

Bertram
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Celebrating One Hundred Years

1923-2023

September

A very strange morning

The story begins in 2008. A regular visitor to the shop, Michael Woods, an eccentric art dealer, who often arrived bearing curiosities for sale or just for a chat - we enjoyed each other's company - turned up clutching a manuscript novel bound in plain green cloth which he had found, rather bizarrely, on a barge. This was *Devereux. A Tale*, 1837, by Margaret Emily Shore. The catch was that this was volume II only. However, I discovered that the University of Delaware already had other Shore manuscript volumes. I contacted the Head of Special Collections, Timothy Murray, whom I had always found exceptionally pleasant and easy to deal with, who was keen to acquire this second volume. The sale was agreed – so far so, relatively, straightforward. This was my description:

Margaret Emily Shore – A Remarkable Discovery

Shore (Margaret Emily). *Devereux. A Tale*. Volume II only, of two. 1837. Original holograph manuscript in her extraordinarily neat and barely corrected hand, consisting of title-page, dedication, two pages, to her cousin Miss Anna Dennis, introduction, two pages, contents page, 264 pages text, comprising chapters X to XXII. Small pencil sketch of a seated woman on blank opposite title (probably a self-portrait). Original plain green cloth, spine lettered “Devereux Vol. II”) and ruled in gilt. One gathering almost detached, cloth rather rubbed and joints broken, some spotting to preliminary and final blanks, light stain to first few leaves, otherwise very clean internally.

The introduction to the author's posthumously published journal refers to and illustrates her “printing hand, varying but little from first to last” and explains that the journal was “written impromptu, without a rough draft, in the midst of as busy a life as ever a young creature had”. Another novel by Margaret Emily Shore *The Emigrants' Tale* is mentioned on the title-page of *Devereux*.

Neither novel seems ever to have been published and indeed they seem scarcely known of. *Devereux* is “the tale of a precocious boy, who escapes from his home, turns pirate, and redeems a career of crime by one act of splendid and pathetic self-sacrifice.” The introduction to the journal states that the author “had neither read nor heard of Trelawney's ‘Adventures of a Younger Son’ when she wrote it. Both these works show book-knowledge of other countries, an eye for localities, and skill in describing nature. The printed manuscript of ‘Devereux’ is, perhaps, the most beautifully executed of all her works; it is, in fact, perfect.”

The rather exciting-sounding chapter headings are as follows:

The Island	Superstitions
The Captive	Assassination
Sorcery	The Day of Departure
Double-Dealing	The Deserted
The Schooner	Wanderings
The Familiar Spirit	Slavery
Wooing in Paris	

There are a few poems and fragments reproduced at the end of the published journal. Those aside, the present manuscript is presumably the only known surviving example of the author's fictional prose.

In her introduction to the novel the author states that she will in all likelihood not finish *Devereux*, and it seems clear that a third volume was never written. She also points out that it is considerably longer than the first volume, that what little time she could give to it was “snatched from the evening hours, when the conclusion of a day of mental labour at a time when my health was too weak to sustain it without excessive fatigue had left me pretty well exhausted both in mind and body” and that “the story ... is highly improbable, but to the merit of skilfully interweaving incident and adventure I make no pretension ... My aim has been rather to depict feelings and passions, to penetrate into the workings of the human heart, and to rouse up the deep sympathies of our nature”.

Written so soon before her untimely death the poignancy of her conclusion is almost unbearable: "I have nothing more to say to you, Reader, except that as you are not likely to be any one out of the circle of my relations, to whom I might have explained all this more shortly by word of mouth, I have to beg your pardon for giving the trouble of reading the above, in which after all I do not know that there is anything worth my asking you to read".

Fortunately, this volume has survived and perhaps now can be made available to a readership the author (1819-1839) would never have anticipated.

Of course the next step was to obtain an export licence. Filling in the forms was not a problem, I have done that often enough in my time. Also though, a copy of the manuscript would be required. I explained that the binding was tight and fragile and that it would be impossible to open it for scanning or photography without risking its destruction. I was summoned to what was then Export HQ - The Advisory Council on the Export of Works of Art at the Offices of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport - in Cockspur Street. I chatted with another dealer also due to appear that morning who told me he had once been sent to do a deliberately bad job of seeking a licence because that was the last thing his employer actually wanted. I think there were around a dozen experts /advisors including two Peers of the Realm, sitting in judgement (it really did feel like that) in a horseshoe pattern with me in the middle on a solitary chair. One of them was very insistent that I should at least try to make a copy myself. She also claimed that the binding was not original but later, about which I completely disagreed. I argued that if I was wrong and the book could be copied without damage, that would be fine, but if I was right I would be destroying the very object in question. The University of Delaware, I explained, had far better technology and would be able to scan the book without needing to open it fully and that they would make a copy available as soon as possible after receipt. Not good enough, she said. Eventually, after much debate, she was overruled and in the end the University was of course as good as its word.

