn Knight writes, "With success came the smoke for which the Potteries are famous and famously abused. One of their most vociferous complainants was Bernard Shaw who, on visiting Hanley in 1911 to lecture on socialism, was appalled by what he found there. Typically, Shaw did not mince his words: 'I have only been in the Potteries for a day – Hanley is a fearfully ugly place…How do you stand it? I suspect that the people of the Potteries are mad…I wanted to get into fresh air, but the more I went up the hill (to Hartshill) the worse the air got…I never used to believe what [Arnold Bennett] told me…I now understand why he lives most of his time in Paris.' "

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May 28th: Patrick White
Maeve Binchy

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Robert Fisk in one of his columns in *The Independent*, collected up as *The Age of the Warrior*, wrote, "And I remember with great fondness the long nights in Ireland when I was completing my PhD thesis (subject: Irish neutrality in the Second World War) at the window of a cottage immediately opposite another terraced home in which that most prolific of Irish writers, Maeve Binchy, was finishing her beautiful novel *Light a Penny Candle*. Like so much of Maeve's output, *Candle* was regarded as unworthy of serious critical attention, even though several scenes in the novel – the terrible moment, for example, when an Irish couple realise (while the reader does not) that their daughter has stolen from the local shop the Christmas present she is giving them – are Dickensian in their pathos. Yet Maeve is not placed alongside literary prizewinners like her much less read but near-neighbour novelist John Banville. Conversely, Banville – the man who once asked me to review the ghastly Ashrawi biography for the *Irish Times* – is not going to rake in the kind of profits that Maeve makes."

"They say that when beginning a story you should always try to catch people at some interesting juncture of their lives, like when they have to make a choice or a decision, or when

someone has betrayed them, or at the start or the end of love. It's better to come across them at some kind of crisis than in the middle of a long, lazy summer where nothing happens."

Maeve Binchy in *The Maeve Binchy Writers' Club*.

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May 29th: André Brink
G. K. Chesterton
T. H. White
Otto Spengler

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P. N. Furbank wrote *Italo Svevo: The Man and the Writer*. I hadn't heard of Svevo, pen name of Ettore Schmitz. But he was quite an interesting man. His Jewish father Francesco Schmitz was German and Italian and ended up in Trieste which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. He wanted his sons to go into business and Ettore spent much of his life in a company which made marine paint. But he began writing plays, articles, and 'animal fables' though he was in his late fifties before he published his novel *The Confessions of Zeno*. This was hardly reviewed in Italy but got some good publicity in France which helped to make his name. In the meantime he had sought out an English tutor to improve his English and the man he went to was James Joyce who had come to Trieste to teach at the Berlitz School there. Joyce went to Rome then returned to Trieste and set up as a private tutor. So was Joyce a good English teacher? It doesn't seem so. But it led on to a friendship between the two men. And as Joyce marked most of his relationships with family and friends by cadging money from them it wasn't long before he was touching Svevo for loans.

Furbank says, "Joyce got a great deal of his knowledge of Jewish customs from Svevo when creating Bloom. Svevo once said to Stanislaus: 'Tell me some secrets about Irishmen. You know your brother has been asking so many questions about Jews that I want to get even with him.' As we have seen, Stanislaus thought there were some traits of Svevo himself in Bloom." But it was a different character who owes something to Svevo or, more precisely, Svevo's wife Livia. "There was one authenticated borrowing from the Schmitzes, in that, according to Joyce, Livia gave her name and her magnificent golden hair to Anna Livia Plurabelle. It was a point Joyce was fond of referring to. He wrote to Svevo on the 20th February 1924 asking for permission to use Livia's hair … Livia agreed, after a little persuading, though she was disgusted when she later heard there were two washerwomen scrubbing dirty linen in the Liffey. In 1928 Svevo gave Joyce a portrait of her by his old friend Veruda, in which she has her hair down. Joyce remarked to a journalist: 'They say I have immortalised Svevo, but I've also immortalised the tresses of Signora Svevo. These were long and reddish-blond. My sister who used to see them let down told me about them. There is a river near Dublin which passes dye-houses and its waters are reddish, so I've enjoyed comparing these two things in the book I'm writing. A lady in it will have the tresses which are really Signora Svevo's.'"

Furbank says of his best known work *The Confessions of Zeno* (*La coscienza di Zeno*): "The outer plot of the novel portrays, or pretends to portray, a Freudian 'resistance' to psycho-analysis. The hero, a rich married man, living on the income of a family business which, by his dead father's express desire, he is allowed no hand in running, decides to fill his idleness with a course of psycho-analysis. As a preliminary to analysis, his doctor suggests he should try writing down his memories, and this he proceeds to do. He describes, in turn, his attempts to give up smoking, his father's death and death-bed curse, his marriage to Augusta Malfenti (how he proposed to each of the three Malfenti sisters on the same evening and was accepted by the one he didn't want), his infidelity (and how it fortified his marriage), and finally his business partnership, and the way in which, to his surprise, it earned him the reputation of a model son-in-law and successful man of business.

"The analysis itself, when it finally gets under way, is a fiasco, or so Zeno considers. Dr. S. keeps encouraging him to revive childhood memories, and he obeys, only soon he can't tell if he is remembering them or inventing them. The doctor explains to him that his smoking does him no harm, or wouldn't if he didn't want to believe it did—he is using it to punish himself for wanting to kill his father. Zeno goes home and smokes like a Turk for twenty-four hours, bringing on acute bronchitis; he doesn't know a moment's happiness till he has managed to reinstate smoking as a vice, and can resume his system of 'last cigarettes'. He finally decides to break off the analysis, but hasn't the courage to tell Dr.S., and so is unable to reclaim his manuscript memoirs; and the thwarted doctor, when he finally discovers he is to get no more fees, takes his revenge by publishing the memoirs (i.e. *La coscienza di Zeno*) himself."

And: "What makes Italo Svevo a major author is the generality and universality of his handling of disease. It should be remembered that the last two decades of the nineteenth century, with their preoccupation with the *mal du siècle*, marked a genuine historic crisis, one out of which psycho-analysis was born. The conviction that something was sick in the whole European society was as authentic as it was ill-defined and superstitious. It was Svevo's importance that he saw the dangers of any such conviction of disease. He perceived that it led either to a tragic and self-applauding embracing of disease—the enrolling of oneself in an élite of damned souls and 'superfluous men' or to the invoking of some violent brand of religious or racial revivalism (Bourget's 'barbarian invasion') as a medicine for the 'declining' West. His own lifework as a writer (and it was especially the task of a comic writer) was to show that if the *mal du siècle* were studied with genuine detachment it revealed itself neither as something to be proud of, as a distinguishing possession, nor ashamed of, as a symptom of degeneracy, but as something familiar and indistinguishable from life itself. It was restored to the order of nature."

The book which did most to foster this belief in a sick society was German historian Otto Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. But was it published before Svevo's novel? Yes. *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* came out in 2 volumes, in 1918 and 1922, and *La conscienza di Zeno* came out in 1923. But 'sick' isn't quite the right description for Spengler's image. The Encyclopedia Britannica said, "He believed that the West had already passed through the creative stage of "culture" into that of reflection and material comfort ("civilization" proper, in his terminology) and that the future could only be a period of irreversible decline."

Svevo was fluent in German so he very likely had read Spengler. But more problematic is that idea of 'a creative stage of culture'; not least because there doesn't seem to be any agreement on what is meant by culture. And would we subsume technological developments which have changed the ways we live, like computers, under 'culture'. But perhaps with so many commentators wanting to call the 21st century 'China's century' it might be time to go back and read Spengler.

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May 30th: Julian Symons

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May 31st: Judith Wright
Peter Fleming
Walt Whitman
Alexander Cruden

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If I had ever wondered who was the Cruden of Cruden's *Concordance* I would most likely have assumed he was an earnest nineteenth-century clergyman who devoted his life to studying the *Bible* and creating his *Concordance*. But then I came upon this line in Raymond Postgate's *That Devil Wilkes*, "The number 45, his symbol number, was chalked all over the city despite the efforts

of Alexander Cruden (of Cruden's *Concordance*), who followed the Wilkites about with a sponge, muttering to himself and rubbing out the figures that annoyed his poor crazy head." So clearly he belonged to the eighteenth century not the nineteenth. And was he a clergyman? And how did he come to have 'a poor crazy head'?

No, he was a bookseller rather than a clergyman. A Scot who came to London he set about in 1735 to compile his *Concordance* using the King James version of the *Bible*. "It has been called the largest task of manual compilation ever undertaken by one man." It was a truly remarkable achievement. Earlier concordances had been compiled in monastries. Later compilations, such as Samuel Johnson's dictionary, used a number of assistants. And when Cruden had finished he couldn't find anyone who would publish it so he published it himself. It was slow to find a market but when it came to a second edition George III gave Cruden a gift of £100. And it has never been out of print since.

Cruden did suffer bouts of mental illness. It isn't clear just what was wrong though he seemed to suffer some form of paranoia. Though he was committed to asylums several times he was gentle and harmless, occasionally pestering young women, but always kind and generous (though he didn't necessarily have the money he offered to give away) and managing to get a young sailor who had been wrongly accused freed. Perhaps more disconcerting than his awkwardness with women was his melancholy belief that he was called to be the moral 'Corrector' of the nation. There was undoubtedly a lot wrong in 18th century Britain, not least in its prisons and asylums, but people did not necessarily thank him for pointing out the nation's moral failures.

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June 1st: John Masefield

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June 2nd: Thomas Hardy

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June 3rd: Larry McMurtry
Rev. Sydney Smith

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Phillipa Pullar in *Consuming Passions* said of cleric, writer and gourmand the Reverend Sydney Smith: "Sydney Smith was quite untouched by any blight of appetite. He was a deliciously funny clergyman, with piercing eyes, prominent nose, a dazzling wit, and, as Hesketh Pearson said, was mentally of giant breed. He entered the Church because there was no alternative intellectual exercise available that could offer a career to a man of his means. He was often impoverished, loved by his parish and mingled a practical religion with a real enjoyment of life. Not for him any quibbling over the saying of grace such as Charles Lamb experienced: 'When I have sat at rich men's tables, with the savoury soup and messes steaming up the nostrils, and moistening the lips of guests with desire and a distracted choice, I have felt the introduction of that ceremony to be unreasonable. With the rapid orgasm upon you, it seems impertinent to interpose a religious sentiment. It is a confusion of purpose to mutter out praises from a mouth that waters.'

He was in his element before a well-furnished dining table, surrounded by good company. He once calculated he 'had eaten and drunk forty-four horse wagon-loads of meat and drink more than would have preserved me in life and health!' The value of the cart contents he put down to seven thousands pounds sterling. Like Miss Markham, one of the civilized circumstances of life, he believed, was a good host, such as Agar Ellis, who could mix up his guests at the table to a sparkling brew. 'That's the great use of a good conversational cook, who says to his company "I'll make a good pudding of you; it's no matter what you came into the bowl, you must come out a pudding".' Smith employed the food idiom freely when discussing matters of the day and his friends. Of Henry Kuttrell, a companion-wit who could make 'all the country smell like Piccadilly'

and who came for a day to test Mrs. Sydney's side dishes and stayed for a week, he wrote: 'He had not his usual soup-and-pattie look; there was a forced smile on his countenance which seemed to indicate plain roast and boiled, and a sort of apple-pudding depression as if he had been staying with a clergy-man…He was very agreeable, but spoke too lightly, I thought, of veal soup. I took him aside, and reasoned the matter with him, but in vain; to speak the truth Luttrell is not steady in his judgements on dishes. Individual failures with him too soon degenerate into generic objections, till, by some fortunate accident, he eats himself into better opinions. A person of more calm reflection thinks not only of what he is consuming at that moment, but of the soups of the same kind he had met with in a long course of dining, and which have gradually and justly elevated the species. I am perhaps making too much of this, but the failures of a man of sense are always painful.'

Sydney Smith's idea of life after death was both sensual and commonsense. Hell was to him a thousand years of tough mutton, or a little eternity of family dinners, while heaven was eating pâtés de foie gras to the sound of trumpets."

Did he share his meals with his poor parishioners? And was he very fat? It seems so. Harriet Martineau politely described him as 'stout'.

Serenely full, the Epicure would say:
'Fate cannot harm me: I have dined to-day.'
Rev. Sydney Smith

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June 4th: Elizabeth Jolley
Maurice Shadbolt

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June 5th: John Maynard Keynes
Adam Smith
Margaret Drabble
Federico Garcia Lorca

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"Words ought to be a little wild for they are the assault of thoughts on the unthinking."
J. M. Keynes.

Don Watson in *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* uses that quote and also says of Keynes, "In the modern public service, the career of John Maynard Keynes might have terminally stalled; not because he was a Keynesian in a non-Keynesian age, but because he wrote in a style that intelligent lay people understood, and even enjoyed. It is even possible that had he written as they write nowadays he would not have been able to think his way to a Keynesian position."

"John Maynard Keynes, thirty-one at the beginning of the war, (i.e. WWI) educated at Eton and Cambridge, briefly a civil servant, then a Cambridge don, was already marked as a young man of diverse interests and effective thought. (Doing badly on economic questions on his civil service examinations, he had observed, no doubt correctly, that his examiners obviously knew less of the subject that did he!) He spent the war in the British Treasury handling the varied problems having to do with conserving and allocating foreign exchange, principally dollars, for Britain's overseas purchases and negotiating on these matters with the French. His personal enthusiasm for the war was not great; some of his closest friends, the Bloomsbury group of which he was a slightly improbable member, were conscientious objectors. When he himself received a notice calling him to military service, he laid it aside as an error."

John Kenneth Galbraith in *The World Economy Since The Wars*.

Keynes is remembered for urging governments to spend their way out of the Great Depression rather than tightening their belts and closing their economies down; something which governments have now taken to heart, it seems. Galbraith, though, has a word of warning: "The point should be made more frequently: Keynes was a far better prophet for recession and depression than for prosperity and associated and often banal optimism. In both depression and prosperity, the singular feature of Keynesian fiscal policy would be the political power and mental rigidity of the forces with which it had to contend."

But, surprisingly, Keynes was not the first to suggest this way out. Galbraith writes, "A smaller and politically and socially much more benign attack on depression was that of Sweden. This too I saw at first hand as I came to know a remarkable group of Swedish economists—Gunnar Myrdal, Bertil G. Ohlin, Erik R. Lindahl, Erik Lundberg and Dag Hammarskjöld—who had broken with an earlier conservative tradition and concluded that mitigation of the depression's hardship and unemployment could come only from affirmative government action.

What they proposed, along with substantial currency devaluation, was government borrowing and public employment, with the promise of more conservative finance upon recovery. They believed in support of farm prices and a greatly strengthened social security system—old age pensions and unemployment compensation.

This program was carried into effect early in the decade of the 1930s, well before the word from Keynes. Nowhere else were economists so influential as to practical policy. Indeed, to a substantial extent, the Swedish economists, who were active in public affairs, *were* the policy makers. By the latter part of the decade the depression was over in Sweden because of their actions. From Keynes one had the theory; from the Swedes one had the intensely practical—and democratic—experience.

Nor did the Swedish recovery depend on armaments and war. Personal observation of what was being accomplished in that small country in this period was one of the most instructive and civilizing experiences an economist could have had. In a just world, reference would be not to the Keynesian but to the Swedish revolution."

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June 6th: Alan Seymour
Lesley Blanch
Thomas Mann
Isaiah Berlin

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Christopher Fowler in *The Book of Forgotten Authors* says of Lesley Blanch. "She also produced a cookbook, *Round the World in Eighty Dishes*, including a useful tip about what to do if you've over-salted a meal – add a potato." She is better known for her book *The Wilder Shores of Love* which probably encouraged the idea that Arab sheiks made very exciting husbands.

He also mentioned an author I had not come across, Philippa Pullar. He says of her, "In the seventies a number of authors began to take up their pens against the horrors of factory farming. Pullar's belief in the sanctity of animal life informed her first and greatest book, the uncategorizable *Consuming Passions: A History of English Food and Appetite*, published in 1970." He goes on to say, "she wrote of history of food like no other, incorporating such apparently unconnected subjects as phallicworship, cannibalism, agriculture, Roman mythology, wet nursing, prostitution, witchcraft, magic, aphrodisiacs and factory canning. Her chapters include 'Pudding, Pepys and Puritanism' and 'Culinary Erections'. Her style was scattergun and frequently hilarious, incorporating recipes, jokes, historical anecdotes and a persuasive explanation about why the English lost the art of cooking – an art still only in the early stages of revival.

"She explains how medieval cuisine was really Roman, and how spices like 'galingale, mace, cubebs and clove' were added after the Crusaders returned with Eastern influences. There are descriptions of dinner etiquette and the experience of table gatherings, the steaming trays of cranes and swans being served, the chamberpots being passed around, the men nodding off, the women stepping into the larder 'where the jars made a cold crack on the marble shelves as the potted meats, the confections and the pickles were taken up to admire and set down again'.

"*Consuming Passions* is not quite a history nor a cookery book, but a treatise on the art of taste, and is unique."

I came across *Consuming Passions* in an op-shop and thought she was at times more interested in sex than food. But I wondered what she was saying about cannibalism. In fact she merely devotes a paragraph to saying the Celtic Britons were cannibals before rushing on. Indeed, the book rather put me off food. But here are two little oddities you might enjoy:

"W. W. Skeat shows that 'lord' is a compound word deriving from 'loaf ward', meaning 'loaf keeper', 'master of the house', while 'lady' derives from 'loaf kneader', 'maker of bread'."

And "Sir Walter Raleigh's recipe for Sack Posset is as follows: Boil together half a pint of sherry and half a pint of ale, and add gradually a quart of boiling cream or milk. Sweeten the mixture well, and flavour with grated nutmeg. Put it into a heated dish, cover it over, and let it stand by the fire 2 or 3 hours." People took possets when they were unwell; I am not sure that this would help but you never know.

Since then I have been reading *Food: A Culinary History* in which Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massamo Montanari invited contributions from a number of writers. So did you know …

Florence Dupont wrote of the Roman world, "Hence to make a profit selling grain was frowned upon: wheat was exempted from the laws of the market, unlike foods regarded as luxury items. Grain had to be sold at cost or even distributed free of charge (the *annona* was a free annual grain distribution to Roman citizens, paid for out of public funds). The city did not, however, impose on itself a duty to feed the indigent one by one. In fact, the citizen-farmer remained the Roman ideal: every Roman was supposed to own enough land to supply his family's daily needs. Romans used the term *paupertas*, the root of our "poverty," to refer to this idea of self-sufficiency without excess." And Ewald Kislinger wrote "State control covered almost all basic Byzantine foodstuffs. It is significant that the term "meat" was limited to the flesh of pigs, sheep, and goats. Cattle did not provide meat but were regarded as working animals."

And I remember being told in primary school that spices were needed to preserve food. Hence the great voyages seeking a sea route to India. But this, says Jean-Louis Flandrin, was incorrect. "First of all, the substances used in the preservation of meat and fish were mainly salt, vinegar, and oil, not spices." This makes sense. Salt is a better preservative than any spice. And most people could not afford spices anyway. Nor did the Crusades encourage the use of spices as spices were already reaching Europe before the Crusades began. So what was the attraction of spices? "Traditionally, the word "spices" referred not to just any aromatic substance used in cooking but only to exotic substances imported from abroad. Many of these oriental imports were used for therapeutic purposes rather than cooking. All the spices used by cooks also had medical uses. … Every spice was supposed to possess analogous virtues. Not only were spices more commonly used for medicinal purposes than as condiments, but the former use also predated the latter historically. Bruno Laurioux has shown that every spice used in the medieval kitchen was originally imported as a medicine and only later employed as a seasoning."

And here is a recipe from history to try. 'Napoleon's Daily Salad'. "Soak and simmer 250 gr (8 oz) dried haricot beans in unsalted water with peppercorns, and bouquet garni and an onion. Drain them when they are cooked and mix them with:

A good handful of green herbs, chopped —
Salad burnet, chervil, tarragon, chives, parsley
6 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar
1 heaped teaspoon moutarde de maille
Salt, freshly ground pepper, pinch of sugar
Leave for a few hours, or overnight, for all the flavours to blend together "

I haven't tried it. But it sounds nourishing. And after all you need nourishment if you are going to invade Russia …

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June 7th: Elizabeth Bowen

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June 8th: Ivan Southall
Suharto

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I do apologise for inflicting a mass murderer on you but this snippet is about Suharto's religion, not his crimes. He gave lip service to Islam but he was a believer in the traditional religion of Java. Richard Lloyd Parry wrote *In the Time of Madness*: "In Yogyakarta, in the spring of 1998, a student at the university gave me a copy of the *Prelambang Jayabaya*, the greatest and most famous of the prophecies of ancient Java. King Jayabaya – or Joyoboyo, or Djajabaja, or Jaya Abhaya – lived in the twelfth century, and the verses which bear his name began to circulate six hundred years later. 'The Nostrodamus of Java,' said my student friend, whose name was Nuri. And sure enough, the prophecies of Jayabaya had the same vague yet nagging suggestiveness, which enabled people in every age to believe that they were witnessing their fulfillment.

One day shall come a cart without a horse,
An iron necklace will circle Java's shores,
Then shall a boat fly in the sky,
Then shall the river cease to flow:
And these shall be the signs that the time of
Jayabaya is at hand.

Cars, railways, aeroplanes, dams…Far from being welcome advances, to the Jayabaya poet these were omens of doom. The verses embodied a recurring theme in Javanese thinking, the belief that peace and prosperity, by their nature, could never last. If Europeans viewed history as progress, to Javanese it had always been a process of cyclical repetition. An Age of Gold was followed by an Age of Darkness, and then by another Age of Gold. Their alternation was inescapable, a principle of the universe more powerful than any man.

The poem described the disasters that beset the land during the Age of Darkness. Crops failed, bringing famines and epidemics. Pirates and brigands flourished. Violence and hardship forced entire populations out of their villages and on to the road. Unnatural and impious behaviour prevailed, between parents and children, men and women, the rulers and the ruled, even among animals.

The earth will shrink and every inch be taxed,
Horses will gorge themselves on chilli paste,
Women will dress themselves in clothes of men,
And these will be the signs that the world turns upside down.

The rains will fall out of their natural turn,
The corrupt will spend their fortunes lavishly,
The king who breaks his promise will lose power.

Then holy temples will be scorned with hate,
And persecution crush the innocent.
The pure of heart will with misfortune meet.
The ministers will become common men,
The little folk will rise up to be lords."

Parry also writes, "Suharto, it was said, used to slip away from Jakarta in his helicopter to meditate in the limestone caves on Central Java's Dieng Plateau. In 1974 he went there with the Australian prime minister, Gough Whitlam, of all Western leaders the one with whom he had the closest rapport. It was during this visit that Whitlam agreed to turn a blind eye to Indonesia's imminent invasion of East Timor; as a sign of his gratitude, Suharto took him into the Cave of Semar, sacred to Java's greatest native deity."

It is doubtful whether many Western politicians, including Whitlam, understood Suharto. But they gave him what he wanted; not least because of the labels they put on him including 'anti-communist'. But how did his Javanese beliefs play out in his actions? Brian May wrote in *The Indonesian Tragedy*, "The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 was joyfully welcomed in Java. For years faith had been growing in a prophecy that little yellow men from the north would free the land from the white man. The prophecy, although attributed to Jayabaya, appears to have originated in the first quarter of this century … The Dutch retaliated in broadcasts from America by quoting the version which predicted that the yellow men would depart after 'a year of corn'. Neither the Japanese nor the Dutch mentioned that Jayabaya had also prophesied that after the yellow interregnum the Javanese would rule themselves, free of all foreign oppression." Suharto was one of the young pro-Japanese soldiers and it didn't hurt his rising career. "In 1962 he had been entrusted with the task of driving the Dutch from New Guinea, a major operation with repercussions that led to tense meetings of the United Nations. At the time of the coup, he headed Kostrad (Strategic Reserve Command); troops under his orders were engaged in the confrontation with Malaysia." The bloody 1965 coup which probably took more than a million lives involved Suharto, but in ways that historians still debate. "Yet it is true that Suharto, once the initiative was securely in his hands, eased Sukarno from the presidency with incomparable Javanese finesse by means that passed for constitutional."

"One of Suharto's methods, which he continued to apply after taking power, was to launch an offensive that served a triple purpose: to test the ground, to advance just as far as was proved safe and to soften up for the next attack."

"As Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker) author of the Dutch classic novel, *Max Havelaar*, wrote: 'Serving his master is the *religion* of the Javanese.' Spiritual power itself is to most Javanese little more than a weapon, which may be acquired and used for either good or evil, which are seen to be co-existent."

Clifford Geertz in *The Religion of Java* divided the traditional religion of Java, though stressing the many conflicts and overlaps, into: "*Abangan*, representing a stress on the animistic aspects of the over-all Javanese syncretism and broadly related to the peasant element in the population; *santri*, representing a stress on the Islamic aspects of the syncretism and generally related to the trading element (and to certain elements in the peasantry as well); and *prijaji*,

stressing the Hinduist aspects and related to the bureaucratic element" and "The *abangan* religious tradition, made up primarily of the ritual feast called the *slametan*, of an extensive and intricate complex of spirit beliefs, and of a whole set of theories and practices of curing, sorcery, and magic" and "At the center of the whole Javanese religious system lies a simple, formal, undramatic, almost furtive, little ritual: the *slametan* (also sometimes called a *kendurèn*). The *slametan* is the Javanese version of what is perhaps the world's most common religious ritual, the communal feast, and, as almost everywhere, it symbolizes the mystic and social unity of those participating in it." "A young carpenter, rather more systematic about such things than Javanese generally are, told me that there were three main kinds of spirits: *memedi* (literally, frighteners), *lelembut* (literally, ethereal ones), and *tujul*." These are spirit children. "If spirit beliefs and *slametans* are two of the most general subcategories of *abangan* religion, the complex of curing, sorcery, and magic centering around the role of the *dukun* makes up a third." And over everyone and everything is Semar, the guardian spirit of Java. "There are numerous versions of the Javanese creation myth, *Babad Tanah Djawi*" and in one of them Semar says, "I am not a man, I am the guardian spirit—the *danjang*—of Java. I am the oldest spirit of Java, and I am the king and ancestor of all spirits, and through them of all men."

Out of all the complexities two strands can be plucked: the belief in harmony and in reciprocity.

Unlike the Judeo-Christian idea of good defeating evil the Javanese believe in bringing them into balance, placating the evil spirits sometimes through the use of *dukuns* who might be wise elders, sorcerers, prophets, or simply people with some medical knowledge, but accepting of the constant see-saw of good and bad cycles. Suharto certainly never acknowledged any wrongdoing or expressed remorse for anything he did, seeming to believe that he was simply bringing his world back into balance. And he seems to have felt (though I can only guess at his thinking) that reciprocity was fulfilled when he wined and dined western leaders and gave them access to Indonesia's resources—and therefore they should respond, not with talk about human rights abuses, but with respect, sympathy, and gratitude.

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June 9th: E. M. Delafield

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For a long time I got E. M. Delafield and R. F. Delderfield mixed up but I finally found that Delafield was a woman and Delderfield a man. And Delderfield wrote the famous trilogy *A Horseman Riding By*. So what did Delafield write? Her writing is called semi-autobiographical and her best-known book *Diary of a Provincial Lady*. But perhaps it is understandable to link them and confuse them because they were both drawing on that world, the middle class provincial world of England in the 1920s and 1930s.

But she also intriguingly wrote *I Visit the Soviets* (1937). This has the sub-title *The Provincial Lady in Russia* and was not written because she was a 'fellow traveller' but rather because her editor suggested it. Her editor apparently believed that it would be amusing to place the Provincial Lady on a collective farm. It probably was, provided it was a peaceful well-stocked collective and not a place of hunger and oppression. Though the blurb does suggest she had a lot of mud to contend with …

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June 10th: Saul Bellow
Terence Rattigan

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June 11th: Anna Akhmatova
Athol Fugard
Helen Cameron

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June 12th: Brigid Brophy
Harriet Martineau

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June 13th: William Butler Yeats
Fanny Burney
Whitley Strieber
Dorothy Sayers

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In the *The Abduction Enigma* by Randle, Estes and Cone, William Cone writes, "I was walking through a bookstore when a strange picture caught my eye. It was the cover of a new book called *Communion*. Mesmerized by those huge black eyes of the creature on the jacket, I bought the book immediately, hurried home, and read it cover to cover."

The book goes on to say, "The most popular of those writing about alien abduction, or claiming to have been abducted, is Whitley Strieber, who was a bestselling author before he began to write about abductions. His earlier books included *The Hunger* and *The Wolfen*, both of which were made into movies."

Streiber went to law school in Texas but dropped out and went to Europe before settling in New York to begin writing. He then believed he had been abducted by aliens. "He wrote *Communion* and then *Transformation*, which told of his encounters. He also wrote *Majestic*, a novel that dealt, in part, with the Roswell, New Mexico, UFO crash in 1947."

I was interested to find Strieber's novel *The Omega Point* in the library. This is an End of the World story, not an alien abduction story. Though it could be argued that if we destroy this planet we might be glad to be abducted by aliens. He expresses his philosophy as: "It is incredibly freeing to know—as, in my heart, I do—that human life is indeed part of a vast continuum of consciousness that persists after death, and that is woven into the extraordinary glory that is intelligent life in the universe."

Aliens were very good for his writing career but the authors conclude that alien abductions are not happening. Still, science fiction writers' stock-in-trade is to tell a good story with lip service paid to science. The authors say, "Science fiction has been an important part of pop culture since Hugo Grensback introduced it to American society in the 1920s. Grensback's idea was to sugarcoat science so that the young would be interested in it. He envisioned it as a way of teaching science to those who weren't interested in learning science. He wanted it to bubble through society, through our collective conscious.

"Frederick Pohl, a science fiction writer of the first rank, has said that in 1945, when the detonation of the atomic bomb was announced, there were two thousand scientists who comprehended the situation….And maybe five hundred thousand science fiction readers who understood it. Science fiction was teaching us all about science."

Science fiction mixes science and pseudo-science and maybe-possible-science. It is there to be enjoyed and discussed. It doesn't require that its readers believe every concept though some probably do … William Burroughs wrote, "After reading *Communion* and *Breakthrough* by Whitley Strieber, I became seriously interested in alien landings and abductions. I visited him and spent a weekend at his cabin. After talking with him and his secretary and reading the *Communion Newsletters*, I was convinced that the aliens, or whatever they are, are a real phenomenon. The abductions, in several accounts, involved sexual contacts. Indeed, that would seem to be their purpose."

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June 14th: Harriet Beecher Stowe

Jorge Luis Borges (d)

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"No body of literary work, however rich and accomplished it may be, is without its dark side. In the case of Borges, his writing sometimes suffers from a certain cultural ethnocentricity. The black, the Indian, the primitive often appear in his stories as inferiors, wallowing in a state of barbarity apparently unconnected either to the accidents of history or to society but inherent in their race or cultural status. They represent a lower humanity shut off from what Borges considered the greatest of all human qualities: intellect and literary refinement. None of this is explicitly stated, and doubtless it was not even conscious; rather, it shows through in the slant of a certain sentence, or in his depiction of a particular form of behaviour."

Mario Vargas Llosa in *Wellsprings*.

I had thought that Borges died in Buenos Aires but no. Alberto Manguel in *Packing My Library* writes, "Jorge Luis Borges died in Geneva at 7:47 a.m., on 14 June 1986. As a special favor, the Administrative Council of Geneva decided to grant him permission to be buried in the cemetery of Plainpalais, reserved for the great and famous Swiss, since Borges had often spoken of Geneva as "my other homeland." In memory of Borges's grandmothers, one Catholic and the other Protestant, the service was read by Father Pierre Jacquet and Pastor Edouard de Montmollin. Pastor Montmollin's address judiciously opened with the first verse of the Gospel of John. "Borges," said Pastor Montmollin, "was a man who unceasingly searched for the right word, the term that would sum up the whole, the final meaning of things," and went on to explain that, as the Good Book taught us, a man can never reach that word by his own efforts. As John made clear, it is not we who discover the Word, but the word that reaches us. Pastor Montmollin summed up precisely Borges's literary credo: the writer's task is to find the right words to name the world, knowing all the while that these words are, as words, unreachable. Words are our only tools both to lend and to recover meaning and, at the same time, they allow us to understand that meaning, they show us that it lies precisely beyond the pale of words, just on the other side of language. Translators, perhaps more than any other wordsmiths, know this: whatever we build out of words can never seize in its entirety the desired object. The Word that is in the beginning names but can never be named.

"Throughout his life, Borges explored and tried out this truth. From his first readings in Buenos Aires to the final writings dictated on his deathbed in Geneva, every text became, in his mind, proof of this literary paradox of being named without quite naming anything into being. Ever since his adolescence, something in every book he read seemed to escape him, like a wayward monster, promising, however, a further page, a greater epiphany at the next reading. And something in every page he wrote forced him to confess that the author was not the ultimate master of his own creation, of his Golem. This double bind, the promise of revelation that every book grants its reader and the warning of defeat that every book gives its writer, lends the literary act its constant fluidity."

And it begs the question: did Borges have no religious beliefs of his own or was he hoping, in death, to please both sides of his family?

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June 15th: Thomas Randolph

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June 16th: Joyce Carol Oates
Katharine Graham
Ottoline Morrell

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Katharine Graham inherited her family's newspaper, *The Washington Post*, when her husband committed suicide, and ran it for thirty years. She also wrote an autobiography which she

called *Personal History*. She gives plenty of space to Watergate but she doesn't mention what was probably one of the most challenging decisions she had to make at the *Post*: whether to publish the FBI files stolen by a group of anti-war activists who were never apprehended. Betty Medsger sets the scene in her *The Burglary: The Discovery of J. Edgar Hoover's Secret FBI*, a detailed account of how the burglary was planned and carried out.

"Hoover played major public and major private roles in the anticommunism movement. Publicly, he was the ringmaster of the movement, much more so than Senator Joseph McCarthy, whose name is most frequently connected to anticommunism. In fact, Hoover provided McCarthy much, if not most, of the material McCarthy used as the basis of his reckless investigations. Hoover wrote books and articles and gave speeches on communism, and he advised the powerful House of Un-American Activities Committee to expose communists and communist sympathizers, "fellow travelers," and liberals, who he often said were more dangerous than communists. He gave HUAC that advice in a major speech, known as the "Communist Menace" speech, on March 26, 1947.

In that speech, Hoover prescribed the pattern for how alleged communists and others should be rooted out. He urged HUAC to publicly "expose" communists and other people whose politics were suspect. Exposure by HUAC, he said, would lead the public to "quarantine" such people in their communities. Indeed, that is what happened.

Hoover's two-punch plan – "expose' and "quarantine" – was carried out repeatedly throughout the country by HUAC and state and education committees in what Victor Navasky, former editor of the *Nation*, astutely described as "degradation ceremonies."

The job of HUAC and the other "shaming" groups, Navasky wrote in *Naming Names*, "was not to legislate or even to discover subversives – that had already been done by the intelligence agencies and their informants – so much as it was to stigmatize."

Hoover's major private role in the anticommunism movement included giving HUAC the FBI's unverified surveillance files to use as the basis of its hearings in Washngton and around the country. Those unverified FBI files were the basis of most efforts throughout the country – in federal, state, and local government agencies; in universities; in public school boards; in businesses and other private organizations – that led to the public humiliation and dismissal of thousands of people from their jobs during the anticommunist era. The accused were not permitted to face their accusers or defend themselves.

HUAC and other agencies "exposed" people by using the unverified FBI files. Often the accused were, as Hoover predicted would happen, quarantined. People who refused to testify were found in contempt, and some of them were imprisoned. Many lost their jobs or were shunned in their workplaces and communities. The accused had no access to the secret FBI files used to condemn them.

In addition to placing himself in charge of searching for Americans who had suspect political opinions during the anticommunist years, and turning their names over to the various agencies that then exposed them to public scorn and loss of employment, Hoover played another very important role during this era. As the fiery prophet of anticommunism, he contributed significantly to shaping the national narrative on anticommunism. He did so in ways that made Americans deeply fearful, and, ironically, at the same time contributed significantly to Americans being intellectually defenseless against communism. His rhetoric often consisted of raw hatred of communism and of the Soviet Union. He encouraged blind, religious allegiance to the hatred, but he imparted little or no understanding of the ideology and its history. Consequently, average Americans tended to rely on the warnings Hoover preached repeatedly. As a result, if a serious communist threat had in fact developed in the United States, many, if not most, Americans would have been inadequately equipped to understand or oppose it. He drummed up fear and convinced

people the FBI would get rid of the enemies that, he said, were penetrating the country's major institutions, even elementary and high schools."

"Anyone could become a target of the FBI's political operations, but files suggest that intellectuals were among Hoover's chief targets – professors, artists, scientists, clergy. To be an intellectual, like being black, was to be regarded as a potential subversive, if not an active one. The director's wide brush rather than precise approach to investigations and to intelligence gathering is indicative of how the bureau monitored intellectuals of various kinds. Files were maintained on nearly all well-known writers and artists. Reading a list of writers who were in the FBI's files gives the impression that all the leading writers were there. To name a few: Sinclair Lewis, Pearl S. Buck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, Thomas Mann, Carl Sandburg, Dashiell Hammett, Truman Capote, Thornton Wilder, Lillian Hellman, Robert Frost, Graham Greene, Hannah Arendt. It is an endless roll call of the best novelists, non-fiction writers, poets, essayists, and playwrights, including Nobel laureates. Science fiction writers, including Ray Bradbury, also were regarded with suspicion and placed in the files. So were some publishers, including Alfred A. Knopf. His file was active for forty years primarily because of FBI interest in the authors Knopf published, some of whom Hoover considered subversive. … A wide array of scientists, including Albert Einstein, were monitored."

"His reported lack of reading may explain why he did not recognize the name of one of the most best known authors in the world." (He had asked who Jean-Paul Sartre was.) "It was widely believed inside the bureau that he did not read even "his" books, the ones written under his name by ghostwriters. It is stunning that such a person presumed he was capable of branding writers as subversive, let alone that it was legal for him to do so."

"As Katharine Graham and the *Post's* lawyer struggled with the ethical and legal implications of publishing the secrets revealed in the stolen documents, no one at the *Post* realized the attorney general was bluffing when he repeatedly and forcefully urged the *Post* not to publish. He had used strong language – "could endanger lives" – in those conversations. That he had neither read nor been briefed on the stolen files was not known until exchanges between the Department of Justice and FBI officials, part of the official record of the investigation of the burglary, were made available to me by the FBI years later in response to a Freedom of Information Act request.

It was clear that the stolen files contained no information about national defense and that public knowledge of their contents could not endanger national security. Given the nature of the documents and the unusual way I had received them – stolen FBI files mailed by burglars who had stolen them – we of course carefully considered the ethical and legal issues involved in reporting on their contents. The impact of the attorney general's claims may have been diminished somewhat by the fact that he and other Nixon administration officials often had claimed that stories endangered national security. That threat had become a preferred Nixon administration means of trying to intimidate journalists from reporting information the administration wanted to keep secret. The threat was seldom, if ever, made because the story in question actually endangered national security. Usually it was made because the stories aired deception, wrongdoing, or other secret information the Nixon administration did not want the public to know. To be fair, the attempt to use vague but threatening national security claims to suppress stories had been used before Nixon was president and has been used since that time by nearly every administration … The question of whether to publish the stolen files presented Graham with an unprecedented challenge. It was the first time a journalist had been given secret government documents by sources from outside government who had stolen the documents. Throughout history, inside whistleblowers have leaked classified

information to journalists, but never had people not employed by the government stolen secret government records and given them to a journalist. Less than two years later, journalist Les Whitten, a colleague of investigative columnist Jack Anderson, would become the second journalist to receive secret government documents from a nongovernment source who had stolen the documents. The documents he received were stolen by activists who temporarily occupied the Washington headquarters of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Whitten was arrested by the FBI and charged with possessing stolen government documents, charges that were later dropped.

For *Post* editors, the responsibility to reveal this information to the public far outweighed concern about how it had become available to us – as the fruit of a burglary. How could we not publish this information? It was important for people to have access to evidence – no matter how we had acquired it – that the FBI, under Hoover's leadership, engaged in practices that had never been reported, probably were unconstitutional, and were counter to the public's understanding of Hoover and the FBI. The publisher did not agree.

As I wrote the story, I did not know that a different rationale was prevailing at the highest level of the newspaper. Throughout the day, as I wrote and called people who were named in the files – none of whom I had known as sources when I worked as a reporter in Philadelphia – top *Post* editors, Graham, and the company's legal counsel debated whether to publish. Not until I submitted the story close to the 6 p.m. deadline did I learn there was a possibility the story would not be published. Graham and the company's legal counsel opposed publication, primarily on the grounds that reporting on secret files that had been stolen had never been done before and was likely to be considered highly questionable ethically and legally. During the debate, Bradlee and Bagdikian continued to make the case that the significance of the information was such that it should be published, no matter who the source was. The debate continued until 10 p.m., when Graham agreed to publish."

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June 17th: Henry Lawson

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June 18th: Gail Godwin

Fernão Mendes Pinto (birthdate not known)

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In 1544 a battered Portuguese ship fetched up on the coast of Japan in the fiefdom of Bungo. It was the first time Europeans had reached Japan and both sides were astonished by the other and had no idea of language or etiquette. Giles Milton in *Samurai William* says, "There was never any doubt as to which of the three Portuguese men would go to meet the lord of Bungo. Fernao Mendes Pinto, a garrulous adventurer, was immediately selected by the port's governor, who chose him because Pinto was 'of a more lively humour, wherewith those of Japan are infinitely delighted, and may thereby cheer up the sick man'. His lively humour would, he explained, 'entertain his melancholy, instead of diverting it'.

"Indeed it would. Pinto was an adventurer extraordinaire – an outlandish *fidalgo* or nobleman – whose flamboyant costume hinted at the colourful persona beneath. He was a perennial romantic, a collector of yarns, who had left Portugal more than six years earlier in search of the bizarre and the absurd. When, many years later, he came to write up his travels, he gave his book an irresistible puff on the title page: '[I] five times suffered shipwrack, was sixteen times sold, and thirteen times made a slave'.

"His book, *Peregrinaçam*, or *Peregrination*, is packed with incident and high adventure, mostly involving the intrepid author. He wrote it for his family and friends, but it was soon printed and became a best-seller. It should have come with a cautionary note: Pinto was a plagiarist who thought nothing of passing off other men's exploits as his own, He claimed to have been the first

European to reach Japan, yet it is now known – as he himself knew – that a handful of shipwrecked mariners had been washed up there the previous year. Pinto altered dates, borrowed stories and exaggerated his own bravado in order to make his tales more entertaining. Yet there is much that is true in his account of Japan. He certainly did sail to Bungo with his countryman, Jorge de Faria, and his information on the Japanese coastline is largely correct. So, too, are the incidents that occurred during his time in the fiefdom, for they can be verified from other sources. The feudal lord's son, Otomo Yoshishige, later recounted a strikingly similar tale to a Japanese chronicler, who recorded it. The English translator of Pinto's book was not altogether wrong when he wrote that 'no man before him…hath spoken so much and so truly of those oriental parts of the world.'"

His book *Peregrinação* was translated into English in 1663 as *The Voyages and Adventures*. But it was when he was asked to cure the feudal lord of gout and stomach troubles that he faced his first difficult test. He infused a wood from his ship into water and gave the brew to the lord and in thirty days the man was better. I wonder what the wood was? The Portuguese had also brought guns which the Japanese had never seen and Pinto told the lord that the Portuguese king had "approximately 2 million gunners at his disposal". Unfortunately the lord's son sneaked in at night to steal and test one of these weapons. The gun, improperly loaded, exploded, and Pinto was arrested. He was told to bring the lord's son back to life or else—

"The young Yoshishige looked as if he was beyond repair. He had collapsed on the floor, 'weltering in his own blood, without stirring either hand or foot'. But a cursory examination convinced Pinto that the wounds were not as serious as the assembled courtiers believed. The gash on his forehead looked terrible, but was actually 'of no great matter', while the thumb, which was hanging from its tendons, could probably be saved. 'Now, because the hurt of the right hand thumb was most dangerous,' wrote Pinto, 'I began with that, and gave it seven stitches.' His handiwork was clumsy and the wound continued to ooze blood, so he applied a more traditional salve – 'the whites of eggs…as I had seen others done in the Indies'. The cure worked. The blood clotted, the prince regained consciousness and he began to recover. Within twenty days, he was completely better 'without any other inconvenience remaining in him than a little weakness in his thumb'. The new technology – Pinto's muskets and arquebuses – had proved their deadly effect, and their future in Japanese warfare was guaranteed. Within a few months of the accident, local armourers were busy making copies of the weapons."

"Pinto survived his time in Japan by a mixture of bluff, bravado and cheery good humour." And some good sense in the face of medical emergencies! Pinto eventually came home to Portugal and died there on the 8th July 1583.

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June 19th: Salman Rushdie

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"It is well known that the term 'Pakistan', an acronym, was originally thought up in England by a group of Muslim intellectuals. P for the Punjabis, A for the Afghans, K for the Kashmiris, S for Sind and the 'tan', they say, for Baluchistan. (No mention of the East Wing, you notice; Bangladesh never got its name in the title, and so, eventually, it took the hint and seceded from the secessionists. Imagine what such a double secession does to people!) – So it was a word born in exile which then went East, was borne-across or trans-lated, and imposed itself on history; a returning migrant, settling down on partitioned land, forming a palimpsest on the past. A palimpsest obscures what lies beneath. To build Pakistan it was necessary to cover up Indian history, to deny that Indian centuries lay just beneath the surface of Pakistani Standard Time. The past was rewritten; there was nothing else to be done.

"Who commandeered the job of rewriting history? – The immigrants, the *mohajirs*. In what language? – Urdu and English, both imported tongues, although one travelled less distance than the

other. It is possible to see the subsequent history of Pakistan as a duel between two layers of time, the obscured world forcing its way back through what-had-been-imposed. It is the true desire of every artist to impose his or her vision on the world; and Pakistan, the peeling, fragmenting palimpsest, increasingly at war with itself, may be described as a failure of the dreaming mind. Perhaps the pigments used were the wrong ones, impermanent, like Leonardo's; or perhaps the place was just *insufficiently imagined*, a picture full of irreconcilable elements, midriffbaring immigrant saris versus demure, indigenous Sindhi shalwar-kurtas, Urdu versus Punjabi, now versus then: a miracle that went wrong."

Salman Rushdie in *Home*. When someone says something I didn't know was 'well known' I am always reminded of my ignorance. More importantly, was the decision to create Pakistan the only realistic option or would some other way have been better?

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June 20th: Lillian Hellman

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June 21st: Jean-Paul Sartre
Clive Sansom
Patricia Wrightson

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June 22nd: Erich Maria Remarque
Wilhelm von Humboldt
H. Rider Haggard
Alan Seager

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Andrea Wulf writing about Alexander von Humboldt in *The Invention of Nature* also has this to say about his brother Wilhelm. "Wilhelm's passion was languages. As a boy he had lost himself in Greek and Roman mythology. Throughout his career, Wilhelm had used every diplomatic posting to learn more languages, and Alexander had also supplied him with notes on indigenous Latin American vocabulary – including copies of Inca and pre-Inca manuscripts. Just after Alexander's return from his expedition, Wilhelm had spoken of the 'mysterious and wonderful inner connection of all languages'. For decades Wilhelm had keenly felt his lack of time to investigate the subject, but now he had the leisure to do so. Within six months of his retirement, he had given a lecture at the Academy of Sciences in Berlin about comparative language studies.

Much as Alexander looked at nature as an interconnected whole, so Wilhelm too was examining language as a living organism. Language, like nature, Wilhelm believed, had to be placed in the wider context of landscape, culture and people. Where Alexander searched for plant groups across continents, Wilhelm investigated language groups and common roots across nations. Not only was he learning Sanskrit, but he also studied Chinese and Japanese as well as Polynesian and Malayan languages. For Wilhelm this was the raw data he needed for his theories, just like Alexander's botanical specimens and meteorological measurements.

Though the brothers worked in different disciplines, their premises and approaches were similar. Often, they even used the same terminology. Where Alexander had searched for the formative drive in nature, Wilhelm now wrote that 'language was the formative organ of thoughts'. Just as nature was so much more than the accumulation of plants, rocks and animals, so language was more than just words, grammar and sounds. According to Wilhelm's radical new theory, different languages reflected different views of the world. Language was not just a tool to express thoughts but it shaped thoughts – through its grammar, vocabulary, tenses and so on. It was not a mechanical construct of individual elements but an organism, a web that wove together action,

thought and speaking. Wilhelm wanted to bring everything together, he said, into an 'image of an organic whole', just like Alexander's *Naturgemälde*. Both brothers were working on a global level."

Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote:

"The *natural disposition* to language is universal in man, and everyone must possess the key to the understanding of all languages".

David Cogswell writing of Noam Chomsky said, "Chomsky found in Humboldt an affinity in both political ideas and linguistic ideas. He credits Humboldt with having a concept similar to Chomsky's generative grammar. But Humboldt lacked the mathematical techniques for developing it." ("Chomsky determined that there is a universal grammar which is part of the genetic birthright of human beings, that we are born with a basic template for language that any specific language fits into. This unique capacity for language is, as far as we know, unique to the human species and ordinary use of language is evidence of tremendous creative potential in every human being.")

"Chomsky called Humboldt…"One of the most profound theorists of general linguistics and an early and forceful advocate of libertarian values."

"John Stuart Mill's essay "On Liberty" began with a quote of the "leading principle" of Humboldt's thought: "the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity." Humboldt concludes his critique of the authoritarian state by saying: "I have felt myself animated throughout with a sense of the deepest respect for the inherent dignity of human nature, and for freedom, which alone befits that dignity." "

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June 23rd: Frank Dalby Davidson
Winifred Holtby

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June 24th: Ambrose Bierce
Walter Stone

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Walter Stone was a great collector of books, particularly early Australian writing. His second wife, Jean Stone, wrote his biography *The Passionate Bibliophile* in which she quotes him as saying: "I can remember in 1945 coming across a copy of the first novel published in New South Wales; not the first in Australia, that was published in Hobart. The one I found was *The Guardian* by 'An Australian'. Who the Australian was, nobody knew. I set to work to find out; I failed. I wrote to libraries all over the world, even the Mitchell Library in Scotland. We failed to track it down but four years ago Gwendoline Wilson Ewens was working in Canberra, writing a history of a well-known Australian family, and she came across the author of *The Guardian*—a woman; we always thought it was a woman. She was Mrs Anna Maria Bunn, the aunt of Gilbert and Hubert Murray, the famous Australian scholar and the famous Australian proconsul in Papua-New Guinea.

"This is how things are discovered and does it matter? You might argue does it matter or not but surely everything in the Australian context, in the big Australian picture, matters. Mrs Bunn never let on until she was eighty; she told her son who left a note saying his mother was the author. It's a remarkably scarce item but then I'm an old-time book collector and picked these things up in the days when some people didn't realise they were worth anything. I must have written to a hundred libraries all over the world. The British Museum wrote back and said, 'we have no copy but we'd be pleased to have one if you have it to spare.'

"It does matter and how interesting to know that Anna Maria Bunn belonged to a family that was to write its name in big letters in the Australian national tradition … And this lady wrote this book, this horrible novel. It was a Gothic novel in the best Gothic tradition … It was one of those

novels with no Australian context whatever except to perpetuate that famous libel which was continued right through the nineteenth century, about our songless birds and scentless flowers. It was set in Southern Ireland and in Italy and there was everything that goes to make a first class Gothic novel. There's incest, there's rape, there's every damn thing and to cap it all a brother marries his sister; she really poured it on. They have a baby and the sad, horrible truth comes out and one day they go down to the Adriatic Sea and they jump in. After all, crime doesn't pay even if you don't know it's a crime but never mind, this was the context of a very finely produced novel, a well-printed novel, printed not a quarter of a mile from where we are now, in the Rocks area, Jamieson Street, 1838, and that's the first novel printed in Sydney.

"What I'm trying to come up to is that we have such a short history, just over 130 years, and that covers the history of fiction in New South Wales. So surely it's worth our while to set to work now to find out the history of books. If *The Guardian* had been the second novel published in New South Wales nobody would have read it. It has historical value by virtue of being first past the post. The collectors value it and no collection of Australian fiction is complete without it. And so the value of the book goes up and up and the literary content of it goes down and down as more people read it and realise just what sort of novel it was."

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June 25th: George Orwell

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George Orwell wrote: "Writing a book is a horrible, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness".

Quite a few writers seem to want you to pity them. I am not sure why. Would they prefer to kill animals in an abattoir or make ammonia in a chemical factory or sew clothes in a sweat shop? Probably not. Or they would have gone and done so. And I have never heard of people being told: 'If you don't take this writing job you will lose your Centrelink benefits.' Writing is many things but no one is whipped till they agree to sit down at their keyboard …

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June 26th: Pearl Buck
Colin Wilson
'Seely Regester' (Metta Victor) (d)

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"Under the name Seely Regester, Metta Victor published the first American detective novel by a woman, *The Dead Letter* (1867), a full decade before Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), the book to which that honor is often attributed. Regester wrote several other books, beginning with a lost world novel, *The Last Days of Tul: A Romance of the Lost Cities of the Yucatan* (1846), published when she was fifteen years old. She went on to be a prolific dime novelist, but her one claim to fame was forgotten."

The Encyclopedia of Murder and Mystery by Bruce F. Murphy.

"The first full-length detective novel written by a woman was *The Dead Letter: An American Romance* (New York, Beadle & Co, 1867) by Seely Regester published in 1867. This was the pen name of Metta Victoria Victor, whose husband Orville, is amongst the many credited with inventing, in 1867, the 'dime' novel or 'yellowback', which was the forerunner to the pulps."

David Latta in *Sand on the Gumshoe*.

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June 27th: Lafcadio Hearn
Paul Laurence Dunbar
Emma Goldman

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"History tells us that every oppressed class gained true liberation from its masters through its own efforts. It is necessary that woman learn that lesson, that she realize that her freedom will reach as far as her power to achieve her freedom reaches."

Emma Goldman on 'Women's Suffrage' in *Anarchism and Other Essays*.

I remember someone telling me how much she admired Emma Goldman. I didn't know who Goldman was so I didn't say anything. In fact, she was Jewish, born in Lithuania, emigrated to the United States where she got into trouble for advocating violence as necessary to change and, later, for opposing the USA's entry into the First World War. She was deported to Russia in 1919 where she was not impressed by what she saw. She eventually returned to North America and died in Canada. She wrote her autobiography, *Living My Life*, including her long support for feminism and anarchism. She also, unexpectedly, was a passionate lover of European playwrights such as Ibsen and wanted to see their plays available to theatregoers in North America. She promoted them in her book *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama* which she brought out in 1914.

So next time someone mentions Emma Goldman I will be able to nod sympathetically and knowledgeably.

"True emancipation," said Emma Goldman firmly, "begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in a woman's soul." Quoted in Margaret Forster's *Significant Sisters*.

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June 28th: Luigi Pirandello
Eric Ambler

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"My work on my next film, *As You Desire Me*, went on simultaneously with *Grand Hotel*. Pirandello was for me an unsurpassed master of moods and philosophies. His play *Come Tu Mi Vuoi* had had a tremendous success in New York. The role of Zara was rather difficult, and I didn't succeed in presenting this character in any great depth. Perhaps I had too much knowledge of the author and too much respect for him. As a result, I was overanxious. Or maybe it was the fault of Gene Markey's script, which failed to capture the spirit of the original."

From *Garbo*, a sort of biography of Greta Garbo, by Antoni Gronowicz.

I, on the other hand, knew almost nothing of Italian playwright Luigi Pirandello. So I bought his *Six Plays*. This did not include *As You Desire Me* but it did include *Henry IV*, *Caps and Bells*, *Honest as Can Be, The Vice*, *A Dream – or Is It?* and his most famous play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. He says of its creation:

'For a great many years now, though it seems no time at all, I have been assisted in my artistic labours by a sprightly young helpmate, whose work remains as fresh today as when she first entered my service.

Her name is Imagination.

There is something malicious and subversive about her, as her preference for dressing in black might suggest; indeed, her style is generally felt to be bizarre. What people are less ready to believe is that in everything she does there is a seriousness of purpose and an unvarying method. She delves into her pocket and brings out a jester's jingling cap, rams it on to her flaming coxcomb of a head and is gone. She is off to somewhere different every day. Her great delight is to search out the world's unhappiest people and to bring them home for me to turn into stories and novels and plays; men, women and children who have got themselves into every conceivable kind of fix, whose plans have miscarried and whose hopes have been betrayed; people, in fact, who are often very disturbing to deal with.

Well, some years ago, this assistant, this Imagination of mine, had the regrettable inspiration, or it could have been the ill-fated whim, to bring to my door an entire family; where or

how she got hold of them I have no idea, but she reckoned that their story would furnish me with a subject for a magnificent novel.

I found myself confronted by a man of about fifty, wearing a dark jacket and light trousers, grim-visaged, with a look of irritability and humiliation in his eyes. With him was a poor woman in widow's weeds holding two children by the hand, a four-year-old girl on one side and a boy of not much more than ten on the other. Next came a rather loud and immodest young woman, also in black, which in her case contrived to look vulgarly dressy and suggestive. She was a-quiver with a brittle, biting anger, clearly directed against the mortified old man and against a youth of about twenty who stood detached from the others, wrapped up in himself, apparently contemptuous of the whole party. So here they were, the Six Characters, just as they appear on stage at the beginning of the play. And they set about telling me the whole sad series of events, partly in turns, but often speaking all together, cutting in on each other, shouting each other down. They yelled their explanations at me, flung their unruly passions in my face, just as they do in the play with the luckless Producer."

