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Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry for bookish people of philanthropic inclination

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Editorial

In the interval between this and the last issue of the Review, the state of wellbeing experienced by the majority of the world's population must have declined significantly – to put it mildly. And whereas some people might find consolation in the vague hope that *things can only get better,* the brutal levels of death, destruction and sheer hatred on a global scale show little prospect of any sort of imminent amelioration. Are there any grounds for hope?

Immanuel Kant, the distinguished 18th century philosopher, famously posed three important moral questions: What can I know, What should I do? and What can I hope for? He considered that attitudes of selfishness, rivalry, vanity, jealousy and self-conceit, combined with the oppressive social inequalities they tend to produce, should have the effect of aiming *to develop our talents and culture, approach enlightenment and, in response to the inevitable strife and instability, encourage us towards justice, political equality and the highest good*. Recently, philosopher Adam Cureton suggested that these claims reveal one of Kant's deep and important insights about the moral life by *describing what a good and virtuous person reasonably hopes for.* [1] But they surely amount to a formidable, if unavoidable, challenge.

I am most grateful to the two guest contributors to this issue of the Review. Geoff Tansey, is a colleague who, like me, has been for many years a member of the Food Ethics Council (see issue 17). Last year were both invited to contribute to an international *food ethics* online conference, and I then invited him to write the article below, which is based on his important conference paper, while Penny Young has produced another of her superb book reviews.

My main contribution to this issue is called *Lexicological Quirks*, an example of my habitual word play, which I hope will prove as informative as I find it entertaining. I also include some provocative questions concerning democratic decision-making, the type of books sold recently, some poems from the 70s and the way leather adds pleasure to handling old books.

[1] Cureton A (2018*). Reasonable Hope in Kant's Ethics:* Kantian Review;23 (2):181-203.

1. Lexicological Quirks

As an inveterate *bibliophile* (lover of books) and *logophile* (lover of words), I have sought to share aspects of these traits in earlier issues of the Review. Many such examples, such as Limericks and Spoonerisms, are amusing and often witty. But an additional motive for my interest is the realisation that, in the words of a noted Victorian logophile (Richard Chenevix Trench), words are, metaphorically, *living powers*: for their meanings and status have evolved through time revealing much about our ancestors – the people who mostly invented them, and we who have, often unconsciously, adapted them to quite different usages. For example, about 50 years ago, writing to the widow of a research colleague who had died at a relatively young age, I referred to his gaiety i.e. his cheerful, carefree disposition. But in a relatively short time, the word 'gay' is now universally agreed to have a quite different meaning- to the extent that it is sufficiently widely-recognised by a single letter in the acronym LGBT.

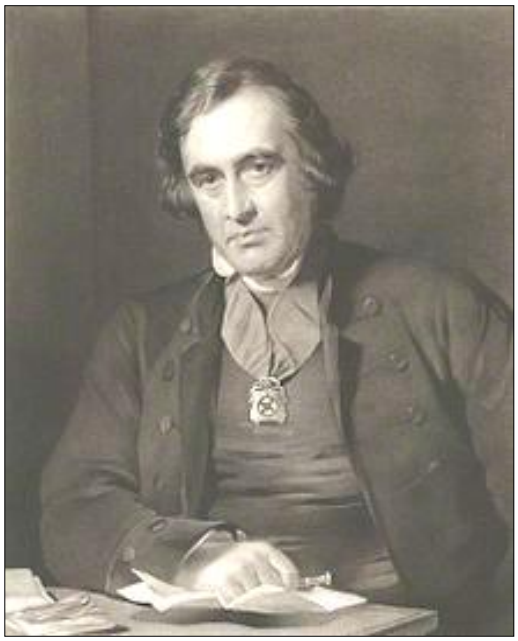
Lexicology (the meaning and origins of words) shares some territory with *lexicography* (the art and practise of compiling dictionaries) and *philology* (the study of language in oral and written historical sources), but in the following I shall not be rigorous in insisting on making a sharp distinction between them. And that is partly because it allows me to cite the definition of *lexicographer* entered by Samuel Johnson, the 18th century compiler of that veritable 'magnum opus' *A Dictionary of the English Language*. This he expressed, with undoubtedly genuine feeling, as: *A writer of dictionaries. A harmless drudge, that busies himself in tracing the original, and detailing the signification of words* - which, ironically, is not a definition one would associate with his typically-acerbic wit!

In this essay, I aim to give a brief taste of the writings of three men whose logophilic interests are revealed in their professional work or merely took the form of an engaging avocation.

R Chenevix Trench (1807- 1886) was Archbishop of Dublin for twenty years. In 1851 he established his fame as a philologist by the book *The Study of Words*, which was originally delivered as lectures. In this, his purpose was to demonstrate that in words *there are boundless stores of moral and historic truth, and no less of passion and imagination laid up* -an argument which he supported by a number of examples. Two of his shorter books of similar character were —*English Past and Present* (1855) and *A Select Glossary of English Words* (1859). But perhaps his most important service to English philology was his paper, read to the Philological Society, *On some Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries* (1857), which was the stimulus that led eventually to publication of the multi-volume *Oxford English Dictionary.* A few examples from his 1851 and 1855 books (slightly edited) are here cited.

❁ ***Whigs and Tories*** (From Trench 1851**)** Certain names, at first imposed on other individuals or groups of people, were initially objected to by the latter, but subsequently '*admitted and allowed*.' For example, the name Quaker (officially the Religious Society of Friends) was not, at the time, accepted by them. Now, however, Quakers, fully accept the name and its expression as Quakerism. The same applies to the names Whig and Tory. *These were originally nicknames of the bitterest party hate, withdrawn from their earlier use, and fastened to two political parties in England, each on the other*. *– the Whig being properly a Scottish covenanter, the Tory an Irish bogtrotting freebooter*. But in the course of time these nicknames *so lost and let go what was offensive about then, that in the end they were adopted by the very parties themselves.*

❁ ***Impact of the Norman Conquest.*** (From Trench, 1851) Trench identified several ways in which the English language reveals the political (in the widest sense) forces which shaped it. For example *Thus we should confidently conclude that the Norman was the ruling race, from the noticeable fact that all the words of dignity* such as *state, honour and pre-eminence descend to us from them – e.g. sovereign, sceptre, throne, realm, royalty, homage, prince, duke, count, chancellor, treasurer, palace, castle, dome and a multitude more. And yet* (he proceeded) the great features of nature, sun, moon and stars, earth, water, the great features natural scenery etc ... are of native growth and un-borrowed. As were the instruments used in cultivating the earth – *plough, rake, harrow, wain, sickle, spade –and the names of domestic animals* – matters which the *Norman masters often viewed with opprobrium and contempt.*



❁ ***Splitting of single words into two.*** (From Trench, 1855) *A fruitful source of new* words *is the splitting of single words into two or even more. The impulse and suggestion to this is in general first given to varieties in pronunciation, which come gradually to be represented by varieties in spelling. In the end they come to be regarded as entirely different words* Some examples are:

antic and antique
human and humane
urban and urbane
gentle and genteel
custom and costume
essay and assay
property and propriety
(Several more pages are here given of further examples)

Now if you will follow up these instances, you will find, I believe, that in every case that there has attached to itself a different form of words, a modification of meaning, more or less sensible, that each has won for itself an independent sphere of meaning, in which it, and it only, moves.

