

18

BOOKSHOPS



Anne Scott



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The author and publisher gratefully acknowledge the quotations which have been utilised in 18 Bookshops.

In the chapter on LEAKEY'S BOOKSHOP, INVERNESS, the lines beginning 'The end of all our exploring ...' are from *Little Gidding* by T. S. Eliot, and come from *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* published by Faber & Faber Ltd, London in 1969.

In the chapter on BOOKS OF WONDER, NEW YORK CITY, the discourse beginning 'So it's true', he thought ...' are from *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* by Chris van Allsburg published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, Boston in 1984.

In the chapter on BAUERMEISTER'S BOOKSHOP, EDINBURGH, the lines beginning 'So I give her this month ...' and later 'So that if now ...' are from *Autumn Journal* by Louis MacNeice published by Faber & Faber Ltd, London in 1939.

In the chapter on THE ATLANTIS BOOKSHOP, LONDON, the lines 'passing moments in a single day' and 'miraculous, the exercises in attention and observations' are from *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* by Piotr Ouspensky published by Routledge, London in 1949.

In the chapter on CARRAROE, CONNEMARA, the poem *Dwelling Place* is original, by the book's author, Anne Scott.

The principle of fair dealing has been observed throughout.



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FIRST ...

FOR A YEAR OR TWO WHEN I WAS A CHILD, MY OLDER BROTHER BOUGHT A PENGUIN BOOK EACH SATURDAY MORNING, AND HE TOOK ME WITH him. The bookshop he liked was curved inside like a longboat, with the Penguins up in the bows ranged out in the stripes of their covers, white with orange, pink, green, dark blue.

Green Saturdays meant he was on holiday and reading mysteries: pink, he wanted to be travelling in the Kalahari, to Marrakesh, the South Seas: dark blue meant people's lives, orange was stories. The Penguins were flat like chocolate bars, and perfect to touch. He collected hardcover books too—bought

without me—shining narrow volumes about drawing, and after a while we had to go to Crawford's second-hand furniture room to buy a book-case, carefully searching out the kind with shelves at different levels.

One Saturday a few weeks later, as we walked through the town, I saw an empty orange-box outside Horne's grocery: slender cream wood with a broad middle spar and a picture of bright oranges on the top.

'Look!' I whispered to him. 'Shelves!'

'Go on in,' he said. 'See if he'll give it to you.'

He did and we took it home. By evening my few books were in: my school bible, my red dictionary, *Grey Owl*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and my annuals laid flat on the low shelf.

The first books I owned smelt all their lives of tangerines.

The next week in our bookshop my brother bought a paperback for me too, my choice, *The Family from One End Street* by Eve Garnett. The bookseller made me a present of a bookmark with a red cord and placed it in at page one. Then we all went up into the bows of the longboat to buy my brother's Penguin.

I think this book was born that day.



I

COMPENDIUM BOOKSHOP
CAMDEN*The Spread Sail*

I N THE SUMMER OF 1968 IN AN EDINBURGH BOOKSHOP I DISCOVERED A GUIDEBOOK BY A BORN LONDONER AND NEW SPY STORYWRITER, LEN DEIGHTON. THIS was *London Dossier*, designed for someone who needed to know how to have a week in London on very little money, culturally well and as safely as possible. Me.

I wintered it into my head and in 1969, about the time the Woodstock Festival was tuning up, set off south with my ten-year-old son in a two-berth sleeper from Waverley Station. I booked us into The Mount Pleasant Hotel and we took London into our lives.

Map in hand, he mastered the Tube system and we rode south to the River, circled to the centre for music magazines and records, and one day followed Len Deighton on the Northern Line to Marine Ices in Chalk Farm—I still feel the thrill in the words—and that evening we crossed the road from there to see Nicol Williamson as Hamlet at The Roundhouse.

The *Dossier* became a second adult in our plans and if it had been written a year later, it would surely have shown us the way to *Compendium Books*, a new, unique, and never-matched marvel of shelves and titles, opened first in 1968 at 240 Camden High Street, extended in 1972 to include number 281, and then consolidated at 234 where I found it at last in the summer of 1975.

