

Aldus Society Notes

Summer 2019

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A Mile and a Half of Lines: The Art of James Thurber

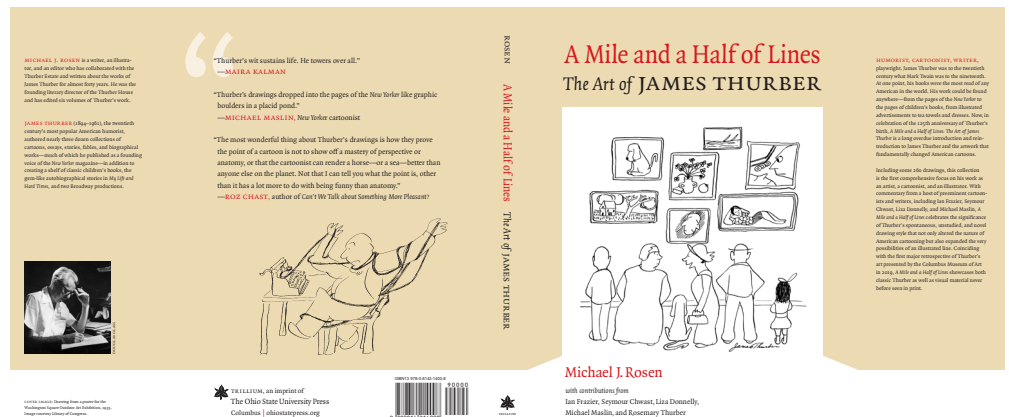
Presented by Michael J. Rosen



Michael will discuss his newest book, *A Mile and a Half of Lines: The Art of James Thurber*. This book is the first to truly consider James Thurber's opus from one or another art historical or sociological point of view. It is a rallying cry: a host of preeminent cartoonists and writers reacquainting us with the significance and importance of Thurber's drawings, which changed the nature of the cartoon in America and paved the way for an entirely different approach to visual art. It's a showcase of some 250 drawings that coincides with the first major exhibit of Thurber's art. Even though the Columbus

Museum of Art, back when it was called the Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, did mount two smaller shows of Thurber's work, and even though works of Thurber's appeared in several solo and scores of group shows during and after his lifetime, this year, 2019, the 125th anniversary of Thurber's birth, offers the first chance to review the character of his contribution to American illustration, cartooning, and children's books. The book, published by the OSU Press in July 2019, arrives in conjunction with a major exhibition of Thurber's art at the Columbus Museum of Art August 24, 2019 – March 15, 2020.

Along with other writing on James Thurber, including another book published this summer, *Collected Fables of James Thurber* (HarperPerennial, June 2019), Michael J. Rosen is an author and illustrator of children's books, poetry, and adult nonfiction, and an editor of anthologies. He was literary director of Thurber House in Columbus and has taught writing extensively.



Aldus Society Meetings

Regular meetings of the Aldus Society are held at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of the month between September and May. Meetings are held at **Thurber Center, 91 Jefferson Avenue, Columbus, Ohio** (unless otherwise announced). Socializing at 7:00 p.m. Free parking on Jefferson or behind Thurber House and at State Auto rear parking lot (between 11th St. and Washington).

The Aldus Society

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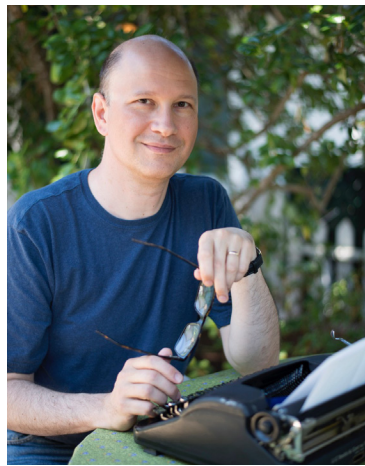
Newsletter deadlines are August 1st, December 1st, and April 1st.

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Bio: Richard Polt is the editor of the typewriter collectors' magazine *ETCetera* and author of *The Typewriter Revolution: A Typist's Companion for the 21st Century*. Polt teaches philosophy at Xavier University in Cincinnati.

October 10, 2019 Typewriters Yesterday and Today

Presented by Richard Polt

The history of typewriters is a fascinating study in the countless means that have been devised to achieve a single end: printing characters on paper, one after the other. This illustrated talk will highlight typewriter inventions from the ridiculously simple to the absurdly complex, from the familiar to the bizarre, as we explore different mechanisms, keyboard layouts, and typefaces from the heyday of typewriters.

The story of typewriters does not end with their obsolescence as a mainstream writing tool; today, people of every age and background are discovering or rediscovering the charm of mechanical writing machines and giving them new cultural meanings. In the second half of this talk, we will meet street poets, artists, musicians, hipsters, makers, and other creative individuals who are swimming against the digital tide and participating in today's typewriter revival.