Of course characters are not born. We do not see them as babies. We meet them at twenty or fifty or ten. We may be given a couple of incidents out of their past, something of time and place and background. But the nuances of a life lived in a certain way belong in the imagination of the audience or the readers. And it is not enough to have the characters. They then must do something.

In the play actors and directors are beginning rehearsing a new play by Pirandello when his six characters turn up and want someone to create a play about them. It is interesting, thought-provoking, sometimes funny, but I wondered how it plays on stage.

FATHER: Fiction? This isn't fiction! This is life! This is passion!

PRODUCER: That's as may be. It will never do on the stage!

FATHER: Now there you're right! This all happens before the play starts.

My question though was slightly different. Was there too much talking, even if sometimes dramatic or angry talking, and not enough action on the stage? And I wondered if his plays made good films simply because you could see close-up the complex emotions, expressions, stances, he gives his characters whereas they would be lost on people sitting far back from the stage?

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June 29th: Antoine de Saint-Expury

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June 30th: Czeslaw Milosz
Winston Graham

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"The adventure has come to be known as 'Singeing the King of Spain's beard', from Drake's famous comment. Drake had all the arrogance of genius, but, as Mattingly has pointed out, this was not intended as a boastful remark. After the Spaniards with their allies defeated the Turks in the great battle of Lepanto in October 1571 the Sultan said: 'When the Venetians sank my fleet they only singed my beard. It will grow again. But when I captured Cyprus I cut off one of their arms.' Drake was claiming a small victory, not a large."

From *The Spanish Armada* by Winston Graham.

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July 1st: Dorothea MacKellar
George Sand
Diane Ravitch

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"Diane Ravitch, a professor of education, explores the relationship of euphemistic language to censorship in her book *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students*

Learn. Ravitch explains the extraordinarily intricate set of rules used by many educational textbook publishers to censor language and subject material that might be considered controversial or offensive. Surprisingly, she traces much of this censorship to the civil rights and women's movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which campaigned to remove prejudicial language from textbooks, and to open history and literature to neglected voices and points of view. These efforts, Ravitch argues, have been taken to an extreme that favours the blandly inclusive and morally simplistic over complex analysis and the free play of ideas.

"Many of the examples in Ravitch's book seem to border on farce: a legend about dolphins was considered problematic by one publisher because it was seen as reflecting a regional bias against children who do not live near the sea; a passage about owls was rejected from a standardised test because the birds are taboo for Navajos; Aesop's fable 'The Fox and the Crow' was marked out as sexist because a male fox flatters a female crow (the sex of the animals had to be changed before the story could be accepted). Ravitch's research indicates that such examples are far from the exception; most tests and textbooks used in American schools are in fact governed by similarly labyrinthine and frequently absurd 'sensitivity-and-bias' guidelines. Pressured by interest groups at both ends of the political spectrum, textbook writers attempt to please everyone by bowdlerising potentially offensive passages, while cramming the pages with innocuous material.

"The result, as Ravitch notes, is dry, boring and insipid content lacking any overarching narrative that might inspire in students a love of history or literature. All diversity is expunged, reducing personalities to interchangeable beings whose differences are ignored – hardly a healthy basis for encouraging perceptive critical thought. Preventing children from being exposed to a wide range of words and ideas (including 'white collar', 'unmarried', 'widow', 'addict', 'landlord', 'brotherhood', 'yacht', 'cult' and 'primitive') limits their access to the world's complexities and stifles their imaginations. The irony in all of this is that the censors' books are themselves guilty of stereotyping, by mandating that students only be exposed to material that fits their presumed experience."

From *Embracing The Wide Sky* by Daniel Tammet.

Diane Ravitch calls herself "an activist on behalf of public schools". The public schools she is concerned for are American and her concerns are much wider than what is being done to language. Two of her key concerns are the privatization of education and standardization, the belief that one size of test can be good for every teacher, every student, every school.

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July 2nd: Hermann Hesse

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I remember a friend of mine, Anthony Raymond, often spoke of his liking for Hermann Hesse's stories set in India. I had read the stories in *The Glass Bead Game* which were interesting but not memorable. The other day I borrowed Hesse's *Siddhartha* from the library. Paulo Coelho introduces it with: "Siddhartha was held as an example. All sensed in him that he would become a true Brahmin, a devoted priest in the lineage of this father. But his heart sensed that something was missing in the sacred teachings and the appeal to set off and discover by himself his true path was stronger.

"This restlessness was all too familiar and before I knew it I was completely submerged in this story and eager to set off with Siddhartha in his wanderings. I was inside a cell, but my spirit was transported to the dusty paths of India and like Govinda, his best friend, I decided to follow the turmoil of a man eager to find enlightenment.

"I did not know that outside the bars of my window, this book was setting alight a whole generation. In the same way it was speaking to my restless soul it spoke to many other young,

idealistic men and women across the West. Even though the book was written in the 1920s and only published in the United States in the 1950s it was truly during the 1960s that it became influential."

I had never come across it in the 1960s ('where on earth were you?') although I'd read Alexandra David-Neel about Tibet and Carlos Castaneda on Mexico, but not Hesse. But as soon as I began it I could see its appeal and influence on Anthony who had been brought up Jewish but gravitated to Eastern ideas and beliefs later on.

I could also see why Hesse found it so difficult to write. As he said, he could write about the search but as he did not feel he had achieved any sense of enlightenment it was very hard to write about someone else who had become an enlightened being. It can be read as a fable. Siddhartha goes through many experiences and ends up working for an old ferryman and contemplating the many moods of the river flowing by. Siddhartha is not a paragon of responsibility and I cannot help seeing something rather self-indulgent about his quest. His search for enlightenment is for himself and although it probably made him a nicer person than he might otherwise have been, though neither a good son nor a good father, he doesn't see his mission in life as being to impart knowledge or help anyone else. Siddhartha says, 'Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it.' He has met up with his old friend Govinda who has become a Buddhist monk. He goes on to share his thoughts. 'I suspected this when I was still a youth and it was this that drove me away from teachers. There is one thought I have had, Govinda, which you will again think is a jest or folly: that is, in every truth the opposite is equally true. For example, a truth can only be expressed and enveloped in words if it is one-sided. Everything that is thought and expressed in words if it is one-sided, only half the truth; it all lacks totality, completeness, unity. When the illustrious Buddha taught about the world, he had to divide it into Sansara and Nirvana, into illusion and truth, into suffering and salvation. One cannot do otherwise, there is no other method for those who teach. But the world itself, being in and around us, is never one-sided. Never is a man or a deed wholly Sansara or wholly Nirvana; never is a man wholly a saint or a sinner. This only seems so because we suffer the illusion that time is something real. Time is not real, Govinda. I have realized this repeatedly. And if time is not real, then the dividing line that seems to lie between this world and eternity, between suffering and bliss, between good and evil, is also an illusion.'

Christopher Koch in *Crossing the Gap* wrote, "In the sixties and seventies, no flower child or counter-culture person was complete without a copy of *Steppenwolf* in his or her rough leather handbag. There were Hermann Hesse rock groups, Hermann Hesse nightclubs, Hermann Hesse T-shirts; even Herman Hesse comic books. Hesse had become a literary man for the non-literary; even for the semi-literate. The counter-culture of America – a country he despised, and said would never read his books – had made him into a prophet, and then into an industry."

Dr Ralph Freedman wrote *Hermann Hesse, Pilgrim of Crisis* in which he says Hesse was seen as a mystic of the East. Koch says, "But Dr Freedman remarks that the West Coast found things in Hesse that Hesse would not have imagined – and he makes the amusing point that Hesse's acceptability was partly possible because 'translation blurred the distinct upper-middle-class flavour of the original language'. The counter-culture created a new Hermann Hesse." Freedman writes, "There was no real India in *Siddhartha*; there was no real Basel and Zürich of the twenties in *Steppenwolf*. There was only a dream and a sermon spoken by a mythical persona, Hermann Hesse."

I had never thought of Hesse as a poet but the other day I came upon his *Poems* in an op-shop. He is a pleasant but not memorable poet. Given his interest in 'the East' I thought I would share this poem:

We travelled down the still river in the evening,
The acacia stood in the colour of rose, casting its light,
The clouds cast down the rose light. But I scarcely saw them,
All I saw were the plum blossoms in your hair.

You sat smiling in the bow of the garlanded boat,
Held the lute in your skilful hand,
Sang the song, that holy country of your own,
While your eyes promised fire, and you were so young.

Without saying anything, I stood at the mast, and what I wanted,
For myself, was to give in to those gleaming eyes, over and over,
To listen to the song for ever in blessed pain,
To the song that could make me happy, tangled in your delicate hands.

'To a Chinese Girl Singing'

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July 3rd: Franz Kafka
Evelyn Anthony
Elizabeth Taylor

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Kingsley Amis said of novelist Elizabeth Taylor, "Her genuine distaste for any kind of publicity – that rarest of qualities in a writer – and her deeply unsensational style and subject matter saw to it that, in life, she never received her due as one of the best English novelists born in this century. I hope she will in future."

Perhaps. I have just been reading her *At Mrs Lippincote's* and I think he was right to suggest that her subject matter worked against recognition. The book is set in World War II and has Roddy sent to an RAF base taking with him his wife Julia, their son Oliver, and his cousin Eleanor. Eleanor teaches at a nearby school and gets vaguely interested in a small left-wing group. Julia does some cooking, occasionally visits people, and pries into Mrs Lippincote's belongings, left behind when she moves to a hotel for the duration. Taylor uses words like 'listless' and 'bored' to describe her characters. It becomes hard to believe that the largest war of the twentieth century is going on around them. None of the characters seem to like themselves or anyone else very much and the reader is left with a kind of relief when Roddy is transferred, because of a possible affair, and the book ends. I found it hard to believe that anyone would wait eagerly for the next Elizabeth Taylor, stylish writing notwithstanding. And surely style should lift characters out of being merely tedious? But perhaps this book wasn't her best?

And was Amis right to suggest that most writers are publicity hounds? I thought back to Agatha Christie fighting shy of any public activities. It didn't affect the popularity of her books but then I suppose you could say that her style and subject matter was not 'deeply unsensational'. Even so, I am not convinced. Writing does often appeal to shy people who would rather be at home pecking at a keyboard than out on the stage or the TV studio. I think it was Kingsley Amis who was unusual for relentlessly courting publicity.

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July 4th: Fay Zwicky
Neil Simon
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Alan Seager (d)

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In *Diana* by R. F. Delderfield the poor boy John Leigh aspires to the much better off and socially prominent Diana Gaylorde-Sutton and she tries to introduce him to 'culture'.

"Miss Thorpe, our English Litt. teacher at school," she told me, "is the only mistress who really understands people our age. Some teachers have a calling, like parsons," she added, "and Thorpey is one of them. She's introduced us to a lot of modern poets, nearly all killed in the war, poor dears, and her favorite, and mine too, is Alan Seager, the American boy. I like everything he wrote because…well, because nothing that happened to him could take the sparkle away!"

"What did happen to him?" I asked, curiously.

She told me about Alan Seager, how he came to France a few years before the war, and how, when Paris was threatened by the Germans, decided that he was under an obligation to defend the city that had been his inspiration; how he served through three years of trench warfare and died, obscurely, at the barricade he had visualized in the best known of his verses. When she was discussing something that had captured her imagination she acted quite shamelessly, and as she quoted "Rendezvous with Death" I could see Alan Seager penning the lines among the debris of a shattered Champagne village.

"Do you know any more of that kind of stuff?" I demanded, eagerly. She was flattered by my enthusiasm and went on to quote her favorite verse from Seager, a little poem inspired by the memory of a prewar love. Later on, much later on, I found and learned the verses myself:

"Out of the past's remote, delirious abysses
Shine forth as once you shone—beloved head,
Laid back in ecstasy between our blinding kisses,
Transfigured with the bliss of being so coveted.

"And my sick arms will part, and though hot fever sear it,
My mouth will curve again with the old, tender flame,
And darkness will come down, still finding in my spirit
The dream of your brief love, and on my lips your name."

There was magic in the way she recited those lines, the kind of magic, I think, that Seager himself would have understood so readily, and as she said them it was not the ghosts of the Negro seaman who hovered over Crusoe Jack's shabby cabin, but the benign ghost of someone to whom the ecstasy of first love was still a strong, bright flame, strong enough and bright enough to light a candle in the hearts of two romantic young idiots and persuade them that it was enough to light them down the years."

And after Diana dies he finds she has written a poem herself:

On Foxhayes edge go scatter my ashes
Above the ground in sunlight splashes,
Where all about my…powdered bones
The trefoil weaves between the stones,
Where what I was feeds foxglove roots
And robust April parsley shoots
Five miles or more from churchyard drab
Where, underneath a lettered slab,
The body that has served me well
Would bloat in clay, pathetic shell.
At Foxhayes edge atop the grass
I'll sense successive seasons pass
I'll see the beeches overhead

Turn tangerine and rusty red
I'll hear the sky-seen of their leaves
Wind-gossiping to younger trees.
Then, with the fall of blue-smoke dusk
I'll settle in the rustling husk
Of brittle, sun-dried bracken stalk
To hear the spruce and larches talk
And see the lovers come and go;
Or later, when the New Year's snow
Builds up in drifts below the hedge
Crisping the blades of dock and sedge
I'll wait content, to stir in sleep
The hour the earliest violets peep.
For with them all the wood will rustle
Under the west wind's old-maid's bustle,
Lifting perhaps a speck of me
And bearing it, due south, to sea.

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July 5th: George Borrow
Jean Cocteau
W. T. Stead

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"I often advise young people, who ask me what would be the best school in which to learn to write well – to fall in love with a clever woman a dozen years older than themselves, who lives at a distance from them, and can only be communicated with by writing."

W. T. Stead in 'Autobiographical Fragment' as quoted in *Muckraker: The Scandalous Life and Times of W. T. Stead* by W. Sydney Robinson.

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July 6th: Pierre Benoit
David Crystal

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David Crystal in *The Disappearing Dictionary: A treasury of lost English dialect words* wrote: "The story of Joseph Wright (1855-1930) begins in Thackley, a village north-east of Bradford in West Yorkshire. When he was six, he got a job driving a donkey-cart, carrying tools belonging to the stone-workers in nearby Shipley. The job, which stretched from seven in the morning till five at night, involved taking the tools to the nearest blacksmith's to be sharpened, and then bringing them back. It earned him eighteen pence a week, and he got an extra penny bonus from each quarryman.

"A year later, his mother took him to a cotton mill – at the time, the largest one in Europe – which had been built by the philanthropic manufacturer Sir Titus Salt in 1853. Salt had created a model village for his workers which (being on the River Aire) he called Saltaire. Joseph was taken on half-time as a doffer in the spinning department. A doffer, according to the *English Dialect Dictionary*, was 'a boy or girl employed in a factory to remove the full bobbins from the throstle-frame [a spinning machine whose sound reminded people of a throstle – a song-thrush] and replace them by empty ones.' This was no menial task, as there were 144 spindles on each frame, and over 16,000 on all the machines in the vast spinning shed … He worked from 6 till 12.30 each morning, which meant an early start, as the mill was two miles from his home.

"The other half of Wright's day was spent in a school that the enlightened Titus Salt provided for the children. It was the only school Wright ever attended, and – as he reflected later – it didn't teach him a great deal. He later wrote in *John o'London's Weekly* (15 May 1926): 'When I left school, I knew very little more than when I first went. I knew the alphabet, and had a smattering of elementary arithmetic, and I could recite, parrot-like, various Scriptural passages, and a few highly moral bits of verse; that was almost precisely the extent of my educational equipment after three or four years of schooling. Reading and writing, for me, were as remote as any of the sciences.' But, as he also liked to recall, the mill gave him a strong sense of local dialects, for the men came from all around the area.

"He left Saltaire when he was thirteen and worked at a mill in Shipley, graduating to the more specialized work of wool-sorting, and stayed there for seven years. It was here, during his dinner-hour, that he taught himself to read and write, using just two books: the Bible and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. His education progressed with a weekly purchase of Cassell's *Popular Educator* magazine, which became, as he put it, his 'constant companion'. Two or three evenings each week he went to a local night-school, where he began to learn French and German. By the time he was twenty, he had taught himself Latin and learned shorthand.

"He might have stayed a wool-sorter indefinitely, but in 1876 the mill had a temporary closure, so he used this as an opportunity to move on. Through his mill-work, along with some income from running a small night-school of his own, he had saved £40 – enough to pay for a term at a university. He chose Heidelberg, in Germany. On his return, he found work in Windhill as a schoolteacher, but his language interests motivated a return to Heidelberg in 1882, and there he began his studies as a philologist, eventually gaining a doctorate. He joined the university in Oxford in 1888, and produced a string of publications, culminating in his masterwork, the six-volume *English Dialect Dictionary*, published between 1898 and 1905, which he financed himself."

And what of his dictionary? Crystal says, "Nobody did more than Joseph Wright to lay the foundation for the study of English dialects. His dictionary is an impressively detailed account of the regional vocabulary of the British Isles at that time. It claims to be 'so far as is possible, the complete vocabulary of all dialect words which are still in use or are known to have been in use at any time during the last two hundred years in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.' That's quite a claim, but the entries certainly support it. There had never been such detail provided on dialect usage before. And only the great Survey of English Dialects, half a century later, would surpass it."

I know people have tried to find differences between Australian states. For instance, in Queensland we called a small suitcase a 'port' (short, I assume, for portmanteau) and we used 'togs' rather than swimmers or bathers. And in Queensland a 'scallop' was a potato cake so I was surprised to find that in Tasmania a 'scallop' was a small sea creature. But this is not as exciting as some of the examples David Crystal gives.

For instance, 'novels' meant news or tidings, "This sense of the noun was widespread in Britain 200 years before it came to be used in the modern sense of a long fictional prose narrative." He says 'fubsy' meaning plump occurs in Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* and 'drowk' meaning a plant wilting from lack of water is used by John Clare 'Drowking lies the meadow-sweet,/Flopping down beneath one's feet', and Sir Walter Scott used 'beflum' meaning 'to deceive by using cajoling language' in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and calls some one an 'etter-cap' in *Waverley* meaning an ill-natured or petulant person. And D. H. Lawrence uses 'barkle' meaning to cake with mud or dirt in *Sons and Lovers* and Shakespeare uses 'bemoil' meaning covered in mud in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

I can't really see myself using some of the examples he gives but they are fun to browse in. And Joseph Wright is even more interesting than this brief overview would suggest.

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July 7th: Robert Heinlein
Lion Feuchtwanger
SHEEP

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I forget where I found this but I thought it was very apt. “In 1851 the chairman of the Scottish Poor Law Board announced that no more funds were available and, along with the Highlands and Islands Emigration Society, advised people to emigrate. When one recruiting campaign appealed to Scots to offer their services in the Crimean War, the answer was hardly surprising: ‘Since you have preferred sheep to men, let sheep defend you.’ “

It was of course referring to the Highland Clearances.

I came upon an interesting book called *A Short History of the World According to Sheep* by Sally Coulthard who writes, “The Highland Clearances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constitute one of the darkest episodes in the history of enclosure” … “Greedy eyes turned towards the Scottish Highlands. The Act of Union of 1707 had merged England and Scotland into the Kingdom of Great Britain. Scotland’s extensive, mountainous pastures had been occupied by Highland clans for centuries, but this proved little obstacle to those landowners and businessmen eager to replace people with sheep. There was also a political motive; the British establishment were keen to ‘cleanse’ Scotland of the clans who had resisted the union and who had supported the ‘Jacobite’ revolts of 1715 and 1745-6, which had attempted to restore the Stuart dynasty in place of Britain’s new Hanoverian monarchy.”

“In a century-long process that has become known as the ‘Clearances’, tens of thousands of Highlanders – men, women and children – were thrown off their traditional holdings, often violently, to make way for livestock.” … “Few Highlanders left willingly; many were literally burnt out of house and home. Some even perished in the flames.” Whole mainland and island communities were uprooted, some forced to emigrate, others pushed on to barren coastal land. And all for what? Sheep farming boomed for some decades and then found it couldn’t compete with cheaper wool and meat from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa … but the Highland communities and way of life were largely gone …

On a lighter note she also wrote of the way that sheep have infiltrated the language. ‘Dyed-in-the-wool’. ‘Wolf in sheep’s clothing’. People get ‘fleeced’. ‘Tenterhooks’ originally referred to a frame called a ‘tenter’ to stretch cloth and which was hung up by hooks. And then there was the rhyme ‘Baa, Baa, Black Sheep’. It was originally the little boy ‘who cries in the lane’ and is thought to hark back to the tax on wool imposed by Edward I. The wealthy dealers could avoid it by paying farmers less. So the ‘master’ was code for the king, the ‘dame’ the merchants and the ‘little boy’ crying represented the shepherds and small farmers. And the rhyme had nothing to do with racism. Rather it was easier to dye white wool. Black lambs were still useful but not as valuable.

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July 8th: Alec Waugh
Jean de la Fontaine

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French writer Jean de la Fontaine is remembered for the fables and fairy tales he both collected and wrote. His fables ran to 12 volumes, completed by 1678, drawing on the writings of Aesop and Horace as well as fables from India and Persia and closer to home. He included well known fables such as ‘The Ant and the Grasshopper’, ‘The Hare and the Tortoise’ and ‘The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse’. Although some of his creatures come to a sad end he obviously cared about creatures great and small.

He wrote: “There was hardly a [Cartesian] who didn’t talk of automata. … They administered beatings to dogs with perfect indifference, and made fun of those who pitied the creatures as if they had felt pain. They said that the animals were clocks; that the cries they emitted when struck, were only the noise of a little spring which had been touched, but that the whole body was without feeling. They nailed poor animals up on boards by their four paws to vivisect them to see the circulation of the blood which was a great subject of conversation.”

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July 9th: Barbara Cartland
Douglas Lockwood

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Douglas Lockwood in *We, The Aborigines* writes up interviews with Aboriginal men, women, and children in the Northern Territory and tells this story he calls ‘One Pound Jimmy’: “Some people call me Australia because that’s the name they gave me on the postage stamp.

Actually it is One Pound Jimmy, although you can see for yourself that I’m worth only two and sixpence. In the Wailbri tribe they call me Gwoja Jungarai.

Not a bad profile, eh? Eyes deeply set behind the shaggy brows to protect them from the vertical rays of the Central Australian sun.

A broad nose, classically aboriginal. The better to smell you with, as one of our hunters said to a fat kangaroo.

A fine flowing beard, pointed nicely to hide my receding chin. It’s a trick I learnt from some of the bluebloods.

Frankly, my beard is purely a utility affair. I wouldn’t wear it at all if we had plenty of water in the desert and I carried a hand-towel. But out here, three hundred miles west of Alice Springs, things are inclined to be dry and dirty.

You need something to wipe your hands on after a greasy meal of goanna. Hence the beard.

Notice how my hair is tied with a braid? That’s an old trick of the tribal hunters. When you’ve been stalking an animal for hours – perhaps days – and you’re ravenously hungry, you don’t want to lose him just because your long hair waves in the breeze at the wrong moment, or blows in your eyes as you take aim with a shovel-nose spear. It’s far too long between meals in this country for that to happen twice.

I’m very proud of this picture and of the fact that I’m the only aboriginal ever to have had his face engraved on a postage stamp.

The Postmaster-General didn’t pick Albert Namatjira, who was a famous painter.

He didn’t pick Robert Tudawali, who was a film star.

He picked me because he wanted a rugged handsome face.

Not before time, either, that my people were honoured by having an aboriginal face on a stamp.

The first postage stamp was printed in Great Britain in 1840, although there had been a system of regular mail services in the seventeenth century. It might surprise you to know, therefore that we have had systems of passing messages and the rather modern refinement of Registered Post for centuries.

Anybody who reads comics knows all about smoke signals, a form of bush wireless that has always been used by my people.

The cartoonists would have you believe that smoke-signalling is a refined method of communicating messages over long distances. That is nonsense. I have never known smoke to mean anything other than the publication of a man’s whereabouts.

Tribal country is sacrosanct. We don’t have passports or visas, but we do have our primitive equivalents of them. It would be a flagrant breach of diplomatic manners for a Wailbri tribesman to

hunt on Pintubi land, or even to trespass there without good reason. Any man walking through the land of another tribe, therefore, sends up smoke signals to let the locals know of his approach. It is one of the courtesies we observe. Wars have been declared in the past because of unauthorized invasion of territory by the black as well as the white tribes of the earth.

Tribal groups seeing smokes approaching know that they are about to be visited by the representatives of other tribes. On clear days, such smokes can be seen up to one hundred miles away, which means about three days travel. A man who advertises himself by smoke is generally welcomed at his destination. But one who keeps his presence secret is inclined to be regarded as a spy. In the old days he would almost certainly have ended with a spear between his shoulder blades.

Smoke is well known as one of our means of communication.

However, not many have heard of our infallible system of delivering messages and goods over enormous distances. This is done by using a message stick, like the one Dambu Milburr is carving on the next page.

I might want to send tobacco and other presents to my son who is working with a drover hundreds of miles away. I wait until I find a blackfellow who is going his way. That might take weeks or months but time is something we have plenty of in this country. The mails don't close every day.

These goods would normally not reach their destination. The postie would smoke the tobacco and give the presents to his own friends,

But once I have given him the message stick I know that the goods will be delivered just as certainly as if I had a Registered Packet receipt from the P.M.G.

They'd better be. Otherwise I'd have his kidney fat as compensation.

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July 10th: Marcel Proust
Robert Chambers

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James Secord introducing Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) *and Other Evolutionary Writings* says, "*Vestiges* became a best-seller, with fourteen editions in Britain and at least that many in America. Readers included Queen Victoria, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Abraham Lincoln, William Ewart Gladstone, Arthur Schopenhauer, Francis Newman, John Stuart Mill, William Stanley Jevons, and Florence Nightingale. The codiscoverer of natural selection, Alfred Russel Wallace, began his search for a lawful explanation of species after reading *Vestiges* in 1845. The book had a profound effect on literature, most notably in the writings of Alfred Tennyson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and George Eliot."

It influenced 19th century thinking on evolution but I think its value now is that it is like a snapshot of what was being thought and written about the natural world, astronomy, zoology, geology etc, in the 1840s.

So who was Robert Chambers? Secord says of him "Robert Chambers was born in 1802, the second son of the manager of a large network of hand-loom weavers in the small town of Peebles in Scotland. He had a good classical education, but his father's failure to adjust to the emerging factory system combined with bad debts and drink to lead the family into sharp decline. At the lowest point, in 1818, Robert took a few pounds' worth of books and set up a stall on Leith Walk, a cheap commercial thoroughfare connecting Edinburgh with its port.

"Working in the street immediately after the Napoleonic Wars, Robert and his brother William witnessed extremes of political debate among the artisan classes. One of their closest friends, a grocer's apprentice named John Denovan, was a "violent *radical*" who worshiped the champion of the illegal unstamped press in England, Richard Carlile. In 1819, the two brothers assisted Denovan in publishing the radical twopenny *Patriot*, one of scores of short-lived street

periodicals that sprouted up after the Peterloo Massacre in Manchester. Robert and William later claimed not to have shared the politics of the *Patriot*, although Robert's first verses appeared there, and they underwrote it financially and sold copies on Leith Walk. They soon realized the dangers of linking their names with a periodical which advocated universal suffrage as the only remedy to a corrupt and tyrannous regime."

"In 1821 the two brothers started their own journal, the *Kaleidoscope*, which William printed on a tiny frame press and Robert wrote almost single-handedly. Robert's first writing in science, "Vindication of the World and of Providence," appeared in this journal … underlining the steady-state equilibrium of the moral, political, and natural world. … Such a cosmological vision could scarcely be more opposed to the progressivist ideas of *Vestiges*. … By 1830 Chambers had married Anne Kirkwood, daughter of a well-known engraver and clockmaker; he owned a successful bookshop and ciculating library; and he had established himself as a leading author of antiquarian and topographical works, with some two dozen titles like *Traditions of Edinburgh* (1824), *The Picture of Scotland* (1827), and *A History of the Rebellion of 1745* (1828) to his credit."

He moved away from a steady state vision of the world and society to one of gradual reform "opposed to what he saw as radical demagogy, evangelical hypocrisy, and aristocratic privilege."

Then in "February 1832 William Chambers founded a three-halfpence weekly, *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, which Robert joined after the fourteenth number. This time the enterprise was a fabulous success, with eighty thousand copies selling each week throughout the 1840s and 1850s. The two brothers became the most celebrated publishers for the middle classes in the nineteenth century. Although ostensibly apolitical, the *Journal* advocated improvement, secular education, political economy, and the interests of the middle class" and it "included fiction as part of an entertaining mix of natural history, biography, and curious facts. As with the *Kaleidoscope*, Robert wrote much of the content of each issue, thus giving it the amiable tone of his experienced pen. Not surprisingly, he soon possessed an extraordinary range of knowledge, and his articles for the *Journal* provide the best record of his changing thoughts on issues that later became part of the scheme of *Vestiges*."

So although some Scottish evangelicals objected to the *Journal's* articles on natural history and cosmology Scottish readers in general did not find *Vestiges* and its ideas on change and evolution in any way threatening because they had been reading the *Edinburgh Journal* for years beforehand.

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July 11th: Yul Brynner
E. B. White

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Yul Brynner liked to tell the world that "There is some confusion as to when I was born, but the correct date is the 7th July, 1920. The place was the little town of St Elizabeth." He also liked to claim he was part Gypsy. In fact his family were Swiss and he was born on the 11th July 1920 in Vladivostok. Still, actors regularly change names and details. It is not acceptable for the Helen Demidenkos of this world but it is a commonplace in Hollywood.

Brynner is of course best known for his films such as *The Magnificent Seven*. But he also did good work for refugees. In 1959 he wrote *Bring Forth the Children: A Journey to the Forgotten People of Europe and the Middle East*. In this he wrote, "Nearly 15 million refugees around the world still need assistance … As long as we live in a world that indulges in war and the kind of rivalry and strife that substitute for war, I feel that we really have to make ourselves responsible for the results … It is important that we do not simply develop a bad conscience about them and let it go at that. These are our fellow human beings, displaced and deprived of their means of making a

living through no fault of their own … There is no disgrace in being a refugee, but there is certainly disgrace in trying to forget that refugees exist."

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July 12th: Pablo Neruda
Henry David Thoreau
Mary Bramston ?

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"Among the enticing literary treats that I have either had, through pressure of work or absence of time, to forgo or which have never, as in this case, come within my reach, a novel called *Apples of Sodom*, ranks pretty high. It was the work of a woman, a Miss Mary Bramston, it was written about 1870, and she sold the world rights for £20. Somewhere there lurk, presumably, critical evaluations of the work ('Miss Bramston casts a bright and wholesome light on a dark corner of biblical history') but its chief interest lies in the fact that its authoress was at the same time, governess to the children of those unusually bizarre Benson parents. It isn't every day that the Master of Wellington College, later Archbishop of Canterbury, marries a basically homosexual bride half his age. And they then produce between them, in conditions that the sensitive will prefer not to dwell on, three highly gifted and queer sons, among them E.F. Benson to whom we owe the marvellous Miss Mapp and Lucia books, and much else. There was also a homicidal maniac daughter. Believers in predestination will enjoy picturing God arranging all that elaborate little tangle … One does so wonder whether the oddities of the Benson background and the tendencies of her charges inspired or influenced to some extent the authoress of *Apples of Sodom*. Who, do you suppose, can be the main character? It can hardly be Mrs Lot of whom vivid details are really rather scarce and whom one sees as a somewhat shadowy and nervous figure, twitching a goodish bit and probably locking herself in a hidden recess while all that clamouring and banging was going on at their door ('Do see who that is, dear. Tell them we've got visitors. If you want me, I'm in the airing cupboard'), though she does of course in the end have her moment of glory as a Challenge to Cerebos. We know much more, rather too much in fact, about her husband and especially his last unfortunate days in that cave, though here his childless and incestuous daughters were much to blame and he, poor man, lying there in a drunken stupor, was literally more sinned against than sinning. None of these persons would, however, tempt the pen of a governess in the saintly public school household of a future archbishop, so the leading figure must have been somebody else. Or do you think that *Apples of Sodom* was in fact a 'modern' novel but with an, er, Sodom theme?"

Arthur Marshall in *Life's Rich Pageant*.

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July 13th: Isaac Babel
John Clare
Wole Soyinka

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Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka gave the 2004 BBC Reith Lectures which were published as *Climate of Fear*. So I thought I would extract a couple of statements which made me stop and ponder.

"The beauty of the political mantra has always been its ability to distil complex events and global relationships into a rhetorical broth that precludes digestion, but guarantees satisfaction."

"One of my all-time favourite lines comes from the black American poet Langston Hughes. It reads, simply, 'There is no lavender word for lynch'. Now that is one line I would not mind converting to the service of rhetorical hysteria. It leaves no room for the continuation of the culture of impunity currently enjoyed by – literally - sacred cows."

"If the Berlin Wall was held to reduce the inherent dignity of a people since it circumscribed their freedom, then a wall in Palestine cannot be viewed with the same regard as is elicited today by the Great Wall of China." This was more problematic. The Great Wall was built to keep the 'barbarians' out of China. But it seems dangerous to imply that if a wall lasts for long enough it becomes merely a cultural artifact to be walked on by tourists.

"The Yoruba have a saying: *Iku ya j'esin lo*. This translates literally as 'Sooner death than indignity'. It is an expression that easily finds equivalents in numerous cultures, and captures the essence of self-worth, the sheer integrity of being that animates the human spirit, and the ascription of equal membership of the human community. This does not in any way belittle other human virtues – integrity, love, tenderness, graciousness, generosity or indeed the spirit of self-sacrifice. Dignity, however, appears to give the most accessible meaning to human self-regarding."

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July 14th: Northrop Frye
Irving Stone

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"Why go to the trouble of annexing a country that is so easy to exploit without taking any responsibility for it."

Northrop Frye on 23 January 1991. He was writing on the way the United States is slowly taking over Canada, business by business. It is a strategy the Chinese are also taking to heart …

Northrop Frye is better known as a literary rather than an economic or political critic. I have just been reading his *Words with Power* in which he uses the *Bible* as his key text. "Our starting point here is the word myth, in its common and popular sense of a story (*mythos*), usually about gods, and usually referred back to a remote past. I am still emphasizing (I will not use the word "privileging") the narrative aspect of literature. The typical myths just mentioned arise in the earlier stages of social development, before the verbal controls of logic and evidence are firmly established. Literary criticism is mainly confined to the era of written documents, so that oral and pre-mythical cultures have to be passed over here." He goes on to say, "in structure myths resemble other forms of story that we distinguish as folktales or legends. Folktales however tend to be socially nomadic, traveling through the world interchanging their themes and motifs; legends are typically stories associated with some particular place, or culture-hero. Myths have a different and distinctive social function. That function is mainly to tell the society they grow up in the important things for that society to know about their gods, their traditional history, the origins of their customs and class structure. Myths are also regularly used in connection with rituals, whether as forming a commentary on the ritual or as being dramatized by it.

Myths have thus two contexts. In their structure they resemble other types of story, and so are potentially literary. But in early societies they also develop a social function that we have been calling ideological. They play a leading role in defining a society, in giving it a shared possession of knowledge, or what is assumed to be knowledge peculiar to it. Its proclamation is not so much "This is true" as "This is what you must know." Such a mythology is close to what is meant by the Biblical term *torah*, essential instruction, including the laws, which no one can be excused from learning. So a mythology creates in the midst of its society the verbal equivalent of a *temenos*, or sacred ground, a limited and sacrosanct area."

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"Thus: there is no such thing as God, because God is not a thing. All language in such areas has to carry with it the sense of its own descriptive inadequacy, and nothing but the mythical and metaphorical language that says both "is" and "is not" can do this."

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July 15th: Iris Murdoch
Hammond Innes
Gavin Maxwell

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Hammond Innes used to be very popular, particularly with men, for his lively adventure stories in interesting parts of the world. The other day I came upon an article he had written titled 'Landfalls in History': "Some travellers collect country houses; others ecclesiastical buildings, gardens, restaurants. I seem to collect fortresses. And since I have spent quite a slice of my life at sea, mostly with my wife and sailing our own boat, many of these have been sea fortresses on the shores of Europe, vast landmarks that have produced in me a sense of excitement.

"It is difficult to explain what this means to those who are not sailors. You come across the sea – the Channel, the Mediterranean, even an inland sea like the Marmara – and there is the land. But where is the shelter you are seeking?

"For many hours perhaps you have been voyaging on the wind, navigating by the speed at which your sails have driven you through the water, by how the wind and tide and breaking sea have moved you, and you are searching, searching through the glasses, hoping to God you have got it right, that the port you have been aiming for will emerge over the bows.

"Then, suddenly, there it is, that huge medieval fortress described as 'conspic' in the pilot book, standing there solid and reassuring. Then I feel like Cook or Magellan or those distant Vikings who first sighted Vinland, the sense of discovery as strong as if I had crossed an ocean. I have made it, and there to prove it is the fort guarding the entrance to the port."

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July 16th: Christopher Koch
Anita Brookner

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July 17th: Christina Stead
Georges-Henri Lemaître
Erle Stanley Gardner
Isaac Watts

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Isaac Watts was an immensely prolific writer of hymns in the 17th century perhaps only outdone by the Wesley brothers. Possibly he excused himself regularly from company saying 'I feel a hymn coming on'. His best-known hymn is:

Our God, our Help in Ages past,
Our Hope for Years to come,
Our Shelter from the Stormy Blast,
And our eternal Home.
'Man Frail, and God Eternal.'

So was he a clergyman, someone steeped in Bible studies, music, church doctrine? Well, yes, he was a Congregational clergyman who was first interested in setting the Psalms into a New Testament format for his congregation to sing. But although he turned the poetry of others into hymns he was a keen verse-maker himself, ending with 750 to his name.

But he also, surprisingly, wrote on logic. His *Logick, or The Right Use of Reason in the Enquiry After Truth With a Variety of Rules to Guard Against Error in the Affairs of Religion and Human Life, as well as in the Sciences* was used as a textbook in schools and he followed it with *The Improvement of the Mind*.

In works of labour, or of skill,

I would be busy too;
For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.
Isaac Watts.

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July 18th: William Makepeace Thackeray
Horatio Alger (d)
Molly Breene

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In *Writers Gone Wild* Bill Peschel wrires: "A minister is caught molesting boys, and church officials send him away and shield him from prosecution.

A story from today's headlines?

Think again. The year: 1866. The minister: Horatio Alger.

The precocious son of a Unitarian minister, Alger was intended for a bright future. He mastered Latin, Greek, and algebra at home. At Harvard, he wrote essays on medieval chivalry and Cervantes and was named class poet.

During the Civil War, he was too short (five foot, two inches), too nearsighted, and too asthmatic to enter the army. His sole contribution to the Union cause was *Frank's Campaign*, a novel in which a boy forms a combat unit while his father is away soldiering. Although the novel brought in some money, it wasn't enough to support Alger as a writer. So he entered the church and, with his father's help, became a minister at the Unitarian Church in Brewster, Massachusetts.

But within a year, unsavory rumors began to fly about the minister's curious behavior. Then, a boy delivering a book to Alger's room reported that the minister had locked the door and committed am "unnatural crime." An investigation followed. Two boys testified that Alger had molested them, too. Confronted with the evidence, Alger broke down, admitted that he had been "imprudent," and fled town.

The outraged congregation demanded Alger's arrest, but the American Unitarian Association hushed up the scandal and assured them that Alger would never work again as a minister.

Alger resettled in New York City. He lived in cheap apartments and befriended the poor boys who earned coins shining shoes and delivering newspapers and messages. He also turned to writing more than 130 novels that would associate his name with boys who find success through luck and pluck.

Was he able to keep his hands to himself? A poem he wrote soon after his disgrace, "Friar Anselmo's Sin," hinted that Alger deeply wanted to atone. But after his death, his family burned all his papers and diaries, ensuring that Alger will keep his secrets forever."

But that was not the end of the story. "The lack of information about Alger was so complete that biographer Herbert Mayes resorted to fiction. In *Alger: A Biography Without a Hero*, Alger dreams of becoming president, acquires several mistresses, and adopts a Chinese boy who is killed by a runaway horse. Despite its excesses, *Alger* was accepted as fact until Mayes confessed in the late 1970s."

"Characters emerged in children's stories who took the world on rather than follow a script written by the old guard. Luke Larkin was such a character. The hero of Horatio Alger's novels, he had an enthusiastic following during the last four decades of the nineteenth century. Luke triumphed because he was brave, smart, and self-reliant. His efforts allowed him to rise above his humble origins and he conquered adversity through his endless resourcefulness. The conclusion of Luke's adventures in *Struggling Upward* (1890) was characteristic of this type of inspirational literature.

Luke had faced numerous hardships and had prevailed against a succession of thieves and villains. Alger reminds us that Luke "struggled upward from a boyhood of privation and self-denial into a youth and manhood of prosperity and honor. There has been some luck about it, I admit, but after all he is indebted for most of his good fortune to his own good qualities."

Dr Peter Marshall in *Sex, Nursery Rhymes & Other Evils: A Look at the Bizarre, Amusing, Sometimes Shocking Advice of Victorian Childcare Experts*.

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July 19th: A. J. Cronin

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July 20th: Louisa Anne Meredith
Cormac McCarthy

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Nick Hornby wrote in *Stuff I've Been Reading*, "It is important to remember that *The Road* is a product of one man's imagination: the literary world has a tendency to believe that the least consoling world view is The Truth. (How many times have you read someone describe a novel as 'unflinching', in approving terms? What's wrong with a little flinch every once in a while?) McCarthy is true to his own vision, which is what gives his novel its awesome power. But maybe when Judgement Day does come, we'll surprise each other by sharing our sandwiches and singing 'Bridge Over Troubled Water', rather than scooping out our children's brains with spoons. Yes, it's the job of artists to force us to stare at the horror until we're on the verge of passing out. But it's also the job of artists to offer warmth and hope and maybe even an escape from lives that can occasionally seem unendurably drab. I wouldn't want to pick one job over the other – they both seem pretty important to me. And it's quite legitimate, I think, not to want to read *The Road*. There are some images now embedded in my memory that I don't especially want there. Don't let anyone tell you that you have a duty to read it."

Lisa Dillman wrote of preparing herself to translate Yuri Herrera's *Signs Preceding the End of the World*. "I tried to read writers who might have styles, or tones, or non-standard usage that I would find in some way comparable or analogous. The most helpful was Cormac McCarthy (in particular *The Road*, another tale – coincidentally, or not? – that can be read on different levels, one of which is "the end of the world")."

I did read *The Road* years ago. Jack Kerouac watches 'Deliverance' then goes to his paintbox but can only find tubes of grey. A dismal journey. But there are two kinds of 'end of the world' stories. The one where human beings turn the place into a wasteland and the sort where our sun slowly dies and with it this world. Naturally writers prefer to tackle the first scenario.

Perhaps 'prefer' is a little too cheerful.

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July 21st: Ernest Hemingway
Marshall McLuhan
Michael Connelly

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Marshall McLuhan in *The Medium is the Message* said "The family circle has widened. The worldpool of information fathered by electric media—movies, Telstar, flight—far surpasses any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage."

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July 22nd: Tom Robbins
Stephen Vincent Benét

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I had come across the name Stephen Vincent Benét without knowing anything about him. But one day in the Tip Shop I found his book *John Brown's Body* and I assumed it was a history or a novel. But no. It turned out to be an epic poem. When I was young I remember hearing the song 'John Brown's Body'. I just assumed someone had recently written the song and it seemed to me to be a very morbid subject for a song. But the song has in fact been around for a long time.

He also says in his introduction, "As this is a poem, not a history, it has seemed unnecessary to me to encumber it with notes, bibliography, and other historical apparatus. Nevertheless—besides such original sources as the Official Records, the series of articles in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, and the letters, memoirs, and autobiographies of the various leaders involved—I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to … Oswald Garrison Villard's *John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After*" …

But on that day fifty years before:
They reached the Maryland bridge of Harper's Ferry
That Sunday night. There were twenty-two in all,
Nineteen were under thirty, three not twenty-one

And he names Kagi, Stevens, Dauphin Thompson, Oliver Brown, Dangerfield Newby, Watson Brown and, of course, John Brown. Oliver was his son.

It was a quixotic but grand gesture which ended badly.

The month ebbed into days,
The wife and husband met for the last time,
The last letter was written:
"To be inscribed on the old family Monument at North Elba.
Oliver Brown born 1830 was killed at Harpers Ferry, Va. Nov.
17th 1859
Watson Brown born 1835 was wounded at Harpers Ferry Nov.
17th and died Nov. 19th 1859
(My wife can) supply *blank* dates to above
John Brown born May 9th 1800 was executed at Charlestown
Va. December 2nd 1859."

I wonder how his wife felt about everything—
Benét writes of real people—
Lincoln, six feet one in his stocking feet,
The lank man, knotty and tough as a hickory rail,
Whose hands are always too big for white-kid gloves,
Whose wit was a coonskin sack of dry, tall tales,
Whose weathered face was homely as a plowed field—

But one of the things he says of the young soldiers was that many of them were barely literate and had only the haziest idea of what they were fighting for. Instead it was an adventure, a chance to leave behind farm labour, an opportunity to see a bit of the world, and they joined because their friends joined. Though much has been written about people like Abraham Lincoln I do not think these simple farm boys who helped, and sometimes died, to end slavery have got much attention. So in that sense Benét's poem is an insight.

Benét writes:
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave.
He will not come again with foolish pikes
And a pack of desperate boys to shadow the sun.
He has gone back North. The slaves have forgotten his eyes.
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave.

John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave.
Already the corpse is changed, under the stone,
The strong flesh rotten, the bones dropping away.
Cotton will grow next year, in spite of the skull.
Slaves will be slaves next year, in spite of the bones.
Nothing is changed, John Brown, nothing is changed.
But he suggests it was a Civil War song:
As they heard the Hillsboro' Silver Cornet Band
Swinging "John Brown's Body" ahead of the soldiers.
And:
The damn band's playing "John Brown's Body" again,
I wish they'd stop it!—I wish to God we could start—
But after he has written 'nothing is changed' he goes on:
"There is a song in my bones. There is a song
In my white bones."

I hear no song. I hear
Only the blunt seeds growing secretly
In the dark entrails of the preparate earth,
The rustle of the cricket under the leaf,
The creaking of the cold wheel of the stars.

"Bind my white bones together—hollow them
To skeleton pipes of music. When the wind
Blows from the budded Spring, the song will blow."

I hear no song. I only hear the roar
Of the Spring freshets, and the gushing voice
Of mountain brooks that overflow their banks,
Swollen with melting ice and crumbled earth.

"That is my song.
It is made of water and wind. It marches on."

No, John Brown's body lies a-mouldering,
A-mouldering.

"My bones have been washed clean
And God blows through them with a hollow sound,
And God has shut his wildfire in my dead heart."

I hear it now,
Faint, faint as the first droning flies of March,
Faint as the multitudinous, tiny sigh
Of grasses underneath a windy scythe.

"It will grow stronger."

It has grown stronger. It is marching on.
It is a throbbing pulse, a pouring surf,
It is the rainy gong of the Spring sky
Echoing,
John Brown's body,
John Brown's body.
But still it is not fierce. I find it still
More sorrowful than fierce.

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Leonard Bacon said of Benét, born in 1898, "He was the son of an army officer, James Walker Benét, and of Frances Rose his wife, and he was singularly fortunate in his inheritance. On his father's side he came of Spanish or, rather, Catalonian stock, for his great grandfather had emigrated from the Balearic Islands to Florida early in the 19th century. His mother's people were of English and Scotch-Irish descent and lived in Pennsylvania. Thus, as a hundred critics have noticed, he was actually a blend of the North and South, whose conflict none was to understand better than he."

And more personally he says, "Physically Stephen Benét was a rather odd looking man, roundheaded, round-shouldered. His sister-in-law, Elinor Wylie, called him 'a cherub in armor', the armor no doubt being his mind. Certainly, despite a constitutional leanness, he had something of the cherubic in his appearance, which I do not think was particularly impressive until you spoke to him. Then you were immediately aware of the quiet intelligence and exciting gaiety in his dark, peering, short-sighted eyes. They had a look as if he were playing in his mind. He was."

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"If the idea is good, it will survive defeat, it may even survive the victory."
Stephen Vincent Benét

"In 1856, fervent abolitionist John Brown led the Kansas Free Soil Militia into "Bleeding Kansas" to exact revenge on pro-slavery forces—"border ruffians"—who were running riot in the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. During their attack, five unarmed anti-abolitionists were hacked to death with swords in what became known as the Pottawatomie Massacre.

In 1859, Brown led a raid on the federal arms depot at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, hoping to arm slaves and initiate a rebellion. The plan backfired and several people, including a free slave, were killed by Brown's men. The rebels were eventually cornered and captured by federal troops under Colonel Robert E. Lee, and Brown was executed. His pro-abolitionist actions have since been credited with bringing the United States closer to civil war."

Alison Rattle and Allison Vale in *Remember the Alamo?*

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July 23rd: Coventry Patmore
Raymond Chandler

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"Coventry Patmore, in a poem I learned by heart as a child, says that after having struck his young son for disobeying him, he went that night into the boy's bedroom and saw that

on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells

And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart."

Alberto Manguel in *Packing My Library*.

Patmore tends to be tagged on to lists of 19th century writers without being given any importance. But now I know he was both a poet and a father. And I learnt that poet Francis Thompson saw Patmore as a father-substitute, at least until Patmore died in 1896. William B. Ober said of this: "Despite Thompson's ability to create unusually vivid descriptions of both natural and imagined objects, the Hound itself is never clearly depicted; it is a presence." (Thompson's famous poem was 'The Hound of Heaven'.) "Not only the selection of a dog as God's image, but the fact that he could not bring himself to supply a shred of physical imagery about this symbol, is revealing. In real life Thompson was deathly afraid of dogs. Patmore's son wrote in later years: "Francis Thompson often stayed with us. Great poet though he was, I fear I had but a poor idea of him, a weakly little man … he had a peculiar dread of dogs, and as he could not hide his terror of our retriever Nelson, I regret to say that my only feeling for him was unmixed contempt." "

So what of Patmore's poems? *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (ed. Christopher Ricks) gives him two poems but I don't think either of them would inspire anyone to go looking for more of his work. Still, his 'Magna est Veritas' is pleasant.

Here, in this little Bay,
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
Where, twice a day,
The purposeless, glad ocean comes and goes,
Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
I sit me down.
For want of me the world's course will not fail:
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it will prevail or not.

His best known poem was 'The Angel in the House' about domestic life but ironically people are more likely to know the phrase from Virginia Woolf's use of it than from his original poem.

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July 24th: Alexander Dumas
Jean Webster
E. F. Benson
Robert Graves (I've also found him given the 26th)

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Although he wrote poems about World War One he isn't usually included with poets such as Wilfrid Owen as a 'War Poet', probably because he is better known for his memoir *Goodbye to All That*, his historical novels such as *I, Claudius*, and his book *The White Goddess* which he called 'A historical grammar of poetic myth' and said "My thesis is that the language of poetic myth anciently current in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe was a magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-goddess, or Muse, some of them dating from the Old Stone Age, and that this remains the language of true poetry—'true' in the nostalgic modern sense of 'the unimprovable original, not a synthetic substitute'. The language was tampered with in late Minoan times when invaders from Central Asia began to substitute patrilinear for matrilinear institutions and remodel or falsify the myths to justify the social changes Then came the early Greek philosophers who were strongly opposed to magical poetry as threatening their new religion of logic, and under their influence a rational poetic language (now called the Classical) was

elaborated in honour of their patron Apollo and imposed on the world as the last word in spiritual illumination: a view that has prevailed practically ever since in European schools and universities, where myths are now studied only as quaint relics of the nursery age of mankind."

His war poems, though less known, are not negligible.

What's all this hubbub and yelling,
  Commotion and scamper of feet,
With ear-splitting clatter of kettles and cans,
  Wild laughter down Mafeking Street?

O, those are the kids whom we fought for
  (You might think they'd been scoffing our rum)
With flags that they waved when we marched off to war
  In the rapture of bugle and drum.

Now they'll hang Kaiser Bill from a lamp-post,
  Von Tirpitz they'll hang from a tree…
We've been promised a 'Land Fit for Heroes' –
  What heroes we heroes must be!

And the guns that we took from the Fritzes,
  That we paid for with rivers of blood,
Look, they're hauling them down to Old Battersea Bridge
  Where they'll topple them, souse, in the mud!

But there's old men and women in corners
  With tears falling fast on their cheeks,
There's the armless and legless and sightless –
  It's seldom that one of them speaks.

And there's flappers gone drunk and indecent,
  Their skirts kilted up to the thigh,
The constables lifting no hand in reproof
  And the chaplain averting his eye…

When the days of rejoicing are over,
  When the flags are stowed safely away,
They will dream of another wild 'War to End Wars'
  And another wild Armistice day.

But the boys who were killed in the trenches,
  Who fought with no rage and no rant,
We left them stretched out on their pallets of mud
  Low down with the worm and the ant.

'Armistice Day, 1918'

What was wrong with the day, doubtless,
Was less the unseasonable gusty weather
Than the bells ringing on a Monday morning
For a church-feast that nobody could welcome –

Not even the bell-ringers.

The pond had shrunk: its yellow lilies
Poked rubbery necks out of the water.
I paused and sat down crossly on a tussock,
My back turned on the idle water-beetles
That would not skim, but floated.

A wasp, a humble-bee, a blue-fly
Uncoöperatively at work together
Were sucking honey from the crowded blossom
Of a pale flower whose name someone told me –
Someone to be mistrusted.

But, not far off, our little cow-herd
Made mud-cakes, with one eye on the cattle,
And marked each separate cake with his initials.
I was half-tempted by the child's example
To rescue my spoilt morning.

'Assumption Day'

I've watched the Seasons passing slow, so slow,
In the fields between La Bassée and Béthune;
Primroses and the first warm day of Spring,
Red poppy floods of June,
August, and yellowing Autumn, so
To Winter nights knee-deep in mud or snow,
And you've been everything,

Dear, you've been everything that I most lack
In these soul-deadening trenches – pictures, books,
Music, the quiet of an English wood,
Beautiful comrade-looks,
The narrow, bouldered mountain-track,
The broad, full-bosomed ocean, green and black,
And Peace, and all that's good.

'1915'

From where do poems come?
From workshops of the mind,
As do destructive armaments,
Philosophic calculations,
Schemes for man's betterment?

Or are poems born simply
From crucibles of love?
May not you and I together
Engrossed with each other
Assess their longevity?

For who else can judge merits
Or define demerits –
This remains a task for lovers
Held fast in love together
And for no others.

'Crucibles of Love'

He, a grave poet, fell in love with her.
She, a mere child, fell deep in love with love
And, being a child, illumined his whole heart.

From her clear conspect rose a whispering
With no hard words in innocency held back –
Until the day that she became woman,

Frowning to find her love imposed upon:
A new world beaten out in her own image –
For his own deathless glory.

'Beatrice and Dante'

Graves had two wives, eight children, a long relationship with Laura Riding as well as with several young women and he also managed to be quite a prolific writer.

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July 25th: Elias Canetti

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July 26th: Poppy Lopatniuk
George Bernard Shaw
Aldous Huxley

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John Dewey said: "As long as politics is the shadow cast on society by big business, the attenuation of the shadow will not change the substance."

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Poppy Lopatniuk wrote a book review she titled, 'Those Corporate Ties': **"**I have just been reading *Corporate Ties That Bind: An Examination of Corporate Manipulation and Vested Interest in Public Health* (Edited by Martin J. Walker. Publisher Sky Horse Publishing, Delaware USA 2017). This book answers many of my questions about doctors' reluctance to give me answers when I researched my book *Tomorrow's Children* about the cluster of cancers and auto-immune diseases I had found around the old Howrah Tip at Wentworth Park. Dr Roscoe Taylor and his colleagues put this cluster down to "chance". It also helps me understand better why we now face an epidemic of cancers and auto-immune problems.

Corporate Ties That Bind chronicles the fall from grace of the highly-esteemed scientist Sir Richard Doll who pioneered the link between lung cancer and smoking in the 1950s. When he died in 2005 he was hailed as "the greatest epidemiologist of our time". But a year later *The Guardian* revealed that for 20 years he had been a consultant for several major pharmaceutical companies including Monsanto and Dow Chemicals as well as receiving fees from the Chemical Manufacturers Association and Imperial Chemical Industries. A letter from 1986 showed he was receiving $1,000 *per day*. For the sake of a luxurious lifestyle and massive research funds he had abandoned his integrity, his independence, and his concern for people's health. He is known to have taken part in a review of Monsanto's Agent Orange which cleared dioxin as "only weakly and inconsistently carcinogenic".

Doll's supporters claimed that the sources of his funding were "widely known". But it is doubtful if the victims of chemical and industrial pollution were aware that all his research material was tainted. And I wonder if doctors such as Dr Roscoe Taylor knew that none of this research into toxic and carcinogenic waste going into landfill areas like Wentworth Park should be accepted or used to brush off the concerns of ordinary people. There is an irony that lives were saved by Doll's work on smoking-related cancers and lives lost from cancers caused by the pollutants of big chemical companies.

