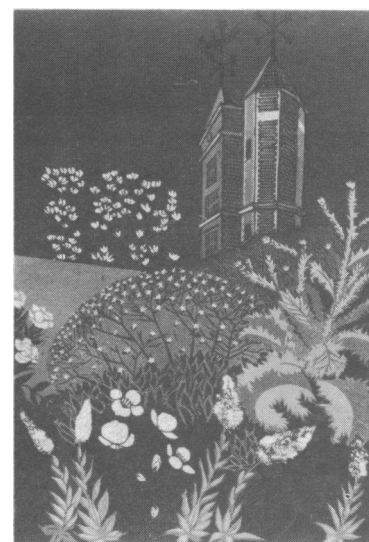


The Whipsnade lion



The white garden, Sissinghurst



Scotney Castle

woodcuts and no doubt the result will be just as good. His craft is that of a "relief printer"—a gross understatement of the careful and beautifully coloured pictures that he produces. He does one picture at a time but has half-a-dozen ideas in his head about others simultaneously. His next project, he hopes, will be a series about mazes—he has already seen the plans of most mazes in Britain—and he is looking forward to trying out other techniques such as etching.

Perhaps Owen Legg was fated to fail his primary fellowship: as it is, he enjoys general practice and his patients, and the art world would have been the loser had he taken up surgery. He has little time for anything else now except for keeping his house, car, and garden reasonably well maintained, but he is a contented "well-rounded" man who makes the best of both worlds.

Reading for Pleasure

A little of what you fancy

RUTH HOLLAND

I don't very often. Read for pleasure, that is. Not any longer. In my prime (very many years ago—I peaked, as they say, a lot younger than Miss Brodie) I could polish off books with the insouciance of the Red Bud Borer chewing up your floribunda. Not now though. I still like the idea. Oh yes, I'll open a book all right. But it's no use—the eyes glaze over, the brain stirs, shudders, then coughs and lies still.

I'd put it down to the stress of modern life, but what about all the people who've written for this series? They're doing far more demanding things than I am. How can they read so much, and such up-market stuff? Then a thought comes like a full-blown rose, flushing the brow: they're nearly all men. That's it. While they're off paddling on the further shores of literature wives, girlfriends, cohabitees, mothers—even the occasional long-suffering sister or grandma—are peppering the ratatouille, fixing the shelf that's been hanging by one nail for weeks, fetching the children from school, and remembering *his* secretary's birthday. The Y chromosome strikes again.

That can't be true, though, can it, in these days of equal opportunity? No. It isn't. Every woman I know has got her eyes

down, not for a full house but scanning Herman Hesse, Dickens, Paul Scott, Beryl Bainbridge and all those other people I ought to have read. So why am I a slob?

I suppose I'm like Eartha Kitt's Englishman who—for a different kind of pleasure—needs time. I need it for reading. Also comfort. And silence. These desirables seldom all occur at once. And for another thing, bookshops aren't what they were. They used to be places of scholarship and imagination, staffed by ladies and gentlemen both civil and knowledgeable. Nowadays they sell sociology textbooks and postcards and funny badges, and the "salespersons"—if they can break off from telling each other who they were with last night long enough to think about it—would look for *Crime and Punishment* under Thrillers and *Fanny Hill* under Geography. Second-hand shops, traditional havens for the poor and the chronic browser, have been taken over by loud-voiced young men out to make a quick buck. It's driven me to newspapers.

Public prints and private eyefuls

No, to be honest: bits of newspapers. It takes some skill to skim through the everyday stories of carnage, rape, theft and famine and find the diverting reading matter. So I tend to start late, with the *Evening Standard*. Beating a tourist to the last seat

on the tube and settling down in it to read the *Standard* is one of the few pleasures left to Londoners. I buy it for its arts reporting; for Maureen Cleave's interviews with interesting rather than merely famous people, which are models of their kind: sympathetic, informative, and putting over the personality of the subject rather than the writer (a recent one with a Steinway piano expert was a delight); and for "Augusta"—a strip cartoon about a child which is funny, unusual and, rarely for such a subject, unsentimental: plugging her parents, her brother and her gin-soaked grandmother, and getting her own nose put out of joint by Frou-Frou Watkins ("a natural blonde"), Augusta is endearing, but she is not sweet. Nor, one imagines, is Bert Brecht Che Odinga, the 4-year-old bearded activist grandson of

