2016

Booklover--Journey

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Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.7525

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Back in the early 1970s, I read the early works of Cormac McCarthy, a so-called Southern Writer at the time and variously compared with Faulkner. I admired McCarthy’s first two books, The Orchard Keeper and Outer Dark, and was able to acquire, at a secondhand bookstore, first editions, dust jackets and all, of each. They weren’t signed but today I could sell them and buy some of the pricey Morley items that I covet. But I lost interest in him somehow and sold them to another bookseller who also admired McCarthy. As most collectors and booksellers will tell you, it’s the one that got away that haunts you the most but you get over it. Or do you?

In 1961 a friend sent me a quotation from a book and writer I had never heard of. The quote goes, “Be master of yourself. The world is not an oyster to be opened, but a quicksand to be passed. If you have wings you can fly over it, if not you may quite possibly be sucked in.” The book was Casuals of the Sea: The Voyage of a Soul and the author was William McFee. I was smitten by those words and later, when I had my own copy of the book, it became a treasured possession and a book that I re-read as if discovering it for the first time. At the time, I didn’t know who Christopher Morley was and didn’t note that my Modern Library copy contained an introduction by Morley, the person responsible for getting McFee published in this country. I now own 50 McFee items including eight editions and printings of Casuals… and I have at least two more to track down. One of my Morley books contains an essay by McFee and Casuals…, the Modern Library editions, contain the Morley introduction. The two collections share a bookcase and the books themselves reflect a friendship between two men, one a writer from his college days and earlier, the other, McFee, a ship’s engineer who read and wrote letters during his free time and, happily, decided to write about some of his impressions of life at sea using the letter form. His first book is thus titled Letters From an Ocean Tramp (1908). I have the first edition, first issue, but my favorite copy is the 1928 Cassell’s Pocket Library edition, a bit worn but bought from Brian Teviotdale, proprietor of Belle Books, Hay-on-Wye, Wales. He was of the opinion that one should buy books to read and not hold out for first editions. The book he sold me now has an association with Brian, his store (although he handed me the book and accepted payment for it in another store), my time in Hay-on-Wye, and reading the book during my train journey back to my home base. This is not what is known in the trade as an association copy but it works for me and reinforces my compulsion to collect books.

I came to collect Morley and McFee as if by chance despite the connection between the two. What drew me to each was something in their books that speaks to me. Then, in the course of my collecting and information about each man, I found that they became good friends, one living in Connecticut, the other in Long Island, and both close by to New York City, the literary hub they each radiated from. Kindred spirits. Would that I could have broken bread with them. Instead, I have their books.

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Booklover — Journey

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There is a nice chill in the evening air. The sun is rising just a bit later and setting just a bit earlier. Those long days of summer are once again behind us. Fall is just around the corner. Time for that last summer read; it’s going to be a journey through the library stacks.

Reading works by a playwright is something I’ve never done. I contemplated this challenge while I perused the stacks at the main branch of the Charleston County Library, my Nobel Laureate list in hand. The stacks are fewer as the book world moves to a digital format thus my journey to the “Os” and the works of Eugene O’Neill is a short one.

The Nobel Prize was awarded to Eugene O’Neill in 1936 “for the power, honesty, and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy.” The choice of Long Day’s Journey into Night was an obvious one. Written between 1941-1942 and published in 1956, it is considered his major work. The treat is the discovery of Selected Letters of Eugene O’Neill edited by Travis Bogard and Jackson R. Bryer. This large volume was divided into eight parts: “Beginnings, 1901-1906; Apprenticeship, 1917-1920; Certainties, 1920-1926; Carlotta, 1926-1928; Voyager, 1928-1931; Laureate, 1931-1936; Heights, 1936-1945; and Ending, 1945-1952.” Letters from the time O’Neill won the Nobel Prize — what an opportunity for a peek behind the curtain into the very personal world of a laureate. The small paperback version of Long Day’s Journey Into Night that I checked out details the copyright as an unpublished work in 1955 by his...
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wife Carlotta Monterey O’Neill; first publication in February 1956; copyright renewed by Yale University 1984; corrected edition copyright by Yale University 1989; Harold Bloom’s Forward copyright 1987; first published as a Yale Nota Bene book 2002. In 1989, the play was in its sixty-first printing.

