

## What we've valued during our time in isolation, Number 2

Did you have, as I had, great plans for reading in depth over our lockdown? I put aside and anticipated reading two of my 'bucket list' books: Moby Dick along with its unsympathetic Quaker characters and Proust's Remembrance of Things Past. I managed neither, but instead of disappointment, was slightly encouraged to hear that we have all had our attention span shortened or maybe diverted by the momentous happenings around us.

### Short reads

One way of dealing with a short attention span is to head towards short stories, another is to revisit old favourites, perhaps wallow in comforting reads or have an outburst of laughter. The library team would like to offer our choices.

***The Golden age of Quaker botanists***, by Ann Morley. 2006. (In Friends House library, and available from [quaker-tapestry.co.uk](http://quaker-tapestry.co.uk)). This book reveals the plant hunters responsible for up to 1,000 of the UK's best-loved garden plants. It tells the story of how Quaker plant hunters journeyed to America, New Zealand, Australia and Africa to discover, recover, identify and introduce new species to this country. It is beautifully illustrated with newly-commissioned, hand-drawn colour plates.

***Dervla Murphy's travel books***. In 1963, at the age of 32, Dervla got on her bicycle and rode from Dublin to Delhi. **Full Tilt** tells of stories about fending off wolves and men with her pistol, braving blizzards and snakes, and suffering accidents and broken bones. It's also full of insight, and lyrical passages about the beauty she found, the connection she felt with Afghanistan, a country she loved, and the wonder and joy of someone having a big adventure, and discovering the world for the first time. Read an interview at: <https://breathdreamgo.com/travel-writer-dervla-murphy-2/>

***Breakfast with the centenarians: the art of ageing well***, by Daniela Mari. 2017. The author is an Italian doctor caring for some of the oldest people on the planet. She draws on her experiences as a renowned gerontologist to reveal the science behind a healthy, happy old age. Informed by the latest medical studies and incredible stories of individual longevity, Mari shows how our lifestyles can far surpass the influence of our genetics and why a daily glass of liquor isn't the end of the world. From our sleeping habits and diet to the crucial importance of our passions and interests, *Breakfast with the Centenarians* is commendably short at 150 pages, a handbook for a fruitful and fulfilling old age.

***Inspector Alvarez detective novels***, by Roderick Jeffries. 1974-. Although these are now somewhat dated they are always philosophical calm mysteries that take place in Mallorca, Spain.

**Georges Simenon's *Maigret* novels**. A canon of 75 titles. "Maigret needed the cafes and bars, where he so often ended up waiting, drinking a beer or a calvados." For this is, above all, what Maigret does: he waits. And he observes. For Maigret's mission is not merely the solving of the crimes. The apprehension of the culprit is secondary to his desire to comprehend the motivations of his opponents."

## Laughter

**Damon Runyon** wrote about Prohibition era New York in his distinctive vernacular style known as "Runyonese": a mixture of formal speech and colourful slang, almost always in present tense. He told very funny stories of gamblers, hustlers, actors, and gangsters using colorful monikers such as "Nathan Detroit", "Benny Southstreet", "Big Jule", "Harry the Horse", "Good Time Charley", "Dave the Dude", or "The Seldom Seen Kid. He is credited with coining the phrase "Hooray Henry".

**Jerome K. Jerome's *Three men in a boat***. "J.", the narrator, is sitting around a fire with his two friends, [Harris](#) and [George](#), as they compare their various illnesses. J. recently spent some time researching diseases at the British Museum and concluded he had them all except for "housemaid's knee." Though none of the men actually appear ill, they agree that whatever they're suffering from must be caused by "overworking." They decide the best course of action is to take a trip away, and after some deliberation agree to boat up the river Thames." Sheer fun, one of my favourite books.

## A very long watch

**Go Further South** @ <https://www.primetv.co.nz/go-further-south-catchup>

This 12-hour show, without commentary, just the calming, mesmeric but at times exhilarating and alarming sound of the sea begins at Bluff, in Southland. From there, it detours to various sub Antarctic islands before sailing to Antarctica with the journey eventually finishing at Scott Base. Read a little about the trip at: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/tv-radio/tv-guide/120530795/local-slow-tv-special-go-further-south-heads-to-antarctica>