

THE NEW GLADSTONE REVIEW

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

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1. Editorial

This (slightly delayed) issue marks the beginning of the latest phase in the life of Gladstone Books – its return to Newark, the town in which it was first established in 2001. As before, the decision to move was not made lightly, because books and their shelving are among the most unwieldy objects to transport with necessary care. Undoubtedly, I shall miss my weekly trip to Lincoln, where I often experienced most congenial (albeit usually brief) conversations with staff and customers - and the ambience of the Cathedral Quarter could hardly have been more pleasant. But changing circumstances have led me to again move to Newark - for what I sincerely hope will be the last time.

The move to Newark has a number of advantages. In the first place, being much nearer to my home will reduce travelling time, and possibly encourage more of my former Southwell customers to visit again – which was probably much less likely when the shop was based in Lincoln. Secondly, the space now occupied in Newark is much larger than in Lincoln, which will allow the display of more stock, and easier and more comfortable browsing. Thirdly, the Centre is open 7 days a week - a considerable advantage over the limited opening hours at previous sites. For those wishing and able to make personal contact, I shall usually be present on Fridays, most reliably after lunch

In this issue of the Review, Article 2 reveals a fascinating glimpse of the history of the Antique Centre and of Newark in Victorian times; article 3 comments on a recent MPs' report on the alleged health hazards, especially for children, of addiction to social media sites; Article 5 is reminder of the attractive way some antiquarian books were embellished – which, although only a surface feature, often adds pleasure to handling such books. Other articles are an obituary of a prominent British philosopher and a review of a fascinating biography of a 17th century polymath.

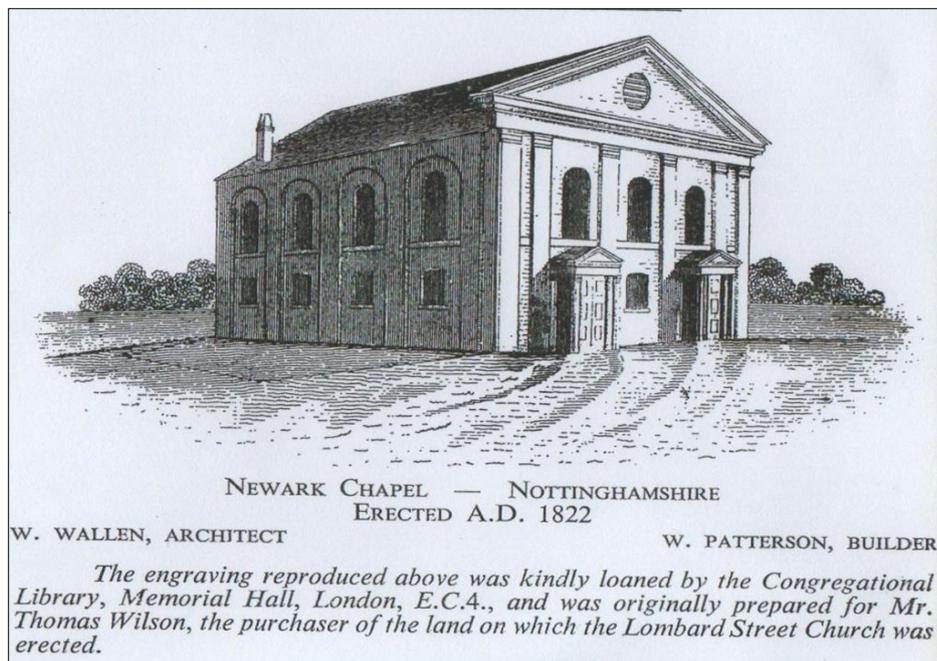
I wrote all the articles in this issue. But, as hinted earlier, readers' submission of articles that might be published in future editions would be most welcome

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2 A Note on the History of the Lombard Street Congregational Chapel, Newark

In moving to a new location (in whatever context) I have an instinctive urge to explore what went on there in the past. So my recent move to the Newark Antiques Centre has quite naturally led me to research the origins of the former chapel which now houses the, much travelled, Gladstone Books.

The establishment of the Lombard Street Chapel grew, firstly, out of the desire of a nonconformist group of Christians, who called themselves 'Independents,' to have a place of worship separate from the town's Baptists, with whom they shared a chapel, and, secondly, because a number of Anglicans had become dissatisfied with the '*spiritual condition of the Parish Church.*'¹ The impetus to respond to the latter concern was pioneered by a Mr Thomas Wilson, who when attending a service at the Parish Church was appalled that the sermon on the text 'Come unto Me' contained no reference to Jesus Christ. Although not a local resident, Wilson, who had founded a theological college and several Congregational chapels, donated £227 for the purchase of the land in Lombard Street to facilitate the building of a new Independent Chapel. Although the leading landowner in the town, the Duke of Newcastle, tried to frustrate this objective, support from several sources secured money to begin building in 1822, and the first services were held in March 1823. The outstanding debt at the opening was £3,500. In the engraving it seems to be set in open fields: perhaps artistic licence?