Now I understand why health authorities, councils, environmental regulators and government departments did not want to listen to my concerns. I had chronicled more than 50 cancers in the few streets round Wentworth Park occurring in young families encouraged to move there when the tip closed, yet I was continually fobbed off. I felt I had no choice but to write and publish my little book *Tomorrow's Children*.

Undoubtedly there are other 'Doctor Dolls' still doing the bidding of the big chemical companies to tell us we are not at risk. And governments and municipal authorities with their lack of transparency, their weak legislation on environmental protection, their unwillingness to do or say anything which might undermine 'development' or lead to compensation entitlements are still in thrall to untrustworthy scientists and tainted science."

It is not hard to find books on all kinds of aspects of medical research and medical practice. But this book raises that key aspect of conflict of interest and the failure to be honest with the public.

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And there are even more serious allegations against doctors. The Nazi experiments have been well documented. In *Medical Murder: Disturbing Cases of Doctors Who Kill* by Robert M. Kaplan he documents less well known abuses carried out by medical men:

"The systematic participation of doctors in state terror commenced in 1915 with the Armenian Genocide in Turkey. Many doctors had leading roles in the Ittihadist Party that came to power in 1908. The leading figures were Dr Behaeddin Sakir and Dr Mehmett Nazim, who played a pivotal role in the establishment and deployment of the Special Organization units, extermination squads staffed by violent criminals. Sakir worked at one time as the chief physician of Soloniki Municipal Hospital and Nazim, described as 'a doctor by profession and not without promise', in what must be regarded as one of the most misguided appointments in the history of medicine, was the professor of Legal (Ethical) Medicine at Istanbul Medical School. Utterly unrepentant to the end of his life, Nazim was thought to have committed a million murders.

"With the onset of World War I, a number of doctors, as governors of the Eastern Provinces, led Special Organization units against the Armenians. Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children were rounded up and killed by a range of brutal means, including drowning in the sea, throat slitting, poisoning, injections of gasoline and phenol and being buried alive. Other forms of coercion, such as mass rape, looting and destruction of homes were employed, a fore-runner of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. After the war, there was testimony that victims were led off in groups and slaughtered by butchers like cattle in an abattoir.

"Medical personnel did not merely supervise proceedings but were directly involved in the killings, often participating in torture. Dr Mehmed Reşid, the 'Executioner Governor', was involved in the 'deportation' of 120 000 Armenians from his province, in addition to embezzling thousands of pounds. Reşid's brutality was extraordinary, including smashing skulls, nailing red-hot horseshoes onto the victim's chest, and crucifying victims on makeshift crosses. Sadistic cruelty was demonstrated by opthalmologists who gave eye drops to children to make them blind. Other doctors, describing their victims as subhuman, used them as guinea pigs to infect with a range of diseases. Hundreds of victims were injected with blood from typhus cases.

"Military pharmacist Mehmed Hasan (Ezaci) was accused of murdering 2000 Armenian labour battalion soldiers and allowing his men to rape 250 women and children. Dr Ali Said killed thousands of infants, adults and pregnant women by administering poison as liquid medicine, and ordering drowning at sea of patients who refused the 'medicine'. Dr Tevfik Rusdü (Aras) was directed to dispose of corpses of the victims. Mass graves were seeded with quicklime to destroy the bodies. A woman later gave evidence that his infant victims were taken to a purported steam bath and killed with a toxic gas, an ominous precursor of the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

"Following their defeat, the Turkish government was directed by the Allies to try the perpetrators and the main offenders were sentenced to death. Many escaped this fate by going into exile; several were assassinated by Armenian agents in Paris; a few committed suicide. In the end, only three participants were executed. When Dr Mehmat Kemal was hanged in April 1919, medical students from Istanbul University demonstrated in protest. The Kemalist government then turned its back on the issue and the collective Turkish denial that the genocide had ever occurred took hold. Kemal is today commemorated by a statue in a public square."

"In the years afterwards, looking at the issue from radically different moral standpoints, Hitler and Churchill noted that everyone forgot the matter before long and Armenia was destined to slip into historical amnesia.

"The Armenian Genocide set the ground for the most notorious examples of medical complicity in state abuses: the Nazi doctors who participated in euthanasia and genocide, and the Japanese doctors who practiced biological warfare."

"The basis for medical involvement in political abuse goes deep into the psychology of medicine and the personality of the practitioner. At its heart is an extreme grandiosity, a belief that 'treating' (in reality, extirpating) the illness affecting the nation is merely an extension of the ancient and honoured role of treating the sick patient.

"This is summed up in the statement of Dr Mehmed Reşid before his suicide:

Even though I am a physician, I cannot ignore my nationhood. Armenian traitors … were dangerous microbes. My Turkishness prevailed over my medical calling. Of course my conscience is bothering me, but I couldn't see my country disappearing. As to historical responsibility, I couldn't care less what historians of other nations write about me."

"The attitude of the doctors who carried out the Armenian Genocide laid the template for the Holocaust."

I had certainly heard of Dr Mengele but I had never heard of Dr Reşid. Or Dr Nazim. I don't think we should compare the awfulness of murdering doctors but it does beg the question of how these doctors could have slipped through the cracks of history.

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In *The Girl With The Crooked Nose* Ted Botha wrote: "Wilton Krogman was one of the most famous people in forensics at a time when few people knew what the word meant. Sometimes called "the bone detective," he had worked with Eliot Ness, had taught many of the country's leading figures in the field, and had been an expert witness in countless murder trials. Long before Fillinger was keeping classrooms and courtrooms on the edge of their seats, Krogman was.

"In 1939 he wrote the FBI's "Guide to the Identification of Human Skeletal Material," a brief work that was one of the first important works in forensic anthropology in the United States. His book *The Human Skeleton in Forensic Medicine*, published in 1962, became a bible for crime-scene investigators and remained so for decades. At that time there were perhaps only a dozen people in the country who focused on what was more commonly known as "Skeletal ID." Besides recognized forensic anthropology, Krogman was also an expert in dentition, osteology, racial studies, genetics,

and paleoanthropology, a combination of interests making it almost inevitable that he would eventually look into the possibility of putting a face on a skull."

Sandra Coney wrote in *The Unfortunate Experiment* of the failure to inform women at a New Zealand hospital that they could have cervical cancer; instead certain doctors in the interests of 'research' simply observed the development of cancers. "Revelations at the Nuremberg Trials of War Criminals of experimental medical atrocities committed in Nazi concentration camps prompted the enactment of the Nuremberg Code in 1947, to regulate clinical research on patients. This formed the basis of all subsequent codes, most notably the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki, first issued in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1975 and 1983. The central principles of both codes are the need for informed consent and the duty of the investigator not to harm the subjects. … The basic principles of the Declaration of Helsinki are that clinical research must be based on 'scientifically established facts', and the 'inherent risk' must be assessed beside the 'foreseeable benefits to the patients or others'. Overseas medical experts to the commission would testify that by the early sixties it was 'scientifically established' that CIS progressed to invasion. Green's study was based on his 'theory' that there was no progression; it flew in the face of the scientific facts. His assessment of the risks to women, therefore, would be very different from that of others in the field. Seen from this perspective, Green's study violated the basic principles of the Helsinki code."

And I am not sure if this will now cheer you up: "Miracle cures, you'll notice, are always some years away."

Bad Medicine. John Archer.

I rather like reading about strange diseases and conditions (while being thankful I do not suffer from them) so I thought I would share one such with you. Dr Stephen Juan in *The Odd Body 2* poses the question: "Do blue-skinned people really exist?" And his answer: "Yes they do. In a remote area of the US state of Kentucky, lives a group of people that has blue skin. They are all descendants of a French-born immigrant who settled in the area more than 160 years ago. Since then, they have been marrying and intermarrying for generations. Marriages with outsiders have been infrequent. As a result, a defective gene causing blue skin has been allowed to show itself in many descendants. Their bodies lack an enzyme needed to convert a blue protein in the blood into the red protein haemoglobin. This gives them a bluish appearance. Quite appropriately, the name of their isolated region is Troublesome Creek." I had thought haemoglobin was vital to life but perhaps this isn't so …

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From *The Slumbering Sentinels* by C.G. Weeramantry:

"In some cases, it is inadequate to remove an organ from a dead body. In kidney, heart and liver transplantation, removal must be from a living body, or from a body in a condition as near to living as possible. Questions of consent arise. Often the living body which is the only available source may be the body of a child, perhaps an identical twin. Bone marrow, which will be regenerated in the body of the donor, may be urgently required to save a life. Who can give consent in such cases – parent, guardian, court, hospital committee or state?

"Here there may be a conflict of interests between the rights of the dead and the rights of the dying. Consider the case of Bill Mathews in the US who, being thought dead through cessation of brain function, was being prepared for an operation to remove his heart, when a chance movement of his Adam's apple gave the surgeon second thoughts about proceeding. Spared, he lived to lead an active life."

And I am not sure if that will cheer you up or scare the pants off you!

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July 27th: Hilaire Belloc
'Hesba Stretton' (Sarah Smith)

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July 28th: Beatrix Potter
John Ashbery
Jim Davis

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Jim Davis started cartooning on the strip *Tumbleweeds*. But as a cat lover perhaps *Garfield* was the understandable next step. He said, "GARFIELD is strictly an entertainment strip built around the strong personality of a fat, lazy, cynical cat. It's the funniest strip I've ever seen. GARFIELD consciously avoids any social or political comment. My grasp of the world situation isn't that firm anyway. For years, I thought OPEC was a denture adhesive."

He also says, "To what do I attribute my cartooning ability? As a child I was asthmatic. I was stuck indoors with little more than my imagination and paper and pencil to play with. While asthma worked for me, I wouldn't recommend it for everyone."

And, "Do I like cartooning?...It's nice work if you can get it."

I have an affection for Garfield but more than liking a 'fat, lazy, cynical' cat I admire anyone who can consistently come up with ideas and clever punch lines about a cat.

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July 29th: Booth Tarkington

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July 30th: WHAT DID THE PHOENICIANS READ

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"In recent years this wholly negative attitude toward the Phoenicians has begun to change. This is partly because by now over six thousand inscriptions have come down to us in Phoenician or in its Carthaginian manifestations of Punic and Neo-Punic (i.e., after the Roman conquest of 146 B.C.), allowing us the chance to discover what the character of the Phoenician language was like. A study of the individual words and syntax has led scholars to the belief that there really was much more to Phoenician thought and writing than direct evidence would indicate. Some scholars now feel that the early Hebrew Bible shows an enormous amount of influence from Canaanite and Phoenician sources; W. F. Albright has gone so far as to say.

"There can be no doubt that the Bible has preserved some of the best in Phoenician literature… Without the powerful influence of the Canaanite literary tradition we should lack much of the perennial appeal exerted by Hebrew poetic style and prosody, poetic imagery and the vivid description of natural phenomena. Through the Bible the entire civilized world has fallen heir to Phoenician art.

"Even if we must revise at least somewhat our traditional thinking about the literature of the Phoenicians, many questions still remain, and too few examples of Phoenician writing exist for us to get many answers. Was the Greek attitude towards the treacherous Phoenicians correct, or just the jealous ramblings of an archrival in overseas commerce? Did the Phoenician culture, which was so highly religious and technically advanced, really have shallow valleys and an indifference to the plight of the individual? Such a description may seem to be paradoxical, but in fact it only shows that the Phoenicians who founded Carthage – with or without Dido – were a highly complex society that scholars are only just beginning to understand."

From *Carthage* by David Soren, Aicha Ben Abed ben Khadet, and Hedi Slim.

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July 31st: Primo Levi
Cees Nooteboom

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I came across a novel by Dutch novelist Cees Nooteboom called *Lost Paradise*. Milton called his story of Adam and Eve, God and Satan and angels, *Paradise Lost*. So where did Nooteboom have in mind? Strangely enough, his is Australia. He has two women come from Brazil interested in Aboriginal art. He describes an Australia "where the whites were the descendants of convicts and felons who had clung to the edges of this huge island because the land in between was a broiling-hot desert inhabited by the others – the people who had lived there forever and looked as if they had sprung from the land itself: scorched, sun-seared beings who trod softly over the earth and lived as if time didn't exist; they, too, lived an upside-down life unlike that of anyone else on the planet, as if all they had ever wanted was simply to be, and had passed down this changeless existence without ever changing anything in the world. We read about the Dreamtime, the time before time and memory began, when the world was flat and empty and shapeless and there were no trees or animals or food or people, until at a certain moment the Heroes, their mythical ancestors, appeared. No one knows quite how it happened, whether they came out of the ocean or the air or over the edge of the world. *Os heróis creativos* – in my language the words resound with an enchantment that still fills me with awe whenever I say them."

From there it went downhill. *The Times* might describe the book as 'Beautiful, dreamlike and beguiling'. But it just seemed to get sillier and more boring as I read on. As though he was determined not to write a travelogue and instead had ended up with something merely pretentious and dull.

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August 1st: Herman Melville
M. R. James

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August 2nd: Isabel Allende
Wallace Stevens (d)

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'Sunday Morning VI'
Is there no change of death in paradise?
Does ripe fruit never fall? Or do the boughs
Hang always heavy in that perfect sky,
Unchanging, yet so like our perishing earth
With rivers like our own that seek for seas
They never find, the same receding shores
That never touch with inarticulate pang?

Wallace Stevens from his *Selected Poems*.

I liked this but it made me realise I knew nothing about Stevens except that he was an American poet. Annie Dillard in *The Writing Life* said of him, "Wallace Stevens in his forties, living in Hartford, Connecticut, hewed to a productive routine. He rose at six, read for two hours, and walked another hour—three miles—to work. He dictated poems to his secretary. He ate no lunch; at noon he walked for another hour, often to an art gallery. He walked home from work—another hour. After dinner he retired to his study; he went to bed at nine. On Sundays he walked in the park. I don't know what he did on Saturdays. Perhaps he exchanged a few words with his wife, who posed for the Liberty dime." I assume he had breakfast before going to work. And I expect they did nice things together of a Saturday.

Then I came on this little story in Bill Peschel's *Writers Gone Wild*. "When Ernest Hemingway's sister, Ursula, was introduced to Wallace Stevens at a party in Key West, Florida, the poet from Hartford, Connecticut, told Ursula that her brother was a "sap" and "no man." After the party, a tearful Ursula told Ernest, and he went hunting for the modernist poet.

It was a tough bout to handicap. Stevens was fifty-six to Hemingway's thirty-six, but he was taller, heavier, and had been an amateur boxer. Stevens was also under the influence, but by that time of night, Hemingway usually was, too. Hemingway caught up to Stevens by the docks and challenged him. Stevens sneered, "You think you're Ernest Hemingway" and threw a punch. Hemingway countered with his fists, and when he was finished, Stevens had not only broken his hand on Hemingway's jaw but also suffered several knockdowns, a black eye, and a bruised face.

Worried about his standing back home, where he was a respected insurance executive, Stevens asked Hemingway not to tell anyone about the fight. While Hemingway agreed, the request rankled him enough to include it in a story he was working on. In "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," after Macomber runs in fright from a lion, he asks the great white hunter, Wilson, not to tell anyone about it."

But it isn't a parallel. It might have been better for Stevens if he *had* avoided a fight with a much younger man. And I am sure his colleagues asked him how he got his black eye and broken hand. Nor did the African story make Stevens embarrassed because, "About Hemingway," he wrote a friend, "I can say little because I don't read him."

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August 3rd: P. D. James
Rupert Brooke

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August 4th: Tim Winton
Percy Bysshe Shelley

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August 5th: Ted Hughes
Guy de Maupassant
Wendell Berry

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"Of course the worst of so-called modern agricultural economics has been to divorce the farm animals from the land. I cannot help quoting from a magnificent book written by a Kentucky poet and farmer, Wendell Berry, called *The Unsettling of America*, in this context.

Berry quotes from an article written by a man named Jules B. Billard in the February 1970 edition of the *National Geographic*. I read the article when it came out and was amused by this fine example of 'gee-whizz journalism'. It is about the future of agriculture in the United States. Mr Billard admits that the confining of all cattle on specialized 'beef-lots' is going to cause an enormous environmental problem. (Indeed one already exists—the problem of what to do with the mountains of raw manure and lagoons of stinking slurry is already insoluble.) He also notes (with approval) that in 1968 American farmers spread 'nearly 40 million tons' of chemical fertilizers on their land (an enormous expense and another dangerous source of pollution). Wendell Berry notes that the connection between these two severe problems is completely missed, 'Mr Billard forgot, or he never knew, that once plants and animals were raised together on the same farms—which therefore neither produced unmanageable surpluses of manure, to be wasted and to pollute the water supply, nor depended on such quantities of commercial fertilizer. The genius of American farm experts is very well demonstrated here: they can take a solution and divide it very neatly into two problems." "

Far From Paradise by John Seymour and Herbert Girardet

In *Against the Grain: How Agriculture Has Hijacked Civilization* Richard Manning says:

"Why agriculture? In retrospect, it seems odd that it has taken archaeologists and paleontologists so long to begin answering this essential question of human history. What we are today—civilized, city-bound, overpopulated, literate, organized, wealthy, poor, diseased, conquered, and conquerors—is all rooted in the domestication of plants and animals. The advent of farming re-formed humanity. In fact, the question "Why agriculture?" is so vital, lies so close to the core of our being that it probably cannot be asked or answered with complete honesty. Better to settle for calming explanations of the sort Stephen Jay Gould calls "just-so stories".

"In this case, the core of such stories is the assumption that agriculture was better for us. Its surplus of food allowed the leisure and specialization that made civilization. Its bounty settled, refined, and educated us, freed us from the nasty, mean, brutish, and short existence that was the state of nature, freed us from hunting and gathering. Yet when we think about agriculture, and some people have thought intently about it, the pat story glosses over a fundamental point. This just-so story had to have sprung from the imagination of someone who never hoed a row of corn or rose with the sun for a lifetime of milking cows. Gamboling about plain and forest, hunting and living off the land is fun. Farming is not. That's all one needs to know to begin a rethinking of the issue. The fundamental question was properly phrased by Colin Tudge of the London School of Economics: "The real problem, then, is not to explain why some people were slow to adopt agriculture but why anybody took it up at all, when it is so obviously beastly."

But is it 'beastly'?

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August 6th: Alfred Lord Tennyson
Marie E. J. Pitt
John Middleton Murry

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L. M. Montgomery obviously loved some of Tennyson's poems because she several times quotes from one of Tennyson's poems, particularly the line 'The horns of Elfland faintly blowing' but I don't think I knew this was Tennyson when I was young.

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,

And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying, dying.
'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls'
from *Garden Poems*. John Hollander.

I had also found this poem given other titles including 'The Bugle Song' so I went to Tennyson's collected poems to find which one was correct. And the simple fact is that it doesn't have a title. It is one of the interleaved pieces in his long poem 'The Princess'. Another of these inserted pieces is also sometimes presented as a poem in its own right.

'Now sleeps the crimson petals, now the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
The fire-fly wakens: waken thou with me.

Now droops the milkwhite peacock like a ghost,
And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,
And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now slides the silent meteor on, and leaves
A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,
And slips into the bosom of the lake:
So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip
Into my bosom, and be lost to me.'

Nor did we know that Tennyson had written the poem which had been set to music and which we were sure was actually 'Come into the garden, Mud' …

Come into the garden, Maud,
For the black bat, night, has flown,
Come into the garden, Maud,
I am here at the gate alone;
And the woodbine spices are wafted abroad,
And the musk of the rose is blown.
'Maud'.

Children are very good at innocently pricking the pomposities of the famous and the revered.

Tennyson was immensely prolific and some of his long poems are now hard going. But of 19th century poets he is probably the most likely to have a number of his poems, like 'The Brook', 'Crossing the Bar, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' or 'The Lady of Shalott', remembered and anthologised. And even if we haven't read his epics we may still know their titles such as 'Enoch Arden', 'Locksley Hall', 'In Memoriam' or 'Idylls of the King'.

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August 7th: Anne Fadiman

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"When my son was eight months old, it could truthfully be said that he devoured literature. Presented with a book, he chewed it. A bit of Henry's DNA has been permanently incorporated into the warped pages of *Goodnight Moon*, and the missing corners of pages 3 and 8 suggest that a bit of *Goodnight Moon* has been permanently incorporated into Henry. He was, of course, not the first child to indulge in bibliophagy. The great Philadelphia bookdealer A.S.W. Rosenbach deduced that one reason first editions of *Alice in Wonderland* were so scarce was that so many of them had been eaten."

Anne Fadiman in *Ex Libris*.

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August 8th: Frank Richards

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August 9th: John Dryden
Fanny Brawne
The Devil

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The devil, a devil, demons, evil spirits, a force of evil—these concepts are extremely useful to fiction writers. Where would the crime genre be without a sense of evil? Ideas of course vary from culture to culture. I came upon this interesting bit in *Scottish Lore and Folklore* by Ronald Macdonald Douglas: "The Devil in Scotland is rarely regarded with the same sort of awe and fear that he excites in most other countries. He is, more often than not, treated with a certain amount of humour; for, despite some of his towering rages amongst the witches he seems to be a bit of a humorous devil himself; and, even when he feels like it he rarely seems to be capable of doing much damage. He is a devil who likes to enjoy himself; he pipes, and fiddles, and drinks; and he is a devil among the women … Some of the names given to the Devil in Scotland indicate the spirit of humour with which he is regarded. He is rarely referred to directly as 'The Devil,' or even by such names as 'The Evil One,' for that would indeed be asking for trouble.

"But this 'tricky rascal,' as Professor MacLean calls him, may be called, with impunity, by any one of a score of by-names. Dòmhnull Dubh, or Black Donald is his usual name in the Gaelic. Other names given to him are no more serious than 'Auld Clootie,' 'Nick,' or 'Hornie'; and there are occasions when he is elevated to the peerage as 'The Earl o' Hell,' or is sent to swell the ranks of the untitled landowners with the designation of 'The Laird o' Yon Place.' And quite recently I heard him spoken of as 'The Queer Fella' … In Scotland, the Devil rarely turns up as he does in most countries in the shape upon which Goethe based his character of the tempter, Mephistopheles. In Scotland the Devil, Proteus-like, assumes any shape that takes his fancy … sometimes he is a workman or a fisherman; at other times a tradesman, for he is expert at all trades but one—he was never permitted to learn tailoring. For, whenever the deil's among the tailors, the craftsmen bolt, so that he has never learned how to baste.

"But whatever disguise he assumes, the devil can always be discovered by one thing: the cloven hoof is ever in evidence: the Pan-like goats'-feet of him cannot be covered."

"My old Mayo woman told me one day that something very bad had come down the road and gone into the house opposite, and though she would not say what it was, I knew quite well. Another day she told me of two friends of hers who had been made love to by one whom they believed to be the devil. One of them was standing by the road-side when he came by on horseback, and asked her to mount up behind him, and go riding. When she would not he vanished. The other was out on the road late at night waiting for her young man, when something came flapping and rolling along the road up to her feet. It had the likeness of a newspaper, and presently it flapped up

into her face, and she knew by the size of it that it was the *Irish Times*. All of a sudden it changed into a young man, who asked her to go walking with him. She would not, and he vanished.

I know of an old man too, on the slopes of Ben Bulben, who found the devil ringing a bell under his bed, and he went off and stole the chapel bell and rang him out. It may be that this, like the others, was not the devil at all, but some poor wood spirit whose cloven feet had got him into trouble."

W. B. Yeats in *The Celtic Twilight*.

Dante in the *Divine Comedy* uses several names for the devil: 1. Belzebub (by Dante), 2. Dis (by Virgil), 3. Lucifer (by Dante), 4. Satan (by Pluto), and 5. Lord of Misrule (by Conrad Malaspina). To that might be added many more.

But I wonder if our focus on evil is healthy? It seems to encourage so much dwelling on the worst that human beings can do while the come-uppance is often attenuated and sometimes missing altogether. In the rush to seem more 'realistic' crime novels and thrillers dwell lengthily on pain and horror and as in real life the victims are forgotten and the perpetrator remembered. Who, after all, remembers the girls who suffer in *The Silence of the Lambs*?

"Lester is gradually becoming aware, in this lull, that everything matters infinitely. Hence, even a black hole, especially one leading downwards, is a fair enough reminder of the judgment that now hangs over and scrutinizes everything she does. This quaint and picturesque medieval way of fancying things might not be so wildly misbegotten, come to think of it: For after all, what are tusked and clawed demons pictures *of*? The modern imagination has not come up with anything that is any more vivid in reminding us of the horror and dereliction that torments any soul who rejects the exchanges of love. The psychiatrist's couch may incline to a milder and more polysyllabic vocabulary, but no one will pretend that talk about paranoia or psychosis represents much advance on pictures of goblins. After all, "paranoia" is simply a label indicating a state of mind in which we think there *are* goblins lurking about."

Thomas Howard in *The Novels of Charles Williams*.

John Bunyan is remembered for *Pilgrim's Progress* but he also wrote *The Holy War* in which the devil (Diabolus) fights for the city of Mansoul (Man's Soul) against god (El Shaddai) and his son Christ (Emmanuel). Like *Pilgrim's Progress* it is an allegory, though I found it much less interesting than Christian's journey, and he makes use of the same device: names express character.

"Now you will surely think that, by this time, word must have reached the court of the good King Shaddai, informing him that Mansoul had been overrun by the giant Diabolus, his one-time servant. A messenger truly brought the sad news to the king, relating in detail how, first, Captain Resistance had been slain, then Lord Innocent had fallen down dead, killed with grief at hearing his great king so abused by a foul Diabolonian, and that the simple townspeople, believing the lies so cunningly set before them, had opened Ear Gate, letting in Diabolus and all his evil followers. The messenger then told of all that had befallen Lord Understanding and Mr. Conscience, and how Lord Wilbewill was now heart and soul in the service of the tyrant, with Mr. Mind as his clerk, and that these two were ruling the town and leading the common people into all manner of wickedness.

"Indeed," added the messenger, "Lord Willbewill has openly turned against his king, giving his faith and entire loyalty to Diabolus. As if all this were not enough, the new tyrant of Mansoul (once a famous but now perishing town) has set up a new Lord Mayor and a new Recorder of his own choice, two of the vilest men in the town, namely, Lord Evil-Desire and Mr. Forget-Good." He also told of the new strongholds, finally describing how the people were now all armed in case El Shaddai should come and endeavour to reduce them to their former obedience.

"This news was not delivered privately, but in open court before the king, his son, and all the high lords, chief captains and nobles. It was amazing to see the grief and distress that was caused by these evil tidings of the fall of Mansoul. Only the king and his son showed no surprise, having foreseen this years before and having even taken steps, unknown to anyone else, to provide for the relief of the town. Nevertheless, both the king and his son were deeply grieved to hear of the misery of Mansoul, showing what love and compassion they felt for this fallen and suffering town."

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August 10th: Lawrence Binyon
Alfred Doblin

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Awful Ends: The British Museum Book of Epitaphs by David M. Wilson says:

"The British Museum was coincidentally involved in one of the best-known epitaphs of the First World War. The poet Laurence Binyon was a member of the staff of the Museum and in 1914 wrote a poem entitled 'For the Fallen'. Not perhaps one of his best works in its entirety, it included, however, a stanza which is entirely memorable and was much used on war memorials, including that of the Museum itself:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We shall remember them."

And did you know this? "Acrostics are popular on funerary inscriptions of all dates; they are particularly common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many of them are banal, some exceedingly clever. I offer an example attributed to Ben Jonson, written for Margaret Ratcliffe:

M arble weepe, for thou dost cover
A dead Beautie undeneath thee,
R ich as Nature could bequeath thee;
G rant that no rude Hand remove her:
A ll the gazers on the skies
R ead not in fair Heav'ns Storie,
E xpresser Truth, or truer Glorie,
T han thy might in her bright Eyes.

R are as Wonder was her Wit,
A nd like Nectar, ever flowing;
T ill Time, strong by her bestowing,
C onquered hath both life and it:
L ife whose griefe was out of Fashion,
I n these times. Few so have rued
F ate in a Brother. To conclude,
F or Wit, Feature, and true Passion,
E arth, thou hast not such another."

"One of the greatest pleasures of the epitaph hunter is to dig out the might-have-beens: epitaphs to people not yet dead or even to people not yet alive. Archbishop Whately composed one such and entitled it an 'Anticipatory Dirge' – a splendid phrase! Its subject was Dean Buckland, the geologist and also, as his epitaph in Westminster Abbey proudly boasts, a Trustee of the British Museum:

Mourn, Ammonites, mourn o'er his funeral urn,
Whose neck we must grace no more;
Gneiss, granite and slate – he settled your date,
And his ye must now deplore.

Weep, caverns, weep, with infiltering drip,
Your recesses he'll cease to explore;
For mineral veins or organic remains,
No stratum again will he bore.

His wit shone like crystal – his knowledge profound
From gravel to granite descended;
No trap could deceive him, no slip confound,
No specimen true or pretended.

Where shall we our great professor inter,
That in peace may rest his bones?
If we hew him a rocky sepulcher,
He'll get up and break the stones,
And examine each stratum that lies around,
For he's quite in his element underground.

If with mattock and spade his body we lay
In the common alluvial soil;
He'll start up and snatch those tools away
Of his own geological toil;
In a stratum so young the professor disdains
That embedded should be his organic remains.

Then exposed to the drip of some case-hardening spring,
His carcase let stalactite cover;
And in Oxford the petrified sage let us bring.
When duly encrusted all over;
There, 'mid mammoth and crocodiles, high on the shelf,
Let him stand as a monument raised to himself."

Unfortunately modern epitaphs tend to be short and succinct.

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August 11th: Enid Blyton
Charlotte Yonge

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August 12th: Robert Southey
Avdotia Panaeva

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In *The Cambridge Companion to The Classic Russian Novel* there is an essay by Barbara Heldt on the question of Gender. Of course there are women in famous Russian novels: Gorky's Mother, Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Lara in Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*, but where are the female novelists? It is not that there were no Russian women writing novels in the 19th century. But rather there were huge problems put in their way. Heldt writes, "Women writers grew up and remained

inside houses: domestic interiors or gardens figure as the chief locus of their writing. As Mary Zirin points out: "Throughout the age of Russian Realism,…most women writers remained rooted in the provinces, cut off from day-to-day contact with editors and from the stimulation of interaction with other writers. They sent their manuscripts to the two capitals by mail." "

Heldt sees a major problem in the "unique combination of overprotection and gross neglect" which was the lot of girls in families of some means. On the one hand their opportunities to experience life other than in the home were circumscribed; on the other hand denied education they could not experience life vicariously.

And then there is the fact that many women used gender-neutral names in the hope of being taken seriously by publishers and editors.

Nadezhda Durova 1783-1866 as Aleksandr Aleksandrov
Avdotia Panaeva 1819/20-1893 as N. Stanitskii
Nadezhda Khvoshchinskaia 1824-1889 as V. Krestovskii
Sofia Khvoshchinskaia 1828-1865 as Iv. Vesenev
Mariia Vilinskaia 1833-1907 as Marko Vovchok
Maria Tsebrikova 1835-1917 various names including N. R.
Sofia Soboleva 1840-1884 as V. Samoilovich

"Avdotia Panaeva (nee Brianskaia) married the writer Ivan Panaev in 1837 and became the common-law wife of the famous poet Nikolai Nekrasov in the mid-1840s. Her *Memoirs*, written at the end of her life, treat not herself but the famous men she knew, the radical circle whose writings and other literary activity formed the blueprint for the socio-political debates to come. It is her only work which has been repeatedly reprinted, reflecting what has been considered important until now.

"*The Talnikov Family*, written under the alias N. Stanitskii, was Panaeva's first work and it occupies a unique place in her writing. Although written as fiction, it is the most autobiographical of her writings, and also the most powerful. Her fiction that followed with titles proclaiming the misery of the married women ("A Woman's Lot," "Domestic Hell"), was published in the leading radical journals. In her writing, marital and family injustice seems somehow reformable, like serfdom. The absolute hopelessness of the family relations of *The Talnikov Family* and its central figure of a mother so negative in character that her children could be happy only when she kept her distance from them hints at human depths unmitigated by any hope of spiritual or political reform. The censor understood the attack on parental authority through the description of an unhappy soul-destroying childhood and did not permit publication." It was finally published years after Panaeva's death.

Just about everyone in the story is either abusive, neglectful, greedy, uncaring or miserable. The house is dirty, crowded and vermin-ridden. Even when Gelb writes—"But the fairy-tales told them by their nurse have a healing power: when the hero or heroine of the story suffers, the children bribe the nurse with biscuits to give their lives a happy ending. Panaeva has a good grasp of "the uses of enchantment," and also of the uses of bribery in a household where food, not money, was the currency."—it doesn't seem enough to want the book brought back from obscurity.

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August 13th: Ridgwell Cullum

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August 14th: Bryce Courtenay
John Galsworthy

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August 15th: Sir Walter Scott
Ring Lardner Jnr.

Stieg Larsson

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A burglar gave Sir Walter Scott this advice, "'tie a little tight yelping terrier within; and secondly, put no trust in nice, clever, gimcrack locks—the only thing that bothers us is a huge old heavy one, no matter how simple the construction,—and the ruder and rustier the key, so much the better for the housekeeper."

So think "yelping terrier, rusty key" and stay safe. Except I doubt any householder would now want to rely on a rusty key. But the little yelping dog is still a good idea.

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August 16th: Georgette Heyer
Michal Goleniewski

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Tim Tate wrote *The Spy Who Was Left Out in the Cold*, the story of Michal Goleniewski who worked for both Polish Intelligence and the KGB then defected to the West bringing with him a huge cache of high-grade material which both the British and the CIA at first used to unmask a number of 'moles' but then under the influence of James Jesus Angleton and his bogus defector Anatoliy Golitsyn Goleniewski was gradually eased out of the CIA's good books and placed in the invidious position of not being paid by the CIA but not being allowed to seek other ways of making a living. Tate calls this the CIA's "discreditable role in the downfall of its most valuable defector." Goleniewski then claimed that he was son of the murdered Russian Tsar and he increasingly descended into paranoia. His story is a reminder that being a spy is fraught with unforeseen problems and rarely glamorous. Polish Intelligence spent a lot of time trying to track down his home address so as to execute him. But they finally gave up hunting him when his growing insanity made it clear no one believed anything he said any more.

Tate writes, "He played the role of both victim and villain in his own tragedy, a confused and confusing mixture of the good and the bad. He was a courageous anti-communist agent for the West, whose information led to the exposure of some of the most damaging Soviet spies of the Cold War, and a genuine defector, who risked his life to betray his country from principle, rather than for financial benefit.

"Yet he was also – and simultaneously – an arrogant, greedy fantasist, who could, and did, play fast and loose with the truth. In his private life, he was a devoted husband to Irmgard Kampf – whom he seems to have genuinely loved – and doting father to their daughter. Yet he was also a bigamist who casually abandoned his first wife and three children in Poland when he defected.

"He trapped himself in the hubrustic pretence to be Aleksei Romanoff; was abandoned in James Angleton's 'wilderness of mirrors'; and was ultimately driven into insanity by a combination of CIA incompetence and harassment, as well as his own profound personal flaws."

A different dissident was not so 'fortunate'. "The first ricin murder in Britain took place in 1978, after Agatha Christie's death, but it is one of the most famous cases of assassination.

"Georgi Markov was a Bulgarian dissident, writer and journalist working for the BBC and Radio Free Europe. He made many broadcasts about the regime in Bulgaria and the privileged lives of those in power in that country, and was particularly scathing in his comments about the president, Todor Zhivkov. On 7 September 1978, as Markov waited at a bus stop on Waterloo Bridge, he felt a sharp pain in his thigh, like an insect sting. Turning around, he saw a man bending over to pick up his umbrella, the man apologised and quickly crossed the road to get into a taxi, which drove away. Markov later told one of his colleagues at work about the incident, and showed him the tiny mark on the back of his thigh. Markov recorded his broadcast, and went home a couple of hours later."

Kathryn Harkup in *A is for Arsenic*.

Markov grew increasingly unwell. An x-ray didn't show anything. He grew feverish and began vomiting blood. "Fluid started to collect on his lungs, and on 11 September his heart stopped. Three days after the incident on the bridge, Markov was dead."

A post mortem found a tiny metal pellet in his leg (which had been thought to be a blemish on the original x-ray film) and further tests indicated ricin, from the castor oil bean, as the poison used. "After the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria it was hoped that the mysteries surrounding Markov's assassination would be cleared up. Documents relating to Markov and the incident were kept in the Bulgarian secret service archives, but many are missing or destroyed. There are still many questions to be answered; no one has ever stood trial for Georgi Markov's murder, or even been seriously accused of commiting the crime."

Among Markov's writings were *The Women of Warsaw* and *The truth that killed*.

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August 17th: V. S. Naipaul
Oliver St John Gogarty

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August 18th: Nettie Palmer
Brian Aldiss
DID YOU KNOW?

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"Privacy is ancient. It's as old as human life, born in the earliest whispers, stitched into the first clothes. It's a concept so primal that any attempts to define it, by dragging it through the nebbish taxonomies of academia and law, drains its vital meaning. We instinctually know what privacy is. It's about identity and ideas that thrive in isolation, and what withers when scrutinized. It's the dark-room that's dark for a reason.

"The *right* to privacy, though, is a highly modern concept. The term is usually traced back to 1890, as the title of a paper published in the *Harvard Law Review*. The authors, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, were partners at a new Boston law firm, and had become alarmed at the sudden intersection of two powerful technologies: the newspaper printing press, capable of ever bigger and faster print runs, and the Kodak, a portable, fast-shooting camera that enabled, for the first time in history, candid shots of unsuspecting subjects. "Instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that "what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops,' " wrote Warren and Brandeis. That was their short-term fear—that gossip would become contagious and all-consuming, and no longer an occupational hazard reserved for public figures. They also worried, upstanding 19th century gentlemen that they were, about the honor of women, that their portraits would be taken at random and "colored to suit a gross and depraved imagination." " The large unwieldy cameras, where the photographer was hidden under a black hood, were suddenly replaced by small portable cameras easy to use with quickly-developed films. "Despite a steep price tag—$25, or roughly $600 adjusting for inflation—thousands of the cameras had been sold by 1890. Reports of scoundrels sneaking photos of women in bathing suits led to posted warnings at beaches, and at least one resort banned the camera altogether. To some, this was a frightening, destabilizing moment. Technology was outpacing society, and possibly the law."

Who's Spying on You? by Erik Sofge and Davin Coburn.

Modern technologies grow ever smaller and ever more sophisticated than the humble Box Brownie.

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August 19th: Ogden Nash

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August 20th: Emily Brontë
Elmore Leonard (d)

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I Used to Know That Literature by G. Alan Joyce and Sarah Janssen says: "Western and detective novel author Elmore Leonard … contributed his rules on writing to the *New York Times* in 2001. His sensible advice included: "Never open a book with weather," and "Never use a verb other than 'said' to carry dialogue" (and never modify said with an adverb). On exclamation points: "No more than two or three per 100,000 words of prose."

Now if you want to write like Elmore Leonard by all means take his advice. But Elmore Leonard is not regarded as one of the world's great writers. So I don't think it is good advice.

I know children's writers like W. E. Johns have been criticized for using such a variety of words for 'said'. I don't have a problem with this. Children do not develop a wide vocabulary unless they hear or see a wide range of words. We do expect a little more finesse in adult novels but is that best created by lowering your dialogue to a lowest common denominator?

Now you can use punctuation to convey a tone of voice but its use is limited. Take: yelled, shouted, cried, exclaimed, demanded, screamed, bellowed. Each one suggests a slight difference in tone. Or: mused, muttered, murmured; again there are slight differences in the image they conjure up. You can turn to adverbs to create shades of meaning. Yes, despite Leonard's strictures. He said testily, he said cautiously, he said kindly, he said bemusedly, he said irritably etc. Adverbs are very useful. But 'he said softly' could be rendered as 'he murmured' or even 'he whispered'.

It is surely the mark of a great writer that not only the images, the characters, and the action, are presented with great thought and care to choose the precise word but the dialogue is also written with the same care to develop its infinite richness. He said, he said, he said, is lazy.

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August 21st: Will Ogilvie

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August 22nd: Ray Bradbury

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August 23rd: GOD

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Is Heaven a Place – a Sky – a Tree?
Location's narrow way is for Ourselves –
Unto the Dead
There's no Geography –
From Emily Dickinson's '489'

"The physical side of the universe is as a speck of dust compared to the invisible and spiritual part. In my past view, *spiritual* wasn't a word that I would have employed during a scientific conversation. Now I believe it is a word that we cannot afford to leave out."
Eben Alexander in *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife*.

"It is interesting to realize that our lives are mostly spent in time – time not in the sense of chronological sequence, of minutes, hours, days and years, but in the sense of psychological memory. We live by time, we are the result of time. The present is merely the passage of the past to the future. Our minds, our activities, our being, are founded on time; without time we cannot think, because thought is the result of time, thought is the product of many yesterdays and there is no thought without memory. Memory is time; for there are two kinds of time, the chronological and the

psychological. There is time as yesterday by the watch and a yesterday by memory. You cannot reject chronological time; it would be absurd – you would miss your train. But is there really any time at all apart from chronological time? Is there time as the mind thinks of it? Is there time apart from the mind? Surely time, psychological time, is the product of the mind. Without the foundation of thought there is no time – time merely being memory as yesterday in conjunction with today, which moulds tomorrow. That is, memory of yesterday's experience in response to the present is creating the future – which is still the process of thought, a path of the mind. The thought process brings about psychological progress in time but is it real, as real as chronological time? And can we use that time which is of the mind as a means of understanding the eternal, the timeless? As I said, happiness is not of yesterday, happiness is not the product of time, happiness is always in the present, a timeless state. I do not know if you have noticed that when you have ecstasy, a creative joy, a series of bright clouds surrounded by dark clouds, in that moment there is no time: there is only the immediate present. The mind, coming in after the experiencing in the present, remembers and wishes to continue it, gathering more and more to itself, thereby creating time. So time is created by the 'more'; time is acquisition and time is also detachment, which is still the acquisition of the mind. Therefore merely disciplining the mind in time, conditioning thought within the framework of time, which is memory, surely does not reveal that which is timeless."

Krishnamurti in *The Penguin Krishnamurti Reader*.

'The Holy Trinity is a way of explaining why we relate to the past as if it is the present. If we live in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and God is in every place, every time, then we too are with him in every place and time. Eternity is all part and parcel of the same breath that I am drawing now.' Rev. Charles Robertson of Canongate Kirk quoted in Roddy Martine's *Supernatural Scotland*.

Many people have written about God but of course they are writing about God as seen through human ideas, human beliefs, human desires. Years ago I wrote in a poem that time is a property of matter. When I came to re-ponder I thought perhaps 'property' wasn't the right word. But if we could remove matter from the universe, with its growth, change, and decay, then time would cease. It could not be measured so we would have stepped into eternity.

The trouble is we cannot envisage a universe without matter. But I think we can envisage God without matter. Because we know that all the images we create, however comforting, however beautiful, are not God but our simulation of what we want God to be.

Yet there are things which conceivably can exist outside of matter. Thought. Emotion. Love. We assume they can only be generated by matter. But we don't know this for certain. Perhaps love predates matter. And then there is the puzzle: why matter?

But an image of God as without matter and therefore eternal is hard to grasp. In effect it can't be an image. We can say God is within us and without us. Because eternity cannot be destroyed. But what does this mean for our daily lives?

And God has taken a flower of gold
  And broken it, and used therefrom
The mystic link to bind and hold
  Spirit to matter till death come.

Robert Frost in 'The Trial By Existence'.

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August 24th: Jorge Luis Borges
Olaf Ruhen

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Olaf Ruhen in *Writing: The Craft of Creative Fiction* dwells on the importance of plotting. "The first real attempt to simplify the problem was probably made by Count Carlo Gozzi, (1720-1806), an Italian dramatist whose *Turandot* was the basis of Puccini's opera, and whose *L'Amore delle tre melarance*, written to protect the dying *commedia dell'arte* from introductions from the newer French drama, was the basis for Prokofieff's *Love of Three Oranges*. Gozzi, a renowned controversialist, announced that in all history there were only thirty-six dramatic situations, and that all stories were based on these.

"At the beginning of the twentieth century a Frenchman, Georges Polti, in a search to reconstruct the thirty-six, classified some fourteen hundred great novels and plays, all that he considered of value at the time. He claimed confirmation of Gozzi's estimate: that all works of fiction can be shown to fall into one or other of these situations, or a combination of several.

"He put them under such headings as *Supplication*, *Deliverance*, *Pursuit*, *Disaster*, *Murderous Adultery*, and *An Enemy Loved*. For each he designated the essential dynamic elements—for the *Beloved Enemy* situation the essentials are an enemy, a lover, and a hater.

"He preached the value of a combination of known factors or situations in releasing, rather than restraining the creative talents. His work offered each writer the widest possible choice in using the material ready to hand.

'It is,' he wrote, 'toward an art purely logical, purely technical and of infinitely varied creations that our literary tendencies seem to me to be converging.'

"Many thousands of writers have followed the Polti method. Eric Heath is the one who, in his *Story Plotting Simplified* has developed Polti's work to more modern applications.

"For myself, I've never been able to use these methods to any effect. Of the several hundred plots of stories I've written, not one owes anything to Polti or Heath; though I have no doubt that, on analysis, all of them could be classified in one or several of the thirty-six dramatic situations, in their appropriate niches.

"In my opinion these methods are in much the same category as a number of machines evolved—and actually sold, and sometimes used with success—in which turning wheels ran down to expose, in juxtaposition, a number of story elements which the author then put together to form a plot. You can make something like this for yourself by simply writing down stock characters and story elements on the faces of the playing cards in a pack, and then dealing yourself a hand. And, in all seriousness, that too has been done by writers trying to get a plot."

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August 25th: Thea Astley
Robert Lloyd Praegar

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Robert Lloyd Praegar said of Nat Colgan: "It could be said of him, truly, *humanr nil a me alicnum puto*. He loved his kind (hence his enjoyment of humour in literature or society); he loved his country and helped to know it and make it known in his own quiet way; he loved true knowledge, and followed its beck along many parts. His contribution therefore to humanity, knowledge and culture is a real one, and worthy of imitation." As Nat Colgan is my great-great-uncle I liked Robert Praegar for saying this about him. But I actually first came upon Praegar's work in a documentary about Irish landscapes, because he was an early and influential environmentalist.

An obituary for him in *The Irish Naturalists' Journal* said of Praegar 1865 – 1953: "From before 1890 until 1940 Praegar's influence on the study of natural history in Ireland was enormous—not only in the realm of botany, but in all subjects connected with open-air study. The time was ripe. There were many naturalists in the country, small societies were springing up. Praegar was a born organiser and an indefatigable worker. He saw the need for co-ordination of

work and for publication of results. Without him the combined Field Club excursions, *The Irish Naturalist* and particularly the Clare Island Survey would probably never have been." He wrote of his own researches in *The Way that I Went* and the Clare Island Survey was the first co-ordinated ecological study carried out in Ireland. Nat Colgan studied the mollusca and recorded the local Irish names of flora and fauna (he spoke Irish but I am not sure if Praegar did) and I would love to have been able to sit in on their discussions. Oh, and Clare Island is off the west coast of Co. Mayo.

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August 26th: Eleanor Dark
John Buchan

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I remember at school many years ago the set novel was John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps.* We read it. We went to the movie of the book. Then I largely forgot it. Now Buchan's novels are seen like the last gasp of the British Empire. But the curious thing I discovered when I was reading *John Buchan by his Wife and Friends* (his wife Susan Grosvenor had been a friend of Virginia Woolf) was that though his novels such as *Prester John* and *Greenmantle* made him popular he was a more prolific non-fiction writer, with biographies of Cromwell, Montrose, Caesar, Sir Walter Scott, as well as histories such as *The Royal Scots Fusiliers* and *The Massacre at Glencoe*.

Susan Buchan writes, "His mind had been turning for some time towards the writing of detective fiction. He read a few thrillers and said to me one day before the war, "I should like to write a story of this sort and take real pains with it. Most detective story-writers don't take half enough trouble with their characters, and no one cares what becomes of either corpse or murderer."

"He must have had the idea of a story in his head before the war began, but if he had not had to go to bed at Broadstairs *The Thirty-Nine Steps* might never have been written. He was corresponding with the War Office about joining up in the Army, but was told that in his present state of health it was useless to think of it, and that he might be used in other ways later on. To distract his mind from the dull bedroom in our lodgings he started on a book. The Grenfells were also at Broadstairs. They had been lent a villa on the North Foreland: the tenancy carried with it the privilege of a key to what our Nannie called the "private beach," a small cove which was reached by a rickety wooden staircase. How many steps there were I do not know, but John hit on the number thirty-nine as one that would be easily remembered and would catch people's imagination. The staircase to the private beach has now disappeared and has been replaced by an imposing steel or iron erection. When this was done we received a small block of wood in the shape of a step bearing a minute brass plate with the words *The Thirty-Ninth Step*. But if the steps have disappeared the book maintains its early popularity. John used to read each chapter aloud to me and I waited breathlessly for the next one. In 1935 a film was made of it which has caused some controversy and a good deal of disappointment to those who love the book and who did not like the introduction of a woman into the story, and other drastic alterations to the plot. We went to the film *premiere* just before we sailed for Canada. John enjoyed it and did not mind the alterations in the least. My own opinion is, that it would have been a better film if the producer had stuck to the original story; but if one forgets about the book, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* as a film is a very good piece of entertainment."

But this cannot have been the film version we saw as a 1935 film would have been in black-and-white.

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August 27th: Antonia Fraser

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August 28th: Johann von Goethe
Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu

Janet Frame

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I think of Janet Frame writing anguished books about mental illness and the travails of women but she also wrote lighter things. I came upon her poem ‘Christmas’ and thought I would like to share it.

In my country Christmas is
frangipani
jacaranda
pohutukawa

is the flotsam holiday court in residence;
the king of the golden river
in swimming trunks, rubbed with sun oil,
saving the stupid who would drown outside the flags.

In my country Christmas is sun
is riches that never were rags
is plenty on the plate
is nothing for hunger who came unseen

too soon or too late;
is holiday blossom beach sea
is from me to you
is from you to me

is giving giving
in a torture of anxiety
panic of pohutukawa
jacaranda that has lost all joy.

In my country the feast
of Christmas is free;
we pay our highest price
for the lost joy
of the jacaranda tree.

Not least because I love jacaranda trees. And she was not the only one to write of them. Douglas Stewart called a poem ‘The Jacaranda’ which begins:

There is some sweetness not to be seen in air,
Not to be trapped in rain, nor to be found
In earth, that made this sky of blossoms flare
In blue and sparkling daylight out of the ground;
Some struggle of more than earth is in triumph here
In that gesture of joy and fulfillment lifted on high
Where, dancing with pale blue fire, the branches rear
And the dark twigs hold the sky up to the sky.

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August 29th: John Locke
Maurice Maeterlinck

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August 30th: Mary Shelley
Carmel Bird
(Janet Miriam Holland) Taylor Caldwell (d)

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"The novel about The Samaritans was called *The Listeners*. In America it was called *The End of the Line*, because Taylor Caldwell had stolen *The Listeners* before I even thought of it."

Monica Dickens in *An Open Book*.

In fact Caldwell called her book *The Listener* and a blurb for it says, "Who was the Mysterious Listener? And what strange power did he offer to fifteen people on a desperate quest? John Godfrey, retired lawyer in a large mid-western city, erects a beautiful marble sanctum as a monument to his late wife. Inside, behind an electronic screen that hides him from each visitor, is the unknown onen who sits…and listens."

I haven't come upon *The Listener* (though of course it is available on-line) but the other day I came upon her *The Romance of Atlantis* in an op-shop. Jess Stearn said of its history, "At the age of twelve, Janet Taylor Caldwell wrote a romance of Atlantis, a presumably legendary land that she knew nothing about. Her father, a newspaper artist, was amazed by the perception in the manuscript, its detail and insight. He sent it to the child's grandfather, a book editor, in Philadelphia. The latter, promptly horrified, suggested the manuscript be destroyed immediately. He did not feel that any child could have produced so unusually mature a work, intellectually and philosophically. The only alternative that suggested itself was that she had borrowed freely elsewhere. In a way, he was right. She had borrowed from the past, not knowing herself how she was dredging up that past.

"The manuscript lay fallow for sixty years. Then, on the strength of my collaboration with the novelist in *The Search for a Soul, The Psychic Lives of Taylor Caldwell*, I was given the task of readying the manuscript for publication. Provocative situations that Miss Caldwell had touched upon were amplified, some of the child's prose simplified; but the situations, descriptions, characters and story line remain pretty much as they inexplicably came from the pen of a twelve-year-old child. The insight, the wisdom, the biting wit, the disenchantment and yet the eternal optimism that intrigued and affected me are still there, together with an allegorical narrative that seems to fit our world with dramatic aptness. Indeed, it almost seems at times that the famous novelist as a child wrote this, her first novel, with prophetic insight."

The nice thing about Atlantis is that you can make it anything you want. And Caldwell gave her Atlantis both slaves and a form of nuclear technology. She also gave it a female ruler. At times the book made me think of Ancient Rome (not least because of names like Seneco, Gatus, Sicilo, Erato and Consilini) with a hint of Mills & Boon so I wondered what that grandfather saw as its source for borrowing? I did wonder if she had been influenced by *The Last Days of Pompeii* and perhaps Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. Her Atlantis is not an attractive place yet it remains an amazing book for a 12-year-old to write. So just a taste:

"Salustra shrugged. 'Thought is the death knell of action. However, I admire Talius, though I disagree that man is enervated by excessive virtue. I can laugh with Morti, who laughs at everything, including himself and me. At times, when I am depressed, I enjoy Zetan. He almost makes me believe that my soul is immortal; he props up my languishing ego with pillars of spiritual strength. I love to argue with Lodiso and crush the fragile fantasy of his ideal state with the hammer of fact. Yonis infuriates me with his enthusiastic simplicity. He tries to convince me that man is born good, when I know that he is born neither good nor evil.' "

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August 31st: Charmian Clift

William Saroyan
Marina Tsvetayeva (d)

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Marina Tsyetayeva is sometimes mentioned in the same breath as Russian poets Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova. Should she be? The other day I saw a copy of her *Selected Poems* and bought it.

Max Hayward said of her: "The best way to define Marina Tsvetayeva's place in modern Russian poetry is to say that she had none – this was her personal tragedy and her lonely distinction as an artist. There is a Russian expression about a person who is frantically at odds with himself and the life around him: 'he cannot find a place for himself'." This is a reminder that we have two reputations: one in life, the other after death. And the second one has treated her more kindly.

She lived a difficult life, first as a White Russian émigré in Prague then Paris, and then when her husband Sergei Efron became a Soviet sympathizer and went back, only to be executed, she followed him, unaware of his fate, and was exiled to Yelabuga in the Tartar 'Autonomous Republic' where she hanged herself in 1941. Her daughter was sent to a concentration camp but survived; her son was killed in the war. And an earlier child also died.

Her poetry is described as being a torrent of passion. And yet this was not my response. I wondered if this was due to reading it in translation. Perhaps. But there is the feeling that each time she wants to pour out her emotions she places a gap between her own feelings and the 'object' of her emotions. Such as in the last verses of her 'The Poem of the End':

These first and last tears
pour them now – for me –
for your tears are pearls
that I wear in my crown.

And my eyes are not lowered.
I stare through the shower.
Yes, dolls of Venus
stare at me! Because

this is a closer bond
than the transport of lying down.
The Song of Songs itself
gives place to our speech,

infamous birds as we are
Solomon bows to us, for
our simultaneous cries
are something more than a dream!

And into the hollow waves of
darkness – hunched and level –
without trace – in silence –
something sinks like a ship.

Somehow her emotion seems more powerful when it is not about her as herself. Such as in her 1938 'Poems to the Czech Lands 6':

They took quickly, they took hugely,
  took the mountains and their entrails.

They took our coal, and took our steel
  from us, lead they took also and crystal.

They took the sugar, and they took the clover
  they took the North and took the West.
They took the hive, and took the haystack
  they took the South from us, and took the East.

Vary they took and Tatras they took,
  they took the near at hand and far away.
But worse than taking paradise on earth from us
  they won the battle for our native land.

Bullets they took from us, they took our rifles
  minerals they took, and comrades too:
But while our mouths have spittle in them
  The whole country is still armed.

And while I was reading the book I came on one of her poems the previous owner had cut from a newspaper or magazine, perhaps because it was the first one of her poems they had come across or because they particularly liked it. As it wasn't included in the book and I liked it, here it is.

The bed of a railway cutting
  has tidy sheets. The steel-blue
parallel tracks ruled out
  as neatly as staves of music.

And over them people are driven
  like possessed creatures from Pushkin
whose piteous song has been silenced.
  Look, they're departing, deserting.

And yet lag behind and linger,
  the note of pain always rising
higher than love, as the poles freeze
  to the bank, like Lot's wife, forever.

Despair has appointed an hour for me
  (as someone arranges a marriage) : then
Sappho with her voice gone
  I shall weep like a simple seamstress,

with a cry of passive lament—
  a marsh heron! The moving train
will hoot its way over the sleepers
  and slice through them like scissors.

Colours blur in my eye,
  their glow a meaningless red.

All young women at times
are tempted—by such a bed!
'Rails'

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September 1st: Edgar Rice Burroughs

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September 2nd: Eugene Field
Hiram Johnson
John Howard

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We had Eugene Field's 'Wynken, Blynken, and Nod' in our poetry books at primary school. It was included in his *Poems of Childhood* published posthumously in 1904; he had died in 1895. Although many of his poems now seem over-sentimental the book does contain some surprises.

