

Perryscope 5



December 2020

PERRYScope 5, December 2020, is an issue of the personalzine published, whenever the mood takes him, by **Perry Middlemiss**, 32 Elphin Grove, Hawthorn, Victoria, AUSTRALIA 3122. E: perry@middlemiss.org
Produced initially for ANZAPA (the Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) and then whoever else unlucky enough to receive it. Unless otherwise specified all material is written by me.
Cover design by WH Chong; photograph by me, Cambodia, October 2018.

INTRODUCTION

Not much change to the layout this month, other than the addition of a new section titled "What I've Been Thinking About". Subjects for this seem to come to me when I'm lying in bed at 3am staring at the ceiling. Which would lead you to think they might not be of much interest to anyone bar me. Maybe. Only you can judge that.

You may also have noticed that I'm watching more television than previously. I just seem to be finding more and more things of interest. And there is some good stuff out there, with more to come. Though I suspect that we might well have a fallow period coming up in 2021 as the current virus situation will have curtailed a lot of productions. I'm sure there is a large amount in the available back catalogue I can work my way through.



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY PERSONAL LIFE

A Growing Interest in Australian Literature

Back in Perryscope 3 I wrote about my interest in the works of the Australian poet and writer C. J. Dennis. That interest is still ongoing and forms only the start of a much larger story concerning Australian literature and the National Library of Australia Trove website.

Also in that article in Perryscope 3 I mentioned Ian McLaren and his publication *C. J. McLaren: A Chronological Checklist to Journals*. To anyone else this booklet was a simple, boring index of Dennis's works in such journals as the *Bulletin*, *The Critic*, *The Gadfly*, *The Lone Hand* and many others. To me it was a starting point.

Most of the works that McLaren listed in his checklist had never been collected by the author, anthologised by other editors, or reprinted in any way. If I was to get a chance to read them I'd have to track down copies of the physical magazines and newspapers and get copies, if I could. Luckily the State Library of Victoria has a large collection of interstate magazines and newspapers on microfilm and a complete set of all magazines and newspapers published in the state of Victoria, at any time.

Dennis's works in the *Bulletin* struck me as being the best place to start: the microfilm was available and by the time Dennis had started publishing his work in the magazine he had been in the writing game for over 10 years. His style was beginning to gell and he was heading towards the first publication of his Sentimental Bloke poems, the work for which he is most famous.

In addition it was the first magazine that McLaren listed in his Checklist. His title might have

included the work “chronological” but McLaren had grouped the works under the magazine title in the first instance, and the magazines in alphabetical order. So it just seemed to make some form of sense to start with one and stick with it until I had copied everything associated with that periodical. The *Bulletin* it was then.



"Den in town" by David Low

The microfilm readers in the library in the early 2000s were of two types: the simplest merely allowed for viewing the film, the other allowed you to view and to print from that film for a small fee. I have a memory that A4 pages were 5c and A3 10c. A few A4 prints after I started I switched over to A3 almost exclusively. Generally the photographic sheets on the film was of ordinary quality; clear enough to read, mostly, and then sometimes scratchy and lined. Printing on the bigger A3 sheets made everything easier on the eye.

As I was reading Dennis's poems in the *Bulletin* I realised that many other poems and short stories were also printed in the magazine's pages by a variety of authors. I began to see the same names cropping up again and again. People like Edward Dyson, Victor Daley, Mabel Forrest and later Zora Cross. Their work was variously amusing, serious, and comical and nearly always interesting. I was starting to get a bit hooked on this magazine poetry.

I kept working my way through the *Bulletin* until I came across Dennis's poem "The Austral-aise", a poem he'd entered for a *Bulletin* national song competition. A lively enough piece with a jingoistic feel that would be echoed in some of his later work. The interesting thing was that Dennis acknowledged a writer who was unknown to me: W. T. Goodge.

The only thing for it was to track down the author and try to find anything they might have written that Dennis might have read. A quick search indicated that the work Dennis was acknowledging was "The Great Australian Adjective", originally also published in the *Bulletin*, in the magazine's Christmas Edition dated 11 December 1897 and later collected in the author's *Hits! Skits! And Jingles!* (1899). (See boxes on next two pages for details of the poems.) I didn't think I'd have much hope of finding the author's poetry collection, but I was in the right spot to read the original publication in the library.

I'm not sure if I had looked at a *Bulletin* Christmas Edition prior to that time, it would surely have made an impression on me if I had. The 1897 magazine was chock-full of poems and stories, far more than was found in the weekly edition of the title. Apart from Goodge there was: Henry Lawson, Roderic Quinn, Edward Dyson, Louise Mack, Banjo Paterson, Victor J. Daley and Breaker Morant.

THE AUSTRALAISE by C. J. Dennis

A Marching Song

Air - Onward Christian Soldiers

Fellers of Australier,
Blokes an' coves an' coots,
Shift yer --- carcasses,
Move yer --- boots.
Gird yer --- loins up,
Get yer --- gun,
Set the --- enemy
An' watch the blighters run.

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on,
Have some --- sense.
Learn the --- art of
Self de- --- -fence.