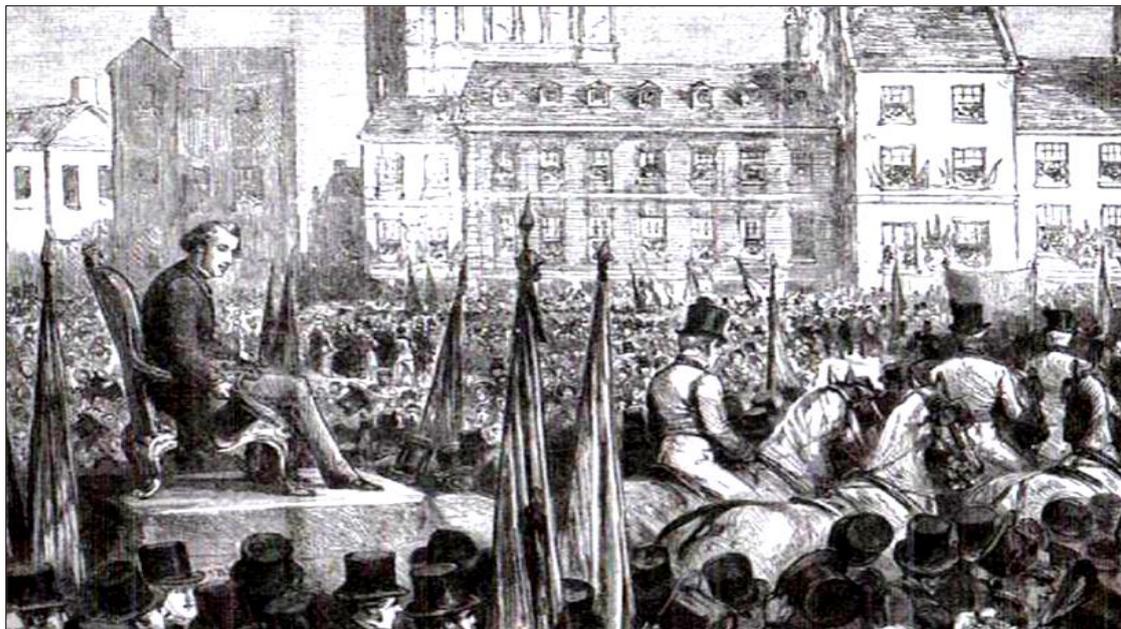


The first minister was Rev Charles Williams, the son of an engineer and inventor, who developed skills in working iron, brass and wood in his father's foundry, before joining a bookselling business where he rose to be principal manager of a bookshop in Piccadilly, London. But after attending a theological college in London, he was ordained as minister at the now-named Lombard Street Congregational Church in 1825. From the outset, all appeared to be going satisfactorily, with large congregations and leading families attending. But in 1826, on returning from his honeymoon, Williams found that the parliamentary elections held in June had '*caused considerable disturbance and aroused the deepest feelings*' among members of the congregation.

¹ All quotations are from 'New Light on an Old Town' G H Peters, (1951), Newark

Three candidates then stood for election of the Newark constituency, of whom two were to be elected as MPs. At that time, somewhat ironically, what are now labelled ‘true blue’ Tories were called members of the *Red Party*, while Liberals were of the *Blue Party*. Such was the strength of support given to the rival candidates that passionate arguments surfaced within the congregation – leading to some pews being painted red and others blue! Perhaps unsurprisingly, several members of the congregation (mostly, apparently, ‘*the wealthy Tory families*’) left the church and some of those who had lent large sums of money for the erection of the building, pressed for immediate repayment of their loans. Soon after, in 1828, the minister was informed that ‘*the mortgage on the chapel had been foreclosed, and the building was to be sold by auction at the Castle and Falcon*’ forthwith. Again Thomas Wilson came to the rescue by offering £2000 to save the church, which was enough to secure the property at the auction. Williams continued as the Minister until 1833, but after a brief period as a minister in Salisbury, he became editor of the *Religious Tract Society* in London.

But an interesting insight into Charles Williams’ views, is provided by the account provided by Rev Frederick Smeeton Williams, Charles’ second son, at the Golden Jubilee of the Church in 1873. It referred to the time when William Gladstone, aged 23, had been elected as a Tory MP for Newark.



William Gladstone, carried aloft after giving a speech from the balcony of the Clinton Arms, Market Square Newark, on his election as MP in 1832.

The address recalled how Gladstone had visited his father, Charles, at his house, and they had discussed the most Christian way of treating slaves – a matter on which Gladstone had doubtless reflected, because his own father was one of the largest slave owners in the British West Indies. Charles strongly disagreed with Gladstone, arguing that the slaves should be freed before any attempt to Christianise them, and not that they should be Christianised *before* they were freed. Frederick Williams’s *verbatim* account, in 1873, when Gladstone was Prime Minister, was as follows:

Fifty years ago, the bread of the poor was embittered by a sense of injustice, for the laws of England were made by the landlords and for the landlords. Fifty years ago there were multitudes of slaves within the British dominion: and I may add that, less than fifty years ago, the present Prime Minister may have been seen in the house of the Independent Minister of this town of Newark, spending hours in the attempt – happily a vain attempt - to persuade the minister that the emancipation of the slaves, pure and simple, was not a good thing, but that the apprenticeship system was far better. I wonder

whether Mr Gladstone will advance in the future as he has done in the past. When I think of him sitting in my father's house in this town defending slavery, and see how far he has advanced, I take encouragement for the days to come.

The touch of irony in the last sentence seems to confirm what was apparent in the *red/blue* fracas, that 150 years ago local people were very involved in politics (despite mostly being unable to vote) and that deference to authority did not curb their outspokenness.