My harp is on the willow-tree,
Else I would sing, O love, to thee
A song of long ago—
Perchance the song that Miriam sung
Ere yet Judea's heart was wrung
By centuries of woe.

I ate my crust in tears to-day,
As scourged I went upon my way—
And yet my darling smiled;
Aye, beating at my breast, he laughed—
My anguish curdled not the draught—
'Twas sweet with love, my child!

The shadow of the centuries lies
Deep in thy dark and mournful eyes;
But, hush! and close them now,
And in the dreams that thou shalt dream
The light of other days shall seem
To glorify thy brow!

Our harp is on the willow-tree—
I have no song to sing to thee,
As shadows round us roll;
But, hush and sleep, and thou shalt hear
Jehovah's voice that speaks to cheer
Judea's fainting soul!
'Jewish Lullaby'

If thou wilt shut thy drowsy eyes,
My mulberry one, my golden sun!
The rose shall sing thee lullabies,
My pretty cosset lambkin!
And thou shalt swing in an almond-tree,
With a flood of moonbeams rocking thee—
A silver boat in a golden sea;

My velvet love, my nestling dove,
My own pomegranate blossom!

The stork shall guard thee passing well
All night, my sweet! my dimple-feet!
And bring thee myrrh and asphodel,
My gentle rain-of-springtime!
And for thy slumberous play shall twine
The diamond stars with an emerald vine
To trail in the waves of ruby wine,
My myrtle bloom, my heart's perfume,
My little chirping sparrow!

And when the morn wakes up to see
My apple bright, my soul's delight!
The partridge shall come calling thee,
My jar of milk-and-honey!
Yes, thou shalt know what mystery lies
In the amethyst deep of the curtained skies,
If thou wilt fold thy onyx eyes,
You wakeful one, you naughty son,
You cooing little turtle!
'Armenian Lullaby'

I was a mother, and I weep;
The night is come—the day is sped—
The night of woe profound, for, oh,
My little golden son is dead!

The pretty rose that bloomed anon
Upon my mother breast, they stole;
They let the dove I nursed with love
Fly far away—so sped my soul!

That falcon Death swooped down upon
My sweet-voiced turtle as he sung;
'tis hushed and dark where soared the lark
And so, and so my heart was wrung!

Before my eyes, they sent the hail
Upon my green pomegranate-tree—
Upon the bough where only now
A rosy apple bent to me.

They shook my beauteous almond-tree,
Beating its glorious bloom to death—
They strewed it round upon the ground,
And mocked its fragrant dying breath.

I was a mother, and I weep;
   I seek the rose where nestleth none—
No more is heard the singing bird—
   I have no little golden son!

So fall the shadows over me,
   The blighted garden, lonely nest,
Reach down in love, O God above!
   And fold my darling to thy breast.
'The Armenian Mother'

And one more surprise. I came on this snippet. "His father was Roswell Martin Field, an attorney who once represented Dred Scott, an African American man known for 1857 U.S. Supreme Court case in which he sued for his freedom. Many believe the denial of Scott's bid by the court prompted the U.S. Civil War."

"As if these existential necessities did not impose enough strains upon a disorganized society, well-intentioned individuals insisted upon adding others. The quite unnecessary shock administered by the Dred Scott decision in 1857 is a case in point; justices from the anti-slavery North and the pro-slavery South, determined to settle the slavery issue once and for all, produced opinions which in fact settled nothing but only led to further alienation and embitterment."
The Causes of the Civil War edited by Kenneth M. Stampp.

Alison Rattle and Allison Vale in *Remember the Alamo* explain: "Dred Scott was a slave who belonged to US Army surgeon John Emerson of Missouri. When Emerson was posted to slave-free Illinois and Wisconsin, Scott went with him and lived as a slave on "free soil" for many years.

Shortly after returning to Missouri in 1842, Emerson died. Although Scott had never attempted to end his servitude before, he was encouraged by abolitionist friends to file suit against Emerson's widow for his freedom, claiming that he should be considered a free citizen, having lived for so long in states in which slavery was illegal.

One Missouri jury ruled against Scott, a second ruled in his favor, and the Missouri Supreme Court upheld Mrs Emerson's appeal. After ten years, the case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, where, on March 1857, Chief Justice and former slave-owner Roger B. Taney upheld the majority decision, ruling that the descendants of Africans—free or enslaved—were not American citizens, and had no right to sue in a federal court. He declared the 1820 Missouri Compromise to be unconstitutional because it violated the Fifth Amendment, which prohibited the government from depriving an individual of his property—including slaves—without due process of law.

The implications and complications of the Dred Scott Decision were far-reaching: if citizens' constitutional right to human "property" was upheld, the government was obliged to protect slavery in every single state. The ruling was at this point met with abhorrence by all opponents of slavery, and civil war became inevitable."

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September 3rd: Will Dyson
James Hanley
Eduardo Galeano

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"After five days it was the custom for the dead to return to Peru. They drank a glass of

chichi and said, “Now I’m eternal.”

There were too many people in the world. Crops were sown at the bottom of precipices and on the edge of abysses, but even so, the food wouldn’t go around.

Then a man died in Huarochirí.

The whole community gathered on the fifth day to receive him. They waited for him from morning till well after nightfall. The hot dishes got cold and sleep began closing eyelids. The dead man didn’t come.

He came the next day. Everyone was furious. The one who boiled most with indignation was his wife, who yelled, “You good-for-nothing! Always the same good-for-nothing! All the dead are punctual except you!”

The resurrected one stammered some excuse, but the woman threw a corncob at his head and left him stretched out on the floor. Then the soul left the body and flew off, a quick, buzzing insect, never to return.

Since that time no dead person has come back to mix with the living and compete for their food.”

‘Resurrection’ by Eduardo Galeano in *Memory of Fire*

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September 4th: Mary Renault

DID YOU EVER WONDER?

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Keith Cooper in *The Contact Paradox* looks at that question of ‘a message from the stars’. In 1967 Jocelyn Bell Burnell discovered a little bit of ‘scruff’ on printouts from a ‘home made’ telescope. The exciting possibility that this was radio waves or something from space was hushed up by more senior astronomers in Cambridge. But in fact she had not discovered messages from space. She had discovered pulsars.

So the search for communications from other worlds went on. But Cooper writes, “Unfortunately the Universe is not obliged to deliver on what we hope or wish it to be. Our mainstream depictions of what we expect terrestrial intelligence to be like insidiously introduce bias right under our very noses. Rather than extending the range of possibilities, these depictions narrow it and confine our thinking to extraterrestrials that are just like us, if not in appearance then certainly in behaviour. While there is no question that technology is linked to intelligence – without intelligence we would not have the means to invent new technologies, or use them – can we successfully argue that technology defines intelligence? Or is technology merely a manifestation of intelligence, perhaps one of many? Consider the consequence – if technology is not ubiquitous with intelligence, then there may be myriad minds out there inhabiting the sea of stars that we could never detect from afar. Observations would never meet expectations; although intelligence would be common, technology would be scarce, resulting in a dearth of signals and the incorrect interpretation that we are alone.”

We search for other possible inhabitable worlds, we look at the medley of ‘noise’ we send out into space, we discuss the ethical possibilities and problems of potential contact. It is curious that anyone trying to pick up our signals three hundred years ago would have determined that we had no technologies—or even that there was no one here. But the fundamental problem is that we cannot imagine a world in which life, intelligence, technology, language, social interaction, community, is not in some way like ours.

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September 5th: Arthur Koestler

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September 6th: Elizabeth Ferrars

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September 7th: C. J. Dennis
Taylor Caldwell

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"Later, Snoopy Tanner, the gangster who had threatened to kill John West long years before, was mentioned by Alan Hall: he had known Tanner in the 1920s. He said that Tanner had supplied C.J. Dennis with the idiom for *The Sentimental Bloke*: "But Snoopy gave him underworld idiom, not the working-class idiom the book needed – all wrong really." "

Frank Hardy in *Who Shot George Kirkland?*

I wonder. Unless Dennis went out with ear muffs on he must have heard people around him. And as he didn't spend all his time in The Melbourne Club they must've mostly been ordinary people talking about ordinary things. And there was not a hard-and-fast boundary between the underworld and the people he met in pubs and shops and everyday life …

C. J. Dennis's long poem 'The Glugs of Gosh' was seen as a children's poem but John Vader in *New Guinea: the tide is stemmed* suggests it had an adult sub-text.

"In 1917, one of the journal's (*The Bulletin's*) contributors, C J Dennis, wrote a prophetic verse regarding his country's trade with Japan; it was called *The Glugs of Gosh* – the story of a people who worked all day for the sake of Slosh and suffered the cant and humbug that communities usually endure from their politicians. The baddies were the Ogs, the people of Podge and, in his story, Dennis warned of baubles from Podge (Japan) and selling back the raw materials of munitions. The Glugs traded stones for eight-day clocks, sewing machines, mangles, scissors and sox, and sure enough one day the stones came hurtling back. It was fortunate for the Glugs that eight-day clocks, sewing machines, etc. could also be hurled."

Next time you come upon 'The Glugs of Gosh' you can see if you agree with this reading.

""Nor did she ever see anything funny in jokes about drunks. Not long after we arrived in Belgrave I remember her making another of her requests to me, another appeal to me to be faithful, 'Mann dear,' she said, 'I want you to promise me faithfully you won't speak to Mr Dennis when he's "peculiar".' I had no idea at the time that she was referring to the author of *The Sentimental Bloke*, who was struggling to observe the command to be 'sober', but from time to time cutting bizarre capers, to the great amusement of the gossips of the mountain district. I made it my immediate business to see Mr Dennis on one of those days when he was 'peculiar', and so had my first lesson in the meaning of the word 'peculiar'. It was rarely possible for a boy to be faithful to his mother's requests."

Manning Clark writing of his mother in *The Puzzles of Childhood*.

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September 8th: Siegfried Sassoon
W. W. Jacobs

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Warren Tute introducing W. W. Jacobs' *Night Watches*, a collection of short stories set in and around the Wapping docks in London's East End, says, "The British are an island race, individual and independent in character with the sea in their blood."

Jacobs is famous for his horror story 'The Monkey's Paw' which still gets anthologised. But *Night Watches* was a different kind of collection; not horror, but often sadness in the lives lived by people in and around the docks; not poverty-stricken but mostly just scraping by. And there is the curious question in there: to what extent are the British still an 'island race' and did this feeling of difference subtly undermine the idea that they might belong to Europe rather than to the sea?

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September 9th: Phyllis Whitney
Dame Edith Sitwell
BRIDGE

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A large bundle of books about bridge came into Vinnies and just out of curiosity I thought I would borrow one: *Inside the Bermuda Bowl* by John Swanson. He writes:

"When I started, my intent was to write only about my own experiences. Unfortunately, there were two major scandals and one minor scandal (minor because no official charges were brought) involving cheating at the playoffs and Bermuda Bowls in which I played."

I remember Roald Dahl wrote a story of a bridge-playing couple who had worked out an elaborate code. But what sort of cheating goes on in the real world? Two Italians were using their feet under the table to send coded messages; two Indonesians were sending nessages by the way they placed their pencils on the table; two British men sent messages with how they held their cards; two Italians were using the way they placed their cigarettes in the ash tray. (I imagine smoking during play has now been banned.)

"… Julius Rosenblum, president of the World Bridge Federation, has proposed that a screen be place(d) diagonally across each table so that partners will not be visible to each other, and that bidding boxes be employed so that partners will not hear one another. He says, "Mostly the problem situations are not caused by outright cheating but by partnership communication in the gray area of manner, tempo and intonation." He believes most of the problem situations will be eliminated if his proposals are adopted."

So where did bridge come from? I thought it had an ancient pedigree but not so. Swanson says, "Whist, or a form thereof, developed in the 16th century. The game consisted of dealing out all 52 cards, turning a card to determine the trump suit, and then playing as partners to win the "odd trick", that is, more than six tricks. Whist was slow to evolve until the late 19th century. The first modification was that instead of turning a card to determine the trump suit the dealer named trump or passed the privilege to his partner. Even more radical was the idea of a dummy, the partner of the declarer placing his cards face up on the table after the opening lead. These innovations defined the game of bridge. Not long after, competition was allowed for the privilege of naming trump. Thus naming of the trump suit became an auction and Auction Bridge was born." "The game of auction bridge was in a state of flux for fifteen or twenty years in the early part of the century before Harold Vanderbilt incorporated several new ideas into the game, added a couple of his own such as vulnerability, and, *voilà*, the game of Contract Bridge came into being. The scoring system and rules of contract have remained virtually unchanged since their publication in 1925."

The Bermuda Bowl was the trophy for the first international bridge tournament held, naturally, in Bermuda.

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September 10th: Stephen Jay Gould
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)

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H. D. is remembered as the poet who inspired the Imagist style of poetry. The other day I came across her memoir, *The Gift*, of a childhood spent in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where her father was an astronomer. I think it would have been very exciting to have an astronomer (rather than a dairy farmer) for a father. But it was her mother who seems to have had more influence on her. She belonged to the German Moravian church and its beliefs and traditions had a great impact on H. D.'s formative years. She doesn't mention any early writing or the development of her passion for poetry but she does mention three books which had a great impact on her early years:

Grimms' fairy tales, Hans Christian Andersen's stories and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales* which is his re-tellings of Greek myths. This comes through in her adult poetry which is saturated with Greek, Egyptian and Biblical images. I got her *Trilogy* (which contained her *The Walls Do Not Fall*, *Tribute to the Angels*, and *The Flowering of the Rod*) from an op-shop and pondered on which poem might be representative …

… coals for the world's burning,
for we must go forward,

we are at the cross-roads,
the tide is turning;

it uncovers pebbles and shells,
beautiful yet static, empty

old thought, old convention;
let us go down to the sea,

gather dry sea-weed,
heap drift-wood,

let us light a new fire
and in the fragrance

of burnt salt and sea-incense
chant new paeans to the new Sun

of regeneration;
we have always worshipped Him,

we have always said,
forever and ever, *Amen*.

[17]

The Christos-image
is most difficult to disentangle

from its art-craft junk-shop
paint-and-plaster medieval jumble

of pain-worship and death-symbol,
that is why, I suppose, the Dream

deftly stage-managed the bare, clean
early colonial interior,

without stained-glass, picture,
image or colour,

for now it appears obvious

that *Amen* is our Christos.

[18]

She had a complex and at times turbulent life when she came to Europe and married fellow poet Richard Aldington; Virago says of her: "The First World War years were difficult for H.D. The Aldingtons moved to Hampstead where in 1915 H.D. had a miscarriage. By 1917 they were once more living in Bloomsbury. Aldington was in the army, and when on leave from France was absorbed in an affair with Dorothy Yorke. H.D.'s brother was killed in action, her marriage disintegrated, her father died and she embarked on a passionate friendship with D.H. Lawrence, and later Cecil Gray, who is the father of her daughter Perdita, born 1919. H.D. then began a long lasting companionship with the lesbian writer Bryher (Winifred Ellerman), who adopted Perdita, and together they travelled widely, finally settling in Switzerland following Bryher's *mariage de convenance* with Robert McAlmon (she later divorced him and, similarly, married H.D.'s lover Kenneth Macpherson)."

Her life at times must have seemed very complicated. Perhaps in her poetry she found calm and beauty and inspiration from the distant past to fill the poems which she said she wrote in odd moments in what she called her "peculiar ego-centric personal approach to the eternal realities."

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September 11th: O. Henry (William Sydney Porter)
D. H. Lawrence

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"United Fruit was the creation of a boy from Brooklyn." This young man, Minor Keith, worked for his uncle's company Tropical Trading Company building a railway in Costa Rica to export coffee but he noticed that bananas also grew very well there. He basically said 'give me land and I will finish your railway'. "He eventually grabbed 320,000 hectares of the Costa Rican interior, filled his underused trains with bananas, and began shipping the strange new fruit to the US, where unzipping a banana proved an instant hit." He merged with Andrew Preston's Boston Fruit and eventually had massive plantations in Colombia, Cuba, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. Fred Pearce in *The Landgrabbers* writes, "Keith had a rival: another banana empire run out of Honduras by Samuel Zemurray, an emigrant from Russia. Following Keith's land-grabbing motif, Zemurray had persuaded the Honduran government to give him 160,000 hectares, around a quarter of the agricultural land in the tiny country, along with the railroads. Zemurray's domination of his Honduran hosts inspired O. Henry, an American writer resident there, to coin the term 'banana republic' in his 1904 book, *Cabbages and Kings*. Six years later, Zemurray seemed determined to live up to the fictional image. Fearing US bankers wanted to force Honduras to tax his business to pay off national debts, he hired mercenaries to carry out a coup that put his man, Manuel Bonilla, in charge – and secured yet more land for his company."

In 1930 his company and Keith's United Fruit merged. (It is now called Chiquita.) But after their years of monopoly and treating their Central Americans as next best to feudal serfs, there was a gradual movement to stand up to United Fruit and claim back land. "In Guatemala, a reformist president called Jacobo Arbenz decided to take on the landed elite, including United Fruit. His reforms began by expropriating 60,000 hectares of unused land that the company held along the Atlantic coast. Zemurray was having none of it. United Fruit lobbied against Arbenz, particularly in the US where it branded him a Communist fifth columnist. The lobbying was so successful that this time the company didn't need to hire mercenaries. Instead, in 1954, in one of the more notorious cold-war episodes, the CIA sponsored a coup to get rid of Arbenz. And, no doubt coincidentally, to stifle land reforms." And so Guatemala limps along; "But the entrenched power of the major landowners has ensured that the reforms have never happened. Less than 2 per cent of the

population still own 70 per cent of the land – bad even by Latin American standards. The world of Keith and Zemurray persists."

'Sapper' introducing *The Best of O. Henry* says of his book *Cabbages and Kings*, "He never wrote a novel, but the nearest approach to it is "Cabbages and Kings." The same people, the same scenes run through it, and to appreciate it properly the book must be read in its entirety." It is a collection of linked episodes; perhaps a reminder that O. Henry was first, last, and always a short story writer.

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September 12th: Han Suyin
Louis MacNeice
Alfred A. Knopf

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Alfred A. Knopf is remembered as a publisher of many famous writers but he also had some wise words about National Parks. He said "a National Park or Monument is a scenic or archaeological or in some way unique preserve, and it is also a playground, camp-ground, natural schoolroom, wildlife sanctuary. It is not a resort, though there will always be those who try to make it so. The Parks are set aside for other than dollar uses, to be kept without impairment for the enjoyment of the people. They cannot tolerate exploitation of any resource, for exploitation uses up, makes over, mars, and changes the things that according to wise law must be kept natural. If a tree falls in a Park, unless it blocks a road or endangers a building or human life, it must lie where it has fallen, slowly to return to the earth out of which it grew."

"An argument for wilderness that reaches beyond the valid concerns of multiple-use-recreation, flood control, providing a source of pure water—is that wild lands preserve complex biological relationships that we are only dimly, or sometimes not at all, aware of. Wilderness represents a gene pool, vital for the resiliency of plants and animals. An argument for wilderness that goes deeper still is that we have an ethical obligation to provide animals with a place where they are free from the impingements of civilization. And, further, an historical responsibility to preserve the kind of landscapes from which modern man emerged."

Barry Lopez in *Crossing Open Ground*.

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September 13th: Roald Dahl
J. B. Priestly
Dante Alighieri (d)

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

Peter Turchi in *Maps of the Imagination*.

Maria Luisa Rizzatti in *The life and Times of Dante* writes, "The life of Dante Alighieri, considered by many to be the father of Italian poetry, is inextricably bound up with his greatest work, the *Divine Comedy*. A poem in three parts, the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*, it was the first major work to be written in the vernacular, Italian, rather than in the Latin of medieval authors. Thus, it ushered in the flowering of the Romance languages which took place during the Renaissance. Yet it is probably unsurpassed by any later work written in Italian."

And in case you have not read it she goes on to précis it. “The basic plot of the *Comedy* is simple. The poet and narrator, wandering lost in a wood on Good Friday in 1300, meets the spirit of Virgil, the greatest of Latin poets and author of the *Aeneid*. Virgil acts as his guide through Hell and Purgatory, where they hear the stories and observe the torments of a variety of sinners. Ascending a mountain, they reach the Earthly Paradise. Here Virgil must stop because, as a product of the pre-Christian era, he is incapable of receiving Grace. But Dante finds another guide in Beatrice, based on a woman whom in real life the poet knew and loved. It is she who conducts him through Paradise, purifying him for the final revelation of God.” Rizzatti also says of it, “The poem is on one level an allegory, describing Dante’s passage from sin and error, through earthly knowledge as represented by Virgil, to a state of grace. At the same time, it is a political and social history of the Italy in which Dante lived, especially of the beloved Florence which had banished him. Many of the personages who appear were Dante’s contemporaries; his own friends and enemies were included, along with great figures from the historical and legendary past.

“The poetry of the *Divine Comedy* is immortal. Literary document though it is, it has never been relegated to the dusty shelves of scholarship. Not only has everyone who knows Italian read it in the original, but much of its language has been incorporated into everyday speech. The ordinary Italian, regardless of rank or education, knows and loves its characters like members of his own family. It is no wonder that we tend to forget which incidents belong to Dante’s real life and which to his poetic journey, when his countrymen over 600 years later are still living with the fruits of his imagination. Thus the *Comedy* is an unequaled popular phenomenon, as well as a brilliant work of art.”

The Florence in which he lived was riven by conflict between the Guelphs, to which he belonged, and the Ghibellines. “In Florence, the old feudal nobility sided with the Ghibellines, while the Guelphs were the party of the communal bourgeoisie.” The Guelphs eventually came out on top but they then split into the Blacks and the Whites and it was the Black faction which banished Dante. In the meantime “On February 9, 1277, according to a sworn notary document of the time, Dante Aligheri and Gemma Donati were married. The bridegroom was not yet 12, the bride perhaps 10. Gemma belonged to one of the most prominent families in Florence, and brought her husband a respectable dowry. In those days, marriage was an alliance between two families, arranged by their elder members. The union would be consummated when the couple grew up.” They eventually had four children, Giovanni, Pietro, Jacopo and Antonia who became a nun as Sister Beatrice.

So what of the Beatrice with whom his name is coupled? “Beatrice’s brief earthly life is as obscure as her appearance. According to the *Vita Nuova*, the two met at the age of nine. Beatrice was dressed in red, “a most noble sanguine color.” They saw each other again at the age of 18, and this time Beatrice was dressed in white. Beatrice was almost certainly the daughter of Folco Portinari, an eminent citizen of Florence and founder of the hospital of S. Maria Nuova. If so, the infrequency of their meetings is a poetic invention: the Portinaris lived only a few steps away from Dante’s house and, no matter how segregated the life led by young girls in the 13th century, there certainly could have been no lack of opportunities for seeing one another. Nevertheless, a marriage was out of the question. Dante was betrothed to Gemma Donati; Beatrice eventually married Simone de’ Bardi and died at the age of 25 in 1290. The love between them was wholly spiritual. Death had no dominion over such a bond. After her death Dante realized that she was more alive than ever. When he sees her again on Mount Purgatory, she is not a dead girl, but a woman who speaks with authority; she approaches him vigorously, and then becomes maternal, radiant and comforting.”

In his exile in Verona and then Ravenna he wrote his best known work, the *Divine Comedy*, and it was in Ravenna that he died in 1321 and was buried in the Church of St Francis there.

I had a 'house sit' for a Japanese lady and her shelves were filled with books in Japanese but as I was dusting I was surprised to come on the three books of the *Divine Comedy*. This was the version begun by Dorothy Sayers and finished by Barbara Reynolds after Sayers died. Sayers says, "His opening words plunge us abruptly into the middle of a situation:

Midway this way of life we're bound upon
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone.

From that moment the pace of the narrative never slackens. Down the twenty-four great circles of Hell we go, through the world and out again under the Southern stars; up the two terraces and the seven cornices of Mount Purgatory, high over the sea, high over the clouds to the Earthly Paradise at its summit, up again, whirled from sphere to sphere of the singing Heavens, beyond the planets, beyond the stars, beyond the Primum Mobile, into the Empyrean, there to behold God as He is – the ultimate, the ineffable, yet, in a manner beyond all understanding, "marked with our image" – until, in that final ecstasy,

Power failed high fantasy here; yet, swift to move
Even as a wheel moves equal, free from jars,
Already my heart and will were wheeled by love,
The Love that moves the sun and the other stars."

Sayers notes Virgil, Ovid, and St Thomas Aquinas (c.1225/7 – 1274) as influences on Dante: "the greatest of the scholastic theologians, the "Common Doctor" of the Church, whose great work in systematizing Christian Doctrine according to the Aristotelian philosophic method dominated the thought of the Middle Ages, and is still officially accepted as fundamental to the exposition of Catholic theology … Dante studied the works of St Thomas closely, and the theological structure of the *Comedy* owes more to him than to any other single theologian, although the poet supplemented his teaching by that of many other authorities, and did not hesitate to differ from him, now and again, in points of detail."

I would not have thought of Homer as I read Dante, except that his epic is a journey, but Sayers writes, "Dante knew no Greek, and in his day no Latin translation of Homer seems to have been available. He knew the poems by reputation and by a few fragments quoted by Aristotle and Horace."

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September 14th: Alexander von Humboldt
Margaret Sanger

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September 15th: Agatha Christie
James Fenimore Cooper

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Cathy Cook in *The Agatha Christie Miscellany* writes, "Another of her father's influences was to give Agatha a life-long love of cricket. As a child she used to accompany her father every Saturday morning during the season to the Torquay Cricket Club, where he was official scorer.

"Half a century later, weekend guests to Greenway would be invited to participate in a family cricket match on a homemade pitch. Despite being a heavily built middle-aged woman, Agatha was never shy of having a go herself.

"When her grandson Mathew was chosen to captain Eton's First XI at Lords Cricket Ground, Agatha was so proud that she declared it one of the great days of her life. After her death, the tour of the England Young Cricketers Club to the West Indies was mainly financed by Agatha Christie Ltd due to provisions made in her will."

So you might look to her books for scenes set at cricket matches. And if you do, you will be disappointed. There is a mention of cricket in *Sparkling Cyanide*—"Inspector Kemp squirmed uneasily in his seat and peered into his teacup.

"Women don't play cricket," he said. "If that's what you mean."

"Actually a lot of them do," said Race, smiling. "But I'm glad to see you look uncomfortable."—but it is rather hard to associate either Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple with cricket. Still, it is a reminder that women were playing cricket more than a century ago. When Women's Cricket took off quite recently in Australia it was spoken of as something new. But in fact women had been playing cricket in Australia for many years. A cousin of my grandfather's, Vera Rattigan, was prominent in cricket in Victoria in the early 20th century. There were even books written about women's cricket. It would be nice to see those pioneer women cricketers given more attention. After all, modern over-arm bowling owes itself to women's long dresses …

Although Christie is not seen as a humorous writer she does have a wry sense of humour which I enjoy.

"Don't speak so ghoulishly," said Mrs. Bantry, "and don't use the word flesh. Vegetarians always do. They say, 'I never eat flesh' in a way that puts you right off your nice little beefsteak. Mr. Curle was a vegetarian. He used to eat some peculiar stuff that looked like bran for breakfast. Those elderly stooping men with beards are often faddy. They have patent kinds of underwear, too."

"What on earth, Dolly," said her husband, "do you know about Mr. Curle's underwear?"

"Nothing," said Mrs. Bantry with dignity. "I was just making a guess."

The Thirteen Problems.

Mr. Shaitana was diverted for a moment by a Lovely Young Thing with tight poodle curls up one side of her head and three cornucopias in black straw on the other.

He said:

"My dear, *why* didn't you come to my party? It really was a marvellous party! Quite a lot of people actually *spoke* to me! One woman even said, 'How do you do,' and 'Good-bye' and 'Thank you so much'—but of course she came from a Garden City, poor dear!"

Cards on the Table.

'These girls that lie out in the sun will grow hair on their legs and arms. I've said so to Irene—that's my daughter, M. Poirot. Irene, I said to her, if you lie out like that in the sun, you'll have hair all over you, hair on your arms and hair on your legs and hair on your bosom, and what will you look like then? I said to her. Didn't I, Odell?'

'Yes, darling,' said Mr. Gardener.

Everyone was silent, perhaps making a mental picture of Irene when the worst had happened.

Evil Under the Sun.

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September 16th: John Colet (d)

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John Colet became Dean of St Paul's, London. When his father (who had been Lord Mayor of London) died he used his inheritance to build St Paul's School. He is remembered as a friend of Erasmus. And he said wisely:

"War is sweet to those who have not tried it."

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September 17th: William Carlos Williams
Ken Kesey

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Ken Kesey wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and it was filmed and then it came to define life in an asylum. Of course Australians have written of their experiences inside asylum walls but such books rarely seem to have made much mark.

Nor has Australia been defined by political assassinations. But we did have one famous case.

Jean Stone in *The Passionate Bibliophile* (about her husband Walter Stone) wrote: "Walter, a vice-president of the Mosman Branch, was in the Chair at the second meeting on 21 June when about 850 people came to hear the Hon. Arthur Calwell, Leader of the Labor Party, speak against conscription for Vietnam. He was supported by James ("Diamond Jim", later Senator) McClelland, and Barry Robinson, secretary of the Youth Campaign Against Conscription. There was no generalized attempt to disrupt the meeting as on the first occasion, but speakers were heckled loudly and persistently by groups scattered throughout the hall. Arthur Calwell spoke with fervour and touches of humour in response to heckling. A generous time was allowed for questions and the meeting closed quietly.

"A few friends walked with Mr Calwell to his car after chatting in the foyer until about 10.50 p.m. as they turned aside after saying goodnight, a youth of 19, Peter Raymond Kocan, ran up to the car and fired a shot at Mr Calwell through the front window. Sitting in the back seat was Frank Williamson, then in his 90s, who had been present in 1891 at the formation of the Victorian Political Labor Council which later became the Victorian Branch of the ALP.

Seeing Kocan approaching, Mr Calwell thought him a well-wisher and started to wind down the window to shake hands. Before he could do so, he heard a loud bang and realized he had been shot. Fragments of glass and bullet were embedded in his jaw and the left lapel of his coat. Kocan, who threw the gun away and ran down the street, was chased and caught by Wayne Haylen, Arthur Calwell's godson, and Barry Robinson. Both later received medals for bravery.

"Greatly shocked and bleeding, Mr Calwell was helped into the hall and from there telephoned his wife in Melbourne to say he was not seriously hurt. He was then taken by ambulance to the Royal North Shore Hospital. His blood pressure had dropped and he was given emergency treatment.

"Outside the Town Hall Walter said to several people who were handling Kocan roughly, "Don't destroy the evidence", and took him into the hall. He wanted to talk to the boy while waiting for the police and find out something of his background and what had motivated him. On being asked was he fond of reading, Kocan answered yes, and to a further question as to what authors he liked, mentioned an obscure Nazi general who had written a political book. The name was familiar to Walter and he assumed the boy had been influenced by Nazi ideology. Fortunately Kocan was not expert in ballistics, for he had held the gun too close to the glass which had shattered, scattering the shot. Had it been held further away it might have passed through cleanly, with deadly effect.

"Arthur was a well-respected politician, known for his life-long concern for social justice; a taxi driver told me a few days later that he thought it a joke when news of the attack came over the cab radio.

"A compassionate, deeply religious man, Calwell agreed to a request from the boy's mother that he receive a letter of apology from her son. He describes it in *Be Just and Fear Not* as "a very contrite, sensible letter, written by a young fellow of considerable ability … I replied in the most feeling way I could. I said that I accepted his apology. I urged him to forget the incident and I wished him well." "

Kocan was sent to the asylum for the criminally insane on the Hawkesbury River.

"Peter Kocan subsequently became a poet and prose writer and in 1983 won the Premier's Literary Award for a semi-autobiographical novel (*The Cure*) about life in a psychiatric institution."

Was Ken Kesey influenced when he came to title his novel by Eugene Field's refrain in his poem 'Intry-Mintry':

"Some flew east, some flew west,
Some flew over the cuckoo's nest!"?

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September 18th: Dr Samuel Johnson

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"On the whole, the eighteenth century soon became satisfied with the current state of English. Welsted in his *Dissertation* claims that English has reached 'the Perfection, which denominates a Classical Age'. After our having 'trafficked with every country for the enriching of it', he holds 'we have laid aside all our harsh antique words and retained only those of good sound and energy; the most beautiful polish is at length given to our tongue and its Teutonic rust quite worn away'. The time for extensive 'trafficking' had certainly passed. The foreign language that continued to contribute most to English was French, but even in the Restoration period, though there was a fashion of using French words in conversation and in plays, the number of French words that were adopted into English was not large. They include *ballet*, *nom-de-plume*, *group*, *tableau*, *champagne*, and *reservoir*, and in *envoy*, *aide-de-camp*, and *commandant* successors to military terms like *dragoon*, *platoon*, and *brigade* borrowed before 1640. Military terms indeed continued to come in during Marlborough's campaigns, and Addison in No. 165 of the *Spectator* mocked at the 'modish' use of such 'modern military eloquence' as *gensd'armes*, *corps de reserve*, *carte blanche*, and *cartel*, and wondered whether 'superintendents of our language' were not required to prevent the entry of foreign, and especially French, words. *Enfilade*, *bivouac*, and *corps*, however, entered in Queen Anne's reign, and there was a trickle of French words throughout the century, increasing slightly at the French Revolution. Among these were *envelope*, *salon*, *bureau*, *canteen*, *roulette*, *connoisseur*, *coterie*, *glacier*, *chenille*, and words of working and social life, such as *casserole*, *croquette*, *picnic*, *etiquette*, *sangfroid*, and *gauche*."

From Dryden to Johnson edited by Boris Ford.

"London was perhaps as catholic in its commercial and industrial pursuits then as now. Every kind of trade was carried on within its walls, just as every kind of merchandise was sold. We are familiar with most of the fourteenth century crafts, but there are some which are now extinct or merged with others. For instance, we find the trades of "Plumier," "Fettermonger," "Wympler" – a wimple was the neck covering or kerchief used by women; "Fannere," who made fans for winnowing corn; "Pater-nosterer," or maker of prayer beads; "Pinmaker," "Saucer," or dealer in salt; "Tabourer," or maker of little drums called tabours; "Imageur," or maker of images for church purposes; "Melekmekere," probably a mallet maker; "Selmakere," or seal maker; "Knyfsmyth;" "Kissere," probably a maker of armour for the thighs – *cuisses*; "Selk-wyfe," a silk woman; "Chaloner," or maker of "chalon," used for coverlets; "Bureller," or maker of *burel*, a kind of coarse cloth; "Disshere," or maker of dishes; "Pelterer," or skinner; "Wayte," or watchman; "Walker," i.e., a fuller who fulled at a walk-mill; and many others."

Walter Besant and James Rice in *Sir Richard Whittington*. 1905.

Words constantly enter the language. But words also drop out. I do not envy anyone the job of dictionary-making.

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September 19th: William Golding
Frank O'Connor

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Christopher Koch attended a writing class in the US where Irish short-story writer Frank O'Connor was a tutor. Koch in *Crossing the Gap* writes, "As legendary in his own way as Malcolm Cowley, and a very proud man, O'Connor was a little testy in his old age, with not long to live, and plainly critical of the new values being born in America in 1961. In a number of ways during discussion, it became evident that he and I, an Irishman and an Australian of different ages, somehow came from the same background, the same value-system, in contrast with the Americans – and despite my warm good fellowship with these young men and women of my own age, many of whom were becoming real friends, there was an area in which Frank O'Connor and I were foreigners to them, and not to each other. As we agreed on some moral or literary point to which the rest of the table objected, O'Connor's eyes and mine would meet in mutual support or amused bafflement. The occasion on which this happened with most clarity was when one of the class read us a story he had written in the first person about a paedophile who had raped and then killed a small girl.

"This was the period when American expert and popular concern was coming to focus largely on the criminal, not the victim, in the way that has since had such profound legal and social consequences throughout the West. The criminal needed all our sympathy and understanding; if possible, we should identify with him; and the story took this proposition to somewhat unusual lengths. The paedophile-murderer had committed his crime in a deserted, beautiful spot – as I recall, in the long grass beside a river – and told from his point of view, it all seemed very understandable and natural, or was meant to. 'You don't understand,' he said (or words to that effect). 'It was cool and beautiful down there.'

"When the author had finished, there was near unanimous agreement around the table that a powerful effect had been created, and that the mind of the killer had been sympathetically entered. But Frank O'Connor and I sat staring at each other in silence from opposite ends of the table. His face expressed an incredulous distaste; and I decided to voice the thought we both knew we were sharing.

'But what about the little girl?'

There was a surprised silence.

'That's right,' O'Connor said. 'What about the murdered child? And her parents? What thought does your story give to them?'

"They stared; we were speaking a language that was not only unfashionable; it was barely understood."

Of course, we are still focused on killers, not their victims. Books about them sell. Whereas most victims, unless they are very high profile, tend to be forgotten.

Someone gave me an article from the *Guardian Weekly* about French writer, bookshop owner, and film-maker Stéphane Bourgoin who managed to parlay his fascination with serial killers into meetings with FBI profilers, serial killers, and investigators. He churned out books, *The Black Book of Serial Killers*, *100 Years of Serial Killers*, *The Serial Killers are Among Us*, and *Who Killed the Black Dahlia?* He also claimed a serial killer had murdered his wife Eileen. But slowly the story began to unravel. His books repeated a lot of the same information, as well as plagiarizing other people's writings, he hadn't done the dozens of interviews he claimed, no one could find his supposedly murdered wife. Despite this he still has a following because anything about serial killers seems to fascinate people and yet most murders are *not* perpetrated by serial killers. You might think otherwise after sampling the Crime section in your library but only about 1% of murders are linked to a serial killer. So why the fascination?

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September 20th: Upton Sinclair

Jimmy Perry
Charles Williams
Girolamo Cardano (d)

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Where do ideas come from? Jimmy Perry and David Croft are remembered for *Dad's Army*, among other comedies. Jimmy Perry wrote, "During the summer of 1967, I was walking through St James's Park and in the distance I could hear the bands playing for the changing of the guard. The red tunics of the soldiers made a brave sight—what a difference from the drab khaki battledress of the war years, when the Home Guard had a spell of duty at the Palace. I thought back to the time when, as a boy, I had been a member of the Home Guard at Watford. Who remembered the Home Guard now? Nobody. I walked quickly to the Westminster Public Library and looked through the shelves; not a single book on it. I asked a young library assistant if she could help me. 'Never heard of it,' she said.

That evening I was sitting on the train on my way out to Stratford, where I was working with Joan Littlewood's company as an actor, when it suddenly hit me! The Home Guard—what an idea for a television comedy series. I quickly made a few notes, and the next morning started on the first script. In three days it was finished. The question was what to do next. I thought that I could not possibly tackle a series like this on my own. I needed someone to work with, but who? A few weeks later fate intervened in the person of David Croft. I was playing a part in a comedy series which he was producing at the BBC, and I gave him the script to read. His reaction was instantaneous. 'What a terrific idea!' said David. 'Then what about writing it with me?' said I. We shook hands and it was the start of a great partnership.

The rest is history. Within two weeks the BBC had commissioned the show, and since then David and I have written over seventy episodes together. So many people have helped to make the series a success, but I would like to pay a special tribute to Huw Wheldon, Bill Cotton, Michael Mills and the late Tom Sloane, who had so much faith in it right from the start, and one extra thank you to Michael Mills, who gave it the title *Dad's Army*."

Perry died in 2016.

Norman Longmate wrote *The Real Dad's Army: The Story of the Home Guard*. He said of it, "It began, like the war itself, with a broadcast. On the evening of Tuesday 14 May 1940 the newly-appointed Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, appeared on the BBC Home Service." He talked about the German advance and said, "Since the war began the government have received countless inquiries from all over the kingdom from men of all ages who are for one reason or another not at present engaged in military service, and who wish to do something for the defence of their country. Well, now is your opportunity.

We want large numbers of such men in Great Britain, who are British subjects, between the ages of seventeen and sixty-five …" He said it would be called the Local Defence Volunteers; and almost before he stopped speaking men were heading for their local police stations. Though he put an age limit on the men this was not always adhered to. "Generally accepted as the oldest LDV was an ex-Company Sergeant Major in the Black Watch, Alexander Taylor, of Crieff in Scotland, who had served in the Sudan campaign of 1885, as well as in South Africa and Flanders." He was still serving on his 80th birthday. At first the men only had LDV armbands, then they received uniforms, then tin hats. There was some conflict between men who wore their uniforms and medals from WWI and those who only had an armband. A few months later the name was changed to the Home Guard. A parody from *Hamlet* went:

August 1940

Enter Armlet in his nightshirt, holding in one hand his newest blue serge suit, and in the other his denim uniform.

To wear, or not to wear; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The jeers and titters of misguided females,
Or to slope arms against my natty suitings
And smear my coat with grease; ay, that's the rub
That lends extremity to the long life
My suit was planned for. Yet should I attend
The Office in my denim uniform
I should, in truth, be fearfully arrayed –
(The clumping boots, the empty bosomed tunic,
The calf-revealing armpit-scratching pants,
The neckband sticking out a yard in front,
The trousers sagging out a yard behind) –
The girls would snigger, and the messengers,
Looking most reverend and sagely wise
Before me, mock at me behind my back.

Yet if I wear my blue suit on parade
The desperate chance of war might ruin it.
'What dids't thou, daddy, in the Greater War?'
'My son, I got this green stain on my waistcoat
When crawling on my tummy through the grass.'

"In contrast, too, to all the tributes paid to the Home Guard over the past four years, was the astonishing meanness with which it was treated now that it was no longer needed. Only after public protests did the government grudgingly agree that Home Guards could keep their boots and battle-dress – both valuable items at a time of clothes rationing."

"The whole Home Guard's total budget for a year was only £16,600,000, roughly equal to a single day's expenditure on the War. The Home Guard was an enormous bargain, the cheapest army of its size and fire-power that any nation ever possessed."

Longmate ends by saying: "And yet, smile as one may at the excesses of its fire-eating commanders, begrudge as one may the millions of man-hours that might have been more profitably or pleasurably spent, there is about the Home Guard (especially in its early days) a touch of nobility as well as absurdity, that makes one almost proud to have belonged to it, and certainly proud to be a citizen of the country which created it."

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September 21st: H. G. Wells

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September 22nd: Snorre Sturlason
Murray Bail
Dannie Abse

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Geoffrey of Monmouth is seen as unreliable because he takes the earliest kings of Britain back to Troy. Snorre Sturlason, too, drew on mythical aspects in the early parts of his history of the Norse kings. He says, "In Sweden there are many great lordships, many kinds of people, and many

tongues; there are giants and there are dwarfs and there are black men, and there are many kinds of strange creatures, there are great savage beasts and dragons."

And:

"King Harald bade a troll-wise man go to Iceland in the shape of some animal and see what he could tell him; he went in the shape of a whale. And when he came to the land he went west along the north side. He saw that all the fells and howes were full of land sprites, some big, others small. And when he came outside Vapnafjord, he went into the fjord and wished to go ashore. Then came a great dragon down from the dale followed by many serpents, toads and adders, and they blew poison at him. Then he went away west along the land till he was outside Eyjafjord. He went into the fjord, but there came against him a bird so big that its wings neared the fells" and so on, with great oxen and giants. But Snorre did go to a great deal of trouble to get dates, names and relationships correct.

The thing that strikes the reader is the sheer amount of fighting, looting, burning buildings with people inside them, and planning for battles that went on. It is rare for Snorre to mention peace in the land.

The kings and jarls had their scalds (bards) to compose verse before men went into battle and after battles were over and Snorre often draws on these verses as illustrations:

The *Long Serpent* had brought
The helm-dighted king
Thither to the great sword thing
(Then they decked the ships).
But south amid the war din
Gladly the jarl took the *Serpent*.
(Heming's noble brother
Dyed the swords in blood.)
Haldor.

The mighty battle-eager king
Said that in the old
Saudungsund he must
Fall upon Hacon.
The strong young prince
There found the jarl,
Who was of the best
And the noblest kin of the Danish tongue.
Sigvat the Scald.

Let us feed the raven gladly
And ward the generous prince.
Let us fell the Tronds
In this storm of Odin.
Torfinn Munn.

Warriors! Now we come
To the great fight.
The noble fighters shall not pale nor quake
Now the sword time grows.
Tormod.

Many fell in the water
From the ship's stems,

There the wolf got food;
The bodies floated down-stream.
The icy cold river was dyed
In the hot blood;
The warm blood poured
With the water out to the sea.

Einar Skulason.

I have heard, O lord,
That in wide Tunsberg thou didst win;
Eager thou art to dye
The wolves' teeth in blood.
The townsmen were afraid
Of the bright point's flight;
They were afraid of the fire
And of the bending elm bows.

Torbjörn Skakkascald.

It is very much a kings' history but Snorre does give some attention to queens, such as "Queen Sigrid of Sweden, who was called the Strong-minded". When King Olav of Norway sought to marry her after the death of her husband Eric the Victorious, King of Sweden, he said "that Sigrid should be baptized and take the true faith. She answered, "I will not go from the faith I have had before, and my kinsmen before me. I will not say anything against thee if thou believe in the god that pleases thee". King Olav was very wroth and answered hastily, "Why should I wed thee, thou heathen bitch?" and he struck her in the face with the glove he was holding in his hand. After that he stood up and she likewise and Sigrid said, "This may well be thy death!" " In fact King Olav came to a sticky end when he jumped off his ship, the *Long Serpent*, during a battle and drowned. While Queen Sigrid married the Danish king, Swein Forkbeard. It made for an alliance between Sweden and Denmark which was certainly not in Norway's best interests … And the moral of that story …

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A near contemporary of Geoffrey, Snorre Sturlason wrote what is an extraordinary book, *Heimskringla or The Lives of the Norse Kings*. Erling Monsen says of Snorre, "He first appears as an author rather late in life, for his first chief work, the *Edda*, was completed about 1220, and his second, the *History of the Norse Kings*, was written probably ten or fifteen years later.

"The *Edda* is a primer for young poets, showing how poetic diction and forms are to be applied. It is in three parts, and was perhaps written at different periods, though they form a unity. The first part is called *Gylfaginning* (that is, the beguiling of Gylfi). The second part is called *Skaldskapar-mal* (i.e. poetic diction).

"The third part is called *Hattatal* (that is, list of verse-forms) and contains a poem of one hundred and twenty verses, composed by Snorre for Skuli the Jarl and King Hacon. *Hattatal* is accompanied by a learned prose exposition of the rules and different applications of the verse-forms." "Snorre's *Edda* is a unique work, without any predecessors or parallel."

Monsen goes on to the influences behind Snorre's work. "As the author of the *History of the Norse Kings*, Snorre has had many imitators, but he rises above them all and his work is the most complete of its kind. Icelandic historical writings are considered to have begun with the priest Ari Torgilson the Wise (1067-1148) who soon after 1120 wrote the older history of his country in his *Islendinga-bok*, where he also gives a short sketch of the history of the mother-country, Norway. This book was lost long ago, but it is known in an abbreviated form. Ari was a conscientious and accurate scholar who strove to discriminate between truth and fiction.

"In Norway also short Latin chronicles were written about the kings of Norway, partly from Icelandic sources. Tjodrek, a monk in Nidarholm (Trondheim) covers the period from Harald Hairfair to the death of Sigurd the Crusader, and *Historia Norvegiæ*, written by a Bergen priest, perhaps went farther, but only the part down to St Olav's time has survived.

"Snorre knew and valued the work of Tjodolv of Kvin, a poet contemporary with Halvdan the Black and Harald Hairfair, who had told of the whole succession of Halvdan's forefathers right back to the old gods.

"Snorre, when he comes to the period of Harald Hairfair, was guided by the writings of Ari the Wise. From Ari the Wise he also probably borrowed his chronology.

"With the help of Thodolv of Kvin and Ari the Wise, Snorre tested the work of his predecessors and selected from them for his purpose. Besides this, he had probably gathered much material on his two journeys to Norway and Sweden.

"The historical saga was principally concerned with biography. Snorre's work is a collection of biographies with description of character as an outstanding feature. The special quality of his work is the skilful composition by which all irrelevant matter is kept out."

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Richard Fidler and Kari Gíslason in *Saga Land* have this to say about Snorri. "Snorri Sturluson is, I discover, Iceland's national hero and the greatest of the saga authors. He was also a poet, a historian and a national leader during Iceland's most turbulent century, and he met with a horribly violent death in 1241. Every Icelander knows his work and his name is everywhere: the island has a shrine, a statue, a street and a beer dedicated to him.

"Snorri is believed to have written *Egil's Saga*, one of the most loved family sagas. He also wrote the epic history of the Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla*, and the *Prose Edda*, the compendium of Norse myths that remains the richest source of information we have on Thor, Odin and Loki, the creation of the Norse universe and its apocalypse on the day called Ragnarok. Today, Snorri Sturluson's name scarcely reaches beyond Scandinavia, but his reach is global: so much of what we know today of the Vikings – their gods, their adventures and their inner lives – comes from the pen of this man, living in a faraway island on the rim of the Arctic Circle in the Middle Ages.

"Snorri was an outstanding lawyer and wordsmith in a nation that prized such skills above all others. His talents as a poet and storyteller, harnessed to his political ambitions, made him the most powerful Icelandic chieftain of his time. Iceland was a commonwealth without a king, but if there was to be a pre-eminent figure, Snorri was determined it would be him. Allies, enemies, lovers and family members were forced to revolve around his brilliance like lesser satellites.

"Yet Snorri did not fit the classic mould of the war-painted Viking chieftain who leads his men into battle, sword in hand. He was a well-padded, charming lawyer, skilled at manipulating others into wielding the axe on his behalf. He saw himself not as a warrior, but as a king without a crown, and so he shrank from physical violence, often (absent) at the centre of an army of kinsmen. This earned him a reputation as a coward, but Snorri enjoyed power, poetry and life too much to want to die young on the point of a sword."

Snorri was born into the Sturlung clan in 1179 and his education included Latin, poetry, and history. He was no saint, having three daughters and two sons with four different women.

" 'Snorri,' his nephew wrote, 'was a very good businessman and a man of many pleasures'. In conversation, he was beguiling and witty, a compulsive gossip. Holding court at his great keep at Reykholt, he could be a princely host at great Viking feasts – lavishing his guests with beef, mutton and horsemeat served on silver platters, and wine poured into golden bowls; providing riotous entertainment with music, dancing and bouts of wrestling. And yet, as a power politician, Snorri could be ruthlessly mean, wielding his sharp legal intellect to carve out every last petty advantage from a lawsuit settlement. Although masterful and persuasive at legal argument, he was often a poor

judge of people. In the pursuit of money and power he needlessly bruised egos, and all too often he would pick the losing side in his larger battles, which would, in the end, destroy him."

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Latin, poetry, and history were all of use when he came to write his great history. But when I think of him writing history without any of the resources a modern historian would deem essential, even such basics as electric light and paper, I am in awe of his huge achievement. Of course, like Geoffrey of Monmouth, he includes some magical elements which a modern historian would rigorously exclude unless touching on the superstitions of our distant ancestors. But Snorri by recording such beliefs gives us an insight into the lives of the people he wrote about and an insight into his own mind. While his careful attempts to get his facts right often make them more reliable than other chronicles of the period. And at 728 pages it was not a little booklet tossed off between the many other activities in his busy life.

Iceland can be proud of Snorre Sturlason.

'That is the key point for all of us: history cannot judge us by our thoughts or feelings, only by what we leave behind.'

Snorre Sturlason in *Heimskringla or The Lives of the Norse Kings*.

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September 23rd: Baroness Orczy
Jaroslav Seifert
Alan Villiers

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When we put on an Afternoon of Eastern European Poetry for the FAW I went in to the State Reference Library thinking to have a browse and see what inspiration might come to me but, alas, they had removed their literature section to some remote back room. I don't know why. They seem to dislike having shelves of books around. So I went to the Hobart Book Shop and browsed there in similar hopes. And Jaroslav Seifert leapt out of a shelf and into my hands. I am glad he did. I had great pleasure reading him.

George Gibian introducing *The Poetry of Jaroslav Seifert* says, "When the Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Jaroslav Seifert in October 1984, he was the last survivor of a galaxy of Czech poets, most of whom had come into prominence in the third decade of this century and had been closely associated with one another. Seifert was the "Grand Old Man" of modern Czech poetry. He may also be thought of as the embodiment of a literary type which has died out in most Western countries – the national poet.

"Poetry is much more widely read and appreciated by Czechs than by the English-speaking public. Although there are only about ten million Czechs, the number of copies published – and sold – of works by Czech poets is frequently several times larger than that of American poets in the United States, which has a population twenty times greater. Or, to put it another way, perhaps fifty times as many books of poetry per capita are bought by Czechs than by Americans.

"In the Czech Republic, poetry is regarded as a normal, everyday activity. The names of famous poets are household words. Their works are widely quoted and discussed. They are respected by the "people" as well as by the elite; their support has always been solicited and their hostility feared by rulers. When Seifert was seriously ill, crowds assembled outside his house and stood in silence, in a spontaneous show of concern and respect."

These are the two poems I read out:

"The happiness of youth
is pleasant to remember.
Only the river doesn't age.

The windmill has collapsed,
capricious winds
are whistling, unconcerned.

A touching wayside cross remains.
A cornflower wreath like a nest without birds
upon Christ's shoulder,
and a frog blaspheming in the sedge.

Have mercy upon us!
A bitter time has come
to the banks of sweet rivers,
two years the factories have stood empty
and children learn the language of hunger
at their mothers' knees.

And still their laughter rings
under the willow sadly silent
in its silver.

May they give us a happier old age
than the childhood we're giving them!"

'The Year 1934'

"Life taught me long ago
that music and poetry
are the most beautiful things on earth
that life can give us
except for love, of course.

In an old textbook
published by the Imperial Printing House
in the year of Vrchlický's death
I looked up the section on poetics
and poetic ornament.

Then I placed a rose in a tumbler,
lit a candle
and started to write my first verses.

Flare up, flame of words,
and soar,
even if my fingers get burned!

A startling metaphor is worth more
than a ring on one's finger.
But not even Puchmajer's Rhyming Dictionary
was any use to me.

In vain I snatched for ideas
and fiercely closed my eyes
in order to hear that first magic line.
But in the dark, instead of words,
I saw a woman's smile and
wind-blown hair.

That has been my destiny.
And I've been staggering towards it breathlessly
all my life."

'To Be a Poet'

Seifert gives his poems some lovely titles such as 'Lovers, those evening pilgrims', 'Reluctant whispers of kissed lips', 'The Smoke of Marijuana', 'Window on Birds' Wings'; he writes of cities, war, famous people, historical events, but his fascination is women and they reappear in poem after poem, as people, as images, as metaphors, as illusions and will-o'-the wisp possibilities. Even when I came upon a poem which didn't suggest a place for women they would still appear. For instance, when I began his 'Mr Krösing's Top Hat'—

A tall top hat used to walk then
along the Embankment.
It belonged to Mr Krösing,
a singer at the National Theatre.
It was a somewhat strange hat
and I think it was unique in Prague.
Except, perhaps, in theatrical wardrobes.
—I wasn't expecting any women to appear … but—
Meanwhile on Pettin Hill there was a spot of rain,
the rain was rose-coloured and smelled
of young girls' lips
—and everywhere I went women waited …
To hide a girl's blushes,
provocative eyes, deep sighs,
Finally wrinkles and a smile becomes wry.

'The Fan'

And women's eyes,
their breasts, whose rise and fall
would rock your head in rich erotic dream,
do they not tempt you?

'Apple Tree with Cobweb Strings'

Today girls wear their hair too short
and that is why they now put gauze on human wounds
and hasten to the injured
to bear their blood-stained heads
upon the stretchers of their breasts.

'Prologue'

A few yards from us the women were dressing.
Thus did I catch a glimpse
for only a second or two
of the nakedness of female bodies

as hands raised skirts above heads.

'Place of Pilgrimage'

Those dozen girls made of light air
are dancing on the green lawn,
gently the wind is caressing their bodies,
breasts, hips, a dimple on the belly there—
open fast, oh my eyes.

'Dance of the Girls' Chemises'

All my life I have sought the paradise
that used to be here,
whose traces I have found
only on women's lips
and in the curves of their skin
when it is warm with love.

'An Umbrella from Piccadilly'

I started to wonder how his wife felt about his poetry. Did she see herself mirrored in them or did she feel he was expressing discontent with what he had, a longing for something else?

But if someone were to ask my wife
what love is
she'd probably start crying.

'Song from an Intermezzo'

To birdsong in the shrubs beneath my window,
to the perfume of flowers:
and finally also to beloved eyes.
They've all walked with me through my life
like stars.

But when I now look back upon my life
it seems to me
that these are probably the only things
worth living for.

'Lines for the Painter Ota Janeček'

* * * * *

September 24th: F. Scott Fitzgerald
William Faulkner

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I remember Dale Spender having a smack at F. Scott Fitzgerald for the way he treated his wife and used her diaries without her permission in his writing. Was she right to do so? Janet and Paul Gotkin in *Too Much Anger, Too Many Tears* write: "I thought about a book I had just finished reading which had affected me and which had taught me something important about myself and my relationship to Janet. I had started *Tender Is the Night* three and a half years earlier, when I first brought Janet for outpatient shock treatments. But I had found the novel painful to read then and laid it aside, picking it up again the previous night. The reputation of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the great twentieth-century romantic, had recently been damaged by the publication of *Zelda*, the biography of his wife. Like me, Fitzgerald had endured a torturous complicated relationship with an unhappy "psychotic" wife. But according to Zelda's biographer, he had actually helped destroy her; he had subtly invalidated her worth, ridiculed her ambitions, stolen her writing for his own use, infantilized her, and finally institutionalized her for life.