Ivor Brown (1891-1974) After graduating from Balliol College, Oxford, with double first degrees in Classics and *Literae Humaniores*. he spent most of his life in writing books. These, amounting to a total of 75, covered a wide range of topics and genres, but he was best known for his books on literature and the English language. He was editor of the *Observer* newspaper from 1942-48, and was appointed professor of drama in the ***Royal Society of Literature***, a fellow of the *Royal Society of Literature*, and was named a CBE in 1957. Some examples of his detailed accounts are:

❁ ***Cloud*** A common climatic word, but no longer employed in its old and beautiful usage to mean ***hill.*** At the southern base of the Pennines, in Cheshire and Derbyshire, it is still so applied, and there you may climb a cloud. That sound magical and lyrical, but, as a matter of fact, cloud is, in origin, the same as ***clod.*** It is a mass. First a clod of earth or rock ... but with stroke of genius or by accident,

those designating clods of air started to use a far more gracious form *cloud*. And what an exquisite world it is, almost creating poetry with no more said!

Like far off mountains turned into clouds

is not one of the best-known lines in a very well-known play of Shakespeare, being most simply descriptive as well as musically perfect. Demetrius, if you are curious, says it to Hermia in *A Midsummer Knight's Dream* (Act IV, Sc 1) When I was a school boy at Cheltenham, we spoke of the highest Cotswold ridge, which rolled smoothly above us, as Cleeve Hill. But since then, one of the senior masters has told me that in his early years it was Cleeve Cloud.

❁ ***Marmalade.*** This word appears to issue from melimelum, the honey apple. The earliest mamalade was usually made of quinces. A seventeenth-century traveller driving from Cambridge to London, took with him macaroons, marmalade (quince) and wine, which suggests a sweet tooth and a sticky meal on the road. The same gentleman's accounts show further fellowship with marmalade and sweet-cakes. Marmalade could be made of every fruit. Cherry marmalade was the old form of our (too rare) cherry jam. In the 18th century a Marmalade Madam was another name for a strumpet. *The London Spy*, who spelled them Marmulets, named them so. The word could also be an adjective and applied to the human heart, signifying soft and sweet. But it has now become limited in range to the conserve made of oranges or lemons. A pity. A marmalade madam, whose heart was by no means marmalade, strongly suggests a relentless daughter of the game with an eye to all her chances. I think the derivation from melimelum must be maintained against the pleasant theory that Mary Queen of Scots, when queasy, used to ask for this kind of confection to relieve her. '*Marie malade*,' her Ladies would say. Hence marmalade. Believe it or not.

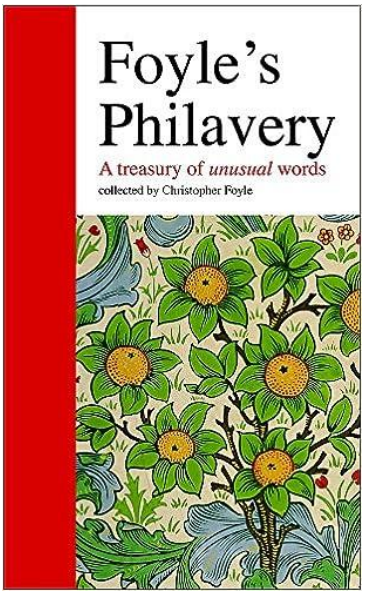
❁ ***Sneap, Snob and Snub***. Few words have stood on their head more completely than snob, which began as a shoemaker, was 'town' as opposed to 'gown' in Cambridge, and so generally proletarian. *A person belonging to the lower ranks of society: having no pretensions to rank of gentility.* But then it became the exact opposite. '*A person admiring, apeing, and pretending to gentility*.' Nobody knows the origin of snob. Everybody, especially the foreigner, likes to use it. '*Très snob'* has endeared itself to the French, even as an expression of praise and delight. Could not a Gent's Suiting be labelled in the window 'Très snob'*?* Words beginning in 'sn' frequently betray contempt. So if snobs are fawning creatures they are exceptions to the rule. Here is a catalogue of proud contemptuous 'sn' s – sneer, snib, snicker, sniff, sneap, snooty, snub, snuffy. Sneap is the most dignified of these, a word of pedigree as well as of pride. Falstaff used sneap for rebuff: *'I will not undergo this sneap without reply*.'

Alison Uttley in her book of north-country's childhood memories writes: *Anyone who had been snubbed or repressed into silence before other people was said to have been 'sneaped' A haughty woman would sneap another, an overbearing man would sneap his wife, the wintry wind sneaped us to silence.'* Snirrup or snurp is (or was) a Northern term for 'turning up the nose.' The following occurs in a Cumbrian ballad:

As seun as she fund I depended on labour
She snirpt up her nose and nae mairleuked at me

Christopher Foyle (1943-2022) Founded in 1903, the famous Foyles bookshop in London's Charing Cross Road was notable for its *Luncheons* to which distinguished speakers were invited from the arts, politics (including prime ministers), and the media etc. But when control of the shop was taken over by Christina Foyle it stagnated, as she refused to install any modern equipment such as electronic tills or calculators: she even banned ordering of books by telephone. After her death in 1999, control passed to her nephew Christopher, who modernised Foyles' shop and practices and restored it to a going concern. He invented the word *philavery* to describe a collection of words chosen simply on the grounds of their aesthetic appeal. *Some of these words appeal because of their aptness, some for their obscurity, some for their euphony, and some for their quirkiness. Collectively, they represent the fruits of a lifetime's reading and are often a delight to word lovers*. Here are some examples:

❁ ***tawdry*** (Adjective) *Showy without taste or worth, gaudily adorned.*
The origin of the word is an interesting one. It's a shortening of 'tawdry 'lace' which was a woman's silk necktie, such as those sold at St Audrey' fair, an annual fair at Ely. Audrey whose proper name was AEthelthryh, was the daughter of the king of East Anglia. She developed a tumour in her throat and believed it was God's punishment for her vanity because she had worn jewelled necklaces. Therefore, a gawdy necktie became known as 'St Audrey's lace' – and thence ''tawdry lace.'



❁ ***brummagem.*** .Noun; 1.(with capital *the city of Birmingham*) 2. *a thing made in Birmingham, especially something showy and worthless*. Adjective: *showy and worthless; sham, counterfeit*.
The variant name for Birmingham dates back to the 17th century, and is the source of the current names for the city (Brum) and its inhabitants (Brummies).*Since that time, the city has been the centre for the production of all metal objects, including swords, cutlery, buckles, buttons, snuff boxes, trinkets and costume jewellery. The sheer quantity of objects produced meant that some were of inferior quality, and this led to 'brummagem' having a meaning of 'counterfeit' or 'worthless. 'This unenviable reputation worried the city's silversmiths, who campaigned for Birmingham to have its own assay office. They were successful, and the Birmingham Assay Office, with its own anchor mark, went a long way to establishing the city as a hugely important centre of fine silverware.*

❁ **valetudinarian** Noun

A person who is constantly anxious about the state of his or her health.