Over subsequent years, the fortunes of the Lombard Street Church fluctuated. In 1834, *'the debt of £1,300 was cleared, whilst new galleries were erected costing £600, and a new school-room costing £400. The number of church members rose to 219.'* I suspect that the school-room was in the part of the building at the rear of the engraving shown above – which now houses the cafeteria and newly-installed Gladstone Books, among several other units.

By the 1850s, the financial situation *'had never been so good'* – which may have been at least partly due to the strong disciplinary regime operated by the then minister Rev John Hallett. For example, in 1851 he introduced the following rule:

If any member shall absent himself from the Lord's Table twice successively he shall be visited; and should he continue to absent himself twice again without giving sufficient reason, he shall no longer be considered a member of the church. The rule was rigorously enforced, for 'the church jealously guarded its good name and would not tolerate slackness.'

A concern that had assumed growing importance by the time of the 1873 Golden Jubilee was the promotion of the Temperance Movement (advocating teetotalism) – which had many supporters, even in this town with its many established breweries. In 1883, the Newark Congregational Temperance Society was formed, with members required to make one or other of two declarations:

- a) *I recognise my duty as a Christian to exert myself for the suppression of intemperance, and having become a member of the Society, I will do my utmost to promote its welfare, or*
- b) *I promise to abstain from all intoxicating liquors or beverages.*

But over the next 50 years, there was a steady decline in church attendance, associated with a series of short-term engagements of ministers. In the early years of the 20th century, the decline in membership was marked, and the income became insufficient to maintain the fabric. What finally proved to be the last straw was the growing popularity of the newly-built London Road Congregational Church in the late 1880s. The Lombard Street Church closed in 1932 – which was considered *'unquestionably right from the geographical point of view, when another Congregational church occupied one of the finest church sites in Newark.'*

PS *My research led me to the following serendipitous discovery.* Although a science undergraduate at University College London in the late 1950s, I was fortunate, along with several students also attending courses at other colleges, in living at New College in Hampstead, a theological college where, in the 19th century, several of the Newark Chapel ministers had studied. One of the lecturers in my time was Dr Geoff Nuttall, a distinguished church historian, who was the great-great grandson of Rev Charles Williams, the first minister at the Newark Church! This small traditional college, with its quad, dining hall and common rooms, contrasted with the busy UCL campus; and I greatly enjoyed the debates and fellowship of the 'theologs,' the college's excellent and comfortable library (probably a seminal influence in my bibliophilia), and my reflective walks on Hampstead Heath.

3. Social Media addiction should be treated as a disease says MPs' report

Over the years that I have been publishing this Review, I have frequently expressed alarm at the number and variety of people whose outlook on life seems unduly influenced by the screens of their hand-held electronic gadgets. For me, this obsessive attachment is made most obvious on train journeys when e.g., as travelling to London and back last Friday, I seemed to be the only person in my carriage who was not so engrossed. Most of the time I took pleasure in the changing scenery *en route* (and in earlier, more sociable, times might have had genial conversations with a fellow –traveller), but the return journey gave a little time to peruse some of the books I had bought at favoured bookshops, and would enjoy at leisure when home. Undoubtedly they would provide both insights and amusement, but also promote deeper reflection – before, in most cases, being offered for sale.

But my own suspicions about those whose preoccupation with what I have learned to call the ‘social media,’ as they constantly flick from screen to screen, have been confirmed by an all-party group of



MPs, who in collaboration with *the Royal Society of Public Health* have just published a report calling for further research on the adverse social effects of the policies of sites such as *Facebook, Instagram* and *Twitter*, which try to encourage users to spend even more time on their ‘platforms.’ For in the words of the report, these sites could be having a ‘*corrosive effect on children.*’ (Although from my own, admittedly-limited observations, the practice seems to apply equally across members of society as a whole.)

According to the report, ‘*It is paramount that we protect young people so that they are kept safe and healthy when they are online*’ – although it was recognised that social media had brought many benefits to society, including improved access to information on public health. But, ironically, as recommended by an earlier World Health Organization report, aspects of the activity, for example, ‘*gaming disorder,*’ should be included in its International Classification of Diseases. The MPs’ report suggested that a similar definition could apply to individuals who struggle to control their excessive social media use, and called for the government to issue formal health guidance on how those aged 24 and younger can avoid such a level of use. It also backed calls for social media companies to be forced to share anonymised data with researchers, in order to help understand the impact of their products on young people.

It seems inconceivable to me that those who issue threats to life, disseminate inflammatory racial opinions or, as most recently in New Zealand, display their hate-motivated murderous acts, are able to do so (at least for a significant time period) with impunity.

I remain convinced that the habit of reading - the literary attributes of which often promote thoughtful and agreeable reflection - is a far more civilised and rewarding activity than any other form of recorded knowledge transfer.

Source of information: Report in the Guardian newspaper on 18th March 2019

4. Mary Midgley (1919-2018): a venerable philosopher who never rested on her laurels: an obituary

Mary Midgley, whose death at the age of 99 years was announced last October, was one of a foursome of pioneering women philosophers who graduated from Oxford University virtually simultaneously in the 1940s (the ‘*gang of four*’); and each, in their distinctive ways, made a significant impact on British philosophy. Indeed, according to another notable philosopher Mary Warnock, who went to Oxford about five years later, before their arrival on the scene only Susan Stebbing (born in 1885) could be said to have made an equivalent impact. But in contrast to the others, Midgley’s influence was perhaps the least conventional, more idiosyncratic and probably for non-philosophers, more accessible form of communication. I have been favourably influenced by several of her writings which, remarkably, she continued to produce in her typically trenchant style right up to the end.