"In *Tender Is the Night* Fitzgerald attempted to redo his life. Superficially the fictionalized story of the middle years of his marriage, the novel was also Fitzgerald's metaphor for the Jazz Age, when a dream of blind pleasure and high-styled living, turned, as dreams always seem to, invariably sour. But in the book Fitzgerald created an odd new role for himself and he slipped a strange ending onto his own story that, in life, he was never able to reproduce: He transformed himself into a psychiatrist and through Dick Diver, his doctor-hero, he sustained Nicole, his fictionalized wife, took good care of her, and ultimately saved her. At the end of the novel, Diver, after manipulating his wife into a love affair with another man, felt free enough to leave her. With a shattering shakeup of his life, he abandoned more than Nicole; he abandoned the pretensions of his flurried expatriate existence, the bitterness of his wasted ambitions, and the sad futility of his dream of love. He returned, as Fitzgerald's alter ego always does, to the simpler, firmer, sourly inadequate traditions of his childhood home."

"In *Tender Is the Night*, Fitzgerald made Nicole reveal to Dick Diver something profoundly important about himself. But Fitzgerald had been unable to translate what he learned into action. He could no more throw off his dreams and ambitions than he could abandon his obligations toward Zelda. He had undoubtedly done her wrong, had transformed his confused feelings into a bitchy denigration of her. But he had remained haunted by her also. And, even after he had given up on her, he had burned out the rest of his short sorrowful life, still searching for what she had once symbolized to him, mystery and glamour and love.

"I could empathize with how badly Fitzgerald wanted to throw off the burden of his wife and I could share his fantasy of bringing her to a firm level of happiness and peace so he could finally leave her. But Fitzgerald had never been able to tolerate the sin of being unhappy, and he had scurried away from pain, moving from one wasted life to another. He believed all the myths of the careless Jazz Age, as he embodied these same myths, and finally he was trapped by them, as well. He looked at Zelda's pain as being distant and distinct from his own pain, as being "pathological" and "sick"; his refusal to see her as being anything more than a distorted alien reflection of his own dream finally destroyed him."

Should we feel sorry for Fitzgerald as well as Zelda? He had the fame and the money and she had the four walls of an institution. But perhaps the one who suffered the most was their young child … who knows …

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September 25th: C. K. Scott Moncrieff
Jessica Anderson

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Jean Findlay wrote *Chasing Lost Time: The Life of C.K. Scott Moncrieff: Soldier, Spy and Translator*. Translators rarely get much publicity. After all, they didn't create the deathless masterpiece, they only turned it from one language to another. But Moncrieff was also a writer and a poet when he wasn't translating other people's writing.

I,
Like a pailful of water thrown from a high window, fell … Alone.

An hour or two I lay and dozed, my unattempting features
Closed,
Or opened a reluctant eye to search the irresponsive sky,
Not speaking, while my dull ears heard many a
Just remembered word
Twine themselves into a song, tuneless

Here beginneth
That old lesson, earth to earth turns, and death regards birth,
Nothing of us but doth fade utterly …

… Ah, whose mind prayed
Through mine then? Whose quiet singing heard I from my
Stretcher swinging
Sorry, weary, sick, belated back to Arras? Who dictated
Strongly, clearly, till I sung these French words with my English
Tongue?

"Translation in Britain did not occupy a significant place in literary culture, and reviews of translations were not common. On the other hand Charles knew the Balzac translation supervised by his professor Saintsbury and executed by Ellen Marriage, and had also read some of Constance Garnett's translation from Russian. He knew Ezra Pound's translation from Anglo-Saxon and Provençal, and it has been said that Charles's first translations 'are like some Pound in their challenging foreignness'. What is beautiful in one language is often clumsy or sheer nonsense in another. Fidelity and transparency, dual ideals, were usually at odds in translation. A seventeenth-century French critic had coined the phrase, *les belles marvelou*, arguing that translations, like women, could be either beautiful or faithful but not both. Charles however thought the translation as he did in other areas of life, seeing it as a vocation and a service to literature."

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Uncorrected Proof, a book of spoofs about books and the book trade put out by MUP (or not?) writes: "New Edition of Proust 'A Must'

Paris, Wednesday

French publishers Pleiade have described the new edition of Marcel Proust's *A la recherché du temps perdu* as a must for both 'scholars of the reclusive dilettante's masterwork', and for 'general readers who have not yet had the opportunity to read the mother-loving, social climber's magnum opus'.

'What readers have to understand', said a spokesperson for Pleiade, M. Jacques Remy, 'is that the effete, Ruskin-lover Proust died before completing his masterpiece. This means that much of the material that this flower-frotting hypochondriac wished to add to his piece-de-resistance never made it to either the original edition, or Pleiade's own 1954 edition.'

Proust's English publisher, Picador, has reacted enthusiastically to the news. Said a Picador spokesperson: 'Our version of Proust, based as it is on D. K. Enright's masterful adaptation of Terence Kilmartin's wonderful translation in light of the 1987 Jean-Yves Tadie authoritative edition, and furthermore, based also as it is on Kilmartin's magisterial adaptation of C. K. Scott-Moncrieff's sensational translation in light of the 1954 M. Pierre Clarac and M. Andre Ferrac's gobsmacking edition, will, I have no doubt, become all the more masterful, wonderful, authoritative, magisterial, sensational and gobsmacking when rejigged by this new, definitive edition.'

In the words of Jacques Remy, 'At last the world will have the opportunity to read this father-fearing, cake-eating, tea-drinking, grandma-kissing, servant-sodomising, bed-laying, cork-lined, Jewish, gay, Dreyfusard's bildungsroman as he intended.'

The publisher then shot himself."

*

"Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty, the celebrated translator of Rabelais, was a devoted warrior for both Charles I and Charles II and died from a fit of laughter on hearing of the latter's Restoration in 1660."

From *Scots Kith & Kin*.

It is always a puzzle when you read a translation of a much-touted book written in another language and you think 'well, I didn't think much of that, so I wonder why people are praising it'. Was it that the book itself wasn't very good or was it that the translator had failed to capture the quality of the original?

Edith Grossman called her book *Why Translation Matters?* She suggests the obvious reasons: it gives writers in 'small' languages a wider market, it gives readers the chance to look into other cultures, it opens the world's classics to us. And if you want to point out that most of us aren't familiar with even our own classics it is still nice to know they are there, waiting, isn't it? And then she goes on to say, "And so we come back to the first question: why does translation matter, and to whom? I believe it matters for the same reasons and in the same way that literature matters—because it is crucial to our sense of ourselves as humans. The artistic impulse and the need for art in our species will not be denied. It has been with us almost from the beginning of our history, and despite profound changes in culture, customs, and expectations, it remains with us all over the world in a variety of guises. Where literature exists, translation exists. Joined at the hip, they are absolutely inseparable and in the long run, what happens to one happens to the other. Despite all the difficulties the two have faced sometimes separately, usually together, they need and nurture each other, and their long-term relationship, often problematic but always illuminating, will surely continue for as long as they both shall live."

And a couple of melodious mistranslations from *Lost in Translation* collected by Charlie Croker:

"Not to perambulate the corridors in the hours of repose in the boots of ascension."

Notice in an Austrian hotel.

"When passenger of foot heave in sight, tootle the horn. Trumpet him melodiously at first, but if he still obstacles your passage then tootle him with vigor."

Sign in a hire car in Japan.

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September 26th: T. S. Eliot

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Dannie Abse in his autobiography *A Poet in the Family* tells the story of an extremely embarrassing Poetry Reading. I had vaguely thought Abse was a young adult writer (his name perhaps?) but he was Jewish, born in Wales, and a poet, playwright and novelist. "I heard Herbert Read announce that my friend, Emanuel Litvinoff would read a poem. Now Mannie had told me beforehand that he intended to read his astringent poem, *To T. S. Eliot* which I knew well and which I admired. I wondered whether Emanuel Litvinoff was aware that T S. Eliot sat amongst the audience. Herbert Read had evidently seen Eliot enter, as had others in the chairs near me, including Stephen Spender.

'*To T. S. Eliot*,' Emanuel began in his customary rasping accent.

Herbert Read nodded with pleasure expecting that Litvinoff's poem would be one of proper homage. But Emanuel Litvinoff continued:

Eminence becomes you. Now when the rock is struck

your young sardonic voice which broke on beauty
floats amid incense and speaks oracles
as though a god
utters from Russell Square and condescends,
high in the solemn cathedral of the air,
his holy octaves to a million radios.

I am not one accepted in your parish,
Bleistein is my relative and I share
the protozoic slime of Shylock, a page
in Sturmer, and, underneath the cities,
a billet somewhat lower than the rats.
Blood in the sewers. Pieces of our flesh
float with the ordure on the Vistula.
You had a sermon but it was not this.

It would seem, then, yours is a voice
remote, singing another river
and the gilded wreck of princes only
for Time's ruin. It is hard to kneel
when knees are stiff.

But London Semite Russian Pale, you will say
Heaven is not in our voices.
The accent, I confess, is merely human,
speaking of passion with a small letter
and, crying widow, mourning not the Church
but a woman staring the sexless sea
for no ship's return,
and no fruit singing in the orchards.

Yet walking with Cohen when the sun exploded
and darkness choked our nostrils,
and the smoke driftng over Treblinka
reeked of the smouldering ashes of children,
I thought what an angry poem
you would have made of it, given the pity.

But your eye is a telecope
scanning the circuit of stars
for Good-Good and Evil Absolute,
and, at luncheon, turns fastidiously from fleshy
noses to contemplation of the knife
twisting among the entrails of spaghetti.

So shall I say it is not eminence chills
but the snigger from behind the covers of history?
Let your words

tread lightly on this earth of Europe
lest my people's bones protest.

Most of the audience began to clap at the end of the poem but Stephen Spender rose angrily and shouted that Litvinoff had grossly insulted Tom Eliot who was the most gentle of men. He continued with great emotion and spoke with great rapidity. Perhaps I did not hear Spender properly but he seemed to say something like: 'As a poet I'm as much a Jew as Litvinoff, and Tom isn't anti-semitic in the least.' In the confusion of anger, Spender was not entirely coherent but there was no mistaking his gutsy aggression towards Emanuel Litvinoff's attitude as it was forcibly expressed in the poem addressed to Eliot. For his part, Eliot, in the chair behind me, his head down, muttered generously, 'It's a good poem, it's a very good poem.'

Mannie Litvinoff attempted to reply to Stephen Spender but Herbert Read, with his chairman's hammer, violently struck the table and called for silence. He firmly indicated that he wanted no further discussion on the matter and would call on the next poet to read. There were a few lonely, scattered cries of 'Let Litvinoff reply, let him reply.' Most people, especially those sitting in the vicinity of Eliot sat silent and awkward. Others plainly appeared to be antagonistic to Litvinoff and had shouted 'Hear hear' when Spender had protested.

Litvinoff tried once more to reply to Stephen Spender's attack but Read, anarchist and defender of free speech, now, presumably because of 'good taste' and genuine feelings of loyalty to Eliot tyrannically censored all further dissension. There was something sad and ironic about the whole incident. In retrospect, something comical too.

As for Mannie Litvinoff, he felt hurt and rejected. He had been invited to read a poem and he had read a poem, a passionate poem, in his usual abrasive way and he had been treated as one who had come into a sacred place and had spat. Bitter as coloquintida, he quit the platform, his whole posture one of aggrievement and smouldering protest. He strode to the back of the hall and stood there, white and exhausted, while Herbert Read called on the next poet to read. During the polite applause that followed the next reading Mannie, with his wife Irene, moved through the door, and as unobtrusively as possible we joined them."

I expect the rest of the poets on the program felt they were an anti-climax.

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September 27th: Francis Adams
Frederick T. Macartney

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When I was at school we had a poem in our reading books called 'Bargain Basement' by Frederick T. Macartney. The other day I was re-reading it—with enjoyment—and realised I knew nothing about Macartney except that he was a Melbourne poet from the early 20th century. So what else did he write?

Not there, my dear, not there:
this way—down the stair.
Have you a line of hillocks and some white
absurd young lambs, all wool, and light
as leaping air?

No, sir—sorry!...
All right, don't worry.

You keep, perhaps,

some inexpensive scraps
of early green
springtime sateen,
with colour partly lost
in folds of frost,
prinked with those flowers that smell
so sweetly?—I know them well
but can't recall the name:
I saw them somewhere a month ago.

Unfortunately, madam, no …
Ah, what a shame!

I say, I'd like a length of thin
pale sea-water to wear next to the skin.
None? A creek, then?—with embroideries
of eucalypt trees,
the soldierly sort that gets
dignity from its golden epaulets.

No, sir, impossible …
Oh, well—

Then do you stock
that delicate sort of frock
now worn by blossoming orchards, thin,
wide and airy, like a crinoline?

No, madam, no: but I might find …
O, never mind.

Come on, my dear:
there's nothing for us here.
Thank goodness, we still have, in the Lay-By
(for what it's worth
when we two die)
that remnant double-width of damaged earth.

'Bargain Basement'

In fact Macartney 1887–1980 had a long and interesting life, working at many different trades and writing in various genres but he is remembered for the work he did with E. Morris Miller on his *Australian Literature* and for his serious and his light verse. William Wilde said of him, "left school at 12 and followed a variety of occupations including stints as a clerk, a bookkeeper on a Riverina station, a shorthand reporter, a freelance journalist and a Victorian government employee, until his appointment in 1921 to the Northern Territory public service". But it seems to be his light astringent verse that is liked by the developers of anthologies. So here is his poem 'Kyrielle: Party Politics'.

In the multitudes of counsellors
There is safety—also many bores.

The proverb nevertheless is wise:
Society has to organize.

Policy, a big name for the small
Belief that one's good is the best for all,
Is a tactful sort of compromise
Society has to organize.

As for our Parties, glance at these
In a political strip-tease—
All the Jack Horners who poke at the pies
Society has to organize.

The Liberal skates as near as he dare
To the very thin ice of laissez-faire:
For protection of private enterprise
Society has to organize.

But why should the noise of lathe and hammer
Interfere with the people's grammar?—
Unless free speech disdains this guise
Society has to organize.

The Country member has his say
(Nymphs and shepherds, come away!).
Earth has its bounties—a new device
Society has to organize!

The Independent weakens the grip
Of the hand that holds the Party whip.
It disturbs the mob when a brumby shies:
Society has to organize.

The fellow may be a Communist
Saluting the world with a menacing fist,
For even the rebel who defies
Society has to organize;

And he has the help of the stalwarts who
Attend opponents' meetings and boo
For freedom, which (their creed implies)
Society has to organize.

Or he may be a preacher of Douglas Credit,
Which painlessly bites the hand that fed it:
Money's a myth—just one of those lies
Society has to organize.

Yet we must admit that the Public Schools
Put a decent varnish on their fools,
With loyalty knotted in those old ties
Society has to organize.

The key to Labour in our nation
Is the peaceful resort to arbitration,
Which (with strikes to synthesize)
Society has to organize:

Each one, when a Cabinet colleague goes,
Has a bag-snatcher's eye for portfolios,
At a funeral of impressive size
Society has to organize.

The axe or rope or guillotine
Might be a suitable go-between
When they help themselves to another rise
Society has to organize.

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September 28th: Sir William Jones
David Unaipon

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"Back in 1786 Sir William Jones expressed the radical but insightful opinion that the Sanskrit texts of India (newly "discovered" by European scholars) bore to Classical Greek and Latin "a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could have possibly have been produced by accident; so strong, indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists." He then added the Germanic and Celtic language families to his list of presumed kin. This was a major breakthrough, for Sir William had discovered the huge language family now called *Indo-European*. Why the name? Because this language family includes many (though not all) of the languages spoken in Europe, the Middle East and India, and because that was roughly their full extent before Columbus started the stampede to America.

"What's more, Oriental Jones (as Sir William was called) had glimpsed a crucial notion: that the "original" language no longer exists as such. Just as with English, both the people who stayed home and those who moved away continued to change their language. Thus *everyone* ended up speaking changed later forms of a language that was no longer spoken. … The common ancestor of our Indo-European—nicknamed proto-Indo-European for lack of knowing what its speakers called themselves—was spoken around 3000 B.C., by our best estimate. But the earliest written texts in any Indo-European languages postdate 2000 B.C. So we are talking about prehistory again, and what we know of proto-Indo-European we have had to reconstruct by regular principles from the daughter languages."

Elizabeth Wayland Barber in *The Mummies of Ürümchi* suggests that the mysterious languages of the people of the Tarim Basin in western China, the mysterious people who pre-date the Uighur people possibly spoke languages most closely related to those of the Celts of Western Europe. This might explain their red hair and blue or grey eyes. But it would raise many other interesting questions.

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"Through the *Proceedings of the Calcutta Society* and other works by, or sponsored by, Sir William Jones, he (William Blake) had some knowledge of Indian myth and philosophy. One of his lost paintings was entitled 'Mr.Wilkins translating the Bhagaved Geeta' – which suggests that Blake had read the first English translation Geeta with attention. (Flaxman designed a memorial for Sir William Jones – the design is to be seen in the Slade school – depicting Brahmans teaching Jones the Indian scriptures.)"

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So who was Sir William Jones? A Welshman in India? Yes, indeed. Or at least partly. He came to India to work as a judge and became interested in both Hindu and Muslim law but for posterity it was his interest in Indian languages for which he is remembered. David Cogswell in *Chomsky for Beginners* writes, "Hindus had studied the grammar of Sanskrit for three millennia and their work in many respects went beyond the traditional grammar of the west in terms of philosophical consistency and analytical thoroughness. The sacred texts of India, the Vedas, were studied grammatically by tradition and the tradition was compiled by Panini, the precursor of modern linguistics. He based his statements on the direct observation of the actual texts he analyzed, and he expressed them in quasi mathematical symbols. Panini's Sanskrit grammar became the model for European linguists. In many aspects his methods have not been improved upon since.

"European scholars sought an explanation for the similarity of Sanskrit to Latin and Greek. Sir William Jones, considered the first great European scholar of Sanskrit, suggested in 1786 that the three languages may all "have sprung from some common source which, perhaps, no longer exists."

"Jones' insight defined the area of study for linguists of the next 100 years. Nineteenth Century linguistics was primarily historical and comparative, as scholars looked for cross-connections and evolutionary links between Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Germanic, Celtic and other Indo-European languages."

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September 29th: Elizabeth Gaskell

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September 30th: Truman Capote
Ion Idriess

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Idriess wrote in *Lightning Ridge*: "Invariably they carried several books in their swag to help pass time away, and as "food for the mind". They swapped these books with one another when meeting along the track, and at station homesteads. Hence, a real sundowner had command of a library, and in his well-regulated life did not care whether it hailed or shone."

(A sundowner was a swagman who made a habit of turning up at a station homestead at sundown when it was too late in the day to be given some work in return for food.)

"He (Red Pollard) was, statistically speaking, one of the worst riders anywhere. Lately, at least. Once, he had been one of the best. But those years were far behind him. He had no money and no home; he lived entirely on the road of the racing circuit, sleeping in empty stalls, carrying with him only a saddle, his rosary, and his books: pocket volumes of Shakespeare, Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, a little copy of Robert Service's *Songs of the Sourdough*, maybe some Emerson, whom he called "Old Waldo." The books were the closest things he had to furniture, and he lived in them the way other men live in easy chairs."

Seabiscuit by Laura Hillenbrand

John Curtin, later Prime Minister, said of the early days of the Victorian Socialist Party: "What an all-round life was demanded of these men and women! They were expected to distribute leaflets, read and listen to poetry, attend Bernard O'Dowd's class in history and listen to Jack Curtin and Scott Bennett or R. S. Ross on public speaking, read Marx, Swinburne, Shelley, Jack London, Robert Blanchford, Eugene Sue and Upton Sinclair, Robert Ingersoll, Shakespeare and Omar Khayyam, that their interests should be as wide as the world that they would conquer for Socialism, and as intense as the activities they followed in the street or in the study classes, that they should donate a shilling a week to a sustentation fund, take up a collection, sing in the choir, run a bazaar."

I wonder who chose the books to be read?

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October 1st: Leonie Kramer

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Leonie Kramer in her memoir, *Broomstick*, wrote, "In the 1980s, when Harvard University decided to restructure the curriculum of its undergraduate Faculty of Arts and Science, the latter's Dean, Professor Henry Rosovsky, began by asking and answering the question 'What is an educated person?'

The ability to communicate with precision, cogency, and force; an informed acquaintance with the ways in which we gain knowledge and understanding of the universe, society and ourselves; a sense of other cultures and of other times; some understanding of, and experience in, thinking about moral and ethical problems; good manners and high aesthetic and moral standards; and a depth in some field of knowledge, if only because cumulative learning is an effective way of developing the powers of reasoning and analysis."

Alfie Kohn called a book *What Does it Mean to be Well Educated?* but it was mainly a critique of the US education system, not an answer to the question.

(Kramer also tells this story about the Orr scandal … "One day, a student who was in one of my tutorials burst into the office in a panic. He had just come from a Philosophy tutorial, taken by a relatively new member of staff, Mr Orr. During the discussion, the student questioned something which the tutor had said. Orr became very angry and said, 'I was trained by the best logical brains in Britain', at which the student, who was very intelligent and normally polite, said, 'You'd never think so'. Orr then told him that he would fail him at the end of the year, or in his own words, 'I'll plough you'. I sent the student off to Professor Boyce Gibson to tell his story. Orr was true to his word, but the student's paper was re-marked and he passed.

At the end of the year I earned some money by marking Leaving Certificate papers, still with Oxford as a fading hope. One of the papers had a 'clear thinking' section, which was, in effect, simple logic. The questions were testing, and also imaginative. It was quick marking, because there was a small range of possible correct answers. On one occasion, after I had finished my papers, I was asked by the chief examiner to read another batch, in which the marking was erratic. I was happy to earn a little more money that year. Shortly after I had finished the extra marking, I encountered Orr, who shouted angrily at me, demanding to know why I had revised his perfect marking. I referred him to the chief examiner. Later, when he had left Melbourne for Tasmania, Sidney Sparkes Orr became the centre of a serious controversy which crippled the University of Tasmania for years. Alan Stout, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Sydney, was a vocal supporter of Orr, and I had an opportunity to question him about his reasons. I discovered that he had never met Orr. Sometimes pure reason needs to be tempered by reality.")

So what do we mean by education here? What should we teach our children and when and how? Should we abandon some subjects and create new ones? Should we train our teachers differently? Should we structure schools and school routines differently? These and many more questions are out there but agreed-upon answers are harder to find.

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"Higher education in Ancient Greece arrived through Plato's Academy, circa 387 BC, and through Aristotle's Lyceum in 335 BC. It was Aristotle who made reading the pivotal marker of education. It was part of a social history of community and collectivity."

Tara Brabazon in *Digital Hemlock*.

"The positive impact of time spent close to nature on children who need help with concentration is far greater than prescriptions of Ritalin."

Hugh Warwick in *Linescapes: Remapping and Reconnecting Britain's Fragmented Wildlife*.

"We should also remember that bizarre English ritual whereby GCSE results get better every year, yet anyone who suggests that the exams are getting easier is criticized for undermining the achievement of the successful candidates. In fact, taking the long view, this easing is obvious: there are forty-year-old O-level papers which are harder than the current A-level syllabus; and there are present-day university finals papers in maths that are easier than old A-level papers."

Ben Goldacre in *Bad Science*.

"The irony of this new discovery is that for hundreds of years educators did seem to sense that children's brains had to be built up through exercises of increasing difficulty that strengthened brain functions. Up through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a classical education often included rote memorization of long poems in foreign languages, which strengthened the auditory memory (hence thinking in language) and an almost fanatical attention to handwriting, which probably helped strengthen motor capacity and thus not only helped handwriting but added speed and fluency to reading and speaking. Often a great deal of attention was paid to exact elocution and to perfecting the pronunciation of words. Then in the 1960s educators dropped such traditional exercises from the curriculum, because they were too rigid, boring, and "not relevant." But the loss of these drills has been costly; they may have been the only opportunity that many students had to systematically exercise the brain function that gives us fluency and grace with symbols."

The Brain That Changes Itself by Norman Doidge.

"The Hedge schools were basically peasant institutions, maintained by the people who were always keen for their children to learn to read and write. The normal instruction was in reading, writing, arithmetic, Latin, Greek and mathematics, and very often the language of instruction was Irish, not English. These schools were the most vital force in education in the eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century they outnumbered all other kind of schools and their very national character was responsible for the introduction of the state system of education in 1831."

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

Of course we don't learn in the privacy of a hedge any more. Education is now vastly different. Thomas Frank writing of the state of the universities in the USA in *Rendezvous with Oblivion* says, "The coming of "academic capitalism" has been anticipated and praised for years; today it is here. Colleges and universities clamor greedily for pharmaceutical patents and ownership chunks of high-tech start-ups; they boast of being "entrepreneurial"; they have rationalized and outsourced countless aspects of their operations in the search for cash; they fight their workers

nearly as ferociously as a nineteenth-century railroad baron; and the richest among them have turned their endowments into in-house hedge funds."

Far from bringing down the costs of a university education students in the States now sign up for a lifetime of debt. And with it comes massive fraud. Frank says, "In 2015, the New York Times exposed a vast network of fake schools selling bogus credentials via 370 authentic-looking websites, all of them linked to one of the biggest software companies in Pakistan. Later on, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that the company reaped some $140 million through its sale of fake degrees."

And, "Perhaps the single most spectacular case of résumé fraud to make headlines in recent years was that of Adam Wheeler, a young man who first cheated his way into Harvard as a transfer student, then cheated his way straight to the top of its internal meritocracy, winning honor after honor with fake transcripts, fake grades, and plagiarized essays. … In his application to Harvard, he claimed to have taken sixteen Advanced Placement tests; to have gone to Andover rather than to the middling public high school he actually attended; to have briefly attended MIT; to be public-minded and community-conscious in every imaginable way." He then went on to send out "résumés asserting that he had coauthored books with his professors, that he spoke classical Armenian, and that he had written a scholarly study on "maps of ideology." Such preposterous claims were closer to satire than to fraud." (I assume he chose Armenian as they weren't likely to have someone handy in the office who spoke "classical Armenian".) "Yet Wheeler was able to fool one of the world's most exalted citadels of higher learning by feeding it back mangled bits of its own jargon. Of course Harvard didn't catch on—it just kept showering the con boy with awards and scholarships."

Frank doesn't say how he was caught, perhaps Harvard was reluctant to spell it out, but when he was "Harvard threw the book at him." He went to jail and was ordered to pay back all he had received through scholarships and financial aid. "That's what you get, I suppose, when you fool Harvard." And perhaps Wheeler spent his time in jail learning classical Armenian. But the question remains—doesn't Harvard check the most basic things and if they don't check the basics do they check anything else? And you can't say he wasn't educated. He had obviously taken a degree in fraud. But it does raise another vexed question. To what extent should schools be responsible for "good manners" and "high aesthetic and moral standards"? And if they are to be who sets those standards. And should schools be sending notes home to say 'Katy's manners need some improvement. See to it.'?

SE QUOYAH (c. 1770-1843) "This Cherokee Indian is one of the few people in history, and probably the first known to have invented an alphabet for a living language. (Another was King Njoya of Bamun, in Kamerun West Africa, who devised an original writing system for his people around 1900.) It took Sequoyah 12 years to invent his 86-character alphabet and syllabary, all of the characters representing the sounds of spoken Cherokee. The alphabet was so logical and simple that it could be learned in a few days and it made an entire, illiterate population literate within a few months."

From *American Literary Anecdotes* collected by Robert Hendrikson. Then I was browsing in an old *National Geographic* from September 1995 and I came upon a Letter to the Editor from Jack Hohenstein: "As a scientist and a Cherokee, I note that your article only mentions in passing the great intellectual achievement of Sequoyah. The unschooled Sequoyah, observing that whites had the power to communicate through space and time with marks on special leaves, designed an efficient syllabary to fit an existing spoken language. The syllabary was so applicable that within ten years the Cherokee had achieved a remarkably high literacy rate. He enriched his people in the most human of characteristics, language, and he started from scratch. That's the reason his achievement was so extraordinary."

"If you think education is expensive, think of the cost of ignorance."

John Gardner

"History is rapidly becoming a race between education and catastrophe."

H. G. Wells

"Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army."

Edward Everett Hale

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October 2nd: Graham Greene
Jack Finney
Groucho Marx
Wallace Stevens

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"As I get further along with this chronicle of trivia, it's beginning to dawn on me that writing is an extremely tough racket. In my day, I've written many allegedly comic pieces for magazines and newspapers, but to keep going for enough passages to fill a book is a new experience for me. I used to play golf daily and badly, take long walks with two expensive, flea-bitten poodles and even ride a horse occasionally. It seems to me I don't do anything now but write. And anybody who has ever written knows that writing requires thinking. And everybody knows that thinking is easily the most distasteful way of spending the day. But I keep plugging along."

Groucho Marx in *Groucho and Me*.

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October 3rd: James Herriot
Gore Vidal

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"Although we regularly stigmatize other societies as rogue states, we ourselves have become the biggest rogue state of all. We honor no treaties. We spurn international courts. We strike unilaterally wherever we choose. We give orders to the United Nations but do not pay our dues. We complain of terrorism, yet our empire is now the greatest terrorist of all. We bomb, invade, subvert other states. Although We the People of the United States are the sole source of legitimate authority in this land, we are no longer represented in Congress Assembled. Our Congress has been hijacked by corporate America and its enforcer, the imperial military machine. We the unrepresented People of the United States are as much victims of this militarized government as the Panamanians, Iraqis, or Somalians. We have allowed our institutions to be taken over in the name of a globalized American empire that is totally alien in concept to anything our founders had in mind. I suspect it is far too late in the day for us to restore the republic that we lost a half-century ago."

Gore Vidal in *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*.

The Russians and the Chinese are nevertheless determined to give the US a run for its money. But then they don't pretend to be democracies.

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October 4th: Damon Runyon

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October 5th: Vaclav Havel

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October 6th: Elizabeth Gray Vining

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October 7th: Thomas Kenneally

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October 8th: John Cowper Powys

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P. J. Kavanagh said in *People and Places*: "If you think of the happiness of the old Matisse, painting his lovely colours and lovely girls, and compare this with the misery and malice that disfigured (we are told) the last years of Somerset Maugham, similarly aged, only a few miles down the coast, you can't help thinking that painting, or almost any activity, is better for you than writing. There are exceptions, of course – Goethe, Blake – but on the whole writers seem to fare badly: 'We poets in our youth begin in gladness;/But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.' Indeed, not long ago, a school of criticism was erected on this; the degree of talent gauged by the disastrousness of the life, with suicide the stamp of authenticity.

That, of course, is the worst kind of romanticism, and I have always taken comfort from the contrariness of that still insufficiently appreciated genius, John Cowper Powys. Far from deteriorating, he began his best work at sixty and after a life of struggle, penury, ill-health and very little public success, became not only happier, but in a strange way healthier. He should have been dead years before – quite early on he had so much of his insides cut away that he had what he called a 'pseudo-stomach' – but he went on till he was ninety-one, emanating more and more energy, intelligence and goodwill, genially existing on bowls of bread and milk. He would have been the first to describe himself as a crafty old saurian – above all things he admired Homeric, Odyssean guile – and he had clearly found some way of adjusting his psychic dial to wavelengths of good news. How?

In 1935, at the invitation of his American publishers, he wrote a book, *The Art of Happiness*, answering that question. (He had published another book with that title in 1923, more philosophical, but this one concentrated on the technique, the 'art'. His publishers had met him, and realized that at the age of sixty-two he had some tips to offer.)"

"Powys began his book by disposing of the cult of *un*happiness. He identifies it for what it is, a desire to revenge ourselves on the world. 'To be unhappy in order to punish! That really does seem a human instinct. But how pathetically absurd!' Nevertheless, the problem has to be faced: 'If at any moment a sensitive person were made fully conscious of the appalling pain in the world he would go mad and die howling.' Nature herself makes sure we remain 'too sturdily selfish' for that. However, we must remain aware, and yet not 'howl' and we can do this by *controlling our thoughts*. I italicize this because it is the core of his advice. He does not like the word 'happiness' – 'the annoying jauntiness, and even the bouncing babyishness of the word' but it differs from pleasure, or joy, in that it is subject to mental volition. He now proceeds to a series of practical tips, with examples: he calls them the 'Icthyian leap' (like a fish out of the water), 'discarnation', the 'panergic' stance. He apologizes for the names, he is the enemy of obfuscation, but is also a profound believer in the magic of naming. But it is astonishing, as he says, how we allow ourselves to be at the mercy of any thought, however banal, that pops into our heads. 'We lavish our energy on plans to improve our condition but seldom concentrate on heightening our mental reaction to the moment as it passes.' This is generally so true that anyone who can help us not to re-play an old film in our minds, or dwell repetitively on some grievance, will do us a great service. He says it is up to us: 'We can be unhappy…or we can *force ourselves to be happy*.' "

Though the son of a vicar "he lays much of our misery at the door 'of those tremendous commandments, in both the Old and the New Testaments, commanding us to love instead of to be at peace in our own souls.' But what balm there may be for some self-tortured soul in his next paragraph: 'What a liberating flood of planetary happiness pours through us from love to peace! It is then that we realise that we can be free and happy and honourable and kind *and yet not have to love anybody*.' "

The Dalai Lama also titled a book *The Art of Happiness*. I wonder which book makes people happier? Or can happiness not be 'learned' from books?

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October 9th: Miguel Cervantes
Leonardo Padura

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Sarah Rainsford wrote in *Our Woman in Havana*: "Cuba's best-known contemporary novelist, Leonardo Padura, appeared at a spillover venue back in Vedado where people waited hours to get their hands on one of his books. 'This happens whenever one of his novels is released: it sells out in an instant,' a student called Jorge told me, nodding at the long line snaking towards the white plastic table where Padura sat. The author was signing his latest work, based on the story of Trotsky's assassin. A few hundred extra copies had been printed specially for the fair but it was nowhere near enough to meet demand. 'We've been queuing since early morning to get one,' Jorge explained, though he complained that the book was 'a bit expensive'. The chunky novel he was clutching was priced at a heavily subsidised thirty Cuban pesos, or just over a dollar.

Now in his early sixties with a grey bushy beard and kindly eyes, Padura still lives in the house where he was brought up in the southern Havana suburb of Mantilla. One day during the book fair I drove out to visit him there and we talked at length, sunk in large wicker chairs in his spotless living room.

The author began his career in 1980 as a journalist. He worked first for a cultural magazine and then for the communist youth paper *Juventud Rebelde* in the days when Padura says it published real journalism and investigations. It was 1990 when he began writing the first of his *noir* detective series featuring a hero known as Mario Conde. The author chose the genre specifically to allow him to explore the margins of Cuban society. Working at the height of the 1990s economic crisis, after the Soviet collapse, writing saved Padura from 'madness and despair'. A passionate and engaging conversationalist, he joked that there were just three problems in the so-called Special Period: breakfast, lunch and dinner. He set his first books a little before the crisis because he realised his detective hero would be physically incapable of chasing criminals in a city with few working payphones, even less public transport and minimal street lights.

The author sees the social and economic meltdown of those years as a turning point for Cuban literature. 'In the 1990s, paper, electricity and ink all disappeared and Cuba just stopped publishing books.' Providing food became the greatest priority for the government.. But the fact the state could no longer support writers ultimately allowed them to cut loose. 'This rupture created a distance, a space, which was gradually filled with freedom,' the writer explained. 'First we began writing differently, then we began finding publishers abroad.' "

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October 10th: Ivo Andric
Harold Pinter

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"So the first time I ever came into contact with O'Toole was at one of these very gatherings. I remember it well because I'd just punched Harold Pinter down a flight of stairs. Oh yes, I'm afraid so. No long dramatic pauses this time, Harold; he got one right on the side of the jaw. Wham!

Some of the students had given a party to celebrate the opening night of Pinter's first play, *The Room*, which premiered in the Drama Studio at Bristol University. Incidentally, I directed *The Room* at Stratford-upon-Avon a few years ago. It got marvellous reviews. The toast of the season! But, anyway, as we all know, Pinter did have a little bit of a temper on him. He was unknown in those days and when in an 'advanced state of refreshment' could be an extremely rough customer. I didn't know this at the time, of course, but when he started wandering round threatening the other

students, something had to be done. All throughout the evening, I had student after student coming up to me.

'Somebody's got to do something, Brian. He's going round threatening to hit everybody.'

The other students knew I'd boxed and looked to me for protection.

Eventually, Pinter saw me standing at the top of some stairs and confronted me.

'You must be the hard man all the students have been talking about. One of them said you were going to knock my block off.'

'If you don't stop bullying them, then yes, I will knock your block off.'

Shouting? Swearing? Threats? Menacing looks? I know what you're thinking: it sounds just like a Harold Pinter play!

With that, he ran to where I was standing and threw a punch.

Now, Harold Pinter was without doubt a great dramatist – the heaviest of them all – but I'm afraid there was nothing Pinteresque about his punches. In fact, they were more Gilbert & Sullivan, really. Once I'd dodged him a couple of times, I let go a quick left hook, which sent him tumbling backwards.

O'Toole was first on the scene and after giving me a 'Did you do that?' kind of look, he examined Harold, helped him to his feet and led him away.

I did feel slightly guilty for a time, but what else could I have done?"

Brian Blessed in *Absolute Pandemonium*.

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October 11th: Eleanor Roosevelt
Elmore Leonard

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Eleanor Roosevelt, wife and cousin of American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was an impressive woman. She wrote a regular newspaper column, 'My Day', and three volumes of autobiography, but the thing she said she was proudest of was helping to write the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

She is also, it seems, a very quotable person. Her little bon mots are still popular. Such as:

A woman is like a tea bag. You never know how strong she is until she gets into HOT WATER.

Eleanor Roosevelt.

Many people walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints on your heart.

Eleanor Roosevelt

"I learned a liberating thing. If you will forget about yourself, whether or not you are making a good impression on people, what they will think of you, and you will think about them instead, you won't be shy."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"You must do the things you cannot do."

Eleanor Roosevelt

"In September 1943, Eleanor Roosevelt landed in Canberra in a four-engine Army Liberator. She was wearing a Red Cross uniform, a little peak cap, and a big warm smile. Her tour of the Pacific region lasted five weeks, and her luggage comprised just two suitcases and a typewriter. She bent over wounded soldiers in military hospitals, and made informal visits to Navy, Army, Air Force, and women's organizations. Constantly on the go, she hopped in and out of little

planes, pecking out her "My Day" column before she went to bed. Everywhere she went there were tumultuous cheering crowds."

Hazel Rowley in *Franklin and Eleanor*. And she writes, "In December 1945, President Harry Truman asked Eleanor if she would serve as a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. The first meeting was to be held in London in January 1946. Eleanor felt proud to be carrying on the work FDR had begun. Like him, she viewed the United Nations as the only hope for lasting world peace.

"She was the only woman in the U.S. delegation, and her leadership was crucial to its success. "The Russians seem to have met their match in Mrs. Roosevelt," *The New York Times* reported. "Never have I seen naiveté and cunning so gracefully blended," said a State Department adviser. On December 10, 1948—in large part thanks to the steely determination of Eleanor Roosevelt—the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The assembly gave Eleanor a standing ovation. For the first time in history, the nations of the world had come together to proclaim the dignity and equality of all human beings."

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October 12th: James MacAulay

THE BICYCLE

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"As the train superceded the old-time coach, so the old horse 'bus and hansom cab came to be challenged in the later 'Nineties by the motor 'bus or car; but ere this epoch-making change in locomotion came about we had already had, from the 'Sixties onwards, an increasing craze for cycling in its various forms, some of the earlier bicycles being primitive indeed. One of the earliest was the early Victorian "dandy-horse," which was merely a seat on two wheels, tandem-wise, and the rider impelled himself forward by giving the machine a shove along the ground with his feet.

"It was not till the late 'Sixties we got the first "bone-shaker," as it was popularly known, a real bicycle, but so crudely made that it was in fact a bone-shaking experience to use one; and it was not until the happy thought occurred to someone to furnish the wheels with tyres of rubber that real cycling became possible. Then, in the early 'Seventies, came what was known as the "penny-farthing" bicycle, so called because the high front wheel and tiny back wheel suggested the proportionate sizes of a penny followed by a farthing. The three-wheeled cycle, or tricycle, was adopted by the cautious and the elderly, but was never very popular, and when, with the 'Eighties, came the early "safety" bicycle, introduced by Starley, and in the later 'Eighties Dunlop's first pneumatic tyre, a cycling boom set in. Moreover, it proved one of the many quickening elements in the emancipation of later Victorian womanhood from the fetters of a too restrictive past, and though at first cycling was considered an unladylike pastime, just as many other forms of healthful recreation were, common sense prevailed at last.

"In the early 'Nineties I well remember the curious interest evoked in the city by the sight of some smart girl riding a "bike" past the Bank of England; but before that decade was half-way through it was quite a usual thing to see strings of young men and girls going off for long bicycling spins on a Saturday afternoon, girl and man often riding tandem, as in the case of "Daisy Bell," of Harry Dacre's tuneful composition, sung with such success by that lively music-hall comedienne, Kate Lawrence, with its haunting waltz refrain:

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do!
I'm half crazy, all for the love of you!
It won't be a stylish marriage,
But you'll look sweet
On the seat
Of a bicycle built for two!"

"By the 'Nineties the form of the then universally popular "bike" had become much what it is to-day, one not yet superceded by its speedier rival, the motor-bike, that later development of the motor-car, which first became a practical proposition in that same period—pregnant of many inventions—the 'Nineties."

Mark Edward Perugini in *Victorian Days and Ways*.

I tend to think that new gadgets spawn books and poems. The bicycle certainly did. Old novels and reference books very often had advertisements for the latest books on cycling, such as *Lady Cycling* by Miss F. J. Erskine and *All-Round Cycling* by Richardson, Hillier, Green, Vine, Wilson and Thomas, though perhaps things such as vacuum cleaners and frypans have been less apt to get anything more than a How to Use leaflet.

A. B. 'Banjo' Paterson wrote 'Mulga Bill's Bicycle' which begins:

'Twas Mulga Bill from Eaglehawk, that caught the cycling craze;
He turned away the good old horse that served him many days;
He dressed himself in cycling clothes, resplendent to be seen;
He hurried off to town and bought a shining new Machine;
The salesman asks him if he can ride and Mulga Bill boasts:
"There's nothing walks or jumps or runs on axle, hoof, or wheel,
But what I'll sit, while hide will hold and girths and straps are tight;
I'll ride this here two-wheeled concern right straight away at sight."

So off he goes downhill with the bike charging down past stumps and rocks, over logs, hitting stones, frightening the wild life, and finally leaping twenty feet into Dead Man's Creek. Mulga Bill, a sadder and wiser man, says:

I'll give that two-wheeled outlaw best; it's shaken all my nerve
To feel it whistle through the air and plunge and buck and swerve.
It's safe at rest in Dead Man's Creek—we'll leave it lying still;
A horse's back is good enough henceforth for Mulga Bill."

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October 13: "John O'Brien"

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I came across an old book of bush ballads called *Around the Boree Log* by "John O'Brien". Around the boree log was another way of saying 'around the campfire', boree being an Aboriginal word for the weeping myall. But my question was: who was John O'Brien? He was clearly an Irish Catholic. Banjo Paterson and his ilk would not call poems 'The Trimmin's on the Rosary', 'The Old Mass Shandrydan', 'The Altar-Boy', 'The Presbyt'ry Dog', 'At Casey's After Mass' or a number of poems about Father Pat. John O'Brien proved to be Monsignor Patrick Joseph Hartigan. So I wondered if his bishop had disapproved of him writing under his own name. His poems are very enjoyable, many written around bush people, but I think I liked best the ones in which he adds in his love of the natural world such as:

Falls the shadows on the gullies, fades the purple from the mountain;
And the day that's passing outwards down the stairways of the sky,
With its kindly deeds and sordid on its folded page recorded,
Waves a friendly hand across the range to bid the world "good-bye."
Comes a buoyant peal of laughter from the tall, white, slender timber,
Rugged mirth that floods the bushland with the joy of brotherhood,
With the rustic notes sonorous of a happy laughing chorus,
When the kookaburras bless the world because the world is good.

Oh, 'tis good and clean and wholesome when we take the sheep-track homewards,
And the kindly kitchen chimney flaps its homely bannerets;
All our twigs of effort, shooting golden promise for the fruiting,
Bring a night in peace enfolded that a useful day begets.
Hopeful dreams, their visions weaving, steel our hearts against tomorrow,
And we dare the challenge, strengthened by to-day's assaults withstood;
Beam the pregnant days before us; and another laughing chorus
Wraps the world in rippling revelry, because the world is good.

Loving eyes to watch our coming, loving arms to twine around us—
Tender tendrils, soft and silken, firmer far than iron stay—
All our little world upholding, gentle hearts and home enfolding,
And a cheery, friendly neighbour dropping in upon his way;
Mellow joy the soul refreshes with the scented breath of heaven,
With the whispered songs of other spheres, hereafter understood:
Angels keep their sure watch o'er us: and another laughing chorus
Flings a vesper blessing round the world, because the world is good.
'The Kookaburras'

And perhaps the most poignant was the one about a young man going off to war and leaving his horse behind.

We'll take the old horse to the paddocks tomorrow,
Where grasses are waving breast-high on the plain;
And there with the clean-skins we'll turn him in sorrow
And muster him never, ah, never, again.

The bush bird will sing when the shadows are creeping
A sweet plaintive note, soft and clear as a bell's—
Oh, would it might ring where the bush boy is sleeping,
And colour his dreams by the far Dardanelles.
From 'Ownerless'

Frank Mecham in his biography of Hartigan *"John O'Brien" and the Boree Log* explained: "He had now abandoned the pen-name Mary Ann and he told us himself how he came to take 'John O'Brien':

By this time, I had changed my pen-name to 'John O'Brien'. It came about this way. I was in a town of which I won't mention, when I saw going by a milk-cart owned by a man with a reputation for selling adulterated milk. The name on the cart was John O'Brien. Adulterated milk, I thought, that's me! So 'John O'Brien' it was from that time forward."

After he died his unpublished poems were gathered up and published as *The Parish of St Mel's* which also deals with a rural parish. It too has some pleasant pieces … such as:

Sing me a song with the ring of the truth in it,
Sing me a song with the freshness of youth in it,
Chant me a paean of joy;
I'm tired of the dirge with regrets and despair in it,
Life has too much of drab sorrow and care in it,
Raise me a chorus with hopefulness rare in it,
Plucked from the heart of a boy.

Give me the splash and the shout of the sea in it,
The trebles of birds and the bass of the bee in it:
Bring the spring's minstrels along,
Trilling a lay with the zest of young life in it,
Tender and clean with no heartache of strife in it:
Send me a message with joyfulness rife in it,
And the singer I'll love for the song.
'Sing Me A Song'

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October 14th: Miles Franklin
Katherine Mansfield
Reginald Arkell

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A 95-year-old friend of mine had borrowed Katherine Mansfield's short stories from the library because she said she couldn't remember the beginnings of longer stories by the time she got halfway through. The cover said Mansfield's 'The Garden Party' was one of the 20th century's best short stories. Was it?

She was married to John Middleton Murry but he rarely gets much attention in writings about her. So here is F. A. Lea's biography of Murry in which he says, "Katherine was twenty-four when Murry met her – ten months older than himself. Like him, she had rebelled against a bourgeois home and upbringing – though her father, the prosperous, complacent Chairman of the Bank of New Zealand, was more indulgent than his, taking a genuine, if bewildered, pride in her first attemps at fiction, and giving way to her importunate demand to be allowed to leave Wellington for London in her twentieth year. Like him, she had spent some months on the Continent, in Paris, Belgium, Germany and Geneva – and incidentally been so struck by the Post-Impressionists that she could refer to Van Gogh as one of her writing masters. Under the influence of Wilde, moreover, she, like him, had set out in search of 'life' – and 'life' for her meant much the same as it did at Dan Rider's. One 'adventure' had ended in a miscarriage, another in an abortion, a third in an operation for peritonitis which had permanently injured her health, making it unlikely, if not impossible, that she would ever bear a child. In 1909 she had married, for the sake of security, only to desert her husband the following day. Now, though without abating her desire to *épater le bourgeois*, she was inwardly longing to start afresh.

"To Murry, the bitter short stories she had just published, *In a German Pension*, equally with the one she had sent in to *Rhythm*, 'The Woman at the Store', seemed to express, with a power he envied, his own 'revulsion from life'. He was eager to meet the authoress; and W. L. George obligingly arranged an introduction – anticipating, it appears, a lively clash of temperaments, since both had acquired reputations which neither could properly sustain, he as a sardonic young Bergsonian, she as a cynical wit. They took to each other at sight.

"This was in December 1911, when Murry was spending a dismal vacation with his parents at Wandsworth, quarrelling with his father about late nights and borrowing from Aunt Doll to pay his keep. Soon afterwards Katherine went back to Geneva, he to Oxford. But a correspondence had sprung up *à propos* of *Rhythm*, and before the end of the term they were meeting again, at her flat in Clovelly Mansions, Gray's Inn Road. There he caught his first glimpse of her young brother, Leslie, who had just been buying a car to take back to New Zealand, 'very impressive to me – a denizen of the strange and inaccessible world of wealth'; and there they tea-ed *tête-à -tête*. It was not many minutes before he found himself confiding his aversion to university life, his incapacity for work, his mostly ineffectual attempts to escape from dons and duns by way of free-lance journalism. She

promptly decided that he must come down, without troubling about the remaining three months that would secure him a first in Greats.

"It was a characteristic beginning. The iniative was always to be hers: and he, whose 'whole life seemed to be histrionic, broken by one only impulse to throw himself into another's keeping, and thus be rid of the unending necessity of choosing and acting the part he chose', acquiesced in it thankfully. Had it been otherwise, she would not have been drawn to him as she was. Little though he suspected it at the time, his very diffidence and dependence were his asset. She had had enough – much more than enough – of the conquering male. Only a few months before, she had been on the point of adopting a child."

He idealized her, saying "She was a woman simple and lovely in all her ways", and wrote, "Looking back, it seems to me now that at first she was enchanted by my innocence, and wanted to preserve it, and (to be in harmony) to put away her own 'experience', which was considerable and much of it an unhappy memory."

But there was an unfortunate side to her desire to put her past behind her. "Not merely did she never confide in him, as he did in her, but even when they finally realized that their hopes of a child were to be disappointed, she never divulged the cause: she gave him to understand that it lay with him. In Murry she found a child as much as a husband, a 'symbol and incarnation of her lost innocence'; in Katherine he found a mother as much as a wife, a symbol and incarnation of security. It was not until forty years later that he learned the facts of her earlier life – from Anthony Alpers's *Katherine Mansfield: A Biography*."

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October 15th: C. P. Snow
P. G. Wodehouse
John Kenneth Galbraith

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"It is my introductory and, I trust, guiding confession that I believe the greatest error in economics is to see the economy as a stable, immutable structure."

The World Economy Since The Wars.

"In Western Europe and America the Malthusian horror was also receding, although it was still possible to suppose that this was the result of the fortuitous opening, all in a few decades, of the North American prairies and plains, the pampas and the veld, the New Zealand pastures and the endless Australian outback. These could rescue the world once but not twice. When population had caught up with these new areas population would again press upon the food supply. Only in the present century, as the relation between real income and the rate of population increase has become increasingly unreliable, has there ceased to be fear that the ghost of Malthus might return to haunt western countries as it still roams the villages of Asia."

J. K. Galbraith in *The Affluent Society*. But if the 19th century took away the lands of the hunter-gatherers and the 20th century turned to technology to feed the world—where will the 21st century turn?

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October 16th: Oscar Wilde
Eugene O'Neill

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October 17th: Les Murray
Arthur Miller

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Les Murray is known as a poet but he did write some essays and articles. I found his book *The Quality of Sprawl* which he subtitles *Thoughts about Australia* and thought these ideas were

interesting. “Most people would agree, perhaps after some dispute about terminology, that something like a religious dimension exists in every human being. Some might want to call it a dimension of wonder, of quest, of value, of ultimate significance or the like. Some have denied its reality altogether, but I think the weight of human experience and, to beg a few questions perhaps, of perceived human behaviour is against them. Modern students of religion, and modern proponents of what we may call natural religious systems, tend to differ from upholders of at least some traditional religions in suggesting that religious activity arises from a human perception of phenomena, whether in the world at large or within the person. They think of it as a human response to the beauty, horror, mystery or incongruity of the world, or to some emotional need within us. The Christian and also I think the Jew and the Muslim, though their terminologies would be different, would rather assert that it is a response to the activity of God’s Spirit working within us at a depth usually too great for direct sensory perception; it impinges on our consciousness most directly, perhaps, at the point we call the conscience, though some modern schools attempt to explain that away as internalised social conditioning and the like, and perhaps what we regard as our conscience may include some of that. The attempt, the wish really, to dispose of the divine element in conscience is interesting in another way, however Christian theology teaches that the love of God, like the rejection of Him, arises from the will rather than the emotions. It is a decision of acceptance, of Assent, in Cardinal Newman’s term. We choose to love God because He has touched us in some way; as Scripture says, ‘we love Him because He first loved us’. And we can only come to an understanding of the real things of religion through our acceptance of the subtle, persistent lifelong offer of Itself which the Spirit makes to every human being.”

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October 18th: James Truslow Adams
A. J. Liebling
Henri Bergson

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I knew nothing of Liebling until I came upon him in an unexpectedly dramatic way. Herbert Mitgang wrote *Dangerous Dossiers: Exposing the Secret War Against America’s Greatest Authors* so this suggested Liebling was well-known but what had he done to raise the ire of J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI? Of course this wasn’t hard to do. Hoover kept files on thousands of people who were never charged or convicted of any crime. Mitgang said, “In the dossier, his name is given as Abbott Joseph Liebling (1904-1963). To those who followed his perceptive articles and commentary, his signature, A.J. Liebling, stood for graceful writing and fierce integrity. Yet before and after World War II he became one of the Usual Suspects. His censored FBI file contains eighteen pages.

“In his “Wayward Press” column in the New Yorker, Liebling pursued and refined the idea that newspapers and magazines should not be above criticism and ought to improve themselves (a belief that, one would imagine, the chief could endorse). Between 1940 and 1945 he was a highly respected war correspondent; one of his books was *The Road Back to Paris*. This writer recalls seeing Liebling in Algiers in 1943, hanging out of his uniform, his overseas cap askew, hardly the picture of the dashing correspondent. Yet Liebling was considerably more impressive than most of the other correspondents, a man fluent in French who understood the complexities of Free French politics and North African colonialism. He set a standard of writing and courage that is still admired by journalists.”

But he forgot that the FBI was a humourless place. “Liebling first came to the attention of the FBI because he took a crack at J. Edgar Hoover in a newspaper piece. Forever after he was considered hostile to the bureau. Making fun of the publicity-minded director was considered—if not a high crime worthy of being adjudged a security risk—at the least an unpatriotic misdemeanor. In either case, it meant having one’s writings watched and one’s file grow thicker.

"His entry reads: "On January 16, 1937, the New York *World Telegram* carried an article entitled 'A Tough Detail,' by A.J. Liebling. It was written in fictional form with the leading character named Patrolman McGimlet. In a satirical manner Liebling described an alleged raid conducted in New York by the bureau and portrayed the director as 'A. Edwin Doover.' The story described an apartment house that was illuminated with floodlights, with a front roped off and agents with cameras and sound equipment. A character portrayed as a cab driver was quoted: 'Looks like a Minsky burlesque opening.' The entire article was an apparent nasty dig at the director and the bureau." "

"Criticism of Liebling as a journalist and author appeared in his file whenever he reported about the Whittaker Chambers-Alger Hiss case. In the magazine Plain Talk, Ralph De Toledano, a Red-hunter, wrote: "A.J. Liebling, a careless journalist of the New Yorker smart set, also rushes into print with a misleading article which disregards the Chambers evidence but makes sure to call him a 'dead beat.' "

The Alger Hiss case has largely been forgotten now. He was a bureaucrat, involved in the setting up of the United Nations in New York. Whittaker Chambers claimed Hiss had spied for the Russians in the 1930s. But by 1950 when people like McCarthy and Chambers were able to bring cases too much time had passed for Hiss to be charged as a spy so he was charged with perjury and was given two 5-year-sentences to run concurrently and of which he served three-and-a-half. But was he a spy? Chambers said Yes. Hiss right up until his death in 1996 said No. The Soviets also said he had never spied for them. And it also begs the question: what kind of secrets, if any, did Hiss have access to in the 1930s?

Tim Tzouliadis in *The Forsaken* tells the story of an even more forgotten episode: the thousands of Americans who went to the USSR in the 1930s in an attempt to escape unemployment and destitution in Depression America. He writes, "An English translation of *New Russia's Primer: The Story of the Five-Year Plan* had become the unlikely publishing phenomenon of 1931, an American bestseller for seven months and one of the highest selling non-fiction titles of the past decade. Its simple explanations, written originally for Russian school-children, were read and reread by an American public searching for answers beyond the deadened reach of another decade of 'rugged individualism'. In the midst of Depression misery, who could not be attracted to the book's shared vision of future happiness and social progress?" and incredibly, "In the first eight months of 1931 alone, Amtorg – the Soviet trade agency based in New York – received more than *one hundred thousand* American applications for emigration to the USSR." Some of those who actually went were sympathetic to Bolshevism but most simply hoped to find work. When they got there their passports were taken. At first the lack of documents didn't seem to matter but as Stalin's Terror increased and people wanted to leave, and especially for those children taken by their families growing up in the USSR they now faced a terrible dilemma. The US Embassy refused to help them leave because they had no proof they were born in America (and Roosevelt's lazy ambassador Joseph Davies was more interested in buying up cheap Russian art and artifacts from poor Russians than helping desperate compatriots), while Stalin saw them as people of suspect loyalty to the USSR. Many of these unfortunate minors ended up in poverty in Russian cities or sent to labour camps.