It had been open only some weeks. Work to do with wood was still in progress. The shop smelt of its pine shelves shining white. The books were fat and thin, bright-sleeved, very tempting to touch. I thought I knew books but there were so many strangers here, whole streets of foreign covers and names, philosophers I had never read, Portuguese poets, African novelists. As the Franco dictatorship drew to a close, Miguel Hernandez poetry was here on the shelves and Federico Garcia Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*; Latin Americans Pablo Neruda, and Jorge Luis Borges whom I knew only as an inspiration to James Kennaway writing novels in Scotland a decade before. The aisles were lined with esoteric books and Ann Shepherd was assembling what was the first big collection of Mind and Spirit books in Britain.

I wish I had been in at the start back in 1968 when Nick Kimberley was building the poetry sections with authors far and far beyond the reach of other bookshops. Now in 1975 he was bringing them here: the New York poets—Frank O'Hara (whom somehow I missed until I found his poems much later in New York), John Ashbery, Charles Olsen: San Francisco editions from the City Lights Bookshop, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, of course, but also his poetry and a copy of *Trip-Trap*, the book of Haiku he wrote at Thanksgiving in 1959 on another road journey, from San Francisco to Long Island to visit his mother.

Jack Kerouac had, contained in himself, the qualities I found in *Compendium*. He was unexpected, he could be rhapsodic or hard in his tastes. He revered writing and he was not afraid to run against grains and assumptions. His biographer and friend Ann Charters flew over to speak in *Compendium* about the Beats and Frank O'Hara. Later, Brian Patten and other Liverpool poets giving readings in the shop, thanked the New York writers for their courage as new released voices. I could find their books nowhere else with such ease.

There was also the sheer knowledge in the shop. The staff members were expert each in a personal field. They could give you a small seminar on your writer and find the book or collection you most needed. Some of their stock, their attitudes, their dreams had been visualised and set out in *The Dialectics of Liberation Conference*

that had been held at The Roundhouse in 1967: their books were not ever to be confined by mainstream traditions or expectations or accepted conformities.

Compendium introduced me to *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, Peter de Vries's *Comfort Me with Apples* and Jerome Salinger's *Raise High the Roofbeam, Carpenters*, through the enthusiasm of a cheerful American book-woman.

In the seventies and early eighties my brother and then my son moved to London and so my times of being there increased. Work sent me on a long weekend each spring and altogether I fell in love with London. I became a member of the Penn Club in Bedford Place so as to wake each morning above trees in a Bloomsbury square and be near Covent Garden and the outdoor cafés.

A fellow Scot named Mike Hart arrived to work at Compendium in 1982. On my visits across the next decade, he turned my reading to Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Alastair Gray's *Lanark*, and a closer understanding of James Kennaway's novels. These were all Scottish and easily bought at home: but at Compendium Mike would take a book in his hand, turn it over and think, then open it fast at a page, and read from it, so swift and clean and quiet that I heard the words straight from the writer's mind, the pretences of paper and print exactly gone. A paragraph, a stanza, and he would finish, leave the book open at the place, and go away. It was done in a minute or two, an orchestration of

word and voice and time and place. I had never seen such open thinking with the mind playing on the words. What James Boswell caught in Samuel Johnson.

In 1986, I went to America for the first time, to take part in book-events at Ann Arbor and in Kansas City. A friend I made bought me a very American present—a 'book bag', my first, with a stars-and-stripes address tag and a long zipper—to carry my American books back to Britain.

Writers were generous with their work: Robert Cormier gave me *The Chocolate War* and the theosophist John Algeo his work-in-progress on the earliest *A Wizard of Oz*. I would not, they told me, 'likely find these in London book houses', but by then Compendium had complete ranges of Cormier and reprinted rare copies of Frank Baum.

Of the books I bought there, I still have, in casual count, work by Walt Whitman, Maya Angelou, a dignified Thames and Hudson *Henry James and His World*, Elizabeth Bishop, Emily Dickinson, and others so assimilated as 'my books' that now I can't see them. I wish Mike Hart had talked to me about Frank O'Hara whose urban life-transforming poetry I found, on a day in Greenwich Village with my son, in 1992. By the time I was buying his poetry widely, and finding his art criticism and the biographies of him, it was 2001 and Compendium Books had just closed: and a year later, Mike Hart died. The old shops in the High Street, the single traders, had vanished too, the ones with

Fruiterer, Ironmonger, Baker, Fish, inscribed across the windows.