Have some --- brains be-
Neath yer --- lids.
An' swing a --- sabre
Fer the missus an' the kids.
Chuck supportin' --- posts,
An' strikin' --- lights,
Support a ---- fam'ly an'
Strike fer yer --- rights.

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on, etc.

Joy is --- fleetin',
Life is --- short.
Wot's the use uv wastin' it
All on --- sport?
Hitch yer --- tip-dray
To a --- star.
Let yer --- watchword be
"Australi- --- -ar!"

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on, etc.

'Ow's the --- nation
Goin' to ixpand
'Lest us --- blokes an' coves
Lend a --- 'and?

'Eave yer --- apathy
Down a --- chasm;
'Ump yer --- burden with
Enthusi- --- -asm.

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on, etc.

W'en old mother Britain
Calls yer native land
Take a --- rifle
In yer --- 'and
Keep yer --- upper lip
Stiff as stiff kin be,
An' speed a --- bullet for
Post- --- -ity.

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on, etc.

W'en the --- bugle
Sounds "Ad- --- -vance"
Don't be like a flock er sheep
In a --- trance
Biff the --- Kaiser
Where it don't agree
Spifler- --- -cate him
To Eternity.

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on, etc.

Fellers of Australier,
Cobbers, chaps an' mates,
Hear the --- German
Kickin' at the gates!
Blow the --- bugle,
Beat the --- drum,
Upper-cut an' out the cow
To kingdom- --- -come!

CHORUS:

Get a --- move on,
Have some --- sense.
Learn the --- art of
Self de- --- -fence.

(With some acknowledgements to W. T. Goodge.)

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN ADJECTIVE by W.

T. Goodge

The sunburnt ---- stockman stood
And, in a dismal ---- mood,
Apostrophized his ---- cuddy;
"The ---- nag's no ---- good,
He couldn't earn his ---- food -
A regular ---- brumby,
----!"

He jumped across the ---- horse
And cantered off, of ---- course!
The roads were bad and ---- muddy;
Said he, "Well, spare me ---- days
The ---- Government's ---- ways
Are screamin' ---- funny,
----!"

He rode up hill, down ---- dale,
The wind it blew a ---- gale,
The creek was high and ---- floody.
Said he, "The ---- horse must swim,
The same for ---- me and him,
Is something ---- sickenin',
----!"

He plunged into the ---- creek,
The ---- horse was ---- weak,
The stockman's face a ---- study!
And though the ---- horse was drowned
The ---- rider reached the ground
Ejaculating, "----!"
"----!"

and noted that Australia really needed "a patriotic Marsellaise". A prize of two guineas was offered for just such a poem and Dennis's "The Australaise" was submitted. The magazine split the prize between two earnest and jingoistic entries written by J. Alex Allen and "Gum-Tree". While it didn't win Dennis's poem was awarded a special prize of one guinea. His entry was published in the *Bulletin* on 12 November 1908.



"Den" by David Low

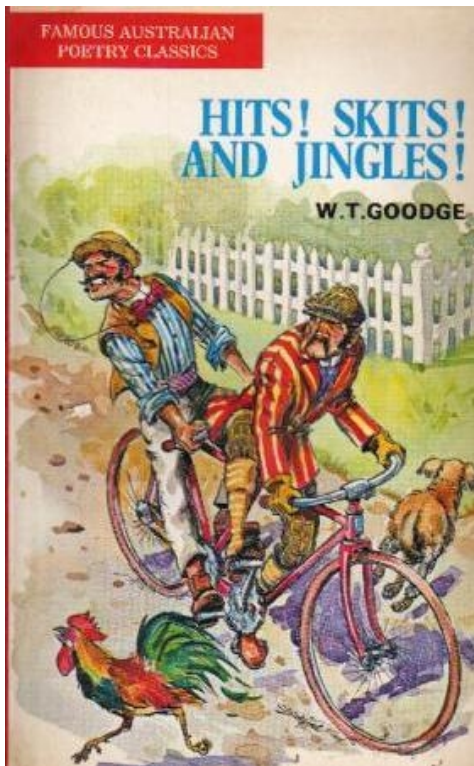
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Goodge's poem appeared first in the *Bulletin* on 11 December 1897.

All works by C. J. Dennis (1876-1938) and W. T. Goodge (1862-1909) are all out of copyright in Australia.

In September 1908, Arthur Adams, the literary editor of the *Bulletin* magazine, criticised the song Advance Australia Fair,

Dennis later added a footnote to 1915 reissue: "Where a dash (---) replaces a missing word, the adjective "blessed" may be interpolated. In cases demanding great emphasis, the use of the word "blooming" is permissible. However, any other word may be used that suggests itself as suitable." In the 21st century we might well substitute a much stronger word.



Some of these names I recognised and a lot I didn't. Though that was to change over the coming years as I started to find old Australian poetry volumes in various second hand bookshops, and tracked down details of their works via Austlit and Trove.

I did eventually find Goodge's collection; not in the original but in a reprint series issued by Pollard Publishing in 1972, with illustrations by Norman Lindsay (see bookcover this page).

I was later to find out that Lindsay did not like Dennis's work: he thought Goodge was a much better comic poet (possibly true) and he hated *The Songs of a Sentimental Bloke*, believing it to be a rip-off of *Jonah* by Louis Stone. This later thought is not true as Stone's novel was published in 1911, and Dennis's first poem about the Bloke appeared in 1908.

