THE *NEW* GLADSTONE REVIEW

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an occasional e-journal

Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry for bookish people of philanthropic inclination

Contents

1. Ameliorating pessimism

It is surely difficult to be optimistic in a world so beset with troubles as we now find ourselves. Very few of us lived through the traumas of World War II, and most of those who did were, like me, too young to appreciate its true horrors. Even the tales my father told me, when a boy, of his time at Ypres during WWI ('Wipers' to the ranks) seemed so strange as to be fictional. And yet, for most of the post-war 20th century, in Harold Macmillan's words, 'We never had it so good.' But even to recall those years favourably, is to ignore the incessant 'wars and rumours of wars' that blighted the lives of many in other countries, and the poverty, hunger and sickness that was the lot of millions in less developed countries. And yet ...morose pessimism is surely no sort of worthy response to the challenges we now face – and which few seem to have any convincing ideas on how to address.

In my own life, I've had to face a number of personal tragedies, mostly the premature deaths of close family members and a serious threat to my own health, but I have usually managed to find strength in a defiant stoicism. I'm sure I'm not alone in finding in music and poetry some encouragement and, with that pretext, I offer below some lines of verse that may strike an enigmatic - if not richly optimistic – chord to lighten the overwhelming gloom (Item 2).

The main article (Item 4) is about a man, whose creative thinking appears to have foreseen the way the Earth acts like a living organism, and which thus needs to be treated with due respect – which, regrettably, humanity has egregiously failed to do. Other articles concern COP and the future of food supplies (Item 3), Limericks (5), and a review of an unusual book on kindness (6).

* I am most grateful to Linda Hunter for her delightful and seasonal artistic adornments.

I wish all customers & readers a restful & convivial Christmas & happier New Year! BM

2. Poems of regret, resolution and restitution in troubled times

We are getting to the end: Thomas Hardy

We are getting to the end of visioning
The impossible within this universe,
Such as that better whiles may follow worse,
And that our race may mend by reasoning.

We know that even as larks in cages sing
Unthoughtful of deliverance from the curse
That holds them lifelong in a latticed hearse,
We ply spasmodically our pleasuring.

And that when nations set them to lay waste
Their neighbours' heritage by foot and horse,
And hack their pleasant plains in festering seams,
They may again, - not warily, or from taste,
But tickled mad by some demonic force. -
Yes. We are getting to the end of dreams.

From: Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam

Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire
Would not we shatter it to bits –and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

Ah, Moon of my Delight who know'st no wane
The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again:
How oft hereafter rising shall she look
Through this same Garden after me – in vain!

Song of a man who has come through: D H Lawrence

(slightly amended)

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, oh, delicate, a winged gift!
If only most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind that takes its course
through the chaos of the world
Like a fine, an exquisite chisel, a wedge-blade inserted;
If only I am keen and hard like the sheer tip of
a wedge driven by invisible blows
The rock will split, we shall come at the wonder

Oh for the wonder that bubbles into my soul
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head
Would blur no whisper, spoil no expression

3. DIETS MUST CHANGE TO PROTECT THE PLANET

The recent COP26 meeting in Glasgow gave little consideration to the urgent need to reform the ways food from animals is produced and used on a global scale. This brief article raises these concerns and indicates the important role **Compassion in World Farming** (CIWF) is playing in drawing attention to this vital element of future plans for environmental sustainability and food security.

CIWF Statement issued at COP26

COP26 is bringing together world leaders to tackle the dangerous and unprecedented climate emergency. We urge governments to seize COP Nature Day on 6th November to properly address the impact of food and animal agriculture. People are relying on their leadership – we need a commitment to immediate global action towards creating sustainable, healthy food systems for the benefit of animals, people and the planet.

Our planet is in crisis. The issue of food and agriculture impact needs to form a central part of the discussion and world leaders need to be ready to bring about serious change.

If the way we eat does not change substantially, as a matter of urgency, we will fail to meet climate targets and the science says the repercussions will be catastrophic. Global meat and dairy consumption must be greatly reduced if we are to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A move to higher-welfare, nature-friendly agriculture is also essential if we are to reduce biodiversity loss. The world is watching.

I was one of the 45 signatories to this statement

In support of the above statement, CIWF has produced the following report:

Breaking the Taboo: Why Diets Must Change to Tackle Climate Emergency

https://assets.ciwf.org/media/7447656/breaking-the-taboo-why-diets-must-change-to-tackle-climate-emerge

CIWF Visionaries

seek food and farming policies that promote:

- Good health by ensuring universal access to sufficient and nutritious food.
- Sustainable farming methods, which support rural livelihoods and relieve poverty.
- Protection for the planet and its precious resources: soil, water, forest and biodiversity.
- Reduced emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants from agriculture.
- Humane farming methods which promote the health and natural behaviour of sentient animals and avoid causing them pain and suffering.
- Reduced consumption of animal products in high-consuming populations to meet environmental, health and sustainability goals.

