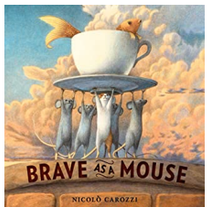
Brewster Ladies' Library

BLL Book Reviews - November 2021

Brewster Ladies Library
1822 Main Street
Brewster, MA 02631

In this issue…

Brave as a Mouse (Random House, 2021 - Picture Book for 3-7 year-olds)
by Nicolo Carozzi
reviewed by: Nori Morganstein, Youth Services Librarian/Assistant Director



What makes *Brave as a Mouse* a stand-out children's book are the unique illustrations. It looks like nothing else I've seen before and I've read a lot of children's books. The story is a sweet tale of mice befriending a fish and banding together against three dangerous-seeming cats. What is more classic than a cat and mouse story? The mice play with the fish, and then distract the cats. When the cats are otherwise occupied, the mice rescue the fish and free him into a river, forever safe from the destructive cats.

The story is rather silly. Kids will love the playfulness of its "Tom and Jerry" style humor. It's not very long or complicated with very few words per page. Most pages have one sentence on them, if any. It can work as a great book for children first learning to read.

Most of the book is dedicated to the artwork. It's told through the images. The funny thing is the images aren't what would typically draw anyone into a picture book. They aren't bright or colorful. They have an almost neutral, monotone feel to them. However, the shading and detail work involved is extraordinary. The artwork is unique, with very little I can compare it to. In some respects, it looks a little like a more detailed version of Mike Curato's *Little Elliot* books, with some close-ups on a city street and park. But, honestly, it's very different from what else is out there, and that alone will make it stand out from other picture books on the shelf.

All in all, this is a fun, easy to read picture book with unique, detailed pictures that will draw you in. I can see kids coming back to it and reading it themselves, or practicing their reading with it. Everyone will be interested in the illustrations. My eyes keep focusing back on the cover. I want to keep looking at.

The Third Pole: Mystery, Obsession, and Death on Mount Everest
by Mark Synnott
reviewed by Jim Mills

In the early twentieth century the two geographical poles of the Earth were finally reached by Americans and Norwegians. For those looking for further worlds to conquer there was what was called *The Third Pole*, the highest point on the planet, Mount Everest. The first serious attempts to climb Everest were the British expeditions in the early 1920s climbing the mountain's north side from Tibet. In 1924 two British mountaineers, George Mallory and "Sandy" Irvine, reached the very highest regions of the mountain within 2,000 feet of the summit. What was not clear was whether the two had actually reached the top. One of the members of the British team, Noel Odell, spotted the two approaching the final obstacles near the top during a brief break in the clouds. The two climbers were never seen alive again. It would take another three decades for Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay to conquer Everest in 1952 on the south side from Nepal.

The mystery surrounding the fate of the two 1924 British climbers remained unresolved until 1999. That year an American group of mountaineers found the body of George Mallory less than 2,000 feet from the summit. His climbing partner's ice axe had been found in the 1930s, but Irvine's remains had never been found. It was known that Irvine had a film camera with him and the discovery of his camera and development of the film it contained might resolve the puzzle of whether the two had actually summited Everest. Examination of high resolution aerial views of the summit regions gave an indication of where Irvine's body might be found. In 2019, another group of American climbers, which included the author, Mark Synnott, made an attempt to climb Everest with an objective of locating Irvine and finding his camera presumably still with his remains. This expedition made use of a new technology, a drone helicopter, to preview the areas of interest while the climbers were still thousands of feet lower. The author explained that the visiting mountaineers in his group were accompanied by Chinese government "minders" who resisted any deviation from the summit climb to look for evidence that Everest may have been climbed by the British in 1924. In 1960. Chinese climbers had been the first to summit Everest from the north side and they were resistant to any evidence that might dispute that achievement. The author was able to break away from the group as they returned from the summit for a brief exploration of the area where Irvine's body might likely be found. In the limited time available it turned out that Synnott was unsuccessful in that quest.