The story runs that Lindsay was sent a copy of *The Sentimental Bloke* by the publisher on receipt of which he nailed it to his gatepost. I'm not sure if that is true, but gives a decent idea of his thoughts on the book.



WHAT I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT

Death of a Namesake

I have an unusual name, I'll be the first to admit that. The surname is rare enough and the first is not only odd it seems old-fashioned, and looks decidedly like a diminutive for some other, longer appellation. The two together in a combination are possibly unique. Or so I thought for most of my life.

So it was odd when I discovered some years ago that I was not alone in this world. At least one other person had the same name; he lived in Ottawa, in Canada. Unfortunately he died in 2018, at the age of 57, before I had the chance to meet him.

My surname of "Middlemiss" was not my father's original birth name. He was born Brian Robert Legarey, son of Robert Francis and Jessie Elizabeth May (nee Schutt) Legarey, on 20th July 1930. If "Middlemiss" was rare, then "Legarey" was even rarer. The first record I can find of my father's great-grandfather, Francis Le Garey (or possibly LeGaré or Legare, the spelling is a little variable from place to place), was in Albany, Western Australia, on 21st June 1845 when he applied for a dog licence (see image from *The Perth Gazette and Western Australian Journal* for that date). As of yet I have not determined how or why he came to be in Western Australia. My father always thought that "Legarey" was of French-

Canadian origin and that Francis may have come to Albany, the site of a major whaling station at that time, on a ship of some kind, and then either left it at the end of contract or simply jumped ship with the intention of staying in Australia permanently. In any event he married Eliza Mooney in Albany on 6th December 1853, left WA with his family and headed to South Australia where his son, James Francis was born on 15 April 1866, at a now-deserted Tothill Creek in the mid-North. My biological grandfather, Robert Francis, was born in Broken Hill in New South Wales in 1907, and by 1930 was living in Adelaide where my father was born.

I'm not sure how long my father retained the Legarey surname as his parents divorced in March 1934 when he was three. Jessie married Arthur Valentine Middlemiss in May 1936 and my father's surname changed officially to Arthur's when Robert Francis Legarey died in 1944, when my father was 13. I suspect he was

known by the name of Middlemiss by the time he started school, and would certainly have been using it when he entered high school in 1942 or 1943.

The upshot of this long story is that my family really has two names to track through any form of genealogical history, though only one if you want to be truly biological about it.

So "Middlemiss" it was, and is.

I must have become aware of Perry Middlemiss of Ottawa via a Google search of some kind. He kept on popping up in my google searches for my name. Then, about a year ago I came across the following:

MIDDLEMISS, Perry It is with great sadness that we announce the sudden death of Perry Middlemiss on April 10, 2018 at the age of 57. Beloved husband of Elizabeth Da Ponte, son of the late Robert Middlemiss and of the late Lorraine St-Louis. He leaves behind his children: Tessa Marie (Phil), Lindsay and Spencer. He also leaves his brothers: Brian (Francine) and Bruce (Andrée); his sister Diane (Jacques); his sisters-in-law: Donaria and Alice (Phillip) and his father-in-law Jean-Maria (the late Gloria), his uncle and aunts, many nephews, nieces, cousins and friends.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Perth,
June 10, 1845.
His Excellency the Governor has been
pleased to direct to be published for general
information the following list of Licences
granted at Albany, King George's Sound—
Boat Licence.
John Robinson.
Licences to keep Dogs.
C. L. Byorason
E. M. Spenoer
S. Hamilton
J. Green
R. Murphy
A. Trimmer
J. Legare.
By His Excellency's command,
PETER BROUN.

Which came as a bit of a shock really. Reading through this notice I began to see a few other connections that we had: his father's name was Robert – which was my biological grandfather's name and my father's middle name; and his brother's name was Brian – my father's first name and my middle name.

The co-incidences just kept on coming.

I never met “Perry Middlemiss of Ottawa”. I wish I had. I reckon we might have had a few things to talk about, to laugh about and generally wonder at the weirdness of the world together. But that will now never be.

Vale Perry.



WHAT I'M DOING TO KEEP MYSELF BUSY

Podcasting – TWO CHAIRS TALKING, co-hosted with David Grigg

Episode summary catch-up (31-34):

Episode 31: Through a dark glass (7 July 2020)

We discuss what we've been reading lately, and then I have a long chat with WH Chong about GHOST SPECIES by James Bradley.

Episode 32: The masks we wear (21 July 2020)

Science fiction television and film that we've been watching lately.

Episode 33: Translations, transforms and traumas (4 August 2020)

We discuss the ConZealand online World Science Fiction Convention and the 2020 Hugo Awards. The Hugo Time Machine then goes back and discusses the 1963 awards.

Episode 34: Location, location, location! (18 August 2020)

Another in our semi-regular crime fiction episodes.

And that catches up the past podcast episodes we produced prior to me starting this publication.

Notes from this month's podcasts

Episode 40: Lost in a labyrinth of words (10 November 2020)

David and I discuss a range of books we've been reading recently. We both read PIRANESI by Susanna Clarke so that book is given a lot of attention. Others covered include the 2020 Nebula Award winner, a couple of Australian novels, an Australian memoir, and a debut US novel that was longlisted for the Booker Prize.



