



“Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays

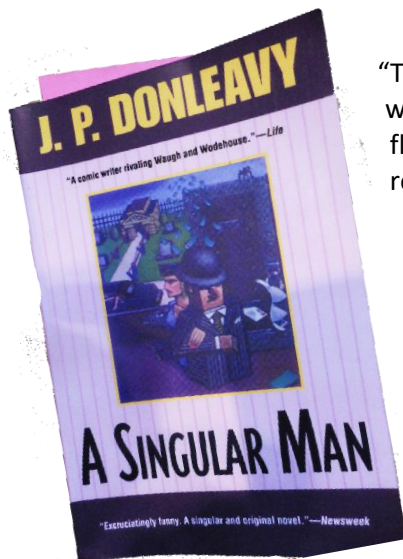
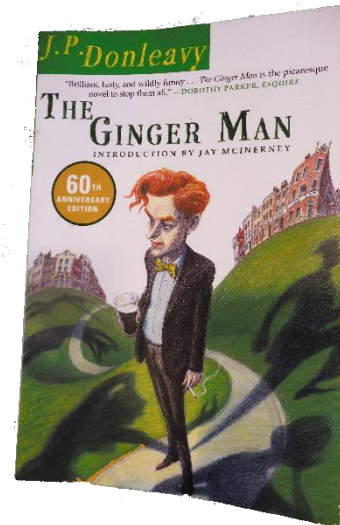


Meeting Mr. Donleavy

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I am very glad I read “The Singular Man” and “The Ginger (which I want to term “tangerine” for some reason) Man.” Author J. P. Donleavy refers to the character by that name only once in the novel and gives no explanation why he chose that adjective. A bar in Greenwich Village was named that --- after the novel became popular.

Starting with “Ginger,” my first strong reaction was that now I understood the difference between men and women. Oh, yes indeed! Most men will find this book hilarious. Women, I suspect, will be horrified. It's not the sex of which there is plenty but his outrageously callous behavior toward every woman he encounters. He may value a few male friendships but, even then, they seem to be based on what he can get out of one, primarily, money. Any cash he does get is immediately spent on liquor.



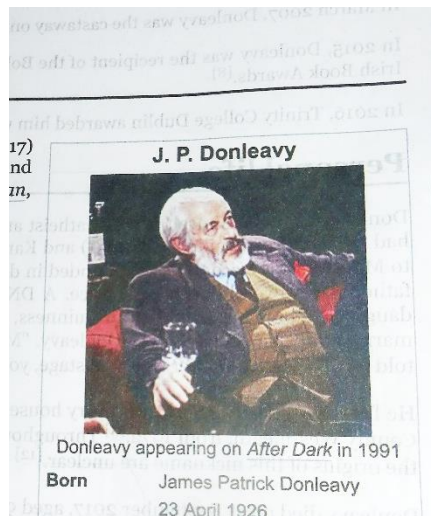
“The Singular Man” described the life of George Smith who's unimaginably wealthy in New York City. I'm sure there are penthouses with “two more crazy floors on top of this. . . I drop golf balls from the top” but with a step-down room with its own altar? “I play organ music. Burn incense. And I sit there.”

“Ginger,” interestingly, dives to the lowest level: nobody has a cent, Sebastian Dangerfield (I can't help but think of Rodney) pawns anything he can get his hands on or steals right down to the plumbing fixtures.

These tales are more interesting when one realized the author is no more than twenty-seven when “Ginger” is published, 37 when “Singular” is copyrighted. Truly these are the rambunctious fancies of a very imaginative young man. And, I must add, a spell-blindingly terrific author. I could find no quotable passages which would be published in our paper – his stream of consciousness when – well, let's call it “making love” (he wouldn't) are hilarious. Being so young and the originator of his own creations, he never encounters a female who doesn't immediately succumb – age, race, culture or wealth matters not at all. He's probably hardest on those for whom he cares the most. All in all, both of the protagonists are fully self-absorbed selfish young men. Dangerfield gives little thought to anyone else. Yet even then, I get the idea the love interest must accept him on his terms and, in most cases, be able and willing to support him.

A totally unpleasant character, you might say. Well, yes . . . but no. He's just young and doesn't know it.

I'd be tempted to read one of his later novels (if anyone has, please let me know) but, in truth, I've had enough. There are so many other books I want to get to.



Mr. Donleavy, on the other hand, seems perfectly charming. The photo I found shows him as what one would picture the ideal Irishman. Beard and tweeds and a picaresque smile with a glass in his right hand. (The credit says he's pictured appearing in a play so who knows? He was an actor as well.)

Born in Brooklyn, Donleavy grew up in the Bronx and received his education in this country before serving during World War II in the U.S. Navy. Once he was out and the war over, he moved to Ireland where he lived until he died at the age of ninety-one. He began to study bacteriology at Trinity College, Dublin, but left before obtaining a degree. He was certainly there long enough to make that the focal point of much of what occurs in "The Ginger Man."

Now listed as one of Modern Library's 100 best novels, "The Ginger Man" was initially banned in Ireland and the United States for its obscenity. I read that the lead character was in part based on a Trinity College companion also studying there on the G. I. Bill. Donleavy described his friend as a "saint though of a Rabelaisian kind."

Declaring himself an atheist at the age of fourteen, the author married Valerie Heron in 1946 when just twenty, had two children (one more than our young Dangerfield in "Ginger") and divorced three years later. Marrying again the following year he had two more children though DNA showed neither was his. He is quoted by a newspaper as saying "My worry is only to look after the welfare of the child, and after a certain stage, you can't worry about their parentage."

Fascinating man. Fascinating novels.

Written on November 20, 2020