

**Eleanore B. Goodman**

Grading the Columbia Journalism School

**John P. Sisk**

Graham Greene in Spain

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**Is Papa Brezhnev in Heaven?**



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# V. S. PRITCHETT on The Folio Society

A year or two ago I overheard a bibliophile mutter 'Reader' with disappointment as he sniffed along my chaotic bookshelves. Of course! Not only a reader, but a re-reader, for a writer's books are the tools of his trade. Most of my books are serviceable: there is the occasional gleam of an elegant production, but there is a lot of the reach-me-down bought out of my wages when I was young, and some – like my French and Spanish, though not my Russian – are getting tatty and my eyesight is not up to the grey print of modern replacements. The sharp decline in so much of our present printing and our binding seems to me one more sign of the decline in the honour in which a literary culture was once held. It is because The Folio Society restores this honour to literature and its authors that I am more than eager to speak for them.



Drawing by Quentin Blake from *Scoop*

When I think of getting a new copy of a book that has been pinched from my shelves – Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* or Helen Waddell's *The Wandering Scholars* for example – I know now where to look for a distinctive edition worthy of the author and of my trade. I am no bibliophile. I do not chase first editions. I want to do the authors honour because they have lasted, whether they are major, minor or eccentric figures. All are links in the chain: no minor writers, no major writers. We learn from one another at random.

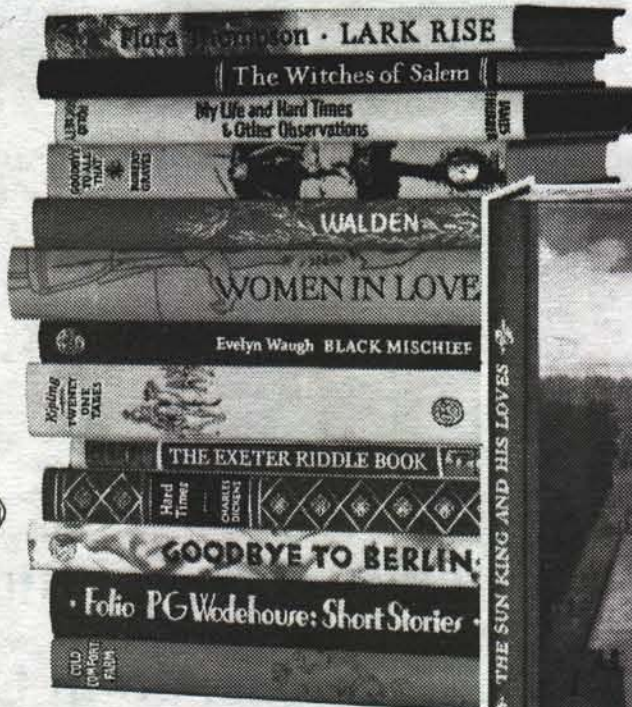
My stolen Lermontov, that marvellous Russian short story, *A Hero of Our Time*, seminal to the Russian and indeed European short story, was school-bookish. In Folio it is elegant but not arty: like all Folio's editions it is intelligently introduced and in this case lithographs by Dodie Masterman evoke the romantic Byronic tale. The Folio volumes have revived and reconsidered the Victorian art of illustration. My Turgenev's were good but small and worn. The Folio edition of his *Fathers and Sons* is graceful, suited to the delicate master of Russian prose, who was above all a man of taste himself; here again the lithographs of János Kass add their comment on the manners of his society. There is also a collection of six



Turgenev stories. Five are certainly his best: *The Superfluous Man*, *Mumu*, *King Lear of the Steppes*, *Asya*, *First Love*. The sixth, Turgenev's last tale, *The Song of Triumphant Love*, has irritated or bewildered many critics, including Richard Freeborn the present translator, who speculates on Turgenev's elderly experiments in the occult and Oriental. To my ear this tale has chiefly a biographical interest: I suspect it of starting as one of those fanciful operettas he used to write as a doubtful compliment to the singer Pauline Viardot who tormented him.

There are finds. Two years ago I needed to look at one of Trollope's short stories, particularly *Lotte Schmidt*, so well spoken of. Impossible to find a copy outside the British Museum, but here it is in the Folio *The Two Heroines of Plumplington*, introduced by Julian Symons. At last, too, I can get Bewick's *My Life*: there is an incurable amateur naturalist in English readers, but I want it for the exquisite engravings. And then there are books one ought to have known and which I know now I shall never read but which some younger maniac might jump at. One tantalises me with the memory of an irrecoverable impulse. I was mad about the Fall of Granada when I was thirteen. I even wrote 150 pages of a novel on the subject at that time. Why didn't I know of Diego Hurtado de Mendoza's eyewitness report *The War in Granada*? How sad.

But Folio does strike a balance between the old and the new, the solid and the esoteric. Classics like *Pickwick Papers* and *Our Mutual Friend* need to look new to the taste of later generations; and the great English gift for comedy and satire has its moderns like Stella Gibbons' wicked fun with the rustic novels of the T.F. Powys period, *Cold Comfort Farm*. Like Waugh's *Scoop* and *Black Mischief*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*, they deserve their commemoration. In the Twenties, privately-printed editions played an important part in drawing attention to new writing and the established. Folio does this for us now.



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