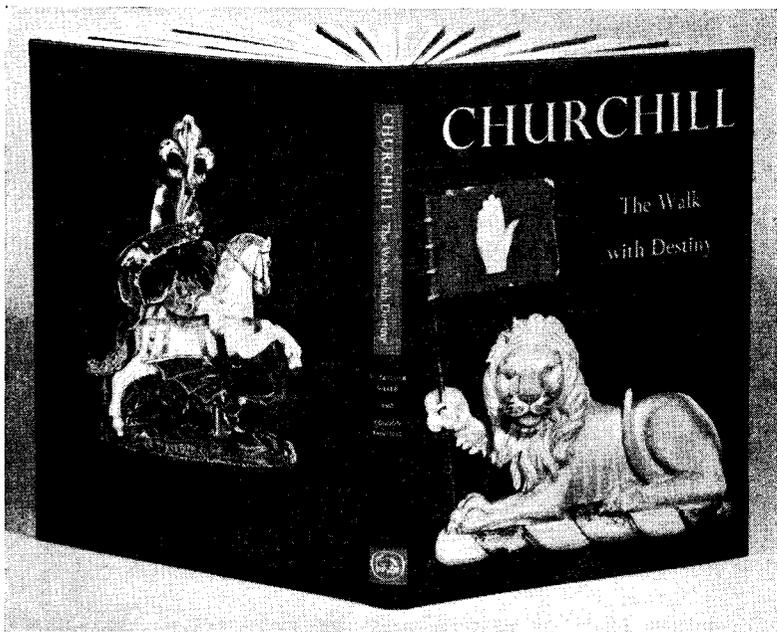


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# The Private Library

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THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE  
PRIVATE LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION

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The Dolmen Press  
Michael G. Freyer

Village Libraries  
Alan Walbank

*Hogg's Memoirs of Prince Alexey Haimatoff*  
James Munro

Association Affairs The 'Golden Cockerel' Ovid

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April 1960

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# The Private Library

Quarterly Journal of the Private Libraries Association

Hon. Editor: Philip Ward, 28 Parkfield Crescent, North Harrow, Middlesex

Vol. 3 No. 2 April 1960

## Association Affairs

### *Private Press Books*

The first volume of *Private Press Books*, edited by Cave and Rae for the Association, has proved so popular that a second printing has now been put in hand. Members who have not yet received their copies (5/-; 7/6d. to non-members) may rest assured that their orders will be satisfied; additional copies may now also be ordered.

Volume 2, covering 1960, will appear in 1961. It will be a larger book, and will cost 10/-, or 7/6d. to members. Retrospective volumes are in course of preparation, and details will be announced later in the year.

### *Concerning Bookplates*

Philip Beddingham's series of four essays on bookplates has been reprinted from 'The Private Library' as a booklet of sixteen pages suitable for presentation to friends. The cost of this illustrated volume is only 2/- to members, and 5/- to non-members.

### *The Private Library*

We are indebted to the Bibliographical Society of Ireland for permission to publish Michael Freyer's fascinating lecture on the Dolmen Press. *Village libraries* is another unusual field explored by the well-known author of *Queens of the circulating libraries*, and *Railway libraries*.

## SIMPLIFIED CATALOGUING RULES

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*a publication of the Private Libraries Association*

April 1960

# THE DOLMEN PRESS

a talk given to the Bibliographical Society of Ireland

by Michael G. Freyer

THE DOLMEN PRESS was founded by Mr Liam Miller at his home in Sion Hill Road, Drumcondra in 1951, with the object of publishing the works of Irish authors and to encourage the art of book illustration. In its seven years of production it has certainly carried out those ideals and has offered the works of over 16 authors and more than a dozen artists in carefully planned and pleasing format.

One day, early in 1952, a serious young man came into my bookshop and asked me if I would be interested in selling some booklets he had printed. Thus was I introduced to Mr Liam Miller and the Dolmen Press.

I have the library habit, which Chesterton describes as '... the habit, not of reading books, but of taking them down from their shelves, opening them, smelling them, taking in the scope of them, skimming a few pages and putting them back'. From the moment I handled those first Dolmen publications I got a feeling of pleasure, excitement and anticipation which has increased with each new issue from this press.

