Dear Literary Friends,

From the feedback I have received from many of you, it sounds as if there have been librocubicularists (those who read in bed) in great numbers of beds! It’s such a fabulous word, and I’ve been trying be one as much as possible.

This month I’ve been thinking about Queen Victoria as a biographical subject and author. Also, I’ve found a poignant poem that captures the essence of England, and I wonder if you can guess what was one of the most popular novels read by WWI soldiers?

I’m thrilled at how much my newsletter has grown (in less than 2 years), and it now goes out to almost 3,000 like-minded people. But this means it is costing me more to produce and I need to find a way to help cover this. Each month, I love to recommend books that I’ve read and enjoyed, so I’m now adding links to enable you to purchase these books. I have established an affiliation with Fishpond.com which means that if you click one of my links and buy the book, I receive a small commission. It won’t cost you anything extra, in fact you’ll most likely save money as their prices are highly competitive. So please, if you'd like to purchase the book, use my links, and help me keep producing this newsletter.

I always love to hear what you think, so get involved and add your comments to the conversations on my website. Please enjoy this edition of “Notes from A Book Addict.”

Susannah

P.S. Are you on Facebook? I’ve launched my new Facebook page and would love you to “Like” me there. I'll be posting fascinating literary titbits regularly and would love to have you share them around. Find me on Facebook here: https://www.facebook.com/susannah.fullerton.author/
Reading in Bed

From the feedback I have received from my previous post, it sounds as if there have been librocubicularists popping up all over the place! It is a word I’ve been trying to introduce into the conversation whenever possible, as I think it is so wonderful, and I have also been trying to put it into practice as much as possible. In my view, reading in bed is one of life’s greatest pleasures.

But where do you like to read? My favourite position is lying on my side in bed, with the book close to my face, blankets pulled up high. When I start getting sleepy, I can place the book on the bedside table and turn off the light, without having to get out of bed, and the book is ready and waiting if I’m lucky enough to get to read in bed when I wake up. My couch is also a good one for lying on with a book, and I love reading in a hot bath! (I’ve never dropped a book in yet.) I’d also love more time reading by a pool, under a sun-umbrella, at a five-star resort! Do you prefer to read in a squishy armchair, a beanbag, outside in the park, on a train, at the beach or a café, in your local library, in a rocking chair? I cannot read in a car (I feel sick) but I usually manage to complete a whole book on a flight to Europe. I read in queues, while waiting to meet friends … in fact any time I have a spare five minutes … but for lengthy reading sessions nowhere is as good as bed or the
couch. Any reading place that allows me to enjoy a glass of chilled white wine as I read is good too.

But in the end, does ‘location, location’ really matter? Perhaps it’s more important to savour every second of reading time that we have, and to make sure we are enjoying the book, whatever it might be.

Let me know what you think, and if you have a favoured reading place or position? Are there places, where, like me, you cannot read? Let’s make a list in my website comments at https://susannahfullerton.com.au/reading-in-bed/

Susannah Fullerton - Are you a Librocubicularist?
Susannah Fullerton - Who are the Biggest Readers?

Queen Victoria

The BBC is making a new 4-part adaptation of E.M. Forster’s Howard’s End. It stars Hayley Atwell and Matthew Macfadyen and is being filmed at the moment. It will be hard to better the 1992 film version with Emma Thompson, Anthony Hopkins etc., but a longer version will hopefully do full justice to the novel.

Later this year we can look forward to a new film Victoria and Abdul (based on Shrabani Basu’s book of the same name) with Judi Dench as Victoria and Ali Fazal as Abdul Karim. Abdul, known as ‘the Munshi’, served the Queen during the last 15 years of her reign – she grew very fond of him, but their closeness caused friction in her court. The film has been billed as a sort of sequel to the wonderful Her Majesty Mrs Brown.

