

Influential Books: personal subjective

The Little Prince. St Exupery

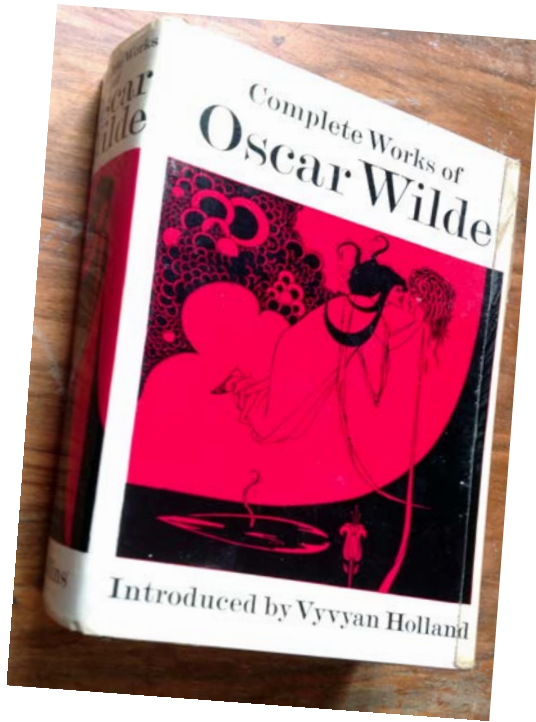
From about the age of 8 to 16 most of the books I read were in French. The Little Prince was a real favourite of mine. I had a hard back copy and I loved the simple language, the watercolour pictures and the clean white space.

Content and message also appealed to me - and still do. The first discussions of the meaning of the drawing of a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant which everyone else interpreted as a hat emphasises the importance of maintaining a childlike imagination even when we grow up - keeping an open mind and always examining preconceptions.

Then the description of the Prince's asteroid home and his love for the rose who does not return his love is really poignant. Then his discussions with the foolish adults on other planets who seem to have lost their basic values of love and simplicity seemed to echo what I felt about the adults around me all preoccupied with social status and arguing with each other over nothing.

I also enjoyed his sense of adventure in flying. And went on to read other books by St Exupery about his life as a pilot.





Complete Works of Oscar Wilde

I got this book from a Book Club when I was about 16. It is a very thick hardback volume with just one image on the front cover - a bright red and black version of Beardsley's Salome. I read this book again and again because I loved Oscar Wilde - his mixture of poignancy and wit. I was fascinated by the ideas underlying *Picture of Dorian Gray*, also the fairy tales are particular favourites of mine. Having all the works in one volume also meant I could dip in and out of the different works as my mood dictated, and compare them. It also looked good on my bedside table.

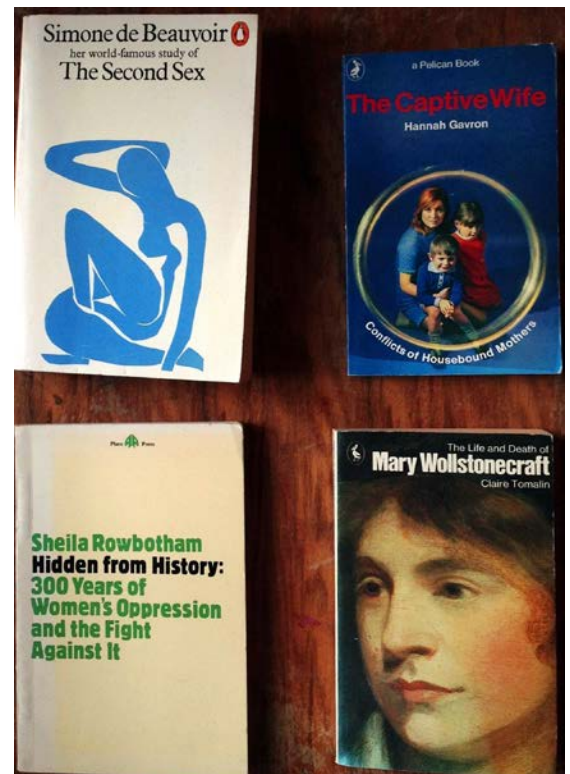
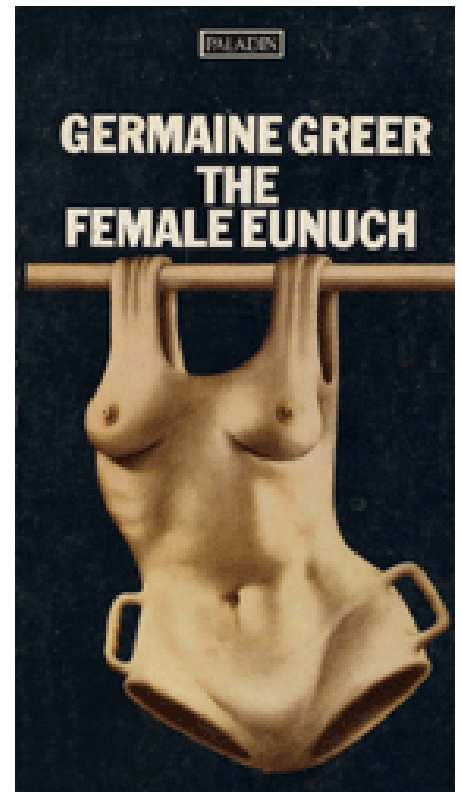
The Female Eunuch

