

The Handheld Newsletter

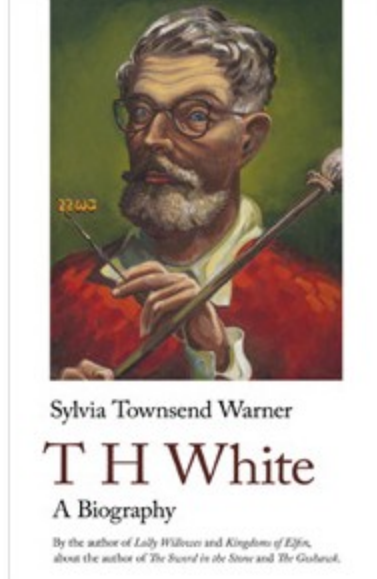
March 2023

Kate on the radio

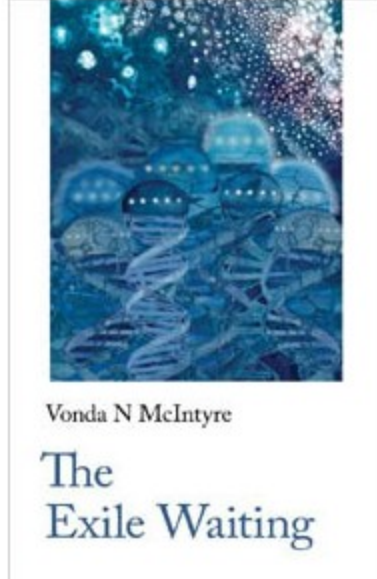
The week this newsletter came out was a bit of a publicity whirl. Not only did we publish our Algernon Blackwood anthology *The Unknown* (see below), with two online events, Kate was also on BBC Radio 4, on *The Digital Human*, talking about salvage, their theme of the week. We salvage old books so it made sense. Kate had a half-hour preliminary interview with a BBC researcher to prove she was OK for what she had to say and what she sounded like, and then did another hour and half of recorded interview with a producer, talking about books we have salvaged, what we have to consider, what we can't salvage, and what can be done to refine the salvaged stuff. And then the programme used 10 minutes [You can listen to it here.](#)


Kate on a podcast

The episode hasn't quite come out at the time of writing, but Kate was the guest on the Edinburgh podcast *Ear Read This*, talking about our reissue of *T H White* by Sylvia Townsend Warner with host Ash Caton. It's a literary podcast, but not heavily so. The episode might also be on their YouTube channel which was a surprise to Kate who had not even checked her appearance or brushed her hair when she did the recording after a long day's work in bad light in the spare room where the wifi signal was better. But it was a very enjoyable conversation.


Handheld on another podcast

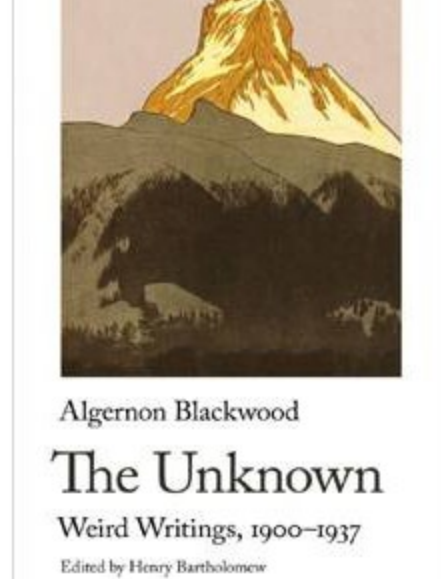
Esteemed *New York Times* best-selling author and friend of Handheld Una McCormack was on the Backlisted podcast, talking about her five top science fiction books. In the course of the conversation she talked a lot about Vonda McIntyre and our edition of *The Exile Waiting*, for which she wrote the Afterword. So that was nice, and sold a few books. [You can listen to the episode here...](#)


The Unknown!

Finally our wonderful Algernon Blackwood anthology of reportage and classic short Weird fiction has been published. We had an online launch on the 13th of March, which was one of the best we've ever done. Henry Bartholomew, who edited the collection, is a gift to an interviewer: he just keeps on talking, lucidly, intelligently, and to the point. The questions at the end kept on coming so this will be one of our longer launch videos, to be up on our YouTube channel soon.

On the 14th of March, the actual publication day (also Blackwood's 154th birthday) Kate and Henry did a two-handed conversation online for the Guildhall Library London, which had an audience well infiltrated with Blackwood specialists who asked Henry some very interesting questions.

Reviews are coming in nicely: [do look at our shop page](#) for the highlights.