Then, two years later, things began to become distinctly odd. I had a phone call from a potential vendor in Wales who had come across another Shore manuscript book, this time a journal, in the same impeccable hand. He too had been in touch with Tim Murray, who suggested that he contact me to assess and value it and handle the sale. Having heard nothing further for a few weeks I chased it up with the vendor, emphasising that the proposed purchaser was very keen to know more. There followed two e-mails with "Hullo Mr Rota" the only content, then another saying that he did not want to trust the book to the post but that we should meet up. Three further e-mails arrived, this time with just "Good afternoon..." The weeks and months rolled by. Every now and then Delaware would ask what was happening, but I was unable to make progress, to pin anything down. Fast forward to August 2011 – again a meeting is suggested. I could hardly do anything further until I had at least seen the thing to verify its authenticity. Strongly suspecting an elaborate hoax, I put the whole thing on the back burner.

In July 2014 however, it picked up once again, with a meeting proposed at a motorway service station, which rang alarm bells. Over and over he cancelled at the last minute but with the service stations chosen gradually moving along the M4 away from South Wales towards me, and finally Chievely Services no less, a short drive from our house. In for a penny..., I thought. I was due at 11 am. A weekend in February (originally January) 2015 it was to be. Full disclosure – I was a touch hungover that morning and arrived a little bit late and very flustered. Of course neither I nor the vendor and his wife had any idea what the other party looked like. On arrival I got out of my car and phoned them, giving a rough description of myself, saying that I would be with them in just a couple of minutes. "Great, we're in the coffee shop, see you soon."

The moment I walked into the café a woman seated near the entrance started gesturing frantically, staring straight at me and pointing at her table. I sat down and her partner joined us. I thought I would start with a bit of small talk. "Goodness me, what a palaver it has been, but it's so good to meet you at last." They were completely silent. After a bit, I asked if I could see the manuscript now. No response. "Or perhaps we would be better doing it in the car park – we don't want coffee spilt on it after all this." Silence and blank faces were the only responses to my every attempt to start a conversation. Suddenly the woman piped up: "This coffee's cold, I don't like it. We're leaving." I stood up and began to follow them out, saying "Excellent, I'll come with you." "Oh no you won't!" she said, ferociously. Then the penny dropped. This was not the right couple. They must have thought I was some kind of psychopath. She had been beckoning her husband over who happened to have come in right behind me, not me.

Twenty minutes had passed, but soon I did manage to find the right people, apologise and explain what had happened and everything was fine after that. I left not only with the absolutely genuine manuscript but another extraordinary book, details of both of which are below.

Margaret Emily Shore – Holograph Journal Volume X

Shore (Margaret Emily). *Journal of Margaret Emily Shore. Vol. X. From April 14 1838 to July 5. 1838. At Worthing, Midhurst, Bevis Mount, St. Heliers, and Bartley Lodge, near Southampton.*

Comprises title-page and text paginated 1-180, but with excisions at pages 53/54, 79/80, 81/82, 83/84, 93/94, 109/110, 119/120, 149/150, 151/152 (little text remaining), 171/172, and stubs only with just a few letters at margins of pages 65-70 and 111/112, being bowdlerisations by the author's sisters.

Two leaves loose.

Original holograph manuscript in her extraordinarily neat and barely corrected hand, many passages outlined or crossed through in pencil, each page of text captioned and dated by the author. 8vo. Original dark green limp roan, rubbed, one corner missing, spine severely rubbed and with pieces missing, light staining from binder's glue to margins of end-papers, title-page and final page of text, otherwise very clean internally.

Memories of Monmouthshire

Memories of Monmouthshire, as to men, times, things, and places. Mental vagaries, public characters, curious anecdotes. Part the First.

“By One of the Dead”

Thomas Murby, no date [but 1860s?, some surprisingly modern turns of phrase notwithstanding]

170 pages including half-title and title-page

Sometime rebound in dark green cloth, spine gilt, new end-papers and stab-marks at margins throughout. Upper cover with some staining, some foxing, tape marks to end-papers, else a nice copy. With the ownership signature of the historian J. Kyrle Fletcher, and presumably his markings and occasional knowledgeable annotations in the margins.

Murby seems primarily to have been a publisher of educational books between 1860 and the early 1880s.

This scurrilous, frank and often racy account concentrates particularly but by no means exclusively on the activities and proclivities of the Tredegar family. The half-title is marked in manuscript “Private and Confidential” and we strongly suspect that it was suppressed and never published and that the first part is all that was written. There is no trace of the book at the British Library, nor WorldCat, nor COPAC. This may well be the only extant copy, or we suggest one of no more than a handful at most.