The father of the eponymous *Emma* in Jane Austen's novel is described as follows: *for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years.*

Addendum Brown's reference to *snob* reminds me of my late father, born in 1891, who had a distinctly different vocabulary to extant varieties. He used to refer to his custom of doing a 'bit of *snobbing*,' when he repaired the family's shoes at home, using leather from worn-out belts that drove the heavy rollers which crushed the wheat at the flour mill where he worked. He cut the leather to shape new soles, and I remember a lot of hammering with the shoes mounted on a cast iron last. I still have the latter, and used it myself when fixing new heels (from Woolworths) to our children's shoes – all in the cause of saving money in not patronising the local cobbler.

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2. Food, power, poverty and resilience in the face of global catastrophic risks

Geoff Tansey[2]

We all know the world faces a number of catastrophic risks for humanity. Some are biological, e.g. pandemics or arising from biotechnology leading to accidental release or intentional misuse of harmful organisms. Others arise from human activity pushing us past tipping points that might cause sudden catastrophic ecosystem collapse, runaway climate change, or the development of artificial intelligence and failures in global justice resulting in inequality, corruption, and structural discrimination.

All such risks are linked to what we humans think about how the world works, the stories we accept as shaping our lives, and the paradigms that underline the current structures – economic, social, and political - that have led to these risks arising. A small group I've been connected with, at the Centre for the Study of Existential Risk (CESR) at Cambridge University, is working on a project called *People and Patterns*, which focuses on the dominant narratives in current systems, e.g. energy, food, defence, and technologies, and how they reinforce each other and exacerbate global catastrophic risks.

Ensuring resilience in our food systems is part of a wider challenge because avoiding these risks becoming catastrophic requires a radical rethinking and practice in how humans run this planet. Putting ethical concerns that respect wellbeing, autonomy and fairness for people and all life on the planet must be central to a new paradigm – as narratives and stories.

Food system challenges

Today there are widespread calls for food system transformation because there are many ways in which they fail to ensure everyone is well nourished in ways that enhance sustainability**.** Various FAO reports point out there are huge costs, of at least 10 trillion PPP (purchasing power parity) dollars, not accounted for by the way current economics works. The bulk of these hidden costs relate to *dietary patterns leading to disease and lower labour productivity*, with over 20% due to environmental costs.

Global hunger is still far above pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels and way-off track to achieve the sustainable development goal of zero hunger by 2030. Over 700 million people in the world were *undernourished* in 2022. A further 2.4 billion were *moderately* or *severely* food insecure, while about 3.2 billion people worldwide were unable to afford a healthy diet in 2020. Poor diets are linked to increased cases of overweight and obesity, and chronic diseases like diabetes and coronary heart disease. And choosing what to eat is hugely influenced by the marketing and advertising activities of the food and retail industries.

Food Systems are not simply about farming and farming is not simply, or even mainly, about growing food. People make a living from the land or sea, and what makes sense for them in doing so is not primarily feeding people but the economics and incentives that shape what makes sense for them to make a living. The latter that need to change if people and corporate actors are going to change. For example, most American farmland acreage is dedicated to animal feed and fuel production. Moreover, the acreage of many key food crops in the US including potatoes, sweet potatoes, sweet corn, tomatoes, apples, and oranges has fallen precipitously by up to 90% from peaks in the 20th century.

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[2] This is an edited version of a paper presented at the 4th Congress of the Turkish Agricultural and Food ethics Association. The full version with links to the quoted sources can be found at https://geofftansey.wordpress.com/2023/12/04/reflections-on-food-power-poverty-and-resilience-in-the-face-of-global-catastrophic-risks/

Poverty

Many of the problems people have in our food systems are not to do with food but poverty and how poverty affects people's relationship with food, as we found in *the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty* in the UK, which I chaired. Poverty underlies food insecurity, reduces peoples' freedom of action – choice, autonomy or agency – and constrains their options. Empowering poorer people, communities and nations is an essential element in increasing resilience. But it won't happen on current trends. Inequality is increasing with an increasing amount of wealth in fewer and fewer individual and corporate hands. These hands are increasingly shaping the direction of change and the dominant narrative on how to tackle the challenges.

This narrative is based on using science and technology to increase control and power over food and the environment. It builds on an old fashioned, 19th century, positivist, anthropocentric view of human dominance and control over nature. As our understanding of science and our ability to manipulate the natural world and all living organisms has grown, so too has the power of those who want to benefit from this for private gain rather than public good. A more modern approach to this growing understanding of our biosphere and ecology would not aim to bulldoze through problems by redesigning living organisms, and using blunt instruments like pesticides and fertilizers, and mining the soil, but rather to work with biological and ecological systems in ways that enhance their viability and resilience, maintain biodiversity, promote diverse communities and focus on healthy nutrition outcomes for people and the environment.

Power

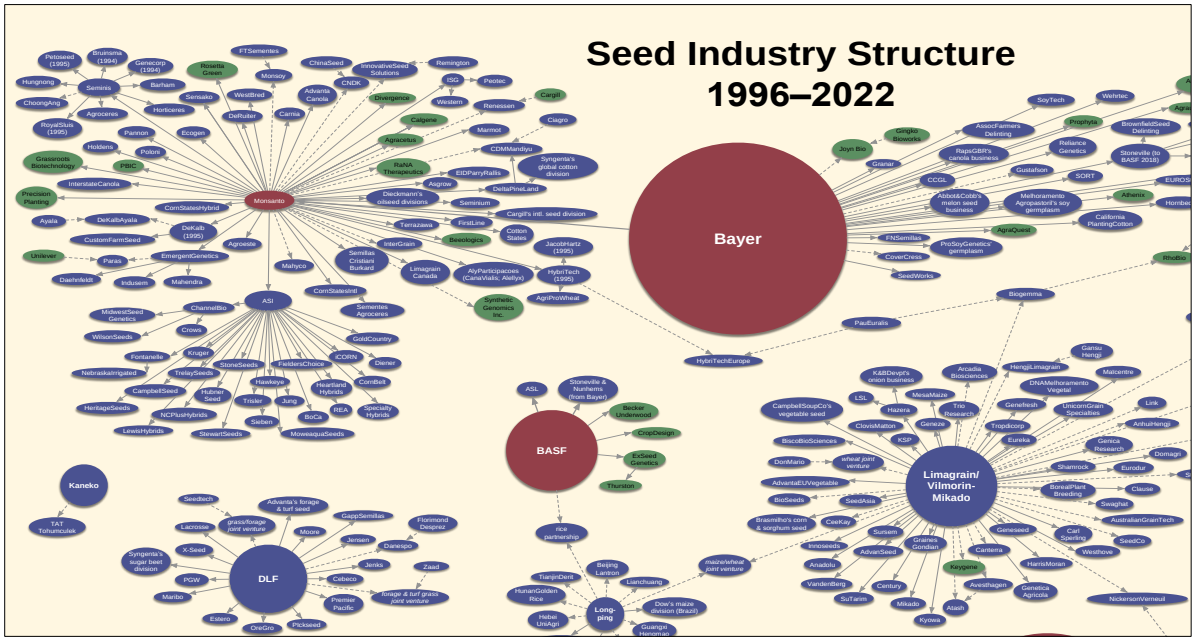
One of the major developments over the past 50 years has been the increasing economic concentration of power across all sectors of the economy into fewer and fewer corporate and individual hands. This is a natural development for the way our current economic system works, in particular with the growing financialisation of the economy. These increasingly powerful private actors influence government policies and international organisations to enact rules and laws that maintain and enhance that power.