Miss Elizabeth Rivers once told me that on an occasion when she was visiting the Millers, Liam's father-in-law asked him what he really wanted to do and Liam immediately replied—simply—'Printing', whereupon Mr Brown gave him a few pounds and told him to go and buy a press! Whether this is the true story of the beginning of the Dolmen Press or not I don't know, but Mr Miller, who was at the time studying architecture in a Dublin office, did buy an Adana flat-bed press and a fount of Caslon type, and started to print a book. With the assistance of his wife, he set up two pages of type at a time, printed it, distributed the type and set up two more pages. This laborious work, which was entirely new to both of them, was carried out during the evenings and the week-ends. When about half the book was finished, they broke off to print an announcement which offered to the world 'Travelling Tinkers: a ballad book by Sigerson Clifford, set and printed in an edition of 500 copies at the Dolmen Press, Dublin, price 10/6'. When the sheets were printed they were sent out for binding and the first title from the press was published on the Gathering Day of Puck Fair, 1951. It was sold out within a month!

The success of this volume was encouraging and the second publication, a Christmas booklet, *Three Carols To Mary*, by H. Neville Roberts, was also rapidly sold out.

About this time Mr Cecil French Salkeld loaned them the hand-press on which he had printed the Gayfield Press Series of Dublin poets and artists, and with the aid of this larger machine a more ambitious programme was planned.

At short intervals several ballad sheets and small volumes of poems were published, and then in March 1952 Mr Miller produced his first book by Thomas Kinsella, a young Dublin poet. This collection of poems, *The Starlit Eye*, with drawings by the publisher, was their first publication set in Bodoni type, the second fount acquired.

Following *Freebooters*, a story by Maurice Kennedy, they tried two experiments with their next book, *Three Legendary Sonnets* by Thomas Kinsella, which appeared in December of that year. In the first place the type was hand-set by the poet himself (Bodoni was used again), and secondly, five of the 100 copies printed were on hand-made paper, signed by the poet, and bound at the press. These five copies were the first 'specials' produced at the press and early the following year they repeated these experiments when Francis Barry set the type for his volume of poems, *Who, A Stranger*, and signed the 25 specially bound copies out of an edition of 175.

The first major work of the press was an edition of David Marcus' translation of Bryan Merriman's *Midnight Court*, with cuts by Michael Biggs. This book, running to 64 pages of Imperial Octavo, was printed in Poliphilus type on Antique laid paper in an edition of 200 and was launched by a literary luncheon—the only one to date!

*Galion*, a long poem by Ewart Milne was the next publication and the drawings by Mia Cranwill, well known as an artist and engraver, were her first book illustrations—in her 71st year.

In September 1953 three booklets were issued with an eye to the Christmas market as the need for some money, at any rate, was beginning to be recognised. They were two extracts from the Bible, one illustrated by Elizabeth Rivers and the other by Michael Biggs, and *An Alphabet of Aphorisms* by Arland Ussher with cuts also by Michael Biggs. They were offered in boards or wrappers, by choice, and some of the Aphorisms were hand-coloured.

After *Lascar Rock*, a dramatic ballad by Sigerson Clifford, came the first of two printings of the *Breastplate of Saint Patrick*, translated by Thomas Kinsella. Of 275 copies, 15 were bound in two leathers inlaid, with a slip-case. Three years later a revised translation was issued, and the 'specials', 10 of 100 copies, were printed on and bound in Irish made vellum. Incidentally, this latter version of the hymn was later set to music by Bryan Boydell.

After the first *Breastplate* came a delightful description of the medicinal properties of Irish whiskey described by the 16th century writer, Richard Stanihurst. This booklet, *Aqua Vitae*, so captivated a wine merchant in England that it was re-issued in 1956 so that he might distribute it to his customers at Christmas time, to, we hope, the benefit of another branch of native Irish skill.

Furthering his desire to use Irish talent and materials, Mr Miller had commissioned Michael Biggs to design a Gaelic alphabet, and although the type has not at yet been cast, a few pulls from the blocks were made in July 1954.

During the latter part of that year the Millers moved to Silchester Park, Glenageary, and their first publication from the new address was *The Sons of Usnech*, from the Book of Leinster, 25 copies of which were bound in full leather, with a slip-case.