The Third Pole covers the history of the exploration of Mount Everest with an emphasis on the George Mallory expeditions and the efforts to resolve the mystery of his disappearance. The author explores the stories of many mountaineers, and how they decided to pursue a very dangerous avocation. It also provides many stories of their survival in extremely hazardous situations. The region above 26,000 feet, known as the Death Zone, proves fatal to anyone facing a prolonged exposure there. Critical to most of those operating at these altitudes is a continuous supply of supplemental oxygen, a hiking aid that can frequently run out unexpectedly. The statistics on climbers operating in the death zone are not a pleasant one and hikers in this region run across dead bodies of unlucky previous hikers going back for almost a century. Today the number of fatal encounters has been increasing due to the number of poorly qualified climbers operating in the area. These numbers usually create traffic jams at the summit from both sides. The delays encountered only intensify the duration of exposure to the thin air and the harsh elements typical of the over 26,000 ft. region. The backup at the summit is referred to as the conga line. The demand from those who seek the to conquer Everest and have the money to pay increases every year. Only the limitations imposed by the Nepalese and Chinese governments in authorizing access prevents an even greater toll. The author provides a very comprehensive history of man's exploits on the Earth's highest peak.

The Conga Line on Mt. Everest

The Good American: The Epic Life of Bob Gersony, the U.S. Government's Greatest Humanitarian

by Robert Kaplan

reviewed by Doug Wilcock

Near the end of *The Good American* Robert Kaplan, in damning the efforts of Paul Bremer, Donald Rumsfeld, and the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, draws a parallel to Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, a book I happened to have recently read and enjoyed. The protagonist of Greene's book is Alden Pyle, the quiet American who saw Vietnam only through abstract concepts like democracy. Pyle had no feel for the complexity of the country, for what people wanted. As Greene said, what people wanted was enough rice; they wanted not to be shot at; they wanted one day to be the same as another. Pyle may never have understood that lesson, and the CPA in Iraq may never have understood it, but Bob Gersony, the subject of *The Good American*, did. Gersony listened to people to understand what they wanted, what their needs were, and over the course of a forty-year career produced granular reports that highlighted those needs and that spurred effective action. Working with U.S. AID under the aegis of the State Department Bob Gersony provided ears on the ground that, in case after case, produced solid information and policy recommendations that well served both the country or region in question and helped the United States to play both a humanitarian role that benefited people in those countries and to avoid what would have been catastrophic policy choices.

Bob Gersony, a high school dropout and the son of Jewish Holocaust refugees, was awarded a Bronze Star for service in Vietnam. While there, he came across the work of writer Bernard Fall whose message was that nations lose wars because of incomplete ground-level intelligence. They fail to understand the cultural reality on the ground. Fall was a from-the-ground-up thinker, digging out ideas from firsthand field experience. This was the template for Bob Gersony, a template he used and perfected over dozens of assignments across the globe.

Bob Gersony began his career in Antigua, Guatemala where he set up a Spanish language school that eventually morphed into a center for the study of Spanish, indigenous languages, and local linguistics. In February 1976 a devastating earthquake struck Guatemala, killing 23,000 who were trapped in their homes and leaving thousands homeless. Gersony stepped into the middle of this, listening to peasants as they explained that they didn't want to rebuild with tile roofs which had just crushed so many. Working with Oxfam, he obtained tin roofing material and pressure treated posts and sold them below cost to the local population for the rebuilding. Here was the germ of another idea that Gersony would use throughout his career. "Don't give anything away. Make people pay and provide work for them." While a good maize harvest had put money into the local economy at the time of the earthquake, if the local economy was poor Gersony suggested that aid money should be used to pay workers to build latrines, cobblestone streets, and storm water drainage. He recommended the use markets in this way to alleviate suffering.