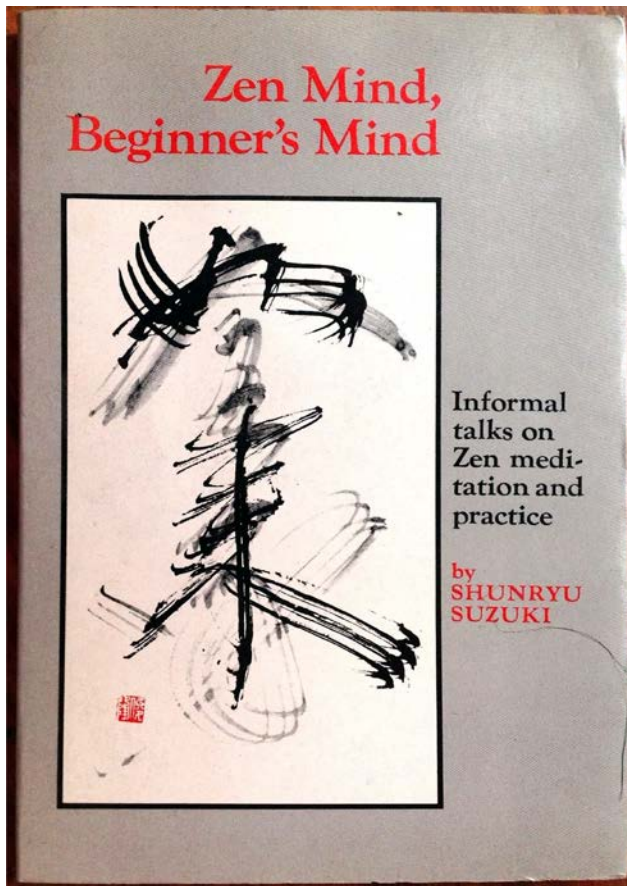
Germaine Greer 1970
ISBN 0-374-52762-8

My best friend bought me a copy of the Female Eunuch for my 17th birthday and it was a complete revelation to me. It seemed to encapsulate everything I had felt was wrong about society's attitudes to women at that time. I realised. Had been a feminist since about the age of 7. My grandfather and the men on the family all thought my brother was more important than me because he would carry on the family name. My mother said it was a pity I was not a boy because I would just get married and my education would be wasted. So the Female Eunuch was a turning point in finding there were other women who felt the same as I did about all the injustice of it all.

I liked the boldness of the cover - very daring for its time particularly a book by a woman. I also enjoyed the humour and boldness of the discussions of sexuality and the constraints on women's lives at all levels.

This was the beginning of my reading of many other books on feminism which followed leading to my enrolment to take women's studies in Cambridge and ultimately the work I do now. This book influenced not only me but many other women of my generation, giving us courage to seek more freedom and break down the barriers in the heady days of protest in the seventies.





Zen Mind Beginners Mind

1970

I got this book when I started to go beyond Indian Yoga to look at other Eastern philosophies. The philosophy which began to influence me most was Zen. Both the philosophy itself and the art. I have always been attracted to the stark energetic black and white ink paintings where everything depends on the skill in a moment.

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

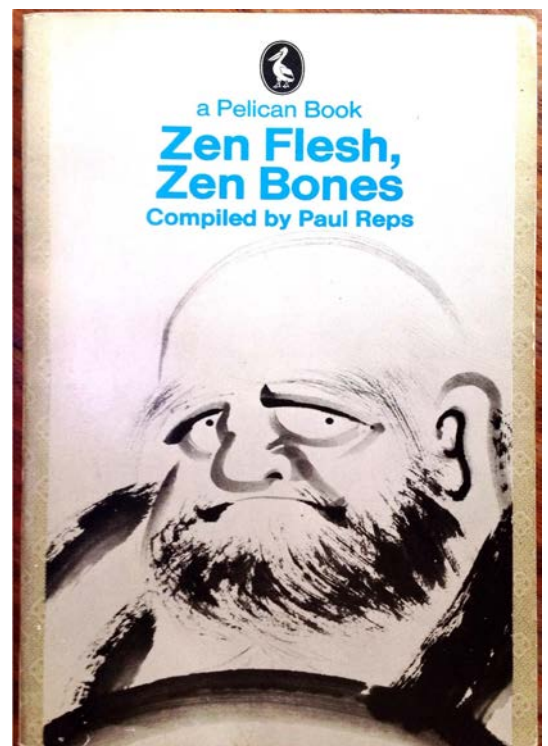
Do I really know what my own mind is? Is it what I am doing now? Is it what I am thinking now?

Zen mind is 'the open mind, the attitude that includes both doubt and possibility, the ability to see things always as fresh and new.'