Episode 41: A series of perfect murders (24 November 2020)

Another in our Crime fiction episodes. I review THE GOOD TURN by Dervla McTiernan and provide an overview of the 3 books in the series; David discusses Tana French novels including the new standalone THE SEARCHER; I look at the Highsmith and Swanson novels mentioned below and David continues his growing infatuation with Murakami.

You can access the current, and all past podcast episodes at www.rightword.com.au or you can subscribe through any podcast subscription service.



"If he believed in the full complement of evil in himself, he had to believe also in a natural compulsion to express it. He found himself wondering, therefore, from time to time, if he might have enjoyed his crime in some way, derived some primal satisfaction from it – how else could one really explain in mankind the continued toleration of wars, the perennial enthusiasm for wars when they came, if not for some primal pleasure in killing? – and because the capacity to wonder came so often, he accepted it as true that he had." **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN** by Patricia Highsmith



WHAT I'VE BEEN READING LATELY

2020 targets met this month: 14 Crime novels

Codes – F: format (e for electronic, blank for paper); R: rating, out of 5.0.

Abbr – Aust: Australian; Neb – Nebula Award winner; Gdn – Guardian 1000 books.

November 2020 books

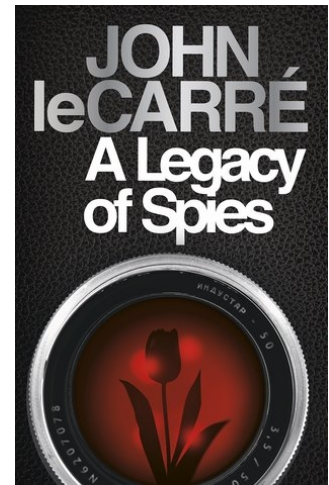
Title	Author	Genre	Date	F	R	Notes
A Legacy of Spies	John Le Carré	Spy	6 Nov		4.3	
A Song for a New Day	Sarah Pinsker	Sf	9 Nov	e	4.0	Neb
Strangers on a Train	Patricia Highsmith	Crime	14 Nov	e	4.5	Gdn
The Women in Black	Madeleine St John	Lit	16 Nov		4.6	Aust
Rules for Perfect Murders	Peter Swanson	Crime	19 Nov		3.8	
The Whole Man	John Brunner	Sf	23 Nov		3.5	
Consider Phlebas	Iain M. Banks	Sf	29 Nov	e	3.8	

Books read in the month: 7

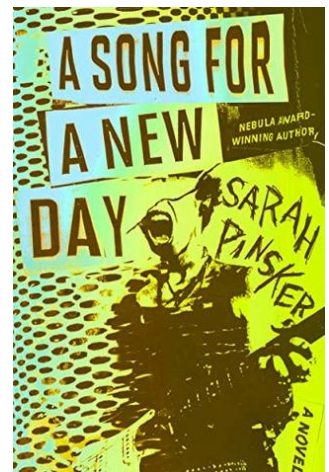
Yearly total to end of month: 110

Notes:

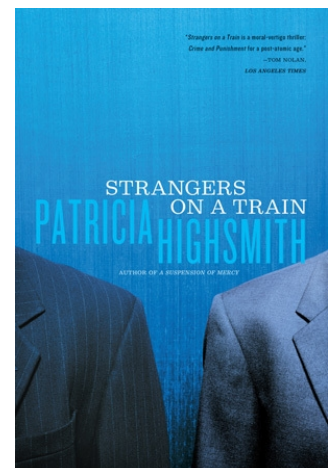
A LEGACY OF SPIES (2017) – George Smiley’s off-sider, Peter Guillam, is living a quiet retirement in Brittany when he is called back to the Circus in London. He is interrogated there about his involvement in the operation set out in the earlier book THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD. The children of Alec Leamas, who was killed while attempting to escape from East Germany, and another East German defector murdered while in the care of the Service, have threatened to sue to find out what really happened to their parents. As Guillam reads through the old reports the original stories are fleshed out and you discover how the Circus was able to place a double agent in East German intelligence; important background for the earlier novel. This reads like the sign-off by Le Carre for his much-loved characters and it is a fitting way for them to finish up. It helps to have read the earlier books in the series. Discussed on the podcast in episode 41. R: 4.3/5.0



A SONG FOR A NEW DAY (2016)– 2020 Nebula Award winner. In a near-future USA – say mid to late 2030s (it isn’t specified) – a wave of terrorist attacks followed by a virus pandemic has forced local and state governments to impose limits on crowds. Luce Cannon (??) was the last musician to play live at anything approaching a medium sized venue before all such live performances were shut down. Now everything has to be performed in a clandestine, underground manner. Rosemary Laws is a small-town country girl who comes across a job vacancy with a large corporation that delivers “live” music performances over the internet. The book asks the questions: how do you perform live music without a crowd, what happens when big business steps in and tries to take control, and how you as an individual could fight back against that? Competent and obviously showing the author’s experience in the music industry this is an interesting book without reaching great heights. Better than most but a bit heavy on the performance detail. Discussed on the podcast in episode 40. R: 4.0/5.0



STRANGERS ON A TRAIN (1950) – Architect Guy Haines wants a divorce from his wife Miriam so he can marry Anne Faulkner. Charles Anthony Bruno is a wealthy spoilt New York kid who hates his father and wants him dead. The two meet on a train by accident and their subsequent conversation is turned, by Bruno, to the idea of them swapping murders. Haines wants none of it but a few weeks later he learns that Miriam has been found dead, strangled, and he realises that Bruno has done it. The novel then moves into a period of psychological warfare as Bruno attempts to wear Haines down and force him into killing Bruno’s father. For a debut novel this is an astounding piece of work, a classic in the genre, full of building menace and tension. Filmed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951.