November 14, 2019 Female Scribes in Medieval Europe

Presented by Dr. Alison Beach

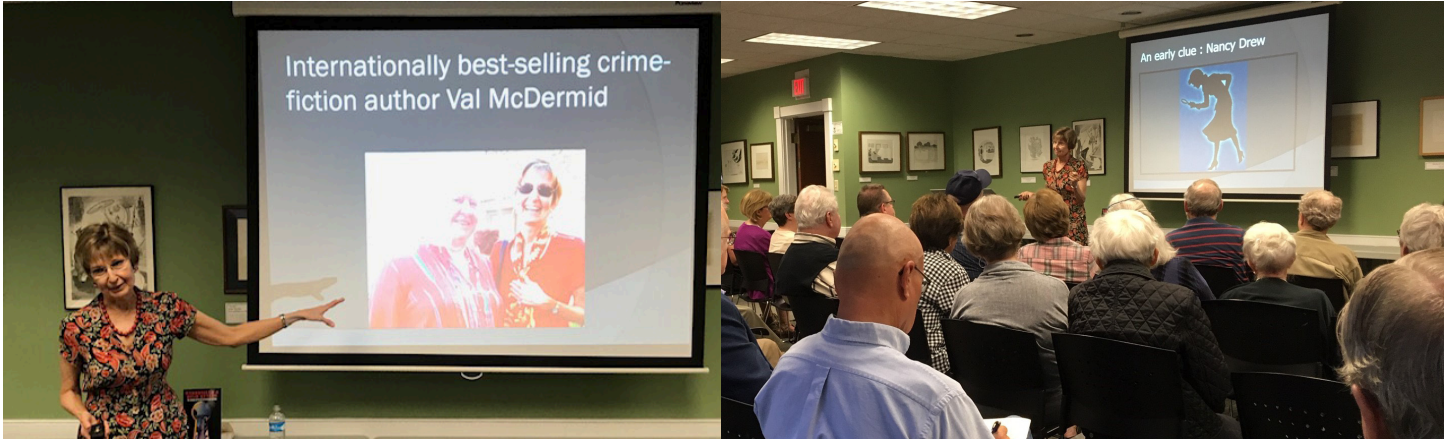
The popular image of a tonsured medieval monk meticulously applying ink to parchment is accurate as far as it goes, but in recent years the scene has been broadened to include nuns occupied at the same task. Dr. Alison Beach, a recognized expert in the field, will present the historical and scientific evidence clearly supporting that fact. And while she's at it, she'll also familiarize us with some of the production techniques that produced the stunning hand-lettered and illuminated sheets that impress us to this day.

Alison Beach, a professor of history at the Ohio State University, completed her B.A. in history at Smith College in 1985 and her Ph.D. in religion at Columbia University in 1996. She also holds an M.A. in history and an M.Phil. in religion from Columbia University. Her main interest is in medieval history, an area in which she has written three books, including *Woman as Scribes: Book Production and Monastic Reform in Twelfth-Century Bavaria* (Cambridge University Press).



May 2019 Program Investigated Women Detectives

This past May the Aldus Society was treated to “Hardboiled and High-Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture,” presented by Linda Mizejewski, Professor of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University. This energetic and entertaining talk explored the ongoing appeal of the female investigator character as well as the question of why this character thrives in print but often falters in the transition to the screen.



Aldus Summer Picnic

On June 23rd Aldus members gathered at the Thurber Center for our annual picnic. This year’s theme was “James Thurber,” and members were challenged to bring dishes that would have been popular in Thurber’s lifetime. We had some delicious and cleverly named menu items! We were also entertained by the Thurber Theatre Troup who performed several adaptations of Thurber stories using a radio program format. We had a fun time, as usual, and we owe a big thank-you to those who organized the event.



Picnic photos continued on page 4...

Aldus Summer Picnic Continued...



Aldus Co-Sponsors the Postcard, Paper, and Book Fair

By George Cowmeadow Bauman

The Aldus Society, for the first time, co-sponsored the 44th Postcard, Paper, and Book Fair, held June 8th.

Thanks to Aldine Scott Williams' initiative, we were able to partner up with the Heart of Ohio Postcard Club and present ourselves to a new audience. Scott created handouts about upcoming Aldus programs which each attendee received. Approximately 125-150 people attended the show at the Franklin County Fairgrounds in Hilliard, many of them hearing about Aldus for the first time.

Once the Aldus Board of Trustees approved the event and \$50, which went toward door prizes, Scott was able in short time to organize several book dealers to set up their offerings on long tables in the hall.

Aldine Leah Kalasky took advantage of a great deal to set up a table of her books. "I've been wanting to downsize for a while, and this fair gave me a great opportunity." She added with a smile, "Now that they're out of the house, it doesn't matter how many I sell. They're not going back inside!"

Book dealers Jack Salling—formerly Jack-in-the-Back at the Acorn Bookshop, Charlie Pugsley of Bookspace, and longtime Columbus dealer Karen Wickliff were all there as well.



Nancy Campbell, Leah Kalasky and Harry Campbell with "Jack-in-the-Back" (in the back!)

Several other dealers who were not able to set up for this year's show expressed interest in doing so for next year's event, which would grow the book component of the fair.