What stays with me now is not only the books I bought in Compendium but how its being, and its men and women, showed me that bookshops are immeasurably strange and that the mind reading next to mine inhabits a separate earth. What people saw from the street was a glass door always open and wide windows shelved with outfacing books. I remember how hardworking the street was: rough underfoot, busy with purposes, loading, shifting, getting started, getting on. Inside the shop were encounters with hardworking men and women, ready intelligence, habitual discovery.

And help, always help. 'Do you have?' I would ask and follow the sure stepping bookman through the sweet-pine shelving. Growing accustomed to this company, to the light in the eyes, I knew the shape and order of this place in my life.

Imago Mundi.



2

CHEPMAN AND MYLLAR
EDINBURGH
1507–1510

Three Years' Light

THE KING WAS BEHIND IT, OF COURSE, THIS WHOLE PLAN FOR A PRINTING PRESS IN EDINBURGH, KING JAMES IV, RENAISSANCE PRINCE, designer, soldier, linguist, scholar, noble mind. Shakespeare may have patterned the soul of Hamlet on him, this northern universal man who died, in the end, of a kinsman's promises.

In 1507 his country was vibrant. Two years before, he had granted a Charter to the Royal College of Surgeons when the Barber Surgeons of Edinburgh were formally incorporated as a Craft Guild. There were three universities—St Andrews, Aberdeen, and Glasgow. He had married the daughter of his ally Henry VII of

England, and he had just commissioned the world's greatest ship to be built at Newhaven.

It would be *The Great Michael*, named for the Archangel and signifying by 1511 the foundation of a master navy in Europe. James was, as well, a patron of artists and musicians, he recommended archery to the citizens for fitness and grace and self defence. He valued books and collected a library of both manuscripts from all over Europe, and printed works from France, bound in vellum, reindeer hide, velvet lettered in gold. He was himself a negotiator and diplomat, recruiting young men of proven integrity and skill to serve in the Office of the King's Secretary as letter-writers whose work appeared above the King's signature and seal—Writers to the Signet.

Among them from 1494 was Walter Chepman, the same age, 21, as James, and already a merchant trading across Europe in wood for shipbuilding, in wool, velvets and damasks. By 1507, when he was called into royal service, he was ready to realise the King's command for a National Printing Press in Edinburgh. While he looked forward to his own entrepreneurial work and financial interest in the new enterprise, Chepman first needed to find a colleague, a man with supreme publishing and printing expertise, and he turned to Andro Myllar, an Edinburgh bookseller who had already supplied the King with books printed abroad, possibly in Rouen where Scots authors traditionally had their work printed, and where Myllar had himself been trained into the printing trade.

He had been a bookseller in Edinburgh for years, travelling to France and Germany for printed books. There were many to choose from. By 1497, the Archbishop of St Andrews had a library of more than twenty foreign imports. Scottish authors sent their manuscripts abroad for printing: Andro Myllar and others brought them home for selling.

They varied in subject. James Liddell's philosophical writings from the University of Paris where he taught may have been, in 1495, the earliest printed Scottish work to be imported. By 1505 we hear of Andro Myllar—*andreas myllar scotus*—setting out his requirements for art and diligence in the making and correcting of two books, a grammarian work and an elucidation of a Missal, which he had commissioned for publishing with the Rouen printing house. His instructions demanded of the French craftsmen the accuracy and high skill he had himself, and his dedication. Reputation was everything. He made it known to his customers and book-collectors that in his absences to Rouen, his wife would receive commissions and ensure their safe keeping against his return. His personal device—a miller on a ladder—was his promise and seal on a book's perfection. Geoffrey Chaucer would have admired him: he is in the fourteenth century tradition of excellent public man.

Late in 1507 he arranged for a Printing Press to come from France: by sea to the east coast of Scotland and then by carriage and cart to Edinburgh. For such a new and hazardous journey, the metal types would be packed in wood chests, oil-based inks

sealed in jars, the parts and plates of the Press itself cosseted and saved in cloth and chested too. Foreign printers travelled with it and perhaps also Myllar himself, seeing the venture through. Finally it all came home and was set up in a workshop prepared by Chepman in the Southgait in Edinburgh, at the end of Blackfriars Wynd off the Canongate.

On 15th September 1507, King James delivered Letters Patent to Masters Chepman and Myllar to inaugurate them officially as Printers to His Majesty. The Letters acknowledge that our 'lovattis servitouris Walter Chepman and Andro Myllar has takin on thame to furnish and bring hame ane prent, with al stuff belangand therto, and expert men to use the samyne for imprenting within our Realme of the bukis of our Lawis, actis of parliament, cronidis, mess bukis and portuus efter the use of our Realme' ... The King also undertook to make a grant, possibly with Chepman's help, to finance the Press and the bookselling.

