

THE NEW GLADSTONE REVIEW

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

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1. Introduction

This third issue of the New Review aims to provide interesting and stimulating comment on a range of literary and cultural issues. These refer to two book reviews: one is a social history that is highly relevant to events occurring in 19th century East Midlands, while the other advances a revolutionary theory on the nature of the Universe. There are also reflections on the literary influence of a leading pre-war author, two poems I that wrote about forty years ago, an article on the amusing (but politically-charged) illustrations of a Victorian illustrator; and a couple of news items.

I am most grateful to Stephen Wade for his sensitive article on Christopher Isherwood, which provides rare insights into the life and character of someone many will have heard of, but are most probably unaware of his wider character. In contrast to the last issue, for which three guests contributed material, Stephen is the only guest contributor to this, a situation which I hope can be improved on for the next (December) issue. If you would like to submit a book review, literary reflection, poetry or relevant news item, I should be very pleased to consider it for inclusion.

Any feedback, even if not intended for inclusion in the journal, would be most welcome. Maintaining an interest in traditional books in the face of the digital onslaught - in my case, largely through Gladstone Books and this *e-journal*, is something I feel sure must also be a high priority for others; and if your contributions can support that objective, in however small a way, they may make a difference in promoting our shared concerns. But the reality is that this e- journal's future will be highly questionable if it simply hasn't enough appreciative readers to justify the effort involved.

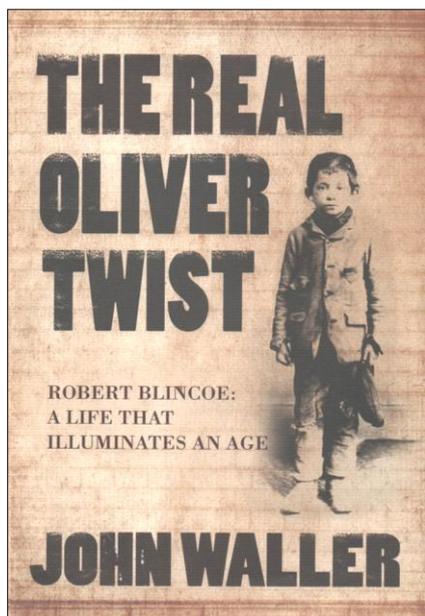
PLEASE NOTE

I must apologise for the mistake in the postcode previously shown on the website –which has been now been corrected to LN1 3AS. I am most grateful to the person who pointed this out. It will also be corrected on the business cards at the next printing.

2. From Fact to Fiction?

A review of *The Real Oliver Twist* by J Waller (Icon Books, 2005)

As an inveterate book browser, I am still, and perhaps increasingly, prone to experiencing the thrill of serendipitous discoveries. A recent case in point concerns a book that provides an absorbing account of an aspect of local social history, while at the same time being a serious work of scholarly research. Remarkably, I found it in a local charity bookshop (where its topical interest had clearly not been appreciated) priced at a mere £1.50. Admittedly, a rather drab 500 page tome with the title '*The Real Oliver Twist*' might deter most people from even taking it off the shelf. But genuine browsers (now a



very rare breed) do not confine their attention to brief scans of the shelves for books by known authors: they know the rich rewards of browsing may take time.

It is the claim of the author, an Australian academic, that there are reasonable grounds for believing that Dickens based *Oliver Twist* on the real-life account of an orphaned boy, Robert Blincoe. In 1799, at the age of seven, he was taken from the St Pancras Workhouse in London to become 'an apprentice' at the cotton mill at Lowdham (about 10 miles east of Nottingham), where he and other children were subjected to a brutal regime of onerous work and savage discipline.

Of course, as history 'is written by the victors' there are very few first-hand accounts of what life was like for the (largely illiterate) underclass in 19th century British society. But Blincoe's account was later recorded in the form of a *Memoir*,

having been narrated to a journalist called John Brown.

Blincoe's first job had been as a 'mule scavenger', picking up loose cotton that fell to the floor from the machines so that it could be passed through them again. "*Pulling flue from nose and mouth, and crouching low to avoid the machinery's fast-moving parts, he formed piles of waste cotton ...and was made nauseous and utterly exhausted from the exertions of his typical 14 hour-day.*"¹ Any slacking was punished by frequent use of the whip.

In the recent past, some historians have questioned the authenticity of Brown's account, arguing that, given the long hours, bullying and poor diets, which were the norm in first-generation textile mills, in the words of one of them,² "Brown was "a gullible sensationalist, whose statements must be treated with the utmost caution." But Waller's scrupulous research led him to state that "*hell-bent on exculpating the pioneer cotton-, flax and wool-spinners, from any slight or suspicion, (such authors) missed what is perhaps most singular and impressive about the Memoir, namely, the wealth of corroborative evidence from other sources*"³

It is true to say that there are elements of dramatisation in Waller's book, but he backs up the story line with sound independent accounts, such as those published in government inquiries, parish