It was shortly after they had moved to Glenageary that an Albion hand-press was added to their equipment. When the old Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, was being sold out the advertisement mentioned 'printing presses and machines' so Mr Miller and I went there on the view day. We found the main body of an Albion easily enough but it took us a considerable time to find the rest of the pieces which were very scattered. However we dragged them together and

having ascertained that the lot would be put up about one o'clock the following day we arranged to meet at noon to be quite sure of being in time. Imagine our dismay when we arrived at the auction to find that the 'scrap iron', which included our precious Albion, had been sold. Moreover, it had all been dragged to a convenient place for loading on trucks and once more the parts were scattered or buried. Making frantic enquiries we eventually traced the purchaser and having again made quite sure that all the parts were still there, we made a deal, and later that day the Albion was delivered to Glenageary. It required a great deal of work to get it into running order again but it was a considerable asset as it enabled Mr Miller to contemplate larger work.

One such thing he had in mind was an illustrated miscellany to be issued in 12 parts, with a folio, to be called *The Dolmen Chapbook*. The chapman device was designed by the Irish artist Eric Patton, and in November and December the first two parts were issued, and at irregular intervals six further parts have appeared to date, some of which have been re-issued in bound editions.

By this time The Dolmen Press was demanding all his week-ends, every evening and many nights and Mr Miller felt he could no longer continue as architect and printer. The fine standard of his publications was beginning to be recognised and orders for books and commissions for fine printing were coming in from all parts of the world. A move had to be made, and in the summer of 1955, allowing his heart to lead him, Mr Miller resigned his architecture and began to devote himself to full-time printing.

The decision made, he lost no time in producing *The Archaeology of Love* in October of that year. This volume of poems was the first book by Richard Murphy, who shortly before had been awarded the AE Memorial prize. The Christmas book for that year was an extract from St. Matthew with designs by Leslie MacWeeney.

Finance now became a more important factor, and though to his credit Mr Miller has never overlooked the artistic appeal of any of his printings, a greater amount of commercial work had to be undertaken—programmes, showcards etc., with a resultant reduction in the tempo of his publishing. Thus it was not until the June of 1956 that his next book appeared: *Out of Bedlam*, a sequence of 27 wood engravings by Elizabeth Rivers with texts from Christopher Smart. It is interesting to relate that the engravings, beautifully reproduced by Mr Miller, were made by Miss Rivers with no set texts in mind. When the late Geoffrey Taylor saw prints of some of them he immediately suggested that she should read Smart's *Out of Bedlam*. Those of you who have seen the Dolmen Press publication will realise the soundness of his judgment, but none more so than Miss Rivers herself who found such perfect verbal expression of her artistic thoughts.

For this book a new press-mark was used for the first time. When the press started Mr Miller tried to think of something that was simple and Irish, and which would lend itself to a good trade-mark. He decided upon a dolmen and himself cut the original square design. This new colophon was based on that of the first Scottish printer—by chance a namesake—Andrew Myllar (c. 1500), and was redrawn by Leslie MacWeeney to accommodate the Dolmen device.

Though announced for the same month, Thomas Kinsella's *Poems* was not

published until September. The delay was due to another move of the press, for between the printing and binding of this book the Dolmen moved to its present home in Upper Mount Street, Dublin. At the same time Mrs Miller's brother joined the staff, which with a boy assistant now numbered four.

The first book from Upper Mount Street was *Time Is A Squirrel*, poems by Rhoda Coghill, which was printed and published for the author and appeared in November, and was followed in December by *The Thoughts of Wi Wong* by Arland Ussher.

The next main publication was the *XXII Keys of the Tarot*, also by Arland Ussher, with the 22 designs drawn by Leslie MacWeeney. A few sheets were set in Gill Pilgrim but on consideration of the proofs Mr Miller decided that the type face seemed too light for the designs and Poliphilus was substituted. This was a magnificent production and 50 copies were specially bound in full vellum, hand-coloured throughout, signed and numbered. Mr Ussher's Tarot pack was incomplete but Mrs W. B. Yeats kindly loaned the missing cards, from her late husband's pack, for Miss MacWeeney to study.

In September 1957 the press published a volume, *Ten Poems* by Padraic Colum. These were written after, and therefore not included in his *Collected Poems* which was published in New York in 1956, though some of them had appeared in magazines and the *Irish Times*.

