

New Books April 2010

Non-Fiction

Spinsters Abroad by Dea Birkett

What spurred so many Victorian women to leave behind the security and comfort of their middle-class homes to undertake perilous journeys of thousands of miles? This book draws on the diaries, letters and other writings of more than 50 such women to describe their experiences and aspirations.

The Mother Tongue - English and How it Got That Way by Bill Bryson

This book wittily compiles the history and origins of the English language's various quirks. It discusses the Indo-European origins of English, the growing status of English as a global language, the complex etymology of English words, the dialects of English, spelling, reform, prescriptive grammar and more minor topics including swearing. Bryson's account is a popularisation of the subject, designed to entertain as well as to inform, and is sprinkled with trivia and language lore.

Spilling the Beans by Clarissa Dickson Wright

Famously half of television's *Two Fat Ladies*, the author was born into wealth and privilege. Her mother was an Australian heiress; her father was a brilliant surgeon to the Royal family; as a child, shooting and hunting were the norm and pigeons were flown in from Cairo for supper. But Clarissa's father was also a tyrannical and violent drunk who used to beat her and force her to eat carrots with slugs still clinging to them. Clarissa was determined and clever, though, and her ambition led her to a career in the law. At the age of 21, she was the youngest woman ever to be called to the bar.

Disaster struck when her adored mother died suddenly. It was to lead to a mind-numbing decade of wild overindulgence during which she partied away her entire enormous inheritance. It was a long, hard road to recovery along which Clarissa finally faced her demons and turned to the one thing that had always brought her joy- cooking. Now at last she has found success, sobriety and peace.

Journey without Maps by Graham Greene

In 1936 Graham Greene set off to discover Liberia, a remote and unfamiliar West African republic founded for released slaves. Crossing the red-clay terrain from Sierra Leone to the coast of Grand Bassa with a chain of porters, he came to know one of the few areas of Africa untouched by Western colonisation.

Wellington, The Iron Duke by Richard Holmes

We associate Wellington so much with the battle of Waterloo that it's easy to forget that, before the battle, he had had a long military career already and that, after it, he had an even longer career as politician, prime minister and pillar of the establishment. Richard Holmes's admirably clear and succinct biography of the Duke has a chapter on his youth as a slightly awkward loner from the Anglo-Irish nobility and a concluding chapter which races swiftly through the 37 years of his post-Waterloo life. However the bulk of the book, unsurprisingly, is given over to a description and analysis of his military exploits.

L S Lowry by Michael Leber and Judith Sandling

L.S. Lowry's "matchstick men" have become one of the most readily recognised images in 20th-century British art. His vivid and faithful portrayal of the industrial north has led to his adoption as "the people's artist", though art historians and critics have sought for years to analyse his significance and appeal. Over 10,000 works by Lowry are known, ranging from finished oil paintings to hastily drawn sketches. The industrial scene was his most frequent subject but he also painted seascapes and portraits. He was a great humorist and had intense insight into human nature, characterising it without sentiment. His death in 1976 was marked by unprecedented homage by the ordinary people. This study of Lowry's life and work provides a full account of his career. Also included are excerpts from a rare interview given to Edwin Mullins and a discussion by Marina Vaizey of his place in art history.

The Spirit of Cricket by Christopher Martin Jenkins

Cricket has inspired more writing, in terms of both volume and quality, than any other sport. A romantic game of skill, patience and heroic deeds, cricket is also a tough duel between batsman and bowler, unique because the team battle is dependent on the sum of individual struggles.

Christopher Martin-Jenkins has written about cricket professionally for twenty-five years, and his personal collection includes well over a thousand cricket books. His journalism and *Test Match Special* commentaries have won him the respect of all cricket lovers.

This anthology conveys the sweep of cricket's evolution from W. G. Grace to Shane Warne, from the sport's origins in the Weald to the contemporary professional (and increasingly commercial) game. There are sections on 'A Boy's Game', 'England v Australia' and 'Champions and Characters', and contributions from such luminaries as C. L. R. James and Mike Brearley, Neville Cardus and E. W. Swanton, Stephen Fry and Edmund Blunden.

The Fearful Void by Geoffrey Moorhouse

'It was because I was afraid that I had decided to attempt a crossing of the great Sahara desert, from west to east, by myself and by camel. No one had ever made such a journey before ...'

In October 1972 Geoffrey Moorhouse began his odyssey across the Sahara from the Atlantic to the Nile, a distance of 3,600 miles. His reason for undertaking such an immense feat was to examine the roots of his fear, to explore an extremity of human experience. From the outset misfortune was never far away; and as he moved further into that 'awful emptiness' the physical and mental deprivation grew more intense.