Hiss wasn't involved in the Manhatten Project nor does he seem to have spoken Russian but he did go to Yalta in Roosevelt's entourage (and he admired Roosevelt greatly) where he met Stalin. He was undoubtedly sympathetic to the Soviet Union though he does not appear, unlike Whittaker Chambers, to have ever been a member of the Communist Party. So was he a spy?

The FBI accepted *Plain Talk's* view that the *New Yorker's* activities were "pro-Communist" and "The New York FBI office then advised the Washington headquarters that Thomas J. Murphy, assistant United States attorney, had "speculated" that the Hiss lawyers had "probably" engaged

Liebling to work for them at the same time that he reported for the New Yorker. This wild and of course unproved speculation became a part of Liebling's permanent file."

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October 19th: (James Henry) Leigh Hunt
Sir Thomas Browne
Adam Lindsay Gordon
John Le Carré

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"To be ignorant of evils to come, and forgetfull of evils past, is a mercifull provision in nature."

Sir Thomas Browne writing in *Urne Buriall* in 1658

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October 20th: Thomas Hughes

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October 21st: Ursula Le Guin

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October 22nd: Doris Lessing
John Blashford Snell

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"In the Pacific, John Blashford Snell's 1979 expedition found traces of the New Guinea dragon, probably even larger than Komodo."

Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World by Simon Welfare and John Fairley.

Gavin Souter in *The Unknown Land* mentions an early explorer describing a 'tree-climbing crocodile'. He says, "This mysterious reptile, which inhabits the dense forests of southern New Guinea and is greatly feared by local natives, is now thought to be a monitor lizard less heavy but longer than the "Komodo Dragon" of Indonesia. A monitor taken near the mouth of the Fly River in 1936 (*Varanus Salvadorii*) was almost seven feet long. The Komodo monitor grows to about twelve feet, but less than half of this length is tail. "As the tail of Salvador's monitor is twice the length of head and body," wrote the animal ecologist of Papua-New Guinea, Mr K. S. Slater, in 1961, "the stories of specimens of 15 feet seem reasonable." " And stories of tree-climbing 'crocodiles' don't seem so amazing after all.

"One evening Frank told us about the giant lizards which live along the banks of the Digimo river, which drains Lake Kutubu. He himself had had only a quick glimpse of these lizards; but one of the station's boys had, a couple of months earlier, been present at the killing of a lizard that was almost six feet long. He and his friends had gone back to the spot the day after, with a bigger canoe, to fetch the animal, but it had been almost eaten up—apparently by other lizards. 'They are terribly shy and difficult to catch sight of,' Frank said. He had once seen them at a distance when they were swimming across the river and thought they possibly belonged to the species Varanus Komodoensis which can be found on a few Indonesian Islands.

The next morning Frank, Peter Thomas, the interpreter Koni, another native who knows the district well, and I went down to the Digimo river to see if we could find any of the giant lizards. No sooner were we a few hundred yards away from the lake than all signs of habitation ceased. We pulled the outboard motor up and let the canoe drift slowly downstream while Koni steered with a paddle. Frank and Peter sat with their cocked rifles across their knees, and I was ready with tele-lens on the camera.

The jungle climbs vertically up from each bank of the river, with liana and other climbing plants hanging down in the water. Behind these green walls it was pitch dark, for no sunlight penetrates down through the tree-tops. It is in there that the lizards live; but it would be quite impossible to hunt them; we would make far too much noise. Our only chance to see them would be if they went down to the river bank or lay on tree trunks out over the water.

For over an hour we drifted silently and slowly down the river without speaking or moving—only peering in towards the banks. The only sound to be heard was a solitary bird screeching from the jungle. The water was mirror-still and the heat oppressive.

We were beginning to grow impatient and restless when the silence was suddenly broken by a loud splash ahead. About a hundred yards away we saw a large snake-like head moving across the river. In the deep silence the rifle shots sounded like the cracks of doom. But the canoe rocked too much when we all turned and both Frank's and Peter's shots went wide. It was certainly a big lizard; we just saw its glistening scaly body as it crawled up the bank and quickly vanished into the undergrowth. It looked at least four to five feet long.

When we came up to the spot where the monster disappeared, we could see clear tracks in the mud from its tail and claws. We tried for a few minutes to trace the animal into the undergrowth; but we hadn't got more than a few yards in before we had to give up; it was impossible to push through that maze of slimy roots and liana.

So we continued as before, drifting downstream and keeping a look-out in absolute silence. For five to ten minutes the only audible thing was the very faint hum of insects and now and again a plop from the water round the steering paddle.

Instead of peering in towards the banks the whole time, I began to watch Koni's face—considering that he would be the first to notice anything unusual. And it worked. Suddenly I saw him concentrating before opening his eyes wide in terror. I turned quickly and followed his gaze. In a second I was looking right into the monster's eyes. Only four or five yards from us, on the mud bank, a giant lizard had raised itself up on its forelegs. The sun was shining on it, so I could clearly see its scaly head—something between a crocodile's and a snake's. It gazed at us in terror and a long forked tongue shot out between its pointed teeth. It looked frightful. It was a moment before I could pull myself together to seize my camera and click it; and at the same time the lizard spun round and disappeared quickly into the darkness; only then did I see that there were not one but two lizards."

Savage New Guinea by Jens Bjerre (1964).

Charles Miller wrote in *Cannibal Caravan: Travels in Dutch New Guinea* (1950) of being told of a 'dragon' which made a noise between a hiss and a roar and thus called a Row or Wrow. With his party he climbs into the mountains. "The plateau, as flat as a table, reached for ten miles on our right before there began the final rise to the snow capped peaks shimmering pinkly on the horizon. Behind us it seemed to extend indefinitely. I recall crossing a mile-wide stretch on my previous dash to the snow line, but ahead I could see we were rapidly approaching the end. The Kirrirris could see it too, for now they were keeping us well back from the rim of the cliff, sending a scout over from time to time for inspection. There was a feeling of tenseness in the air hard to describe, but there were times when I could have cut it out in chunks.

We reached the western lip of the plateau and headed north. At length Wroo decided we had gone far enough. He gave me a sign for extra caution. I got down on my hands and knees and crawled with him for a peep over the side. What I saw surprised me. While we were travelling across what amounted to a desert, below us the country had changed into a regular swamp, bogged down between our plateau and another one that began farther on and at a lower level. The swamp, triangular in shape, covered about forty acres and formed a sort of delta between the two plateaus.

At the narrow end on the mountain side a thin stream trickled in, vanishing almost at once in high yellow reeds. There was no outlet on the southern side that I could see. But abruptly I stopped looking. I saw the reeds move.

I have been scared many times in my life. Several times I have sampled death. But never in my life was I paralysed with fear. But I was paralysed now. My camera was in my left hand, my gun in my right, but they might as well have been miles away. I couldn't reach them."

"Leona reached me on her hands and knees just as the reeds parted and a head rose up like something out of the *Lost World* or *King King*. Except that these were phantasies, and this monster was real. Leona gave a soft sigh and collapsed on the ground." Eventually he managed to train his camera on the reeds. "As if in obedience to my wishes, the colossal remnant of the age of dinosaurs stalked across the swamp. Once its tail lashed out of the grass so far behind its head I thought it must be another beast. For one brief second I saw the horny point. I heard it hiss—Roooow—Roooow—Rooow. I licked my dry lips, suddenly aware that I had not started my camera.

The spring was already wound for a hundred feet. I pressed the release. To my ears the whirring gears sounded like a threshing machine. Sweat rolled down my face. Ice cold sweat. The *row* seemed to catch the sound for it suddenly stopped, reared up on its hind legs, its small forelegs hanging limp, and shot its snaky neck in our direction. It was a full quarter mile away, it couldn't possibly hear the camera, but I found myself cowering back as though that snapping-turtle shaped beak would lash out and nab me. I gasped with relief when the creature settled back.

Up to that time the only thing I had noticed photographically was the *row*. Now I was noticing other things. That the monster was a light brown yellow in colour, almost the identical hue of the reeds through which it was passing. I noticed that it was covered with scales laid on like armour plate, that the plates were uneven, almost as though they were designed for camouflage … Twice more the *row* reared up, giving me a good view of the bony flange around its head and the projecting plates along its backbone. Then with a click my camera ran out just as the *row* slithered behind a growth of dwarf eucalyptus."

One of his guides tells him that "there were a lot more where that one came from." But he doesn't attempt to give it a name. So it can be taken to be a monitor lizard but perhaps larger and with more prominent scales than normally found.

In December 2017 the ACU Art Gallery in Melbourne put on an exhibition on West Papuan fauna and said in the exhibition's notes: Papua Monitor Lizard (also called Varanus salvadorii, Salvadori's monitor, Crocodile monitor, Artellia). *Varanus* derives from the Arabic *waral* meaning 'lizard'; *Salvadori* from the Italian zoologist and taxonomist Count Adelardo Tommaso Salvadori Paleotti whose four-volume study of the birds of Papua and the Moluccas ('Ornithologia delle Papuasia e della Molucche') was published in 1880. (Note to freedom fighters: Salvadori was also a medical officer in Giuseppe Garibaldi's 1860 battle against the Bourbons for Sicily, which concluded with a plebiscite and the formation of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861).

The Papua Monitor is a tree-climbing lizard endemic to New Guinea and is the territory's top predator. It inhabits the canopies of lowland rainforests and coastal mangrove swamps from sea level to 2000 ft (600 m).

Indigenous folklore has the Papuan Monitor as an evil spirit that climbs trees, walks upright, breathes fire, and kills men. It has long straight teeth, long forked tongue, blunt bulbous snout, and a bite which like the Komodo Dragon's is capable of causing a fatal infection. Its long tail is 2/3 of its total length and is used like a whip to break the leg bones of Papuan hunting dogs, or rolled up to warn of marauding crocodiles.

In a 2007 study of three *Varanus* species by West Papuans at Papua State University in Manokwari, the three villages surveyed in the Arfak Mountain Nature Reserve did not use monitor

skin on their drums (*tifa*) because they did not own the rights to the skin tanning process. The meat of *Varanus indicus* and *Varanus salvadorii* was a source of animal protein (but not *Varanus prasinus*), but all avoided hunting *salvadorii* because of its aggressive attitude and behaviour to both man and dog.

So big monitor lizards certainly existed in New Guinea. But the question is: do they still thrive there?

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October 23rd: Robert Bridges

Jemima Montgomery, Baroness Tautphoeus

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"One day when the family had fled the New York heat and was staying at New Brighton, on Staten Island, the elder Henry accompanied by Henry Junior took the boat to New York to do a number of chores. These included the usual visit to the bookstore where the father purchased a number of volumes, including a novel for the mother's reading. This book was handed to young Henry to carry. They made their way back to the boat and the small boy clambered into the little cabin or sitting-room for the brief journey. Here he turned the book's pages. It was called *The Initials* and was by a woman with the picturesque name of the Baroness Tautphoeus. 'It came over me with the very first page,' he later wrote, 'assimilated in the fluttered little cabin…' that '*The Initials was* grown-up.'

It is easy to see, even today, what appeal the first page of this novel by Jemima Montgomery, Baroness Tautphoeus, had for the young Henry. It has an atmosphere not unlike the first page of *Daisy Miller*: a young Englishman named Hamilton has alighted at a Munich inn and is taking a sophisticated view of his continental surroundings. In a few minutes an 'international' situation develops, a mysterious note, merely initialled, is delivered, and in due course Mr Hamilton has met the proud German beauty Hildegarde and her sister Crescenz and the book, with a freshness and lightness that have not faded from its pages after a century, carries us into masquerades and suppers, visits to little towns (even to Berchtesgaden long before its garish moment in history), inspection of cloisters and monasteries, hare hunts, the Hôtel d'Angleterre in Frankfort (how many Hôtels d'Angleterre Henry was to stay at in later years!) The Baroness was an Irishwoman who had married a Chamberlain to the King of Bavaria and was one of a group of English writers of her time who skillfully illuminated foreign manners for Anglo-Saxon readers. She is entirely at home abroad, and little Henry, aged 11, seems to have felt himself at home also in her pages. What was a sentimental story of an orphan and a lamplighter compared to a tale, romantic and witty, set in the Bavarian Alps, containing a lurid suicide, a struggle of lovers against cruel fate, even a quasi-elopement in which, however, the hero observes all the niceties after registering the heroine at a Mainz hotel and being taken for her husband. 'I will go at once across, and if there be any rooms to be had, not quite on the other end of town. I shall not return until morning.' The precision of the 'not quite at the other end of the town' could only be an anticipation of the early writings of Henry James Junior."

Leon Edel in his *The Life of Henry James*.

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October 24th: Nairda Lyne

Alexandra David-Neel

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October 25th: Thomas Macauley

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I found Lytton Strachey had written an essay on Macauley (collected in *The Shorter Strachey*) which might or might not encourage you to go out and read Macauley's *History of England*.

Strachey begins: "In Apollo's house there are many mansions; there is even one (unexpectedly enough) for the Philistine. So complex and various are the elements of literature that no writer can be damned on a mere enumeration of faults. He may always possess merits which make up for everything; if he loses on the swings, he may win on the roundabouts. Macauley – whatever the refined and the sublime may say to the contrary – is an example of this. A course texture of mind – a metallic style – an itch for the obvious and the emphatic – a middle-class, Victorian complacency – it is all too true; Philistine is, in fact, the only word to fit the case; and yet, by dint of sheer power of writing, the Philistine has reached Parnassus."

"As for Macauley's point of view, everyone knows it was the Whig one. In reality this is simplifying too much; but, however we may describe it, there can be no doubt that Macauley's vision was singularly alien to the England of the latter years of the seventeenth century. Like Gibbon, like Michelet, like the later Carlyle, he did not – to put it succinctly – understand what he was talking about. Charles II, James II – that whole strange age in which religion, debauchery, intellect, faction, wit and brutality seethed and bubbled together in such an extraordinary *olla podrida* – escaped him. He could see parts of it; but he could not see into the depths; and so much the better: he had his point of view. … Macauley's Whiggism was a composite affair – it was partly eighteenth-century and partly Victorian. But the completeness with which it dominated him gave him a certainty of attitude and his clarity of vision. It enabled him to stand up against the confusion and frenzy of the seventeenth century and say, very loudly and distinctly, what he thought of it. So far so good. The misfortune is that what he thought was not of a finer quality. The point of view is distinct enough, but it is without distinction; and Macauley in consequence remains an excellent but not a supreme historian."

"A certain crudity, a certain coarseness of fibre – the marks of a party politician – are particularly obvious in those character sketches of great persons which form so important a part of Macauley's History."

Then Strachey says an odd thing: "The curiously metallic quality in Macauley's writing – its hardness of outline, its slightly hollow ring – is so characteristic that it is difficult not to see in it the indication of some profound psychological state. The stout, square man with the prodigious memory and the inexhaustible capacity for conversation, was apparently a normal human being, except in one direction: he never married, and there seems no reason to suppose that he was ever in love. An entertaining essay might perhaps be written on the sexlessness of historians; but it would be entertaining and nothing more: we do not know enough either about the historians or sex. Yet, in Macauley's case, one cannot resist the conclusion that the absence from his make-up of intense physical emotion brought a barrenness upon his style. His sentences have no warmth and no curves; the embracing fluidity of love is lacking. And it is noticeable how far more effective he is in his treatment of those whom he dislikes than of those whom he admires." … "Probably the futility of his aesthetic judgments was another effect of the same cause. Whenever he writes of pure poetry – in the essay on Byron, for instance – he is plainly at sea; his lack of sensibility becomes painfully obvious. A true child of his age, he had a profound distrust, amounting at times to an actual hatred, of art."

Strachey ends with: "His whole History is conditioned by a supreme sense of the narrative form. It presses on, with masterly precipitation, from start to finish. Everything falls into place. Unsatisfying characters, superficial descriptions, jejune reflections, are seen to be no longer of importance in themselves – they are merely stages in the development of the narrative. They are part of the pattern – the enthralling, ever-shifting pattern of the perfect kaleidoscope. A work of art?

Yes, there is no denying it: the Philistine was also an artist. And there he is – squat, square and perpetually talking – on Parnassus."

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October 26th: John Romeril

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October 27th: Dylan Thomas
Emily Post

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"I wonder if Emily Post's marathon guide to every possible situation that could rear its head to harass a human will help the situation or just make it worse.

Will everybody sit up in bed laughing themselves sick at the etiquette of gloves and napkin? Will they be depressed to think that in 1922 women went out in droves to buy this ludicrous tome, which eventually ran through 99 printings and sold out four million copies? Most frightening of all, will any reader who pays £2 10s for the new edition, brought out, I assume, as a giant laugh at this stage, take one word of what Emily wrote seriously? More than any other book that has appeared recently, I would love to know its sales today. I would be fascinated to know who buys it and why I got it to review, but if I had seen it in someone's house I certainly would have bought it. At least to people I showed it to are ordering copies.

It is well over 600 pages of utter and complete nonsense, but it is compulsive reading. There is drama in every line, from the gentle warning not to refer to a bell as a 'tintinnabulary summons' or a cow's tail as 'bovine continuation', to the wording of engraved pew cards for weddings.

Emily Post was everyone's ideal woman in the twenties. Americans bought her book without question as soon as there was to be a wedding in the house. She was a Baltimore Beauty herself, which of course gave her the right to speak; her wedding to Edwin M. Post Jnr in Tuxedo Park was one of the year's social events. As Edwin became more and more important in Wall Street, Emily became more and more obsessed with table settings and the duties of a chaperone.

It is easy to be wise after the event, and I know very little about either of them, but I do feel that it must have been quite predictable that the social event of 1892 should have ended in the Divorce Court of 1906.

Then Emily got down to business seriously …"

Maeve Binchy in *Maeve's Times*.

The problem with a world in which ideas on etiquette are merely there to be laughed at is that we risk living in a world where people see nothing wrong with being rude, pushy, inconsiderate, and with table manners to make a pig blanch. I have just been browsing in her *Etiquette* (in Elizabeth Post's updated version) and she covers just about every possible situation. Times have changed, most men for instance don't wear hats nor do people agonise over how to refer to a divorced person, but a lot of what she writes is simply good sense. And I think most people would agree with her, "The cardinal principle of etiquette is thoughtfulness, and the guiding rule of thoughtfulness is the Golden Rule. If you always do unto others as you would have done unto you, it is likely that you will never offend, bore or intrude, and that your actions will be courteous and indeed thoughtful, … Other courtesies—never intentionally embarrassing another, never talking only about oneself, not gossiping, not prying, not asking personal questions, and not staring or pointing at someone, for example, are as old as time and I fervently hope, will last in perpetuity."

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October 28th: Socrates (birth and death dates not known)

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"The discovery of the alphabet will create forgetfulness in the learners' souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves."

Attributed to Socrates.

* * * * *

October 29th: James Boswell
Lee Child (James Dover Grant)
OGHAM

* * * * *

Ogham sounds like one settled script. But Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* had this to say about the ancient Ogham script used in Celtic Britain: "A Goidelic alphabet, called Ogham, was used in Britain and Ireland some centuries before the introduction of the Latin A B C. Its invention is credited in the mediaeval Irish *Book of Ballymote* to 'Ogma Sun-face son of Breas'—one of the early gods of the Goidels, Ogma, as a veteran Hercules, with club and lion-skin, drawing crowds of prisoners along with golden chains connected by their ears to the tip of his tongue. The alphabet consisted of twenty letters—fifteen consonants and five vowels—apparently corresponding to a deaf-and-dumb finger-language."

There were two basic languages to be written. The earlier Q-Celt or Goidelic (which did not include the letter P) and the P-Celt which he thought came about two centuries later from Gaul in the early fourth century B.C. He says, "Dr. Macalister proves that in Ireland Oghams were not used in public inscriptions until Druidism began to decline: they had been kept a dark secret and when used for written messages between one Druid and another, nicked on wooden billets, were usually ciphered." But then there is the mystery of the extra Greek letters which were added to this alphabet "Dr. Macalister suggests that the Ogham alphabet, when complete with the extra letters, corresponds fairly closely with an early, still somewhat Semitic, form of the Greek alphabet, known as the Formello-Cervetri which is scratched on two vases, one from Caere and the other from Veii in Italy, dated about the fifth century B.C. The letters are written Semitically from right to left and begin with A.B.G.D.E. He assumes that the 'Greek letters' used by the Druids were this alphabet of twenty-six letters, four more than the Classical Greek, though they discarded one as unnecessary; and I think that he has proved his case." Graves goes on to say, "I conclude that the twenty letters of the Ogham alphabet were in existence long before the Formello-Cervetri alphabet was brought to Italy from Greece and that the Gallic Druids added the five foreign letters to them with such disdain as virtually to deny them any part in the system. What complicates the case is that the ancient Irish word for 'alphabet' is 'Beth-Luis-Nion' which suggests that the order of letters in the Ogham alphabet was originally B.L.N., though it had become B.L.F. before the ban on inscriptions was lifted." And then there was the belief that the letters had come not via Gaul but via Spain.

Ogham looks simple with its collections of vertical and diagonal lines but to interpret it you need to know the alphabet behind it. And this is not quite so simple.

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October 30th: Richard Sheridan

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Richard Sheridan is always on the list of Irish-born playwrights but how much time did he actually spend in Ireland? Not a lot. His parents brought him to England while he was still at school. But critics suggest that the wit of his plays such as *The School for Scandal*, *The Duenna*, *A Trip to Scarborough*, and *St Patrick's Day; Or, The Scheming Lieutenant*, owe something to that Irish childhood.

I had always thought of Dion Boucicault as an Irish playwright but the other day I picked up his play *London Assurance* and discovered that although he was born there he spent most of his life in London and New York, with a brief sojourn in Australia after he eloped and entered into a bigamous marriage; Australia, I suppose, being about as far as he could get from his other wife.

Yet perhaps it is impossible to grow up in Ireland and not return to it for material. Peter Thomson said of Boucicault, "In *The Colleen Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1864) and *The Shaughraun* (1874), Boucicault provided himself with his best acting parts, comic Irishmen who combined an inventive indulgence in blarney with an off-hand heroism in the service of that great melodramatic virtue, loyalty. These are by no means his only Irish plays, but the verdict of posterity that they are the best is probably a fair one."

And then there was Oscar Wilde swanning around in London. Would his life have been very different if he had remained to work and swan around in Dublin?

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October 31st: Dick Francis
Joseph Wright
John Keats (Some sources give him the 29th but the 31st seems to be correct)

* * * * *

While I was browsing in various compendiums of Australian literary history I found Henry Gullett editor and journalist, "made the *Australasian* the outstanding colonial literary journal of the day". He was uncle of Sir Henry Somer Gullett and his mother, Isabella, was a cousin of the poet John Keats.

And Sir Henry Somer Gullett was on the staff of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and married Barbara Baynton's daughter and their son Henry Baynton Somer Gullett "wrote a biographical memoir to the 1965 edition of Baynton's *Bush Studies*."

This doesn't quite add up to a Keats connection to Australia but it seemed to be a window on an interesting family connection.

Henry Gullett was born in Devon in 1837, son of Henry Gullett, a stonemason, and Isabella Keats, called 'cousin' of the poet. If this means 1st cousin then Isabella has to be a daughter of the poets' uncle. But there doesn't seem to be much about the family beyond the fact that Thomas Keats came alone to London apparently from Devon to work at a livery stable where he married the boss's daughter, Frances Jennings, and had the poet John. I came upon the suggestion that Thomas Hardy knew a Keats' family in Dorset which had a Thomas and a James. But had the Keats family moved from Devon to Dorset? It seemed to be time to move from literary speculation to genealogical research and see what I might find. Ancestry gave me Henry Gullett on the 1851 census, born Devon, stonemason, but living in Bethnal Green by then with his wife Isabella, son Henry and another four children. But interestingly Isabella is down as born in Wiltshire. So I went looking there. I couldn't find a birth for Isabella (though Keats came in a variety of spellings) but I did find John and Susannah Keats having a Thomas in Chapmandale in 1771 but he died young, and another Tom born to a John in Corsley in 1770. (As Thomas Keats called his first son John there is a good chance his father was a John.) Then I found the marriage of Henry Gullett and Isabella Keats, 4/10/1835, she "of the Parish of Blandford, Dorset", spinster, born around 1814, but they married in Wolborough, Devon. A witness at their wedding was a George Keats. They also turn up on the 1841 census but living in Surrey. And the Henry born 20/1/1837 was christened in a non-conformist chapel in Wolborough and Newton Abbott, Devon, as was his sister Eliza but then they had Isabella born Hampshire, Charles born Surrey and Sarah born Hertfordshire. So was Henry a master stonemason working on important buildings or just a restless man? And perhaps more importantly was Isabella's father—and perhaps her grandfather, the father of Thomas Keats—an

itinerant worker in the building trade? This just might explain the lack of contact between Thomas and his family.

*

‘House in Rome’ by Snorri Hjartarson
Dark and silent
in the house by Trinita del Monti
as then

the white steps up the hill
ringing with multicoloured
young life

an evening sky above
and a few large stars

I look up at the window
and the harp on the wall

Bright star, would I were steadfast

here he vanished into the darkness
the earth’s young lover
that sang sweetest

into the darkness
John Keats

to the stars

*

We do sometimes use lines of Keats’, sometimes without knowing their origins; so here are some you might have heard.

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness
‘To Autumn’

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.
‘Ode to a Nightingale’

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’

‘Silent, upon a peak in Darien.’
‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’

This seems all the more remarkable when you realise John Keats was only 25 when he died.

He packed a lot of poetry into a short life. And yet, on the surface, he seems an unlikely man to be passionate about poetry. His father ran a livery stable and there do not seem to have been any writers in the Keats family. He had the good fortune to be sent to Mr Clarke's small school where he had a sympathetic headmaster and the chance to learn Latin and to enjoy the library. He left school at fifteen to be apprenticed to a surgeon but was welcome back at the school to borrow books. At 21 he became a qualified apothecary and surgeon although, in those grim pre-anaesthetic days, he never practiced that trade, working instead as a dresser. But he caught TB possibly from his brother Tom who died from the disease. While he was apprenticed he began working at his poetry. He drew inspiration from Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, legends of Greece and Rome, and more immediately from the poet, essayist and journalist Leigh Hunt. Keats spoke of his own morbid temperament and he suffered from an inferiority complex when he met poets such as Shelley with land-owning families and an Oxford education behind them. Whereas with Leigh Hunt he seems to have always been comfortable and to have found a different kind of inspiration in Hunt's cheerful and determined attitude to his life and work.

*

Leigh Hunt was not a great poet. But he was a prolific and vigorous writer of essays, articles and poetry. He wrote *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* and Edmund Blunden later wrote *Leigh Hunt: A Biography*, so he obviously made some mark on his times, apart from his friendship with Keats. Though it seems, these days, that people write autobiographies simply to keep themselves in their little patch of the limelight. Perhaps Leigh Hunt had the same motivation. Or perhaps he thought being a friend of Keats was one reason to write about his life.

Curiously, both he and Keats wrote a poem on the same subject—

'On the Grasshopper and Cricket'
The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
That is the grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury,—he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

John Keats

'To the Grasshopper and the Cricket'
Green little vaulter in the sunny grass,
Catching your heart up at the feel of June,
Sole voice that's heard amidst the lazy noon,
When even the bees lag at the summoning brass;
And you, warm little housekeeper, who class
With those who think the candles come too soon,
Loving the fire, and with your tricksome tune
Nick the glad silent moments as they pass;

O sweet and tiny cousins, that belong,
One to the fields, the other to the hearth,
Both have your sunshine; both, though small, are strong
At your clear hearts; and both seem given to earth
To ring in thoughtful ears this natural song—
In doors and out, summer and winter, Mirth.
Leigh Hunt.

—and I found I preferred Leigh Hunt's poem to Keats' and they obviously both knew the folklore that to have a cricket on your hearth brought you good fortune.

* * * * *

Keats' muse and the woman he planned to marry was Fanny Brawne. Sidney Colvin wrote in *Keats*, "From his (Keats) first sarcastic account of her written to his brother, as well as from Severn's mention of her likeness to the draped figure in Titian's picture of Sacred and Profane Love, and from the full-length silhouette of her that has been preserved, it is not difficult to imagine her aspect and presence. A brisk and blooming, very young beauty, of the far from uncommon English hawk blonde type, with aquiline nose and retreating forehead, sharp-cut nostril and gray-blue eye, a slight, shapely figure rather short than tall, a taking smile, and good hair, carriage and complexion,—such was Fanny Brawne externally, but of her character we have little means of judging."

Keats said of her, "beautiful, elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange—we have a little tiff now and then—and she behaves a little better or I must have sheered off." And later he describes her in greater detail. "Shall I give you Miss Brawn? She is about my height" (Keats was just over five feet tall) "—with a fine style of countenance of the lengthen'd sort—she wants sentiment in every feature—she manages to make her hair look well—her nostrils are fine—though a little painful—he[r[mouth is bad and good—he[r[Profil is better than her full face which indeed is not full but pale and thin without showing any bone—Her shape is very graceful and so are her movements—her Arms are good, her hands baddish—her feet tolerable—she is not seventeen [actually she was eighteen and three months]—but she is ignorant—monstrous in her behaviour flying out all directions, calling people such names—that I was forced lately to make use of the term *Minx*—this I think no[t] from any innate vice but from a penchant she has for acting stylishly."

(Poor Fanny. He makes her sound like a horse he is inspecting. And I cannot imagine myself discursing on someone's nostrils!)

W. Jackson Bate in *John Keats* says, "Few women have had their memory more harshly treated without justification than Fanny Brawne for the first century after Keats's death. The hardy Victorian legend was that of a dying poet consumed with unsatisfied love for a heartless flirt. So strong a hold did it take that we still find it lingering on as a general impression despite the frequent efforts made to correct it."

Maurice Buxton Forman collected up a number of letters to and from Keats in *The Letters of John Keats* and his letters to Fanny range from My dear Fanny to My dearest Girl, My dearest Love, My sweet Girl, and Sweetest Fanny.

Apart from the fact that he would probably have infected her with TB it raises the curious question: if they had married would it have been a happy marriage? Twelve years after Keats' death Fanny did marry, to Louis Lendo who changed his name to Lindon, and it seems to have been a happy marriage which gave them a son Herbert and a daughter Margaret—and possibly her husband did not discourse on her nostrils or say she had 'baddish' hands ….

* * * * *

Keats, as he grew sicker, decided to go to Rome with a friend, Joseph Severn, in the hope the milder climate would help him. Instead, he grew worse and died there in 1821. In his last weeks his reading was a book by Jeremy Taylor called *Holy Living and Dying*.

Only his brother George who went to North America and had eight children, and his sister Fanny who married a Spanish diplomat and had four children were left of that little family. But his poetry lived on, influencing many of the 19th-century poets who came after him.

Poetry was his passion and he experimented with form and subject. Would he have remained solely a poet or spread to other kinds of writing? Sidney Colvin wrote, "among those unfortunate guests at the banquet of life, the poets called away before their time, who can really adjudge the honours that would have been due had they remained?"

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November 1st: Christopher Brennan

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William Wilde in his *Australian Poets & Their Works* wrote "Christopher Brennan also stood remote from the popular literary scene in Australia in the early 1900s – in the words of fellow poet Hugh McCrae, 'a star in exile, unconstellated at the south'. His milieu was German romanticism, French symbolism and the work of English poets Milton, Keats, Patmore, Tennyson and Swinburne. In his own poetry he took himself and the universe, not Australia, as his subject matter. Brennan's stature and achievements remain, even today, the subject of considerable scholarly debate. Seldom does a discussion of Australian writers ever venture into the field of comparative literature. Harpur is never measured against Wordsworth, Kendall against Tennyson. Their worth is estimated only in Australian literature; it is not simply that any other estimate would depreciate their achievements but that it would be largely unrealistic, even valueless. With Brennan, however, there comes, for the first time in Australian poetry, a suggestion of universal merit. Pioneer literary critic H.M. Green made such an assessment: 'he is among the very best poets of his day or of our day in at least the English-speaking world', and R.G. Howarth, an eminent literary scholar, spoke of 'the monumental writings of our finest poet'. It is impossible to find, in a century and a half of Australian literary criticism, another example of the serious application of the word 'monumental' to an Australian poetic work. The complexity of Brennan's work has made him largely inaccessible to the general reader, but his influence on later poets such as 'William Baylebridge', R.D. Fitzgerald, Kenneth Slessor and Judith Wright was considerable. The list may well be much longer. No serious poet of the period 1930 to 1970 and beyond would have been unaware of the great shadow Brennan had thrown across the Australian literary scene."

As Brennan's drinking problem increased his marriage broke up and he lost his position at the University of Sydney but he did manage to continue with his poetry.

Terry Sturm said of him, "Brennan's poetry marks a crucial period of transition in Australian literary culture, when emergent nationalist and modernist impulses began to assert themselves against older Anglocentric colonial attitudes and conventions. The pressures of that local milieu, as well as the impact of late nineteenth century developments in Anglo-European art and thought, can be felt in everything he wrote. So, too, can the pressure of more personal circumstances: in particular, a crisis of belief, after his youthful rejection of a vocation for the Catholic priesthood and subsequent loss of religious faith, which cast him adrift among the larger secular and spiritual cross-currents of the 1890s and early 1900s."

His poetry though lyrical and sometimes described as 'lush' nevertheless has a dark edge.

How long delays the miracle blossoming,
vermeil and gold, soft fire, flush of the dark,
aurora, and ravish of night's mother ark
still hallow'd 'neath her present cherishing!

The sides of night are anguish'd with this thing,
unnatural, a fear, a rending: hark,
dim mutterings; the gulfs are strain'd and stark:
dark stress, delay, distress, and vanishing.

O womb, dark womb that darkenest, what art
shall set thee free, and us? or must our heart
yet sleep in squalid snowdrifts of the dust?

Oh that all ends of the world were come on us,
and fire were close beneath earth's stubborn crust,
and all our days were crumbling, ruinous!
From 'The Forest of Night'

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November 2nd: George Bernard Shaw (d)

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"What is a last will and testament? The double terminology is not redundant since, strictly speaking, the will originally dealt with landed property, the testament with personal effects."
Gerald Warner in *Being of Sound Mind: A Book of Eccentric Wills*.

"A twentieth-century *cause célebre* was that of George Bernard Shaw. The contentious clauses in his will, proved on 20 March 1951, were those which provided for setting up an investigation into the possibility of substituting an alphabet of at least forty letters, for the existing one of twenty-six. In particular, he requested that his play *Androcles and the Lion* should be transliterated into the experimental alphabet and printed, page by page, with the conventional text opposite. Six years later, litigation ensued, involving the three bodies interested in the case as residuary legatees – the British Museum, the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and the National Gallery of Ireland.

"The case was heard before Mr Justice Harman who himself made several Shavian comments during the hearing. 'Why invent new sounds when there are perfectly good old ones?' he asked at one point, later observing, 'There is another way of spelling 'Shaw' – and that is, by beginning it with a P.' While one of the counsel for the Attorney-General was developing his argument, the learned judge confided to him: 'I think I should disclose to you a large and heavy tome has arrived in my room. I have not read it, and I propose to hand it down to you. I should not be able to understand it, because it contains square roots and things of that sort.'

"There seemed to be a general scepticism regarding philological pedantry among the lawyers present, and, while demolishing the argument that transliteration of *Androcles and the Lion* could be construed as a charitable purpose, counsel for the trustees of the British Museum remarked that he would be interested to see the revised version of the passage 'Did ums get an awful thorn into ums tootsums – wootsums?' Giving judgement, on 20 February 1957, Mr Justice Harman found that the alphabet trusts were invalid and must fail. After a vigorous campaign by the Shaw Society, however, a compromise was arranged at the end of that year, whereby the Public Trustee was to receive sufficient money to carry out the alphabet provisions."

And here is another interesting little snippet from his book. "The twentieth-century controversy over smoking is actually an old issue, as a succession of wills can illustrate. Peter Campbell, a Derbyshire gentleman, made his will on 20 October 1616, in which he left all his

household effects to his son Roger. But there was a condition 'that yf at any time hereafter, any of his brothers or sisters' (there were eight of them) 'shall fynd him *takeing of tobacco*, that then he or she so fynding him, and making just proofe thereof to my executors shall have the said goods…'

"More than two hundred years later, in America, the original home of the noxious weed, a Maine farmer insisted that any of his descendants, 'born or yet unborn,' who should be found smoking, chewing tobacco, or drinking alcohol – unless prescribed by a physician under oath – should be 'cut off from their dower in my property for six months for the first offence, and one year for each subsequent offence; and for one year of total abstinence, his or her dowers to be restored'."

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November 3rd: Martin Cruz Smith
Pearl Craigie 'John Oliver Hobbes'

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Pearl Craigie is one of many 19th century writers who chose a male pseudonym. Born in the US she did her writing in England and had a best-seller with *Some Emotions and a Moral*. I doubt if such a title would appeal to modern readers but the Victorians snapped it up. Nevertheless, the thing I found myself pondering on was: are there other women writers from then who have gone down to posterity as male—simply because their books didn't sell enough copies or achieve enough fame to make anyone want to look for the writer behind the name?

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November 4th: John Bude (Ernest Elmore)

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I was reading the *The Sussex Downs Mystery* which introduced me to largely forgotten Golden Age crime writer John Bude. (I picked it up in the library because I liked the cover!) He wrote competent detective novels using, like Ngaio Marsh, a competent policeman called Meredith. Compared to the distinctly idiosyncratic detectives from that era they don't really stand out. But he had another claim to fame. With John Creasey he founded the Crime Writers Association in 1953. Australia now has its own CWA which you can join. But the thing which made me ponder was that the Golden Age is always seen as a one-off period. And yet I would think, going by the number of new crime novels being published that we are in a second Golden Age. So what is the requirement or requirements for an era to be classified as a Golden Age? Certainly most of those writing in the 1920s and 1930s were English and known to each other but this doesn't seem to have been necessary. I think it was rather that for the first time detective fiction was treated seriously. It wasn't merely the serials that livened up the magazines of the late 19th and early 20th century. Now quite a few of the books got reviewed and although still seen as entertainment they were more than 'railway fiction' to while away a tedious journey. So that no matter how many practitioners there are now, and how erudite, that early development cannot be recreated.

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November 5th: Ella Wheeler Wilcox
James Elroy Flecker

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When Agatha Christie called her late mystery *Postern of Fate* she was drawing on a famous poem by English poet James Elroy Flecker. His 'Gates of Damascus' begins,

Four great gates has the city of Damascus,
And four grand Wardens, on their spears reclining,
All day long stand like tall stone men.
And sleep on the towers when the moon is shining.

He then goes on to give each gate warden a song. The East Gate Warden:

Postern of Fate, the Desert Gate, Disaster's Cavern, Fort of Fear,

The Portal of Bagdad am I, the Doorway of Diarbekir.

The West Gate:

I am the gate toward the sea: O sailor men, pass out from me!
I hear you high on Lebanon, singing the marvels of the sea.

The North Gate:

I am the gay Aleppo Gate: a dawn, a dawn and thou art there:
Eat not thy heart with fear and care, O brother of the beast we hate!

And the South Gate:

I am the Gate that fears no fall: the Mihrab of Damascus wall,
The bridge of booming Sinai: the Arch of Allah all in all.

So when Christie first set off to the Middle East she undoubtedly had a romantic image of what she would find. There must have been some shocks when she actually got there. But although Flecker didn't particularly like Syria he immortalised it in his poetry. Sir John Squire said of him. "In person Flecker was tall, with blue eyes, black, straight hair, and dark complexion. There was a tinge of the East in his appearance, and his habitual expression was a curious blend of the sardonic and the gentle."

He was only thirty-five when he died after a long battle with tuberculosis so he did not live to see such images as Lawrence of Arabia entering Damascus. His Greek wife Helle Skiadaressi did her best to keep his literary memory shining bright.

One of his late poems, written when he knew he was dying, was 'Stillness':

When the words rustle no more,
  And the last work's done,
When the bolt lies deep in the door,
  And Fire, our Sun,
Falls on the dark-laned meadows of the floor;

When from the clock's last chime to the next chime
  Silence beats his drum,
And Space with gaunt grey eyes and her brother Time
  Wheeling and whispering come,
She with the mould of form and he with the loom of rhyme:

Then twittering out in the night my thought-birds flee,
  I am emptied of all my dreams:
I only hear Earth turning, only see
  Ether's long bankless streams,
And only know I should drown if you laid not your hand on me.

I wondered if it was Helle's hand he was thinking of or some more abstract angelic hand …

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November 6th: Raymond Postgate

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English writer Raymond Postgate wrote several biographies including of John Wilkes and Robert Emmett. He also wrote what you might call a biography of a year. *1798*. It is like a snapshot of things happening in the world in that year and I liked the idea, not least because history keeps getting re-written, sometimes to add in new information or correct mistakes, but equally to re-write history to suit someone's preconceptions or simply to make it sound more entertaining.

Europe had not yet 'scrambled' for Africa but was interested in one African 'commodity'. "Of Africa, the outline had been discovered, but little more. An exception was a hundred-year-old settlement of Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope, recently taken over by the British. The north coast of Africa, the modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya, was also fairly well known; it was called Barbary, and was occupied by Moslem pirates, nominally subject to Turkey. Everywhere else there was little but trading posts and fortresses, situated on bays or at river mouths, whose most profitable merchandise was slaves brought down from the interior by the local chiefs, often as a result of wars deliberately provoked for the purpose. Most of the African coast was claimed by the Portuguese, though they no longer had the lion's share of the trade. At the outbreak of the French Revolution there had been forty European "factories," as they were called, on the Guinea coast, the best source of slaves. Of these 15 were Dutch, 14 British, 4 Portuguese, 4 Danish and 3 French." Of course the Danes do not like to be reminded of their involvement in slavery.

Postgate makes an interesting comparison: "There were two islands whose fate seemed to have been settled this year, Ireland and St. Domingo, better known to us as "Haiti,"which is really only the western part of it. For Ireland the year was one of disaster; nothing had happened that was fortunate or even hopeful; the best that the most zealous supporter of Protestantism and British domination could have said was that a danger had been averted. There had been misery, civil war, and murder, the nation was irremediably divided into two, and the future promised nothing but darkness. For St. Domingo the story seemed to be exactly the opposite. An end was at last put to the devastations and civil wars which had been wrecking the country. The invading armies of Britain were driven out. The island was reunited. The country was under the firm control of one of the most noble and ablest men that his race has ever produced—Touissant. This phrase is not too strong; his figure has been blurred by melodramatic biographies filled with imaginary conversations, but there is no doubt that he was a man on whom the widest hopes could be founded. The future at least seemed likely to be all sunshine.

"Never were anticipations more dramatically unfulfilled. Ireland was to rise again; St. Domingo to slide down to savagery, from the nobility of French republicanism to voodoo, from Touissant to Trujillo and Duvalier of today."

The two leaders, Theobald Wolfe Tone and Toussaint L'Overture, both died at the height of their struggles. But whereas Wolfe Tone had educated and able supporters, Toussaint, an ex-slave, had taken Haiti from a miserable slave-owning French colony to become the first independent nation in the Western Hemisphere, and the loss of his brilliant leadership was disastrous. He was endeavouring to develop the institutions and leadership which would maintain Haiti as free and prosperous. Without him the country descended into anarchy and misery.

Postgate gives two important formative influences on Toussaint. The New Testament and Epictetus. "His Christian faith, and the humanity which went with it, he might perhaps have hoped to communicate to his fellows; the other great influence on him he hardly could have shared. He was a disciple of Epictetus, and though that philosopher was an eighteenth-century favorite, there were few indeed on the island who had read, let alone understood, him.

"Epictetus was a Stoic who lived in the first century A.D. He had been a slave, and what was his real name is unknown—"Epictetus" means "the purchased man" (from the Greek word *epictao-mai*, to buy something extra) and he probably called himself that as a kind of defiance. He had been bought by Epaphroditus, one of the administration secretaries of the Emperor Nero, who set him free; he became a friend of the Emperor Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius was his pupil. Four small volumes of his lectures remain and were read by Toussaint in a French translation; unlike almost any other classical records, it is fairly certain that they are verbatim reports. They are not easy to summarize, partly because they are conversational; but it is abundantly clear to anyone who reads them why they had a powerful influence on Toussaint. His love of freedom, for instance. "The

words *free*, adjective and verb, and *freedom*, appear some 130 times in Epictetus; that is, with a relative frequency about six times that in the New Testament and twice that in Marcus Aurelius," writes one of his recent editors. Perhaps the most central point of his doctrine is that man's will, or power of choice (*proairesis*), is the only thing which is truly his own."

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November 7th: Albert Camus
Helen Garner
Cecilia Miereles

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Here is a potted bio for Cecilia Meireles, 1901-1964. Born in Rio de Janeiro, also traveled in Europe and India. Published 22 books of poetry and books for children. Several times nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Married Meitor Grillo. Friend of Gabriela Mistral.

She wrote beautiful poetry and more than that she looks just as a poet 'should' look. Grave, thoughtful, romantic, someone whose mind is in ethereal regions. It is a pity her poetry has not been published in English. So here is one of her poems, not in English:

Suspiro do vento,
lágrima do mar,
este tormento
ainda pode acabar?

De dia e de noite,
meu sonho combate:
vêm sombras, vão sombras,
não há quem o mate!

Suspiro do vento,
lágrima do mar,
as armas que invento
são aromas no ar!

Mandai-me soldados
de estirpe mais forte,
com todas as armas
que levam à morte!

Suspiro do vento,
lágrima do mar,
meu pensamento
não sabe matar!

Mandai-me esse arcanjo
de verde cavalo,
que desça a este campo
a desbaratá-lo!

Suspiro do vento,
Lágrima do mar,
que leve esse arcanjo meu longo tormento,

e também a mim, para o acompanhar!

'Noturno' from her collection *Viagem Vaga Música*.

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November 8th: General TomoyukiYamashita
Bram Stoker

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Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, Goebbels wrote several novels, Franco and Mussolini wrote a novel apiece, Mao-Tse-Tung wrote poetry. And Japan's famous General Yamashita penned some poems, including this one when he heard that Japan had surrendered:

The brassy sun burns down upon the earth—
An earth burnt black by battle.
From spring until the autumn leaf,
I have stood against the foe,
But not alone: with a million brave warriors
Serving their sacred Emperor.

Then suddenly I knew it all must end.
My soul overflowed with awe.
When the Emperor spoke to his people,
It knifed deep into my heart.
Yet, as I gaze into the sky,
How can I help the sorrow, the regret?
But I will be born seven times,
And once again will stand and fight

When my country wakes.

In *A Soldier Must Hang*, John Deane Potter says of Yamashita, "What will be history's final verdict on Japan's greatest general? His record is a mixture of brilliance and bad luck. He captured Singapore in the East's most decisive victory against the West. His success so frightened Japan's Premier that Tojo banished him to Manchuria for three years, in the middle of their country's most desperate war. Yamashita fought, on a shoestring, a spectacular year-long rear-guard action against General MacArthur, who was backed by all the mechanized might of America. He was hanged by what two United States Supreme court judges called "legalized lynching."

"But was it not the Japanese themselves who were responsible for his death? Was it not their indifference to human life, their archaic, inefficient chain of military command, their only partial integration into international civilization, their reckless gamble for conquest, which finally led this European-educated doctor's son to the scaffold one February morning?

"Perhaps, as his European biographer suggests, his execution in the Philippines was the best fate he could have expected. For what place would there be among the chromium, the neon signs, and the skyscrapers of Westernized postwar Japan for an out-of-date soldier who always began his day with a bow and a prayer, facing the Emperor?"

Potter says, "He was an old-fashioned Oriental general, a product of his country and his time."

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November 9th: Ivan Turgenev
Emile Gaboriau
William Camden (d)

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David McKie wrote in *What's in a Surname?*—"In the south aisle of Westminster Abbey, close to a memorial to the actor David Garrick, just across the way from John Dryden, and within nodding distance of Chaucer and of his own great contemporary, Shakespeare, there's an imposing plaque to commemorate the first notable analyst and disentangler of the mysteries of surnames in Britain. Like his own most famous work, the inscription is written in Latin, which being translated, says: *William Camden, Clarenceux King of Arms, who illustrated the British Antiquities, by ancient truth and indefatigable industry, and adorned his innate simplicity with useful literature, and illustrated his pleasantness of humour with candour and sincerity, lies here quietly, in hopes of a certain resurrection in Christ. He died 9 November 1623, aged 74.*

"Since one should not wish to build false hopes among today's onomasticians it ought to be said that he didn't attain this eminence for his studies of names alone. It much more reflects the success of a book called *Britannia*, begun in 1577, the year he turned twenty-six, and completed more than a decade later. It's a kind of inventory of the nation, exploring its history from earliest times but also its geography" and to do his work he learned Old English and Welsh. And material he couldn't fit into that book he put into *The Remaines Concerning Britain* "a book full of wisdom, wit and irresistible charm, whose findings on surnames would not be greatly enhanced for centuries afterwards."

"Camden is full of good sense. He warns against easy conclusions. He knows that the spread of surnames begins only after the Conquest. Among the Normans, he says, 'it seemed a disgrace for a Gentleman to have but one single name, as the meaner sorte and bastards had.'" I assume he had William in mind as he was no gentleman and was known as William the Bastard before he went down in history as William the Conqueror. "He tells people with apparently old Norman surnames, who claim to be able to trace themselves back to the Conquest, that they're often deceiving themselves. The direct links they like to parade are too often based on illusion. They're by no means alone in that. 'Some English men and Scottish men,' he says, 'like the Arcadians, think their surnames as ancient as the Moone, or at least to reach many an age beyond the Conquest.' Or again: 'Whatsoever some of their posteritie do overweene of the antiquities of their names, as though in the continual mutability of the worlde, conversions of states, and fatall periods of families, five hundred years were not sufficient antiquitie for a family or name, when as but very few have reached thereunto.' "

It would be nearly two centuries before surnames began to interest more researchers.

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November 10th: Oliver Goldsmith

William of Malmesbury (possibly b. 30 November between 1090 and 1096 – c. 1143)

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Charles Knight in *Half Hours with the Best Authors* wrote, "Days Before Books.—In the old ignorant times, before women were readers, history was handed down from mother to daughter, &c., and William of Malmesbury picked up his history, from the time of the Venerable Bede to his time, out of old songs, for there was no writer in England from Bede to him." Oh ho—

I came across a mention of William of Malmesbury in Snorri Sturlason's book about the lives of the Norse Kings. He wrote, "Sigurd the Crusader starts on his voyage to the Holy Land and returns to Norway overland in 1110." I was tempted to follow this thread of the Vikings who after centuries of harrying western Europe turned to crusading. But the editor, Erling Monsen, added this interesting little footnote: "William of Malmesbury writes as follows about Sigurd the Crusader's voyage to Palestine":

"Foreigners willingly resorted thither (to England), as the only haven of secure tranquility. Siward, king of Norway, in his early years comparable to the bravest heroes, having entered on a voyage to Jerusalem, and asking the king's permission, wintered in England. After expending vast sums upon the churches, as soon as the western breeze opened the gates of spring to soothe the ocean, he regained his vessels, and proceeding to sea, terrified the Balearic Isles, which are called Majorca and Minorca, by his arms, leaving them an easier conquest to the afore-mentioned William of Montpelier. He thence proceeded to Jerusalem with all his ships in safety except one; she, while delaying to loose her cable from shore, was sucked into a tremendous whirlpool, which Paul the historian of Lombardi describes as lying between the coasts of the Seine and Aquitaine, with such a force of water that its dashing might be heard at thirty miles distance. Arriving at Jerusalem he, for the advancement of the Christian cause, laid siege to, battered, and subdued the maritime cities of Tyre and Sidon. Changing his route and entering Constantinople, he fixed a ship, beaked with golden dragons, as a trophy, on the church of Sancta Sophia. His men dying numbers in this city, he discovered a remedy for the disorder, by making the survivors drink wine more sparingly, and diluted with water; and this with singular sagacity; for pouring wine on the liver of a hog, and finding that it presently dissolved by the acridity of the liquor, he immediately conjectured that the same effect took place in men, and afterwards dissecting a dead body, he had ocular proof of it. Wherefore the emperor contemplating his sagacity and courage, which promised something great, was inclined to detain him. But he adroitly deluded the expectation in which he was already devouring the Norwegian gold; for, obtaining permission to go to a neighbouring city, he deposited with him the chests of his treasures, filled with lead and sealed up, as pledges of a very speedy return; by which occurrence the emperor was deceived, and the other returned home by land." "

So William was something of a historian and lived in or near Malmesbury where he was a monk and librarian at the Abbey. But what did he write? My son took me to Berkelouw Books near Bowral and I saw a Folio Society edition of William's *Deeds of the Kings of England*. I was tempted to buy it but reluctantly decided it would be too heavy to go in my luggage. His *Gesta Regum Anglorium* is also translated as *The Deeds of the Kings of the English*.

The DNB says he was both librarian and precentor at Malmesbury but also had a connection to Glastonbury as he described himself to the monks there as "your servant by devotion, your brother in the fellowship of God's soldiery, your son by affection." The DNB says, "If he was exceptionally qualified, he was also exceptionally circumstanced for the pursuit to which he chiefly devoted his powers. The two great abbeys with which he was so closely connected were treasure-houses of material of all kinds, documentary and traditional, for the early history of England; and from the number of authors with whom he shows himself acquainted, even in his early works, it is evident that, what with the libraries of these two houses and his private means of procuring books, he had, while still a very young man, access to a much wider field of reading than was open to most of his contemporaries." He was also more widely traveled than most of his contemporaries and spoke three languages. He did a sequel to the *Gesta* in 'Historia Novella' as well as an ecclesiastical history but among his lost works was a 'Life of St. Patrick' as well as books of poetry.

So what of the Gesta? "Much of the interest and importance which attaches to the 'Gesta Regum' as a whole is literary rather than historical. In the earlier books, especially the second, William makes considerable use of the older ballad literature of England, which in its original shape is entirely lost. In the same portion of his work more particularly, but to some extant also throughout its whole course, he frequently breaks the sequence of events to entertain his readers with a string of miscellaneous tales, some utterly frivolous, some curious as illustrations of mediaeval manners and habits of thought, many of a character which has justly brought upon their narrator the reproach of being 'a greedy swallower of every wonder that he could rake up from

every quarter,' most of them totally irrelevant to his main subject, but all of them related with the facility of a master of the art of story-telling."

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David Daiches in *A Critical History of English Literature* says, "Latin was not only the language of theological and didactic works; it was also the language of science, philosophy, history, and a great deal of poetry. Latin was also used for all official documents, and was the legal language of Norman England until it was replaced by Anglo-French in the thirteenth century. (Anglo-French remained the official legal language of England until 1731.) Perhaps the most interesting prose works produced in England in the early Middle English period were the histories. Such Anglo-Latin historians as William of Malmesbury, whose histories of England show both learning and a critical judgment, and Matthew Paris, the greatest of the twelfth century English historians, are of more interest to students of historiography than to those concerned primarily with literature, but the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, written in the third decade of the twelfth century, provided a mine of material which was later to be fruitfully employed by poets and romancers. Geoffrey was a Welshman, and drew on old British traditions, including the Welsh historians Gildas and Nennius. He gives us a picture of the Anglo-Saxon invasions seen through the eyes of the retreating Britons, and his pages are filled with figures which were to become famous in imaginative literature. Here we first find the stories of Lear and Cymbeline and Gorbodue, and here, most important of all, we get the first full-dress story of the exploits of King Arthur. It is Arthur himself, rather than his knights, who keeps the centre of the picture: we hear nothing yet of Lancelot or Tristan; but we have Uther Pendragon and Merlin; we have the treachery of Arthur's nephew Mordred and the disloyalty of Guanhumara (Guinevere), and we have the final bearing of the mortally wounded Arthur to Avalon. Arthur is a great hero to Geoffrey, rather than a great symbolic figure in the background, as he was later to become, and the knights by whom he is surrounded are loyal feudal retainers rather than epitomes of courtly virtues. Geoffrey has Arthur successful in war against enemies both at home and abroad, until, rejecting Rome's demand for tribute, he sets out to conquer Rome itself. But the disloyalty of Mordred and of Guinevere recalls him, and so the story goes to the last great battle and the journey to Avalon. Here is the outline of the story that so much later medieval literature was to use as a grand backcloth for innumerable individual incidents."

"According to the chronicler William of Malmesbury, the king at one point demanded that a debate be held between his own churchmen and the Jews, declaring that if the Jews won, he would convert to Judaism."

From *What's in a Surname?* by David McKie.

Bede (b. 673 AD) did write about kings and things other than church records in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. He tells his readers something of geography and says, "Britain is rich in grain and timber; it has good pasturage for cattle and draught animals, and vines are cultivated in various localities. There are many land and sea birds of various species, and it is well known for its plentiful springs and rivers abounding in fish. Salmon and eels are especially plentiful, while seals, dolphins, and sometimes whales are caught. There are also many varieties of shell-fish, such as mussels, in which are often found excellent pearls of several colours, red, purple, violet, and green, but mainly white. Whelks are abundant, and a beautiful scarlet dye is extracted from them which remains unfaded by sunshine or rain; indeed, the older the cloth, the more beautiful its colour."