Bob Gersony's genius was in systematically listening to what people said. By 1987 when he reached Mozambique he could say, "I was now in the zone. I was doing exactly what I was made for." Here, during a nasty civil war, he went to 42 locations in either Mozambique or bordering countries, visiting 25 refugee camps separated by as much as 1500 miles, and interviewing 196 refugees and displaced persons from 48 different districts of Mozambique about the behavior of the two groups engaged in that war, FRELIMO and pro-Western RENAMO which the U.S. contemplated aiding. He produced a forty-page report that built on peoples' stories, distilling the essence of what the interviewees were saying. In the report he documented how, when asked who was responsible for the atrocities, interviewees would simply say, "RENAMO." Ninety-one percent said that RENAMO was the reason they fled Mozambique, 7% said it was because of FRELIMO, and 2% were undecided. Because of the innumeracy of many of the displaced persons (they usually could not count beyond ten), when asked how many had been killed by RENAMO and receiving an answer of many, Gersony would assign the number 10. Using this conservative estimate Gersony said that RENAMO was responsible for at least 100,000 deaths. UNICEF later put the figure at 600,000. (continued on the next page)

His work and his report went well beyond statistics. Gersony documented the story of a woman who had seen her niece and other villagers killed by RENAMO. When RENAMO soldiers closed in on her and her daughter, forcing them and other villagers into the Zambezi River and then opened fire, she panicked and let go of her daughter who was swept away and drowned. For Gersony, hearing this story was an epiphany. He relates that the woman's story was a turning point for him, that he needed to do a good job to get this tragedy across in Washington. Detachment was ended for him. "This is a task that has been given to me to do."

In nineteen chapters and an epilogue and through what I count as 24 crisis zones, Robert Kaplan builds a compelling story about Bob Gersony's life and work and the impact he had. One might view this as Kaplan's cri de coeur: what we desperately need are more Bob Gersony's, more hard-headed realists who are idealists, more humanitarians. I give this excellent book a hearty recommendation. It is a history that needs to be told and understood.

Below the Edge of Darkness: Exploring Light in the Deep Sea
by Edith Widder
reviewed by Jim Mills

For this reviewer *Below the Edge of Darkness* is an exceptional addition to my understanding of the nature of life in the deep sea. Oceanographer Edith Widder has had a fascinating and illuminating career in Oceanic Biology spanning many decades following an early life of severe health problems. She has participated in countless excursions in deep sea submersibles exposed to the crushing pressures produced by the weight of thousands of feet of overlying sea. The author points out that diving in these submersibles is quite safe, despite several mishaps that she has encountered, safer than driving in Boston.

Edith Widder's speciality is a previously much overlooked aspect of life in the sea, bioluminescence. Bioluminescence is a relatively rare aspect of life on land and in our experience found essentially only in fireflies and glowworms. However in the sea, as Widder has discovered, the biological generation of light is not only common but a cornerstone of the life cycles of an immense number of creatures. Earlier excursions into the deep sea tended to overlook the bioluminescence phenomenon. These earlier explorers did not take steps such as turning off their lights and providing incentives such as bait and simulated light displays to attract the denizens of the deep. Initially ocean biologists thought that there was very little life in the region below the illuminated top region of the sea and the ocean bottom. Edith Widder's research has basically reversed that view.

A central precept of Widder's discoveries is that bioluminescence is not just an aspect of deep sea life but operates at the very core of its existence. Creatures on land have many means to protect themselves from predators: burrowing, hiding in vegetation, climbing trees, etc. In the sea, above the ocean bottom, none of these options are available. Much of sea life resort to dropping below the sea's upper illuminated levels during the day to avoid predators returning to the surface en masse at night to feed. This phenomenon has been observed using surface ship sonars, giving the impression that the entire sea bottom was rising. Creatures that live their entire lives in darkness need some mechanism to attract mates, find food and avoid predation. That mechanism is bioluminescence. Even in the illuminated levels of the sea, bioluminescence can be used to reduce the visibility of various creatures when viewed from both above and below.