¹ J Waller(2005) Italicised quotations are from the book here reviewed

² S D Chapman(1967) *The Early Factory Masters* (David and Charles) pp. 208-9

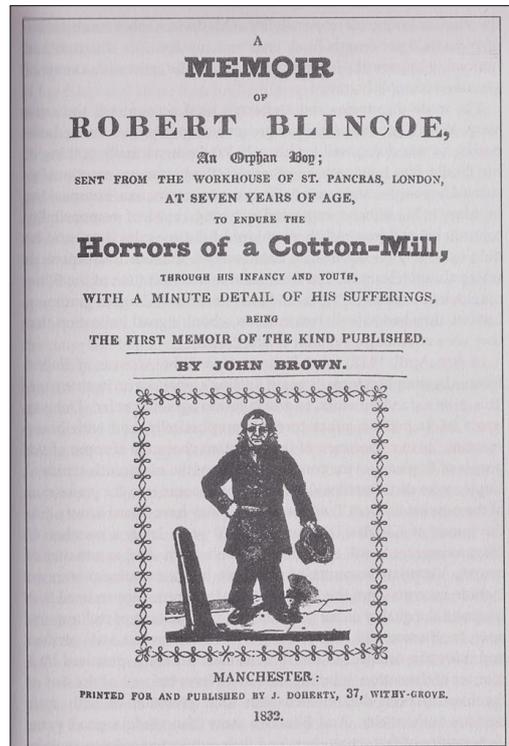
³ Waller (2005) p. 382

records, and the memoirs of other workers, as well as the secondary literature on English working life – and he makes it quite clear when he is resorting to speculation.

Following four years at Lowdham (during which Blincoe attempted to escape, but got no further than Burton Joyce), he was moved in 1803 to a mill at Litton in Derbyshire, which was apparently run on even more brutal lines. Here he struggled to survive and maintain some sense of dignity; and tried to contact a local magistrate at Litton. But, as in many similar workplaces, Peel's *Health and Morals of Apprentices Act* of 1802 had little effect. Completing his apprenticeship meant he could aim to earn a wage, and he began as a journeyman spinner on just 4 shillings and 6 pence per week.

As he reached adulthood, Blincoe became politically active, especially after moving to Manchester, and in particular was involved in the national campaign to limit the hours of child labour, which was led by Richard Carlile, perhaps the best-known of London's 'radical publishers.' Waller uses these aspects of Blincoe's involvement as a basis for describing the agitation behind the 1823 *Reform Bill*, the *short time* campaign and other aspects of factory reform.

In fact, it was Carlile who first published the *Memoir* in serialised form in his radical newspaper *The Lion* in 1828, Brown himself having earlier committed suicide. On learning of this, Blincoe complained to Carlile that his permission had not been sought for publication – which led, after some corrections to the text, to its publication as the pamphlet shown here in 1832. Through this, Blincoe achieved a measure of fame, as the biography was often read out to working class men in public houses.



When Blincoe finished his 'apprenticeship', he struggled to find work as a spinner, but then did a stint in debtors' prison following a business failure. But by dint of hard work he subsequently set up his own business as a dealer in cotton wastes, securing private lodgings and renting warehouse space. By 1819, having become an eminently 'eligible bachelor,' he married a Martha Simpson, their standard of literacy being revealed by his signing the register 'Robert Blinkhome' and she marking it with an 'X'. His elevation from ignominy to 'respectability' is perhaps no more evident than by the fact that the marriage took place in Manchester Cathedral, in a service conducted by the Reverend Joshua Banks, who although himself born in poverty, had become an Oxford graduate. Undoubtedly showing uncommon drive and tenacity, Blincoe had escaped from a harsh orphaned childhood in slave labour to reach a comfortable domestic life, with a settled family and a respectable position in society.

The image shown here, taken when in his 50s, is the only known photograph of him in existence.

Robert and Martha had three children, one of whom, Robert junior, achieved distinction beyond anything to be expected from his disadvantaged background. Although not then carrying the social status attached to the leading, boarding ‘public schools’ (but, of course actually ‘private’ schools) Manchester Grammar School aimed, in the words of its founder, to ‘*convert the pregnant wit of Lancashire’s unruly lower and middle orders into ‘virtue, cunning, erudition, literature and good manners.’*’⁴ It was here that Robert senior was able to secure a place for Robert junior, at a time when the school had become a *bastion of Toryism* which found itself *uncomfortably out of place in the heartland of the new industrial economy.*”

This resulted in a bitter rivalry between those school governors who wanted to promote the elite form of education for Oxbridge entrance and those wishing to provide a more utilitarian curriculum for boys of lower middle class background destined for apprenticeships. In 1844, just two students went from Manchester Grammar School to university and, remarkably, given this contentious environment, one of them, who was deemed fit to attend Cambridge University (at Queens College) and to be awarded the school’s scholarship, was Robert Blincoe junior.

At Cambridge, Robert “*was to embrace a gentleman’s calling, and over the next 4 years rubbed shoulders with future prime ministers, statesmen, archbishops and leading scientific thinkers.*” But Cambridge was then a class-ridden society, where students from lower social strata (so called ‘sizar’) were conscious of their inferior status. But, demonstrating a high degree of scholarship, he received his BA in 1848 and took holy orders.