I am privileged to have been invited to be one of the list of CIWF Visionaries who fully endorse the above objectives – in my case through my writing, speaking and lecturing activities. Other visionaries include: Dr Jane Goodall - pioneer ecologist and environmentalist, Prof Martin Rees – cosmologist, former President of the Royal Society and Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, Prof Peter Singer, notable bioethicist, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Dame Judi Dench, Michael Morpurgo and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

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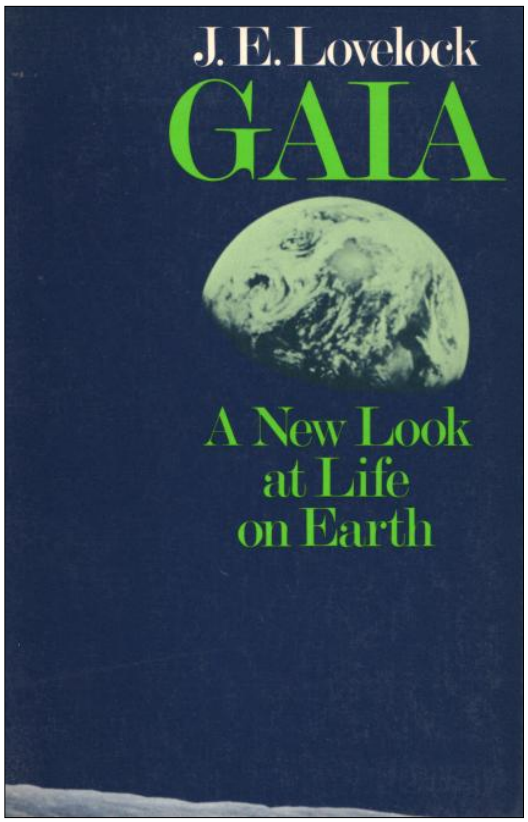
4. COP26 versus GAIA
The prescience of James Lovelock

It was some time before I got round to looking up what COP26 stood for. It was not revealed in news items, and my whimsical guesses – Council for Prevarication, Congress of Procrastinators or an Americanised form of PC49, charged with arresting owners of high-mileage cars – all lacked appropriate gravitas (although not being too wide of the mark). But the actual meaning -***Conference of the Parties*** - sounds like nothing so much as a bunch of MPs discussing what form this year's Christmas festivities might take – perhaps a game of Sleaze Monopoly with compulsory face masks. (But since the main attendees were representatives from countries that signed the UN Framework at the Congress on Climate Change in 1994 - the UNFCCC - they were probably greatly relieved not to have been required to pronounce that acronym whilst keeping a straight face.) But enough of quips, this is serious stuff.

To many politicians, as well as captains of industry and others whose decisions have significant effects on global geopolitics, the startlingly gloomy assessments of just how precarious is the continuing existence of life on Earth seem to have come as a surprise. But the Glasgow COP meeting was the 26th of such events – and followed publication of an IPCC report which, according to UN secretary general Antonio Guterres, indicated that humanity is now '*at the verge of the abyss*.'



Someone who foresaw the likelihood of the impending crisis – over 40 years ago – was James Lovelock. In *Gaia: a new look at life on Earth* (1979) he put forward the novel idea that the Earth was not, as widely believed, an inert lump of matter, but displayed self-regulatory properties somewhat akin to a living organism. This he called the Gaia hypothesis, the name of the mythical ancient Greek earth mother, which was suggested to him by a fellow resident in his Wiltshire village, the famous novelist William Golding (notably, of Lord of the Flies).

Lovelock is remarkable for three main reasons – his brilliant *originality* as a thinker, his long-standing status as an i*ndependen*t scientist and his *longevity,* for this year - as sharp as ever - he is 102. I suspect there is a close connection between these characteristics.

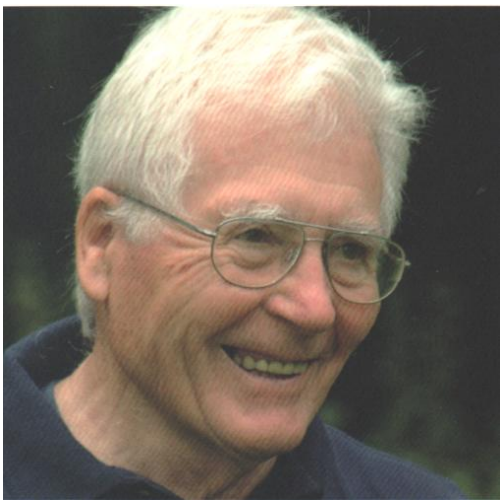
Almost by definition, mental originality does not flourish in the conventional channels of academic achievement; and Lovelock's life history is a colourful demonstration of that. Born at his grandmother's house in Letchworth Garden City, 30 miles from London, to a man in his late 40s (who in his teens had served six months hard labour for poaching, and was illiterate until attending technical college) and a woman *who had a passion for classical music,* he was brought up in Brixton, south London. His father then collected coins from gas meters for the local gas company, a position that meant Lovelock went to the local primary school; but due to his mother's keen encouragement he gained entry to the local grammar school in Brixton. However, science teaching there was not strong, and he learnt most of his science from books borrowed from the local public library.

From such inauspicious beginnings, by climbing a 'greasy pole' (his cockney accent then being a serious liability) his intellectual abilities began to become apparent. His first job was as a lab technician to a company specialising in aspects of the chemistry of photography, where he became familiar with the standard equipment never encountered before – pH meters, spectrometers and a range of bizarrely-shaped glassware suited to specific roles. As part of his training he had to enlist as a part-time student at Birkbeck College of London University, a requirement that opened up opportunities for him to reveal his true talents. But he was by no means only a scientific *boffin*, as his interests ranged over history, literature and philosophy: he also became a Quaker at this time.