About 30 dealers overall were set up, with long aisles of well-organized postcards providing great temptation to sit down and flip through various categories and geographical regions. I was able to find several cards of

my hometown of New Castle, PA, and at one dealer's spread, I even found a category of "Bookstores."

As well, some dealers specialized in old magazines, documents, stamps, and more, providing a wide variety of fascinating material to browse through and get lost in.



Jack Salling—formerly "Jack-in-the-Back" at the Acorn Bookshop

Many Aldines were in attendance, having a good time among the tempting merchandise.

It was the kind of event when most people arrived with a smile of anticipation and left with a smile of accomplishment and a bag of goodies.



Melody Gilmore, President of the Heart of Ohio Postcard Club, at the check-in table for the Postcard, Paper & Book Show held June 8th at Franklin County Fairgrounds. The Aldus Society collaborated with our local postcard club to help expand their show to include books and other print collectibles.

"Despite the challenge of organizing a new book show for Columbus on little notice, everybody involved said they were happy with the results," said Aldus Board member Scott Williams.

Next year's show is scheduled for June 20, 2020. Photo by George Bauman who also helped with the show!

Field Trip to Marietta Was a Summer Highlight

By Nancy Campbell

Twenty Aldus members visited Marietta on July 19 to see the “Ohio Pioneers” exhibit at the Marietta College Legacy Library, visit the Campus Martius Museum, and have lunch at Austyn’s.



Some of the tour participants were (from left) John Weiler, Doug and Brenda Allinger, Bill and Marcia Evans, Marilyn Logue who coordinated the trip, Linda Showalter, the Legacy Library’s Special Collections manager, Christine Hayes, Nancy Campbell, Clyde Dilley, Dan Jensen, an unidentified visitor, and Harry Campbell.



Built around 1850, the Greek Revival-style Erwin Hall is the oldest academic building on the Marietta College campus (photo by John Weiler).

David McCullough’s new book, *The Pioneers*, the Heroic Story of the Settlers who brought the American Ideal west, is about the founding and settling of Marietta, which began in 1788. Much of the research for the book was done in Marietta, using diaries, newspapers, and letters in the Legacy Library’s collections. In the book’s Acknowledgements, Mr.

McCullough praised highly the library staff who helped him find the treasures, especially the Special Collections Manager, Linda Showalter, who led us through the library’s exhibit. The exhibit included paintings, artifacts, and banners highlighting the stories of the founders and early settlers.

We also saw a roomful of treasures on display in the Special Collections reading room, including the architectural pattern book owned by Colonel Joseph Barker, the shipbuilder who became the architect of some of Marietta’s earliest buildings.



Colonel Joseph Barker’s copy of *The Town and County Builder’s Assistant*, from 1799, the first architectural pattern book published in the U.S.

After the Legacy Library, the Aldines went to the Campus Martius Museum, on the site of the settlers’ original stockade. The museum contains exhibits about early life in the Northwest Territory.



Painting of Campus Martius by Charles Sullivan, c. 1840 (photo by John Weiler).

Aldus field trips are memorable events and we heartily thank Marilyn Logue, a native of Marietta, who with assistance from Clyde Dilley, made the day’s arrangements which included introductions to Linda Showalter and to Le Ann Hendershot, the administrator of the Campus Martius and Ohio River Museums.

Books Needed for Gift Shop at Marietta's Campus Martius Museum

By Nancy Campbell

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an Aldus member with an hour to spare will ask, "Where is the nearest bookstore?"

This happened at the end of our lunch in Marietta, when we had an hour before our tour at Marietta College's Legacy Library was to start. The answer to our query was, "We don't have any bookstores in Marietta anymore." We stifled our gasps and hatched a plan to supply what may be the only outlet for used books in town – the gift shop at the Campus Martius Museum.

Naomi Schock manages the museum's front desk and gift shop. You meet this friendly person when you arrive at the museum. Naomi had previously worked at a Barnes & Noble store and has added the shelf of used books to the gift shop's offerings. I contacted her, told her about the Aldus Society, and asked if she would like to receive used books from us for the shop.

She replied that she would love to receive books from Aldus members! And she provided a list of the subject categories that they sell:

- Northwest Territory history
- Native Americans
- Ohio history
- West Virginia history
- Civil War
- General history, including biographies and autobiographies
- General Fiction and Historical Fiction, including titles for children and young adults

So, if you have a few good books about regional history or pre-history to donate to the Campus Martius Museum to be sold in their museum shop, please bring them to the October Aldus program meeting or to my house (123 East Longview Avenue).

Their shop is not large, so please be selective and keep your donations within the categories listed above.

Thurber House Fall 2019 Special Events

9/18 Tayari Jones	11/17 Senator Sherrod Brown	11/23 Mo Rocca
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2019/20 Aldus Board of Trustees

In case you missed the May program and annual meeting, here is the list of the new Aldus board members and the officers for the coming year.