In two years’ time it will be the bicentenary of Queen Victoria’s birth, so we can probably expect a number of new books about the Queen and her reign. I have just finished reading Julia Baird’s acclaimed new biography Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire. I loved it and it did make me think about Victoria in a
new way. Another book about Victoria which I found most intriguing was *Queen Victoria’s Gene: Haemophilia and the Royal Family* by D.M. Potts. This book showed how that gene spread amongst the royal families of Europe and helped change the course of history.

While Victoria is remembered as a monarch, don’t forget that she was also an author. She is said to have written an average of 2,500 words a day as an adult. She kept journals (122 volumes of them!) and in 1868 she published *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands*. The book sold extremely well, as did its sequel *More Leaves*.

Did you enjoy *Her Majesty, Mrs Brown* as much as I did? Have you read any of Queen Victoria’s journals? They are not easily available here in Australia. (UK readers can access them here: [http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/](http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/).) Let me know here https://susannahfullerton.com.au/queen-victoria/.

* Howards End by E. M. Forster
* Victoria the Queen: An Intimate Biography of the Woman Who Ruled an Empire by Julia Baird
* Victoria & Abdul by Shrabani Basu
* Queen Victoria’s Gene: Haemophilia and the Royal Family by D.M. Potts

**WWI and Books**

100 years ago the world was at war. In April 1917 America declared war on Germany, the Battle of Vimy Ridge took place (many Canadians were killed there), and also the Battle of Chemin des Dames. In Russia the Tsar had just abdicated and the country was engulfed in revolution, Germany was being squeezed by the British naval blockade, while in the Middle East the Ottoman Empire was losing ground to British-led forces.

A.A. Milne (who had been injured at the Front) was writing propaganda for British
intelligence, Robert Graves had been sent to the royal home of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight to get over shell shock, and Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon were hospitalised in Craiglockhart Hospital, Edinburgh (the building now has an excellent museum to Sassoon and Owen). Canadian poet John McCrae had found himself suddenly famous as a result of writing In Flanders Fields, but in spite of that fame was serving as army surgeon in France, with less than a year to live.

WWI produced many great poets (and I’m not going to discuss war poetry here), but it also produced memoirs and novels, from both sides of the conflict. Goodbye to All That by Robert Graves, Sassoon’s, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque, Peace with Honour written by A.A. Milne in 1934 (his plea to the world not to engage in another conflict), Storm of Steel by Ernst Jünger, A Farewell to Arms reflecting Hemingway’s own experience in the Italian ambulance service, Vera Brittan’s Testament of Youth, and L.M. Montgomery’s fabulous Rilla of Ingleside which tells of the war from the point of view of the women waiting at home – these are all works I can recommend. More modern writers have also written of the Great War – some of my favourites are Pat Barker’s Regeneration Trilogy, Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks, Maisie Dobbs by Jacqueline Winspear, and War Horse by Michael Morpurgo.

And for superb factual accounts of the war, you could try The Guns of August which won a Pulitzer Prize for its author, Barbara Tuchman, The Great War by Les Carlyon, Castles of Steel by Robert K. Massie, and Gallipoli: The Fatal Shore by Harvey Broadbent.

And did you know that one of the books most often read by soldiers at the front in WWI was Pride and Prejudice? What better therapy for the horrors of war could there be?

“War is something of man’s own fostering, and if all mankind renounces it, then it is no longer there.” (A.A. Milne)

Did you read war stories or poetry? Who is your favourite author? I value your input, tell me at my website here: https://susannahfullerton.com.au/wwi-and-books/
Poem of the Month

Adlestrop by Edward Thomas

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

One hundred years ago, on 9 April, poet Edward Thomas died. Thomas made a name for himself as an essayist, literary critic and poet, before he became a soldier. Thomas was a friend of American poet Robert Frost. When the two men enjoyed walks together in the English countryside, Frost teased Thomas about dithering over which path to choose when there was more than one. Frost sent Thomas an advance copy of The Road Not Taken and Thomas, taking the joking message of the poem seriously, made the fateful decision to enlist. He was a married man in his mid 30s, and did not have to fight, but he went off to serve with the Royal Garrison Artillery. He was killed in action soon after, and was buried in a war graves cemetery in northern France.