An important but relatively neglected area that is enhancing those actors' power, and which limits options for transformative change, was the introduction of more or less global rules on intellectual property. This came about through inclusion of the *Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement* into the World Trade Organisation in 1995. In the 2000s, I worked with negotiators at the WTO and elsewhere on these complex legal fictions, which affect huge areas of life from food, access to medicines and knowledge. These rules on IPRs underpin the growing power and control of large corporate actors who increasingly dominate our food systems – from plant to mouth.

The impact of TRIPS, which allowed the patenting of plants and animals and required some form of plant variety protection in all WTO members, has underpinned the increasing consolidation of the structure of the seed systems. This has been well illustrated by excellent graphics from Michigan State University (see below). These show how, after TRIPS, the initial larger players, in particular former chemical companies, moved progressively into acquiring more and more seed businesses. They then began merging, so that now just three big players dominate.(see figure below, with Bayer largest) The trend developing in the mid 2020s is of growing connections between seeds, inputs and data businesses, which some industry executives say aims to create a world of fully autonomous farming. As a result, many giant companies that previously have not been involved in food production, such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Bosch, now penetrate the agricultural sector, offering farmers a variety of technological tools such as automatic tractors, satellites, and a myriad of apps and software. Consequently, such companies aim to make use of 'big data, artificial intelligence, and automation along the entire commodity chain, from input production and harvesting, packaging, transportation

and consumption'. Moreover, the harnessed agricultural data will allow for higher levels of surveillance and enable agribusiness to tailor advertisement packages to farmers. This has led to concerns that digital agriculture will exacerbate existing inequalities, including between core- and peripheral nations, urban and rural areas, ethnic majorities and minorities, and men and women. In addition, these trends are contributing to lock-ins, or a tendency to make industrial farming systems even more resistant to change—such as by increasing the cost of switching to other data platforms, steering users toward more expensive inputs and larger-scale operations, or steering users away from crops other than commodity corn and soybeans. But this approach is surely based on a false narrative.

While the dominant agribusiness firms and proponents of digital agriculture assert that smart farming and industry consolidation will be needed to increase the amount of food needed to feed a growing world population, this is a smokescreen - the real problem is overproduction due to massive government subsidies (particularly agricultural input industries), which leads to a runaway train of industrial agriculture, not population growth.



Indeed, the model for the future of research and development (R&D) emerging in the food system is where publicly financed research can only be taken up and developed by private companies which use intellectual property to then get all the benefits from them. This skews the direction of R&D into those areas that can be privatised rather than innovations that can be easily and freely shared, e.g. as the aim in much agricultural research and extension aimed at benefitting resource-poor farmers.

This approach is most developed in the pharmaceutical sector with terrible consequences, e.g. vaccines against COVID-19, largely underpinned by publicly financed research. Despite the amazing triumph of developing vaccines against COVID-19 in record time, Big Pharma companies were allowed to hold the patents to them. Arguably, they used this power to set whatever price they could get away with and rationed who got how many doses of the vaccines, and at the same time made massive profits for both the companies and executives. These latter are incentivised by reward systems that put share prices above maximising health outcomes. They also mitigate against working on less profitable areas, such as development of antibiotics and diseases of the poor. It need not be like this. Enabling our food systems to be resilient in the face of global catastrophic risks requires reforming the economic system in which it is embedded, challenging the power relations shaping the

direction of change, and creating a form of global governance based on the common good. This is clearly a challenging and long term, but urgent, project.

The transformation needed does not look likely to come from the *top down*. Rather a whole host of *bottom-up* actions are beginning which may help it come about. Neither in the pharmaceutical sector nor food sector is the domination of the big corporations and powers going unopposed. Alternative approaches are being tried to avoid dependence, create greater autonomy and spread the results of research more fairly. Just as the problems arising from the monopolist control of medicines by Big Pharma is leading many countries in the South to create their own industries and vaccine production capacities, so too is the current dominance of Big Food interests leading to push back in the Global South, particularly from farmers and peasants organisations. Dozens of peasant and indigenous organisations have come together in a *Global People's Caravan* for Food, Land, and Climate Justice (GPC) to challenge what they see as the way the UN Food Systems-COP28 agenda is being dominated by *big transnational corporations that cover every step of the agriculture supply chain, from production to consumption and finance.* Others are pioneering open source and participatory plant breeding and developing new ways of doing business. These are just a few of those working on more-decentralised, locally-led activities to enable more just and effective change.

I have what might be called the *dung heap* view of power. In a huge great pile gathered together, dung stinks. When it's spread out it can fertilise. If it's not gathered together in the first place but diverse communities and approaches are allowed to blossom and knowledge, which is not diminished in the sharing of it, is distributed widely - that's even better. If the need in the face of rapid climate change is to share knowledge and best practice to enable adaptation and mitigation to occur, then the rules on monopoly privileges need changing as one element in enabling knowledge sharing and resilience.

What's the story I hope today's babies will be able to tell their grandchildren in 70 years time? It's how in the face of global catastrophic risks, seeing the dangers of continuing to run the world in the way we humans had, people from all countries began to change to see themselves as part of a common humanity. With more in common than they had historically been told divided them – religion, culture, nationality – they began to transcend the traps of history. There was so much to celebrate, such as the ways different peoples had found to manage their environments over millennia, to create many and varied cuisines based on what they could produce there, and now were sharing around the world. That the fantastic possibilities for creating a better world for all using our great scientific understanding, technological capacities and accumulated traditional and indigenous knowledge had been used for sharing, not hoarding behind legal fictions. This enabled humanity to adapt to the changes that human activities had, to-date, been causing – so that humanity rose to this, the biggest challenge humans had ever faced, to let go of the things that had divided us and share out the wealth of the planet in order that all might live well and sustainably

*G**eoff Tansey*** has worked on food issues since the mid 1970s. He curates the open education resource the *Food Systems Academy*, *and* has over 150 interviews on *his blog* for the FSA as well as lots of material on his own website.