In the early 1940s, Lovelock was an undergraduate in chemistry at Manchester University, where he was greatly influenced by Professor Alexander Todd, who subsequently was awarded a Nobel Prize. During his student years he was called before a tribunal for his registration as a conscientious objector, for which he was granted exemption from military engagements. In 1948, Lovelock received a PhD degree in medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and was soon invited to join the scientific staff at the National Institute for Medical Research at Mill Hill in London, where he was involved in projects in bacteriology, virology and cryopreservation. During this period he abandoned his conscientious objection to military service in the light of Nazi atrocities and tried to enlist in the armed forces, but was told that his medical research was too valuable for the enlistment to be approved.

Perhaps the most concise way of indicating some of his earlier scientific achievements is to reproduce the citation on his being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1974:

Lovelock has made distinguished contributions to several diverse fields, including a study of the transmission of *respiratory infection*, and methods of *air sterilisation*, the role of calcium and other divalent ions in *blood clotting*; damage to various living cells by freezing, thawing and *thermal shock* and its prevention by the presence of neutral solutes; methods of freezing and thawing small live animals; and methods for preparing sperm for *artificial insemination*, which have been of major economic importance.



He has invented a family of ionization detectors for *gas chromatography*. His *electron capture detectors* are the most sensitive that have been made and are universally used on pollution problems for residual halogen compounds.[1] . He has many inventions, including a *gas chromatograph*, which will be used to investigate planetary atmospheres. His chromatographic work has led to investigation of blood lipids in various animals, including ateriosclerotic humans. He has made a study of *detecting life on other planets* by analysis of their atmosphere and extended this to world pollution problems.

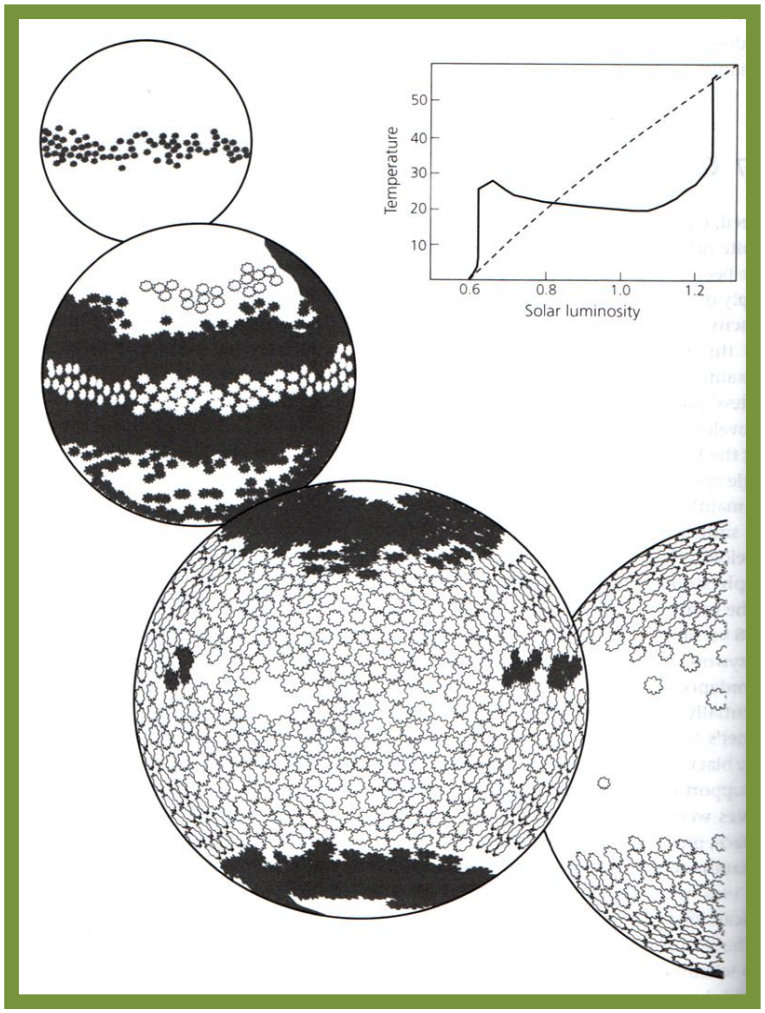
His work generally shows remarkable originality, simplicity and ingenuity.

Most of these achievements were accomplished as he worked independently, collaborating with colleagues around the world but, since his early years at Mill Hill, he has eschewed any tenured university position which is the standard career move of the vast majority of scientists of his calibre.

[1] In his own assessment, the ECD was his most significant invention.

But the reason for this article was not mentioned in the Royal Society citation, its popular announcement only having been made in 1979. Lovelock arrived at his visionary Gaia hypothesis by posing questions the answers to which were not obvious to anyone at the time. Where did the nitrogen in the atmosphere come from? Why was the proportion of atmospheric oxygen just within the safety zone? Why wasn't the sea far more salty? Why hasn't all that water boiled off into space? From such questions, he patiently built up an argument that began to sound increasingly interesting - that *life is an agent in its own survival*. When Gaia was first published it was widely regarded as daringly provocative – and the source of numerous other questions never previously considered.