And, "At the present time there are in Britain, in harmony with the five books of the divine law, five languages and four nations – English, British, Irish, and Picts. Each of these have their

own language; but all are united in their study of God's truth by the fifth – Latin – which has become a common medium through the study of the scriptures. At first the only inhabitants of the island were the Britons, from whom it takes its name, and who, according to tradition, crossed into Britain from Armorica, (ie. Brittany) and occupied the southern parts. When they had spread northwards and possessed the greater part of the island, it is said that some Picts from Scythia (probably Scandinavia) put to sea in a few longships, and were driven by storms around the coasts of Britain" and he then turns to the Romans in Britain. "Rome fell to the Goths in the 1164th year after its foundation. At the same time Roman rule came to an end in Britain, almost 470 years after the landing of Gaius Julius Caesar." The Romans had barely departed when new invaders began arriving. "These new-comers were from the three most formidable races of Germany, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent and the Isle of Wight and those in the province of the West Saxons opposite the Isle of Wight who are called Jutes to this day. From the Saxons – that is, the country now known as the land of the Old Saxons – came the East, South and West Saxons. And from the Angles – that is, the country known as Angulus, which lies between the provinces of the Jutes and Saxons and is said to remain unpopulated to this day – are descended the East and Middle Angles, the Mercians, all the Northumbrian stock (that is, those people living north of the river Humber), and the other English peoples. Their first chieftains are said to have been the brothers Hengist and Horsa. The latter was subsequently killed in battle against the Britons, and was buried in east Kent, where the monument bearing his name still stands. They were the sons of Wictgils, whose father was Witta, whose father was Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock sprang the royal house of many provinces."

Bede was not always accurate in his history. Nor was William of Malmesbury. (Though I assume he had first-hand knowledge when he wrote "Drinking in particular was a universal practice in which occupation they (the English) passed entire nights as well as days … They were accustomed to eat till they became surfeited and to drink till they were sick." And he certainly knew some of the characters; "the political history of the reigns of Henry I and Stephen came to him at first hand from three of the foremost actors in it—Roger of Salisbury, Henry of Winchester, and Robert of Gloucester.") Even though they had access to the vellum manuscripts of monastic libraries it amazes me that they could put together interesting, coherent, and useful histories without many of the records and resources a modern historian would regard as essential.

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November 11th: Fyodor Dostoevsky
Kurt Vonnegut

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The New York Times Book Review, collected as *By the Book*, asked writers about the writing life and one of the column's questions was: 'What the President Should Read' and Dave Barry said, "*The Brothers Karamazov*, by Dostoyevsky. I was required to read this book in English class during my freshman year at Haverford College, but I never finished it. I seriously doubt that Dostoyevsky ever finished it. So I figure if the president read it, he could tell me what happens."

In *I Used to Know that Literature* Joyce and Janssen say, "You can stop feeling guilty for giving up halfway through George Eliot's *Middlemarch* or Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (nee *Remembrance of Things Past*). Turns out many fancy-pants authors do the same thing. Canadian short-story doyenne Alice Munro admitted as much in a 2001 interview with *The Atlantic*, noting that she was rereading Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*—not necessarily because she enjoyed it so much, but because she missed so much the first time around, when she skipped "the parts about money." "

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"Neither Siegfried nor I suffered from insomnia but on the rare occasions when sleep would not come we had recourse to our particular books. Mine was *The Brothers Karamazov*, a great novel, but to me, soporific in its names. Even at the beginning I felt those names lulling me. 'Alexey Fyodorovich Karamazov was the third son of Fyodor Pavlovich Karamazov.' Then by the time I had encountered Grigory Kutuzov, Yefim Petrovich Polenov, Stepanida Bedryagina and a few others I was floating away.

With Siegfried it was a book on the physiology of the eye which he kept by his bedside. There was one passage which never failed to start him nodding. He showed it to me once. 'The first ciliary muscle is inserted into the ciliary body and by its contraction pulls the ciliary body forward and so slackens the tension on the suspensory ligament, while the second ciliary muscle is a circular muscle embedded in the ciliary body and by its contraction drags the ciliary body towards the crystalline lens.' He had never managed to get much further than that."

James Herriot in *The Lord God Made Them All*.

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"Robert Graves, in a letter, has an interesting list of writers and people whom he regards as truly great. He denies the title to Dostoevsky 'whose works have depressed more young people in England and Russia than any other novelist from the first beginnings. *Genius* does not depress.'"

P. J. Kavanagh in *People and Places*.

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These seemed like good reasons for *not* reading *The Brothers Karamazov*. But I did read it and I did finish it but it *was* hard going. The father is a rogue and comes to a sticky end. But the trouble is—the brothers, Ivan, Aloysha, and Dmitry, just aren't very interesting. Sometimes I liked a minor character, sometimes I felt I was learning a bit about 19th century Russian life, occasionally they spoke about something interesting. Money does come into it although their interest in the stuff didn't surprise or bore me. But I won't recommend that you go out and read the book.

Most of their conversations are of a domestic nature so I was a little surprised when Ivan suddenly launches out into the unexpected.

" 'By the way, not so long ago a Bulgarian in Moscow told me,' Ivan went on, as though not bothering to listen to his brother, 'of the terrible atrocities committed all over Bulgaria by the Turks and Circassians who were afraid of a general uprising of the Slav population. They burn, kill, violate women and children, nail their prisoners' ears to fences and leave them like that till next morning when they hang them, and so on – it's impossible to imagine it all. And, indeed, people sometimes speak of man's "bestial" cruelty, but this is very unfair and insulting to the beasts: a beast can never be cruel as a man, so ingeniously, so artistically cruel. A tiger merely gnaws and tears to pieces, that's all he knows. It would never occur to him to nail men's ears to a fence and leave them like that overnight, even if he were able to do it. These Turks, incidentally, seemed to derive a voluptuous pleasure from torturing children, cutting a child out of its mother's womb with a dagger and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on a bayonet before the eyes of their mothers. It was doing it before the eyes of their mothers that made it so enjoyable. But one incident I found particularly interesting. Imagine a baby in the arms of a trembling mother, surrounded by Turks who had just entered her house. They are having great fun: they fondle the baby, they laugh to make it laugh and they are successful: the baby laughs. At that moment the Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The boy laughs happily, stretches out his little hands to grab the pistol, when suddenly the artist pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows his brains out….Artistic, isn't it? Incidentally, I'm told the Turks are very fond of sweets.'

'Why are you telling me all this, Ivan?' asked Aloysha.

'I can't help thinking that if the devil doesn't exist and, therefore, man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.'

'Just as did God, you mean.'

'Oh, you're marvelous at "cracking the wind of the poor phrase", as Polonius says in *Hamlet*,' laughed Ivan. 'You've caught me there. All right, I'm glad. Your God is a fine one, if man created him in his own image and likeness. You asked me just now why I was telling you all this: you see, I'm a collector of certain interesting little facts and, you know, I'm jotting down and collecting from newspapers and books, from anywhere, in fact, certain jolly little anecdotes, and I've already a good collection of them. The Turks, of course, have gone into my collection, but they are, after all, foreigners. I've also got lovely stories from home. Even better than the Turkish ones. We like corporal punishment, you know. The birch and the lash mostly. It's a national custom. With us nailed ears are unthinkable, for we are Europeans, after all. But the birch and the lash are something that is our own and cannot be taken away from us.' "

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November 12th: Janette Turner Hospital
George Feifer (d)
'John Oxenham'
Elizabeth Cady Stanton

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In *Creative Writing for Dummies* Maggie Hamand wrote, "In a real twist of fate, Anthony Hopkins was offered a leading role in a film based on the book *The Girl from Petrovka* by George Feifer. After signing the contract, Hopkins traveled to London. He visited several bookshops, hoping to buy the book, but none had it in stock.

Waiting for the Tube at Leicester Square station, Hopkins saw a book discarded on a bench. When he picked it up, he saw it was *The Girl from Petrovka*, with some notes scribbled in the margins.

Two years later, filming in Vienna, Hopkins was visited by Feifer, who mentioned that he'd lent a copy of the book with his notes in it to a friend who'd then lost it somewhere in London. Hopkins handed the copy he'd found to Feifer. It was the same book."

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November 13th: Robert Louis Stevenson

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"We have learned of late of the furtive brandies and sodas of General Gordon, of the subtle selfishness of Henry Drummond, of the very wild oats sown by Robert Louis Stevenson, and of the domestic incompatibilities of the Dickens and the Carlyles. The things that the Victorian biographer thought well to draw a curtain across, the modern biographer plunges into with all the gusto of a showman. There are no idols today, we are told. They all have clay feet. Human nature is of the earth, earthy. We are all the same. Let us be truthful about it. Whatever else we can't be, let us be honest."

W. E. Sangster in *Why Jesus never wrote a book*. I am not sure that is why Jesus never wrote a book! Not a lot of people were writing or reading books in 1st century Palestine. Nor do I think RLS sowed any very wild oats. He was after all raised in 19th century Scotland. But Sangster raises an interesting question. Should writers' lives, anybody's life for that matter, be seen as 'open season' or should the subjects of biography be allowed the dignity of keeping some aspects of their lives private?

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November 14th: Steele Rudd

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November 15th: William Cowper

Gerald of Wales (Giraldus Cambrensis) (birthdate not known)

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William of Malmesbury wrote a history of the kings of England, as did both Matthew Paris and Geoffrey of Monmouth. Gerald did not devote one of his known 17 books specifically to the kings but refers to them through his other books, all written in Latin. He began by being quite supportive of the Plantagenet rulers (he called Richard I 'lion-hearted' which turned into Richard the Lionheart) but gradually changed his mind, eventually calling King John 'a tyrannous whelp' and saying of Henry II, 'From beginning to end an oppressor of the nobility; weighing right and wrong, what is lawful and unlawful, by his own interest; a seller and delayer of justice; shifty in speech and full of craft; readily breaking, not his word only, but his pledged honour and his oath; an open adulterer; ungrateful towards God and without devotion; a hammer of the Church, and born to destruction.'

Huw Pryce in Charles Kightly's *A Mirror of Medieval Wales* writes, "As Gerald contemplated the Roman ruins at Caerleon in 1188, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* cannot have been far from his mind. Completed some fifty years earlier, Geoffrey's book had been an instant success. It provided the first coherent narrative of the early history of the Britons and introduced Arthur to an international audience. According to Geoffrey, it was at Caerleon that Arthur had held court, exhibiting the highest virtues of chivalry. Gerald alluded to this in the *Journey*, but how much of Geoffrey's work he believed is unclear."

"Gerald accepted that Arthur had been a great king of the Britons, whose renown was reflected in the name Caer Arthur, 'the fortress of Arthur', the highest peak of the Brecon Beacons (Pen-y-Fan today). Yet he also realized that virtually nothing was reliably known about what Arthur had done, citing the explanation given by the Welsh that Gildas, the sixth-century British churchman, had thrown all his writings on the king into the sea. Most of what was said about Arthur was therefore legend rather than history. … One such legend was that Arthur would return and lead the Welsh in recovering their rightful sovereignty over the whole island of Britain. For Gerald, this belief was foolish, and he had the evidence to disprove it. Not long after his journey round Wales a dramatic discovery was made at Glastonbury Abbey: the monks had excavated between two pyramids in their cemetery and, sixteen feet down, found an oak containing what were thought to be the bodies of Arthur and Queen Guinevere. Gerald subsequently saw these and wrote two accounts of the exhumation, noting the huge size of Arthur's bones and describing how a lock of Guinevere's fair hair had crumbled into dust when grabbed by an over-eager monk. The discovery thus gave substance to the legends about Arthur while depriving them of any dangerous political implications: the much vaunted deliverer of the Welsh was well and truly dead."

Curiously "According to Gerald, there had been two Merlins." In Welsh Myrddin. One of these was Merlin Ambrosius, "found as a child at Carmarthen which was named after him (Caerfyrddin – Caer + Mryddin) and who later prophesied to Vortigern at Dinas Emrys, and another, Merlin Silvester, struck mad in a Scottish forest in the time of Arthur. Both Merlins had foretold the future fate of the Britons, and Gerald quoted some of their prophecies, regarding them as valid historical evidence which subsequent events had vindicated."

His travels, as far as Rome, his life at court and church might be said to be of their time. But his interest in animals other than domestic animals, his fury when horses were ill-treated, and his careful observations of a range of creatures were something new in British writing. "With notable exceptions, Gerald was at his best when describing birds, beasts and other living creatures, especially those that he observed for himself. If he believed that barnacle geese hatched from barnacle shells, or that summer-visiting birds hibernated in winter, it must be remembered that such theories were commonly held for many centuries after his death: indeed, no scientist visited the barnacle goose's remote Arctic breeding grounds until 1907."

"Much more remarkable, by twelfth-century standards, was Gerald's concern with wildlife for its own sake. Even on the most gruelling day of his journey through Wales, he took the trouble to note the song of an oriole; he observed that the jackdaws of St Davids were so used to kind treatment from priests that they showed no fear of anyone dressed in black; and he clearly spent many hours observing the habits of beavers – probably (with a true naturalist's instinct) because he knew them to be already very rare in Britain, surviving only on the Teifi and perhaps on one Scottish river."

Gerald died in 1223.

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November 16th: Michael Arlen
Chinua Achebe

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November 17th: Auberon Waugh
DID YOU KNOW?

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Next time you are listening to, or perhaps singing, 'Click Go the Shears' you might like to remember Jackie Howe. I found a snippet about him in a travel guide to Queensland. "On the corner of the Cunningham Hwy and Glengallan Rd in Warwick is a giant pair of blade shears atop a block of stone. This monument commemorates Jackie Howe, born on Canning Downs Station near Warwick, and acclaimed as the greatest 'gun' (the best in the shed) shearer the country has ever seen. He holds the amazing record of having shorn 321 sheep with a set of hand shears in less than eight hours. Established in 1892, the record still stands today – it wasn't even beaten by shearers using machine-powered shears until 1950.

"Jackie had a habit of ripping the sleeves off his singlets when he was working and to this day the sleeveless blue singlets favoured by many Australian workers are known as 'Jackie Howes'."

And his back probably told him in no uncertain terms that he had sheared 321 sheep.

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November 18th: Margaret Atwood

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November 19th: *Famous Detective Stories*

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I remember someone donated a bundle of these to Vinnies and I enjoyed reading them. So here are two items which gave me pause in the November 1948 edition.

A German immigrant called Arnold Soderman was found guilty of assaulting and killing young girls and hanged 2nd June 1936 in Melbourne. The article, 'The Guilt of Arnold Soderman' by Allan Brenna, names his victims as:

6 November 1930, Mena Griffiths aged 13 at Ormond.

9 January 1931, Adelaide Hazel Wilson aged 16 at Caulfield.

1 January 1935, Ethel Belshaw

2 December 1935, June Rushmer, both these girls at Leongatha.

Those were the deaths he was linked to. By then he was in his fifties so I couldn't help wondering if there had been earlier deaths, such as that of Alma Tirschte in December 1921, where he was not a suspect. Another man was hanged for Alma's death. But doubts about his guilt remain.

And "Stop Smoking for 5/- Nicotine undermines your health, often causing blood pressure. Tobacco smoke contains carbon monoxide—a deadly gas—causing cyanosis of the blood. Overcome the tobacco habit with Dr. Parkes Anti-Smoking Mixture.

Complete Treatment 5/- posted. Obtainable only from Noel P. Ford, M.P.S., Chemist 249 King St., Newtown." This is a reminder that doctors were discouraging smoking well before the scientists began telling us it was dangerous. But did the Anti-Smoking Mixture work?

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November 20th: Nadine Gordimer

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November 21st: Francois Voltaire
Luigi D'Albertis
Ada Cambridge

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We hear a lot about British explorers around our region, with a mention of various French and Dutch, but we don't really expect to find an Italian wandering around. The ADB says of Luigi D'Albertis: "D'ALBERTIS, Luigi Maria (1841-1901), explorer, was born on 21 November 1841 at Voltri, Italy, into an old Florentine family. … at 18 he joined Garibaldi's army. Trained by the French savant, Abbé Armand David, and inspired to devote his life to science, he joined Odoardo Beccari in November 1876 on an expedition to western New Guinea. He reached the peak of Mount Arfak Geb but was compelled by fever to retreat and arrived in Sydney on 1 February 1873 in the corvette *Vettor Pisani* to recuperate. An account of the journey was published in the *Melbourne Review*, 1876. D'Albertis left for Europe via America with a fine collection of specimens on 29 December 1873." (Arfak Geb is in the Vogelkop Peninsula in what was then Dutch New Guinea.)

Gavin Souter in *The Last Unknown* said: "Luigi Maria D'Albertis, a full-blown romantic with a weakness for soliloquizing on such matters as life and death, saw his own life as a parabola which would mount to a crest in his thirty-fifth year — "the fatal point, which Dante calls the middle of the way" — and then begin its descent into the abyss. And he was not far wrong. His parabola started its upward curve during childhood visits to the Alps and Appenines, among whose crags he developed a cur(i)osity about wild life and a taste for the open air; the curve rose steeply after the French naturalist Abbé Armand David had interested him in New Guinea, "a land of ever verdant primeval forests, a region of perpetual ecstasy", and reached its zenith when D'Albertis, in his thirty-fifth year, ascended the Fly River. The farthest point of this remarkable voyage, some 580 miles inland, was like the highest point reached by one of the rockets that D'Albertis was in the habit of firing to awe unruly natives: the rocket might still have had one or two flares to explode, but gravity had overcome thrust and the rocket's course was now irrevocably downward. D'Albertis would ascend the Fly River once more, but would not reach as far upstream as he had on that first journey. He would live for another quarter of a century, but nothing else he did would ever match the climactic achievement of his thirty-fifth year.

"The arrival of this lusty, bearded, aria-singing Italian in central New Guinea had all the surprise and flamboyance (to say nothing of the magnesium, phosphorus, and gunpowder) of a fireworks display. "There is no better place for fireworks than a river between two forests," remarked D'Albertis in his book, *New Guinea: What I Did And What I Saw*. "The shower of fire and rockets, reflected in the water, seemed magnified, and shone marvellously, set off by the dark hue of the vegetation….If the natives were remaining on the watch at any point, one can imagine what effect the double report and the shower of fire must have had on them." By the same token, D'Albertis himself seemed larger than life in the stone-age world of the upper Fly, and his effect upon natives who had never even heard of white men before may well be imagined."

He says that the man's "violent disposition enabled D'Albertis to survive trouble, but was no help to him in avoiding it. His bravery was beyond question, yet many of the situations that called for displays of this quality were at least partly of his own making. He cowed his own men, thrashing them on occasion and even enforcing discipline by deliberately shortening rations, and he did his best to cow the Fly River people too. He sent rockets whizzing into their villages, stole artifacts from their huts and skeletons from their burial platforms, ogled young native women, and bottled a head which one of his men had removed from its unfortunate owner's shoulders."

The NSW Government gave him a nine-ton steam launch to explore the Fly River and a mixed crew. "To celebrate the *Neva's* first evening on the Fly, he tested the efficiency of rocket-borne dynamite. D'Albertis's rockets could carry two ounces of dynamite for a distance of about 300 yards … "I believe," he wrote, "that the use of rockets, combined with dynamite, could, especially at night, keep a whole fleet of these heroic savages at bay, and by day it would serve to throw a whole village in disorder." " As he went he collected plants, insects, and birds, "took two skeletons from a burial platform in a deserted village ("Exclaim, if you will, against my barbarity—say that I have sacrilegiously violated the grave! I shall turn a deaf ear; I am too delighted with my prize to heed reproof!")" and elsewhere he took "a large stone hammer, a cuirass made of rattan cane, and the skeleton of a child wrapped in bark".

"Geographically and scientifically, the first Neva expedition had been a brilliant success. D'Albertis had penetrated to the centre of New Guinea and had brought back a most valuable collection of everything from beetles to heads; but as detailed reports of the expedition reached Sydney some people began to express strong disapproval of the means by which these results had been obtained. While D'Albertis was still in Sydney preparing for another journey up the Fly a Congregational minister, the Rev. James Jefferis, described the explorer's conduct as "more like American buccaneering than anything that has been done by English exploration". Years later this criticism was revived by the anthropologist Doctor A. C. Haddon. "One reads how D'Albertis 'opened up' the Fly River," wrote Haddon. "By 'collecting' he means frightening people away from their villages, then going into the houses and ransacking them; he then comes back and says, 'I have opened up the Fly River', and the result is that where he collected specimens, there [his successors] have invariably been attacked by the natives."

"D'Albertis was certainly more frank than most explorers of his day, but one suspects that even his account of the first *Neva* expedition was not complete—that some of those conveniently deserted villages had been emptied by rocket fire, and that not all his revolver shots were fired into the air. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that when the *Neva* ascended the Fly a second time it ran into more trouble than ever." He also had trouble on board with mutiny and desertion, and the expedition achieved little. D'Albertis and some of his artifacts then returned to Italy. Souter writes, "Until his death from mouth cancer in 1901 he lived alone in Rome, making occasional hunting excursions to the Pontine Marshes, where he built himself a stilted Papuan house of cane and reeds. It is not hard to imagine him sitting in the doorway of this house on a sweltering summer's night, perhaps dressed in semi-Adamite costume, and seeing in his mind's eye the brilliant scarlet and green flare of a rocket bursting over the broad and muddy Fly."

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November 22nd: George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)
Jon Cleary

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The other day I was reading Rebecca Mead's *The Road to Middlemarch*. And when I started to read it I realised it was the one George Eliot I *hadn't* read. I remember we had a segment from *Silas Marner* in our reading books in the 1950s so that was the first one I read. I always felt sorry for him in his lonesomeness. And more so as spinning and weaving tended to be family activities,

the women spinning, the men weaving. I found both silk weavers and linen weavers in my family tree and in there was a strong sense of both family and a broader solidarity. Poor Silas seemed to stand outside of this sense of a community …

So I thought it was time to read *Middlemarch*. But I also thought I would share this which Mead had to say about George Eliot's notebook. "I paged through the notebook carefully, looking at the hand-numbered pages, their contents carefully indexed at the back. (Why had I never thought to index a notebook? My own organization of research tends to be haphazard and disorderly, like that of Mr. Brooke, Dorothea's scatterbrained uncle and guardian, who demands of Casaubon to know his method of arranging documents. "In pigeon-holes, partly," replies a startled Casaubon. "Ah, pigeon-holes will not do," says Mr. Brooke. "I have tried pigeon-holes. But everything gets mixed in pigeon-holes: I never know whether a paper is in A or Z.") Eliot has listed the episodes of *The Canterbury Tales*, made notes on Hindu literature, named the colleges of Oxford University. She had transcribed lines from Wordsworth, Blake, and Spenser, and made notes in Italian on Machiavelli. There were quotations from sacred Jewish literature, the Hebrew letters carefully if inexpertly copied, and I remembered a line from the first chapter of *Middlemarch*, about Dorothea's hopes for marital life even before she has met Casaubon: "The really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it." This wonderful sentence shows Eliot's dexterity with comedy and with pathos: Dorothea is so wrong, and so earnest, and so completely recognizable in her well-intentioned misprision."

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"You can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl."

George Eliot in *Daniel Deronda*.

"God was cruel when he made women."

George Eliot in *Felix Holt, The Radical*.

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November 23rd: Nirad Chaudhuri

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Christopher Koch in his book of essays *Crossing the Gap* says, "Like many another writer, I was concerned with dualities. Perhaps an Australian writer must be a little more concerned with them than others are, since he is bound to find duality deep within his spirit. … In Hinduism, I had found for the purposes of metaphor and symbol an entire system based on such dualities, personified by that figure who endlessly dances. And I concluded that Australia and India, in at least one way, might be akin in spirit." He goes on to say, "This notion was reinforced when I read Nirad Chaudhuri, the Bengali writer who has been a gadfly to his countrymen. Chaudhuri wrote an autobiography when young (*Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*) which ended in despair – 'a strange state of mind,' he says, 'for a young man of twenty-two'. Later in life, he diagnosed his own problem: in common with his fellow Hindus he was at odds with his own country, with the landscape into which he had been born. And this, he says, is because Hindus are Europeans in exile. Europeans whose ancestors wandered into the Indian plains from the cool grasslands of Hungary and the banks of the Danube, and who have never quite come to terms with the Dravidian spirit they have had to absorb—that spirit which Durga embodies." Chaudhuri was opposed to both British colonialism and what he called 'brown colonialism', Indian dependence on foreign training and finance. His idea that Europeans and north Indians are the same people undermines the idea that Indians were 'Anglicised'. "Chaudhuri is a poet, seeking in himself the mysteries of his ancestral origins, and the myths and gods of his race." But whereas Koch was fascinated by Durga, Chaudhuri was fascinated by Circe and even wrote a book he called *The Continent of Circe*. "The

Hindu equivalent of this, he says, is such sex manuals as the Kamasutra, with which the West has been so impressed. These are symptoms of Hindu impotence and exhaustion, physical and spiritual. These are the wiles of Circe." Needless to say his ideas on the nature, and the failings, of the Indo-European family are not accepted by many Indians.

But all writers, I think, understand dualities. To be a writer, a fact, and to create a fiction which becomes its own fact is an enduring duality.

November 24th: Laurence Sterne

Thomas Kohnstamm

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"For most people, November 24 is not a special day. Sure, it hosts Thanksgiving every few years, but I could care less about that. In Seattle, where few things out-of-the-ordinary ever happen and where people strive, often pathologically, to maintain a façade of tranquillity, the day has a different significance.

On November 24, 1971, a balding, middle-aged man boarded a flight from Portland to Seattle. He used the name Dan Cooper. He dressed in a black suit, a black overcoat, black sunglasses, and a narrow black tie with a pearl stick pin. Cooper hijacked the Boeing 727 with a briefcase full of wires and bright red cylinders. The hostages were exchanged for four parachutes and two-hundred thousand dollars at Sea-Tac Airport (to put that in perspective, the average cost of a new home in the U.S. in 1971 was $28,000).

DB Cooper, as the press mistakenly dubbed him, demanded to be flown to Mexico. He parachuted out of the plane somewhere over southern Washington State and disappeared. Maybe DB died in the jump. Maybe he got away with the money. Nobody knows. But legend has it that DB was a man so disenchanted with his life that he gambled it all on a way out. The point isn't whether he made it or not. The point is that this little bald man didn't spend one more day pumping gas in Tallahassee or adjusting claims in Denver. He didn't waste one more day wondering, "What if?"

I nominate Cooper as the patron saint of disillusioned men, particularly for those who, like me, were born in Seattle on November 24."

Thomas Kohnstamm in *Do Travel Writers Go to Hell?*

Or he was running from something quite different …

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November 25th: Maurice Brodsky

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When we hear of muckrakers we probably think of famous Americans like Upton Sinclair but Australia also has muckrakers worth remembering. Michael Cannon in *The Land Boomers* tells the story of the wealthy men whose peculations brought Victoria to near bankruptcy in the 1890s; and the man who exposed some of their criminal activities: Maurice Brodsky.

He was said to be a Polish Jew though his family's perambulations took him to Germany, France, England, and finally to Melbourne. The ship was wrecked and he arrived on shore with only the clothes he stood up in. He was able to teach Hebrew, French and German, he turned to journalism, he wrote a book about Judaism in Melbourne, *The History of the Two Synagogues*, which brought him to court when the Rev. Elias Blaubaum supposedly spread slanderous rumours about him and Brodsky took him to court. But he lost his case and had to pay £55 in costs. His only assets were his 900 unsold copies valued at £29. And then he started *Table Talk* in 1885.

"How a £3-a-week journalist, who could not pay 7s. in the £1 on a debt of £55, was immediately able to start a substantial weekly journal, remains an unsolved mystery." It is thought that his wife's relative Theodore Fink helped him which suggests great confidence in Brodsky's

abilities. "*Table Talk* was an immediate success. Its main ingredients were brilliant political and financial pages, obviously written with deep inside knowledge of Victorian politics and commerce; a keen eye for scandal; a wide appreciation of the arts; and a detailed social gazette" and "among those who worked for the journal at different times were Victor J. Daley, Will Dyson, E. A. Vidler, C. H. Chomley, and Eugenia Stone, all of whom became prominent in other literary and artistic fields." Brodsky gradually began investigating "land companies and mushroom banks" and "Soon there was plenty for Brodzky to get his teeth into, and from 1891 onwards the columns of *Table Talk* were increasingly filled with the most detailed and sensational evidence of company manipulations. The space given to society gossip and culture shrank. Some of the information obviously came from the early court cases, some from company liquidators, some from angry shareholders. Some of it could only have come from bank officials who must have taken copies of overdraft lists and unlawfully passed them on to Brodzky. Some of the facts may have come from J. S. Horsfall, a wealthy director of Goldsbrough Mort, who was well disposed towards Brodsky and possibly helped him with cash as well as information. Whatever the sources were, there is no question that most of the frauds of the boom period would have been successfully covered up had it not been for Brodsky's work."

Table Talk became a must read—"Its publication was awaited impatiently each work by thousands of small shareholders who suspected they were being defrauded; and with trepidation by company directors who were just as likely to find themselves named in the next issue as partners in some audacious conspiracy. The astonishing thing was that not once during those years was Brodzky sued for libel; although a parliamentary committee once angrily summoned him to explain an article stating that the Speaker's mace was being kept in a Melbourne brothel. Every damning fact that Brodzky published on company affairs was proven twice over by the spate of official and quasi-official investigations which followed his financial articles. The need for reform of the Companies Act and Insolvency Act became obvious to all. In comparing the old *Table Talk* files with official documents which later became available, one is constantly amazed by the depth and thoroughness of Brodzky's investigations. His work forms a record of individual public service which, it is safe to say, has never been surpassed anywhere in the world."

He wasn't a radical. He didn't want to change the system. Rather he wanted to see the 'ruling class' in the colony clean up its act. "To this day, nobody knows how Brodzky discovered the truth about the Mercantile Bank machinations, which led to the lengthy prosecutions of its directors." It was such people who were his prime target.

But his 'luck' finally ran out. In 1902 he was sued by a Labor MLA Frederick Bromley and was ordered to pay £500. With his seven children and the costs of his office and printing press he had never been able to accumulate any capital and now his creditors moved in while he was ill at home and stripped his office. "Without plant, credit, or the presence of its owner, *Table Talk* ground to a halt."

"In his insolvency papers, Brodzky valued the goodwill of *Table Talk* at £3,330. William Denham, the official assignee, sold it for £15." The last issue of Brodzky's paper was dated 30 April 1903. Then *Table Talk* briefly disappeared, only to be resurrected as a society and gossip paper. It finally closed for good in 1939. Times were tough for the Brodzky family as he eked out a living with freelance journalism.

"He was then given a loan from an unidentified source to take his family abroad. They went to San Francisco, where he worked on the *Examiner*, and later became editor of a weekly paper called the *Wasp*. This new career was cut short by the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which practically destroyed the whole city. The indestructible Brodzkys made their way to New York, thence to London, then back to New York, where Maurice Brodzky died in 1919. Hardly anyone in

Melbourne remembered the gadfly of the boom era: his death raised not a ripple in the city where his greatest years were spent."

He is surely worth remembering as an early and effective whistleblower. "Maurice Brodzky wrote and published contemporaneously with events, successfully confronting the risks of legal action and the reprisals of some of Melbourne's most prominent men. His was the great courage and achievement."

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November 26th: Charles Schultz
Ferdinand de Saussure

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David Lodge in *Lives in Writing* wrote on Literary Theory, "Key figures in its evolution were a brilliant generation of French intellectuals, including Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucalt, who turned upon the methodologies of the founding fathers of structuralism, such as the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the work of earlier seminal modern thinkers like Marx and Freud, a scrutiny that was both critical and creative."

This de Saussure was an educationalist and linguist. But I had first come upon the name in a different connection. "Never can I forget the day when, quite early in our explorations, we found the rare alpine Saussurea on the face of a dripping cliff on one of the highest summits in Wicklow. It was the first time that this rare and shy alpine, named after the great de Saussure, first man of science to climb Mont Blanc, had been found in eastern Ireland. Later on we found it in abundance on the high crags of Brandon in Kerry, and in one or two other wild spots in western Ireland, but the thrill of the first discovery can never be forgotten."

C. F. D'Arcy in *The Adventures of a Bishop*.

They were a Swiss family although I haven't got all their relationships worked out. Then I came upon this in Tim Blanning's *The Romantic Revolution*: "The Alps were everything the romantics liked – irregular, particular, sublime, organic, terrifying, spiritual. The Swiss natural scientist Horace-Benedict de Saussure, only the third person to reach the summit of Mont Blanc, in 1786, wrote of his experiences in the high mountains: 'the soul ascends, the vision of the spirit tends to expand, and in the midst of this majestic silence one seems to hear the voice of nature and to become certain of its most secret operations'."

"Horace-Bénédict de Saussure is credited with inventing the cyanometer in 1789. Saussure's cyanometer had 53 sections, ranging from white to varying shades of blue (dyed with Prussian blue) and then to black, arranged in a circle. He used his colour wheel to measure the colour of the sky at Geneva, Chamonix and Mont Blanc. Alexander von Humboldt was also an eager user of the cyanometer on his voyages and explorations in South America."

Jan Colville in *Journey*.

David Cogswell in *Chomsky for Beginners* said, "Toward the end of the 19th century, linguists began to turn their attention from the history and evolution of language to its organization and function. This branch of study became known as synchronic linguistics, the study of the language now, as opposed to historical or diachronic linguistics. It was exemplified in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*, published posthumously in 1916. The two analytic modes remain today as complementary aspects of the study of linguistics."

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November 27th: Charles Austin Beard
Frank Clune

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Jean Stone wrote, "Stephenson wouldn't come out unless they tried him and they were not concerned to try him, so I don't know who really won the battle. All the time behind barbed wire he was writing Frank Clune's books because he was Clune's ghost." (P. R. 'Inky' Stephenson was interned as a fascist during WW2 in Australia.)

"There were aspects of his literary work and political involvement in Australia which Inky did not put on public record, though he spoke of them. For instance, his bibliography, which he submitted to the Australian Humanities Research Council, did not mention his 12-page pamphlet "Aborigines claim citizen rights!", published by the Publicist Company in 1938. He also helped Jack Patten, the first Aboriginal to edit a newspaper, to bring out *Australian Abo Call: The Voice of the Aborigines*, of which the Publicist Company published six issues in 1938. An extract from *Capricornia* (1938) by Xavier Herbert appeared in each issue. He assisted in organizing the Australian Aborigines Conference Sesqui-Centenary gathering at the Australian Hall, 148 Elizabeth Street, Sydney, on Australia Day, 26 January 1938. It was held by the Aborigines Progressive Association, of which Jack Patten was president, and an appeal was made for "full citizen status and equality within the community". The notice of meeting stated "Aborigines and persons of Aboriginal blood only are invited to attend". Stephenson referred to Australia Day as an Aboriginal Day of Mourning, and in an article on publishing for the *Australian Rhodes Review* in 1934, he described the Aborigines as "an ancient and wise people". His wife, Winifred, recalled a number of Aboriginal visitors when they lived in York Street, Sydney."

That business about P.R. Stephenson ghosting Frank Clune's books raises questions. After all, Clune was quite capable of writing his own books. Clearly when he wrote books like his 1938 *Sky High to Shanghai* there was no part for Stephenson to play in it except perhaps as an editor. He came home with notes, photos, diaries, records of conversations. But his 1954 book *The Viking of Van Dieman's Land* has them as co-authors. But without the original manuscripts it is a little difficult to determine how much Stephenson wrote, what he researched, and what he only edited of Clune's records of people and places.

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November 28th: William Blake
Nancy Mitford
DINOSAURS

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Queensland is doing well in the 'Dinosaur Stakes', turning up new and exciting species, but the other day I came upon a book with the intriguing title *The Lost Dinosaurs of Egypt* by William Nothdurft with Josh Smith. I had never thought of Egypt in connection with dinosaurs. But they were certainly there. In the early 20th century a German, Ernst Stromer von Reichenbach, found the fossilized skeletons of three different carnivorous dinosaurs in the Bahariya Depression in the Western Desert. He eventually got them back to Munich where they were stored as part of the Bavarian State Collection of Paleontology and Historical Geology. With the arrival of the Second World War Stromer begged the director, Karl Beurlen, to allow the collection to be moved to safety. Beurlen, a rabid Nazi and believer in Hermann Goering's assurance that no one could invade German airspace, refused. The British bombed the museum and the fossils were destroyed.

At the end of the century a group of young Americans became interested in these lost fossils and what might still lie in the Bahariya Depression. They also had a puzzle to try and solve. "Stromer found the remains of dozens of species of plants and animals in Bahariya. Most of the animal remains were of marine creatures, not land-dwelling ones. Though he found sketchy

evidence of a diplodocoid sauropod and another much larger sauropod, he was able to identify definitively just one species of plant-eating dinosaur, *Aegyptosaurus*, not an especially large sauropod and unlikely to have been the sole food source for three species of giant meat eaters (and very possibly more, given additional fragmentary evidence described by Stromer). There has been some debate as to whether one of the predators, *Spinosaurus*, might have been a fish eater, but many paleontolgists dismiss this notion, concluding it is far more likely that these therapods were opportunistic carnivores, eating whatever meat came their way—including fish.

"But Stromer's riddle remains. It baffled Matt Lamanna. "These three predators each weighed three tons or more. I know of no other dinosaurian ecosystem that supported three carnivores this size. They would have required a lot of food to stay alive. The ecosystem that supported them must have been incredibly productive."

Eventually they were able to solve the puzzle—by finding a giant plant-eater, previously unknown to the world, and then to find evidence that what is now desert was long ago a swamp. They took the bones to Cairo (perhaps Stromer's fossils would have survived if he had left them in Cairo?) and set them up there. "In Cairo, in the halls of the Geological Museum, both he (Stromer) and the great titanosaur will at last become public history with the display of the bones of an immense dinosaur and a plaque in Latin that reads simply:

Paralititan stromeri."

So after you've had your fill of looking at pyramids …

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November 29th: C. S. Lewis
Louisa May Alcott

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November 30th: Jonathon Swift
Mark Twain
John Bunyan (bap)

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"[New York] is a splendid desert—a domed and steepled solitude, where a stranger is lonely in the midst of a million of his race," wrote Mark Twain in 1867. "A man walks his tedious miles through the same interminable street every day, elbowing his way through a buzzing multitude of men, yet never seeing a familiar face, and never seeing a strange one the second time. … The natural result is … the serene indifference of the New Yorker and everybody and everything without the pale of his private and individual circle."

Quoted in Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Was Mark Twain not good at making friends or was this his indictment of the unfriendliness of New York?

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Frederick Drimmer in *Very Special People* looked at the lives of people born with strange disabilities, such as Siamese Twins or people with two heads or three legs, in the 19th century. They sometimes made a living as exhibits in traveling shows and although it cannot have been pleasant to be stared at it did provide an income.

"Money, of course, isn't everything. Charles Davis, an old-time sideshow buff, saw the twins in Allyn Hall, a dime museum in Hartford Connecticut, and talked to them through an interpreter. They spoke to him without reserve, telling him that they minded their condition very much and that they frequently felt discouraged and downhearted. He described them as "pathetic." He noted that the boys were able to sit down or stand up by themselves but were unable to "walk a step." After they returned to Italy they took up residence in a villa in Venice, and refused to exhibit themselves again.

"It is good to be able to change from this somber note to a much more cheerful one. The Tocci twins, it turns out, were the inspiration of one of the classics of American literature, Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

"Twain published Pudd'nhead Wilson serially in 1893-94. He developed the novel from a story he had been working on which he called "Those Extraordinary Twins." "I had seen a picture," he wrote in his preface to that work, "of a youthful Italian 'freak'—or 'freaks'—which was—or which were—on exhibition in our cities—a combination consisting of two heads and four arms joined to a single body and single pair of legs—and I thought I would write an extravagantly fantastic little story with this freak of nature for hero or heroes… " Included in the text of "Those Wonderful Twins" in the authorized uniform edition of Twain's collected works is a "made-up" picture which shows the humorist studying some posters. One of them portrays a human oddity with two heads and bears the words "Wonderful Twins."

Twain called those Italian twins Angelo and Luigi. I had never read *Pudd'nhead Wilson* so I wondered how he had put these poor lads into his novel and went looking. In fact he called his novel *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* and Harry R. Werfel said of it, "He conceived the title character, who solves a murder mystery, as a man with his own disillusionment, tired of sham and unwilling to accept romanticized versions of human folly. At the beginning of each chapter, therefore, Mark Twain placed aphorisms and wisecracks, bristling with irony and sarcasm, that ostensibly came from *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*. Although the book was begun as a farce, it deepened in seriousness until its main theme emerged as a plea for the humane and just treatment of all human beings regardless of race or national origin."

And "The present edition contains the Introduction to *Those Extraordinary Twins* (1784), a tale containing the selections that were removed to make *Pudd'nhead Wilson* a unified novel." Twain said he originally planned a very short story and as well as his 'freaks' he would have "a silly young miss for heroine, and two old ladies and two boys for the minor parts. I lavishly elaborated these people and their doings, of course. But the tale kept spreading along, and spreading along, and other people got to intruding themselves and taking up more and more room with their talk and affairs. Among them came a stranger Pudd'nhead Wilson, and a woman named Roxana; and presently the doings of these two pushed up into prominence a young fellow named Tom Driscoll, whose proper place was away in the obscure background. Before the book was half finished those three were taking things almost entirely into their own hands and working the whole tale as a private venture of their own—a tale which they had nothing to do with, by rights."

He sets his story "in the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi side, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis." And to the town comes David Wilson, a lawyer and surveyor, "a homely, freckled, sandy-haired young fellow, with an intelligent blue eye that had frankness and comradeship in it and a covert twinkle of a pleasant sort." But he makes an infelicitous remark on arrival and gets his derisory nickname which also puts paid to any legal work until the end of the story. Two Italian twins, not handicapped, do come to the town and get caught up in the murder mystery. It is a slave town with the constant threat of 'being sold down the river' hanging over its slaves. The story revolves around two babies swopped in their cradles and theirs, rather than Pudd'head Wilson's, is the tragedy.

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And I wondered if people go to such lengths to try and look or behave differently so that they will not simply be an anonymous stranger in an uncaring city. Walking a panther cub on a lead or dressing as a clown may draw attention. But I am sure the Tocci twins would have rather been just two of those anonymous people and they would have been grateful for 'serene indifference' …

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December 1st: al-Khwārizmī (dates unknown)

Max Stout

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Brian Christian and Tom Griffiths in *Algorithms to Live By* wrote, "The word "algorithm" comes from the name of Persian mathematician al-Khwārizmī, author of a ninth-century book of techniques for doing mathematics by hand. (His book was called *al-Jabr wa 'l-Mugābala*—and the "al-jabr" of the title in turn provided the source of our word "algebra.") The earliest known mathematical algorithms, however, predate even al-Khwārizmī's work: a four-thousand-year-old Sumerian clay tablet found near Baghdad describes a scheme for long division."

In *Invisible Power* Alan Haynes writes about the early development of codes and ciphers so as to send communications secretly. And he introduced me to the work of Italian mathematician Girolamo Cardano and his interest in cryptography.

"In 1552 Girolano Cardano (Cardanus) was in London staying with Sir John Cheke, whose sister Mary was William Cecil's first wife. Cardano, a Milanese doctor and mathematician, was the deviser of the Cardan grille. This was a piece of sturdy material pierced with rectangular holes at irregular intervals. The same height as the script, they varied in width allowing access to whole words, syllables or letters. Each was randomly numbered and by placing the grille on a piece of paper the message was spelled out in the number order – at this point still a clutch of letters. These were further disguised by incorporation in an apparently innocuous message. A decoder with an identical grille placed on top of this text to read the message in the correct order. Widely used for many years, it was the covering message that usually alerted the attentive reader, by its clumsiness.

It is known that Cardano had met John Dee at Cheke's home, and it is inconceivable that the polymath Englishman did not question Cardano about ciphers. Indeed, it may have been these exchanges that alerted Dee to the cryptographic works of abbot Johannes Trithemius of Sponheim (d. 1516). In his *De Rerum Varietate* (1557), Cardano attacked both the method and personality of Trithemius, who was for long believed to be an exponent of demonic magic, despite the denials he had made in his lifetime. For those with a particular interest in ciphers the unpublished 'Steganographia' (covered writing) and Polygraphia, published in 1518, were key texts. The latter's several volumes contained hundreds of alphabets in which words and phrases could be substituted for individual letters of an item. The most famous was the Ave Maria cipher with its 384 columns of Latin words from which equivalents could be selected so that the plaintext message could be disguised as a piece of devotional writing."

Cardano was involved in a long conflict with a fellow Italian mathematician, Niccolò Fontana 'Tartaglia'. Hal Hellman in *Great Feuds in Mathematics* begins by saying, "In 1545, Girolamo Cardano, an Italian physician and mathematician, set the world of mathematics abuzz with a book on algebra. Referred to today as *Ars Magna or The Rules of Algebra*, it is still considered by many scholars to be one of the scientific masterpieces of the Renaissance.

What was so important about an algebra book?

Ars Magna began with some introductory material, including standard solutions to linear and quadratic equations. But then it jumped into uncharted territory and laid out for the first time a complete procedure for solving cubic and biquadratic (third-degree and fourth-degree) algebraic equations.

The book was in truth a stunning achievement and was to play an important role in stimulating the growth of algebra in Europe during most of the remainder of the 16th century."

But Tartaglia said *he* had been first with the solution to a key problem and Cardano had stolen his work. In fact Cardano had given him credit, his assistant said he had made no promise of secrecy to Tartaglia, and Tartaglia had not been first with a solution because Scipione del Ferro had

pre-dated him. It probably did not help that both men were hot-tempered and that Tartaglia as a self-made mathematician was very determined to enhance his own reputation. So Tartaglia far from backing away set out to ruin Cardano. The bad behaviour of Cardano's children helped Tartaglia in his campaign. Then Tartaglia managed to denounce Cardano to the Spanish Inquisition and have him imprisoned. Fortunately Archbishop Hamilton managed to get Cardano out of prison—only to be himself executed by Mary, Queen of Scots. Though out of prison Cardano was a broken man and lived out the rest of his life in obscurity except for writing an autobiography.

It is extraordinary that Cardano managed to do so much, given his personal problems. And I wonder—did that Persian mathematician also have jealous rivals snapping at his heels or was he able to work in the sort of intense peace I associate with those who practise algebra? David Ewing Duncan in *The Calendar* says of him: "One of the astronomers involved in the project of measuring the distance between two meridians was almost certainly Abu Jafar Mohammed ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi (780-850), perhaps the greatest of the scholars working at the House of Wisdom during the golden age, and the most influential mathematician on any continent during the early Middle Ages. As famed among Arabs as Euclid and Ptolemy, and later respected by the Europeans of Roger Bacon's day, al-Khwarizmi was probably born near the Aral Sea in modern Turkestan, called Khwarizmi in his era. Working in the city of Merv, south of the Aral Sea, he became famous enough to be summoned to Baghdad in 820 by al-Mamun, who appointed him 'first astronomer' and later head of the library at the House of Wisdom. An Arab version of what Europeans call a 'Renaissance man', al-Khwarizmi wrote on a dizzying number of subjects from mathematics and astronomy to geography and a history of the Arab caliphates. He also led three scientific missions to India and Byzantium to meet with scholars and collect manuscripts.

"He is best known, however, for being one of the first major scholars in the Arab world to use the accumulating store of knowledge from India, Greece and Persia to make his own discoveries. These include the invention of modern algebra. Indeed, the word algebra itself comes from one of al-Khwarizmi's books, *Kitab al-jabr wa al-muqābalah* (*Calculation by Restoration and Reduction*). Later this became a standard textbook of mathematics in European universities until the sixteenth century. The word *algorithm – algoritmus* in Latin – comes from medieval Europeans' use of al-Khwarizmi's own name to refer to the study of mathematics.

"Al-Khwarizmi wrote out the oldest surviving *zij* – set of astronomic tables - in the Arab world, much of it based on Indian charts possibly brought to Baghdad by Kanaka. This *zij* later made the journey to Spanish Córdoba and onwards to the rest of Europe, where a Latin translation made in 1126 became one of the most influential works on astronomy in medieval Europe.

"Perhaps most important of all was a small booklet al-Khwarizmi penned in 825. Called *Algoritmi de numero Indorum* when it was later translated into Latin, this short treatise detailed something the great sage of Baghdad apparently picked up from reading Brahmagupta: the numerical system of the Indians – the nine symbols and a placeholder called *sunya*. Amazed by the usefulness of these simple symbols and of positional notation he demonstrated in his pamphlet their superiority to the Greek numbers then used in Baghdad, and to the cruder Bedouin numbers the Arabs had brought with them from the desert."

And just before I leave this fascinating subject perhaps a small digression. "The Mayas' mathematical knowledge, as far as it has been possible to reconstruct, is remarkably sophisticated for a people who, technologically, were in the New Stone Age. The most surprising thing is that these dwellers in the virgin forest were familiar with the idea of zero nearly 2000 years ago, whereas Europe had to wait for almost another thousand years before this concept reached them from India through Arab traders and came into frequent use."

Henri Stierlin in *The World's Last Mysteries*.

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December 2nd: Mary Elwyn Patchett

DID YOU KNOW?

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I had vaguely thought that Oak Island, supposed home of pirate treasure, was off the coast of the USA. But no. Randall Sullivan in *The Curse of Oak Island* writes, "Oak Island sits off the coast of Nova Scotia just north of the 45th parallel, the half-way point between the equator and the North Pole, about forty-five miles southwest of Halifax. It's almost a mile long and not quite a half mile wide at its broadest point, narrowing to only a little more than a thousand feet at its sunken center, which is filled mostly with swamp and marsh. The island is commonly described as peanut shaped, but when I've looked at it from above I've always seen a baby elephant, mainly because of the curve of an incipient trunk that protrudes from its east end, wrapping around the southern shore of a compact, crescent-shaped bay that was once known as Smuggler's Cove. Small hills of glacial drift, known geologically as drumlins, rise to about 35 feet above sea level on both ends of the island. The composition of the island's two sides is very different: on the east layered with limestone, gypsum, and sandstone, on the west mainly quartzite and slate. Because the geologic structures of the island's east and west ends are so dissimilar, and because the swamp divides them, some theorists think Oak Island was once two islands, very close together, that may or may not have been joined by the work of men."

In around 1795 three teenage boys, Daniel McGinnis, John Smith, and Anthony Vaughan, (and possibly with an ex-slave Samuel Ball) discovered what appeared to be a man-made pit there. They thought, and probably hoped, it would contain pirate treasure. I had a second query: did pirates operate off Canada? And yes, they did. The famous names, Easton, Phipps, Morgan, Kidd, all came that far north. The ships between England and Canada and France and Canada carried the gold to pay soldiers and clerks, and to buy trade goods. They also carried a range of other goods.

The boys' discovery sparked what Sullivan calls 'the World's Longest Treasure Hunt'. The first attempts to excavate what became known as the Money Pit found clay walls and wooden 'platforms' at about every ten feet down but water poured into the pit making further excavation difficult and it was eventually found that tunnels had been constructed to the sea but because of coastal erosion they were now under water. Tunnels and beaches were found to contain large quantities of coconut fibre. Other pits were dug, all kinds of machinery were barged over to the island; occasional intriguing things were dug up, bits of old wood, a couple of old iron nails, a tiny piece of parchment, a couple of small value coins. Dams were constructed to try and keep the water out but always broke. Theories multiplied. If not pirates was it Acadians, Freemasons, Knights Templar, was it rogue Spanish captains hiding away some of the loot rather than taking it home to Spain, was it from the British sack and pillage of Havana, did it link to French-British conflict, was it the brainchild of Francis Bacon, or the French Crown jewels, the theories keep coming. But it soon became obvious that to create the deep pit and the hidden tunnels would have required many men over quite a long period of time. It was this simple fact which pushed the treasure hunters on because surely no one would go to so much trouble unless they wanted to hide something precious. Of course they might long ago have come back and taken what they had temporarily hidden but that possibility didn't deter treasure-seekers.

The two things that I came away with was the depressing thought that the Spaniards ripped hundreds of tons of gold and silver and precious stones out of the indigenous societies of Latin America, bare-faced theft, for which they have never apologised and then compounded the theft by taking land and destroying societies. And that the millions of dollars poured into the search would have been better spent elsewhere and only succeeded in leaving the island in a big mess. Two and a quarter centuries later the search for something 'worthwhile' goes on.

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December 3rd: Joseph Conrad
Francis Kilvert

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I didn't know that Henry James and Joseph Conrad knew each other. But in fact they were good friends. Leon Edel in his biography *The Life of Henry James* says it began with an exchange of books. Conrad sent his book *An Outcast of Islands* to James saying his characters were 'Exquisite Shades, with live hearts and clothed in the wonderful garment of your prose'. James sent his book *The Spoils of Poynton* to Conrad and then invited him to lunch.

Edel writes: "They lunched on 25 February 1897 in De Vere Gardens and the master mariner got a sense of the established power of James's literary life. What Conrad could not know was that he met a James who was at odds with himself. In the midst of his fame, and with his command of the world's respect, the American was going through a difficult phase. What James couldn't know – though he seems to have sensed it – was that he was faced with a powerful and deeply disturbed genius, possessed of 'paranoid trends' (as one psychiatrist surmises) whose strength resided in his perception of the buried violence within himself. Conrad reached out to James with a predatory emotion that made him want on occasion, as he himself avowed, 'to howl and foam at the mouth'. And he couldn't reach James. The plate glass was between them. What they talked about we do not know; but James that very morning had written to Whistler 'with the artist, the artist communicates'. James and Conrad stood on their common ground of art. We can imagine the two face to face. Both were short stocky men. James was all repose and assurance. Conrad, with his head tucked between his shoulders, his strong Polish accent, looked at James with eyes which seemed to live in wild dream and which somehow, for all their penetration, sought the very 'heart of darkness'. The man who would write a tale of such a search faced the man who would write *The Beast in the Jungle*. The two stories speak for the two temperaments. Conrad, making the descent into the irrational jungle of himself, James fearing the irrationality, walking anxiously and warily through the dense growth of human consciousness, on guard against the beasts that might leap – yet knowing that the beasts were those of his own mind. With his slow-moving eyes and settled aristocratic manner he would have listened to Conrad and answered his questions. He had always loved seamen's tales. James may have described on this occasion how he was learning to dictate directly to the typewriter: he had just begun. Conrad would allude to this in an article he wrote some years later. They may have discussed the British Navy for at some point the first volume of Pepys's diary was pulled from the shelf. In turning its pages Conrad came upon the passage describing the boarding of the *Naseby* to bring Charles II back from his exile across the water. 'My lord, in his discourse discovered a great deal of love in this ship.' Conrad copied the sentence. He affixed it as epigraph to the book he had completed that week, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*."

Of course they may have talked about their lives in England or the weather or publishers or … Edel goes on, "If we do not know the precise nature of their talk we know that James would speak of the 'independent nobleness' in Conrad's work and the 'moral radiance' that he apparently did not find in the man. He got from Conrad a vivid sense of long lonely vigils on ships in distant waters, of the landfall in the dark, of adventures such as he had learned only in books or from men of action. 'I read you,' James would write to Conrad, 'as I listen to rare music – with the deepest depths of surrender.' This would not always be so. Conrad on his side liked the nobility of James's world and the way in which he created characters with 'fine consciences'. He would argue this with John Galsworthy, when the latter called James 'cold'. James's finished, chiselled, carved work might be so called, Conrad admitted, but the perfection of craft did not prevent James from imparting to his readers a full sense of 'flesh and blood'. Above all, Conrad felt that James's people rode always to moral victory: they lost battles, yet never left the battlefield. They renounced, but it

was ‘an energetic act’ – ‘energetic not violent’. James’s books ended as episodes in life ended; one retained a feeling of life still going on. ‘His mankind is delightful,’ Conrad would write. ‘It is delightful in its tenacity; it refuses to own itself beaten.’ And in a supreme passage in his essay on James, Conrad wrote words that would inspire a novelist of a later date (William Faulkner) to proclaim the victories of life over death, of art over chaos:

When the last aqueduct shall have crumbled to pieces, the last airship fallen to the ground, the last blade of grass have died upon a dying earth, man, indomitable by his training in resistance to misery and pain shall set this undiminished light of his eyes against the feeble glow of the sun.

Conrad inscribed *The Nigger of the Narcissus* to James in French – a long inscription in which occurred the phrase *on ne communiqué pas la réalité poignante des illusions*. Perhaps it was difficult to communicate the poignancy of certain dreams, perhaps this poignancy could never wholly penetrate the soul of the listener – so Conrad mused in his eloquent *dédicace*”.

Conrad’s ‘irrational jungle of himself’ becomes more understandable when I read of what he called ‘My Hazardous Childhood’ in which his mother died of TB and his father … “On a fine day in May 1869 a solemn crowd of thousands led by an eleven-year-old boy moved through the streets of Cracow to the mournful tolling of bells. The occasion was the funeral of Apollo Korzeniowski, Polish patriot and revolutionary; the boy, his only son. The young Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, noble, exile and now orphan, had already led an extraordinary life. How much more extraordinary that after many years sailing the seas, he would emerge as Joseph Conrad, an Englishman and one of the world’s greatest writers.