3. Questions concerning *Democracy*

Is it then a truth so universally acknowledged that a pure democracy is the only form into which human society can be thrown, that a man is not permitted to hesitate about its merits without suspicion of being a friend to tyranny. *Edmund Burke (1790)*

is liberal democracy prey to serious contradictions, contradictions so serious that they will eventually undermine it as a political system ? *F Fukuyama (1992)*

The presumption that democracy is the soundest, fairest and most efficient form of government is one which many of us in the West apparently feel little reason to question. Grudgingly, some may admit that they believe it is flawed – but even so, consider other systems a lot worse. We may not like the outcome of elections, but most accept that periodically totting up votes is the fairest way to elect our political decision-makers. But the two opinions cited above – expressed 200 years apart – surely give cause to review our presumptions – and with even more justification in view of recent developments.

I assume it's widely agreed that sound governance aims to represent the general will of the electorate to achieve acceptable living conditions for all in terms of safety, health and freedom of beliefs. Ideally, this entails appointing people of integrity and competence (e.g. MPs) charged with the duty to advance the views of their electorates in parliamentary debates, with a view to supporting appropriate legislation. But to accomplish this objective *fairly* depends on several, overlapping, procedural arrangements. ***Here, I express some personal opinions on these to stimulate reflection.***

Suffrage refers to the right to vote, e.g. on a political decision. For example, for general elections the following are not allowed to vote: i) *members of the House of Lords; ii) anyone convicted of a crime who is serving their sentence in prison, regardless of the severity of the crime; iii) anyone found guilty, within the previous 5 years, of corruption or illegal practices in connection with an election; iv) children below a certified age (18 in England).* The criteria are arbitrary, and often based on political opportunism. ***An enquiry should be set up into the justice of the current arrangements.***

Advertising Electors who take voting seriously seek out information to inform their judgments from a wide range of trustworthy sources e.g. BBC programmes, serious newspapers and public debates. But it is evident that many people are persuaded by forms of advertising, now including **deep fake using AI**, that often aim to distort the voting system or fuel prejudice against social diversity or religious practices. Vast amounts of money are spent on such propaganda which often makes scurrilous insinuations that are frequently amplified by rapid dissemination via the so-called 'social media.'
There is a strong case for regulating the money spent on advertising and banning false claims.

Competence *One man (and woman) one vote'* sounds fair and commendable. But it is obvious that some electors reach their decisions after careful, conscientious deliberation, whereas others do so on a whim and/or spurious grounds. Does that matter? The consequences are almost certain to be more serious in a 'first past the post' system, where 'the winner takes all.' Respect for fairness demands adoption of some form of proportional representation. Political judgments (that may affect the health of the planet and human survival) are usually a lot more difficult than performing brain surgery. But we entrust the former to politicians, usually with very little understanding of the underlying science, while restricting the latter to those with years of training. ***The questions of who is qualified to vote and to what extent their opinions are respected need to be considered by an independent enquiry.***

BM

4. Blinded by Lies

a book review by Penny Young

Many years ago I went to a talk in Newark Library given by a Nicola Beauman, who had set up a publishing company called Persephone Books, now widely sold in bookshops but at the time only available by mail order. At the end of the talk my friends and I eagerly signed up to go on her mailing list – since when I have been an ardent fan of Persephone. They publish four books each year, chiefly by long-neglected and out-of-print authors and mainly by women though not exclusively so – among their male authors are Leonard Woolf, Duff Cooper, R.C. Sherriff, Wilkie Collins. To those who regularly order books they send a biannual magazine with reviews, articles and details of their literary events. These magazines are works of art in themselves, and worth buying the books for (to remain on the mailing list). So far Persephone have published 149 books in their distinctive and elegant dove-grey covers. I'm sure many of Ben's readers will be familiar with them.

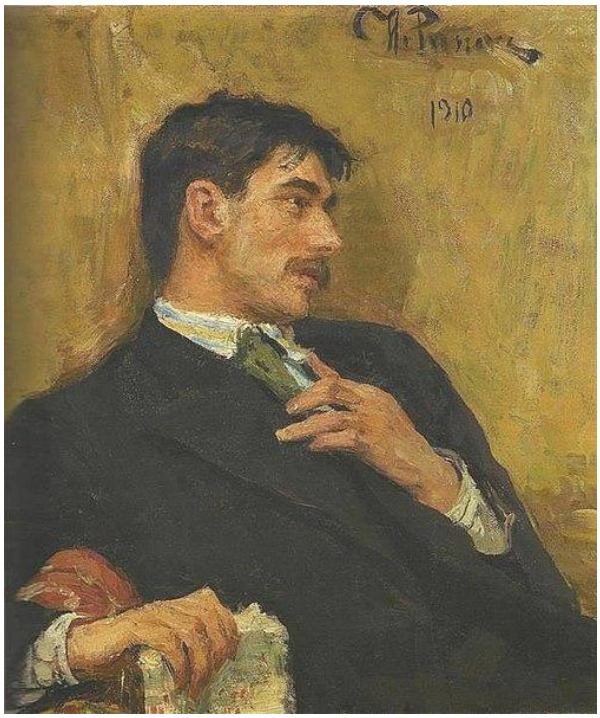
One of their latest books I've just been reading is *Sofia Petrovna*, by Lydia Chukovskaya. Born in 1907 in Helsinki, Finland – then part of the Russian Empire – she was brought up in St Petersburg. Her father was the celebrated poet and children's writer Kornei Chukovsky, and she later married the physicist Matvei Bronstein (who was executed in 1937). She was also a close friend of the poet Anna Akhmatova, and devoted much of her life to defending dissidents such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov. She was a prolific writer whose writings reflect the human cost of Soviet repression.

Sofia Petrovna is set in 1937 and written as a witness to everyday life for the mass of ordinary people during Stalin's Purges: the pointlessness, the brutality and inhumanity they had to endure. Sofia is a young mother whose husband, a doctor, had died, and the house they had lived in, in Leningrad, has been divided up so that all the rooms are occupied by different families, with a communal kitchen and bathroom; Sofia and her son Kolya are reduced to living in one room. Following the death of her husband Sofia takes a typing course and finds a job in a large printing firm, which she loves; she works hard, is efficient and good at her job, gaining promotion. Kolya turns out to be extremely clever and interested in engineering. He and his school friend Alik are given jobs in Sverdlovsk and do well, Kolya winning a national award for a cog-wheel invention. Both Sofia and Kolya are loyal Soviet citizens and signed-up Party members; they love their country and they are people for whom the Party and Comrade Stalin can do no wrong: do they not have the people's best interests at heart?

So far, so everyday. But Sofia's circumstances change, insidiously. First, the director of the printing firm is fired. He is falsely accused of being a 'wrecker', i.e. an anti-Soviet person infiltrating a company or organisation in order to undermine its work and its Soviet ideals. Next to be sacked is his former secretary; then one of the typists, Natasha – a hard and loyal worker who has made a simple

typing error, typing ‘Rad Army’ instead of ‘Red Army’, which, in the paranoid mind of thoscharge translates as ‘Rat Army’, a gross slur on their beloved country. Next is Sofia herself for trying to vindicate her friend. The purging machinery is in full force. People are guilty by association. Erstwhile friends dare not be seen together. Fear and suspicion are now the atmosphere in which everybody lives. An atmosphere where lies and petty vengeances thrive.