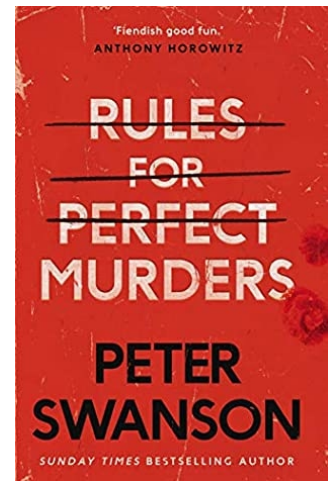


Maybe 50 pages too long, but that's a minor quibble. Discussed on the podcast in episode 41. R: 4.5/5.0

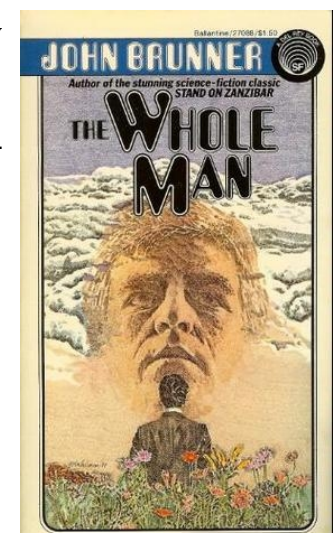
THE WOMEN IN BLACK (1993) – A debut novel by this Australian author, written when she was 52. She only wrote another 3 novels, which is a pity given the quality of this one. The book is set in the late 1950s in and around the Ladies' Frock Department of the fictitious F. G. Goode department store in Sydney. Lesley Miles, who changes her name to Lisa, is a young schoolgirl who takes a summer job in the Cocktail Frocks section while she waits for her Leaving results to be announced. Her coming of age coincides with major changes for the sales staff in Frocks, as one after another undergoes a momentous life event. The novel is as joyous and bright as the Sydney weather, with not a step out of place. Filmed by Bruce Beresford as *Ladies in Black* in 2018. Reviewed in full next issue. R: 4.6/5.0



RULES FOR PERFECT MURDERS (2020) – Malcolm Kershaw is living a quiet life as the proprietor of a crime and mystery book in Boston when he is approached by an FBI agent investigating a series of murders. The agent has noticed a pattern in the murders and has tracked it back to a blog post that Kershaw wrote, when he first started in the shop, listing the books that he felt described “perfect murders”. He and the agent begin investigating and Kershaw starts to see connections to his past life and starts to hide some of those connections from the agent. The more the investigation progresses the more things spiral out of control for Kershaw. I had previously bought this novel for my wife (who tells me that she picked the killer) and I read it because of the connection to STRANGERS ON A TRAIN. A competent mystery which some may find a tad gimmicky. And no, I didn't pick the killer, though I did get part of the solution correct. I was trying to be a little too clever. Discussed on the podcast in episode 41. R: 3.8/5.0

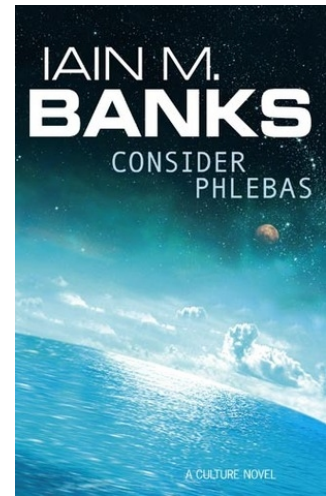


THE WHOLE MAN (1964) - Gerald Howson is born crippled in body to a broken family – absent father, disinterested mother – which becomes more broken when his mother dies young. He wanders the streets of an unnamed American city until an encounter with a deaf-mute girl brings to the fore his latent telepathic ability. He is discovered by the authorities and is rated as one of the most powerful telepaths ever. His attempts to heal both his body and his mind continue through the book until he discovers someone with a major new talent who needs his very specific help. This is an okay sf novel fitting in that sub-genre of telepathy that we don't tend to see any more. It isn't to the standard of Brunner's later works but you begin to see glimpses of what he was capable of. Appears on the 1965 Hugo Award ballot. Discussed on the podcast in episode 42. R:



3.5/5.0

CONSIDER PHLEBAS (1987) – The first of Banks’s Culture novels, and his first sf novel to be published though the fourth to be written. Classic space opera which may well have had a major role in reshaping the sub-genre in the late 1980s. Set during a war between the Idiran Empire and the Culture the novel follows Bora Horza Gobuchul, who is fighting with the Idirans, as he co-opts a band of Free Company mercenaries (okay, space pirates) to track down a runaway AI. Banks introduces most the major concepts (Orbitals, independent drones, Minds, massive Culture ships etc) that would appear later in this series of novels. Too long by about 80 pages the novel can drag a bit during action scenes oddly enough, but shows a bright imagination. R: 3.8/5.0



Notes on shorter fiction:

“Soldier, Ask Not” – Gordon R. Dickson (*Galaxy* Oct 1964) novella
Military SF – part of Dickson’s Childe Cycle of stories. Winner of the 1965 Short Fiction Hugo Award.