Many scientists disparaged Lovelock's claims and the invocation of a mythical Greek goddess. But others (including me) were impressed by the arguments and the power of the metaphor. As journalist Tim Radford has said: *Having invested a few paragraphs in rehearsing the improbability behind the assembly of sentient, self-replicating life from a chemical soup, in turbulent conditions, over immense timescales, Lovelock cheerfully resolves it all on page 14 by concluding, "Life on Earth was thus an almost utterly improbable event with almost infinite opportunities of happening. So it did." I don't think I've ever seen a neater or more graceful summation.*



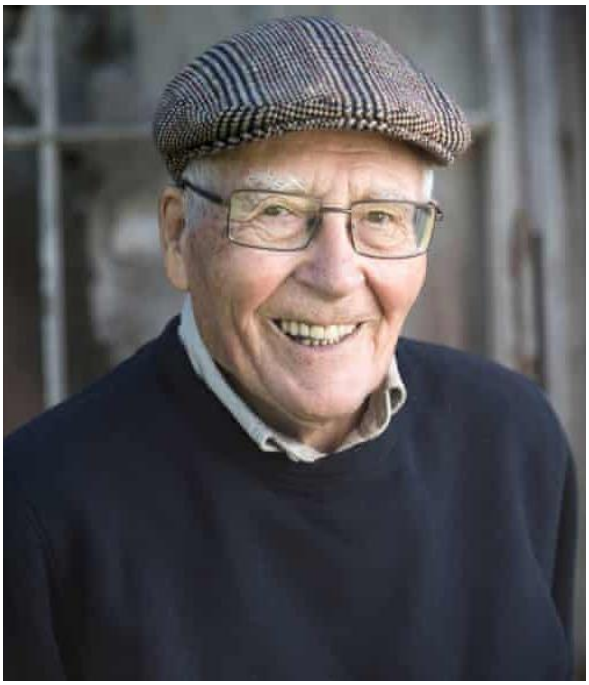
It is time to provide a summary of the nub of Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis. Many living organisms exhibit *homeostasis*, a collection of physiological processes by means of which, despite fluctuations in the environment which an organism occupies, internal reactions maintain the organism's inner status fairly constant. For example, exposure to heat causes humans to sweat, the evaporation of which cools the body; diverts blood to the skin surface, enabling heat loss; and stimulates drinking, thus cooling the body and replacing water lost through sweating..The result is that the blood temperature remains virtually constant in spite of the changed external temperature.

When Lovelock's book first appeared, biologists' standard view was that living organisms adapt to their environment by the natural selection of new mutant forms, which give them advantages over less-successful forms. These evolutionary changes were due to blind forces which led to the perpetuation of the most fitting species in their particular environmental niches. The concept of Gaia

has undergone some modifications since it was first proposed, and in the 1988 version the imaginary planet *Daisyworld* was introduced to explain the thesis. [2]

Daisyworld is populated by two kinds of plant only – white daisies and black daisies, which in accordance with Darwinian theory serve to maintain the planet's temperature at an essentially constant level despite a major increase over time in the heat radiated by the planet's *sun*. Initially, when the planet's surface was low, only black daisies could grow, because by absorbing heat they warmed the planet sufficiently to support continued life.

With the passage of time, as solar radiation increased, black daisies were displaced by white daisies, which by reflecting heat, cooled the planet's surface, preventing it from over- heating. Thus, the biological response to changing solar radiation achieved homeostasis – the maintenance of almost constant temperature of Daisyworld's surface despite a two-fold increase in heat from the sun (see graphs in the box.). Even though the example is simplistic, it serves to convey the idea that species diversity can supply the necessary response to support life. In reality, Gaian stability is maintained by ecological adaptations to changes not only of a climatic nature, but increasingly – since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution – those resulting from human activities, so-called anthropogenic effects.



As noted, many scientists disparaged Lovelock's claims, but others, were impressed by the arguments and the power of the metaphor. Recently, in an article published in the *Guardian* newspaper during the COP26 meeting, Lovelock was interviewed by Jonathon Watts, the global environment editor. A few choice quotations provide a strong sense of his current opinions.

- Almost 60 years ago, I suggested our planet self-regulated like a living organism. I called this Gaia Theory, and was later joined by biologist Lynn Margulis (in the USA), who also espoused this idea. Both of us were roundly criticised by scientists in academia. I was an outsider, an independent scientist, and the mainstream view was the neo-Darwinist one that life adapts to the environment, not that the relationship also works in the opposite direction, as we argued.

- In the years since, we have seen just how much life – especially human life – can affect the environment. Two genocidal acts – suffocation by greenhouse gases and the clearance of the rain forests – have caused changes not seen in a million years.

- Covid19 may well have been one attempt by the Earth to protect itself. Gaia will try harder next time with something even nastier.

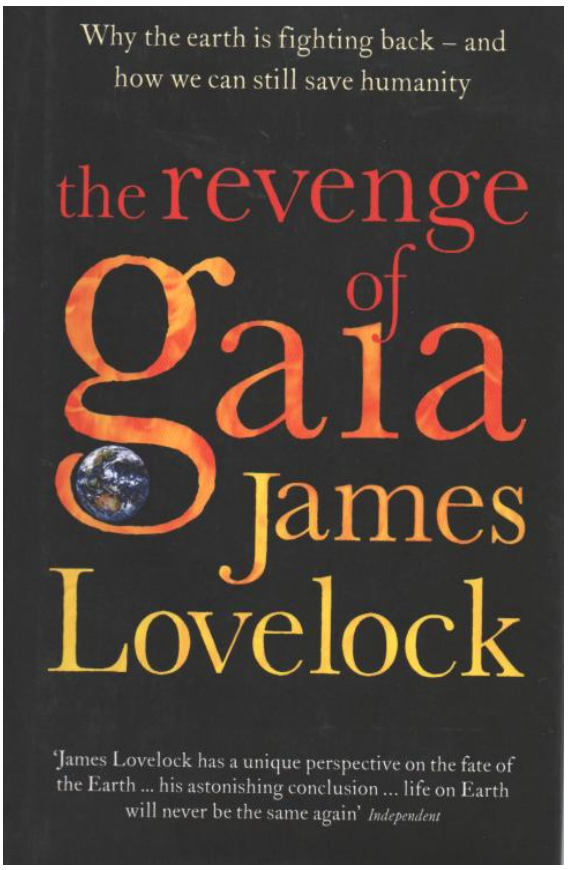
- We need to address the problem of overpopulation and to urgently halt the destruction of tropical forests. Most of all we need to look at the world in a holistic way.