As a curate, in Wolverhampton and London and then a vicar in Cheshire, he was praised for his personal warmth and preaching skills. Indeed, in 1855 an artist was commissioned to produce a lithographic portrait of this ‘*able, energetic and accomplished divine*’ for the *Illustrated London News*, signed copies of which sold at 12 shillings and 6 pence! His parents’ pride was immense.



It is, of course, a matter of conjecture as to whether, or to what extent, Dickens relied on Blincoe’s *Memoir* in writing *Oliver Twist*. But there is no doubt that in a very real sense the factual account supplied by John Brown gave added credibility to Dickens’ novel.

Footnote: The current appearance of Lowdham Mill, (above), now more accurately described as located in the parish of Gonalston, gives little hint of the practices performed there over 200 hundred years ago that led to its justifiable notoriety. Now a private residence, its imposing size and ivy-clad walls suggest only an aura of peace and distinction.

But, regrettably, the practice of slavery, that some might have imagined has now been consigned to history is far from extinct. Thus, the website **Anti-Slavery** (<https://www.antislavery.org/slavery-today/modern-slavery/>) lists modern forms of slavery, as follows: ***forced labour; debt bondage; human trafficking; descent-based slavery; child slavery and forced and early marriage*** – and estimates the total number of people enslaved at over 40 million.

Ben Mepham

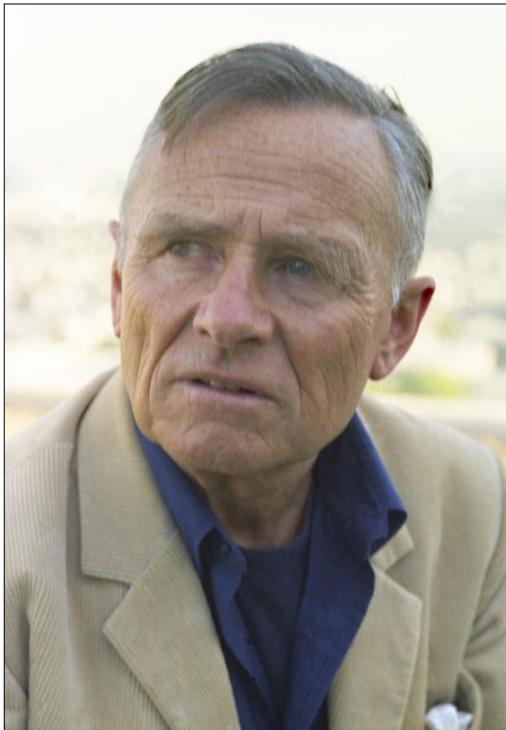
⁴ Waller (2005) pp. 357 -359 and 366.

3. The Camera that was Isherwood

by Stephen Wade

My relationship with the life and works of Christopher Isherwood began when I was a student in Wales, back in 1972. I had never even heard of him at that time, and one day a fellow student started talking about how he had read *Mr Norris Changes Trains* right through, at one sitting, engrossed in it. I took the recommendation, and since then, Isherwood has been one of the few, select writers I go back to, again and again, along with James Hanley and R.L.Stevenson.

I wrote my doctoral thesis on his work, and over the years I have written two short student guides to his work. I constantly think of his approach to fiction – which, of course, he learned from E M Forster and from European influences because it was as a transient writer in working-class Berlin in the years of Hitler's rise to power that he made his first impact on the British literary scene.



This came first of all through John Lehmann and his *Penguin New Writing*. These wonderful anthologies, in proper paperback format, reflected the prose and poetry of the war years and after. Isherwood was a regular contributor, and his Berlin stories really made his name.

Today, Berlin is very much back in the limelight, thanks to the popularity of Hans Fallada, and also to the late Philip Kerr, whose *Bernie Gunther* books are utterly wonderful. There is even a renewed interest in that unique and innovative work *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Alfred Doblin, published initially not long before Isherwood and Stephen Spender descended on the city.

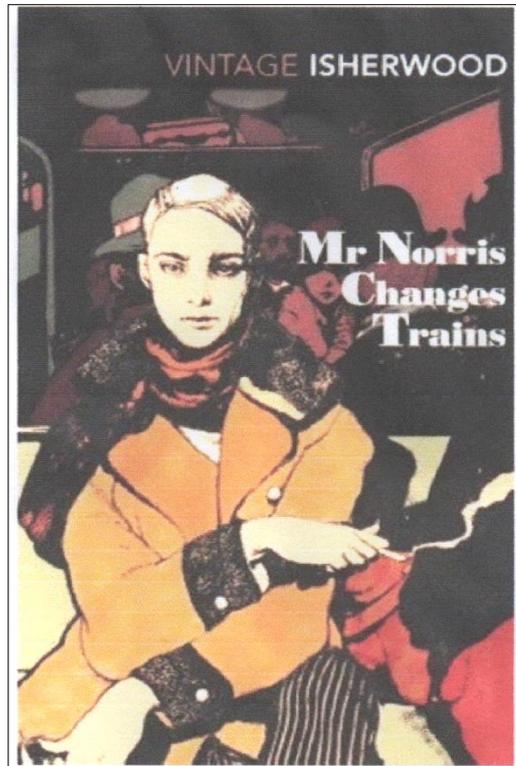
Later, after becoming an American citizen and settling in the States, Isherwood found contentment in his loving relationship with Don Bachardy, the artist, and in his last decades, Isherwood became defined by his voluminous journals and his memoirs, as much as by Berlin.