New Trustees:

Dan Jensen and Willkie Cirker

New Officers:

Pat Groseck, president
 Harry Campbell, vice president
 Janet Ravneberg, treasurer
 Mary Saup, Secretary

2019/20 Board of Trustees:

Pat Groseck; Harry Campbell; Janet Ravneberg; Mary Saup; Willkie Cirker; Dan Jensen; Leah Kalasky; Tony Sanfilippo; and Scott Williams

As many of you realize, most of these folks have been active members of Aldus for quite a while, including their work as board members. I know you must realize also that these are the members who volunteer to share the burden of projects, programs, committees and various activities that make the Aldus Society something that uniquely enriches our lives. I urge everyone to consider putting your own names forward when the time comes next spring to elect new board members, or when calls go out for committee members. An all-volunteer society like ours must continually look to renew and refresh these key positions in order to sustain vitality and growth.



Harry Campbell hands over the presidency to Pat Groseck

Book Hunting Notes 38

The Palace of Nestor: An Archaeological Mystery Solved

By Bill Rich

The Iliad tells of King Nestor, the old counselor, widely respected among the Greek leaders who sailed against Troy. Book 2 of *The Iliad* has the famous “Catalog of Ships”, listing the contributions of each kingdom in the expedition. Nestor’s forces are called out:

“Next the men who lived in Pylos ... Nestor the noble old horseman led these troops in ninety sweeping ships lined up along the shore.”

These ninety ships were a huge contribution to the Greek expedition, exceeded only by the hundred ships of Agamemnon of Mycenae, leader of the Greeks. Some of the citadels of the Mycenaean leaders were known – Mycenae itself, standing since the Bronze Age, Tiryns, the stronghold of Menelaus, Helen’s erstwhile husband, and even Athens itself. Others were uncovered by modern archaeologists – the stronghold at Knossos, on Crete, for example. But the Bronze Age palace of Pylos was not known, even if Homer was correct, and it was the center of one of the largest Mycenaean kingdoms. Now the town of Pylos has been known from classical Greek times. It is situated on a small bay on the west coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula – it was the site of a famous battle between the Spartans and the Athenians, and of other battles down through Greek history. But there was no trace of a Bronze Age palace, not until 1939. But that year, the American archaeologist, Carl Blegen of the University of Cincinnati, made some test diggings on a small hill northwest of Pylos. Some surface indications among the trees of an olive orchard aroused curiosity. First diggings began to reveal traces of a Mycenaean palace. The orchard was bought from the farming family, and extensive ruins were brought to light. There was a huge central megaron that served as the throne room of the place, with a circular hearth in the center of the room (Fig. 1). Near the entrance of the palace were the remains of an archive room, filled with hundreds of clay tablets, baked in the final conflagration that destroyed the palace (Fig. 2). But mystery remained. Was this the palace of the Homeric Nestor? It was surprisingly far from the coast and from the modern town and bay of Pylos. It was 3.5 miles from the coast, as the crow flies, and 10.5 miles from the modern town. Could this really be the Homeric kingdom that sent the second highest number of ships to Troy? The clay tablets might contain a possible clue, but, in 1938, they were written in an undeciphered script and an unknown language. They were similar to an archive found in the ruins of the Bronze Age palace of Knossos, in Crete, by Sir Arthur Evans,

and dubbed by him “Linear B” script. Despite Homer, it was not even known if the language of the tablets was Greek.



Fig. 1. The central megaron at Pylos, with the circular hearth.



Fig. 2. Linear B tablets from the Pylos excavation. Some of the fragments have been pieced together.

Blegen intended, of course, to return in the summer of 1940 to begin full scale excavations. Fortunately, the Linear B tablets had been taken to Athens, and stored in the basement of the National Bank there. That part of the palace that had been excavated was recovered, awaiting the return of the archaeologists. But World War II broke out, with the German conquest of Greece and Nazi occupation. Even when the war ended, the internecine struggle of the Greek civil war followed. Blegen must have been beside himself. He couldn’t return until May, 1952 to resume operations. Excavations then continued every summer from 1952 until 1969. The results of this great discovery were published in four massive volumes from 1966 to 1973. These were wonderful quarry for this book hunter, who bought them as they were published. They are not exactly designed for reading in bed, however. Each volume is 11½” x 9”, and weighs several pounds. Fig. 3 shows the third volume. *The Palace of Nestor* is magnificently illustrated, with reconstructions of some

of the principal rooms. Fig. 4 shows the throne room, with the hearth (compare Fig. 1, the room as found).

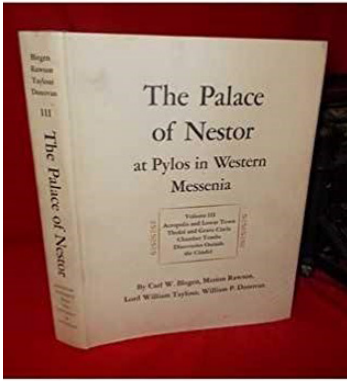


Fig. 3. *The Palace of Nestor*, 3rd volume.

Fig. 4. The central megaron as restored.