Like her exact contemporaries, Mary Midgley came from a comfortable middle-class background and married another prominent academic. But in contrast, after her graduation in Greats, instead of going straight into an academic position after the War, she acted as a secretary to Gilbert Murray, the Oxford professor of Greek and did some occasional tutoring. When her husband Geoffrey was appointed to a philosophy lectureship at Newcastle University in 1949, she largely devoted herself to raising their three children, but also did some occasional lecturing there. She was later appointed to a lectureship in philosophy at Newcastle, but had only attained the, rather modest, status of senior



lecturer by the time she retired – surely a huge underestimate of the significant academic role she was later to play.

Her late return to mainstream academic activity meant that she was nearly 60 when her first philosophical book *Beast and Man* was published – but she more than made up for this late start by producing over 20 books of great merit over the ensuing 40 years.

In fact, she later expressed a sense of relief that she had not gone straight back into academic philosophy to study for a doctorate, because she considered that, in the immediate post-war period, such an approach was often concerned with fastidious concern over issues of little relevance to the big philosophical questions of ‘how to live’ and ‘what counts as morally good.’ From my perspective, this chimes with the views of another philosopher whose views I share, Bryan Magee, who is of a not dissimilar vintage.

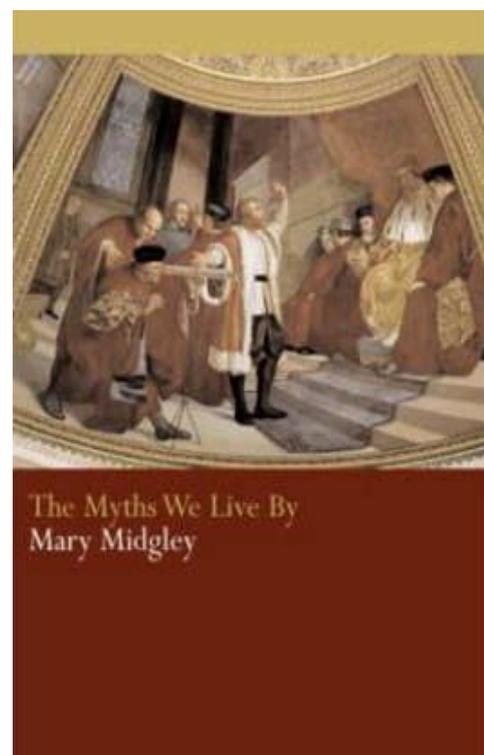
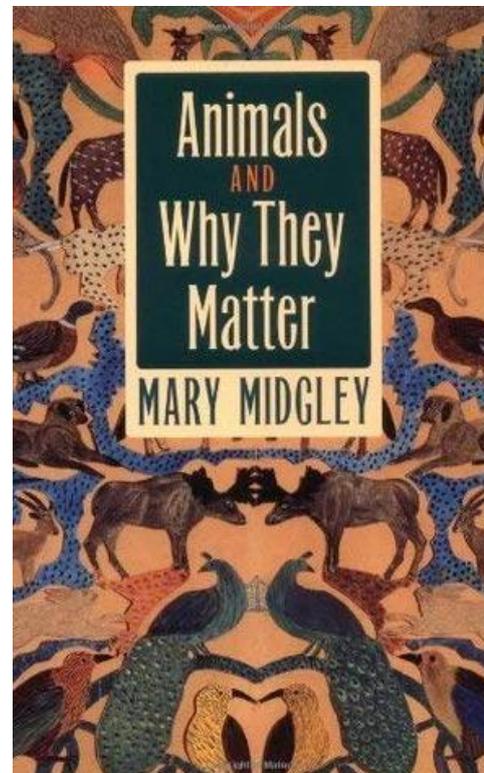
After *Beast and Man* (1978), Midgley went on to write numerous other important books, including *Animals and Why They Matter* (1983), *Wickedness* (1984), *Evolution as a Religion* (1985), *Science as Salvation* (1992) and *The Ethical Primate* (1994) – the titles of which signify the concerns which occupied much of her thinking - the implications of advances in science and evolutionary theory for understanding human behaviour. She argued that it is clear that human achievements have their roots in abilities and patterns of response that we share with other mammals, so that our exercise of ‘freewill’ is severely limited. Even so, she claimed that this insight does not result in our being subject, like robots, to biological determinism. For deeper reflection shows that our biological nature encompasses the capacity to develop a shared culture, and this, in turn, fosters our creativity as unique individuals.

Often, the stimulus for her writing was that of countering, as she put it, ‘*some wonderfully idiotic doctrine which I can contradict.*’- claiming that she regretted the common tendency of people to become excessively combative in debate. But this claim amused her close friends, who recognised that she could herself be guilty of unsympathetic interpretation of her opponents’ arguments! Even so, her frequent targets were the muddles to which we are all prone, especially when indulging in our tendencies to simplify and exaggerate. A notable example of her style resulted from an article called ‘Gene Juggling’, which appeared in the journal *Philosophy* in 1979, which initiated a notoriously acrimonious debate with Richard Dawkins, the Oxford scientist who had written *The Selfish Gene*. In response, Midgley wrote:

Genes cannot be selfish or unselfish, any more than atoms can be jealous, elephants abstract or biscuits teleological. This should not need mentioning, but Richard Dawkins's book 'The Selfish Gene' has succeeded in confusing a number of people about it.

