

## A Note on *All This and Bevin Too*

In the mid-1970s, copies of Quentin Crisp's *All This and Bevin Too* – reputed to be the longest limerick sequence in English – were exceedingly hard to find. And since they were printed on low-quality, war-issue paper, the few copies one came across were generally faded and dog-eared, with browning pages. Yet they contained some utterly brilliant, tongue-in-cheek drawings by Peake. So I decided to make this booklet the Mervyn Peake Society's first publication (apart from *The Mervyn Peake Review*, which I had initiated in 1975 and was editing).

In preparation for printing in England by offset, I had negatives made by Lausanne specialist Pierre Echenard.

As the original drawings were not available, we had to work from an old copy of the book. Rather than just photograph text and illustrations as they stood, we checked the poem closely, correcting misprints, removing blemishes and tidying up the damaged Linotype lettering. The original printer had carelessly allowed the heads of the nails fastening the plate to the block to appear in the corners of some of the illustrations, so these were removed too. In the end, this reprint looks very much as the booklet *should* have done when it was first published.

(MPR 8 (Spring 1979), p.37, slightly revised)

The paper used is much better quality too – not to mention the 40 special copies on heavier paper.

Once I had decided to reprint ATBT, I began wondering about the title. Obviously enough, "Bevin" alluded to "the great trade union leader [who] was brought into Churchill's national government, where he set about persuading non-conscripted citizens to volunteer for work of national importance" (Cyril Bibby, *The Art of the Limerick* (1978)). But where did the title as a whole come from? In those pre-internet days, one could turn only to reference books – which proved to be of no help at all – and librarians. I was doing research in the Bodleian Library at that time, and I pestered every assistant I could glimpse in the Reading Room. To no avail.

Then came a day when I had arranged to meet a friend in Geneva. I arrived a little early; finding a flea market nearby, I began to idly browse the books in English on a small stand. Imagine my amazement when I spotted a book titled *All This and Heaven Too*, and next to it a second copy in an American edition. I bought them both.

In the British copy, a previous owner had pasted cuttings from a periodical (*Picture Post*, I suspect) about the 1940 Warner Brothers adaptation of Rachel Field's 1938 bestseller. It starred Bette Davis and revealed a more restrained and gentle side of her than in her previous films; it was her most successful to date (although the film made less money than Warner Bros had hoped). The scenes with Charles Boyer emphasize their eyes, revealing their growing love with every glance. It strikes me now, as I write this, how the eyes of the Kangaroo and the Horse (learning to be a mole) in Peake's illustrations, are equally large and lustrous. Is this an allusion to the film, or simply Peake's reference to Maeve Gilmore's eyes?

The American edition brought me more precious information. In an introductory note, Rachel Field informed us that the exclamation, "All this,

and Heaven Too!” was attributed by Matthew Henry (1662–1714) to his father, the Rev. Philip Henry (1631–96).

Thus the two books from that open bookstall in the middle of Geneva brought me, quite by chance, everything I had sought for in vain. All this – and heaven too, indeed!

And that, I thought, was that. But forty years later I discovered that there is another side to the story. During the Second World War, the novel *All This and Heaven Too* was used by Nazi spies to encode the radio messages they sent back to Berlin from their posts in various countries around the world. An Enigma machine would have been hard to hide, and immediately identified the user as a spy; no one would suspect that a copy of a bestseller found lying around in their room or in their luggage was in fact their code book.

The system worked like this: each agent was assigned a unique identification number, let’s say 7 – no, that’s corny; we’ll take 17. To encode a message, he added to his own number the day’s date, and the number of the month. On 10 January 1940, this would give  $17+10+1=28$ . The spy turned to page 28 in his copy of *All This and Heaven Too*. The first three letters in the last line of text on that page provided him with that day’s call sign, to be placed at the beginning of his radio message, uniquely identifying him as the sender. Any answer or instructions radioed back to him from Berlin on that day would be identified by the last three letters of that line. Then the first five words on page 28 plus the first letter of each of the other lines on the page became the cypher with which the message was encoded.

Here comes the punch line: this code was broken by a brilliant American cryptanalyst, Elizebeth Friedman, by “reverse engineering” – that is, she was able to decode messages encrypted in this manner even though she did not have a copy of *All This and Heaven Too*, or even know that the novel had been used to generate the cypher. (See Jason Fagone, *The Woman Who Smashed Codes*, 2017.)

So in 1943 Quentin Crisp unwittingly alluded to a novel that was playing a key role in Nazi espionage during the war. And he even introduced “a foal being trained as a mole”, a term that, even then, was used for a long-term spy or informant within an organization (although it was not in general use before John Le Carré’s 1974 novel *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*).

Peter Winnington