I was always attracted to both phases of his life because, basically, the attraction for me is in his narrative voice, and the imprint of a specific personality behind everything he ever wrote. The first appeal, for me, was the realisation that one factor in his escape from English mores and to the suburbia of his mother's life had been his homosexuality. My literary education had never included any of the elements we take for granted today in reading for an English degree. Isherwood's books opened up a different world to me – and more profoundly – a richly empathic perspective, something that gave a fresh horizon to my reading and thinking.

His famous statement, which is always quoted in connection with his art, is ‘*I am a camera*’ By this he meant that he was the impassive observer looking at the world around him and turning the subjects into words, as a camera turns the scene before it into an image. Clearly, there was more to his art than that. But he began writing in an age of documentary, and writers c. 1930 were discovering alien and alluring cultures. It was a great age of travel and of travel-writing. He and W H Auden went to the Far East to cover the Chine-Manchuria War, and Isherwood used the same mix of material in that book, *Journey to a War*, as he did in his fiction.

His outstanding skill was to bring the reader into a close position, inviting him or her to share in the unfolding story, without any sustained imagery or fine style. In the 30s, there was a sense that ‘fine style’ was perhaps not the way forward. The Welsh poet, Idris Davies, writing at this time, said, ‘Don’t ask me for fine style – I don’t sell it.’

It could be argued that to enjoy Isherwood’s later writing one has to invest time and interest in the ongoing enterprise that was Christopher himself, the all-embracing consciousness at the core of the books. But the most marked feature of all his writing since about 1960 was his religious quest; this led eventually to his embracing the lifestyle and discipline of Vedanta. Yes, it was fashionable on the West Coast in Isherwood’s time there, but he was interested in this philosophy long before it was the focus of much film and visual art, or even music.



Why do I continue to read Isherwood, then? There are many answers, and these are all also recommendations to anyone reading this: invitations to obtain and read particularly the Berlin stories. First, his writing is, in Orwell’s telling phrase, ‘clear as a window-pane’; second, his puts life into every word he writes; finally, he reminds one that creative writing is a joy, and that joy comes across more strongly than anything overtly ‘meaningful’ or profound. You read Isherwood with intense pleasure, feeling you have made a new friend and a new guide in a strange and fascinating world.

Stephen Wade is a Yorkshireman, who has now lived in Lincolnshire for 30 years. Formerly a teacher and lecturer, he now writes full-time, with special interests in crime history and literary biography.

*His forthcoming books this year are *The Count of Scotland Yard* (Amberley) and *Murder in Mind* (Scratching Shed Publishing).*

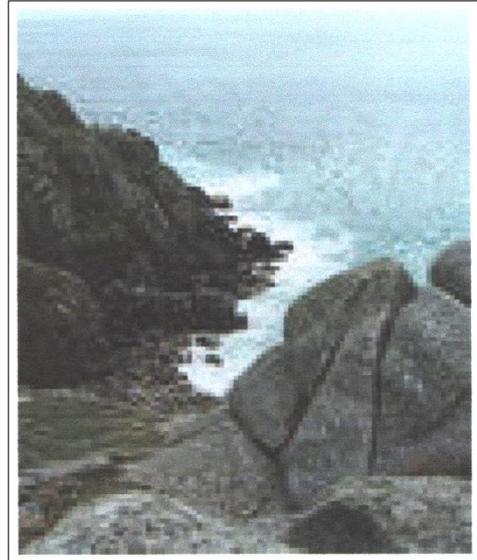
See the website: www.stephen-wade.com

4. TWO LITTORAL POEMS

The distinctive atmosphere of the coast (to which 'littoral' refers) – the sounds, smells and relentless power of the waves – have often induced in me feelings of a deep connection with, and reflection on, the origins of humanity, both physical and mental. I wrote these two poems about 40 years ago.

ABEREIDDY

In the bay
spent waves slide and seep
between black, limpet-clad rocks,
viscous as oil-slicks.
The slow pulse of the sea
licks each slimy pebble,
its remote lunar power
resolved to countless eddies.
And still our veins contain
this restless surge
the urgent blood nourishing
each delicate cell
as does the lapping swell
the fragile life in pools.



❖ As written, and typed, when staying near this Pembrokeshire village in the mid 1970s.