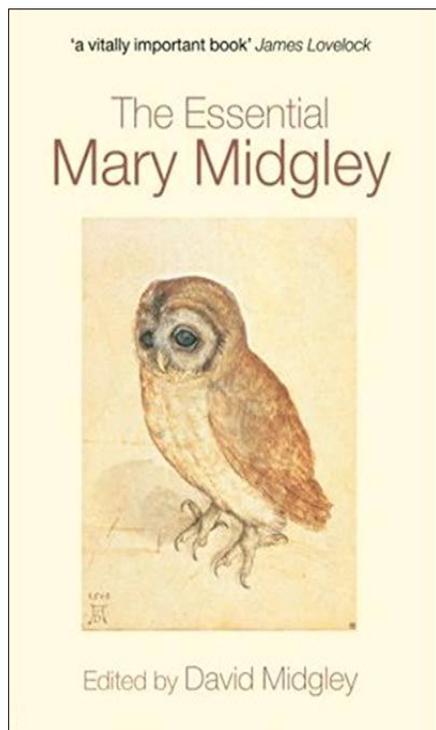
Dawkins responded by accusing Midgley of wilfully misrepresenting his claims about the *selfish gene*. She later acknowledged that her tone had been intemperate and that she had not conceded that the phrase was intended only as a metaphorical way of presenting ideas in evolutionary theory. That said, she maintained her original argument – and may well have been right in thinking that the impression many people would take from Dawkins’ memorable metaphor is the misleading idea that our genes doom us to individual selfishness. How often nowadays do we hear people saying ‘*It's in her/his DNA*’ - without any real understanding of what that phrase means?

Much of her writing sought to identify the limitations of reductionism, i.e. the belief that true understanding is only



achieved by breaking biological entities down to their constituent parts. For her, this was to lose sight of the many ways in which parts are dependent on the wholes in which they exist. These reductive approaches are particularly mistaken when it comes to trying to understand ourselves. In her typically trenchant, and often witty, style in her books and lectures Midgley pointed the way to a wiser and more helpful overview of ourselves and the world we inhabit.

Another topic, which dominated her later books, was the hubristic prediction of future utopias that allegedly will be achieved as technology becomes capable of solving all our human problems. It is a mindset sometimes associated with the term *transhumanism* (perhaps, *Homo Sapiens 2.0* - in the current jargon). In that context she eloquently stressed the limitations of science, and by contrast the significance of poetic and religious perspectives and the need to integrate our many sources of insight into the human condition. (She was not, however, conventionally 'religious' - although her father had been, at one time, the chaplain of Kings College, Cambridge.) Among her books on this theme were *Evolution as a Religion* (1985), *Wisdom, Information and Wonder* (1989), *Science as Salvation*



(1990), *Utopias, Dolphins and Computers* (1996), *Science and Poetry* (2001) and *The Myths We Live By* (2003). A taste of her crisp writing style in this vein is exemplified by the following, from the last-named book:

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.