[2] Lovelock responded positively to my personal request to reproduce the Daisyworld figure in my book *Bioethics* (OUP, 2005., 2008), sending me an updated version to that appearing in other publications.

- My fellow humans must learn to live in partnership with the Earth, or the rest of creation will, as part of Gaia, unconsciously move the Earth to a new state in which humans may no longer be welcome.

- I am not hopeful of a positive outcome at COP26, knowing who is participating. I was not invited to Glasgow, though that is hardly a surprise. As well as being 102 years old, I am an independent scientist, and the university scientists have never been happy with that.

- Warnings that once seemed like the doom scenarios of science fiction are now coming to pass. We are entering a heat age in which the temperature and sea levels will be rising decade by decade until the world becomes unrecognisable. We could also be in for more surprises: nature is nonlinear and unpredictable, never more than at a time of transition.



To conclude, it is worth quoting a philosopher, the late Mary Midgley, for her wise words on myths, the use of which some readers may still find problematical. She wrote:

We are accustomed to think of myths as the opposite of science. But in fact they are a central part of it: the part that decides its significance in our lives. So we very much need to understand them.

Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape meaning.

For instance, machine imagery, which began to pervade our thought in the 17th century, is still potent today. We often tend to see ourselves, and the living things around us, as pieces of clockwork: items of a kind that we ourselves could make, and might decide to remake if it suits us better. Hence, use of the confident language of 'genetic engineering' and 'the building blocks of life.

Afterthought

Perhaps many scientists' adverse reactions to Gaia are due to its apparent association with ancient Greek ideas, which they regard as mere fantasy. Coining a new word such as ***Eceostasis,*** in which the parallel with *homeostasis* is more explicit, might avoid their abreaction. (Another neologist has already claimed *Ecostasis*!) The imaginary, iconic planet could then be called ***Eceostasia.***

Reference sources: Gaia: a new look at life on Earth (1979); The Revenge of Gaia (2006); Homage to Gaia (2000) [All by J Lovelock]; Guardian articles by T Radford and J Watts

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5. *LIMERICKS*

Regular readers of this publication will know I have a penchant for word play. Recently the Review has featured articles on *clerihews* (Issue 9) and *spoonerisms* (Issue 12) – so when I chanced on a copy of *The Complete Limerick Book*, published in 1924, in a second-hand shop, I couldn't resist buying it. Some of the verses have caused me to chuckle – which I must confess is a rare occurrence. Perhaps it's because I am more attuned to the humour of the period following the 1920s than that of the 2020s!

In his Introduction, the author, Langford Reed, manages to combine a scholarly description of this enigmatic verse-form with a witty, irreverent style, which I found both informative and uplifting: an accomplishment I rarely encounter in the recent, troubled times. The origins and provenance of limericks are uncertain, but he seemed confident in ascribing these to customs in the city of Limerick in the Republic of Ireland . The name was first used to describe a song – popular in the 18th century in which *each of an interminable set of verses dealt with the adventures of an inhabitant of a different town. It had to be invented on the spur of the moment, each line by a different singer.* The first time a verse was recorded in print was in the late 19th century. He rendered it as:

All hail to the town of Limerick
Which provides a cognomen, generic,
For a species of verse
Which for better or worse
Is supported by laymen and cleric

That seems innocent, and obscure, enough not to stimulate much interest, but according to George Bernard Shaw the bulk of subsequent verses *should be excluded from all printed record due to the ribaldry and indelicacy which would offend the general reader*. Arnold Bennett endorsed this opinion and opined that *the best ones are entirely unprintable*. But Reed was offended by such assessments and ventured to hope *that the many scores of felicitous and ingenious examples of real literary merit* he had collected *would succeed in 'deodorising' the false impressions of its critics* –and *prove to the public that literary waggishness and obscenity are not necessarily dependent on one another*. Indeed, many of the examples he compiled were composed by prominent clergymen like Dean Inge and Father Ronald Knox.

A limerick now is a type of lyric poem, with a specific rhyme scheme and metric pattern (with the format ***aabba***). They serve as a type of comic outlet, the last line often providing an ironic or satirical flourish. The successful ones can be very effective, and memorable, because they are short, catchy and to the point.

