

Against the Grain

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Bet You Missed It-Press Clippings – in the news – Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Editor's Note: Hey, are y'all reading this? If you know of an article that should be called to *Against the Grain's* attention ... send an email to <kstrauch@comcast.net>. We're listening! — **KS**

LOUISA MAY WRITES BLOOD AND THUNDER

Treasured American classic *Little Women* shows an idyllic community of girls. The reality of **Louisa May Alcott's** existence was far more grim.

Her father **Bronson Alcott** was a religious fanatic who never provided for the family. Anything other than teaching and chopping wood was beneath him. He founded the utopian community Fruitlands where animals products were forbidden and root vegetables as well because they grew in the direction of hell.

The family starved and froze wearing only linen in New England winters. **Louisa** wrote the famous book to feed the family. **Lizzie** (Beth in the book) died of anorexia and anxiety.

In 1950, **Madelein Stern** discovered **Louisa** wrote tales of murder and opium addiction under a pen name. **Louisa** much preferred these.

She said she was tempted to end the book with an earthquake that would engulf Jo's school "and its environs so deeply in the bowels of the earth that no archaeologist could ever find a vestige of it."

See — **Sophie Gilbert**, "The Lies of Little Women," *The Atlantic*, Sept. 2018, p.34.



FROM ROW HOUSE TO MANSION

Ken Follett grew up in a tiny brick row house in Cardiff, sharing beds with siblings. His family had a religious objection to pleasure so there was no radio or TV. He lived for Mondays to hear his friends talk about what they had seen over the weekend.

Books became his sole diversion. He loved **Enid Blyton's** young-adult mysteries, *Treasure Island* and *Black Beauty*.

After **University College London** where a reporter for the *London Evening News* where another reporter had a book serialized in the paper.

He moved to a job at **Everest Books** and ten unsuccessful novels. In 1977 he took three weeks' vacation and wrote *Eye of the Needle*.

Now 31 thrillers later, he and his wife have a sprawling 17th century house in Hertfordshire and a town house in London.

See — **Marc Myers**, "The Home Where Fun Fell Short," *The Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 7, 2018, p.M4.

BOOK STORE PLUG

In a nice tour of Martha's Vineyard, the wealth of independent bookstores is noted. Two standouts: **Dawn Braasch's Bunch of Grapes** in Vineyard Haven and **Edgartown Books** in Edgartown.

See — **Jessica B. Harris**, "Fall for Martha's Vineyard," *Garden & Gun*, Aug.-Sept., 2018, p.127.

LITERARY REALTY

Edward Albee died in 2016. Now his Tribeca loft in a former cheese factory is on the market for \$9 million. 4,500-square-feet with a keyed elevator that takes you up from a loading dock. It has exclusive rights to the roof which looks out on the Manhattan skyline.

His **Kandinsky, Chagall, Picasso** art collection was sold last year for \$12 million. His Montauk beach house is on the market for \$20 million.

See — **Katherine Clark**, "Edward Albee's Troibeca Loft for Sale," *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 30, 2018, p.A12.

LET'S READ GILDED AGE SOCIETY

Lady Decies, *King Lehr and the Gilded Age* (1935) (Excesses of 1890s society. Playboy Harry Lehr marries Elizabeth Drexel for her money.); (2) **Consuelo Vanderbilt Balsan**, *The Glitter and the Gold* (1953) (The archetype beautiful heiress marries Duke of Marlboro.); (3) *Titled Americans: The Real Heiresses' Guide to Marrying an Aristocrat* (revised annually) (A husband hunting guide with details of available men. Italy has the most titles. France has thousands who have adopted titles to which they have no right.); (4) **Maud Howe Elliott**, *This Was My Newport* (1944) (Describes how Newport succeeded Saratoga as the place to go. Dinners for 100.); (5) **Andy Logan**, *The Man Who Robbed the Robber Barons* (1965) (Vicious gossip weekly Town Topics with a sideline in blackmail.)

See — **Anne de Courcy**, "Five Best Books on Society in the Gilded Age," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 6-7, 2018, p.C8.

REALLY SMALL PRESSES

The "Big Five" publishers — **Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, Simon & Schuster, Hachette Book Group, Macmillan** — and their myriad of imprints publish 80 percent of the books in America. But the independent presses have their edge.

Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize for literature with *Second-hand Time*. She was published by **Fitzcarraldo Editions of London**. With the good fortune, the publisher increased the workforce from one to two.

Seattle's **Wave Books** got a Pulitzer for poetry. Minneapolis's **Coffee House Press** had a Pulitzer finalist. And **Graywolf** of the same city was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize.

And they are indeed small presses. St. Louis-based **Dorothy Publishing** puts out two books a year.

See — **Chris Power**, "Fine Print," *WSJ Magazine*, Nov. 2018, p.104.

OBITS OF NOTE

Walter Mischel (1930-2018), a Stanford University psychologist, whose most famous experiment was a test of willpower. Present a preschooler with a treat — pretzel, cookie, marshmallow. Say you can eat it now or wait 20 minutes and have two. Less than a third could resist.

Twenty years later, he checked up on the kids and found those with willpower had gone on to greater success in life.

See — "The psychologist who tested our willpower," *The Week*, Sept. 18, 2018, p. 39.

Jane Fortune (1942-2018), an Indianapolis native, arrived in dazzling Florence in 1962.

She made her own mark on the city by discovering a book on **Plautilla Nelli**, 16th century Dominican nun and self-taught painter. Inspired, **Jane** founded **Advancing Women Artists** to show the forgotten works of **Plautilla** and other women.

The foundation restored 61 paintings and sculptures by Italian women. She came to be called "Indiana Jane," and the Mayor pronounced her "One of our citizens, one of us."

See — **James Hagerty**, "'Indiana Jane' Dug Up Italian Women Artists," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 6-7, 2018, p.A12.