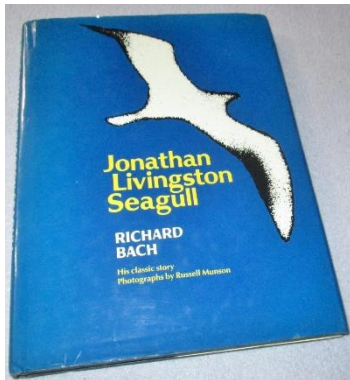


Richard Bach: Jonathan Livingston Seagull



I was recently reintroduced to this lyrical little novella that I last read when I finished my 'A' levels in 1984. Then, I wasn't too fond of it. I did enjoy it more this time around. Maybe because I read it cover to cover waiting in the queue at Boots... Really.

It is a bit 'of its time' but it is almost a companion-piece to St Exupery's Vol de Nuit (Night flight) as it exhilarates in the sheer joy of flying. Seen through the eyes of the titular seagull it explores the possibilities of flight rather than its functionality. Jonathan wants to fly higher, longer, faster than is necessary in the mundane search for fishermen's scraps. And in so doing he finds a profound enthusiasm and meaning in life.

Inevitably, he is rejected by the flock for being a bit mad, and after a dangerous manoeuvre in which he is thought to have been killed, the story takes us to "a farther shore" where Jonathan meets like-minded gulls and begins his education in the full potential of air travel. He excels, gains some followers and returns to the original flock to share his knowledge. Unsurprisingly, he is again spurned by the majority and held in awe by the few. Towards the end Jonathan departs a second time, leaving his lieutenant behind to continue the lessons in flight's wonder, admonishing him to not allow the group to think of him as any sort of divine being.

Part of the purpose of the story seems to be to challenge conventional rules of society in order to find 'real' meaning in a radical form of freedom. It is uncertain whether he was aware his tale ended up as a near allegory to the Gospel story but it is interesting to mark the similarities and differences. It won't be for everybody, but it has a quiet power that lingers pleasantly in the mind.