“Conrad was born in the Ukraine on 3 December 1857, to parents whose families had long been involved in the turbulent history of their country. Poland had ceased to be one of the foremost powers in Europe in 1795, when it was divided up between foreign powers, among which Russia was the most important. Apollo, descended from an ancient noble family, inherited a revolutionary ardour which manifested itself in numerous uprisings against the Russians. His father’s lands were confiscated in one such rebellion, that of 1830, when he was eleven years old.

“All the resentment inspired by his country’s burden, his family’s oppression and his own humble position as an estate’s manager gathered force and focus as Apollo himself entered fatherhood. In a christening song ‘To My son born in the 85th year of Muscovite oppression’, he grimly laments of the infant Conrad that ‘You are without land, without love, without country, without people, while Poland – your mother – is in her grave’.”

From *Joseph Conrad* by Chris Fletcher

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December 4th: Rainer Maria Rilke
Thomas Carlyle

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“Mighty events turn on a straw; the crossing of a brook decides the future of the world.”

Thomas Carlyle

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December 5th: Christina Rosetti
Joan Didion
Flora Thompson

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Richard Mabey in his book *Dreams of the Good Life* about Flora Thompson points out that her famous book *Lark Rise to Candleford* is not precisely the memoir of growing up in an

Oxfordshire village which I had regarded it as. Certainly she calls herself Laura and writes in the third person but otherwise it reads as a memoir. But Mabey says it was more complex than that. She changes names of people and places (Lark Rise was really Juniper Hill in Oxfordshire), she creates composites of people, she puts conversations in people's mouths, and as she wrote the three books of the *Lark Rise* trilogy forty years after leaving there undoubtedly memories had been overlain by hindsight. So her ability to make readers believe this was a young girl experiencing this life is part of the attraction. But many people also saw her books as chronicling the vast changes in rural life occurring in late 19th century Britain.

In fact she had written many articles, reviews, short stories and poems for magazines before she sat down to write *Lark Rise to Candleford*. She had met or seen famous writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle and George Bernard Shaw. She had married a fellow postal official and had a family of her own. She had also read very widely. And she undoubtedly brought a very vivid memory to her writing.

And people undoubtedly liked the characters of that fading rural life. Mabey writes, "The best known of all Flora's female characters is Queenie Macey, hamlet earth-mother, keeper of the gossip, brewer of herbal nostrums, a figure who is both comic and mystical. Flora's vivid portrait of the woman who lived in the tiny one-up one-down cottage next to the End House runs to not much more than 2,000 words, but succeeds in knitting together an acute sketch of Queenie's personality with a real sense of the changes both she and rural society were experiencing at this critical moment in their history. (Flora had had some practice at perfecting this blend of biography and cultural tone-poem, since a journalistic sketch of Queenie in 1936 would be the first step in the evolution of *Lark Rise*.) Flora paints Queenie as a survivor of an earlier generation of hamlet-dwellers, who grew up before enclosure in the 1850s.

"Juniper Hill was more prosperous at that time, and some of the women made moderate livings as lace-makers. Half a century later, in *Lark Rise*, Queenie, last of their kind, sits outside her cottage demonstrating her arcane skills to an enthralled audience, like one of those living manikins in modern heritage exhibitions. In this case the lookers-on are the hamlet children, who watch her conjuring lace bobbins as if they are ornaments on a secular rosary. 'They loved to see the bobbins tossed hither and thither … every bobbin weighted with its bunch of bright beads and every bunch with its own story, which they had heard so many times that they knew it by heart, how this bunch had been part of a blue bead necklace worn by her little sister who had died at five years old, and this other one had belonged to her mother, and that black one had been found, after she was dead, in a work-box belonging to a woman who was reputed to have been a witch.' Queenie is also an apiarist, not just a bee-keeper but a bee-whisperer. Her bees have to be communicated with, to be told when there has been a death in the household, or 'tanged' more loudly by the beating of a spoon on a shovel if the swarm has strayed outside her territory.

"Queenie's husband Tom, better known as Twister, is 'a small, thin-legged, jackdaw-eyed old fellow', with a taste for eccentric clothes that included a gamekeeper's velveteen coat and a bowler hat with a peacock's feather stuck in it. But Flora portrays him as very much the one in the marriage who does *not* wear the trousers. Twister is kind-hearted but feckless, and grabs any chance, legal or otherwise, of earning a shilling, but is more likely to spend it on drink than anything useful for his family. One night, very drunk, he beats Queenie with his belt. The next evening, she lays a pie on his plate, baked golden-brown and decorated with a pastry tulip 'such a pie as must have seemed to him to illustrate the old saying: "*A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the more you beat 'em the better they be*"'. When Tom cuts it open, 'curled up inside, was the leather strap with which he had beaten his wife'. He never laid a finger on her again."

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December 6th: Richard Harris Barham

St. Nicholas (d)

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'Ah,' he said, 'my job again! Why does it revolt you so much?'

Troy said: 'It's simply that I've got an absolute horror of capital punishment. I don't even know that I agree with the stock arguments against it. It's just one of those nightmare things. Like claustrophobia. I used to adore the Ingoldsby Legends when I was a child. One day I came across the one about my Lord Tomnoddy and the hanging. It made the most extraordinary impression on me. I dreamt about it. I couldn't get it out of my head. I used to turn the pages of the book, knowing that I would come to it, dreading it, and yet – I had to read it. I even made a drawing of it.'

'That should have helped.'

'I don't think it did. I suppose most people, even the least imaginative, have got a bogey man in the back of their minds. That has always been mine. I've never spoken of it before. And so you see when you and I met in that other business and it ended in your arrest of someone I knew – ' Her voice wavered. 'And then there was the trial and – the end – '

from *Final Curtain* by Ngaio Marsh.

But it was Richard Harris Barham as poet who first came into my life rather than any of his ghoulish stories in the *Ingoldsby Legends*. We had his 'The Jackdaw of Rheims' in our poetry books at primary school which I loved. The jackdaw, like a bower bird, picks up the cardinal's ring and takes it away to his nest. The cardinal curses the thief by bell, book, and candle, "But what gave rise To no little surprise,/Nobody seem'd one penny the worse!" Except for the little jackdaw whose feathers fall and he can only limp about. So in misery he leads them to the missing ring; "Then the great Lord Cardinal call'd for his book,/And off that terrible curse he took;" and the little jackdaw becomes the most pious bird imaginable.

So were the *Ingoldsby Legends* actually legends retold? Not really. It is a collection of poetry (such as the 'Jackdaw'), ghost stories (such as 'The Spectre of Tappington', 'The Ghost', 'The Old Woman clothed in Grey'), humorous anecdotes, folklore from Kent, and legends retold. Barham, a clergyman, put them all together as being collected by a fictious Thomas Ingoldsby.

So where does Lord Tomnoddy come into them? Lord Tomnoddy who liked 'gin-toddy' appears in 'The Execution: a Sporting Anecdote'. In the days when hangings were public spectacles, people including Tomnoddy and his friends would go out to watch. But Tomnoddy falls asleep while waiting and misses it. And as a man cannot be hanged twice he sees nothing for it but to go home again. Though Barham's description is not as graphic as a modern writer would probably make it I can see it having an impact on a sensitive child.

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December 7th: Willa Cather
Leopold Kronecker
Noam Chomsky

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In Dorothy Sayers' *Gaudy Night* she writes: 'Harriet grinned at Betty Armstrong, hearing the familiar academic wrangle begin. Before ten minutes had passed, somebody had introduced the word "values." An hour later they were still at it. Finally the Bursar was heard to quote:

"God made the integers; all else is the work of man."

"Oh, bother!" cried the Dean. "Do let's keep mathematics out of it. And physics. I cannot cope with them." '

It was a quote and the women gathered obviously knew it because no one says, 'Oh, who said that?' or 'What did they mean?' But for less erudite mortals like myself there were the questions 'who' and 'why'. Just by chance I was reading Hal Hellman's *Great Feuds in Mathematics* years later and he writes of 19th century German mathematician, Leopold Kronecker,

"Thus, when Ferdinand Lindemann wrote a paper containing a proof of the existence of transcendental numbers, Kronecker would comment, "Of what use is your beautiful research on the number *n*?" (My *n* is not quite the same as the one in the book but my computer is not up to transcendental numbers.) "Why cogitate over such problems, when really there are no irrational numbers whatever?" He believed that eventually a way would be found to recast these "unnatural" forms into a more elementary form involving only the natural numbers. A beautiful one-liner of his states, "God made the integers; all the rest is the work of man."

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December 8th: James Thurber

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James Thurber in *The Thurber Carnival* had something to say about cars.

"Mrs Robertson's beliefs and feelings about the future of the automobile (which I have been leading up to) go like this: the oil supplies of the world are being dried up in order to prevent future wars. This will also put an end forever to pleasure driving, but that is all right because, if people kept on riding in cars, they would soon lose the use of both legs, and the life of Man would pass from the earth." (Recollections of the Gas Buggy)

"Some day, I suppose, when the clouds are heavy and the rain is coming down and the pressure of realities is too great, I shall deliberately take my glasses off and go wandering out into the streets. I daresay I may never be heard of again (I have always believed it was Ambrose Bierce's vision and not his whim that caused him to wander into oblivion). I imagine I'll have a remarkable time, wherever I end up." (The Admiral on the Wheel)

And more so if he is immediately hit by a car.

Donald Westlake said of Thurber: "Thurber's gentleness and mild air of bewilderment no doubt came at least in part from an accident in his childhood. When he was six, one of his brothers accidentally shot him with an arrow, causing the loss of his left eye. His right eye, never particularly strong, failed when he was forty, and he spent the last quarter century of his life blind." Yet, remarkably, he continued to find humour all around him and to write and draw his distinctive cartoons.

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December 9th: John Milton

War

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"Tomorrow (9th December 1941) in common with the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands East Indies Governments, the Australian Government will formally and solemnly declare the state of war it has striven so sincerely and strenuously to avoid."

John Curtin.

James Curran in *Curtin's Empire* points out that Australian Prime Minister John Curtin then went on to say, "We Australians have imperishable traditions. We shall maintain them. We shall vindicate them. We shall hold this country, and keep it as a citadel for the British-speaking race, and as a place where civilization will persist."

Curran follows the difficult path Curtin always trod. As an Irish Catholic he had no time for the snobbishness that each visit by Royalty brought out but he saw Australia as a bastian of Britishness in the South Seas (which included support for the White Australia Policy and his promotion of the idea of an Imperial Council) which led him to see an empire of British dominions, not so different from the current British Commonwealth. He was not quite a pacifist but believed that war was a last resort; not as in the First World War something to be embraced with an Empire's fervour. He wrote of Anzac Day in 1927, "each anniversary as it comes around provides occasion

for much public speaking and preaching from pulpits. But the lesson which should have been learned from the war is as yet unlearned. If anything should have been absorbed by now it is that it was time there was a practical application of the doctrines of peace on earth, and goodwill towards men. The speeches and sermons, however, still glorify war and warlike deeds. The fact that the Anzac fought for the sake of ensuring peace to the world is overlooked. Their sacrifice was not to the god of war, but to the fairer goddess of peace, and while they remember the day it is because of memories of pals who died, and not because they desire to perpetuate war or any remembrance of it."

It is interesting that it is Britishness which is important rather than the more narrow concept of Englishness. Though as later Labor figures have wiped even Britishness from their memorials to him he has ceased to be a true figure in history and become someone to be resurrected to endorse a statement. Curran says, "If Curtin had any sort of conversion, it was to the concept of imperial defence, a scheme he had strongly criticized in the 1930s. But Curtin's sustained efforts to create a new Empire Council reflect his deep, continuing attachment to the community of Britishness, and shows that this cultural identification implied an ongoing acceptance of British world leadership. That in turn influenced the shaping of Australia's policy, even where it had seen that its interests often diverged from those of the 'mother country'."

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December 10th: Emily Dickinson

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I do not think it is a good idea to read a lot of Emily Dickinson all at once. I start to feel a sense of gentle melancholy spreading through me. I don't want to give a wrong impression. She did write some poems which might be described as cheerful. For instance –

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the Soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the Storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I've heard it in the chillest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me

'254'

But it is her poems about death which seem to be most remembered. So I found myself wondering: did Emily have a sense of fun and laughter or was she always grave and thoughtful?

Lyndall Gordon in *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* certainly suggests Emily had a satiric sense of humour though perhaps not a sense of fun. After all, she belonged to a Puritan-descended New England family.

She also suggests that Emily chose to live in relative seclusion—only relative as she was surrounded by servants, family, and occasional visitors—because she suffered from epilepsy and was always afraid of a seizure coming on. This certainly seems possible. She had regular times of unexplained 'ill health'. And it would probably discourage a life of laughter and fun.

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December 11th: Alexander Solzhenitsyn

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December 12th: Vasily Grossman
John Osborne
Joseph Heller (d)
D. Elton Trueblood

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Erica Heller in her memoir of her father *Yossarian Slept Here* says they lived for years at the Apthorp Hotel. "My father wrote much of *Catch-22* in Apartment 2K South. Early in the mornings and after returning home in the evenings from his pleasant but prosaic job as an ad writer. The apartment was cramped and had little light. Still, it was rich in distinctive detail, so it makes sense that the man who was about to invent a unique brand of circular logic lived in a second-floor apartment overlooking a circular driveway and courtyard. As he was about to introduce the world to a new kind of twisted, irrational rationality, he lived in a place that was itself completely idiosyncratic and extraordinary, and has only become more so with the galloping passage of time."

"When Dad started *Catch-22* in 1953, it was called *Catch-18*. Later, he and his young editor, Robert Gottlieb, changed the title because Leon Uris's novel had usurped the number with *Mila 18*. I can remember nights at the dinner table with my parents tossing out different numbers. "*Catch-27*?" Nah, my father shook his head. "*Catch-539*?" Too long, too lumbering. I had no idea what they were talking about. Thank goodness for Bob, Dad's uber-editor at Simon & Schuster; he was the one to come up with the unremarkable remarkable number 22. Along with Dad's redoubtable agent, Candida Donadio, and Nina Bourne, who plotted the clever, quirky promotional campaign for *Catch-22*, these were the book's earliest disciples. Without them, not only wouldn't there have been a number, there wouldn't have been a book."

"At one point when Dad was writing *Catch-22* (he wrote it for nine years, which turned out to be something of an average gestation period for his books), only once and quite late in the game do I remember him becoming discouraged, fed up with the writing process and how long it was taking to finish. This brief, uncharacteristic bit of self-doubt caused him to actually set the book aside and try to find distractions. I recall seeing him watching television in the evenings, but his boredom and exasperation was immediate. Within a week, he'd become so sullen that soon he was scurrying exultantly back into the waiting arms of *Catch*, telling my mother that he honestly couldn't imagine how anyone survived who didn't have a novel to write."

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December 13th: Heinrich Heine
Laurens van der Post
Kenneth Patchen
Beatriz Guido

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Laurens van der Post wrote in *Journey into Russia*: "One Indian said a lot of the criticism came out in jokes and funny stories. It was then that I heard, for the first time, of Radio Armianski, the wireless station to which is attributed all sorts of satirical comment on the system of the Soviet Union. The station exists, of course, only as a figment of the popular imagination, but its function is so compelling and active that while I was in Russia the Government appointed a commission to investigate the phenomenon and to recommend means of dealing with it. They were all amazed that I had not heard of it and gave me many examples.

For instance it was said that a geologist wrote to Radio Armianski and asked if it could help him to get a truck from the state to take him on an urgent technical expedition. After six weeks

without reply he protested to the station and got this apology: 'Sorry we have been unable to answer before because we have not yet stopped laughing since we got your request.'

Then there was the official campaign against the passion of Local Authorities to house themselves in great neo-classical edifices with frontages of imposing columns. Krushchev himself had railed against these columns as over-expensive embellishments. Hence, according to Radio Armianski, a Russian architect on a visit to Athens when shown the Acropolis and asked what he thought of it, patted the marble columns with his hand and said: 'My dear chap, mere embellishments, a waste of money.'

The Afghan engineer added an illustration of his own. He told us that at his institute an expert attached to the radio station in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, had appeared one day to lecture to them. When he announced that he was from the radio station in Armenia the class laughed so much that it was many minutes before he could begin to speak. It all sounded harmless enough that evening in Tashkent but I was to remember it vividly some weeks later in Moscow when I read of the expulsion of an American newspaper correspondent because he had made a collection of typical Radio Armianski stories and cabled them out to his newspaper."

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December 14th: Rosemary Sutcliffe

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December 15th: Edna O'Brien

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I found an audio book in an op-shop, *Girls in their Married Bliss*, and bought it. It said 'Read by the author'. Now this can be fascinating but it can also be something else. I remember hearing a man say how excited he had been by the idea of going to hear Pablo Neruda read his poetry. But Neruda, he discovered, had a little squeaky voice and it spoiled the poetry for him. So I came at Edna O'Brien with a little trepidation.

But she reads very well. The problem I found, when I got to the end of the cassettes, was that the 'Girls' irritated me. They do nothing but complain and be miserable. This can create sympathy, a smile, a sense of connection, or it can simply … irritate …

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December 16th: Jane Austen
Noel Coward
George Santayana

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I came upon a library book titled *Flirting with Pride & Prejudice* edited by Jennifer Crusie and she subtitles her book *Fresh Perspectives on the Original Chick-Lit Masterpiece*. I may have missed something when I originally read *Pride and Prejudice* but I don't remember an obsession with dieting, nor was the heroine out night-clubbing in search of men. To call it chick-lit seemed to demean a classic so what did Crusie have in mind when she made the connection?

Actually the book is quite fun. And one of her contributors, Laura Caldwell, writes, "Yet within sixty pages my God-like perceptions of the characters floated away, and I moved on through the story as I would any other. As I did, I couldn't help but notice a similarity between *Pride and Prejudice* and many chick-lit novels published today. This similarity is that, instead of discussing the political situation of the time, Austen deals instead with what my friends and I call "high-class problems." " She also calls these 'a problem of privilege'. "Chick-lit is often dismissed for dealing with trivial women's issues (for example, which Prada shoe to buy definitely falls into the category of high-class problems) much the same way in which Austen was once criticized for not dealing with her political landscape. Austen, however, with Elizabeth Bennet and the surrounding *Pride and Prejudice* characters, manages a tongue-in-cheek nod to high-class problems while dealing with

them at the same time. She puts a sympathetic face on the issues. She wrote with a confidence that insists that although some might call Elizabeth's concerns (and those of her sisters and family) trivial or high-class, they are still legitimate concerns; they are still very real issues."

"Chick-lit, much like *Pride and Prejudice*, gives us a view of someone struggling with *our* issues. It's not big business, it's not a murder at the Louvre, it's not a hunt to uncover a terrorist plot. Instead, it's women looking for fulfillment, whether that fulfillment takes the form of a husband, a new job or a pair of strappy sandals. It's girls occasionally behaving badly. It's friendships and fashion and fun, and it's growing up, at least just a little."

This, of course, suggests a similarity in plots. But I think there is still a difference and that is that I don't turn to chick-lit in the hope of finding prose so memorable that I cannot put it down.

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December 17th: Erskine Caldwell

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December 18th: 'Saki' (H. H. Munro)
Christopher Fry
G. B. Lancaster (Edith Joan Lyttleton)

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Nettie Palmer said of G. B. Lancaster: "a quiet little woman in grey, with a subtle, very feminine, nervous attitude to ideas and persons: yet known as the writer of immensely he-men stories."

"For months he had had a dream that worked like a powerful spell. If the convicts rose, not sporadically like bushrangers, but in one great wave. If they rose altogether they could have the country in a week. And England … one never knew what England might do. Perhaps she would withdraw her troops and leave them to it, glad to pull such a thorn out of her flesh. It was possible. All things were possible."

From *Pageant* by G. B. Lancaster.

There was never an uprising. But there *were* escapes. Alan Villiers in *The Coral Sea* tells the story of one. "Dutch suspicions might have been strengthened by a recent experience, when a boat's crew came in from the sea to Koepang with a story that the eight men, one woman, and two children aboard were the sole survivors of an English merchantman. They were somewhat vague about this merchantman, and they had no papers. The Dutch thought it strange that their boat should be an obvious fishing boat, not the normal type carried aboard ocean-going ships. However, the presence of the woman and the two babies added some support to the story. If they had not come from a wreck, where and what had they come from? How far could that little fishing boat have sailed? They had, as a matter of fact, come almost 3,000 miles. Far from being survivors of a near-by wreck, they were runaway convicts from New South Wales, and they had brought that fishing boat from inside Sydney Heads.

"The party was led by William Bryant, an ex-smuggler from Devon who had been transported to New South Wales. With him were his wife, Mary, and their two small children, Emmanuel and Charlotte. Being a handy man with a boat, Bryant was employed at Sydney as a fisherman for the governor's table. He was given a boat, but it was not the type in which any but the desperate would attempt a sea voyage of 100 miles, let alone 3,000. An obliging Dutchman, in command of the snow *Waaksamheid*, gave Bryant, for reasons of his own, a rough chart, an old quadrant, and an older compass. Possibly Bryant bought these things with fish, for food was scarce in Sydney at that time. Bryant assembled a crew from his trusted friends. His wife and babies were allowed to live with him. His friends were seven fellow convicts: William Allen, James Cox, Nathaniel Lilley (all 'lifers'), Samuel Bird, *alias* John Simms, James Martin, George Morton, and Samuel Broom, *alias* John Butcher. Though the shortest sentence any of these was serving was

seven years, the most serious crime of which any had been convicted was stealing three pigs. Mary Broad, Bryant's wife, had been transported after being sentenced to death for stealing an old cloak."

They weren't pursued, mainly because the authorities didn't believe they would get far. "It was the night of March 9, 1791, when the boat voyage was begun. On June 4 the party arrived safely at Timor. "All went well until Captain Edward Edwards came along. Even then the runaways might have escaped, if they had kept their heads. The captain of a Dutch East Indiaman who had been moved by their story and was eager to tell the Bryants the news of the arrival of another party of castaways hastened to tell them their captain had come.

"What captain? Damme, we have no captain!" exclaimed one of the lifers, starting up, caught off his guard.

"When Captain Edwards heard of this it was the end of freedom. The party was carried off, babies and all, to Batavia, to await passage to England as felons. At Batavia the unfortunate Bryant sickened of a fever and died. He was followed shortly afterwards by his infant son. In the Straits of Sunda one of the lifers jumped overboard from the ship which was taking him home, and two of the other convicts did not survive the voyage.

"Mary Bryant, with her small daughter, was sent to England in a ship called the *Gorgon*. Her daughter died in the South Atlantic: Mary Bryant went alone into the dock at London. Yet she was not quite without friends: an officer of marines who also had traveled in the *Gorgon*, much taken with her quiet courage and her beauty, still youthful despite jails and prison ships and sentences of death and 3,000 mile voyages in open boats, was also in the court. On the day after the trial a cloaked stranger drove in a hansom cab to the city jail where she was being held, and informed the jailer that a pardon would shortly arrive. Apparently, the pardon did arrive; the last that was seen of Mary Bryant was in a four-wheeled cab with the officer of the marines from the *Gorgon*, driving away from the jail."

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December 19th: Jean Genet
Edith Piaf
Italo Svevo

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Edith Piaf (1915-1963) was born to Louis Gassion and Annetta Maillard and "Annetta called her baby Edith in homage to the war heroine Edith Cavell, an English nurse executed by a German firing squad that October for having organized an escape route through Belgium for wounded soldiers". But Annetta abandoned her and she lived a chaotic vagabond childhood with her acrobat father. As she began her life as a singer she was given the name Piaf, the French for sparrow.

I would not have included her but as I was reading Carolyn Burke's biography *No Regrets* I found that Piaf was also a songwriter. She began by singing the songs that were 'out there' but as her popularity grew people began writing songs for her then she began to write songs for herself.

Burke writes. "Despite her worries, Edith kept writing songs that would become her own triumphs. One day, when she was sitting with her friend Marianne Michel at a café on the Champs-Elysées, the young woman complained that she had nothing new to sing. Edith began scribbling words on the paper tablecloth, a tune that she had been thinking of for some time: '*Quand il me prend dans ses bras, / Qu'il me parle tout bas / Je vois les choses en rose*' Her friend thought about the '*choses en rose*' (an echo from Piaf's recent song for Montand, 'Elle a …') and suggested instead '*la vie en rose*.' Suddenly Edith had the title, lyrics, and music of the composition that would be translated into scores of languages as her theme song. But meanwhile she made a gift of it to Marianne; Piaf would not record 'La Vie en rose' until two years later."

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December 20th: John Wilson Croker

D. Elton Trueblood (d)

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American theologian, chaplain, and author D. Elton Trueblood wrote a book about Abraham Lincoln and more intriguingly he wrote *The Humor of Jesus*.

"It has been said that man is the only animal who laughs, the only one who weeps, the only one who prays, the only one who can invent, the only one with a written language, the only one who is proud, the only one who can make progress, the only one who guides his own destiny, the only one who is penitent and the only one who needs to be."

Elton Trueblood in *Philosophy of Religion*.

Above all else love God alone;
bow down to neither wood nor stone.
God's name refuse to take in vain;
the Sabbath rest with care maintain.
Respect your parents all your days;
hold sacred human life always.
Be loyal to your chosen mate;
steal nothing, neither small nor great.
Keep to the truth in word and deed,
and rid your mind of selfish greed.

Elton Trueblood's version of The Lord's Prayer.

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December 21st: Frank Moorhouse
Jean Baptiste Racine
Massacre

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T. M. Devine wrote in *To the Ends of the Earth: Scotland's Global Diaspora*: "The evidence currently to hand confirms that Scots were just as deeply implicated as any other white immigrants in the tragedy of the Aborigines. After all, Scots were over-represented in those very sectors of the frontier economy – large-scale pastoralism and land-squatting – where interracial violence was most endemic. Defining the 'average' Australian squatter of the middle decades of the nineteenth century, one author concluded, 'the mixture is Scotch, somewhat military, and intolerant alike of obstacles and authorities'. Thus, Angus McMillan from Glenbrittle in Skye built up a great personal fortune in Victoria by sheep-farming, 'though in the process, he disposed of the Aborigines with hideous savagery'. The murder by natives of a kinsman named Ronald Macalister, in 1843 in Gippsland, led to the formation of the so-called 'Highland Brigade', when 'every Scotchman who had a horse and gun' gathered and which then led to one of the worst single massacres in Aboriginal history. At Warrigal Creek over a hundred men, women and children were slaughtered by the 'Brigade' in retaliation for the killing of Macalister. Inevitably, there are conflicting accounts of this incident. However, it appears that the initial catalyst for this chain of events was that Macalister's murder had been an act of revenge for the killing of an Aboriginal boy either by Macalister himself or by one of his stockmen."

Devine was quite correct to name Angus McMillan as a mass murderer. M. F. Christie's Massacre Map of Victoria 1836-50 in *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86* makes this clear:

May 24 1836 Mt Dispersion near Euston – several shot by Major Mitchell and his party.
July 1836 Werribee River – 10 shot by Henry Batman and others.
1837 Geelong area – 4 shot.
1837 Western Victoria – 3 killed.

1838-41 Western Victoria – 43 killed.
July 1839 Campaspe Plains – 40 or more shot by Mounted Police.
July 1839 Mt Alexander – 13 shot.
November 11 1839 Western District – 15 killed by Mr Taylor.
1839 Pyrenees – 5 or more shot.
1839 Western district – group shot or poisond.
1839 Western district – almost all Tantgort people "butchered".
Early 1840s Wangaratta – 20 or more shot by George Faithfull and his men in a 6-hour 'battle'.
March 10 1840 Konong-Woottong station – between 20 and 40 shot by the Whyte brothers.
July 1840 Western district – 3 or 4 shot by party led by Foster Fyans.
Oct-Dec 1840 Nuntin, Gippsland – unknown number killed by Angus McMillan's men.
December 21 1840 Pyrenees – 3 shot.
December 22 1840 Boney Point, Gippsland – Angus McMillan and his men took a "heavy toll" of Aboriginal lives.
1840 Grampians – 1 killed by J. F. Francis.
1841 Mt Bainbridge – 3 shot.
1841 Port Fairy – 1 killed by George Bolden.
1941 near Lake Lonsdale – 20 shot by station owners, cooks and shepherds.
1841 Portland – 6 poisoned on Henty brothers' property.
1841 Glen Ormiston station – 30 – 40 shot.
1841 Junction of Wannon and Glenelg Rivers – 15-17 poisoned.
1841 Butcher's creek, Gippsland – 30–35 shot by Angus McMillan's men.
1841 Maffira – unknown number shot by Angus McMillan's men.
August 25 1941 Murray River – 30 shot by government troops.
August 1841 Mt Emu – 3 shot.
August 1841 Mt William – 1 shot by station storekeeper.
October 1841 Leighton Station, Hopkins River – 2 beaten and shot.
December 1841 Port Fairy – 20 or more shot by Mr Taylor, station overseer.
1842 Skull Creek, Gippsland – unknown number killed.
February 1842 Caramut – several killed by station hands.
February 24 1842 Muston's creek – 4 shot.
February 1842 Port Fairy – 10 or more shot by station hands.
October 1842 Mt Rouse, Port Fairy – 9 killed.
December 10 1842 Brutten Creek, Gippsland – "Hundreds" killed.
Pre 1843 Grampians – 5 killed.
Pre 1843 Grampians – 2 or 3 killed.
Pre 1843 Darlot – 3 killed.
Pre 1843 Lake Colac – 1 killed.
1842-44 Eumeralla River area – 299 or more Gunditjmara people shot and poisoned.
June 1943 Warrigal Creek – between 60 and 180 shot by Angus McMillan and his men.
August 1843 Wannon River – 17 shot by Captain Dana and the Aboriginal Police.
August 1843 Fitzroy River – 8-9 killed by Captain Dana and the Aboriginal Police.
August 1843 Koroite Station, Wannon River – 7-8 killed.
1843 Grampians – 4 killed by Captain Dana and the Aboriginal Police.
1843 Portland Bay area – 4 killed.
1843 Western district – 2 killed.
1844 Maffra – unknown number killed.

January 1845 Wimmera District – 2 shot by Troopers.
July 1845 Mt Arapiles – 3 killed.
December 1845 Westernport – 7 killed.
1845 Grampians – 1 killed.
November 1846 Gippsland – 14 killed.
December 1846 Snowy River – 8 killed by Captain Dana and the Aboriginal Police.
1846-47 Gippsland – 50 or more shot by armed party hunting for white woman supposedly held by Aborigines. No such woman ever found.
1847 Mt Talbot – 1 killed by Mr Stokell.
February 1848 Murrumbidgee station, Murray area – 7-8 poisoned.
Pre 1848 Cape Otway – 20 killed by government survey party.
1850 Gippsland – 15-20 killed.
1850 Murrindal, near Orbost -16 poisoned.
1850 Brodribb River, near Orbost – 15-20 killed.
1853 Wangaratta – 2 killed.
1840s Port Fairy/Portland area – 3 or more killed.
Unknown date, Mt Eccles – 30 or more killed.

Christie wrote that "Within a period of fifty-two years from the date of arrival of the first Europeans in 1834 to 1886, it is estimated the (Aboriginal) population fell from 11,500 to 806." As I only had a copy of material from Christie's book I did think of getting the original to check but each time I considered it I put it aside as being too depressing. But anyone who talks about 'peaceful settlement' should be set Christie's book as required reading.

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December 22nd: Edward Arlington Robinson
William Hale White
Sarah Ricardo-Porter
Kenneth Rexroth
Racine

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Naomi Wolf in *The Treehouse* wrote of her father Leonard Wolf. She calls him a poet and a teacher but although she quotes from other poets she doesn't include any of his poetry. The closest she comes is: "Patricia and Leonard created a poetry evening every Friday at their apartment. The 'Berkeley Circle' of poets gathered there: Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer, and William Everson, who later became Brother Antoninus. Dwight Macdonald visited from New York City, E.M. Forster from London, and other, lesser known poets and writers gathered there as well. 'Our literary gods were Kenneth Patchen – almost unknown now, but who was a really avant-garde poet – and Kenneth Rexroth.' "

She also mentions Eudora Welty, Josephine Miles, and Allen Ginsberg.

I certainly hadn't heard of Kenneth Patchen or Kenneth Rexroth so why would anyone make them into 'literary gods'? But when I went looking I found Patchen and Rexroth were both interesting poets living, knowing, and influencing the group which came to be known as the Beat Poets … Anne Waldman said of Jack Kerouac, author of *On the Road*, "He also wrote books of poetry, the best-known being *Mexico City Blues*, which Kerouac wrote while imagining himself as a blues saxophonist. Later, he performed his writings to jazz accompaniment, inspiring wide interest in the poetry-jazz collaborations begun by Kenneth Patchen, Kenneth Rexroth, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti."

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December 23rd: Robert Bly

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December 24th: Matthew Arnold
Mary Higgins Clark
George Crabbe

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William B. Ober in *Boswell's Clap and Other Essays* includes George Crabbe under writers who took opium. His is a rags-to-riches story. "George Crabbe (1754-1832) first came to public notice in 1783 when he published his poem, *The Village*, a work of social realism written as a corrective to Goldsmith's roseate view of rural life in *The Deserted Village*." (I am not sure that you can call Goldsmith's view 'roseate'.) "Crabbe had been born in poverty in Aldeburgh, a small coastal town in Suffolk. In 1770 his father had apprenticed him to an apothecary-surgeon who used him chiefly as an errand boy and farm laborer and made him sleep with the stableboy." He tried to find similar work in London but failed and returned home. He could not get work in Aldeburgh and returned to London to become a writer. "After some struggles he obtained patronage from Charles Manners, duke of Rutland, through the intercession of Edmund Burke, who recognized his merits and introduced him to the leading figures in London's literary world." Burke also encouraged him to take holy orders which he did becoming a respectable clergyman-poet. Five of his seven children children died young which caused his wife to suffer a deep depression. But he began to take laudanum after a fit of vertigo. Researchers have found what they see as a hallucinatory undertone in both his poetry and his dreams which included vivid dreams of being chased by wild young boys made of leather.

In 1810 he brought out his best-known poems *Peter Grimes* and *Ellen Orford* which Benjamin Britten later combined in his opera *Peter Grimes*. "*Ellen Orford* features incest and the seduction of a feeble-minded girl, but *Peter Grimes* is a sordid and tragic tale of overt sadism with latent homosexuality. Grimes is depicted as an unmarried fisherman who leads a solitary life, who has broken off relations with his family and is somewhat alienated from the society in which he lives. After his father's death he hires a series of young apprentices, whom he beats and starves. The first apprentice dies of starvation; the second, Grimes insists, fell from the main mast into the hold; the third was a boy "of manners soft and mild" of whom Crabbe says:

> Passive he labour'd, till his slender frame
> Bent with his loads, and he at length was lame;
> Strange that a frame so weak could bear so long
> The grossest insult and the foulest wrong.

Although Grimes is acquitted of criminal charges, he goes mad and is haunted by hallucinations and dreams of terror. He sees the specter of his father rise from the waters, holding "a thin pale boy in either hand." They glide on top of the salt water without touching it and vanish when Grimes brandishes an oar at them. At a second manifestation the vision is enriched by an act of retribution from the father, an image of blood-guilt, and opium-induced synethesia:

> He, with his hand, the old man, scoop'd the flood,
> And there came flame about him mix'd with blood:
> He bade me stoop and look upon the place,
> Then flung the hot-red liquor in my face.

Relentless, the spectral vision recurs and continues to haunt Grimes until his dying day, much as the leather lads haunted Crabbe's dreams. It would seem that Crabbe was astute enough to keep his opium usage within reasonable bounds; the price he paid for his habituation was a recurrent dream of terror and pursuit, and some of his poems do reflect elements of hallucinated imagery as well as narrative elements traceable to intrapsychic conflicts." Ober sees both opium and latent homosexuality in Crabbe but I would first want to know if anything terrible had happened to Crabbe

in a possibly abusive childhood or apprenticeship and I also couldn't help wondering if through *Peter Grimes* he wanted to draw attention to the plight of young boys sent to sea with cruel masters.

It also makes the life of Grimes as a fisherman so grim you almost expect him to be cruel.

Alas! For *Peter* not an helping Hand,
So was he hated, could he now command;
Alone he row'd his Boat, alone he cast
His Nets beside, or made his Anchor fast;
To hold a Rope or hear a Curse was none,—
He toil'd and rail'd; he groan'd and swore alone.

Thus by himself compell'd to live each day,
To wait for certain hours the Tide's delay;
At the same times the same dull views to see,
The bounding Marsh-bank and the blighted Tree;
The Water only, when the Tides were high,
When low, the Mud half-cover'd and half-dry;
The Sun-burnt Tar that blisters on the Planks,
And Bank-side Stakes in their uneven ranks;
Heaps of entangled Weeds that slowly float,
As the Tide rolls by the impeded Boat.

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December 25th: Rebecca West
Christmas
Sir Isaac Newton

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"I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a little boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smooth pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Sir Isaac Newton

That ocean of truth still lies undiscovered … but is Christmas a moment to lift a tiny corner of the veil and see what lies beyond? Christina Rossetti wrote 'A Christmas Carol' which is conventional enough. It begins 'In the bleak mid-winter/Frosty wind made moan' but the last verse goes: What can I give Him,

Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,—
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

That is surely the other side of Truth. Love.

Of course Father Christmas/Santa Claus has become a commercial investment by many businesses but what of the man who inspired the tradition, St Nicholas? Reginald Nettel in *Santa Claus* writes, "About the year A.D. 280 there was born in Patras, in Asia Minor, a boy destined to become one of the most beloved of all Christian saints. He was named Nicholas. His parents were Christian, and his mother is reported to have been a most holy woman; they had great wealth. The boy Nicholas was in time to become Bishop of Myra and to suffer persecution for being a Christian,

for he was a fearless preacher and a helper of the oppressed; as such he incurred the enmity of the joint Emperors of Rome, Diocletian and Maximian. He did more. He refused to worship the statues of these emperors and was thereupon cast into prison. This was in the year 303. Diocletian and Maximian were succeeded by the emperor Constantine, who was tolerant of all religions, and then Nicholas was released from prison. He carried great influence in the Eastern Church, and when he died his loss was deeply mourned.

"So much for the facts. The fame of Nicholas may rightly have been earned by his generosity and his resistance to an Imperial decree which he as a Christian could not obey. Anyone who suffers imprisonment in a battle of the conscience is a hero, and men will recognise this fact. So the tomb of Nicholas became an object of pilgrimage, and stories were told of this great man and the miracles he wrought. He was canonised in the ninth century. Nicholas is the patron saint of children, unmarried girls, sailors, scholars, bankers and thieves, and for each of these a reason is to be found in some incident related of his life."

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December 26th: Henry Miller
Thomas Gray
Dion Boucicault

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Liza Mundy in *Code Girls: The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II* tells the story of the USA's hunt for girls to break and analyse Japanese and German codes. There was an irony in it that girls had been discouraged from learning mathematics. It was seen as unfeminine and unsuitable. And then, to work on code-breaking, there was a desperate search to find women who had studied maths, taught maths, majored in maths, lectured in maths …

Mundy wrote:

"The ploughman homeward plods his weary way. The ploughman plods homeward his weary way. The ploughman plods his weary way homeward. The ploughman his weary way homeward plods. The ploughman his weary way plods homeward. His weary way the ploughman homeward plods. His weary way homeward the ploughman plods. His weary way the ploughman plods homeward. Homeward the ploughman plods his weary way. Homeward his weary way the ploughman plods.

Everywhere in the cryptographic unit of Arlington Hall, posters on the walls reminded staffers sending out coded messages to vary the order of the texts. "There's always another way to say it," exhorted one poster, demonstrating how lines from Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" could be rearranged. At Arlington, the staff of eight thousand did more than break enemy messages. They encoded American traffic and monitored that traffic to make sure it was secure. They were obsessively reminded to avoid the sorts of stereotypes and predictable repetitions that had give Americans an entering wedge into Japanese and German codes. "Parallel texts lost a battle," the posters pointed out, reminding the encoders that in World War I, a battle had been lost because a single message was sent both in cipher and in the clear. "Shifting position of words and substituting synonyms and using passive voice of verb" are all ways to vary the order of a sentence, the posters reminded them."

We had the poem in our poetry books at school—

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

—but I wondered why they had chosen that poem. And what would the spirit of Thomas Gray think of this way of using his famous poem?

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December 27th: Elizabeth Smart

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December 28th: Alasdair Gray
Elizabeth Packard

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"Elizabeth Packard was an early activist. Back in the 1860s, she self-published *Modern Persecution, or Insane Asylums Unveiled*. In it she told the story of how her minister husband committed her to the Jacksonville State Asylum because she publicly contradicted him on a matter of Calvinist doctrine. She was taken away on a train, "railroaded," and spent three years trying to regain her freedom and struggling with Andrew McFarland, the asylum superintendent. Finally, after a well-publicized trial, her sanity was vindicated, although she found herself with no money, no home, and no children. In the last years of her life, Elizabeth Packard crisscrossed the United States, convincing state legislatures to overturn laws that made women the legal property of their husbands and gave people labeled "insane" fewer rights than household pets. In the Introduction to *Modern Persecution* she wrote "In the following narrative of my experiences, the reader will therefore find the interior of a woman's life delineated through the exterior surroundings of her bitter experiences."

From *Too Much Anger, Too Many Tears* by Janet and Paul Gotkin.

Packard says of her own experience:

'My husband then informed me that the 'forms of law' were now all complied with, and he now wished me to dress for a ride to Jacksonville Insane Asylum. I complied, but at the same time entered my protest against being imprisoned without a trial, or some chance at self-defence. I made no physical resistance however, when he ordered two of his church-members to take me up in their arms, and carry me to the wagon and thence to the cars, in spite of my lady-like protests, and regardless of all my entreaties for some sort of trial before commitment.

My husband replied, 'I am doing it as the laws of Illinois allow me to do – you have no protector in law but myself, and I am protecting you now! it is for your own good I am doing this, I want to save your soul – you don't believe in total depravity, and I want to make you right.'

'Husband, have I not a right to my opinions?'

'Yes, you have a right to your opinions, if you think right.'

'But does not the constitution defend the right of religious toleration to all American citizens?'

'Yes, to all citizens it does defend this right, but you are not a citizen; while a married woman you are a legal nonentity, without even a soul in law. In short, you are dead as to any legal existence while a married woman, and therefore have no legal protection as a married woman.' Thus I learned my first lesson in that chapter of common law, which denies to married woman a legal right to her own identity or individuality.'

Linda Carlisle, suitably, called her book about Elizabeth Packard *A Noble Fight*.

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December 29th: Dobrica Cosic
Brian Garfield (d)

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Nigel West wrote a book he called *Counterfeit Spies*. He says, "Christopher Creighton is the *nom de guerre* of the hero of Brian Garfield's story, *The Paladin*, an account of the exploits of a young man who became Churchill's private spy while still a schoolboy. The rather odd title refers to any one of the Twelve Peers of Charlemagne's court, whose name has come to designate any knight errant or champion. Garfield, who wrote the novel *Death Wish* which was subsequently made into a

movie directed by Michael Winner, is an experienced author who has dozens of titles of fiction and non-fiction to his credit. He insists that Creighton is a real person, averring that 'perhaps only Christopher can say how closely and at what points the narrative coincides with the truth'." It was billed as a true story—but was it?

Creighton was said to have been recruited as a teenager by Churchill, his first mission was to look at Belgian defences. He followed by reporting on a German U-boat base in Donegal and blowing up a Dutch submarine in the Pacific because it had sighted the Japanese fleet heading for Pearl Harbour; he was then involved in the Dieppe raid and giving false information to the Germans about D-Day. He managed to be abducted from Ireland by a German U-boat, to carry out an assassination assignment in North Africa, to train in Canada, to get to know Von Ribbentrop, to kill quite a large number of people, and to switch between aliases. Although it was at times difficult to check because material was still classified there were basic problems. For instance, his Belgian contact Prince Paul did not exist (and the Belgian Royal Family *was* easily checkable). Nor did any German base in Donegal exist and the Dutch submarine … "When challenged on the question of exactly which submarine he had sabotaged, Creighton identified the K XV11 (0-17), perhaps not realising that this craft had been seen on the surface on 14 December, a week after he had supposedly sunk it."

Creighton then, with Noel Hynd, wrote *The Kruschchev Objective*, with more improbable scenes "including one in which Sir Winston Churchill complains about the Berlin Wall (five years before it was built) and Kruschchev rails against the U-2 aircraft…before it has even flown." Creighton then wrote *OpJB* with Milton Shulman and Duff Hart-Davis in which some of his personal information contradicts that in *The Paladin* and in which he says he and Ian Fleming went to Berlin to persuade Martin Bormann to come to Britain so as to give Britain access to the Nazis hidden assets. The problem with this was that Fleming was in Jamaica not Berlin by then.

And there was no Christopher Creighton. He was in fact John Ainsworth-Davis.

Nigel West asks: "Considering that none of Christopher Creighton's fanciful claims stand up to prolonged analysis, how were respectable publishers on both sides of the Atlantic taken in? According to Brian Garfield, who still believes Creighton's tales, his New York publishers employed William Stevenson to investigate and authenticate *The Paladin*. He did so, allegedly, by consulting Sir William Stephenson, who acknowledged having heard of the boy spy's exploits." It could perhaps be asked: 'From whom? Creighton himself?'

I can understand people exaggerating the role they played. It is natural to want to appear braver and more resourceful and to have led a more exciting life. West writes, "When the Comte de Marenches returned to Paris after the Liberation in 1944, having spent the previous three years in London organising de Gaulle's fledgling intelligence service, he remarked that he had had no idea there had been sixteen million Frenchmen in the resistance." There were complete fantasies such as *The Man Who Wouldn't Talk* about Canadian George DuPre who claimed to have been a spy in Normandy but had in fact spent the war in Canada. There were books like William Stevenson's *A Man Called Intrepid* which took a real man Sir William Stephenson who had done some intelligence work and wove a fantasy around him. "Analysis of the five major episodes in which Stevenson alleged Sir William had been involved reveal that there was not even the most tenuous of connections between them." And then there was *My Sister and I: The Diary of a Dutch Boy Refugee* by Dirk van der Heide which became a best-seller in 1941-2. In fact there was no Dirk van der Heide and the book "was a plausible forgery designed for the purpose of assisting Britain's anti-Nazi propaganda, and Faber had acted as a willing front for the intelligence establishment."

We don't know exactly what Brian Garfield knew about Creighton's life, what questions he asked, or what checks he made, and it is too late to ask him, but there are very real dangers in books

which twist history because the people who pick them up and read them and believe them and share them are not always aware that the 'true stories' they purport to tell are bogus.

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December 30th: Rudyard Kipling

The Mystery of 'Tung Chia'

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I bought an old book called *Lays and Relays* by 'Tung Chia'. In the front it had the bookplate of Harold Pearce, Shanghai 9th May 1905. And inside it was dedicated to Robert Hart:

To Sir Robert Hart, Bart., G.C.M.G.
"the great I.G."
This little book is dedicated,
as
A slight token of admiration
and
In kindly recollection of many happy days
by
the Author.

Shanghai,
30 June, 1894.

So who was 'Tung Chia'? I had already come across Robert Hart in an unexpected way. "A book called *The I.G. in Peking, Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, is a collection of letters between Hart and Campbell and one of them 4/9/1879 asks that Campbell get in touch with: Mr. Horneck, c/- J. Taylor Esq, Trinity Chambers, 41 Dame Street, Dublin, about him doing the qualifying exam for a clerkship in China and be ready to start 1880."

Now John Taylor was a Dublin solicitor, of Taylor, Mortimer and Elliott, and his sister Louisa Taylor was my gr-gr-grandmother and another sister Agnes Taylor married the Rev. George Horneck and had the young man who is suggested for a clerkship. The puzzle in there was why Robert Hart should write to John Taylor to suggest his nephew. Was he a client, a friend, a neighbour? "This Robert Hart is credited with putting the chaotic Chinese customs system on to a workable and efficient system which actually made money for the Chinese government."

Robert Hart was an Irishman (and James Campbell his London agent) so did he prefer to recruit his clerks from Ireland or had he somehow heard good reports of this young man or did John Taylor write to him to see if he could secure a position for a young relative?

And the poet who calls himself 'Tung Chia' is obviously European not Chinese. He writes very sympathetically at times—

Thy lot is hard, thy paths are rough,
Poor coolie of Shanghai,—
Dull care is written on thy brow
And hunger in thine eye;
Thy coat is of the poorest stuff,
Thy breeches past all hope;
And oh! 'twill ne'er be thine to know
The blessedness of soap.
From 'To a Sleeping Rickshaw Coolie'

And at other times less so—

I sit upon a rugged bench
By Yangtze's muddy tide,
In lone Wuhu, and a horrid stench
Comes up from every side—
A breath of things which have had their day,
A flavour typical of Cathay,
From 'Super Flumina'

And he calls Confucius 'a tremendous fraud' and the root of 'agëd customs, barbarous and tough'.

My first thought was that he was English because of such lines—
Whitechapel streets at sunset, where the poor
Child waifs of sin play piteously along
From 'A Ballade of Civilisation'
Alas! Cathay has none of these;—
I want a day of English June!
From 'a Ballade of June'

But at the end I came across two poems which suggested an Irish connection:
Boys, far over the water,
Erin is smiling to-day,
Ready for mirth and for slaughter,
Rife for the feast and the fray—
Ach! To be back there in Dublin
Wearing a bit of the green,
With never a care to be troublin',
Nor Sassenach scowl to be seen.
From 'Erin Go Bragh'!'
Tom Moore has said there's nought
Like Love's young dream, and taught
How love's sweet fruit's a sort
Best when it's ripe.
From 'To My Pipe'

Was he a missionary who got his ideas about Chinese religion from a 'Mr Legge'? (In fact James Legge was more sympathetic than this would suggest. A Scot he went to China as a missionary, learnt Chinese, taught young officials arriving from the UK, translated a number of Chinese classics, including Confucius, and ended up as Professor of Chinese at Oxford.) Was he a trader on the Bund in Shanghai? Was he a diplomat who met the emperor? I think he was a well-read, well-travelled clerk. I doubt if the others would have written:

Mouldy thou art.—thou hast suffered much
From mildew and damp, and age,
But many a vanished hand's soft touch
Rests on each faded page.

Six years I have used thee, and till now
Thy cover has lasted well;
Thou knowest far more of that time, I trow,
Than ever myself could tell.

From ‘Lines to an Old Chit-Book’

So I tried ‘Tung Chia’ through the internet in case anyone else had ever wondered about the identity behind the pen name but without anything coming up. I asked a friend to translate Tung Chia and she said it meant Tung Dynasty. The Tung Dynasty was said to be a dynasty which encouraged poets and artists. But when I looked I found she was thinking of the Tang Dynasty. So I looked for the words separately and found ‘tung’ in Chinese means the candlenut tree (Aleurites fordii) from which they get tung oil. And ‘chia’ is an edible seed from Salvia hispanica. So was I looking at someone interested in botany or someone interested in exporting tung oil or did the poet simply like the sound of the words? And then I found there had been an Emperor Tung except that he was Tongzhi in Chinese. It was only when his name was rendered into the Wade-Giles system that he became T’ung Chih. In English his name meant ‘Union for Order’ and he became Emperor as a very young man and died in 1875. In that brief time he had taken several small steps to ‘westernise’ the country. So was the name a tribute to the memory of a man who might’ve changed Chinese history if he had lived?

Rudyard Kipling created the description ‘Globe Trotter’ and Tung Chia creates a poem ‘Lines to a Globe Trotter’ which includes these verses:

Sadly, Egypt sees thee crawling
Up the landmarks of her race,
Scaling Cheop’s tomb and scrawling
“Smith—and pal” upon its face.

Sadly India sees thee linger
By her holy Ganges’ tide,
Pointing out with ribald finger
Spots described in Murray’s Guide.

Not with pious joy, but slowly,
Sadly, to his evening prayer
Goes the priest of Vishnu, lo! the
Reason is that thou art there.

Sad the Japanese who sees thy
Curious hat and awful clothes,
Feeling that no art can please thy
Taste, which nought but shoddy knows.

Sad the Daimio’s thoughts and bitter
(Ah! that glory’s sun should pale),
Whilst his country thou dost litter
With cheroots and Bass’s Ale.

And he fully realises
By the note-book in thy hand,
Thou will print as many lies as
There are temples in his land.

Gentle trotter, I would pray thee,

Keep away from China's shore—
Any other land will pay thee,
For thy time and trouble, more.

All our Treaty Ports are sleepy,
Scarcely worthy of abuse;
Not the sort of place to keep a
Diary for future use.

No! we have no startling wonders,
Nothing really fit to show,
And our most authentic Bunders
Have been published years ago.

Trotter of the Globe! thy legions
Swarm now yearly worse and worse;
If it keep thee from these regions
Not in vain my humble verse.

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December 31st: Simon Wiesenthal

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I always feel I would like to end on a positive note. This is difficult given that very few humourists or self-help gurus seem to be born on this day. And Simon Wiesenthal though an amazing and dedicated man was not what you would call 'light-hearted'. So I have chosen a couple of little verses from John Hemming's book *More Than Meets the I* to lighten your mood before I return to a very serious subject.

'Lord, why do you these verses send
  At awkward times like 3 a.m.?'
'Because, my very simple Friend
  I find you only listen then.'
'The Reason'

Send to Love to come and preach;
  Love sends back to you:—
'Self-knowledge is the Way I teach;
  Will not Silence do?'
'Speakers Required'

I found this book – The Word of God.
  The Word inside was LOVE.
I looked for 'Further Reading';
  It just said, 'See above.'
'In a Word'

Alison Haynes in *Change* wrote, "While a concentration camp prisoner in World War 11, Simon Wiesenthal, a Jew, had an unusual and troubling encounter. A young SS soldier who was dying in a hospital bed sought absolution from a Jew so he could die in peace. It was Wiesenthal

who was brought to his bedside. The soldier had much to confess and, many hours later, Wiesenthal sensed he faced a choice—to give his forgiveness or not. He left the room without uttering a word but the decision haunted him. Should he have forgiven the dying man? Was it even in his power to forgive him?

Years after the war had ended, Wiesenthal told his story in a book he called *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*. The title is drawn from his thoughts as a prisoner being marched from one place to another, past the graves of German soldiers. From each grave grew a sunflower—a connection between life and death that for Wiesenthal was a symbol of their freedom in stark contrast to the mass grave, with no sunflowers, that he imagined he would finish in. In the second half of the book, Wiesenthal asks what others would have done in his shoes.

The twentieth anniversary publication (1996) presents 53 responses from theologians, political leaders, jurists, psychiatrists, human rights activists, Holocaust survivors and victims of attempted genocide in Bosnia, Cambodia, China and Tibet. Respondents range from the Dalai Lama and Primo Levi to Desmond Tutu and Harry Wu. Arthur Waskow turns his attention to the dying man. 'What would it mean for me to "forgive" you?' 'Ultimately…we have to live with ourselves,' comments Dith Pran. What would you have done?"

I cannot forgive an Indonesian soldier for what he has done to the East Timorese, the Acehnese, the West Papuans. I am not the one who suffered. If he asked a Timorese, not his victim but someone he saw as representing the suffering Timorese for forgiveness it becomes more difficult. But it is still fudging the issue. We need to ask forgiveness from our victims. So was Wiesenthal a victim of that young man? It seems not. But as this is often not possible, the victims being dead, we do vest, I think rightly, our leaders with the power to apologise on our behalf in certain circumstances. It is not the same, it doesn't necessarily come from the heart, but I think sometimes it can help.

But if we cannot receive forgiveness in this world, for whatever reason, then can we receive it in the next? I believe 'In a Word' we can.

THE END

NOTES: In *A Vague Survey* I mentioned the little ditty about Ned Flaherty's drake. I later came upon this: J. Meredith, R. Covell and P. Brown in *Folk Songs of Australia* wrote: "About thirty years ago I recorded Vic's brother Fred from Cooks Gap, and he began to sing an Irish song called 'Nell Flaherty's Drake'. It was a song that Bill Large used to sing, and he had died only a short while before my visit. The memory of his father singing the song proved too much for Fred who broke down and was unable to continue, a great pity, because while Vic knew the tune, he could only recall a verse and a half of the words. A complete version of seven stanzas appears in Colm O Lochlainn's *Irish Street Ballads*, with a very different tune to that used at Cooks Gap.

"The complete version contains a curse that exceeds in dreadful malediction even that which was called down upon the Bastard from the Bush by the Captain of The Rocks Push, and which is directed at the thief who stole Nell's drake.

My name it is Nell, candid I tell
For I come from Conell, which I ne'er shall deny;
For I had a large drake, and the truth I will speak,
He was plump, round and fat and as brisk as a bee.
He was a dear little fellow, oh his legs they were yellow,
He would fly like a swallow and dive like an eel;
And it's some dirty savage, sure to grease his white cabbage,
Oh the villain has murdered Nell Flaherty's drake.
May his pipe never smoke, his teapot be broke,
And to make matters worse may his kettle never boil,
May the bugs and the fleas build a nest in the wig
Of the villain who murdered Nell Flaherty's drake."

Robert Gibbings also heard the version which mentions Nell Flaherty but he adds another few lines he had come across:

May his pig never grunt, may his cat never hunt,
That a ghost may catch him in the dark of the night,
May his hen never lay, may his ass never bray,
And his goat fly away like an old pay kite.

So they were all probably drawing on an existing ballad. And looking at one version I wonder if the original had an underlying meaning—because it was men further up in society who wore wigs. And white cabbage suggests something superior to ordinary green cabbage.