But is it really the Homeric palace of Pylos? By the 1960's, this mystery was solved, at least to most people's satisfaction. By this time, "Linear B" had been deciphered, and proved to be an ancient form of writing Greek – a thousand years before the classical Greek of Athens, and long before the Greek alphabet – the oldest written language in Europe. The archive Blegen discovered was part of the day-to-day business of the palace government operations – notices of tax receipts in goods and slaves, orders going out to various districts of the kingdom, offerings to gods and sanctuaries, etc., etc. These were clerk's notes written on clay slabs – presumably to be transferred to a permanent writing material when needed. They were not meant to be permanent records – their clay was accidentally (and fortunately) baked in the conflagration that destroyed the palace – perhaps around 1200-1100 BC. As such, they reflect some of the crisis facing Pylos in its last year. There are orders to send troops and coast guards to various locations, for example. And, most telling, some of the memos list place of writing at their top – not unlike a modern business letter. And this place, when the Linear B is deciphered, spells "Pylos." This type of site identification does not happen often in archaeology, but it happened here.

King Nestor and his court lived well. Fig. 5 shows one of the bath tubs in the "women's megaron." At least, in some places, it was possible to get a decent bath in Europe 3,200 years ago. Some vases for bath oil were found still left in place in this tub. This discovery reminds me of a passage in Book 3 of *The Odyssey*. There, Odysseus' son, Telemachus, has gone to find some word of his still-missing father. He travels to Pylos, the kingdom nearest to Ithaca, and is royally entertained by

King Nestor, as the son of his old companion in arms. In particular, this passage resonates:

"...lovely Polycaste, youngest daughter

Of Nestor, had bathed Telemachus.

Rinsing him off now, rubbing him down with oil,

she drew a shirt and handsome cape around him.

Out of his bath he stepped, glistening like a god,

strode in and sat by the old commander, Nestor."

Talk about a royal welcome. I prefer to think that Fig. 5 shows the very bath where young Telemachus got the rub down from beautiful Polycaste.



Fig. 5. The bath in the "women's megaron."

This book hunter continues to collect books on Pylos. Fig. 6 shows a recent book, *The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project*. This is a compendium of papers published by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in 2017. Here, it is reported that there was a canal from ancient Pylos leading to a port excavation directly opening on the sea. Room enough for King Nestor to harbor his 90 ships, we can suppose. The harbor has been found by ground survey and test probes. It had been silted up and completely covered in the three millennia since it was used. Only a trace remained of the place from which 90 ships sailed for Troy. So goes the glory of the world.

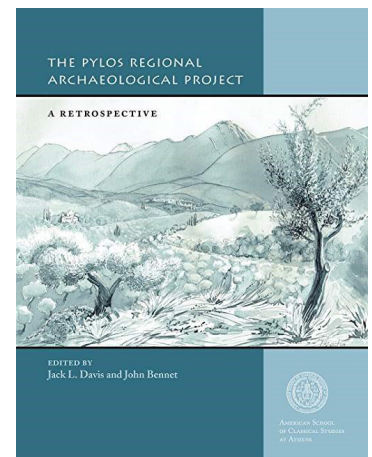
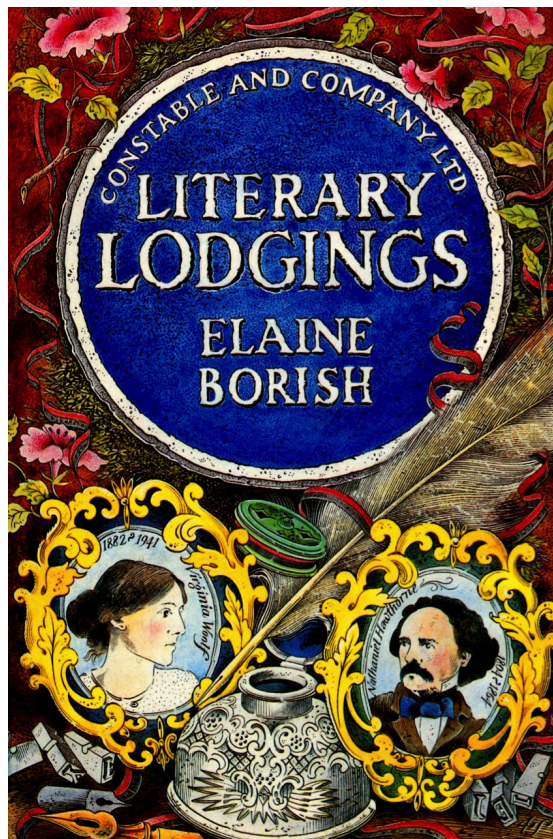


Fig. 6. *The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project*.

BOOK REVIEW
Finding Agatha—Or Not

By Don Rice



Literary Lodgings
By Elaine Borish
Constable & Company
249 pp.

The circle in the center of the dust jacket is an allusion to the (mostly) blue plaques installed on buildings in Great Britain to commemorate a link between that location and a famous person, event, or former building on the site.

Just as there are books that gain value because of their associations—signed by the author, having the bookplate of a famous person, and so on—so are there physical locations that are similarly enhanced. Who wouldn't want to walk a path known to have been trod by John Muir or have a drink in the White Horse Tavern where Dylan Thomas toasted many a friend?