Mrs Dutt-Pauker, the Hampstead thinker, in the *Daily Telegraph's* Peter Simple column. Long before the art world was on to Lionel Constable, Peter Simple had discovered the unknown sibling in a famous literary family: Doreen Brontë. Michael Wharton, who writes the column, has the gift of creating memorable people in a few words—characters like J Bonnington Jagworth, toasting the success of the Motorists' Liberation Front in champagne from a silver hub-cap; Dr Heinz "We are all guilty" Kiosk, the psychiatrist; and what must be the most successful pressure group ever, the Friends of Noise. How gloriously and horribly likely they are—indeed, the trendy cleric Dr Spaceley-Trellis, Bishop of Bevingdon, was once seriously quoted with approval in another paper (which shall be

Words

COCKS and TAPS.

A cock is a male domestic fowl and, by extension, the male of other bird species. The aggressively self-confident attitude of a fighting-cock gives us "cocky." Over-confident is "cock-sure." "Cock of the walk" is one who will not tolerate a challenge to his supremacy. Hence, "Cock!" is a familiar greeting between men implying recognition of *machismo*. A cock is a short spout or pipe serving as a channel for passing liquids and having a device for regulating or stopping the



Der Männerbad (The Men's Bath)—detail. Albrecht Dürer, 1498.

flow. The derivation of this sense is obscure. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says "the resemblance of some stop-cocks to a cock's head with its comb readily suggests itself" (see figure). A coxcomb-like structure is sometimes found on spouts to hold the handle of a pail. A cock in fire-arms is a spring-loaded lever holding match, flint, or hammer and capable of being raised and then brought down by the trigger, thus igniting the powder, and is so called because appropriately zoomorphic in its original form.

A cock, in vulgar usage, is a penis. The term in this sense derives

from the pipe, as described above. Although the *OED* gives 1730 as its first recorded usage, oblique earlier reference to the ithyphallic state suggests an earlier date, possibly in unrecorded speech. Shakespeare surely intended a *double entendre* (as in the later tradition of Restoration plays and music-hall) when he wrote (1598)

"... and Pisto's cock is up and flashing fire will follow."
Henry V, II, i, 55.)

Furthermore, the ithyphallic principle seems to underlie the verb "to cock." Although the *OED*, in defining it "to stick stiffly up or out," likens this posture to a cock's neck in crowing, this suggestion would appear to come from a lexicographer with a Freudian scotoma. "Cock up" is applied to appropriately shaped articles, as, for example, the plaster of Paris cock-up splint. The use of "dicky" for penis in children's language derives from rhyming slang for cock, and is the first moiety of Dickory Dock.¹ Genital terms are vulgarly used as vehicles for insult. "Cock" is thus used to describe something nonsensical, though it is probably of respectable provenance (?poppy-cock, ? cock-and-bull story). In slang a cock-up is an action that has ended disastrously.

It is surprising that in German the word *Hahn* has all the same meanings as in English: male bird, tap, fire-arm component, and penis (also the diminutive *Hähnchen*). This parallelism of meanings is quite remarkable and would seem to be beyond mere coincidence. Albrecht Dürer's pictorial pun in the woodcut of 1498, *Der Männerbad* (The Men's Bath), contrives to show three of these meanings in one small area (see figure). The male bird is represented on the tap-handle. The spout of the stop-cock is so placed as to hide discreetly the man's genital area, though in position, size, and shape it well represents the penis. As Dürer is reported to have said, "Det voss my liddel dschoke."²

A TAP on the other hand was originally a peg, plug, or bung for opening and closing a hole in a cask or similar vessel, and later a hollow plug in a containing pipe for regulating or stopping the flow. To tap is to pierce the wall of a vessel to draw off the liquid contents, as in tapping ascites or a pleural effusion. The corresponding German word for bung is *Zapf* (German Zs often became English Ts on crossing the North Sea). The original meaning of *Zapf* as peg-shaped has been retained in German; its diminutive ZÄPFCHEN means both suppository and uvula. In English we liken the latter to a small grape. Tattoo (the sort that is beaten on a drum) is from "tap-too" (tap shut); Dutch, *taptoe*; German, *Zapfenstreich*.