Like bird songs each species use various light flash patterns to provide messages to prospective mates, sound an alarm, or attract prey. Prey can use bright light flashes to blind predators or when attacked to attract other predators that could attack the attacking predator. The light patterns emitted by prey have been used by the submersibles to attract predators for capture and study. The lighting used by the submersible has tended to be on the red end of the spectrum since that is not visible to many sea creatures, and would not scare them off being readily absorbed by sea water. One of the major finds on Widder's deep sea dives has been the legendary giant squid also known as the Kraken. Evidence of the existence of this legendary creature has been found going back for centuries. Parts of Giant Squids have been found in the jaws and stomach of its only known predator the Sperm Whale. Images of the Squid in its natural environment were eventually gathered by submersibles and also by using robotic cameras left on the sea bottom for protracted periods. Much of the mystery of deep sea life has been revealed during the past few decades due to the dedication of the inquisitive minds of Dr. Widder and other enthusiastic researchers. (continued on the next page)

The author provides an eminently readable explanation of the logic and the decision making process used by scientists in their search for the truth in the natural world. She also describes life on the oceanic research vessels, the interaction with other researchers, and the perils of diving thousands of feet into the sea. Major points the author makes are the very limited funding levels available for oceanic research, the importance of the sea, the need to have knowledge of its functioning and the effect of its continuing health on the wellbeing of us all. All of this makes for captivating reading. *Below the Edge of Darkness* seems to be the first book written by the author for the general public and comes with this reviewer's highest recommendation.

Dirty Jobs: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America
by Eval Press
reviewed by Jim Mills

The recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to our attention the courageous efforts of many unheralded workers risking their health and wellbeing working at jobs necessary to the wellbeing of the rest of us. In *Dirty Jobs,* Eval Press describes many of these jobs and the negative impact these jobs have on the physical and mental status of these workers. The jobs covered include working in prisons, controlling military drones, working in meat packing plants and on off-shore oil rigs, and battling cyber crime on the internet.

Some of the workers chose what they do under a false sense of just what the job entailed but most ended up in these jobs simply because better ones were not available. A large proportion of these workers are minorities or illegal immigrants. The threat of disclosure of their status keeps most of the immigrants from complaining about their work conditions. To a great extent our prison system has become a warehouse for those suffering from mental illness. Many mental health workers originally chose to work in these prisons thinking that they could make a difference. Instead they became witnesses to extreme violence perpetrated by the guards on prisoners, occasionally resulting in death. The workers were not able to penetrate the prison code of conduct to report the incidents.

In recent decades the U. S. military has developed the capability to strike anywhere in the world using the modern technology of aerial drones that have remote sensing and weapon delivery capabilities. These capabilities have been employed to deter terrorist activities but have frequently mistakenly struck innocent civilians. The operators of these drones based in America witness, on a daily basis, the carnage that results from employing these drone weapons. The impact of seeing the death and destruction that results from their work has a long range effect on the mental health of the drone sensor and weapon operators. Similarly in meat packing plants the workers face the daily stress of killing and dismembering the animals that form our food supply. The rest of us have this activity conveniently hidden from our view and consciousness but the consequences of repeatedly witnessing the carnage over weeks and months drive many of the workers to seek work elsewhere, if available. Others end up with severe mental or physical repercussions as a result of their work.

Energy extraction industries have historically been dangerous places to work. Today this danger persists on the off-shore oil rigs particularly in the Gulf of Mexico. These workers provide us with products basic to our way of life. The tragedy of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon British Petroleum oil explosion was just a recent example of the dangers that persists in this field. The dangers that surround these jobs has been magnified during the current pandemic particularly for those working in prisons and meat packing plants. The book underscores our debt of gratitude to these workers in dangerous circumstances

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Thanks to Joann Philips for her skill in editing these reviews.

Late City
by Robert Olen Butler
reviewed by Doug Wilcock

It is 2016. Sam Cunningham is 115 years old and about to die. But before he does, he must talk to God. This God that he will talk to is not the vengeful, thundering, tempestuous God of the Old Testament. This is God with a sense of humor, with a deft touch, but with an iron will. "I'm the interviewer for now. I want you to talk to me, Samuel. About your life. On the record." And so begins Robert Olen Butler's *Late City* and Sam Cunningham's recollection of his 115 years here on earth.