To review, I was hesitant about reading a play. But it didn’t take me long before I was lost in the journey of that day which began in the living room of the Tyrones’ summer home in 1912. In one afternoon I quickly advanced through the four acts and came to midnight. A fluid living room of the Tyrones’ summer home in 1912. In one afternoon I quickly advanced through the four acts and came to midnight. A fluid

dialogue is self described in a letter dated January 20, 1935 penned while at his home: Casa Genotta, Sea Island, Georgia. O’Neill had written a tribute to Professor George Pierce Baker that appeared in the New York Times seven days after Baker’s death. Baker's wife must have written a note of appreciation to which O’Neill responded: “Dear Mrs. Baker: Your kind letter took a great load off my mind. Ever since I sent that to the Times’, I’ve been laboring under a guilty feeling that it was unforgivably inadequate. I did try hard to make it a message of my very deep feeling of gratitude and sadness, and emphasize the greatest gift one human being can give another — the courage to believe in his work and go on — a gift which Mr. Baker gave to me, as he did to so many others. What I will always remember first about him is not the teacher but the man, the charm of his personality, his ability just by being himself to convey faith to you, and understanding sympathy, and friendship. Many men can teach but only a fine, rare few can be in themselves an education in faith for others! But I am a clumsy writer indeed when it comes to anything but dialogue, and I was afraid my word had bungled expressing any of this. However, now that I know you found worth in what I wrote, that’s all I care about.

Again, my deepest sympathy — and, always, all good wishes to you. Cordially yours, Eugene O’Neill” For 1936, there are eleven letters included in the chapter entitled “Laureate, 1931-1936” for the reader’s enjoyment. Six of them reference the Nobel Prize. There are references to hectic days, “dodging the radio and newsreel baloney,” delight in hearing from old friends, and enjoying congratulatory notes. One letter is to James E. Brown, Jr., the third secretary of the American embassy in Stockholm, Sweden that includes the speech he prepared: “Enclosed you will find the speech you suggested. I have never been a guest of honor, or made a speech in my life, and I’ve only written about two of them before this, but I hope this one is adequate.” O’Neill did not attend the award ceremony. Long Day’s Journey into Night premiered in Sweden in February 1956, opened on Broadway in November 1956, and won a Tony Award for best play. The script was a gift: “For Carlotta, on our 12th Wedding Anniversary. Dearest: I give you the original script of this play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood. A sadly inappropriate gift, it would seem, for a day celebrating happiness. But you will understand. I mean it as a tribute to your love and tenderness which gave me the faith in love that enabled me to face my dead at last and write this play — write it with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all! The four haunted Tyrones. These twelve years, Beloved One, have been a Journey into Light — into love. You know my gratitude. And my love! Gene. Tao House. July 22, 1941.”

Collecting to the Core — Commodity and Alcohol Studies in World History

by David M. Fahey (Professor Emeritus of History, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio; World and Comparative History Editor, Resources for College Libraries) <faheydm@gmail.com>

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Column Editor’s Note: The “Collecting to the Core” column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the Resources for College Libraries bibliography (online at http://www.rclweb.net). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

What did you eat for breakfast? Coffee, milk, tea, orange juice, bread, butter, eggs? These grown products are commonly considered soft commodities, while mined resources like gold and petroleum are labeled hard commodities. Commodity histories provide a convenient way to explore world history, as studies into the production, exchange, and consumption of goods can help illustrate the complex economic, social, cultural, ecological, political, and transnational transformations of people and places.1 For those interested in the genre of commodity histories, an accessible introduction is that by the prolific journalist Mark Kurlansky, Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World.2 Unlike most of those who write about commodities for a popular audience, Kurlansky is interested in producers as well as consumers, in this instance, fishers and buyers of fish. Commodity histories seldom offer theory; the few that do often use a Marxist framework. Here are some examples. In 1985 cultural anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz wrote what may be the most influential commodity history, Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History.3 Mexican anthropologist Arturo Warman published a thoughtful history of maize in 1988 that Nancy L. Westrate later translated into English as Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Domination.4 More recently, the economic historian Sven Beckert published Empire of Cotton: A Global History, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and was awarded the Bancroft Prize.5 Commodity histories often claim to be world histories and may flaunt an over-the-top subtitle such as the otherwise admirable book by Markman Ellis, Richard Coulton, and Matthew Mauger, Empire of Tea: The Asian Leaf That Conquered the World.6 In Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World, David T. Courtwright provides a broad look at the global history — geographically and temporally — of the “big three” drugs (alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine), which today are mass produced and largely legal, as well as the illegal “little three” (opiates, cannabis, and cocaine).7

Alcoholic drinks are at the edge of the standard definition of commodities, since they do not have a standard price that prevails internationally. They vary much more drastically in price than, say, kinds of crude oil. Despite this distinction, historians definitely study alcoholic beverages within the history of commodities. Reaktion Books’ “Edible” series publishes an array of short commodity histories, from bread to water, all with the subtitle “a global history.” The “Edible” series includes volumes about virtually every alcoholic beverage consumed

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