In March 1973, having walked the last 300 miles, Moorhouse, ill and exhausted, reached Tamanrasset, where he decided to end his journey. This book is the moving record of his struggle with fear and loneliness and, ultimately, his coming to terms with the spiritual as well as the physical dangers of the desert.

Loitering with Intent – The Apprentice by Peter O’Toole

In early 1953 O'Toole, fresh from stints as a steeplejack, trainee photographer, and journalist, began studies at RADA, the training ground for many of England's most respected actors. The Apprentice is his account of his student life there, from the parties and money-making schemes (including selling balloons and constructing toy cars) to pub-crawling and, of course, the always challenging - and occasionally eccentric - RADA curriculum itself. O'Toole takes readers with him into Stretcher Fletcher's torturous ballet classes, and into Miss Boalth's movement class, in which O'Toole drifted like a bubble while his classmate Albert Finney spun around like a leaf. We follow the young student through rehearsals and performances, successes and flops, and into the very heart of the plays themselves, as only a great actor can reveal them. We meet the gifted professionals who influenced him, as well as the young American woman who became the centre of his attentions. In his attempts to win the affection and respect of this dark-haired beauty, the fledgling actor reveals himself to be more the shy romantic than the image of the raffish man-about-town he cultivated on stage and in films.

Parrot Pie for Breakfast by Jane Robinson

This anthology tells the story of over 100 women spanning four centuries, from the lowliest kitchen skivvy to ambassadors' wives: emigrants who settled the wildernesses of the world in search of new and better lives. Many were lured abroad by the promise of work or fortune; some went because imperial duty called, while for others it was a most unfeminine lust for adventure that drew them away. But all faced challenges in their homes from home that were to test to the limit their spirits, their resourcefulness, even their survival.

Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud by Sun Shuyun

An extraordinary story of one woman's search for her roots, as she undertakes a historical, cultural and spiritual journey to retrace the steps of the seventh century monk Xuanzang, who travelled to India searching for Buddhist teachings. This is her beautiful and moving account of a remarkable personal pilgrimage, fulfilled despite a journey fraught with difficulties.

"Ten thousand miles without a cloud" is a Buddhist saying, meaning the search for a mind clear of doubts. The author grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution, but remained influenced by her grandmother's forbidden Buddhist prayers. Disillusioned with communism she discovered the fame of a true Chinese hero, Xuanzang, so she set out to find out what gave him such strength and purpose, and above all to find a faith for herself. She retraced Xuanzang's steps from China, on the ancient Silk Road through Central Asia and back - and in so doing traverses four landscapes - personal, historical, cultural and spiritual, and gives us an insight into China and its people, past and present.

Jerusalem by Colin Thubron

Jerusalem is a city sacred to three faiths: Moslem, Jew and Christian. No other city has been fought over with such religious ferocity and anguish; no other city has inspired such love and devotion through the centuries. Colin Thubron, author of "Among the Russians" and "Mirror to Damascus", wrote his personal tribute to Jerusalem in 1969. It is an evocation of the sights, sounds, unique atmosphere and character of the Jerusalem of recent years, set against the backdrop of cultural, religious and historical influences of the past.

Fiction

The Blade Itself by Joe Abercrombie

Logen Ninefingers, a barbarian on the run from an ex-employer who's now king of the North, finds his loyalties complicated when he switches sides and becomes a valuable source of intelligence to the beleaguered Union. Glokta, a torture victim turned torturer, gets roped into securing the Union's position against both the invading Northmen and the incompetent Union king and council, and ruthlessly wields his skills in attempts to weed out traitors. Foppish Jezal, a preternaturally excellent swordsman, manages to win the contest to become the Union champion, thanks to a little help from Bayaz, who has his own agenda

Long Lost by Harlan Coben

Myron is summoned to Paris at the behest of an old lover, Therese. She is in unspecified trouble and needs his help. When he gets there, he discovers that her ex-husband has been murdered and she is the main suspect. The interesting thing is that more than one blood-type has been discovered at the scene - and the other blood can only be attributed to the dead man's daughter. But she died 10 years before. But there is a twist. Did the daughter really die? Did Therese's husband have a further child with someone else?

Brida by Paulo Coelho

The story of a young Irish girl, and her quest for knowledge. She has long been interested in various aspects of magic, but is searching for something more. Her search leads her to people of great wisdom, who begin to teach her about the world. Her teachers sense that Brida has a gift, but cannot tell what that is. Meanwhile, Brida pursues her course ever deeper into the mysteries of life, seeking to answer questions about who she is. She meets a wise man who dwells in a forest, and teaches her about overcoming her fears and trusting in the goodness of the world, and a woman who teaches her how to dance to the music of the world, and how to pray to the moon. She seeks her destiny, as she struggles to find a balance between her relationships and her desire to become a witch.