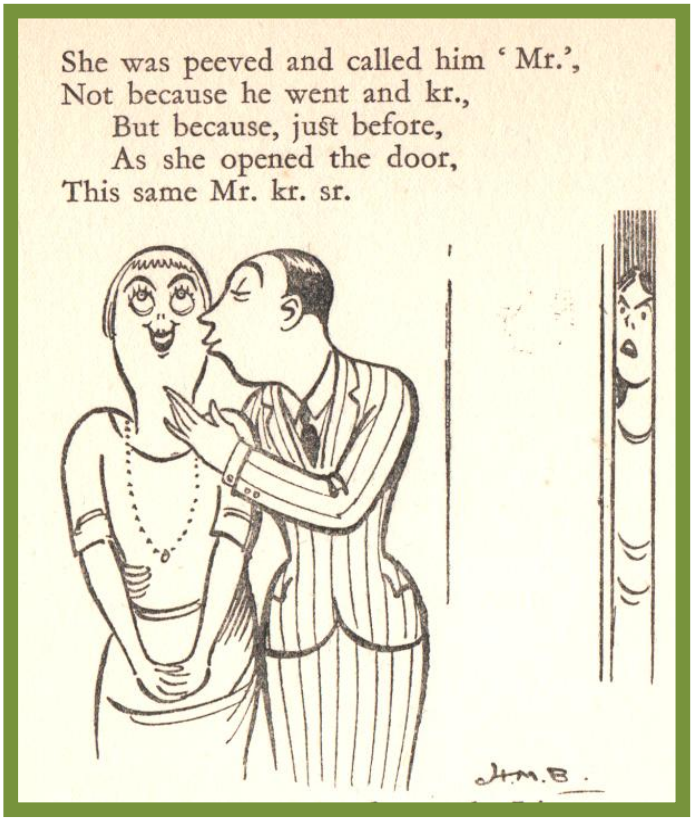
One of the earliest to try his hand was Edward Lear (poem below), who was probably, falsely, claimed to have invented them in 1846. But Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* etc, also wrote a number of limericks.

There was once a young man of Oporta,
Who daily got shorter and shorter,
The reason he said
Was the hod on his head,
Which was filled with the heaviest mortar

A quite well-known one of Ogden Nash goes:

A flea and a fly in a flue
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
Said the fly, "let us flee!"
"Let us fly!" said the flea.
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

But the added pleasure of Reed's book is that several of the poems are accompanied by cartoons drawn by the leading cartoonist of that period H M Bateman.

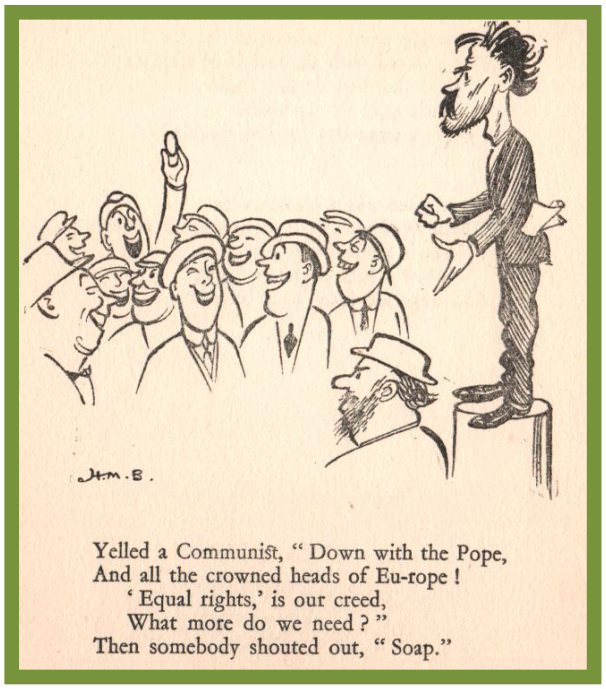


The above example illustrates that within the general metric scheme, word play often adds another layer of surprise, such as:

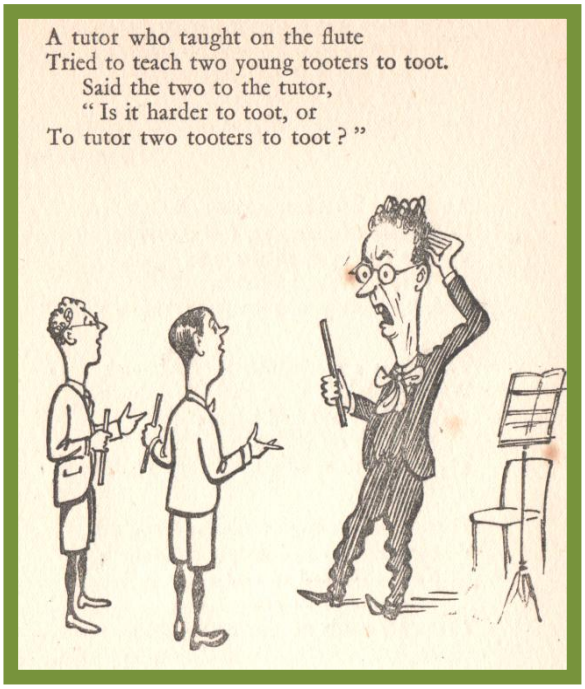
There once was a diarist named Pepys
Who wrote about London in hepys
When the Fire had died down
Pepys went about town
And culled tales that gave one the crepys

And another in a similar vein:

Said a man to his wife down in Sydenham
My best trousers – where have you hydenham?
It's perfectly true
they weren't very new
But I foolishly left half-a-quidenham



A political jibe



A tongue twister

In the 21st century, the limerick might seem just a quaint remnant of entertainment in an earlier, rather naive period of history. But in the opening decades of the 19th century it was the basis of a craze which swept the country. The person who was probably most responsible for this was the editor of *The London Opinion*, Lincoln Springfield. With the aim of increasing sales of his journal, he introduced competitions in which readers, having submitted evidence that they subscribed to the journal, were invited to suggest the 'last line' to new limericks from which the latter had been omitted. *Very large prizes were offered, and for months a considerable proportion of the population of these islands derived their principal 'literary' diversions from the cult of the Limerick, which formed one of the chief topics of their conversation.*

Soon, the craze assumed the proportion of a recognised business, with its own trade journals and its own 'professors' who, for a fee, prepared 'last lines' almost guaranteed to win prizes. Other newspapers adopted the same strategy, and the 'professors' reaped substantial profits. An idea of the wholesale manner in which these competitions attracted public attention is *given by Mr Buxton during a speech he made in the House of Commons in July 1908 on the Post Office vote*. Referring to the effect the craze was having on Post Office revenue, he noted that *while in the last six months of a year about 800,000 sixpenny postal orders would normally have been bought – in the preceding period of 1907, a total of 11,500,000 had been bought – fourteen times as many*!