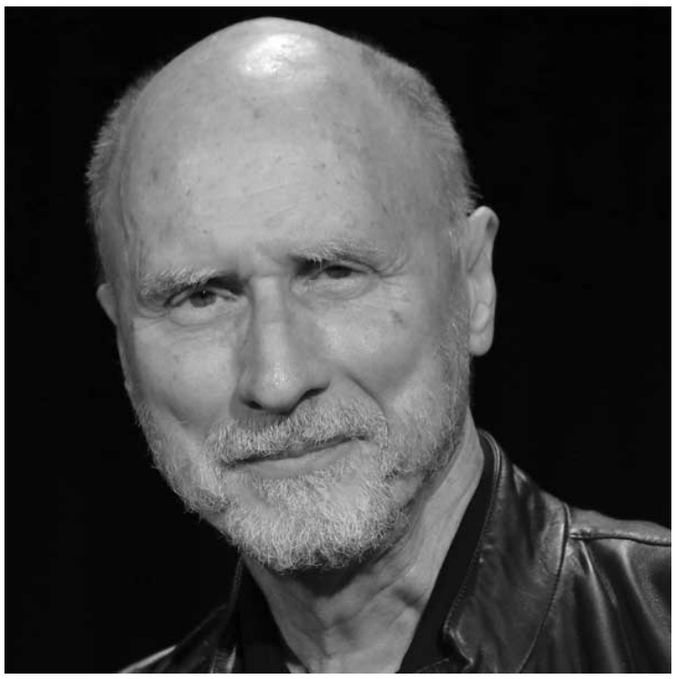
Sam Cunningham has a lot to tell God. We, the lucky observers of that conversation, get to see how God deftly molds Sam's telling of his life, forcing Sam to confront his successes and failures and to reckon honestly with what kind of life he has led. We are early on introduced to Sam's parents and get to witness his overbearing small-town Louisiana father and his understanding mother,. We get to hear Sam's surprising stories from the trenches in World War I. We follow Sam to Chicago as he eventually opens a new chapter in his life as a newspaperman. We learn how Sam meets his wife and we meet the child that the marriage will produce.

Central to this story is Sam's role as a father. Sam recognizes that as a father he has "refused to become my father to father my son." What does this do to the father-son bond? What does it hold for the son? What does it mean for Sam's relationship with his wife? Not surprisingly, these three relationships, Sam with his father, Sam with his wife, and Sam with his son, are tightly intertwined, leading to the complex, layered story that Robert Olen Butler constructs.

We learn more as Sam learns more. As we approach the end of the novel, and the end of Sam's life, he can tell us how he reported but did not see, how he loved but did not comprehend, how the young soldier who experienced all the horrors of trench warfare could become a terribly oblivious man. God tells him that there is no more trying to figure things out. "I'm your God. We love you." Sam is ready.

Throughout his career in Chicago, Sam is an editor for the *Chicago Independent*. Sam's stories are headlined in the book as headlines in what author Butler calls *The Cunningham Examiner*. The book title I took to mean that the version we read is the Late City Edition, the final paper for the day or, in this case, the final version of Sam's telling of his life story. That telling makes a deeply moving tale, a tale filled with humanity, compassion, understanding, and complexity. I recommend it highly.

Robert Olen Butler



The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-line Pioneers.

by Tom Standage

reviewed by Jim Mills

Our current electronic age can be said to have started in 1845 when Samual Morse sent the first telegraphic message from Baltimore to Washington. The impact of that technical achievement cannot be overstated. That first 40 mile line miraculously expanded over the next fifteen years to tens of thousands of interconnected miles in the US and around the world. A world that had experienced communication network speed limited by the fastest horse or ship could now pass the news at light speed over thousands of miles. To those alive at the, time this capability was no less than a miracle.

In the century before this electronic breakthrough some nations experimented with different techniques to speed up the transmission of messages. In France, during the Napoleonic era, a complex network of towers was established using large signs to send visual messages much faster than what was achievable by horse. The French called this transmission technique the telegraph. In America Samuel B. Morse was not a scientist. He was trained as a professional painter and in the mid 1830s he traveled to France to copy some of the paintings in the Louvre. On his return trip to the US he overheard fellow passengers discussing the possibility of an electronic telegraph. The encounter triggered his interest in the potential of this technology. With the help of American technicians and scientists Morse developed the basis of the telegraph including the code that bears his name. In the US, commercial competition was the spur to the rapid growth of telegraphy.