400 years prior to the start of this story Man moved out to the stars, colonising a number of planets and then splintering into specific specialised types: warriors on Dorsai, philosophers on the Exotic Worlds, etc. The Friendlies are a race of religious fanatics. Tam Olyn is a journalist who has arrived on the planet of St Marie to cover a local revolutionary war. Each side has recruited mercenaries – one the Dorsai and the other the Friendlies. Olyn hates the Friendlies as they executed his brother-in-law on New Earth for no apparent reason other than expediency. On St Marie it is obvious that the Friendlies are outnumbered and outgunned by the Dorsai-led troops. The leader of the Friendlies realises he has only one way to bring the conflict to a satisfactory end, which he accomplishes. Olyn is the catalyst for this solution but is too fanatical in his own way to realise it, and doesn’t understand what has occurred until it is pointed out to him in detail at the end. Discussed on the podcast in episode 42. R: 3.4/5.0

“Little Dog Gone” by Robert F. Young (*Worlds of Tomorrow* Feb 1964) novella
Nominated for the 1965 Short Fiction Hugo Award.

Actor Nick Hayes is a world-famous actor, and an alcoholic. One day, sick of the grind of his life, he heads off to the stars and wakes up after a long drinking stint looking at a dog-like animal that can teleport. He drags himself back to the nearest town and meets Moira Blair who sets out to sober him up. The two, plus the dog, then set themselves up as a travelling acting troop, jumping from planet to planet, selling patent medicines on the side to make money. This is a standard western story transposed to an sf setting. There isn’t much to it and it is instantly forgettable. Discussed on the podcast in episode 42. R: 2.8/5.0

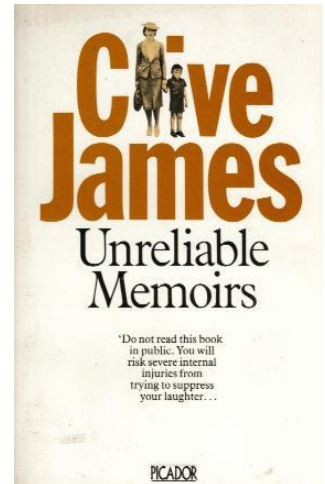


REVIEWS OF AUSTRALIAN BOOKS

UNRELIABLE MEMOIRS (1980) by Clive James

Genre: Autobiography

It's a sad fact that we are sometimes reminded about an author by their death. Clive James took a long time dying and was able in his last ten years or so to produce more work seemingly every year. So I didn't need much reminding of James as he seemed to pop up in the book review pages on a regular basis. Then, in late 2019, we heard the news that he had succumbed at the age of 80 to the leukaemia that had threatened to put an end to him at any time. And now in 2020 there is news of one last book from the author, a collection of his favourite poems.



It seemed timely, therefore, to go back and re-visit the first volume of his autobiography written at about the mid-point of his life. The book's title was to become the overall series name, and James was to go on to write a total of 5 volumes of memoirs – there were rumours of a sixth but James probably became too ill at the end to complete it.

This first volume was a revelation when it first appeared back in 1980 when James was 40. Irreverent, witty and, at times, laugh-out-loud funny, it was rather unlike anything we'd read before, and yet seemed exactly the sort of memoir you'd expect James would write if you had been following his television reviews in *VISIONS BEFORE MIDNIGHT*, and his critical essays in *AT THE PILLARS OF HERCULES*. You might have expected something like this, though I doubt you could have visualised the final package.

Clive James was born Vivian Leopold James in October 1939, in Kogarah, a southern suburb of Sydney. Within a couple of years of his birth his father had enlisted in the Australian Army to fight the Japanese in World War II, been captured during the fall of Singapore, imprisoned in a PoW camp, and was to die on the flight home after the end of the war in 1945. James never really knew his father and the death of his father was a pivotal event in his early life that echoed down the years and impacted the whole of the rest of his days.

James deals with this event relatively quickly in the book and he is then brought up by his single mother in the semi-rural areas of Kogarah, riding billy-carts down precipitous streets, terrorising the neighbourhood dressed in mask and cape as the superhero Flash of Lightning, and falling into and out of gangs of kids at primary school. It was all basic stuff and he ended up having about as an idyllic childhood as it was possible to get, father absence aside.

Prior to his arrival at school James had switched his first name to Clive in order to avoid the feminine associations of his original name. After he starts at school Clive begins to dominate his mother's life. As her life revolves around him to a very large extent he begins to take advantage of the attention, joining Cubs and attending camps. Until at the end of his primary years he wins a scholarship to Sydney High School but forces his mother to allow him to attend Sydney Tech instead, on the grounds that a good friend of his is also going there. In

these passages James comes across as a bit of a little shit, demanding and receiving with little or no regard for his mother's situation. That James is able to state this, wide-eyed, indicates that he was, at the time of writing, aware of what he had been doing, yet was in no position to change the past, he could only record it. Which he does, mostly.