THE MIND'S SHIFTING SANDS

Mind waking to a new day
as sunlit sand flats
fresh laid by the receding sea
seem like the original *tabula rasa*

Whereon, tentative at first,
we tread exploratory footprints
reverentially, apologetically asserting
our selfhood's presence

But soon, other selves materialise
from nowhere
leaving their heavy tread and hurried scrawls
upon the receptive shore
which no event appears too mean
to notice and record

So in so short a time the beach has seen such turmoil and debate
and suffered such desecration of its virgin smoothness
that those clear certainties we hoped to know
are crumbling as completely
as the drying sand

❖ Written in about 1980, probably in North Wales

5. All in the mind? Cosmology revisited

a review of *Biocentrism* by Robert Lanza

*The brain is wider than the sky
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
With ease, and you beside⁵*

Cosmology is hardly a subject of popular interest, and in devoting so much space to reviewing ideas on it recently advanced I am aware that some readers (but I hope not too many) will decide not to spend time on it. The reason for persisting, despite my reservations, is that I think the ideas – especially those of the prominent scientist who wrote this book – are worthy of wider dissemination because of their provocatively mind-changing potential.

As revealed in some autobiographical vignettes, Robert Lanza is a highly unorthodox scientist, who overcame social deprivation in a large family (living in Stoughton about 15 miles from Boston, Massachusetts) headed by his rough-mannered father, who was a ‘professional gambler.’ By dint of remarkable initiative, at the age of eight, and fired with ambition to ‘alter the genetics of white chickens to make them black,’ he made his way, alone, to Harvard University in Boston, and gained access to Dr Stephen Kuffler, a world-famous neurobiologist.

This, and similarly bold initiatives, later led him to qualify in medicine, and achieve a glittering CV in medical research. He has made important contributions in the fields of human embryo cloning, stem cell research and tissue engineering, and some have even compared him to Einstein in respect of his innovative thinking. At 62, he is currently Head of Astellas Global Regenerative Medicine and an adjunct professor at Wake Forest University Medical School.

With that introduction, it may be surprising that this review has little to do with Lanza’s achievements in medical science – but they are surely relevant in demonstrating his sharp intellect and readiness to challenge standard thinking. Mostly, Lanza’s theories discussed here concern the explanation of the nature of the Universe, to which the *quantum theory* of physicists has for decades assumed prominence. But rather than such approaches eliminating the importance of humanity’s significance in cosmology (the standard assumption being that the highly unlikely presence of life can have virtually no significance in the light of the limitless vastness of the cosmos), for Lanza the conscious mind is central to understanding it. Hence his neologism ‘*biocentrism*’ – to which, in a not unrelated way, Emily Dickenson averred in the lines of the poems cited above.

A brief synopsis of the claims made for biocentrism

The book packs a lot of abstruse and challenging ideas into its 210 pages in a highly impressive manner. My aim here is to summarise the gist of Lanza’s claims very concisely but, for those prepared to open their minds to new ideas, in a way consistent with his persuasive reasoning. (Even so, the attempt is clearly subject to both the accuracy of my own understanding and the inevitable brevity of this summary.) In essence, the theory proposes that life and consciousness are central to any authentic descriptions of reality and the cosmos. That is to say, it is claimed that life creates the universe rather than the other way around.

⁵ Emily Dickenson: from *Life* poems (1924)

We might start by making some obvious statements that rarely get subject to closer examination. For example, our knowledge of the world around us is only accessible because of the information obtained via our five senses. But in every case, such information is a limited part of the total spectrum of physical phenomena. For example, because the human eye only responds to electromagnetic radiation (which determines appreciation of colours) with wavelengths of 390 to 700 nm we are oblivious to many things we could see if our visible range was wider. The same applies to sounds (fluctuations in air pressure), tastes and smells (dependent on detection of chemical molecules) and touch (responding to physical pressures). So from the perspective of being fully aware of our environment (everything outside and inside us) we are all relatively ‘disabled.’

Then again, if we take note of the images that scientists can now envisage with their complex equipment, we learn that the atoms of which any material (chemicals, planets, cars, and our very bodies) are made are not minute, solid particles, but subatomic *events* which from some perspectives seem like miniscule solar systems, with electrons encircling a central nucleus. But, from a different perspective, electrons are akin to waves of energy whose spatial location is governed by probability criteria and behave in ways defying human prediction (dubbed *quantum weirdness*).



The physics involved is very difficult to put in simple terms, but to Lanza “*The behavior of all subatomic particles – indeed all particles and objects – is inextricably linked to the presence of an observer. Without the presence of a conscious observer, they best exist in an undetermined state of probability waves. Science has essentially conceded that quantum physics is incomprehensible outside of complex mathematics.*”

If we avert our attention from the world too small for us to apprehend directly, and which our attempts to ‘explain’ are based on patently inadequate metaphors, and turn instead to the space around us, the twinkling stars might induce a sense of secure knowledge – as such images have apparently persisted unchanged for millennia. But the theories of astronomers and astrophysicists soon bring us ‘down to earth’ – and not only metaphorically-speaking - for we are now told that 96% of the Universe is composed of *dark matter* and *dark energy*, the true nature of which defy any meaningful descriptions. To quote Lanza again ‘*Our understanding of the fundamentals of the universe is actually retreating before our eyes. The more data we gather, the more we’ve had to juggle our theories or ignore findings that simply make no sense.*’

Moreover, as famously established by Albert Einstein, the phenomena that we perceive as *space* and *time* do not exist as objective physical properties of the Universe, but are forms of sense perception that we, and probably certain other life forms, experience subjectively. It’s a notion that philosophers like Kant and Schopenhauer had proposed on metaphysical grounds, but Einstein’s demonstration of e.g. the relativity of the passage of time to the speed at which objects travel gives it scientific validity.

