

THE BOOKS IN MY LIFE

Done for the February 1981 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association by John Foyster, 21 Shakespeare Grove, St Kilda 3182, Victoria, Australia.

This isn't going to be much like Henry Miller

How many of you have my own offensive habit of, on entering someone's house for the first time, checking out the books which are visible in a frantic attempt to get some shortcut information about the owner's nature? Quite a few, I suspect. One can't really do that on an international scale. But one thing might come fairly close to that; not a listing of books reviewed (or reviews), or of books that one has recently read, but why not a list of books recently purchased? That's a reasonable sort of cross-section of a person's interest - at least roughly. This could be pretty boring, but since I've never done it before (or seen anyone else's attempt either) I can't be sure. But there should be some mailing comment further on. I do hope the November mailing arrives in time for this (it's only 5 January now).

One might ask, of course, who would be foolish enough to keep a list of books purchased. The answer, of course, is very straightforward - anyone having slight problems with income tax. The friendly neighbourhood tax people haven't been wholly understanding of my spending patterns over the last few years, and I've been told to keep an accurate list.

I started at the beginning of September, and will make comments on the ones I have read so far. Just which books have already been read will probably tell you something about me, too.

1 September

CRIMINAL VIOLENCE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, (Charles Silberman) I read this pretty much straight away. It's a bit light (though not quite a poor man's DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH ^{Michel Foucault}), but had a couple of interesting passages.

NABOKOV COLLECTOR'S EDITION This was a cheapie which enabled me to get a few Nabokov novels I didn't otherwise have. Haven't read it yet.

REPRODUCTION IN EDUCATION, SOCIETY AND CULTURE (Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron) Although this focusses upon French society and research it is one of the most important books around on the sociology of education. One of the most important books I read last year.

4 September

ILLUSION AND REALITY (Christopher Caudwell)

NEW MASSES (edited by Joseph North) Only glanced at these two.

5 September

COMPLETE GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

6 September

CRITICAL ESSAYS AND DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL ON A SOLZHENITSYN VOYAGES (vol 7)(Richard Hakluyt) Filling gaps

JAILBIRD (Kurt Vonnegut) Well, all right I suppose, but I didn't get as excited as some reviewers did.

TITTERS collection of humour by women, some of it funny.

THE BOOKS IN MY LIFE/page 2/ February 1981

9 September

HISTORIC AUSTRALIA Sloppy book for tourists with some decent photographs.

AAA GUIDE TO NEW YORK CITY Not the sort of thing one reads immediately, but delightful for dipping into. An architects' eye(s) view of the buildings of NYC, with detailed and usually wry comments thereon. Better than the Northern California guide I have.

THE 1940S (Cabell Phillips) I haven't read it, but it looks weak beside Phillips' similar volume collected from the files of the NY Times for the '30s.

12 September

WORKER CITY, COMPANY TOWN (Daniel J Walkowitz) I bought this by chance and am very glad I did. It's a detailed study of social and political changes in Troy and Cohoes, New York, in the third quarter of the last century.

14 September

CITIES OF DESTINY (edited Arnold Toynbee) Got this cheap and only read parts of it. The illustrations are, mostly, better than the text.

19 September

HISTORY OF WESTERN EDUCATION (E J Good)

CLARITY IS NOT ENOUGH (Lewis)

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND REALITY (Joseph Needham, ed) Should read this.

DAILY LIFE IN VENICE (?)

26 September

Ordered some books from The Scholar's Bookshop, Princeton; haven't arrived yet.

29 September

THE MYTH OF PSYCHOTHERAPY (Thomas S Szasz) Playing an old tune, but plays it very well.

AN EVALUATION REPORT ON THE MULTI-ARTS PROJECT Only glanced at it and it is very bad.

30 September

BOSTON AUGUST 22ND (Upton Sinclair) Sacco and Vanzetti novel; I should have read this by now.

3 October

ON MORAL FICTION (John Gardner) Probably have to agree with most of this.

8 October

MEMOIRS (Julian Huxley) I read through the first half of this with interest, then slowed. The most fascinating thing about the book is actually the change in what Huxley wants to write about as he describes his growth. Up to about age 20 we refers to aspirations and inner thoughts - thereafter it is all about the public Huxley and what he achieved. Interminably boring by comparison with his notes on his earlier life. Asimov seems to have started to write about the external Asimov rather than the internal one at about the point he was conceived, which might explain why I didn't get too far into his autobiography.

12 October

DEFY THE FOUL FIEND (John Collier) This used to be listed amongst fantasy books - I can't understand why.

MCSORLEY'S WONDERFUL SALOON (Joseph Mitchell) So that's what gave the New Yorker its good name!

THE BOOKS IN MY LIFE/page 3/ February 1981

CONFESIONS OF A TRIVIALIST (Samuel Rosenberg) This was a remarkably uneven collection of essays. Maybe I ought to read more of Rosenberg.

