

## Collie wobbles

**Friend for Life:  
The Extraordinary  
Partnership Between  
Humans and Dogs**  
Kate Humble  
(Headline, £16.99)

**M**ONMOUTHSHIRE, 2013. The wind blows, the rain rains, and the hills are alive with the thrum of self-recrimination.

"I was such a fool to think that I could ever do this," laments Kate Humble, up to her sodden gilet in bewildered sheep and the exuberant indifference of recalcitrant sheepdog Teg.

Humble wants to train Teg to herd sheep. Teg would rather use sheep as makeshift bowling pins. The resulting odyssey – the former *Springwatch* presenter anxiously seeking reassurance and direction from experts while berating herself for her "dismal failures"; Teg barking at mud – is charted in *Friend for Life*, a journal-cum-travelogue-cum-dissertation that uses their stubbornly pedestrian quest as a springboard to an exhaustive exploration of all things dog.

"Inspired by [their] special connection," bugles the dust jacket, "Kate wanted to find out more: how did this remarkable animal evolve from predator to lifesaver? What happened to allow a fearsome hunter to be invited on to our sofas? This is the story of how dogs became essential to our lives." A bold undertaking by any measure, and it's tempting to suspect that Humble's hillside handwringing and "hot silent

tears" are as much to do with the enormousness of her self-imposed literary challenge as they are with persuading a thick sheepdog to shunt ruminants into a pen. But undertake she does, with an approach to structure that makes Teg's sheep-assembling technique look considered.

So off we scamper to Austria, where a visit to a centre that studies the differences between wolves and dogs takes a detour into the origin of the domestication of canines. Then it's off to the New Forest for a quad-biking session with huskies, then 11th-century Switzerland with a groundbreaking St Bernard, then Vanuatu for an anecdote about a collie, then back to Wales for another thwarted lamb-badgering session with Teg. A mildly diverting gander at ancient dog burial sites provides the wilting reader with a much-needed comfort break, but there's barely time to re-buckle our trousers before Humble's enthusing about an academic thesis entitled *Hunting Dogs as a Global Foraging Adaptation to Early Holocene Temperate Environments*.

It's exhausting. Here a fact, there a fact, everywhere a fact-fact. Staffordshire bull terriers, gasps Humble, can pull over 90 times their body weight. Siberian nomads use samoyeds as hot water bottles. Sledge dogs "shit copiously and potently".

So who is it all for? Dog enthusiasts? They'll know most of this already. Passing poodle fanciers? Too info-heavy. Humble fanatics? Possibly, although the expected personal revelations come to

naught. Even those hoping for a celebration of her rural lifestyle are short-changed. While her former *Springwatch* colleague Chris Packham's memoir, *Fingers in the Sparkle Jar* (also out this month), embeds personal drama in a beautifully composed paean to the physical world, here nature is resolutely beige, Humble's Wye Valley surroundings rendered featureless by her stolid gumboots-and-tweed-cap writing style.

The reader is left with a directionless canine factjam that barks an overriding message: dogs are great. How great? One chapter ends with the words, "there seems to be nothing these dogs can't do". So why couldn't one of the buggers have edited this guff, then?

## ARTISTIC LICENCE

■ IN THE blurb for the first volume of Eric Shanes's biography of JMW Turner, published last month at a modestly priced £85, Yale University Press promises "a wealth of new findings" – and indeed new findings of wealth, as the author presents "newly discovered source material, such as the artist's principal bank records, which shed significant light on his patronage and sales".

Shanes himself boasts: "Acting on a tip-off that the painter's name had been spotted in Bank of England ledgers some years earlier, I have unearthed Turner's investment records from the age of 19 onwards."

Quite a scoop. Or is it? "Considering that money was one of Turner's great obsessions, it is surprising that so little has been written about his accumulation of it," the veteran scholar Selby Whittingham

wrote almost a quarter century ago, in an article on "Turner's wealth" for the December 1993 issue of the journal *JMW Turner, RA*. "The way his wealth grew is graphically shown by the registers of the Bank of England, which have been open to public inspection for some time, but so far have not been used."

Whittingham's findings in the Bank archives – remarkably similar to those now produced by Shanes after his "tip-off" – showed how Turner's investments had grown from an initial £100 in 1794 (when he was 19) to £73,297 at his death in 1851.

If Shanes has done his research as thoroughly as he claims, he should surely have read the article. So why no doff of the cap to Whittingham? The two men used to know each other well, both helping to run the Turner Society and Whittingham often writing for a Turner magazine published by Shanes. Because of differences of opinion over Turner's bequest, however, they are no longer on speaking terms. Even so, given American academia's attitude to allegations of plagiarism, Yale University Press will presumably want to ensure that future editions of *Young Mr Turner* include a footnote giving due credit to his old rival for the "tip-off".



Written at the height of Britain's imperial project, those 23 little tales are really a primer for navigating the merciless currents of amoral capitalism.

Sub-head introducing an article by **KATHRYN HUGHES** on the works of Beatrix Potter, *Guardian*

I kind of want to resist the Emperor's New Clothes a bit. I think it's a serious work of art. I don't think it's a gimmick per se. I think it's an investigation into conditions of labour. It sets a number of questions about how people are employed in the kind of globalised world...It's a deliberately provocative piece and sits within a continuum of performance pieces... [continues]

**EKOW ESHUN** discussing Maria Eichhorn's residency at the Chisenhale Gallery, which consists of sending the staff home for five weeks, locking the empty gallery and putting up a 'Closed' sign, *Radio Four Saturday Review*

...he was a great master and a mentor who I always made a point of deferring to – until maturity bid me to go my own way. His job was to awaken the troops, those of us knighted by destiny to serve in the culture wars that forever engage us.

**TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY** remembers Prince, *New Statesman*

## pseud's Corner



entertainer, I'm an engager. I never sell myself, in a sense. I'm a barefoot human being, walking across the planet, touching the heart of things... [continues]

a-ha's singer **MORTEN HARKET**, *Guardian*

Such will necessarily entail expropriation – redefining organisation to discard the role of the capital-investor and disengaging the theft of wealth that is inherently common – but what will follow is a series of events that will mean that people are in a

position where their rationality is conducive to their self-management.

'The case against voting', *Freedom News website*

I was rushing back to campaign for the Women's Equality Party in the May 5 elections here. When we flew into the storm, my first thought was 'I can't die. I have to vote.'

**CATHERINE MAYER** on her experience of lightning striking an Icelandair plane, *London Evening Standard*

Sir, Joyce Milne (letters, April 29) is perhaps too quick to defend Daisy Dunn's translation of *fututiones* in Catullus 32 as 'fucks.' 'Fucks' is certainly urgent and striking, but, as Helen Morales pointed out in her review, it is untrue to the poet's novel polysyllable *fututio*. Catullus knows the trades of both poet and lover, and is asking Ipsitilla for something innovative, protracted and elaborate, if she has the leisure: she will need to stay at home for some while (32.4-8). I have not seen anyone propose the attested English coinage 'fuckulations'.

**N.J. SEWELL-RUTTER**, letter to *Times Literary Supplement*

Contributors: Andrew Wood, Stefan Leszczuk, Graham Mott (and others), Gail Fairman, Chris Wheel, Serenhedd James, Chris Sowton.

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