His poem Adlestrop is a memory of a soldier on a troop train which makes an unscheduled stop at a tiny Gloucestershire village station. The natural world is wonderfully evoked – smells, sounds, sights. This is the England that the soldiers will be fighting to preserve – an England of rural beauty. Society is excluded from the poem? “no one left and no one came”, but that allows the poet to fully appreciate all that nature offers.

The poem begins with the word ‘Yes’, as if he is answering a question or pulling an event from the depths of his memory. This opening creates an immediate relationship with the reader, and he then goes on to talk about that very English subject, the weather. There’s a conversational tone, a feeling of intimacy. The relaxed tone almost allows us to forget that the train holds young men who might be making their final journey.

The poem captures the essence of England – quaint train stations, county names, an unusual village name, blackbirds and meadowsweet. This is what he identifies with, and this of course is what he will most miss on the terrible battlefields of France. The wonderful harmony he feels with nature at Adlestrop, will soon be so rudely shattered – the birds will not be singing, and the heat will be of battle rather than that of a June afternoon.

You can still visit Adlestrop, but you cannot travel there by train as the station was closed in 1966. The station sign was saved and is on display in the village today, with words from Edward Thomas, from the Hutton/Stringer Archive, circa 1905. Wikipedia, Public Domain
the poem on a public bench. Edward Thomas never saw his poem in print, but its 16 poignant, beautiful lines give a slightly different view of World War I.

Share your thoughts on this poem by leaving a comment here:

Listen to a reading by Richard Burton
Poetry Foundation: Edward Thomas
The Road Not Taken and Other Poems by Robert Frost

Save the Date

SYDNEY

J. M. Barrie and Peter Pan, Ashfield Library, Wed 5 April, 11am. Free

Frances Hodgson Burnett and her Classics for Children, Ashfield Library, Mon 19 June, 11am. Free


Jane Austen: 200 Years On – Ashfield Library, Fri 14 July, 11am. Free


Jane Austen: 200 Years On – Art Gallery of NSW, Mon 17 July, time to be confirmed. (Not possible to book yet)

Jane Austen: Why we Should Still be Reading Jane Austen 200 Years After She Died – State Library of NSW, Tues 18 July, midday. (Not possible to book yet)


Art Gallery of NSW
I will be doing a 5-part course at the Art Gallery later this year. If you would like to keep the dates free, they are:
Sat: 19 Aug, 26 Aug, 2 Sept, 9 Sept, 16 Sept.
In my next newsletter, I’ll tell you more about what the course will include and when you can book.

**MELBOURNE**

*A Jane Austen Entertainment* – a performance of readings from Jane Austen’s novels and letters. The Savage Club, 12 Bank Place, Melbourne. Wed 12 April, 6 for 6.30pm. $80 per person. Refreshments included. To book email alan.egan@bigpond.com, or phone (03) 9606 0501

**BRISBANE**

*Jane Austen: Her Legacy*, Fri 12 May, Chermside Library, Brisbane, 1-2pm, phone library for bookings

*L.M. Montgomery and Anne of Green Gables*, Avid Reader Bookshop, Fri 12 May, 6 for 6.30pm, $10 per person, phone 3846 3422 to book.

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**Literary Tours**

F. Scott Fitzgerald once described the South of France as “the nearest thing to Paradise”. There are still a few places available on my Southern France literary tour, 5 – 22 Sept, 2018. For a detailed itinerary and details about booking, see http://www.asatours.com.au/tours/literary-tour-of-southern-france-2018/

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**Literary Publications**

For further details about my books and publications, visit https://susannahfullerton.com.au/literary-publications/

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“The oldest books are still only just out to those who have not read them.”

— Samuel Butler