In *The Victorian Internet*, the author chronicles the rapid technological progress in the 50 years following 1845 in which steady improvements expanded the rate that messages could be sent over the established transmission lines. Telegraph cables were laid under large bodies of water. The English Channel was conquered very early on, connecting Great Britain to the European continent. And in the mid-1860s the Atlantic Ocean was crossed and America and Europe were connected with instant communications. The Earth, as man had always known it, had shrunk appreciably and the planet was becoming a global village.The telegraph provided many jobs through the years for an army of skilled telegraphers capable of truly fantastic transmission speeds, including the young Thomas Edison. In 1876, the invention of the telephone spelled the beginning of the end of the telegraph era. Unlike the telegraph, the telephone ended up being a communication device that was eventually found in virtually every home. The telegraph continued to be used until the mid-twentieth century. In choosing his book title, Tom Standage emphasizes how the impact of the telegraph on the mid-19th century was very similar to that of today's internet.

Samuel Morse

Early Telegraph Key

Coming to Our Senses: A Boy who Learned to See, a Girl who Learned to Hear and How We All Discover the World.

by Susan R. Barry

reviewed by Jim Mills

The author expertly points out that our sensing of the external world goes well beyond the proper functioning of our sense organs, our eyes and our ears. Those of us blessed with proper functioning of our sense organs from birth have progressed from infancy through adolescence teaching our brains to interpret the signals from our eyes and ears. The two stories that the author describes involve two children who did not develop these capabilities from infancy, but acquire vision or hearing in their teens.

These stories have to do with the interpretation of senses by a brain not trained to do so. Essentially we see a two dimensional image that is painted onto the retina of our eyes. It is the job of our brain to interpret this image as the reality of the external three-dimensional world. The infant grows up developing that interpretation, the older individual has much greater difficulty. One example comes from the sequence of lines seen through our eyes that in reality are steps indicting a change in elevation. Our ability to function in the world is based on the proper evaluation of those lines. The author has provided numerous two dimensional images that would normal confuse those used to a three dimensional interpretation of these images. However, for someone new to seeing there is much less confusion since the eye sees the image in two dimensions with no 3D interpretation.

Newly acquired hearing provides different challenges. The interpretation of spoken sounds is difficult to distinguish as individual words even for someone familiar with the written language. The sounds of daily activity such as walking come as a surprise to someone not familiar with the auditory world. While the evolving mind of the infant is attuned to learning to understand the spoken word, older minds are not. Some of those who have acquired these sensory capabilities later in life end up rejecting the new capabilities and prefer the simplicity and familiarity of the world that they once knew.

The investigations into our sensor-mind cooperation are spurred by the experiences of those who acquire these senses later in life. We take for granted our ability to interpret the visual and audio world that is so familiar to us. Learning from others who have not been so blessed teaches us how grateful we should be for the advantages of our birth. The author relates her own vision problems. Since birth she had been unable to see in three dimensions. Only later in life was she able to train her eye-brain system to perceive the world in 3D. The story of her gaining 3D vision is told in an earlier book, *Fixing My Gaze.* (Incidentally this reviewer has the same problem, unaware that anything could be done about it.) *Coming to Our Senses* provides a revealing view into the complexities of our minds as a product of millions of years of evolution and the training of decades of experiences.

Susan R. Barry

The October 24th issue of the Sunday New York Times featured a special Book Review Section, celebrating 125 years of the newspaper's book reviews, which included archival reviews written over that period. What follows are selections from those reviews:

Oct 13, 1912: The Lost World by Arthur Conan Doyle (reviewed by William Kennedy)

"For he goes back of the hintermost beyond of man's knowledge and has his little company of 20th century scientists and adventurers test their courage and their skill against the huge and loathsome beasts of the Jurassic period. They fight for their lives with pterodactyls, see iguanodons at play and watch the tragedies of life among the gigantic dinosaurs. And finally, at the climax of their nightmarish experiences, they come upon a tribe of man-apes, missing links, and for a time it looks as if the 20th century would go down before the survivals of antiquity."

