Reading for Pleasure

Greatest of all comforts

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The more I read the less I seem able to express myself without giving credit to the author from whom I have filched ideas and opinions. This eclectic attitude is stifling original thoughts, and the search for the new is interfering with my powers of self-expression. I do not think, however, that my nightly reading of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* has been responsible for these feelings. Boswell records that Johnson said something to the effect that "a man who knew nothing was a fool and likewise that a man who knew not what he knew was also a fool," but having intermittently reread the *Life* many times this passage has always proved elusive and I now wonder if I read it elsewhere. I regret the passing of absolute clinical and other rules and their replacement by vague and frequently untested assertions; Johnson was never in doubt—even if he was wrong. I was surprised to discover that Johnson added only three or four words to the English language whereas Shakespeare contributed over a thousand. "Reading stimulates the mind, seeing satisfies it," said the great Cham. Alas! Many of the books I have enjoyed are about those who are dead.

More intimate detail

My favourite book at school was *England has my Bones* by T H White. I read his biography by Sylvia Warner and it was with surprise I discovered that he was homosexual, which made his personal life seem less than agreeable but none the less interesting. Homosexuality, particularly among writers, is certainly well publicised today. Gone are the days of 1950 when Sir Roy Harrod wrote *The Life of John Maynard Keynes* without referring to his sexual proclivities. Likewise Sir Osbert Sitwell mentioned his male companion only once in five volumes of autobiography. There is no doubt that many biographies can now be justifiably rewritten to include more intimate detail.

Another homosexual, Gavin Maxwell, wrote *A Reed Shaken by the Wind*, an amusing and interesting and occasionally unbelievable account of the life of the people living in the marshes of the Shatt-el-Arab at the joining of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—now apparently a taxi ride away from civilisation. The book upstaged *The Marsh Arabs* written by the explorer Wilfred Thesiger. Thesiger's steps were dogged by Maxwell when he was gathering his material and he became the major character in Maxwell's book, eventually suffering the humiliation of having his own book reviewed in a Sunday newspaper by his possibly unwelcome companion, in which errors in the spelling of names of Arab dignitaries were pointed out and stories which had been told by Thesiger corrected.

Thesiger subsequently wrote a most interesting book about

Saudi Arabia, *Arabian Sands*: a monument to his physical endurance and a volume infinitely more enjoyable than another Middle East book *Philby of Arabia* by Elizabeth Munroe, which showed the father of Kim Philby as eccentric and not very memorable. It was a disappointment beside *The Devil Drives* by Fawn Brodie, a biography of a similar but larger character, Sir Richard Burton. Burton really was of heroic stature and Philby was not.

Fascination of diaries

The fascination of diaries has been much aired in this column and those of Boswell appeal to me more than those of Pepys, although I could not contemplate life without both at my elbow. Boswell seems so contemporary in his *London Journal* when he declares that "London is not his scene."

Recently I think it was Classey's, the booksellers of Abingdon, who advertised some of the letters of Havelock Ellis for sale and I regret not taking more interest in the matter. *The Life of Havelock Ellis* was recently remaindered in Melbourne, and I can now understand why. The book almost extinguished my interest in him but it did show the reasons for his pleasurable interest in female urination and explained its basis. The author of the *Psychology of Sex* deserved better than he and his mistress could provide, and *Havelock Ellis* by Vincent Brome redressed the balance. Maybe it will eventually be disclosed who proposed Ellis for fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians in 1936 and their reasons. Or even what plans St Thomas's Hospital Medical School, which has so successfully ignored its ex-students Keats and Maugham, has to celebrate the centenary of Ellis's qualification in 1987. Dr Frank Forster, bibliophile of Melbourne, tells me that a large collection of papers belonging to the late Dr Norman Haire, one of the early sexologists, have been discovered at the University of Sydney. These could well form the basis of a most interesting biography.