Naturally, the winning submissions had to be decided by a panel of adjudicators. In one case a railway clerk claimed £79 from the proprietors of a weekly journal, alleging that £158 had been paid to a competitor for a line identical to that he had submitted – and he felt he should have half the prize But the editor insisted he was not responsible for late deliveries – and the claim was rejected.

Some 'prizes' that were offered lacked any credibility. For example, a cigarette company offered for a winning prize a '*a pretty, well-kept villa standing in its own grounds, decorated and furnished by Waring and Gillow, together with a £2 a week pension and a pony and trap.'* Unfortunately, the villa's location was not publicly revealed, allegedly in order to 'protect the winner's privacy'!

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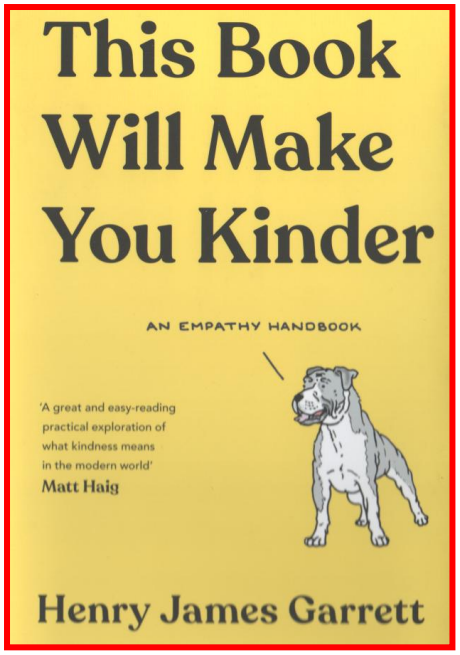
6. A BOOK TO MAKE YOU KINDER?
book review

Traditionally, Christmas is reputedly the season of 'peace on Earth and good will to all men'. Why such noble aspirations don't apply in *every* season, and to *all women* and *children* as well, isn't clear; but, charitably, we can put it down to the longstanding patriarchal sexism which was 'normal' from a time as far back as anyone can remember, or even read about in ancient documents. Despite all the racism and male chauvinism that still exist everywhere, but in some countries more perniciously than others, there is hope in the countless expressions of desire for harmony and kindness towards others which many, especially in the younger generations, are crying out for.



Self-help books designed to increase confidence, ambition and 'mindfulness' have been popular reading for decades, but an explicitly practical manual to encourage kindness is perhaps something of a novelty – especially by someone whose day-job is drawing cartoons. But to clarify the situation, the author admits that he had embarked on a PhD study on metaethics before abandoning it in a state of anxiety.

Having spent the latter half of my academic career researching and teaching bioethics, I am always interested in novel ways in which philosophical ideas might be raised and discussed. So I approached this book with an attitude combining curiosity and well-versed scepticism.

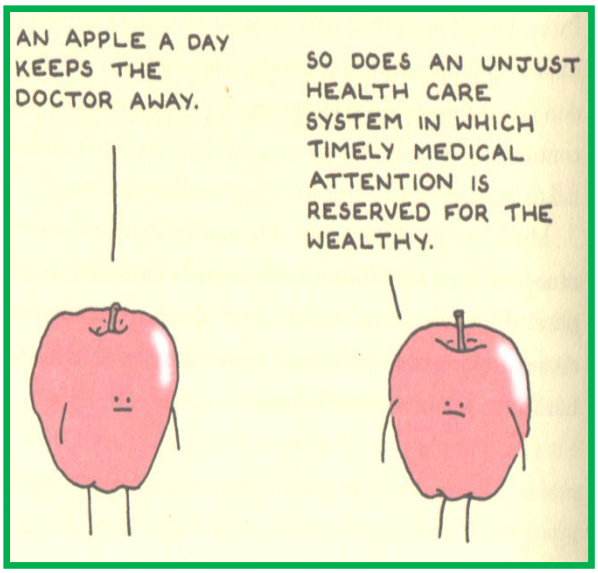
In some ways it might be described as a combination of two interwoven books – with one clearly directed at people with no previous acquaintance with philosophical language, which is illustrated with many, often amusing, cartoons; and the other a set of footnotes citing academic books and papers that underpin the popular, illustrated account. But at less than 200 pages long, of which cartoons occupy over a third, the challenge to say anything profound was formidable.