In his introduction James outlines what he is presenting in this book: "Most first novels are disguised autobiographies. This autobiography is a disguised novel." Names, places and events are changed throughout, though more so when he reaches Sydney University I suspect. It is possible to recognise Germaine Greer, Bruce Beresford and maybe Robert Hughes under their pseudonyms and it is to James's credit that he doesn't dwell on the people he knew, deciding rather to describe his university experiences and his lackadaisical approach to his studies.

After university James worked for a year at the *Sydney Morning Herald* before deciding to join the exodus of Australians to London, his mother seemingly forgotten. This first volume ends with James remembering his approach to England on his boat and with him contemplating what he has written in this memoir: "Nothing I have said is factual except the bits that sound like fiction." And yet it all sounds like fiction, and is the better for it.

Rating: 4.5/5.0



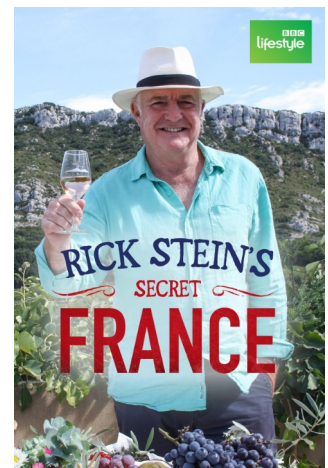
WHAT I'VE BEEN WATCHING LATELY

RICK STEIN'S SECRET FRANCE (6 episodes)

Platform: Foxtel (probably on SBS Food later)

Genre: Food, documentary

I must admit to being an admirer of Rick Stein's work. My son thinks he's pretentious, which may well be a product of his lack of experience with other so-called "celebrity chefs" who tend to be so far up themselves that they almost disappear from sight. Stein appears to take a genuine interest in what he sees, in what he eats and in who he meets. He must by now have a vast bookshelf of Moleskine notebooks filled with drawings and notes as he always seems to have one in hand jotting down recipes and techniques. His humour is always of the self-deprecating type, while lamenting the British general public's lack of ambition for new food experiences. In this series he's sticking to the back-roads of France, visiting well-known regions but staying away from the well-worn tourist routes. He's just meandering and following his nose, as he says. It makes for a warm, amusing and informative food-travel series. About the only way I'm going to be able to enjoy travel in this wretched year of 2020. Cheers Rick. R: 4.2/5.0



MINDHUNTER Season 1 (10 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

Set in the period 1977-80 when an FBI hostage negotiator (Holden Ford) forms a relationship with a multiple killer. He is recruited by an FBI Behavioural Scientist and they begin to develop a methodology of categorising and identifying such killers. But Ford's techniques, even though they are successful, begin to rankle his co-workers and his superiors. It defeats me how his superiors can get upset about the language he uses when he's dealing with people who have committed such vile acts, but such is the way with some people who want things to change, just not with themselves. A very perceptive insight into the early days of behavioural theory as applied to criminals and its subsequent consequences. R: 4.2/5.0



THE QUEEN'S GAMBIT Mini-series (7 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Drama

Based on the novel by Walter Tevis (THE HUSTLER and THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH) this 7-episode series follows the life of an orphaned Beth Harmon (played by an excellent Anya Taylor-Joy) from her first introduction to the game of chess at the age of 9 through her winning the US Open Championship at 16 and later taking on the Russian World Champion in Moscow. It's a character study showing how an outstanding talent in one area can lead to a sense of isolation, and, in Harmon's case, addiction to pills and booze. It's been a very long time since I read the book, and I can't find it anywhere in the house at present, but I believe they may have changed the ending. This one works just as well. R: 4.7/5.0

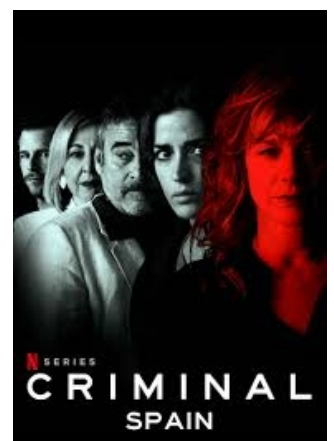


CRIMINAL : SPAIN Season 1 (3 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

This is the last (for us) of the current run of CRIMINAL series on Netflix. Again this Spanish version of the concept uses the same set and same basic idea of a small team of police investigators interviewing suspects or persons of interest regarding crimes: a woman is questioned over the possible death of a man in her house; a young woman is interviewed about the death by drowning of her sister in the family bath; and a life-long criminal is interrogated about a cocaine possession charge. If this program is a true reflection of the Spanish criminal justice system then I hope I never fall foul of it. The tactics used by the police team to get their results were all underhand and borderline illegal which turned me off a bit. In addition the leader of the team, while being continually praised for her interview techniques, never shows what she is made of. This is the least effective of



the four variants on the theme. R: 3.4/5.0

MINDHUNTER Season 2 (9 episodes)