Anything written about my personal heroes is read without criticism and may explain why I so enjoyed the rather poor translation of the life of Balzac, *Prometheus*, by Andre Maurois and *Tolstoy* by Henri Troyat. I regret to say that I have never been able to read more than 40 pages of Proust in English. Looking for clues to his way of life I found the "revelations" of Madame Albaret, his housekeeper, in *Monsieur Proust* banal and utterly uninformative. I still desire to enjoy Proust but was encouraged to discover that Evelyn Waugh also found his writings impossible.

I was not able to put down the biography *Lytton Strachey* by Michael Holroyd. My mother, albeit unconsciously, was right as we drove past Tidmarsh Mill on our way from Pangbourne to Theale in 1930, when she told us that some very queer people lived there—like witches, we wondered. I enjoyed Holroyd's *Augustus John* almost as much and was surprised to find that it was Epstein, not Eric Gill, who made the sculptures that were on BMA House in the Strand. I particularly relished the description of Bishop Cosmo Lang, as he then was, inspect-

ing the sculptures under the tarpaulins in order to assure the British public that they would not be corrupted by their nakedness.

My reading is somewhat restricted as I cannot enjoy anything concerning violence or death without anxiety. This sensitivity must be inherited as the horrors of the Great War likewise prevented my father from reading about the battle of the Somme and others in which he fought. That is not to say that some reputed last words are not worth recording, such as Philby's "I'm bored" or George V's "Bugger Bognor." Perhaps my squeamishness enabled me to find time to read and enjoy such ephemera as *The First Cuckoo*, and *Bring on the Empty Horses*, although the *Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes* was a great disappointment despite its titillating title.

To strengthen my ego I sometimes read *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections* by Jung—particularly the chapter "Late Thoughts"—and *The Integrity of Personality* by Antony Storr. Both are helpful at times, especially when I am perplexed by myself or others.

Required reading

It seemed to be a duty to read the *White House Years* by Henry Kissinger and, although a rewarding experience, I felt he could have been more free with wry comments. His experiences are clearly recorded but are not in any way as lively as they might have been. I suffered a similar disappointment when he was interviewed on television. *The Real War* by Richard Nixon also seemed required reading and must have influenced the thinking of President Reagan. The deficiencies of the present defence position of the free world are chillingly set out but unfortunately at too great length to be described as entertaining.

Food has its lyrical side and I find occasional refuge and much information in *The Oxford Book of Food Plants* and take to Spain and France *Mediterranean Sea Food*, which often has to act as a substitute for the real thing. *The International Book of Trees* satisfies like no other coffee table book I have ever read both visually and in the way the text is filled with interesting information about trees, some literally thousands of years old.

The Letters of Evelyn Waugh held my attention throughout but they were less intimate than I expected, probably as they were written with publication in mind. I particularly enjoyed

the story of how Miles Lampson (later Lord Killearn) who, during the war and wishing to ingratiate himself with the Prime Minister, cabled that his son Randolph, who was in the army, had the light of battle in his eye. An unfortunate transcription error caused the telegram to read "the light of bottle in his eye." Waugh comments "All too true." The *Diaries of Evelyn Waugh* were equally entertaining bedtime reading, but somehow the letters are better. One friend unkindly said that the explanation of this was that he wrote his letters in the morning when he was sober and his diary at night when he was drunk.

The Listener arrives here eight weeks after publication and loses some of its immediate interest as a result. It recently highly praised a book by the late Gregory Bateson called *Mind and Nature*, and the review said that it dealt with the riddles attendant on truthful communication. This encouraged me to buy the book, and it was the first time in my life that a work has been totally unintelligible. I now wonder whether I am just dim or whether it is just another bad book praised because of its obtuseness or out of respect for the dead. Here, not having found a book reviewer with similar reading tastes, I can make expensive mistakes, and more and more I come to rely on lending libraries rather than risk purchasing an expensive book that proves to be unreadable. Books are the greatest of all comforts. The problem in a relatively small city is to find somebody who has read the same book to discuss it with, because this definitely enhances the pleasure and reinforces passages sometimes only half appreciated or remembered. I was very pleased when an Englishman with whom I discuss books on his occasional visits to Perth told me that he had to travel 96 km to find somebody who read the same books as he did. In my case it is often 3200 km. I shall not forget the look of disappointment on the face of a woman who asked to meet me in Sydney as she had been told that I had read all the works of Proust and subsequently found out she had been misinformed. I had read the works of Tolstoy—we were both frustrated.