In the same month an edition of *Enter These Enchanted Woods* by Arland Ussher and Carl von Metzradt was issued. This book had rather a chequered career. The original edition of 75 copies was printed in Spain for Mr Ussher's Sandymount Press but owing to some restrictions about the export of printed matter from that country, the sheets spent six months travelling to and from the border—four times being sent back to the printers by suspicious customs-officers. However, eventually they were released, and on arrival in Dublin were bound at the Dolmen Press, which also printed the page of errata, which still did not by any means correct all the printer's errors. Despite the poor production the book was well received and a few years later Mr Ussher decided to re-issue it. The new edition was designed and produced at the Dolmen Press by Mr Miller, though the presswork was done outside. Drawings by Tate Adams and a preface by Padraic Colum were added to the book which was published in association with the Sandymount Press.

The year 1958 has brought recognition from a slightly different angle to the Press. One of the first young Irishmen encouraged by Mr Miller was Thomas Kinsella to whom I have referred earlier and in March of this year the Poetry Book Society of London chose his volume of poems *Another September* as their Spring choice. Apart from the considerable prestige value of this selection there was the more mercenary side—a firm order for several hundred copies. Recently further honour has been accorded the poet; the last poem in the book, 'Thinking of Mr D', won the Guinness Memorial second prize for poems in English published during the year throughout the world.

An Irish legend, *The Soul Cages*, retold in 20 wood-engravings and some words by Tate Adams appeared in July. Mr Adams, an Irish born Australian, has exhibited in the International Colour Woodcut Exhibition in London in 1957, and when his book was published exhibitions were arranged at the

Dolmen and another gallery in Dublin. I believe he is working on a further series of engravings which Mr Miller hopes to publish in 1960.

I have now covered the main items that have been issued by the Dolmen Press since its foundation. As I mentioned earlier Mr Miller also undertakes commercial work, which to a great extent finances his publishing activities, but whether it be a play-bill, an invitation card—or a volume in *Interlingua*, which he prints for an American association, the same loving care and thought is expended and in every instance the traditions of fine printing are maintained.

To close I would like to quote from a lecture given by J. H. Mason to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, in London in 1933. This quotation was also used by Mr Miller, during a practical demonstration of hand-printing earlier this year. Mr Mason said: 'I claim a place for handwork in modern civilisation on the grounds that it offers man a good way of life, that it preserves the best traditions of a trade, and is an unrivalled medium of education; that its productions are full of delight and loveliness, and provide the chief means of sweetening the spirit of our over mechanised modern life.'

I believe Mr Miller and the Dolmen Press do all that.

## VILLAGE LIBRARIES

by Alan Walbank

LIKE Colonel John Byng, the eighteenth century tourist and diarist, I am one of those who never visit a new place, town or city, without taking my 'bookseller walk'. If it does not always lead to acquiring 'blacks', it seldom fails to lead to acquaintance with some unusual or archaic aspect of the place, which is reward enough. Deep in the country, however, one scarcely expects book-hunting to meet with any success. All the more pleasant to me then was the surprise of 'finding' in a covert that few perhaps would think to draw.

The manner of the find was as follows. After a long morning's walk in the daleheads between Yorkshire and Westmorland and lunch beside a well-known trout stream, a sudden heavy shower coincided with my arrival at the first hamlet. A white-washed building that had once been a Quaker meeting-house, invited shelter with door ajar: I turned in and found myself in the parish billiards-cum-reading room. Cue racks and glass cases of monster trout lined one long wall: a table full of papers and magazines—*Angler's News*, *Cage Birds*, *The Woodworker*, *Smallholder*, *Cycling*, *Popular Gardening*, *Titbits* and, rather out of character, *The Tatler*—stood under the window. Over the fireplace hung a faded sepia photograph of a long-forgotten wagonette party. But it was the other long wall that came to hold my attention. A three-bay, two-tier bookcase with blank wooden sliding doors covered it from floor to ceiling. It was not locked: there was no one about to ask: I rolled one door back. Then, seeing that it contained, as Byng expressed it 'what I and other (collectors) pant for', the second and the third doors. A complete library of mid-Victorian fiction, most of it cloth bound, was revealed to view on twelve tightly packed shelves.

It has been remarked that institute libraries, whose total of books often sounds imposing, suffer from being composed largely of gifts. Barbara and J. L. Hammond refer in *The Bleak Age* to such collections in mechanics institutes as 'turned out of people's shelves and never used, so that out of 1000 volumes there may be only 400 or 500 useful ones. The rest are only annual registers and old religious magazines that are never taken down'. Samuel Smiles, who was well acquainted with Yorkshire institutions found many of the books there 'very unattractive: books given by way of presents which nobody would think of reading nowadays, a large proportion of them dull and heavy'. No doubt that was true of the time and place, though what is deemed 'useful' or 'dull' depends on the reader. Of this village institute library neither stricture applied in my opinion. Gifts, of course, most of the books were, made over probably at the time of the institute's founding and possibly from the same local gentry who now supplied that incongruous *Tatler*. As a period collection in original state, however, they were far from unattractive.