The author's subject matter is as broad as the title suggests, but politics and the Tredegar estates loom large. There is a great deal of wit. In our view, the work cries out for publication today. The following passages selected more or less at random, give a flavour and evidence the necessity of the author's anonymity.

“Sir Charles was essentially a ladies' man, and in their society his free and easy manners were accepted as a compensation for the almost total absence of polish and refinement ... Some time after the death of his wife he formed a *liaison* which leaves a blot upon his escutcheon, and which, in a moral point of view, cannot be defended or palliated ... [but] Let those who are without fault, throw the first stone.”

“Like the unhappy woman whose brother was hanged for forgery, and who, dressed in black and rouged up to the eyes, was accustomed for years to haunt the purlieu of the Bank of England in silent mystery, Mrs. Waddington might be seen to parade the alleys of her garden, but was seldom known to open her lips. When she did by any chance speak to a stranger she was concise and oracular as the Pythoness of Delphi. Acting upon the maxim, *Omne ignotum pro magnifico*, Mrs. Waddington often carried her airs of sublimity to the very verge of ridiculous, but it answered her purposes ... and though some said she was a witch, no one ever saw her riding on a broomstick or poring over the fire in familiar intercourse with a black cat. Had she pretended, like Pythagoras, to be gifted with a *golden thigh*, many a credulous Welshman would have believed the fact without any sort of ocular or

tangible demonstration. Such was the lady whom destiny had selected to become the mother-in-law of the future Lord Llanover.”

“Mr. Blewitt published the letter of the Duke’s Home Secretary in the next number, turned it into ridicule, and soundly rated the Duke for his undignified and unworthy conduct. The Tories of Monmouthshire stood aghast at such open defiance of the great ducal character on his own dunghill ...”

On the waltz: “It is no doubt a very agreeable thing for a young gentleman, animated by the music of Strauss or Musard, to be able to clasp by the waist a charming young girl, with her hand pressed in his, her arm on his shoulder, to receive her balmy breath, to look love into her eyes, to watch her snowy palpitating bosom, and while whirling in the maze to feel the transient pressure of her quivering limbs. But is not such a state of things beyond the pale of civilized amusement ...?”

“Lord Tredegar at the time of his father’s death was probably the oldest heir apparent in the kingdom. He is short in stature, plain in features, has a harsh voice, and his dress and appearance generally are those of a respectable yeoman on market day. Lord Tredegar, like his father, is very fond of farming and is a good judge of cattle, horses and hounds. As Mr. Morgan he kept a pack of harriers, but for his own exclusive amusement, I have heard that some of his favourite neighbours only were allowed to join in the sport, any stranger being regarded as an intruder, and sometimes treated with rudeness or incivility.”

I sold the second to the National Library of Wales in a heartbeat and even the export licence procedure for the journal went fairly smoothly thanks to an accompanying letter:

With regard to the enclosed export license application for the Margaret Emily Shore manuscript journal, please note that it is not possible for us to provide a copy since we believe the copying process would destroy the object. The binding is extremely fragile and as you will see from the description, two pages are already loose.

This is exactly the same situation as arose with another Emily Shore manuscript sold by us in 2008 (part of her novel, *Devereux*), except that this binding is even more delicate and worn. I attended a hearing at which this was discussed and it was eventually agreed that the manuscript could be exported subject to assurances that the purchaser would make a copy using more sophisticated techniques – this was duly done and a copy sent to the British Library.

The purchaser of the present manuscript is the same and he makes the same assurances:

The previous manuscript was exported under Licence No. PAE/0888/08, dated 19th November 2008.

Please also note that two volumes of Margaret Emily Shore’s manuscript journals already reside at the University of Delaware, as well as the abovementioned *Devereux*.

It had taken five years, but it at least ended well. There was one further twist that morning though. Still reeling from the service station debacle, I stopped off before heading home to collect a book from self-storage units in Newbury which we used for much of our stock at the time. I noticed that someone had tied a small piece of dark red wool in a neat bow around the hasp of the door where the padlock went through. At the time, in my frazzled state, this seemed rather worrying. I went to the reception and asked what it could possibly mean. “I’ve no idea, that’s very odd, I had better come and have a look, I’ve never seen that before ...” said the man on duty that day, whom I had come to know quite well. We walked down the corridor and basically stared at the piece of wool for some minutes. He was literally scratching his head in bafflement. In the end he shrugged and we both gave up.

As soon as I got home I told the family everything that had happened. Once I had finished, my then nine-year-old son had this to say: “Dad, you know the bit of wool on the door? That was me. I don’t know why I did it.” The strange, niche world of bookselling is rarely dull.

Julian Rota