I have resolved always to buy a copy of a really enjoyable book to experience the pleasure of reading it later. Waiting for rediscovery are *Byron—A Portrait* by Leslie Marchand; *James Joyce* by Richard Ellmann; and, with its beautiful photographs taken by the author, *From an Antique Land* by Julian Huxley.

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Some trout in a local reservoir are parasitised by long thin flat-bodied white worms, roughly 2-3 × 1 mm in cross section, which look like tapeworms. If this is so what are the risks of infection to man by eating the flesh after the fish has been properly cleaned and cooked; or to man or livestock by drinking water from the reservoir?

Two phases of tapeworm life cycles occur in trout—adult worms in the lumina of the intestine and pyloric caeca and larvae, which are normally encapsulated in the viscera, although sometimes in heavy infections, but also spread into the surrounding body-wall musculature. The species of adult tapeworms found in brown trout in Britain include *Eubothrium crassum* (most commonly), *Cyathocephalus truncatus*, and *Proteocephalus neglectus*. These are parasites of poikilotherms, and as such even if eaten alive by man would be digested. As they occur, however, in the intestinal lumen of the trout the tapeworms would be removed during cleaning of the fishes before cooking. The larval stages of tapeworms commonly seen in trout in the British Isles are members of the genus *Dipyllobothrium*. The broad tapeworm of man, *D latum*, belongs here, but in its last larval stage this worm occurs in the muscles and viscera of fishes such as pike, burbot, perch, and ruff in Europe.¹ Man acquires the adult worms by eating raw or inadequately prepared fish flesh or hard roe. Although *D latum* has been reported from char, salmon, and trout,¹ it is unlikely that these were actually larvae of *D latum*, but rather that they were specimens of either *D dendriticum* or *D ditremum*, or both, whose last larval stages are naturally parasites of salmonoid fishes. The adult worms of these two species also develop

in homoiotherms, *D dendriticum* in gulls (Laridae) and fish-eating mammals, and *D ditremum* in piscivorous birds of the families Phalacrocoracidae (cormorants), Ardeidae (herons), and Colymbidae (divers).² As most of the larvae (plerocercoids) of both *D dendriticum* and *D ditremum* are encapsulated in the viscera they, like the adult worms in the intestines, are removed during cleaning of fishes before cooking. Some plerocercoids of *D dendriticum* do occur in the musculature of heavily infected trout. These if cooked are harmless, but if eaten alive can establish in the intestine of man. Vik³ showed in experiments with man that the eggs of the tapeworm appeared in the faeces 12 to 14 days after feeding plerocercoids of *D norvegicum*, a species now reduced to a synonym of *D dendriticum*. Treatment with male fern extract successfully eliminated the worms. Anglers depositing viscera of salmonoid fishes containing *D dendriticum* larvae at the waters' edge can provide sources of infection for dogs, rats, and other scavenging mammals. The life cycles of both the adult and larval stages of species of tapeworms found in trout take place in water. Even if the eggs or other larval phases are present in drinking water available to man or livestock no risks of infection are present. It is only the living plerocercoids of *D dendriticum* from salmonoid fishes that can present a risk of infection.—J C CHUBB, reader in zoology, Liverpool.

¹ von Bonsdorff B. *Dipyllobothriasis in man*. London: Academic Press, 1977: i-xii, 1-189.

² Chubb JC. Tapeworms of the genus *Dipyllobothrium* in the British Isles. *Parasitology* 1968;58:22P.

³ Vik R. Studies of the helminth fauna of Norway. I. Taxonomy and ecology of *Dipyllobothrium norvegicum* n sp and the plerocercoid of *Dipyllobothrium latum* (L). *Nytt Magazin Zoologi* 1957;5:26-93.