Elaine Borish, who's written a number of clever books usually with a culinary or literary theme, compiled a collection of extant British hotels where some of our favorite authors have spent a night. When you're traveling, you have to stay somewhere, so if you're going to be in Oxford, say, why not share an

experience with Henry James and stay at the Randolph Hotel (now the Macdonald Randolph)? Do you plan to travel through Cumbria with thirteen of your best friends? Consider booking Hardcragg Hall (seven bedrooms, six baths) for a self-catered weekend at \$1600. This works out to only \$115 per person, cheap enough for two nights in a place where Beatrix Potter stayed with friends when it was a private dwelling. In all, Borish has included temporary lodgings for forty authors, every one of whom you'll recognize and many whose books or poetry you've read. I counted only three Americans among them: Edith Wharton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James.

One helpful feature of the book is the way Borish divided the entries geographically. If you're visiting relatives along the southern coast and haven't the time to be traipsing all over the place, check out the entries under The South of England. And if you're a fan of William Makepeace Thackeray you're in luck because he stayed in Brighton at The Old Ship Hotel during the 1840s while writing parts of *Vanity Fair*. In fact, he mentions the hotel in one sequence: "Our young bride and bridegroom had chosen Brighton as the place where they would pass the first few days after their marriage; and having engaged apartments at the Ship Inn, enjoyed themselves there in great comfort and quietude."

Each six- or seven-page entry has a couple of illustrations and many interesting historical details.



The Old Swan Hotel today

I've owned my copy of *Literary Lodgings* for some years but never got around to consulting it in earnest until 2017. I was going to be in the U.K. over New Year's and decided it would be fun to make a literary side trip based on one of Borish's selections. Obviously all forty of the writers stayed in any number of lodging houses, but for each of them she chose just one place of particular interest—the Victoria Hotel in Devon for George Bernard Shaw, for example, and the Hannafore Point Hotel in Cornwall for Katherine Mansfield. I selected what seemed to me to be one of the odder choices—the Old Swan in Harrogate, where Agatha Christie had hidden herself away for eleven days in December 1926. Being there in the same season of the year I thought would heighten the experience.

And so, on January 2, 2018, I bought a train ticket from Folkestone, Kent, to Harrogate, North Yorkshire, with changes at London and Leeds. The entire trip was supposed to have taken four-and-a-half hours. Delays resulted in my getting there over two hours late. Now here's something to keep in mind while traveling by train in Great Britain. Always keep your train tickets because, depending on which lines you use, if you're delayed long enough you can get a refund. In my case I got the entire \$129.27 back.



Agatha Christie

During January at that latitude 4:30 PM is nighttime. It was pitch black when I got off the train. Fortunately the Old Swan was a reasonably short walk away. Christie, also in similar darkness, would have taken a cab, but I'm too cheap for that. It's a huge four-star hotel with 136 spacious rooms (200 when built in the late nineteenth century) and the first building in Harrogate to be electrified, having its own steam engine and generator. In Christie's day it was called the Swan Hydropathic Hotel, hardly a name to entice travelers, but back in the day the hotel was a destination in itself, where one might partake of various water cures.

The city of Harrogate was famous for its mineral springs, first discovered in 1571. By the early 1600s they were already being used for medicinal purposes. Over the centuries it became a hugely popular spa, attracting not only British royalty, but even such notables as Tsarina Alexandra of Russia. During Charles Dickens's visit he noted that "[Harrogate is] the queerest place, with the strangest people in it, leading the oddest lives of dancing, newspaper-reading and dining." Even in Agatha Christie's time it was still immensely popular. The year before her stay the city had over a quarter million visitors.

So what was she doing there, anyway? Here's the basic story, which many of you already know. I pieced this together from a half-dozen different sources, no two of which agreed on much more than the date. Her husband at the time, Archie Christie—an established philanderer—seems finally to have settled on one girlfriend in particular, and told Agatha that he wanted

a divorce. This happened at a time when she was emotionally vulnerable, her mother having died earlier that year. On December 3, 1926, after one final argument, Agatha left the house and drove her Morris Crowley for some miles before crashing it into a tree. She walked to the next village where she took a train to London. In London, so the story goes, she saw a poster advertising the Swan Hydropathic Hotel and that determined her destination. When she checked in (with hardly any luggage) she registered under the name of Theresa Neele. Where *Theresa* came from, I don't know, but *Neele* was certainly derived from Nancy Neele, Archie's paramour. Weird.

One of many front pages published following Agatha Christie's disappearance.



Her disappearance resulted in a nation-wide manhunt, involving hundreds of police and eventually hundreds more volunteers. It got so crazy that ice cream vendors set up shop to cash in on the assembled mobs. Fellow mystery writers, Arthur Conan Doyle, Dorothy Sayers, and Edgar Wallace became involved, but proved not to have the investigative skills of Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, or Detective Sgt. Elk. All the while Christie was having a gay old time at the hotel, dining and dancing and playing bridge with other guests. Her picture was plastered all over the newspapers, but no one made the connection.