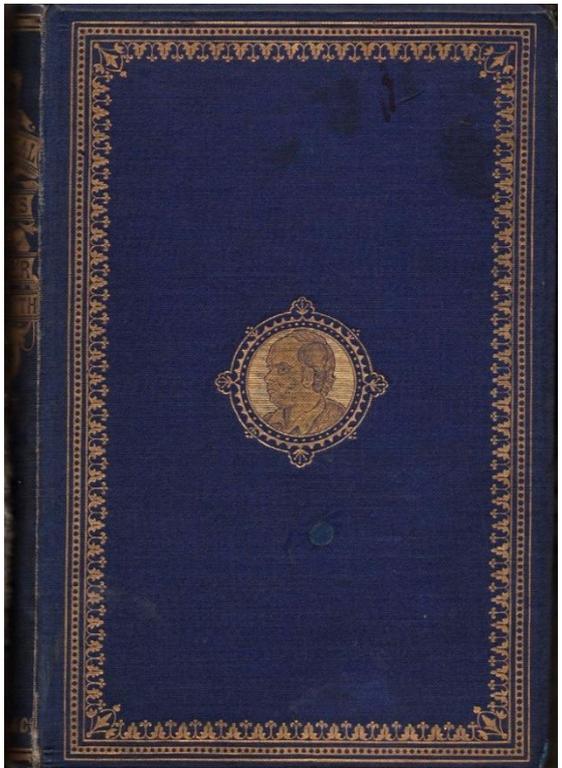
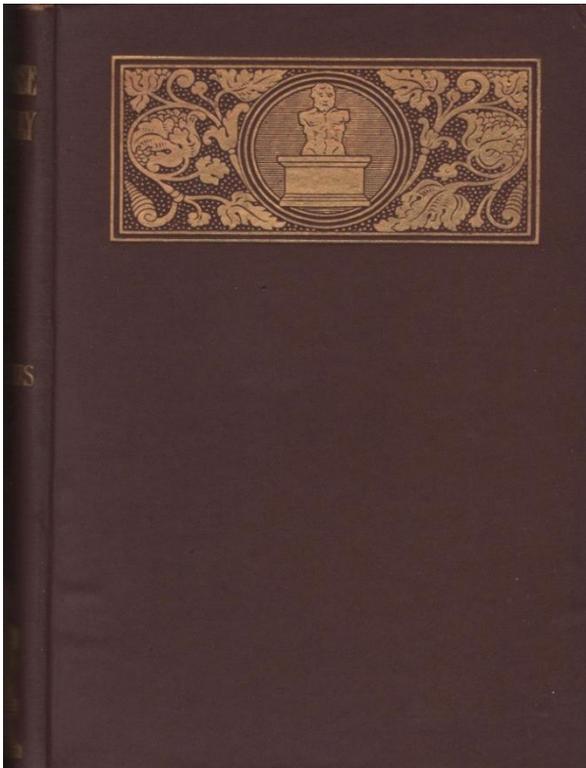
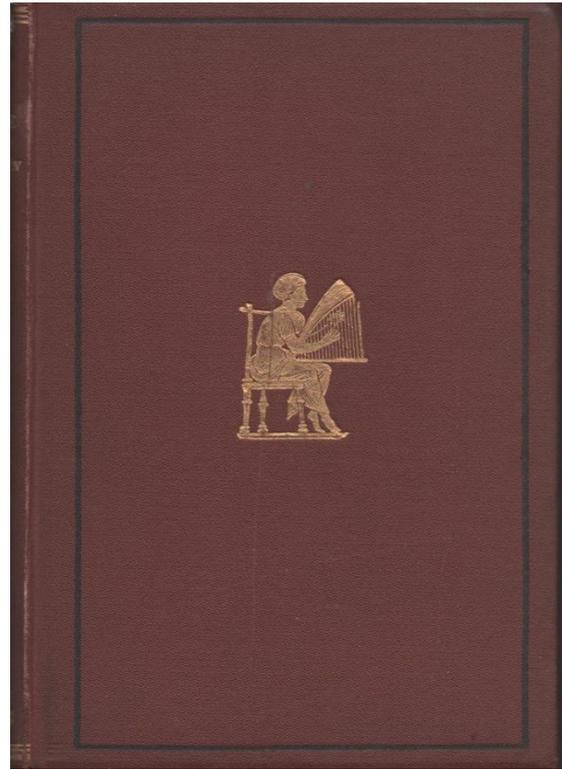
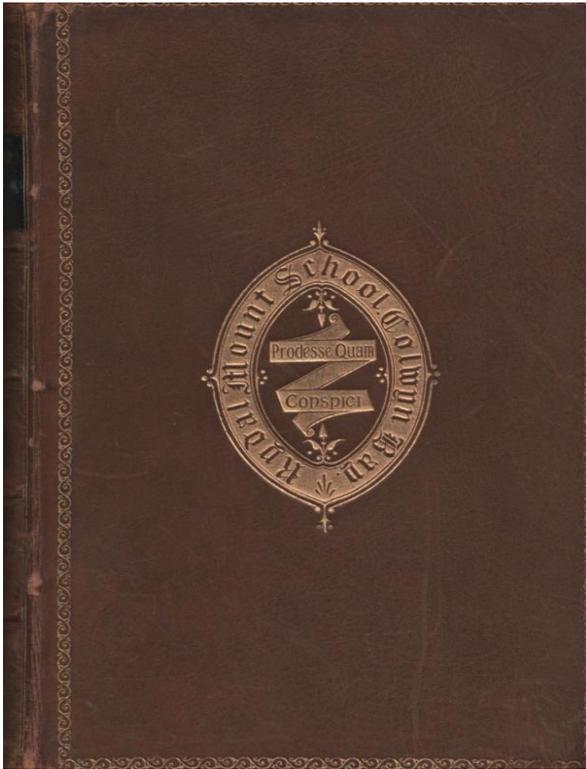
Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape meaning. For instance, machine imagery, which began to pervade our thought in the 17th century, is still potent today. We often 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 the confident language of 'genetic engineering' and 'the building blocks of life.'

Given such a worldview, it is unsurprising that she was impressed by James Lovelock's concept of Gaia (that commends the view that we should regard the whole Earth as a living organism), and in some of her writing she sought to provide a philosophical rationale for this hypothesis.

For anyone looking for an accessible approach to her thinking, *The Essential Mary Midgley* (Routledge, 2005 pb), provides a useful anthology of excerpts from ten of her notable books. It is edited by her son, David, with an introduction by James Lovelock. David Midgley is himself an (unorthodox) philosopher, and for anyone wanting to get some fascinating insights into the Midgley family, I recommend his recently written piece: *Geoff and Mary Midgley - Two kinds of Philosopher*. (10/11/2018), which can be accessed at:

<http://www.womeninparenthesis.co.uk/geoff-and-mary-midgley-two-kinds-of-philosopher-david-midgley-10-11-2018/>