Thomas the Earl of Surrey, and himself,
Much about cock-shut time, from troop to troop
Went through the army, cheering up the soldiers
(Richard III, V, iii, 70.)

The other TATTOO, a mark or design on the skin made by insertion of pigment, is a Polynesian word. Strictly speaking, then, a cock was the pipe and a tap was the bung. The cock's crow has traditionally been a waker for early risers. As the Hungarian diplomat is reported to have said at an embassy dinner, "My speech will not be long. As you English say: Early to bed and up with the cock!"³—BERNARD FREEDMAN.

¹ Franklyn, L, *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang*, 2nd edn. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.

² Dürer, A, *Zeitschr f Kunst u Wissenschaftl. Unsinn*, 1498.

³ Blake, G F, *Book of Bricks*, ed R Morley, p 123. London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978.

nameless), and I am myself more than half convinced that there really is such a place as the Stretchford conurbation, with its "lovely, sex maniac-haunted Sadcake Park."

Reading newspapers means you can't avoid politics, and one of the advantages of being a don't-know—apart from gumming up the works of the opinion polls—is not minding which way the news gets slanted. People with strong political convictions, on the other hand, would rather be caught without their teeth in than reading a paper that toes the wrong party line. But still—as that character says in *Some Like It Hot* when he finds the girl he's run off with is a man—nobody's perfect. I'd rather read a flog-'em-all reactionary or a workers' revolutionary who writes well than someone, of whatever persuasion, who thinks "presently" means "now" and can't write a sentence without using the word "just" ("this is just one of many cases . . ." ". . . it is just six weeks since . . ." ". . . just half a mile away . . ."). And before most other things I'd rather read *Private Eye*.

There is obviously something special about a publication which Sir James Goldsmith sees as a hot-bed of lunatic left plotters and which Vanessa Redgrave described at an Equity meeting as "that fascist rag." The *Eye* is rude and funny, prints what other papers daren't, uncovers scandals, makes the powerful and the pretentious sweat and shows, in Mr Thatcher's letters—as in Mrs Wilson's diary before—truly inspired satire. I wish it was a daily, but it only comes out once a fortnight. There's nothing for it but books, after all.

Rags to riches

From a diet of newsprint it's a treat to turn to writers like Jane Austen or Samuel Johnson who use language with grace and precision. This sort of sentence clears the mind like a glass of cold water: "The task of an author is either to teach what is not known or to recommend known truths by his manner of adorning them; either to let new light in upon the mind and open new scenes to the prospect, or to vary the dress and situation of common objects so as to give them fresh grace and more powerful attractions; spread such flowers over the regions through which the intellect has already made its progress, as may tempt it to return and take a second view of things hastily passed over or negligently regarded." (*The Rambler*)

Finding favourite authors is like choosing friends—you can see that many are admirable, but they aren't necessarily the ones you're fond of. Take George Eliot, for instance, or the Brontës (without Doreen); or Lawrence or Joyce: I can see that they're some of the big shots of Eng Lit, but I couldn't settle happily down with them any old time. I could with the writer of this, though:

"It is curious how you can be intimate with a fellow from early boyhood and yet remain unacquainted with one side of him. Mixing constantly with Gussie through the years, I had come to know him as a newt-fancier, a lover, and a fat-head, but I had never suspected him of possessing outstanding qualities as a sprinter on the flat. . . . He was coming along like a jack-rabbit out of the western prairie, his head back and his green beard floating in the breeze. I liked his ankle work."