I noted a few of the titles, mixture of well known and unknown. *The Duke's Children* by Anthony Trollope, 3 vols. first edition 1880, and next to it on the shelf *A Left-handed Marriage* by Mrs. Oscar Deringer. *Ishmael* by the author of *Lady Audley's Secret* (M. E. Braddon) 3 vols. and *Sylvester Sound* by Henry Cockton, author of that odd novel about a ventriloquist called *Valentine Vox*. *The Moonstone* in buff and *Great Expectations* in blue cloth, gilt; that sensational success by Fergus Hume *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* and Wilkie Collins' collection of mystery stories *After Dark*. Two pairs of items that I was tempted to rearrange side by side—*Piccadilly* by William Black and *Fast and Loose* by Arthur Griffiths, both in three volumes, along with *The Tale of a Lonely Parish* by Marion F. Crawford, and an anonymous companion *The Dailys of Sodden Fen*. The pseudonymous 'Rita' provided promise of romance with *Like Dian's Kiss* and one Paget its fulfilment in *She Wore a Wreath of Roses*. Such a conspectus of Victorian popular reading offered tantalising vistas of research . . .

The obvious drawback to finding hidden treasure of this sort is that one may look and handle, but not possess. After visiting the above collection more than once, I almost became resigned to having 'permission to view' only. An early Spring visit to the Lake District was to put a new complexion on this. There, on the outside shelf of a stationer's shop I noticed some sixty or seventy leather bound volumes, offered for sale cheaply in bundles of three. They were not the books previously described, but they were a similar lot and from a similar source. The institute of a well-loved village associated with Wordsworth had apparently decided to sell off its library. For pasted inside each cover were the rules for subscribers.

- (1) One subscriber cannot have more than one volume at a time.
- (2) A subscriber is not to keep a book for more than one week, unless living more than one and a half miles from the Library, in which case he may keep it two weeks.
- (3) If any book is lost, the Subscriber to whom it is lent shall pay its value: and if one of a set, shall pay for the whole set or replace the work.

The titles again broadly represented mid-Victorian fiction, from the pens of William Black, the Brontes, Dickens, Marryat, Mrs Marshall, Mrs Oliphant,

'Ouida', Henry Kingsley, Whyte Melville, Trollope and so on. This time I viewed *and* bought, despite the half-leather library covers.

An eye once opened to the possibilities of such off-the-beat finds soon becomes 'serendipitous'—in Horace Walpole's sense. It was not long before I turned up the remains of another institute library, this time the Mechanics' Institute of Gomersal, in the Saturday market at K—. They had bought the People's edition of Dickens in green, decorated boards (2 volumes per novel at 2/- a volume) published in the 1860's by Chapman and Hall. Each book still had its access number in faded ink on the flyleaf. As a collector of 'yellowbacks' and the like again I was glad to buy.

The Lake District too offered another *trouvaille*. Visiting T—to look at the Burne-Jones windows in the village church I took half an hour's siesta in a high backed armchair before the Institute fire. Bookshelves flanked the fireplace and spread round two walls of the room. This time there were sets of Disraeli's society novels in appropriate light blue cloth, of Hawley Smart's racing romances in vivid green, of Besant and Rice's once popular studies in contemporary manners and, a long brown row of Waverley novels. I was rather more interested in the less expected items, such as *The Manchester Man* by Mrs Linnaeus Banks and a first edition of Elizabeth Browning's *Last Poems*, that came to light on a high shelf. And for anyone who keeps an eye on current prices *She* and *Cleopatra* by Rider Haggard and *The Prisoner of Zenda* by 'Anthony Hope' (this in Arrowsmith's popular three-and-sixpenny series) were first editions not to be sneered at, even in that dusty state.

The fact that Mechanics' Institutions were endowed between the 1820's and 1840's—by mid-century there were seven hundred such societies and over 690,000 books in their libraries—and that Village Institutes developed later in the same era, imposes limits on the type of book that is likely to be found there, whether by gift or original purchase. If one is a student of nineteenth century reading habits they are a quarry of peculiar value. For the less specialised collector, however, another sort of parish library, possibly unique of its kind, will exert stronger appeal.