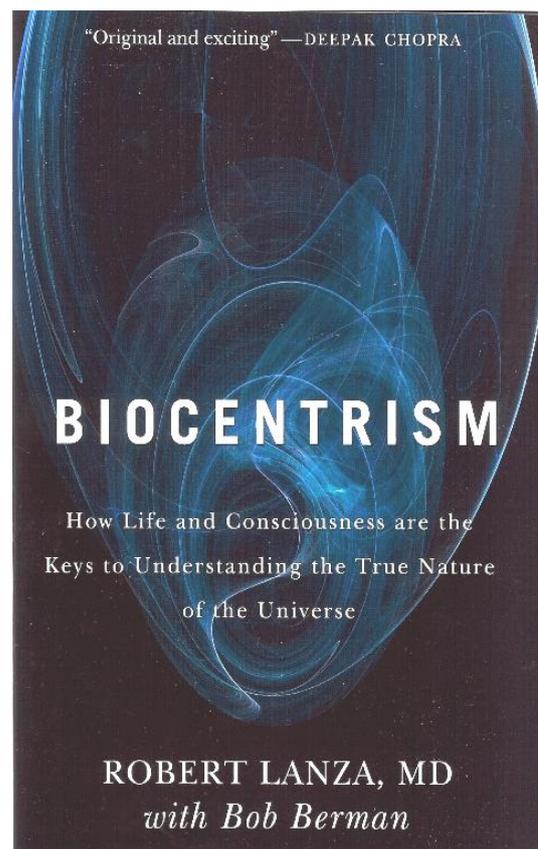
Another challenging question is posed by the realisation that the existence of life depends on a combination of apparently extraordinary coincidences in the nature of a wide range of physical constants. By the late 1960s it had become apparent that if the so-called *Big Bang* (physicists’ rather flippant name for the origin of the Universe 13.7 billion years ago) had been one part in a million

more powerful it would have caused an expansion too fast to allow planets to form; hence, *inter alia*, we would not exist. But *even more coincidentally, the universe's four forces and all its constants are just perfectly set up for atomic interactions, the existence of atoms and elements, planets, liquid water and life. Tweak any of them and you never existed* (pp. 84-84)

The suggestion that this demonstrates the *Participatory Anthropic Principle*, namely, that the Universe is so constituted that observers (i.e. people or other sentient life forms) are required to bring it into existence, was first made by the eminent physicist John Wheeler (who incidentally coined the term *black hole*), and Lanza claims that his theory of biocentrism supports and extends that theory. We are here addressing perhaps the most formidable scientific challenge ever encountered. Many who try to 'explain' consciousness do nothing of the sort, a claim for which I cite here excerpts from my recent review of a book that considered that cerebral anatomical complexity provided an explanation of consciousness.

By its very nature, consciousness is such a personal and intuitive phenomenon that any attempt to define it in objective terms, let alone explain its development, might seem to defy reason. For we are all only subjectively aware of the existence of consciousness (and its alter ego 'sentience'). ... This is why the so-called 'hard problem' of explaining how mind emerged from physical processes has been declared insoluble by many leading scientists ... while from a philosophical perspective it is widely regarded as an ontological non-starter.

But, eschewing such concerns, the authors seek to illuminate the emergence of consciousness by tracing the way in which allegedly crucially-relevant features of the human nervous system have appeared in the course of evolution. ... On this basis they suggest that consciousness emerged 550 million years ago in the great Cambrian explosion of animal diversity. That might satisfy 'common sense,' but, appealing to Karl Popper's criterion for the authenticity of scientific claims, the theory is unscientific because unfalsifiable.⁶



The revolutionary claims of Biocentrism

In summary, when we experience the events or objects we encounter in wakeful life, what the mind perceives is dependent on both the incoming data (sights, noises, words etc) and our 'interpretation' of them. We have seen that the 'incoming data' is of highly variable quality, but our interpretation is probably equally problematical. For, why should the function of human brain – a moist lump of organic material (composed of carbohydrates, proteins and fats and evolved, according to Darwinian theory, in response to the criterion of survivability at all costs) – be concerned with divining the subtle

⁶ Mepham B (2017) Review of: The Ancient Origins of Consciousness: how the brain created experience. Todd E Feinberg and Jon M Mallatt (2016) MIT Press. In *The Biologist* 64, p.39

nature of the whole universe, as though it had been designed for such an intellectual challenge? And why should a wide range of physical constants be so finely attuned to the emergence of life and its supreme manifestation, consciousness?