It was a £100 reward (well over a thousand bucks today) that finally did her in. She spent many evenings listening to music in the hotel's Palm Court, and a couple of the band members—the drummer and the saxophonist—realized who she was and called the cops. To make certain before approaching her, the police called Archie, who made his way to the hotel and identified his missing wife.

There have been all kinds of explanations for why she did it, a form of amnesia being the most popular, but nobody really knows. In her autobiography, Christie doesn't mention the incident. There was a book published in 2006 that purported to tell the whole story—*Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days*. The author, Jared Cade, makes many claims, but because he offers no documentation his conclusions can't be taken too seriously.

Then, of course, there's the movie, *Agatha*, with

Arthur C. Clarke: A Semester at Sea Story

By George Cowmeadow Bauman

Linda and I once got paid to voyage around the world.



In the spring of '84, we were passengers on the S.S. Universe. Lucky-Boy-Me had been hired to manage the onboard bookstore for the Semester at Sea program, an immense bit of good fortune. Each semester 500 selected American students transferred into Pitt (now Colorado State University), the administrating university, and received 12-15 academic credits for the classes they took from among the 50 faculty who had been chosen for the semester. All while we sailed around the world for over 20,000+ miles, visiting nine countries: Brazil, South Africa, Kenya, Sri Lanka, India, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Japan, then back to the USA. What an education, and not just for the students. What an experience!

At each port, an expert in some field regarding the next country which we'd be visiting would come onboard and lecture not only to students, but also to the shipboard community as we sailed. For example, in Brazil someone joined us as we crossed the calm and sunny South Atlantic to lecture about South Africa, whose politics were a very controversial topic among the passengers.

A full shipboard meeting publicly discussed the hot-button issue of apartheid. Should we dock in reprehensible apartheid South Africa, thus economically helping the economics of the oppressors, or did it matter enough to take a stand? In the end, the administration voted to dock there, though sentiment was largely against it. One much-admired professor said, aphoristically, "Every economic decision is a political decision." That wisdom rolled all over the ship for the rest of the voyage. Linda and I still use it.

But the Universe had to refuel *somewhere* after crossing the ocean. Our intended port of Maputo, Mozambique had been denied us due to civil unrest. The government didn't want the responsibility of 500+

Dustin Hoffman and Vanessa Redgrave. In a short prologue it claims to be "an imaginary solution to an authentic mystery." For "imaginary" you should read "totally unbelievable." Hoffman is completely miscast as an invented American newspaper reporter and, at barely five-foot-six to Redgrave's nearly six feet, isn't quite credible in the role of a romantic interest.



**Vanessa Redgrave as
Agatha Christie**

The screenplay and direction do not do justice to the first-class photography, setting, and attention to period detail. *The Motion Picture Guide* summed up my thoughts: "There is no suspense, no tension and not even one good scene in this preposterous and ostentatious mess." Enough about that.

I have to admit that not for a single minute did my stay at the Old Swan ever seem as if I were sharing an experience with Agatha Christie. I thought that might happen when having dinner in the hotel's huge dining room, but it was so sparsely populated at that time of year I would have felt silly sitting nearly alone in a desert of white table cloths. Instead I ate at a classy and crowded pan-Asian restaurant just down the road.



The Royal Pump Room Museum

Harrogate's a pleasant city, and I very much enjoyed walking about and visiting the Royal Pump Room Museum, still redolent of sulfur, but I'd seen enough and probably won't return. Would I bother to stay at another of Elaine Borish's literary lodgings? Given the opportunity, of course I would.

Americans turned loose in their unstable country.

International politics became very personal during that visit.

Linda and I spent as little currency as possible in Cape Town, though we did take the swinging cable car to the top of windy Cable Mountain, where on many days “The devil spreads his tablecloth” in the form of heavy cloud cover. Cape Town was such a beautiful city, visually, if rather ugly behind the scenes with their racial unrest.

Also I *had* to buy new socks and fresh underwear. Otherwise, we were tight with our rand. Long walks of observation were free.

The bookstore was sealed by customs everywhere, so Linda and I were free to explore our host countries. Without knowing I knew how, I bargained intensely and successfully for handsome leather bags in Brazil to sell in the shop; we went on a memorable safari in Kenya; saw incredibly horrible slums outside Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town; in Sri Lanka sat next to hot coals as a man walked barefooted across them and urged us to touch his still-cool feet; rode a very smelly elephant in India; broke two ribs in China teaching students to play Frisbee; were offered snake blood in Taipei’s Snake Alley “to increase manliness!”; and spent a day in Hiroshima, an unforgettable experience to consider as we sailed home to San Francisco across the North Pacific in a Category 8 ocean storm, which tossed a bolted-down piano crashing through the wall of the Faculty Lounge, an indication that our sailing song was over.

We find it difficult to express what that voyage meant to us in terms of exposure to non-American customs and cultures. Our minds were blown in each port, but then we had a few days at sea before the next incredible stop so we could try to put our adventures into perspective.

