

Review *Bright Day* (1946)

Written and set just after the Second World War, narrator, Gregory Dawson, is holed up in an Eastbourne hotel trying to finish his latest Hollywood script. One evening he recognises an elderly couple and hears the opening of the 2nd movement from Schubert's *B flat major Piano Trio* played by the resident musicians. He is transported back to his youth and experiences before the outbreak of the First World War.

The novel moves back and forth between the present day and the thirty years before, as Gregory tries to recall past events and the relationships which have shaped him. JB's epigraph on the title page:

'It is the bright day that brings forth the adder'

is a quotation from *Julius Caesar*. And if you know the rest

'... And that craves wary walking'

you will also understand the journey that Gregory Dawson takes and how he comes to terms with truths not before revealed.

I have always been interested in authors who describe music and the experience of listening to music. Not many do. In *Howard's End* (1910), EM Forster wrote exquisitely about the Schlegel sisters' experience of listening to a performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*:

'For, as if things were going too far, Beethoven took hold of the goblins and made them do what he wanted. He appeared in person. He gave them a little push, and they began to walk in a major key instead of in a minor, and then he blew with his mouth and they were scattered!'

and continues for a good part of Chapter 5.

Whilst not quite on the same level, Priestley does explore the power of music on an individual's sensibilities. In *Angel Pavement*, the effect on Smeeth of hearing Brahms at a concert is life changing. And in *Bright Day* the Schubert acts as a catalyst for Dawson's exploration of his past:

'I knew at once when the 'cello began the exquisite quiet tone, slowly and gravely rocking in its immeasurable tenderness. A few moments

*later, when the 'cello went wandering to murmur its regret and the violin
with its piercing sweetness curved and rocked in the same little tune.*

I was far away, deep in a lost world and a lost time.'

Dee La Vardera