Sofia and Natasha are now unemployable, and plunged into poverty. Then Sofia hears that Kolya has been arrested, but no further information is available. She now has to join the long queues of women – wives, daughters, mothers – whose men folk have been arrested and sent to distant labour camps. Day after day they queue for hours, sometimes for whole days or more, waiting to see the officials in charge of their case, but when they finally reach the right office very little information is given them and they are dealt with summarily. Trying to argue your son’s case could get you arrested yourself.



Sofia knows her own son; she knows he could never be guilty of the terrorist activities he has apparently confessed to (under torture). As the months go by, Sofia seesaws in her mind between two things which to her are incomprehensible: Kolya must be guilty otherwise he would not have been arrested; but, no, Kolya must be innocent – he *is* innocent – so how could he be treated in this cruel and unjustifiable way by the people she had always trusted in. Neither proposition was acceptable to her mind. Not so long before she had said to an old friend in similar circumstances, ‘Since [your son] is not guilty, why, everything will be all right. In our country nothing can happen to a decent and honest person. It’s simply a misunderstanding. Don’t be downhearted, my dear . . .’ Sofia never sees her son again.

Reading this, you may think the book sounds grim – and you’d be right. And you may also think, well that was in another country, under a different regime, and a long time ago. What I found disturbing was the portrayal of how insidiously and by such small steps a people can change. How quickly paranoid thinking becomes normality. How truth becomes buried by fake news, and how justice and rationality can easily be subverted. It took a very few steps for Sofia to find herself threatened and under suspicion, separated both from those she loved and from her own sanity. It happens. It can happen before we know it.

At the front of the book, Lydia Chukovskaya includes a quotation from Leo Tolstoy: ‘The hero of my story, whom I love with all my heart, whom I have tried to portray in all his beauty, and who was, is and will forever be beautiful is – Truth.’

I am most grateful to Penny Young for producing another of her typically enlightening – and stirring – reviews. Penny is the former editor of 'Folio', the quarterly arts magazine produced in Southwell, and a regular contributor to the Gladstone Review.

5 Added value – and delight

There is little doubt that however entertaining, enlightening or engaging a book's contents may be its appreciation is usually enhanced if it is bound beautifully in leather and embossed with a memorable image. These covers of books in my personal library (although there are some similarly bound books for sale in the book room) were all prizes for academic achievement awarded by secondary schools.

Working from left to right and from top to bottom, the following notes add to their interest.

- The book (*Tales from Shakespeare*) bearing the words 'Girls Public Day School Company - Limited' (now Nottingham High School for Girls) was awarded to Winifred Cawse for '*History and Object Lesson*' in 1888.

- *Dura Virum NuTrix*, the motto of Sedbergh public school, which rather enigmatically is translated from the Latin as '*a hard nurse of men,'* is on the front of the *Oxford Book of Latin Verse* awarded to R J StC Harlow for Classics in the Michaelmass term (1981).

- *The Odessey of Homer* (1887) bears the following title around the central figure '*Libere Schole Edward VI Brimicham Sigilvum*.' No name of a recipient is cited.
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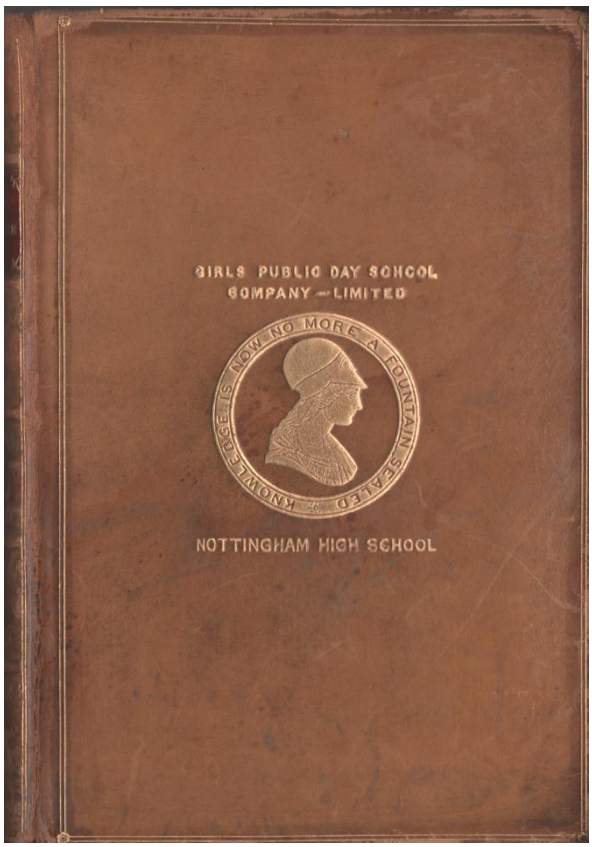
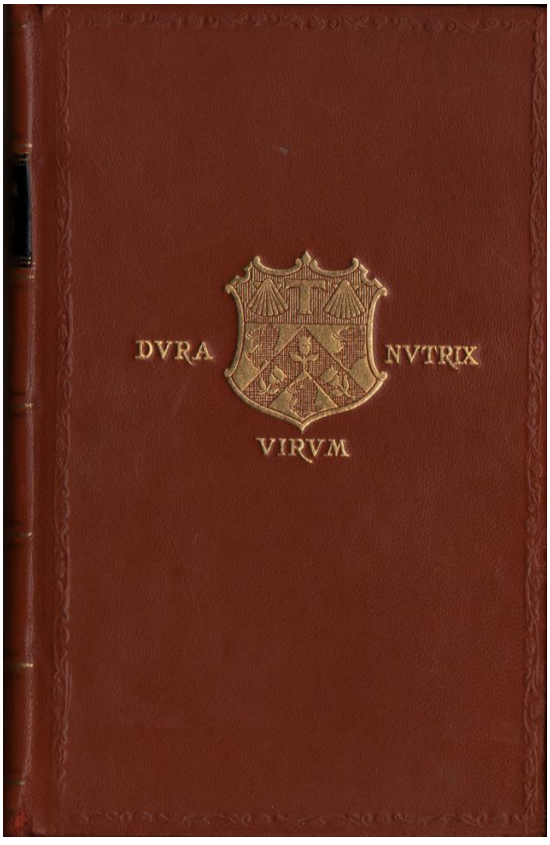
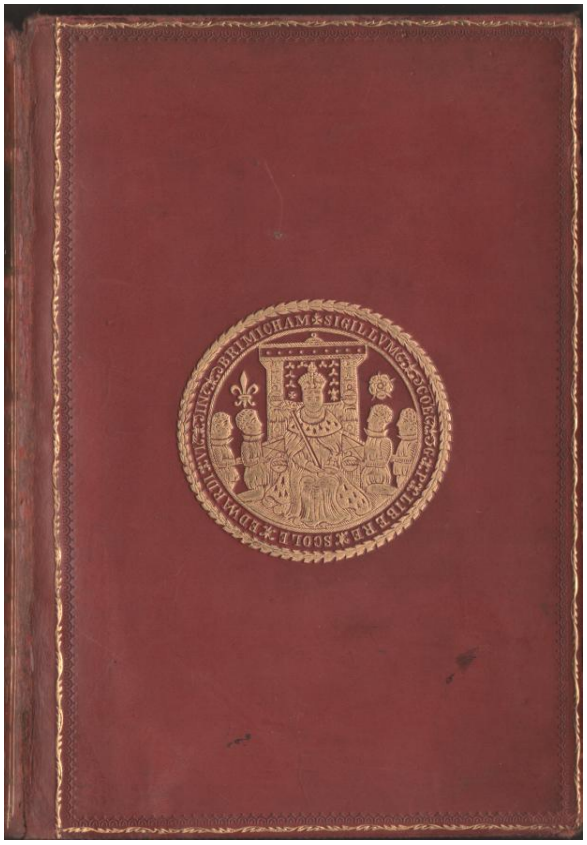
- Boswell's *The Life of Samuel Johnson LLD* bears the words *Shepton Mallet Grammar School founded 1627,* but again no recipient of the prize is mentioned.