The 19th Wife by David Ebershoff

It is 1875, and Ann Eliza Young has recently separated from her powerful husband, Brigham Young, prophet and leader of the Mormon Church. Expelled and an outcast, Ann Eliza embarks on a crusade to end polygamy in the United States.

Soon after Ann Eliza's story begins, a second narrative unfolds—a tale of murder involving a polygamist family in present-day Utah. Jordan Scott, a young man who was thrown out of his fundamentalist sect years earlier, must re-enter the world that cast him aside in order to discover the truth behind his father's death.

Never Say Die by Tess Gerritsen

Twenty years after her father's plane crashed in the jungles of Southeast Asia, Willy Jane Maitland was taking a trip through hell.

Saigon was teeming, hot and dangerous. But her search for the truth about that fateful flight was about to make her life even hotter still ...

Rumpled, irreverent ex-army Guy Barnard knew the jungles and the workings of this mystical Asian nation. But in a country where truth had many faces, even Guy had hidden motives . . . shocking secrets . . . and undeniable attractions.

Though the war was over, Vietnam was proving to still be a dangerous place to fall in love.

C is for Corpse by Sue Grafton

'My name is Kinsey Millhone. I'm a licensed private investigator . . . thirty-two, twice divorced. I like being alone and I suspect that my independence suits me better than it should . . .'

Kinsey met Bobby Callahan in the gym on Monday morning. His story was hard to credit: a murderous assault by a tailgating car on a lonely rural road, a roadside smash into a canyon 400 feet below, his Porsche a ruin, his best friend dead, and his memory severely impaired. He was convinced someone was trying to kill him.

By Thursday, he was dead.

But Kinsey wasn't going back on a deal. She had been hired to prevent a murder. Now she was looking for the murderer . . .

I is for Innocent by Sue Grafton

She was out of work. Attorney Lonnie Klingman's usual private investigator had just dropped dead of a heart attack. Kinsey was more than happy to oblige.

The trouble started on the very first day of the investigation. Either Kinsey's predecessor was incompetent – or someone had been getting away with murder. And next time it might turn out to be hers . . .

The Keys of Hell by Jack Higgins

Super-spy Paul Chavasse embarks on a mission to Albania, only to find himself at the centre of a deadly double-cross, fighting for his life. It's a trip that he will never forget. His destination: the isolated republic of Albania on the Adriatic coast, at a time when the regime is at its most repressive and the people live in daily fear of the ruthless secret police. His job: to find a double agent whose cover has been blown and put him out of commission, permanently. But what Chavasse doesn't know is that deep within the twisting channels of the perilous coastal marshes, someone has set a trap for him -- someone who holds the keys of hell.

Lake Wobegon Days by Garrison Keillor

If you've ever marveled at the simple elegance of a weather-worn gazebo resting in a small-town America park, or sat down in a Main-Street diner and felt right at home with the locals, then you'll know the warm feelings and hidden charms found in this book.

Celebrating the quirks and idiosyncrasies of small-town America, part town history, part family remembrance, the book is imbued with a sly humor that picks at the silliness and the earnestness that are woven so tightly together in a small town. With acute observations we meet all kinds of characters: a family so destitute they had a vacuum cleaner with such poor suction that hairballs had to be stuffed into it, and who believed that "air-conditioning" was for the weak and indolent." We also meet Pete Peterson, the duck-hunter's duck-hunter, who shot ducks from bed! The portraits are varied: warm and funny, honest and revealing. The state of Minnesota, where the fictitious Lake Wobegon exists, is nicknamed the "Land of 10,000 Lakes" and you'll be glad to lounge beside this one for a spell.

Call for the Dead by John le Carré

John le Carré's first novel introduces us to his most enduring character, George Smiley.

George had liked Samuel Fennan, and now Fennan was dead from an apparent suicide. But why? Fennan, a Foreign Office man, had been under investigation for alleged Communist Party activities, but Smiley had made it clear that the investigation - little more than a routine security check - was over and that the file on Fennan could be closed. The very next day, Fennan was found dead with a note by his body saying his career was finished and he couldn't go on. Smiley was puzzled...

Deaf Sentence by David Lodge

Retired Professor of Linguistics Desmond Bates is going deaf. It's a bother for his wife who has an enviably successful new career and is too busy to be endlessly repeating herself. Roles are reversed with his aging deaf father, who resents his son's attempts to help him. And then there's Alex, a student whom Desmond has agreed to help after a typical misunderstanding at a party. But her increasingly bizarre requests cannot all be blamed on his defective hearing. So much for growing old gracefully...

The Rice Mother by Rani Manicka

Promised in marriage at 14, Lakshmi must leave the comfort of her village in Ceylon with her new husband. Sailing to Malaysia with this older man she has just met, Lakshmi is forced to quickly grow up and become a woman, wife, stepmother and homemaker. This is the story of four generations of women. From Lakshmi to her great-granddaughter Nisha, the novel follows the family and all of its strong personalities across Malaysia, through World War II and the Japanese occupation, past violence, drug abuses, marriages, births, losses and family secrets.

