BOOKS I HAVE READ: MARCH MISCELLANY

Posted on March 31, 2015 by Eddie

From a novel loosely based on the blues to a tour of the languages of Europe, by way of Ancient Rome, 1970s London, the Suez Canal and the highlands of Scotland. My bed-time reading this month.
Category: Reviews

It's been a bit of a slow month for reading for some reason; but here goes.

Fiction

I continued my odyssey through Antony Price' oeuvre withÂ Sion Crossing. If you like the sound of a book which manages to combine British political intrigue, Cold War spying and the American Civil War, you will love this.

Sword of Rome: The Complete CampaignsÂ by Richard Foreman is diverting reading, if a bit predictable. It's pretty cheap on Kindle at the moment and worth getting if you are looking for something non-stretching to read in bed or on a long journey.

The oddity of the month (and I mean that in a good way) was a thriller that took the reader on a journey fromÂ a (the?) crossroads in Mississippi to New Orleans, Chicago, Detroit and New York. Or if you prefer from delta blues, punk by way of jazz, electric blues and Motown.Â Blues Highway Blues (A Crossroads Thriller Book 1)Â is a must read if you share my love of the blues and crime fiction.

Non-Fiction

Deep Sea and Foreign Going: Inside Shipping, the Invisible Industry That Brings You 90% of Everything; I'll leave you to guess what this book is about, but it is a very good read and a very human story.

> *An Indian crew arrived at Immingham and Colum went aboard their ship. He asked the captain his usual questions: â€˜What can I do for you? Shall I take you shopping?â€™ The captain said no, thank you, but he had another request. His crew would like to walk on grass. Green, green grass. â€˜We have been ashore,â€™ said this captain, â€˜but most of the time we walk on steel. It is unforgiving.â€™ The priest was not flummoxed. He put them in the centreâ€™s van and drove them to a churchyard near Hull airport. â€˜And they all took off their shoes and walked barefoot on the grass for an hour, then they went back to the ship.â€™*

At the Water's Edge: A Walk in the WildÂ is a book which I wish I'd written - more to the point, it's a life that I wish I'd lived. When I was a teenager, I dreamed of being a naturalist working in the hills and writing about the plants and animals that I encountered. There is a bit of me that will always regret that I didn't get to live that life - not that I'm complaining. At the Water's Edge captures so much of what I love about the world that God has created and in particular the North Western corner of these islands.

> *April in the Highlands is firmly gripped by winterâ€™s long tendrils. It toys with spring and then draws back. Snow and the bleat of new-born lambs are Aprilâ€™s signature. I heave a sigh of relief when the month passes. May is defiant; it breaks free like a half-trained puppy,*

> *running away from the north wind and the rain, ducking the sleet squalls and raising its shout for the sun and the springing grass.*

However, the highlight of the month has to beÂ Lingo: A Language Spotter's Guide to Europe; a fascinating and amusing trip through the linguistic complexity of Europe. You don't have to be a language geek to enjoy this one; though any of my Wycliffe colleagues who don't buy it should be ashamed of themselves. There are lots of short chapters each of which looks at a particular language from a social, linguistic or political point of view - it's more fun than that sounds. Each chapter ends with a list of words English has borrowed from the language under consideration and another word or two which English really needs. It's fun stuff. Here are a few quotes to give you a feel for the thing.

> *If youâ€™re one of those people who worry that the English language is going to the dogs, linguists are of no help to you. Whatever it is that annoys you â€“ double negatives, the demise of whom, the non-standard usage of literally â€“ linguists will answer that a language is a living thing, and is always changing. You canâ€™t stop the process, so youâ€™d better get used to it.*
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> *So if the Catalan language area and Catalonia itself are not the same thing, and Italian is far from the whole story in Italy, you might ask: is there any country in Europe where the political boundaries and the linguistic boundaries are identical? Well, yes, there is: Iceland. Icelandic is the only language of Iceland, and its inhabitants are the only people in the world for whom Icelandic is their mother tongue. And in all of Europe thereâ€™s no other country that has a language thatâ€™s unique to that country, and is spoken by all of its citizens.*
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> *Modern linguists donâ€™t often stray far from the confines of academia. If they ever raise their voices, itâ€™s mostly in defence of their theories or their research budgets. On the great issues of their age, they tend not to speak out. Whenever one of them does, he tends to be Noam Chomsky.*