5. A selection of antiquarian books with gilt embossed covers in my personal library



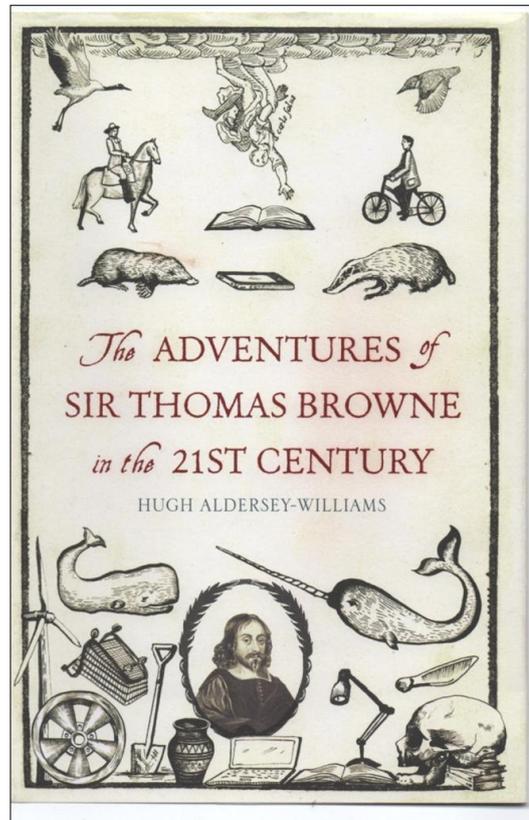
Clockwise from top left: i) Sir Robert Ball: *Starland* (astronomy) School prize awarded at Rydal Mount School Colwyn Bay [Cassell, 1892]; ii) *Odes of Horace* (tr. J Conington) [G Bell, 1874]; iii) Oliver Goldsmith *Poetical Works* [Griffin, 1864]; iv) Desideramus Erasmus *In Praise of Folly* [Gibbings, 1900]. Although only a surface feature, these embellishments often add to the pleasure of handling such books.

6. The Adventures of Sir Thomas Browne in the 21st Century²: a book review

As a literary genre, biographies include a highly diverse collection of subjects, styles and approaches; from the hagiography revealed in the overblown praise of minor television celebrities, and the fulsome accounts of sporting achievements scripted by ‘ghost writers’ - to the intimate confessions of authentic auto-biographers. But the range of choices and motives of their readers is probably equally diverse, such that my decision to read this book was based on the anticipation that its subject was someone with whom, despite the lapse of 350 years, I would find a degree of empathy. This was because, after dipping into some of his rather terse writings, I hoped for more enlightenment.

Even so, on launching into the 330 pages I wondered whether I had misjudged it. I soon realised that I had - but, fortunately, it subsequently proved to be engrossing, both in its stimulating eccentricity and in the unwavering fascination its author Hugh Aldersley-Williams (hereafter, for brevity, HAW), shows in exploring Browne’s mind and habits. For he set out not only to delve into Browne’s life in forensic detail, but also to seek to test the validity of Browne’s ideas in the ‘here and now,’ by treading in his footsteps, both literally and metaphorically.

Thomas Browne (1605-1682) was born in London into an aristocratic family, and after schooling at Winchester College graduated at Oxford before pursuing medical studies at the leading European universities of Padua, Montpellier and Leiden. While such a CV would have qualified him to practise medicine in a prestigious London hospital, he moved to Norwich (admittedly then the second largest city in England) and remained there, as a general practitioner, until his death 45 years later.



Like Erasmus Darwin (the 18th century grandfather of Charles, who was also a provincial doctor who preferred privacy to publicity) Browne was a remarkable polymath, who occupied the time when not caring for his patients in enquiries into medical science, botany, zoology, archaeology, philosophy, religion and lexicography.

Browne was 36 when he married the 20 year old Dorothy (see below), with whom he had eleven children. But, as was not uncommon at that time, six of them died before their parents. Browne had always been a Royalist, and it seems that this, together with his fame as writer, was rewarded with a knighthood when Charles II visited Norwich in 1671. Although he only rarely left the city, he corresponded with some distinguished literary men, such as John Evelyn and John Aubrey.

Perhaps the best known of his books, written in his 30s, is *Religio Medici* (‘the religion of a doctor of medicine’) which has been published in many editions and by numerous publishing houses. In this he sought to square his religious beliefs with the new understanding of nature that scientific studies were

² By Hugh Aldersley-Williams (2015) Published by Granta ISBN 978 1 84708 900 7

increasingly providing. As an example of which, I have chosen the following (from my treasured Gresham edition):



As reason is a rebel unto faith, so passion unto reason: as the propositions of faith seem absurd unto reason, so the theorems of reason unto passion, and both unto faith; yet a moderate and peaceable discretion may so state and order the matter that they be all kings, everyone exercising his sovereignty and prerogative in a due time and place, according to the restraint and limit of circumstance. There are in philosophy, so in divinity, sturdy doubts and boisterous objections, wherewith the unhappiness of our knowledge too nearly acquainteth us. More of these no man hath known than myself, which I conquered not in martial posture, but on my knees.

Those unimpressed by these sentiments may, even so, relish his style, which arguably marks Browne as a skilled and eloquent communicator. In fact, HAW, in seeking to interpret Browne in the context of the 21st century, adopts similar moderation, notably in disparaging the strident atheism of Richard Dawkins *et al*, whose militant attitude he regrets, despite sharing his atheism. So, for the admiring HAW, Browne's life demonstrated dignity and integrity; and a profoundly inquisitive mind, which was always coupled with circumspection and respect for those expressing different views.