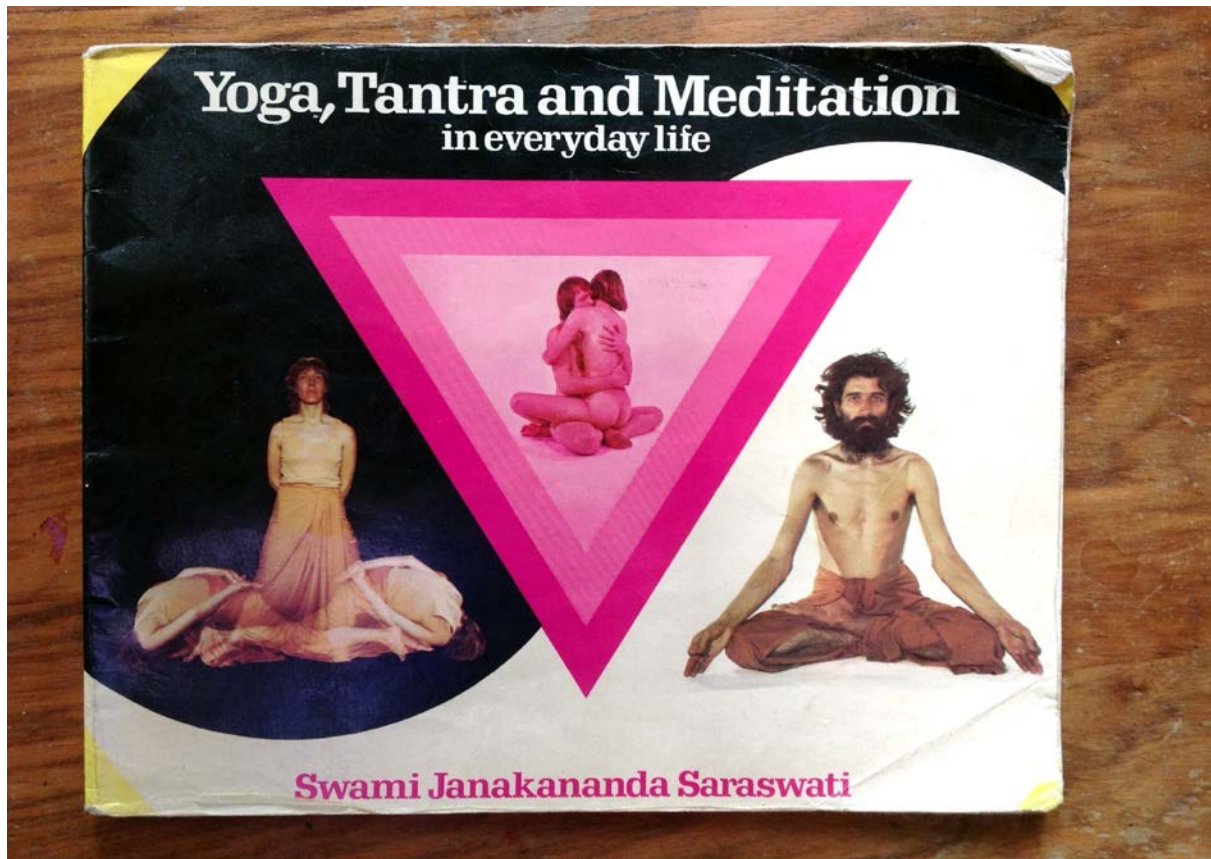
Zen Flesh, Zen Bones

First pub 1957. Penguin 1971.

This was another book I bought at the same time. Partly because I liked the cover. I was actually looking for a book of haiku and found the poetry translations a bit clunky. I dipped into this book now and again but found the absence of women a bit oppressive. In the sexism context of 1970s it was disappointing to find that sexism was rife even in an apparently open philosophy aiming at freeing the mind. So the impact of this book was not so much in relation to Zen, but to make me want to look outside any established philosophy.



Yoga, Tantra and Meditation in everyday life



My best friend a school had been interested in yoga and Hinduism and I have always been much more attracted to the idea of a universal energy which is neither male nor female than the Christian/Jewish/Muslim male god sitting on a cloud. That just did not make any sense to me - nor did all the laws and restrictions imposed by male hierarchies. Meditation was a very important part of my life from the age of about 13 and I practised certain yoga exercises regularly.

This Swedish book was published in English in 1975. I bought it around then and have taken it with me regularly when I have been travelling for work. I thought the cover was awful - both the sensationalist overt sex and the crass hippy symbolism. The cover and also some of the explicit photos inside have been a source of some anxiety going through customs in some countries!!! But the the actual content in terms of the actual exercises and clear ways they are described has been very useful. Also the large format and binding mean it is possible to have the book open and read along while learning new things.

The communist manifesto Marx and Engels 1847

I was introduced to the Communist Manifesto in 1971 by a male friend interested in economics and politics - a friend of the friend who introduced me to the Female Eunuch. It was a time when ideas of revolution were very popular as a solution to what we saw as the many Injustices in the world. As the smallest and most rhetorical of Marx's works in a nice slim blue Penguin volume it was quite an attractive read. "Workers of the world, unite!".

This was the beginning of my political education - then going on to study the rest of Marx and Lenin when I was friends with people organising on the far left in India and friends doing doctorates on Eastern European history.