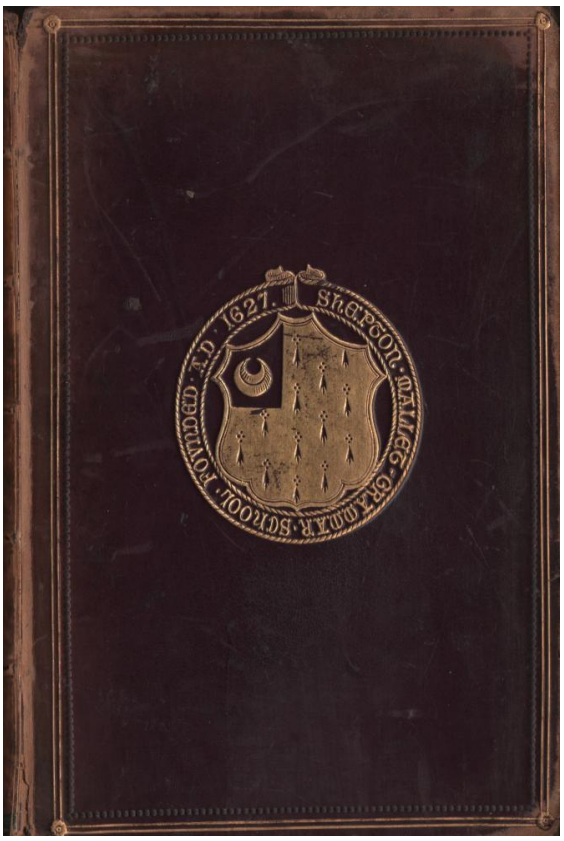
- J B Hardcastle, of the Lower IV, Rydal Mount School Colwyn Bay, was awarded this book on astronomy (*Starland*) for *Dux* (presumably, for skills of *leadership*) in 1893.

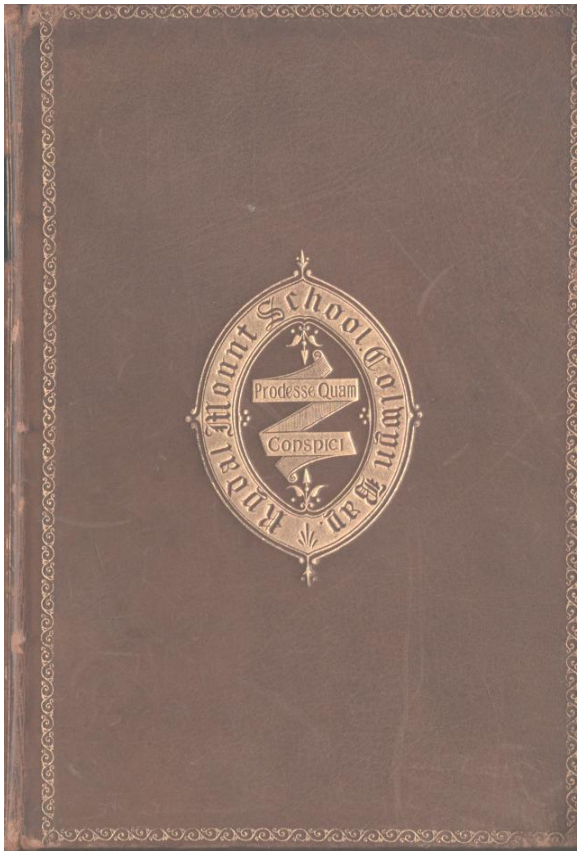
- White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1901) bears the emblem of Hele's School Exeter. Again, no recipient is mentioned: perhaps names have been carefully removed by previous owners.

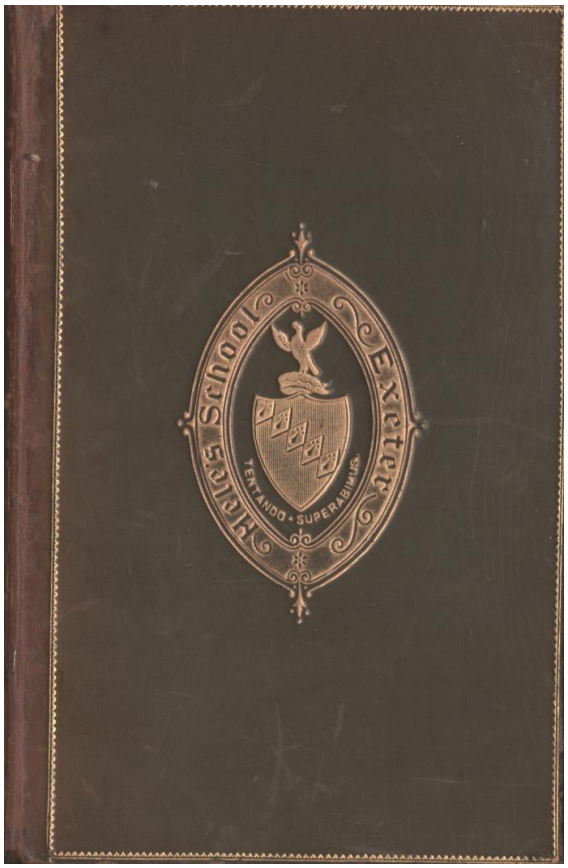












What a wealth of worthy books! BM

6. A selection of forty recent book sales

While I don't currently publish a full catalogue, this list provides a rough idea of the types of books recently sold: the majority are hardbacks and several are antiquarian. But there are fashions in books, and some subjects don't feature in this list, despite extensive stocks held.