Perhaps enough has been said to suggest that the current dominant cosmological theories are based on some very shaky foundations. For the Universe we perceive is a mental construction assembled from a physiologically-filtered selection of sensory inputs, subject to cognitive capabilities that are constrained by both inherent biological limitations and culturally-acquired mental habits, and largely interpreted by metaphorical associations which may be of questionable validity. If species survival, inevitably based on successful precedent, is the basis of day-to-day strategies for living, it is hard to understand why acquiring intellectual understanding of the cosmos would justify devoting human resources of any kind to that purpose. And, if the survival of species in the ‘struggle for existence’ is *all that matters*, what could be the point of *consciousness* – which according to dominant neurobiological theory, is a superfluous frill that some label an ‘epiphenomenon’?

The bold alternative claim that Lanza makes is that it is the conscious mind that *constructs* the commonly-accepted ideas of the *reality* of Universe. This process results from the collective rationality of humans who seek to deduce coherent, logical explanations of the range of sensory stimuli to which we are exposed, and which are processed in ways that seem most effective in addressing the practical problems of survival. As he puts it: “*The universe is simply the complete spatio-temporal logic of the self*” (p.93). Without conscious minds, nothing could be said to exist since it is the mind that, in Wheeler’s words, *brings the Universe into existence*.

This claim is, of course, highly speculative and contentious; and it has been subject to criticism from many scientists and philosophers. But the reactions have by no means all been critical, and many physicists, astronomers, biologists and philosophers have welcomed the radical, new approach to what has for millennia seemed an intractable intellectual problem. To quote philosopher Karl Popper *The method of science is the method of bold conjectures and severe and strenuous attempts to refute them*. Rather like evolutionary theory, the fittest ideas will survive in the competitive struggle for acceptance. In those terms, Lanza has performed a useful role in putting forward his ideas for detailed scrutiny.

But it is also worth noting that, throughout history, there have been many instances of ultimately successful ideas, that challenged the conventional wisdom, being initially ‘laughed out of court.’ For example, at random, one might cite: Benjamin Franklin’s lightning conductor, Young’s proof of the undulatory theory of light, Thomas Gray’s ideas on the practicability of a railway system, and even discussion of the feasibility of telegraphy.

Lanza and his supporters admit that if their hypothesis has merit the implications and ramifications for our understanding of the Universe and our place in it will be profound. But so are the consequences of the dominant current beliefs. For, from their perspective, life is merely an extremely rare chance event, with only insignificant cosmic impacts. And as for consciousness, it is an epiphenomenon, in consequence of which the flowering of human culture - perhaps the culmination of all that we regard as having enduring value –is, as Shakespeare put in ‘Macbeth’: “... *but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more; it is tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*”

Ben Mephram

6. Ernest Griset (1843-1907)

Victorian illustrator of animal fantasies

After the rather heavy dose of cosmological debate in article 5, I thought it appropriate to refer, in the lighter vein that history allows, to some humorous reactions to an earlier period of scientific and theological contention. Ernest Griset was born in Paris, but spent most of his life after early childhood in London, where he became a notable illustrator of books with an animal theme. The publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species* provided a highly topical canvas on which to display his deeply held respect for animals, and distaste for the way in which humans often mistreated them and denied them basic liberties or freedom of expression.

Under the guise of humorous grotesques and cartoons, Griset revealed his political sympathies in response to Darwin's demonstration that humans and non-humans had common origins and shared a great deal more - biologically, psychologically and socially - than had been previously acknowledged.