One Step Behind by Henning Mankell

On Midsummer's Eve, three role-playing teens dressed in eighteenth-century garb are shot in a secluded Swedish meadow. When one of Inspector Kurt Wallander's most trusted colleagues - someone whose help he hoped to rely on to solve the crime - also turns up dead, Wallander knows the murders are related. But with his only clue a picture of a woman no one in Sweden seems to know, he can't begin to imagine how. Reeling from his own father's death and facing his own deteriorating health, Wallander tracks the lethal progress of the killer. Locked in a desperate effort to catch him before he strikes again, Wallander always seems to be just one step behind.

The Comfort of Saturdays by Alexander McCall Smith

Isabel Dalhousie is a new mother and a connoisseur of philosophy; she'd rather not be a sleuth. But when a chance conversation at a dinner party draws Isabel into the case of a doctor whose career has been ruined, she cannot ignore what may be a miscarriage of justice. Because for Isabel ethics are not theoretical at all, but an everyday matter of life and death. As she attempts to unravel the truth behind Dr Thompson's disgrace, Isabel's patient intelligence is also required to deal with challenges in her own life. There is her baby son Charlie; Cat's deli to look after, not to mention her vulnerable assistant Eddie; and a mysterious and unlikeable composer who has latched on to Jamie, making Isabel fear for the future of her new family. She treads a difficult path between trust and gullibility, philanthropy and interference, while keeping in her sights the small but certain comforts of family, philosophy and a fine Saturday morning.

The Yellow Admiral by Patrick O'Brian

The eighteenth installment in Patrick O'Brian's popular tales of Aubrey and Maturin finds Jack Aubrey in serious danger of not receiving the promotion to flag rank for which he desperately longs.

In the Skin of a Lion by Michael Ondaatje

The novel fictionalises the lives of the immigrants whose contributions to building Toronto in the early 1900s never became part of the city's official history. It illuminates the investment of these settlers in Canada, through their labour, while remaining outsiders to mainstream society. The book is thus an exposé of the migrant condition. It is a novel about the wearing and the removal of masks; the shedding of skin, the transformations and translations of identity. Ondaatje's later and more famous novel *The English Patient* is, in part, a sequel to *In the Skin of a Lion*, continuing the characters of Hana and Caravaggio, as well as revealing the fate of this novel's main character, Patrick Lewis.

Alice in Exile by Piers Paul Read

A love story set in England, France and Russia, played out against the turbulent backdrop of the First World War. Full of moral and emotional conflict, this is the story of a strong, independent-minded woman caught between two men, and of lovers forced apart by their different social backgrounds and the terrible circumstances of war.

Aboriginal Stories Days by A W Reed

This book presents a wealth of poetic and imaginative tales from Aboriginal cultural heritage. While retelling the stories simply, this book captures the mystical bonds that exist between Aboriginal people, their environment and the spirit life of the Dreamtime. Each story provides the reader with an insight into one of the oldest cultures.

Testimony by Anita Shreve

At a New England boarding school, a sex scandal is about to break. Even more shocking than the sexual acts themselves is the fact that they were caught on videotape.

A Pandora's box of revelations, the tape triggers a chorus of voices - those of the men, women, teenagers, and parents involved in the scandal--that details the ways in which lives can be derailed or destroyed in one foolish moment.

The Septembers of Shiraz by Dalia Sofer

In the aftermath of the Iranian revolution, rare-gem dealer Isaac Amin is arrested wrongly accused of being a spy. Terrified by his disappearance, his family must reconcile a new world of cruelty and chaos with the collapse of everything they have known. As Isaac navigates the terrors of prison, and his wife feverishly searches for him, his children struggle with the realisation that their family may soon be forced to embark on a journey of incalculable danger.

Orlando by Virginia Woolf

This book playfully constructs the figure of Orlando as the fictional embodiment of Woolf's close friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West. Spanning three centuries, the novel opens as Orlando, a young nobleman in Elizabeth's England, awaits a visit from the Queen and traces his experience with first love as England under James I lies locked in the embrace of the Great Frost. At the midpoint of the novel, Orlando, now an ambassador in Constantinople awakes to find that he is a woman, and indulges in farce and irony to consider the roles of women in the 18th and 19th centuries. As the novel ends in 1928, a year consonant with full suffrage for women. Orlando, now a wife and mother, stands poised at the brink of a future that holds new hope and promise for women.

Poetry

Ariel by Sylvia Plath

Many of the poems in *Ariel* were written in an extraordinary burst of creativity just before her death in 1963. It is the volume on which her reputation as one of the most original, daring and gifted poets of the twentieth century rests.