That was the point of Semester at Sea, and we who were staff had our minds scrambled often, just as the students had. Fortunately the classes and the sense of community provided the forum to share our experiences and increase our understanding of the non-American world at the foot of the gangplank.

In Sri Lanka, we hit the lecturer jackpot. For the short sail from Columbo to Madras, India, noted science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke came onto the ship! He was there to lecture on science fiction; another lecturer had come on board in Kenya to discuss Sri Lankan history. Clarke met with classes and held informal discussions for several days, clearly enjoying his interaction with students, who constantly surrounded him. They gathered in a semi-circle on various decks and in public rooms as he talked about writing, about science fiction, and about the future, from his intelligent perspective. After all, he first developed the concept of orbiting communication satellites, in 1945. He patiently and with good humor responded to endless questions about his dozens of books. Questions, always questions.

Wow! Arthur C. himself on the ship with us. He

was a strong supporter of Semester at Sea, and not only joined us for a few days to speak, but he also financially contributed to SAS.

His longtime home was in Sri Lanka; he was quite the recluse, leaving that year to visit only the Vatican and the White House... and coming onboard the Universe. One of the practicums offered by SAS was a visit to his home. It filled up within minutes. Regrettably, I didn’t act fast enough for the trip to his residence in the jungle outside Columbo.

The ship’s crew was Taiwanese, as the SAS program was owned by the Institute of Shipboard Education in Taiwan. Ping-pong was their national game.

Well, Clarke sought out the ship’s rec area where the sailors played, and asked if he could have a game. Here was this 67-year-old man, asking these Taiwanese if they’d let him play. He asked about giving points to make the game more fair. They assumed *he* wanted to be given points. But no, he was asking how many points *they* should get. They chattered away in Taiwanese and laughed at his boldness. “Old man vs. sailors in-our-prime! What are his chances?!”

The laughter didn’t last long. He was an expert at the game, and in a few very exciting games, which drew more and more curious spectators as the afternoon wore on, he beat all Taiwanese comers, smashing the ball with powerful back- and forehand swings, ranging 10’ behind the table and 6’ to the left and right to return the ball.

The student jocks then spoke up and said they’d play him, as though they were better than the skilled crew. He was game, though he did take off his shirt first. Against their wishes, he spotted them 18 points. And won. 19 points, and won. 20 freakin’ points, and beat them 21-20. They hadn’t scored a single point against this deceptive-looking senior. He looked around at the disbelieving crowd and asked for more comers, and finally not one person was willing to try to beat him, he was that good. The science-fiction genius tossed his paddle on the table then, and asked in the midst of roaring applause, “Where’s the nearest restroom?!”





When he lectured in classes, the room overflowed with both enrolled students, and other students, as well as faculty and staff. I've never seen the like of the way he was so revered. A literary god walked and talked amongst us. His words were collected like pieces of gold as they dropped from his mouth. Or so it seemed. Extensive journal-notes were made by those in awe of the great writer.

I was able to spend a little time with him myself; he was a class act, and always very interesting. He was quite knowledgeable about the bookstore trade, following things closely from his Sri Lankan retreat. I told him I sold a lot of his books back in West Virginia in the Bethany College Bookstore, which gained me a firm handshake from the author of *2001 A Space Odyssey*, and my favorite Clarke title, *Childhood's End*. He always seemed to have time for anyone who wished to interact with him.

The day he left, he gifted me with an inscribed copy of *The Fountains of Paradise*, immediately becoming a prized book in my collection.

The bookstore had become a popular onboard hang-out. I employed unusual ways to encourage students to visit the shop, where we displayed the literature and language guides of each country we visited, and of course had a nice selection of Clarke's books.

Among those methods to stimulate sales was my famous Bubble Gum Drill. Customers learned that there were times when I would scoop a handful of 2¢ Bazookas from behind the counter and fling them over the customers' heads, causing people to scramble for a free piece of bubble gum.

Students hung around the small shop just waiting for a Bubble Gum Drill. While they waited for the Bazooka to fire—maybe two or three times an hour, and we were open only four hours a day (!), they would be exposed to that great lit, and often would also buy expensive gifts I'd purchased from local crafters in previous ports—at a nice mark-up for the shop. So I'd become known to most of the passengers.

The last night he was on board, there was a much-anticipated lecture which he was to present to the entire shipboard community. The student union and

its bar were overflowing. (The student-loving Taiwanese bartender was known for a heavy pour.) The onboard TV station was covering the event so that people unable to squeeze in could go to other gathering rooms, such as the library, which had a monitor to experience the lecture that way.



I was not expecting to do anything but attend Clarke's final appearance—while sitting at the bar. Linda and I loved the strong Long Island Ice Teas they served.

But instead, the academic dean of the onboard university gave me, not the English professors, the honor of introducing our famous author.

It was one of the highlights of my professional life. "...and now it gives me great pleasure to introduce one of the most respected, and best-selling, authors in the world, and the Ping-Pong champion of the S.S. Universe...Arthur C. Clarke!"



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