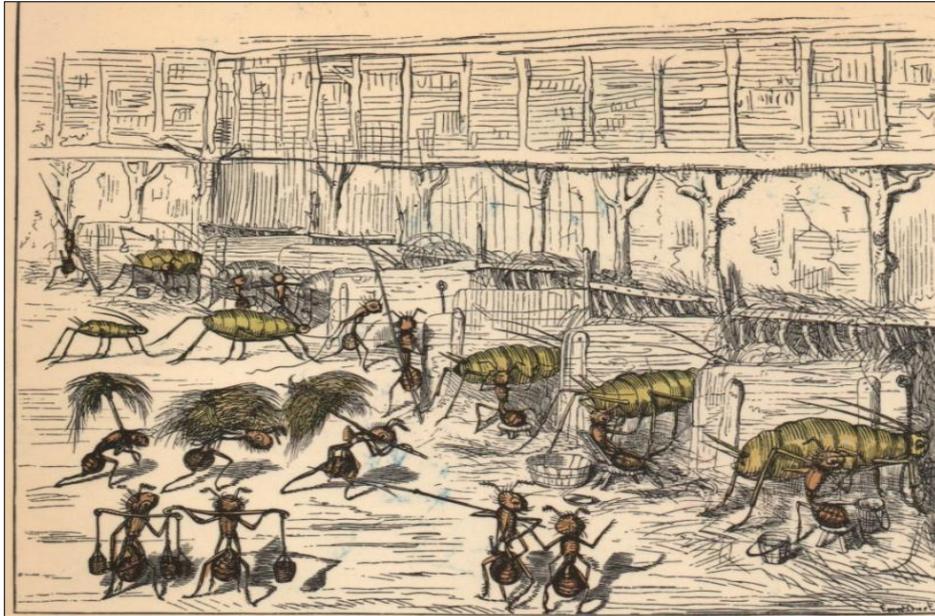


The Dream of the Fisherman: a lazy pelican employs cormorants to do his fishing

Griset was fascinated by the debate over evolution, and got to know several of the protagonists, on each side of the argument, some of whom were colourful eccentrics. For example, Frank Buckland (son of the Dean of Christchurch and first professor of geology at Oxford) was a pioneer in the study of fish and wrote “*the delightful four volumes of ‘Curiosities of Natural History’ and was an eccentric on the grand scale.*”⁷ Sir Richard Owen, the first director of the Natural History Museum was “*a caricaturist’s dream,*” while “*for sheer eccentricity, pride of place must go to Charles Waterton*” who in his ‘Wanderings in South America’ described “*sleeping with his big toe out of the mosquito net to give a thirsty vampire bat a drink; riding a crocodile; holding a sprained ankle under the Niagara Falls, hugging a savage orang-utan at the Zoo; and at home in Wakefield establishing the first English nature reserve.*”

⁷ This, all other citations and the illustrations are from L Lambourne ‘Ernest Griset’ Thames and Hudson (1979)

Of Griset's book illustrations, those in James Greenwood's moral tale 'The Purgatory of Peter the Cruel' (1868) may be the most notable. Here, Peter (in one of his purgatorial disguises, as an ant) is given the task of milking the aphids 'cows.' (shown below) This apparently fantastic event is based on the biological fact that "ants tickle greenfly with their antennae and then 'milk' the aphids' tubes dry of honeydew."



But not all Griset's illustrations were of this fantastic nature. He also produced straightforward naturalistic studies of individual species, of which *The Sleeping Lion* is a fine example



As Lambourne noted: Although 'knowledge of animals' is now freely available (and he was writing in 1979!), "the animal now comes 'gift wrapped,' whether dead from the factory farm or alive from the television screen. Day to day contact with animals, except with the domestic dog or cat, or more rarely, the horse, is the exception, whereas in previous centuries it was the norm."

There is a growing realisation that human domination of other species has been excessive. But, as for so many similar issues, one wonders whether it is now too late to rectify the situation.

7. Market forces better for bacon and broccoli than for books?

The last issue of the New Gladstone Review advertised the opportunity for old and, perhaps new, customers to take advantage of my bookstall on the Southwell Saturday market. Occupying the same site as that where the previous bookseller had plied his trade for at least 20 years, I thought his departure might provide the chance to fill a long-standing need. (On the other hand, not apparently being of retirement age, he presumably had other good reasons for leaving.)

For a couple of weeks, when my presence had been noticed, the number of books sold seemed sufficient to suggest it might become a useful adjunct to my main ‘shop’ in Lincoln. But as the weeks passed, it became apparent that it was not going to sustain that early promise. Selling from an outdoor stall presents a number of problems that are not easy to avoid. For example, the small number of books on display (I had only about 200 each week – which even so entailed no mean task in loading and unloading) limited the range of tastes that could be catered for: and the typical market shopper, usually more concerned with buying food and garden plants, is only rarely also drawn to books.

But the vagaries of the weather affect not only the numbers of people using the market, but also the safe display of the books and the rigours of being personally exposed to wind and rain. So, regrettably, I gave up that venture after two months.

In mid-July, the opportunity arose to have a stand at the PBFA fair, held at the Saracen’s Head Hotel in Southwell. I had never exhibited at a PBFA fair before, and not being a member I was listed as a ‘guest.’ It was a pleasant enough occasion, with congenial chats with other exhibitors. But having made the effort to display several antiquarian books not previously exhibited, I was disappointed that they attracted so little interest – even to the extent that hardly any were taken from the shelves to inspect, and discover their quality and modest prices!

Given the fact that the annual Southwell book fair is apparently the smallest in the UK, I was surprised (but perhaps should not have been) at the low number of local people who attended – especially when there was no entrance fee. All the evidence seems to point to the fact that interest in books of quality is now confined to a small minority of people, and even they are usually prepared to spend only very little in buying them.

8. Glued to a book: a new meaning

“He’s been glued to that book all day!” – surely, a back-handed compliment to the literary addict utterly immersed in the engrossing volume he ‘can’t put down.’ But a sinister trend has been recently reported (on the *Sheppards Confidential* website) by a true and venerable bibliophile, relaxing with his pint in the scholarly ambience of a Cambridge pub. In such a setting, what would seem more appropriate than to find shelves of leather-bound antiquarian books on a wide range of abstruse subjects, assembled to acknowledge the regular customers’ catholic intellectual tastes?

But then- the shock! Reaching for a fancied book to peruse over his leisurely drink, he discovered that it was securely glued to its half-dozen neighbours! The landlord’s excuse? It keeps them tidy and prevents wayward academics from handling them – and thereby disturbing the carefully-contrived scholarly atmosphere. For when beautifully displayed old books create such a fitting ethos for drinkers in this ancient university town, why risk someone actually wanting to *read* them?

O tempora o mores!

BM