I came across it on market day in the high dale capital of H—The square was full of farmers with calves in straw-bedded trailers, mixed among stalls of fruit, hardware and fish: the market hall was converted to an eastern bazaar of carpets, cloth and rolls of artificial silk busy with farmers' wives. But in one retired corner of the square, under a solicitor's office, a door half-opened gave into a dusky room, whose walls and almost all the window space were stacked with books. There was no one in attendance, no bell: a plate with some silver and copper lay on the hexagonal table, also piled thick with books. The shelves held a mixture of all sorts, from heavy volumes on leadmining to gatherings of light verse. Probing deeper I found on the floor at the back a two volume Gothic novel in half-calf, marbled boards, crimson morocco labels, with a rococo engraved frontispiece and plates. It was *The Rose of Claremont* by Catherine Ward authoress of *The Mysterious Marriage*, etc. (1821). Nearby there were the four volumes of Walpole's *Letters* in half green morocco (Colburn 1820). Other desirable items no doubt lie secluded there still . . .

When dusk fell too deeply to prolong my browsing further I made enquiry

of a passer-by where and how one might pay. The reply was that the shop's owner really did not mind. A local businessman, he rented the room to house discards from the book sales he was in the habit of attending: he wanted these books disposed of and so customers paid what they considered an honest price, leaving money either on the plate or at the grocer's shop next door. Some of the townsfolk used the room as a library, taking a book out one week, putting sixpence in the plate and exchanging it for another the week after. The shop was always open on market day.

This surely is the ideal method for a latter-day philanthropist to propagate love of books in country places. How it would have delighted the heart of John Byng to find such a bookseller on one of his journeys among the northern counties!

## SOME NEGLECTED XIX CENTURY FICTION      iii Hogg's *Memoirs of Prince Alexey Haimatoff*      by James Munro

A NOVEL which provokes a review from Shelley, is mocked by Peacock, and adds a word to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, deserves better than almost total neglect but *Memoirs of Prince Alexey Haimatoff* by John Brown Esq. has remained almost entirely unnoticed since it was published by Thomas Hookham in 1813. Despite its publisher's enthusiasm ('I have a presentiment that His Serene Highness will shortly be in very general request', he wrote to Hogg on 8 November of that year) the original edition did not sell out, and in 1825 a number of copies from it were reissued with a cancel title page. Since then it has appeared only once, in 1952, when an edition with an introduction by Sidney Scott and engravings by Douglas Percy Bliss was issued by the Folio Society.

Thomas Jefferson Hogg, the author of the tale, is best known today as the writer of the *Life of Shelley* which aroused such protest in the poet's family that it was left incomplete, but which nevertheless contains all that we know of Shelley's early years. He was in an excellent position to write it, having struck up a friendship with Shelley when they were both undergraduates at Oxford, where they collaborated in a volume of poems, *Posthumous fragments of Margaret Nicholson* and in the notorious but harmless pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* which led to their expulsion from the university. A very good life of Hogg by Winifred Scott, published in 1951, gives a useful account of his relations with Shelley at this time.

In 1811 Shelley married Harriet Westbrook and dropped out of Hogg's circle for over a year. It seems likely that much of *Prince Alexey Haimatoff* was written during 1812 while Hogg was at his home in Norton, County Durham. Its plot is very decidedly of the neo-Gothic style initiated by 'Monk' Lewis, and mocked by E. S. Barrett in *The Heroine*, also published in 1913. Alexey,

a Russian of good parentage – ‘to say who I have reason to suspect are my parents, would even now be dangerous, and would formerly have been fatal both to myself and them’ – is sent to Lausanne as a child of five or six. Here, under the tuition of Monsieur Gothon, a man ‘of stern and forbidding aspect, with a plainness of manners bordering on coarseness’ but who loves his pupils as a father, he spends the next ten or eleven years, stuffing his head with learning and in the last year indulging a violent though platonic love for his tutor’s niece.