13 October

THE GLASS TEAT/ THE OTHER GLASS TEAT (Arlan Ellison) These proved to be unreadable.
BITS OF PARADISE (Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald)

14 October

TOTAL WAR (Calvocoressi and Ward)

17 October

NEVER TOO LATE (John Holt) How John Holt learned to play 'cello in his forties, and loved it. An inspiring sort of book.

18 October

AFRICAN STORIES (Doris Lessing) Wow! But I prefer the other short stories.

THE WASHINGTON CONNECTION AND THIRD WORLD FASCISM (Noam Chomsky and Edward S Herman) This is volume 1 of THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HUMAN RIGHTS. Time to go out and buy vol 2, I guess. The detail is typical of Chomsky, and the notes on the suppression of the first edition interesting but unsurprising.

MEMOIRS OF HICKAM COUNTY (Edmund Wilson) The longest story is pretty predictable if you've read Wilson's memoirs of the 20s, which I had done, but this was my first encounter with Wilson's fiction.

KAI LUNG UNROLLS HIS MAT (Ernest Bramah) I haven't read this copy, but I did read the book 25 years ago. I hope it is still as good now but know it won't be - nothing ever is.

23 October

THE MIND MANIPULATORS (Shelton and Upton) Dreadful book, poorly written. I probably have the names wrong.

TRANSITION 1927-1938 A history of the little magazine which is readable, but only just.

31 October

BLUE GUIDE TO ENGLAND Not to be read, but handy
THE MISSING ANGEL (Erle Cox)

1 November

A HOUSE FOR MR BISWAS (V S Naipaul) The first Naipaul I've read, I have to confess. Fine stuff.

GOOD AS GOLD (Joseph Heller) Funnier than JAILBIRD

STORIES OF JOHN CHEEVER Addictive reading, and not really great. Some individual stories fine, but I shouldn't have swallowed this over a couple of evenings.

3 November

A DISTANT MIRROR (Barbara Tuchman) I think this rightly popular. It is rarely boring and has a healthy feel about it.

I ordered some books from Complete Paperback Shopper around here.

10 November

THE PERPETUAL DREAM (Grant and Riesman) This is a thoughtful study of several alternative colleges in the sixties and seventies. It won't happen here, he noted with regret.

THE BOOKS IN MY LIFE/page 4/ February 1981

15-30 November

MAN AND TIME (J B Priestley) Pretty boring stuff which I would not have read but for the absence of anything else. I suppose there were occasional interesting paragraphs.

DAYS OF WINE AND RAGE (Frank Moorhouse) An amazingly boring and self-serving collection of items about supposed intellectuals in Sydney (you may have heard of it; it's somewhere in New South Wales and is, I believe, bidding for the 1983 World Convention).

THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING-CLASS (E P Thompson) Hard to put down once I got started on this; it reads less well in toto than as a series of shorter monographs.

1 December

THE GIFTED AND THE CREATIVE (J Stanley +) Reports on latest developments in the Terman Study; the most engaging chapter is written by one of the subjects of Terman's original study.

THE COUNTERSTORPE EXPERIENCE

THE SF OF ISAAC ASIMOV (Joe Patrouch)

6 December

SHIP OF FOOLS (Katherine Anne Porter)

MR STONE AND THE KNIGHTS COMPANION (V S Naipaul)

29 December

BEARD'S ROMAN WOMEN (Anthony Burgess) Sometimes I wonder about my fascination with Burgess's writing. This was a minor sketch, but very funny.

A CELEBRATION (Rebecca West)

LIVES OF THE LATER CAESARS

JOHN FRANKLIN BARDIN OMNIBUS (JFB) I'm sure that Bardin's novels must have been written up in fanzines somewhere, but I can't recall it. Detective (?) stories from the late '40s; I read the three novels in a day.

WORLDS OF THE FUTURE (Phillips)

MICHELIN GREEN GUIDES ITALY and SPAIN

THE KING'S ENGLISH (H W FOWLER and his brother) I'd rather read this than use it (which is my customary policy) and I'm pecking away right now.

30 December

A LONDON FAMILY BETWEEN THE WARS (M V Hughes) I've read the earlier trilogy by Mary Hughes, and am looking forward to this.

TWO MEMOIRS OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE Diary-like writings by Buonocorso Pitti and Giovanni Dati. Pitti was a remarkable fellow who must have been a fine diplomat as well as a gambler and businessman (but then who can tell the difference?). Dati was more pedestrian- a forerunner of the middleclass businessman, but how he fitted it in to the fathering of all those children must remain a mystery.

ANNA KARENIN (L N Tolstoy) Remarkable I haven't had a copy of this on the shelves.

CHAMBERS BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY VOL 1 Goes well with Vol 2

RUSSIA'S POLITICAL HOSPITALS (Peter Reddaway and A N Other)

THE LORE AND LANGUAGE OF SCHOOLCHILDREN (Iona and Peter Opie)

31 December

THE FINAL DIARY (Ned Rorem) Extremely readable, like the earlier volumes; I wonder if there will be a final volume?

THE BIG BUSINESS READER (Mark Green and A N Other) An interesting collection gathering together a large variety of anti-capitalist articles, some of them quite substantial.