May 18, 1922: Ulysses by James Joyce (reviewed by Dr, Joseph Collins)

"A few intuitive, sensitive visionaries may understand and comprehend 'Ulysses' , James Joyce's new and mammoth volume, without going through a course of training and instruction, but the average intelligent reader will glean little or nothing…"

Dec 26, 1920: The Mysterious Affair at Styles by Agatha Christie

"Though this may be the first published book of Miss Agatha Christie, she betrays the cunning of an old hand. She first presents the mysterious affair of Styles and then proceeds to make it more and more mysterious by leading us gently to all sorts of wrong theories about the criminal."

Feb 23, 1930: The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett

"If the locution 'hard-boiled' had not already been coined it would be necessary to coin it now to describe the characters of Dashiell Hammett's latest detective story. All the persons of the book are of that description, and the hardest boiled of the lot is Sam Spade, the private detective, who gives the impression that he is on the side of the law only when it suits."

Feb 14, 1937: How to Win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie (reviewed by Alfred Kazin)

"In a brisk, cheerful, easy style, enlivened and emphasized by personal anecdote, this authority on 'public speaking and human relationships' tells us to smile and be friendly, not to argue or fine fault, to get the other person's point of view, encourage, and praise him, let him talk all he wants to and persuade him that all the good ideas are his. He advises us also never to tell another person that he is wrong, but adds that if we are wrong ourselves we can turn a liability into an asset by admitting it 'quickly and emphatically'. If we do all that, we are sure to win friends. And if in addition we have the wit to dramatize our own ideas, our salesmanship will profit the more."

Sep 15, 1968: The Jeweler's Eye by William F. Buckley Jr. (reviewed by Mario Puzo)

"Buckley is one of the few men in politics whose style can be called literary, has an intelligence to match, and a TV show that is interesting and worthwhile. He is the editor of National Review, the most influential conservative publication in America, and through his speeches, debates and newspaper columns his best propagandist for the 'right'. The fact remains that his arguments are clever rather than convincing."

July 21, 1988: Do You Sleep in the Nude by Rex Reed (reviewed by Nora Ephron)

"Rex Reed is a saucy, snoopy, bitchy man who sees with sharp eyes and write with a mean pen and succeeds in making voyeurs of us all. If any of this sounds as if I don't like Rex Reed, let me correct that impression. I love Rex Reed."

* 1928: A. A. Milne's son, 6 year old Christopher Robin, told the Times he planned to take revenge on his father with some writings of his own: "Wait and see how father likes the poems I write about him."

* 1943: Upton Sinclair came home from a few days away to find that uninvited "picnickers" had raided his kitchen, smoked his cigarettes and gone swimming in his pool. "I don't think," he told The Times, "that they read any of my books."

* Edna Ferber: The Book Review's gossip column of 1911 noted that Ferber, like the main character in her novel "Dawn O'Hara" was a reporter. "She commenced her journalistic career at 17 on a paper in the town of Appleton, Wis. She has since declared that a year of foreign travel and a whole course in college couldn't have crammed half so much into my head as did 18 months of small-town journalism."

* 1904: "The motor car or the automobile, as one pleases, will probably take the place of the horse in fiction for a little while."

* 1911: "Within the last few days I have been asking a number of my friends among the publishers what, in their view, is likely to be the next 'school' in fiction. They agree in answering that the flying machine is probably the next text on which the 'Oh to be popular!' novelists will concentrate."

* 1937: "Ernest Hemingway says he slapped Max Eastman's face with a book in the offices of Charles Scribner's Sons, publishers, and Max Eastman says he then threw Hemingway over a desk and stood him on him on his head in a corner," the paper reported on Aug. 14. Both men agreed that there had been a clash, but their accounts of it differed substantially.