He is then summoned by his guardian, a certain Baron Groutermann to his castle in Germany, where the Baron, an old soldier of considerable distinction teaches him the bodily accomplishments – riding, shooting and swordplay – of which hitherto he has learned nothing. The Baron engages a tutor for him, a young man who curiously refuses any recompense except food and lodging. This man, Frederic Bruhle, instantly becomes a close friend of Alexey and when the latter’s guardian dies after about two years, accompanies him on his travels. First they go to Greece, from whence (as Alexey is becoming attached to an Athenian beauty) Bruhle hurries him to Constantinople. Here he falls into more adventures: at the invitation of a eunuch he goes to the Seraglio where he is for three days the fêted, indulged lover of the Sultana. At the end of the three days he asks permission to depart, and his request is met with a look of ‘diabolical malignity’. He escapes, despite her attempt to poison him, and he and Bruhle sail away to Naples – but not before he has bought a Circassian slave, Aür-Ahebeh, and fought off a party of janissaries who dispute his removing her. The description of his passion for this girl is remarkably like that of Trelawny for Zela in *The Adventures of a Younger Son*: both are of course the heroines of the Byronic tale of the period, though Hogg’s is scarcely the cliché that Zela is.

At Naples, Aür-Ahebeh dies of smallpox and Alexey goes nearly mad with grief, but time dispels his despondency, and while Bruhle is called ahead to Germany, he goes to Florence where he is the second in a duel, the circumstances of which are described at some length. From Florence he travels into Germany where he is initiated into the mysteries of the Eleutheri (which involves watching by the dead, three months’ solitary confinement, and other Gothic tests), but balks at swearing complete obedience to the Eleutherarch, despite Bruhle’s persuasiveness, and is banished to England for a year. But once here, he falls in love with the daughter of a crusty Tory baronet, and by skilfully playing down his own liberal tendencies, obtains his consent to their marriage. The news of Bruhle’s death removes all temptation he feels to return to the Eleutheri, and he settles down to the life of an English gentleman.

Such a précis brings out the extreme formlessness of the story which is, like so many of the Gothistic novels, a conglomerate of violent episodes thrown loosely together which though some are done effectively, as a whole are absurd. Even Shelley, in the review of the tale which he contributed to the *Critical Review* in December 1814, commented that ‘the adventure with the Eleutheri, although the sketch of a profounder project, is introduced and concluded with unintelligible abruptness’, and in a letter to Hogg of 26 November had said *Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus*; and . . . the

Eleutherarchs are proofs that you were a little sleepy’. In *Nightmare Abbey*, Peacock seized upon the same passage and we learn that Scythrop Glowry ‘dreamed of venerable eleutherarchs, and ghastly confederates holding midnight conventions in gloomy caves’.

In his introduction to the delightful 1952 edition, Sydney Scott claims that – like Scythrop Glowry – Alexey is based on Shelley, and suggests that Harriet is to be seen in Rosalie, Monsieur Gothon’s niece; while Gothon himself is derived from Shelley’s description of Dr Lind, his tutor at Eton. This may well be so (although Alexey is in no way a *roman à clef*) and certainly Shelley’s influence is evident throughout the tale; his theories of love, education and liberty form the core of the plot. In her life of Hogg, Lady Scott suggests that the latter part of the book is a rebellion against this influence: ‘the idealist settles down at length to a practical life of happiness and enduring affection, not unlike that which Hogg might have desired at Norton’.

Rebellion or not, the tale certainly had Shelley’s approval, and although he was obviously aware of the shapelessness of the story, begged Hogg to ‘write more like this . . . extraordinary and animated tale’. The one thing he objected to was (ironically enough) Alexey’s doctrine of free love, which is however by no means as sensual as he made out – the episode with the Sultana, the only purely carnal amour, is portrayed as a dangerous and stupid mistake.

In later years Hogg is reported to have recommended novel-writing as ‘a prolonged and steady interest, salutary to the imaginative excesses of youth’. Is *Alexey* such an essay in sublimation, or is it an attempt at literary fame in the style of Shelley’s own piece of juvenilia, *Zastrozzi*? If the latter, it failed sadly, but despite the ridiculous elements in the story, it is not without its good points. The description of Alexey’s adventures in Constantinople are particularly well done, while other passages (his life in England and the digression about the duel in Florence, for example) have considerable power. In the words of Shelley’s review, ‘it is an unweeded garden where nightshade is interwoven with sweet jasmine, and the most delicate spices of the east peep over the struggling stalks of rank and poisonous hemlock’. A real curiosity of literature, it still holds a great deal of fascination for at least one reader.

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