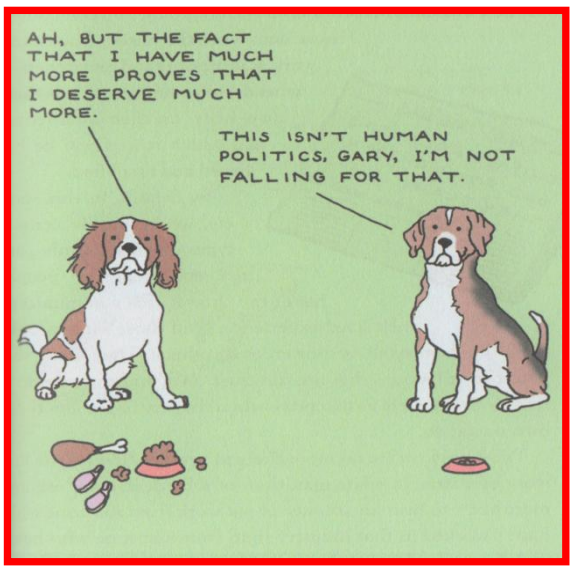
In essence, interpreting *kindness* as an aspect of *morality*, Garrett argues that the question of how we *should* behave is simply to follow our intuitions, which are motivated by our natural capacity for *empathy*. I have highlighted four words here, all of which merit deeper consideration than is possible within the book's format, but the referenced footnotes do indicate that he did his homework. For example, there is certainly a strong case for claiming that humans' altruistic behaviour has biological foundations, as implied by the examples, on film, of charming cooperation between chimpanzees (our 'mammalian cousins'), that have been demonstrated by the leading primatologist Frans de Waal.[3] But morality surely cannot simply be a matter of behaving instinctively, especially for we humans. Some of our *natural* instincts – those, to use the overused (and often misused) phrase, 'in our DNA' - certainly need to be reflected on in the light of reason and compassion. For we are certainly not *always* kind!

The result of Garrett's reflection seems to be confined to amplifying our, often meagre, tendency to kindness by exhorting us to *reduce our ignorance* – and to do that by expanding our knowledge of the lives of those who are in great need of help and understanding. Several of his examples feature injustices which capitalist political systems perpetuate - what Edward Heath (a former Tory prime

[3] . Frans de Waal: Moral behavior in animals | TED Talk

minister) identified as aspects of the 'unacceptable face of capitalism.' The two cartoons below exemplify the author's style in using fruit and animals to make political points. But he also focuses on the ways in which many people lack empathy because they are unaware (by accident or intentionally) of the unhappiness, loneliness, alienation etc which result from sexist, racist, xenophobic etc attitudes, which they may have grown up with, and preserve as prejudices born of ignorance. His claim is that it is ignorance that leads to the lack of empathy, which then leads to lack of kindness.





Well, I suspect I have the same political stance as he does. But I am extremely sceptical that his, doubtless, useful tips on '*How to listen' – widely and directly; to those multiply oppressed; to what is said, and not what you expect to hear; to take your time and be present etc.* will themselves prove to be the sole element needed to improve kindness.

As opposed to Garrett's single problem, *ignorance*, I have, in my academic writing, identified another four constraints beginning with 'i.': *incapability, inconsistency, insincerity* and *incompetence*. The problems those seeking to lead a more moral life inevitably encounter (and it would be smug in the extreme to claim that you couldn't do any better) are highly dependent on how effectively one can overcome those constraints – and how to prioritise one's efforts. Moreover, each of us is in certain ways 'disabled' and 'we are not required to do what we cannot do.'

In ancient Greece, the cradle of philosophical reflection, the challenge of how to act ethically was made simpler by the limits of mental and physical horizons – and the lack of scientific knowledege at their disposal was not a serious impediment. In contrast, the challenges of which we are now aware – but individually can often do very little about – certainly suggest that if wholesome life is to continue succesfully on Earth humanity needs to cooperate in unprecedented ways to ensure that outcome.

For all its good intentions, and zestful arguing, I fear this book is naive in its conviction that listening is all that is required. The study of ethics in the 21st century needs to feature much mor prominently in all educational programmes – and short books, however amusingly engaging, are not enough. I was also disappointed that the author chose to scatter the *f* – word liberally in the text (particularly in a book of this nature). As I stated in Issue 13, I suspect I am not alone in considering its use in swearing is inappropriate on both aesthetic and etymological grounds - but it certainly does not, at least in my case, offend any sense of Whitehousian prudery.

BM

7. GLADSTONE BOOKS

After a prolonged period of virtual hibernation, due to both Covid19 and health problems in the family, the opportunity to pick up the threads of my bookselling activity seemed firmly in prospect with the planned book fair to be held at the Patchings Arts Centre, near Calverton on October 3rd.

As it turned out, this date coincided with the pronounced lack of petrol supplies throughout the country, which reduced both the number of dealers who had registered to be present and the number of visitors – potential customers - who were bold enough to attend.

The venue was pleasant and the weather fine until the rains came at about the scheduled closing time, and it was good to meet up with some fellow dealers, although I have not atteded many such events.

But books are heavy, and almost as many that are taken are sure to have to be taken back! So my verdict on the exploit was that in terms of sales it was disappointing, but it was good to get back into the swing of things and to again encounter several people who were genuinely interested in books. The photo shows me and some of the books on display – a small fraction of my total stock of about 3000 books.

Covid19 has doubtless been a major reason for the poor level of sales from my **book room** in Southwell. But this item gives me the opportunity to remind readers in the Notts region that the arrangements for visiting the room, which entail advance booking, preferably by making a 'phone call, are fully explained in the last edition of this Review (No. 13), which is avaiable via the website:

www.gladstonebooks.co.uk

<u>Views of Southwell</u>

Left: The Great Hall and State Chamber

Right: The Minster Southwell Cathedral