The unmistakable P G Wodehouse touch. You can't describe him, just read and rejoice, like me and the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Nor can I convey the effect of reading Kipling's short stories without breaking out in a rash of hackneyed phrases like "spell-binding" and "riveting"—but it's too bad, because that's what they are. When I first read them I couldn't understand why people weren't rushing round the streets shouting "Kipling's a genius!" At last I met two Americans in an Indian restaurant who felt the same way and we grabbed each other's hands with cries of delight, saying "Have you read the one about . . ." "Do you know that one where. . ." They are unforgettably rich in character and atmosphere (Kipling's stories, I mean, not Americans—though some of them are too, come to think of it) and as varied as the plays Polonius offers to Hamlet—realistic, fanciful, exciting, grim, sardonic, farcical,

sentimental. One volume, *Limits and Renewals* (1932), deals with: a long-planned revenge through a complicated academic forgery; shell-shock; tourism; Saint Paul; a surgeon who waits to operate until a suitable moment in his patient's body rhythms; and in a delightful and touching story—"The Miracle of Saint Jubanus"—with the curative power of laughter (Saint Jubanus was a Roman soldier whose only previously recorded miracle was to bring a dying man back to life by telling him a joke that made him sit up and laugh). Another story, "The Tender Achilles," concerns a bacteriologist whose scientific perfectionism drives him to a breakdown; he is saved by more down-to-earth practitioners, one of whom remarks: "It's the same between Doctor and Patient as between Man and Woman. Do you want to prove things to her or do you want to keep her?"

Much of Kipling's work seems, unfortunately, to be out of print. So, for a long time, were the poems of Louis MacNeice and through most of my adult life I have been trying unsuccessfully to persuade a friend to part with her copy. Luckily Fabers have now taken pity and republished the *Collected Poems* in paperback. I'm not a great one for the flashing eye/floating hair school of poetry, nor for rock-age monosyllabics, and I like MacNeice's combination of deep feelings urbanely expressed and his metrical ingenuity. He was an Ulsterman who loved all Ireland, and what he wrote about it is still sadly to the point. These lines from *Autumn Journal* were written in 1938:

Kathaleen ni Houlihan! Why
Must a country, like a ship or a car, be always female,
Mother or sweetheart? A woman passing by,
We did but see her passing.
Passing like a patch of sun on the rainy hill
And yet we love her for ever and hate our neighbour
And each one in his will
Binds his heirs to continuance of hatred.

Ancient lights

Sometimes I resort to the relics of a misspent youth and pick up Old English poetry or the *Ancrene Rivwe*—there is nothing more soothing than reading something you only understand about one-third of: the effect is misty and soft-focused like a shampoo advertisement—or to something completely unfamiliar, like Penguin's *Six Yuan Plays*. These were written during the Mongol occupation of China, and show how the native Chinese managed, through the theatre, to lament their fate, make fun of their oppressors and entertain them at the same time. Doctor-baiting was a popular blood-sport even in thirteenth-century China. This is Dr Best Physician Lu from *The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo*:

In medicine there's room to change one's mind,
For prescriptions there's always the standard text;
There's no way of bringing the dead to life,
The living can always be doctored to death.

Dr Lu then tries to strangle one of his patients, fails, repents, and decides to give up killing people and sell rat poison—a sort of antique oriental conversion to community medicine.

OLD STUDENTS' DINNERS Sir,—I recently undertook a railway journey of some hundreds of miles for the purpose of enjoying the society of old friends at an annual hospital dinner. It appeared, however, in the light of subsequent events, that certain gentlemen in authority who were present considered the occasion to be more favourable to an exercise of what they were doubtless pleased to consider their oratorical powers than to the pleasures of social intercourse. Conversation was almost a matter of impossibility. I would not venture to bring these remarks to notice if I were not aware that they admit of a fairly general application, and that the old student is apt to regard the inevitable presence of the postprandial orator as a sufficient reason for remaining absent from what should be one of the pleasantest of social functions.—I am, etc., OLD STUDENT. (From the *British Medical Journal*, 1900.)