The Times Literary Supplement

Kate used to review for the TLS, some decades ago, so getting reviews in there of our books is always a pleasure. (At the last count we've had 13, which is a little more frequent than every third book.) In February we had [a review](#) of D K Broster's *From the Abyss*, and in March both [our Rhys titles were reviewed](#). Do these reviews make a difference? Sometimes we get a flurry of sales from our website when a review comes out, but most of the time we don't really see where the sales come from. But our public profile is certainly enhanced by reviews so we are all for them.


We have an Instagram shop!

Social media has become a very important part of our marketing, because it's free, we're quite good at it, and it does put customers we might never be in touch with in touch with our books.

Since Twitter's algorithms went a bit peculiar we've really noticed the difference in our ability to reach an audience, and looked around for other ways to sell books via social media. Setting up an Instagram shop seemed like a good plan, but then we realised this involved adding bits of software to our website. Then Kate had to set up a Facebook shop (since Instagram and Facebook are both run by the monolithic social media giant known as Meta). That took FOREVER, especially the verification process which entailed arguing with robots. Finally, sometime at the end of February, our Handheld catalogue was connected to our Facebook page, which was connected to our Instagram account. We can now tag an image in an Instagram post so that customers can click on the picture and then click once more and land in our online shop. Apparently reducing the shopping process by one click is important.

As far as I know we've sold two books using that route, because they used a discount code. If you do shop via the Instagram or even the Facebook shop, let us know in the comments box in the order page. Ooof.

Posting to North America

The effects of the ransomware attack have been dealt with and postal services are back to normal, thank goodness. Though it's slower: each parcel going to North America now has to be registered by hand by post office counter staff, so that dictates which post office Kate goes to when she has a parcel for Canada or the US. The local post office counter in the village Spar is faster because the main post office in Bath always has a counter queue.

We've also noticed that our January title, *T H White*, is a touch over the Large Letter size when wrapped in cardboard, which we routinely do for all North American orders. That book already costs a swingeing £11 in postage to the US because it's so heavy. To keep the postage at £11, rather than £19, which we'd have to pay if it were wrapped in cardboard, that book goes across the Atlantic lightly clad in two layers of paper only. Please do consider whether ordering the book from your local bookstore would be cheaper for you.

What we've been reading

Kate has been revisiting Margaret Irwin's novels about Elizabeth I of England, which she [blogged about here](#). Reading these out of order (first *Elizabeth*, *Captive Princess*, then *Elizabeth and the Prince of Spain*, and then *Young Bess*) was a good way to see how Irwin created a golden thread of narrative through the three novels. Excellent Tudor history revision as well.

David has been to Java with Harold Nicolson in 'Cruising for the Over-Privileged' (actually *Journey to Java* from 1957). It's a happy, delightful read, though he did skip Nicolson's discussions of melancholy.

News from the garden

No toadspawn yet. We had four inches of snow overnight in early March, which actually rendered Kate speechless when she opened the curtains in the morning. She really had not been expecting that. David has been deer-proofing the hedges, which tend to get nibbled up to deer head height and consequently look a bit top-heavy.

Two foxes have moved into the area, White Tip and Black Tip, and have been seen perambulating the upper lawn in the early morning. White Tip was the character seen in the garden at New Year and is the bigger of the two. We don't know where they live but they've been turning over the compost heap, and kindly left out for us a garden fork and a kitchen spoon that managed to get buried.

We think we have two pairs of blackcaps in the garden now, which is odd because they are very aggressive birds. Perhaps they're related. The longtails are coming back, as are the goldfinches, and the chaffinches are a constant presence under the bird feeders, picking up scraps as fast as they can, and at least once one of them flew up to intercept a dropped seed before it reached the ground. The larger of the two rooks seem wary of the squirrel baffle, approaching the area with extreme caution, dodging away as soon as it's found a seed, as if it expects the baffle to land on its head. The other rook and all the other birds don't seem to care at all.

Kate saved some pods from the last mange-tout plants to flower last summer, and forgot about them over the winter. In February she soaked the 16 peas in water for two days, and planted them in pots, and now we have 15 very healthy seedlings climbing up their little poles and trying to fraternise with each other. They'll stay indoors till Easter.

We've had a few enquiries from readers about when we'll be moving, but it doesn't look like we'll be moving any time soon. We put the house on the market the day before that month's prime minister crashed the economy. Hardly anyone has come to see it, and so nobody wants to buy it. The house itself seems to be well regarded: it's the garden that causes viewers to back away, pale-faced and worried about what? They've all seen the estate agent's video, so why does the garden surprise them? It's a long steepish slice of hillside so we now have the theory that people are scared of heights, or prefer sitting on Astroturf to mowing lawns. But we're not in a hurry, and we don't have any urgent need to move: we'd just like a bit more room indoors. Meanwhile we'll keep gardening.

March came in like a lion, so we're hoping spring is on the way now.

Kate & David

Handheld Press