Adam Smith (2010) ***The Wealth of Nations*** (Capstone)
J Morley (1912) ***Life of Gladstone*** (1912) in 3 volumes. (Macmillan)
Arthur Mee (1974) ***Norfolk*** (Hodder & Stoughton: in King's England series)
M P Lefevre (1896) ***Freedom of Land***. (Macmillan)
Rowan Williams (2008) ***Dostoyevsky:language, truth and logic*** (Baylor UP)
R Browning (1888) ***Selected Poems:1812-1887*** (Macmillan)
Aristotle (1949) ***Poetics and Rhetoric*** (Dent: Everyman series)
W J Gordon (1896) ***Butterflies and Moths*** (colour illus) (J Day)
C Henry-Warren (1948) ***English Cottages & Farmhouses*** (Collins: Britain in Pictures series)
Ezra Pound (1971) ***Collected Shorter Poems*** (Macmillan)
D J Dallin (1946) ***The Big Three: USA, UK & Russia*** (Allen and Unwin)
Laurence Sterne (1956) ***Sentimental travels through France and Italy*** (Folio)
Emily Dickenson (1988) ***A Murmur in the Trees*** (poems)
R C K Ensor (1946) ***England 1870-1914*** (Oxford UP)
Seamus Heaney (1967) ***Selected Poems*** (Macmillan)
Donald Cupitt (1997) ***After God: the future of religion*** (Weidenfeld and Nicolson)
Aristotle (1905) ***Politics*** (Dent: Everyman series)
L F Salzman (1944) ***English Life in the Middle Ages*** (Oxford UP)
Marcus Aurelius (1920) ***Meditations*** (Routledge)
Mary Cadogan [Richmal Crompton)] (1968): ***Just William*** (Hamlyn)
George Orwell (1944) ***The English People*** (Collins: Britain in Pictures series)
Seamus Heaney (1966) ***District and Circle*** (poetry) (Faber)
K Coats & J Silburn (1973) ***Poverty, the Forgotten Englishmen*** [re Nottingham] (Penguin)
CWS (1914) ***Annual Reports of the Cooperative Wholesale Society***(CWS)
Topham & Hough (1948) ***The Cooperative Movement in Britain***
Kate Greenaway (1987) ***Mother Goose Nursery Rhymes*** (Chancellor)
T S Eliot (1943) ***Old Possums Book of Practical Cats*** (colour ills by N. Bentley) (Faber)
Thomas Hobbes (1943***) Leviathan*** (Oxford UP)
Ted Honderich (ed) (1995) ***Oxford Companion to Philosophy*** (Oxford UP)
Trevor Royle (2011) ***National Service: the best years of their lives*** (with CD) (A Deutsch)
Benjamin Jowett (1905) ***Four Socratic Dialogues*** (Oxford UP)
Lady Wentworth (1944) ***Horses of Britain*** (Collins: Britain in Pictures series)
Mao Tse Tung (1972) ***Red Book*** (quotes) (Peking publishers)
N Compton (2016) ***The Shipping Forecast*** (Ebury)
Rose Macaulay (1945) ***Life among the English*** (Collins: Britain in Pictures series)
Charles Dickens (1953) ***Pickwick Papers*** (Nelson)
Brady & Pottle (1958) ***Boswell in search of a Wife*** (Reprint Society)
Peter Ackroyd ((2011) ***London Under: the secret history beneath the streets*** (Knopf-Doubleday)
A J Thomson (1896) ***Natural History of the Year*** (Pilgrim Press)
Robert Louis Stevenson (2008) ***A Child's Garden of Verses*** (Random House)

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7. Poems written about 45 years ago

As a young scientist at a biological research institute, there was plenty of time for reflection. These were times when computers had very limited capacity and most data were assembled by laborious manual procedures. So breaks from tedium allowed the mind to stray into questions of deeper significance.

Two of these poems suggest doubts about the 'point of it all,' and probably presaged my subsequent move into the field of bioethics – for which my experience as a lab-coated scientist was probably invaluable.

But the death of my mother surely contributed to the prevailing gloom. I have a notion that poetry is often at its most potent when the writer is at their most vulnerable.

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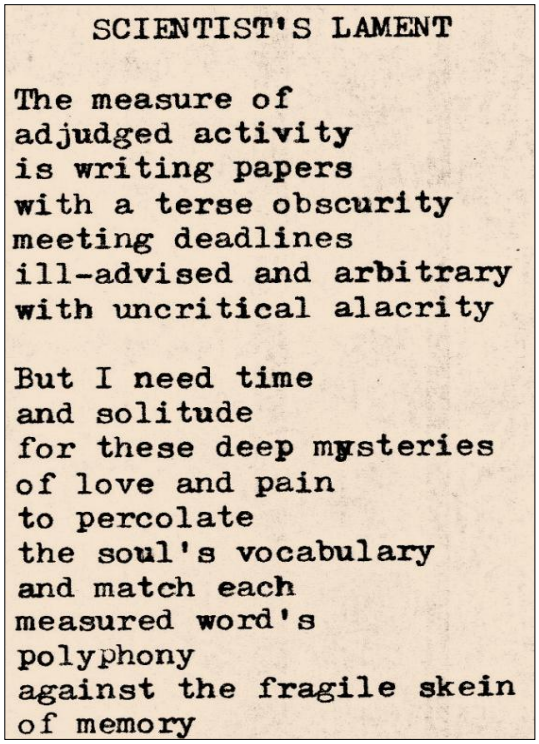

SCIENTIST'S LAMENT

The measure of
adjudged activity
is writing papers
with a terse obscurity
meeting deadlines
ill-advised and arbitrary
with uncritical alacrity

But I need time
and solitude
for these deep mysteries
of love and pain
to percolate
the soul's vocabulary
and match each
measured word's
polyphony
against the fragile skein
of memory

In The Office: 12th September 1980

The sun blinds flap in the breeze
the light flickers over the pages
and over my hunched frame
in this airy cell
the hum of the ventilation system
dulls extraneous sounds
isolating me, as much as the walls do
from the outer world

And behind my constricted eyes
the forehead sunk in my hand's palm
beyond taught fingers
gripping my pen
a bemused 'I'
befuddled by the dancing lights
beneath the eyelids
struggles to perceive the point

The point
to which all this paper,
books, box files, rubber stamps,
in/out trays, stapling machines
slide rules, paper clips, tobacco ash
are as irrelevant as
the ragged edge of my beard's shadow
on a printed page.

Mother: 26th November 1978

In a grey eye
clouded like a distant memory
a transitory recognition of my features
startles her
until, reassured, a child-like smile
gathers at the corners of her mouth

A smile, summoned seemingly effortlessly
over a life's span
from my childhood world
where a pale yellow sky
suffuses memory's images

And then again, the studied look
emanating from the depths of
our common past
partly chiding, partly forgiving
but for that briefest moment
wholly at peace.

A visit to my mother in a Birmingham hospital after she had suffered a brain haemorrhage.

She died soon after