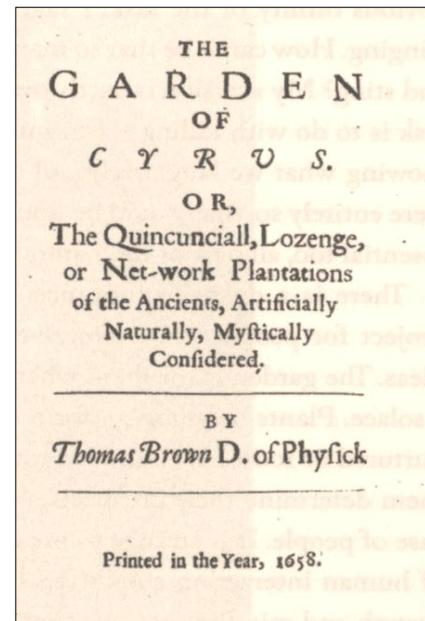
Although it takes a little while to fathom HAW's real intentions, soon his eccentricity becomes so familiar that we are happy to indulge his fantasy, as when he imagines the statue of Browne in Norwich's city centre coming alive, descending from its plinth and engaging in a theological discussion (in the style of a Socratic Dialogue) with him, in the chapter entitled 'Faith.'

Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is virtually an 'encyclopaedia of errors' which contains within its vast (three volume) remit the entire intellectual landscape of the seventeenth century. Being perhaps closest to Browne's professional interests, much of the content of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is concerned with correcting medical misapprehensions, notably the commonly-held fallacies about the efficacy of standard treatments. At the time, the ancient Greek idea that health was due to the right balance between the *four humours* that influence our basic physiology (*viz.* blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile), was still accepted as valid. Illnesses caused by deficiencies in this balance were considered best corrected by selectively adjusting (e.g. by dietary supplementation) or reducing them (e.g. by employing leeches to suck the patient's blood). But Browne was well acquainted with the physical measurements that had recently been adduced as evidence in William Harvey's discovery of the circulation of the blood (reported in *de Motu Cordis* in 1628). Even so, the standard treatments were frequently based on herbal remedies, which in many cases were efficacious – and, indeed, remain the basis of some currently-used pharmacological agents. But separating the wheat from the chaff was not easy, and again Browne wrote with tact so as not to alarm his readers unnecessarily. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* was not however confined to medical matters, and science, natural history, painting, history, geography and biblical oddities were all subjects of his critical analyses.

Concern with herbalism inevitably led him to a deep interest in plants, which he pursued in the garden of his Norwich house. When the diarist John Evelyn visited in 1671, he described Browne's 'whole house and garden as a paradise and cabinet of rarities, and that of the best collection of medals, books, plants and natural things.' In fact, it seems clear that Browne's main interest in plants was more utilitarian than aesthetic, and in that context preceded the establishment of the now famous *Chelsea Physic Garden* in 1673. But plants had another, unusual, fascination for him, which concerned what he considered the natural patterns in which plants should be grown. This mysterious thesis, elaborated in *The Garden of Cyrus*, has a subtitle which, I suspect, will be enough to dissuade most people from rushing to read it. But, in his almost 'spiritual pilgrimage,' HAW was disappointed to find that nothing now remains of either house or garden, with a signpost to 'Browne's Meadow' only directing one to a Norwich car park!

In the field of natural history he was equally fascinated by animals, not only those personally observed, which he recorded in his *Natural History of Norfolk*, but also by the strange tales told of animals that might be included in a *bestiary*. Moreover, it was not only their appearance and habits he recorded, but also the taste of their meat: not the current idea of a nature lover!

Apart from *Religio Medici*, it is Browne's reflections in *Urne Burriall*, written on the discovery of about 50 urns that were unearthed in field near Walsingham, Norfolk, that many consider his greatest work of literature. It was the collection of skulls, bones, combs and jewels that the urns contained which stimulated his melancholia, but not in any sense of dejection. For he wrote 'marshalling all the horrors, and contemplating the extremities thereof, I find not anything therein able to daunt the courage of a man.' For HAW, 'these were not the outpourings of incoherent grief, but the subtlest contemplations of life and death brought off with exquisite poise.'



Brief reference was made above to his lexicographical interests: perhaps something he would have been instinctively inclined to, given his pedantic approach to observing and analysing the world around him. HAW claims that he introduced 748 new words into the English language, including *asceticism, anomalous, append, carnal, carnivorous, deductive, electricity, hallucination, incontrovertible and medical*. But here I urge caution, because in my treasured 1814 edition of *Dr Johnson's Dictionary* several words on even this short list are attributed to other authors, and where a 'Brown' does appear it is spelled without the 'e'. (But that's how it was spelled on the above cover!)

Thomas Browne appears to have been a remarkably knowledgeable and wise man, who conducted himself with dignity and kindness, and sought a reasonable resolution when disputes arose. But, like most (perhaps, all) of us, he was a man of his time, and, for example, believed in the existence of witches, an observation which HAW raised in the first chapter of the book. What, I believe, commends him to later generations is his eloquent moderation in addressing the 'big' questions, as in:

Let thy Studies be as free as thy Thoughts and Contemplations; but fly not only upon the wings of Imagination; Joyn Sense unto Reason, and Experiment unto Speculation, and so give life to Embryon truths, and Verities yet in their Chaos. [From his *Christian Morals* (1716), published posthumously.]