Platform: Netflix

Genre: Crime

The spark from the first season seems to have dissipated somewhat here in the second. The investigation is mainly concentrated on a series of child murders in Atlanta in 1979-81 where at least 28 boys and young men were murdered. The FBI team's methods prove successful though there appears to be much more of an emphasis on the private lives of the main characters. This would be understandable if it had an impact on the long-term direction of the program but it appears now that Netflix has this series on indefinite hold. The rumour is that the major creative force, David Fincher, has moved on to other projects. R: 3.8/5.0



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PERRYSCOPE Responses

PERRYSCOPE 3:

Graham Peters: "Vonnegut is best understood (and admired) if you read a glut of it together. I actually think his short stories and the collection of essays, WAMPETER, FOMA AND GRANFALLONS is a good introduction.

"SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE and CAT'S CRADLE (to a lesser extent) stand outside of much of his work, but there is a sense almost of having to master the meter in poetry – your discussion of C.J. Dennis in the same magazine gives some sense of it. Once one masters the meter of Songs of a Sentimental Bloke, hearing the rhythm and accent in one's head, it flows naturally. I had the same experience reading Hunter S. Thompson in Rolling Stone – initial irritation shifting to admiration at his narrative flow and realising how one could use parallel disjointed narratives to build the whole picture. I've flipped this on its head professionally when interviewing dodgy folk, running up to six concurrent lines of questioning to elicit information which they would otherwise conceal."

[**PM:** Phil Butterss, who wrote a recent biography of Dennis titled AN UNSENTIMENTAL BLOKE: THE LIFE AND WORK OF C. J. DENNIS, told me that no-one in university read Dennis anymore as they couldn't understand him. I suspect your point about "the rhythm and accent" is correct and that the younger generation have trouble understanding the "old" Australian accent of the first half of the 20th century. That accent may well have been at a higher pitch and more nasal than the current version, though that may be me pushing the accents heard on early Australian film a bit too far. I'd have to leave that to the experts to determine.]

John Hertz: "Good title. Does it by any chance allude to Nabokov's invented term 'perry' – possibly, he says, derived from 'periscope' – for a kind of literary gadget used by some authors, see him on Dickens' BLEAK HOUSE in LECTURES ON LITERATURE?"

[PM: In a word “no”. Nabokov not being anywhere near my list of favourite authors I tend to avoid him like the plague.]

John also disagrees with my assessment of GLORY ROAD by Heinlein. He quotes Delany as saying it (the novel) is “endlessly fascinating”.

[PM: Well yes, but only in the sense of “endless fascinating that he was able to get away with this.”]

PERRYSCOPE 4:

Martin Field: “I’m with you on liking the novella length – packing a lot of plot into the short form suits me sir...I despair when I see more of the modern trend of trilogies – and larger – stuffed with padding and extraneous guff. (If Peter Jackson had written the (310 page) HOBBIT it’d be a morbidly obese thousand plus pager – like his unwatchable film trilogy of same.)”

[PM: The “morbidly obese” trilogy has been a scourge of the field since the seventies. I don’t see it going away any time soon. If, say, the third or fourth volume in a series is nominated for a Hugo Award I have the problem of wanting to be able to put the book into context. Which basically means having to read all the previous works in the series before getting to the one I actually want to read. Not a particularly welcoming prospect.]

“Have just re-read Sassoon’s thinly disguised autobiography The George Sherston Trilogy. What a wonderful writer. I think the third volume suffers though from introspection and self analysis. However, I can forgive this of an heroic yet pacifist soldier who suffered greatly for his beliefs.”

[PM: Don’t know that one at all. But then, I am very aware that I have some major blind spots in my reading.]

Lucy Huntzinger: “I’ve never collected books, so I’ve never had a to-be-read pile more than five or six deep. I virtually never buy books thinking I ought to read them/will probably read them/got to have all of this anthology series, and so on. I am frankly in awe that you’re attempting to get through years of collected material! I hope you find some good stuff...Personally, I’m not interested in anything published more than twenty years ago. Times and technology change too fast.”

[PM: Most of the shorter fiction is very forgettable; the good stuff really stands out. A lot of the short stories read like excerpts from unfinished novels which is not what I’m looking for. I suffer for my art, cough.]

Graham Peters: “Reflecting a little on your viewing, rather than reading, the Crime emphasis seems high. I am not sure if you have ever read any Hans Hellmut Kirst. THE NIGHT OF THE GENERALS is well known, but many of his other works were also very well translated. I have a fondness for the Gunner Asch series, originally a trilogy but finally five novels...One quote from Kirst, a Nazi Party member and WW2 officer, is opportune this week: ‘One did not really know one was in a club of murderers.’”

[PM: Ah, good to see that someone noticed the crime emphasis. This has been more a matter of who I’m watching the programs with. My wife does have a tendency to lean towards the criminal side(!). And those seem to be the most interesting of late. More books to check out, just what I need.]

I also heard from: Leigh Edmonds, who wondered if I'd been an accountant in a previous life; [**PM**: I certainly hope not. I haven't got anything against accountants, it's just not my thing.]; and **Werner Koopmann**. Thanks to one and all. ♦