The most telling words in the Letters Patent are those about the mess bukis and portuus—Mass Books and Breviaries—further emphasised later where they are to be 'usit generally within al our Realme alssone as the samynn may be prentit and providit, and that na maner of sic bukis of Salusbery use be brocht to be sauld within our Realme in tym cuming'.

The emphasis explains the King's urgency to have a Press in Scotland at this time when the Scots form of the Mass was being, as he saw it, infiltrated with English forms unacceptable

to Scottish worship, and particularly offensive to the powerful William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen and adviser to King James, who had his own *Scots Breviary* ready for printing. Seen in this light, the Edinburgh Printing Press was a national instrument of religious defence.

What false beginnings followed, what hard winter days and rough exchanges between Scot and Frenchman? What sweating anxieties in Myllar and Chepman? We can never know. But by the fourth day of aperile the yhere of God MCCCC and viii yheris—4th April 1508—they had ready the first dated printed book in Scotland. This was a long poem by John Lydgate, a Romance work named *The Maying or Disport of Chaucer Or The Complaint of the Black Knight*.

Over the next months, nine separate booklets making up a series of poems and prose pieces, came off the Press, 216 pages in all, new-printed. There were poems by William Dunbar and by Robert Henryson, Romance verse and lyrical poetry and a piece of prose. Each book was six inches tall, fit for the hand so that a reader might carry Henryson's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, Dunbar's *Golden Targe* and *The Twa Merrit Wemen* and *The Widow* into gardens, where Readings took place and short dramatisations, to make time pass in carriages on journeys, into daily reading life. Reading as a solitary pleasure evolved. Where manuscripts had been too fragile to go, bound books were safe, and so Scots poetry was brought easily to the table as well as to the mind. The printed works cost less in time

and money than manuscripts and were cheaper than French imports. Small personal collections began. Best of all, bookshops spread.

Perhaps the poems were test-runs for the press, and first tries for the printers, as some historians have argued, though there is no real evidence: but I believe Chepman and Myllar saw how their Press would spread the names of Scots poets through the two kingdoms as William Caxton's printing of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* had spread his name. William Dunbar was already a Court poet, Robert Henryson writing in Dunfermline, was still to be acknowledged as a poet surpassing Dunbar, perhaps even Geoffrey Chaucer himself. But that accolade comes later, in the twentieth century.

All the work of that year 1508–09 survives in only one single set of the poetry—the nine Chepman and Myllar Prints in The National Library of Scotland. *The Scottish Breviary of The Mass* was duly and successfully printed for Bishop Elphinstone and King James in late 1509 or early 1510.

And then there was no more from the Press. Andro Myllar was not heard of after 1513 and only Chepman's name appeared on the Breviary. King James IV was killed at the battle of Flodden in 1513. His Renaissance Court at Holyrood declined and, with it, potential patronage for literature. His son, crowned James V, was a child: the Regency ensured he had no instrumental powers for seventeen years. In 1528 after a full and rewarded merchant's life Walter Chepman died without any further reference to his amazing enterprise of 1507–1510.

When in 1532 King James V revived the office of King's Printer, Thomas Davidson from Birse in Aberdeenshire, now printer in the High Street of Edinburgh, was admitted to his heines prentare. Ten years later, the King gave him premises for printing and bookselling 'on the North side of the High Street', in a house where Walter Chepman too had lived.

David Chepman, Walter's son, set up as Bookbinder in Edinburgh from 1526 to 1541 and had court business too. In 1539 he bound and laid about with gold, a matin buik for the Queen.

But of the great Press of 1508 and the Southgait printing bookshop, nothing is heard. It too had been a King's servant, servitour to his duty as the Stewart defender of the Scottish Mass.

Yet James IV had not foreseen, as his printers had done, that the first pieces from his Press, the poems, would be its greater work: and that they would send the names of William Dunbar and Robert Henryson to booksellers across Europe and into the mainstream of Renaissance writing. In 1604, 1605 and 1607 the Edinburgh publishing firm of Charteris brought out reprints of Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*, for by then English lawyers and diplomats were using the poem to teach themselves Middle Scots, and Scottish ways, now that they had to serve a Scottish King, James VI and I, great grandson to James IV.

