

change

Since you have ~~three~~ ^{four} other chances to hear something nifty tonight, I figured I might as well be the guy to ask the solemn literary question of this occasion. Namely, where would writers be without dedication?

Like any other literary theorist, I would not ask that question if I didn't already know the answer. (Pick up book) Writers would be left with a blank page right here, which is where dedications go.

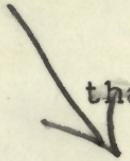
Book dedications have been around about as long as books have, so bear in mind that their history--as I'm about to gallop through it here--is the ten-minute pre-shrunk version.

Get up and talk about books is my assigned task here, but I think I'd better whittle the topic a little narrower than that. So, as somebody who has spent a lot of his adult life writing half a dozen books--and is trying as hard as I know how to commit a seventh--I'll bring the cosmos of books down to a single solemn literary question: /namely, where would writers of books be without dedication?

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been around about as long as books have,
~~Book dedications have hundreds of years of history, so bear in mind~~
~~their history-according-to-me is~~
~~that this is the ten-minute thin-air-of-Denver version.~~



I don't know whether any of you were unmerry enough on Christmas Day
 some years ago to be scanning the obituaries in the Dec. 25th New York
 Times as I was, but if you had been you'd have ^{noticed} ~~come across~~ the
 obituary which began: "Mary Moore Cross, to whom the late Ezra Pound
 in 1906 dedicated his first book of poems, Personae, died Thursday
 at her home in Montclair, New Jersey..."

That a few words at the front of a book should become
 the grace notes of a life of 92 years ~~is~~ as Mary Moore Cross's life was-- admittedly
 unusual. But dedication pages hold a strange power. The
 practice of an author singling out someone for inscription
 there, alone with the white space and posterity, has gone
on automatically for centuries, ~~and still thrives.~~ ~~The~~ 
 tiny Times memoriam to Mary Moore Cross, for instance,
~~attests that she is in company with such more recent~~
 dedicatees as

~~Book~~ dedications began as barter, a kind of wordsmith's wampum.

Writers as far back as Virgil and Lucretius can be found repaying ^{their} ~~monied~~ patrons with dedications. By Elizabethan times, patron-wooing had become so standard that one practitioner said dedications simply were bills of lading "drawn by the witty upon the great, and payable at sight."

~~They served as political insurance, too. "...It is hard not to slide into the panegyrick, when once one begins to speak of your Majesty," John Evelyn crooned in a masterpiece of wheedle directed to Charles II in 1664. What with patronage and politics,~~ honeying up a page or more with flattery became an

10/20

art form of its own. Dr. Samuel Johnson is known to have ghosted ^{- WRITTEN} ~~dedications~~ for the books of at least a dozen of his friends.

~~The dedication still is saying what it always has: "Thanks, from me and these hundreds and hundreds of sentences."~~

What saves the book dedication from being just an overweight black-and-white valentine is what makes interesting the entire business of ~~creating~~ ^{that we're all in:} books, the play of personality, ~~and the echoes of eras.~~

Some of ~~the~~^{OUR} departed luminaries of fiction, for instance,
 left dedications in which their singularities shine through
 with high wattage. William Faulkner was at his most squirely
 when he tapped in at the start of The Town: "To Phil Stone--
 He did half the laughing for 30 years." *(Correct Sun. L. with)* And with what
 perserverance Hemingway reported on his domestic situation:
The Sun Also Rises-- "For Hadley..."; Death in the Afternoon--
 "To Pauline"; For Whom The Bell Tolls--"...for Martha Gellhorn"
Across the River and Into The Trees--"To Mary..."

2 min
10 lines

Even book critics

~~And critics~~--in the poetic words of Robert Burns, "our friends the reviewers/
those chippers and hewers"--even ^{the} critics have been honored, sort of, in dedications.

In 1893, when Lew Wallace's novel The Prince of India was about to come out, he fretfully dedicated it to his father, who "loved literature for the pleasure it brought him, and could I have had his counsel while composing this work, the critics would not be so terrible to me now that it is about to appear ... going to press."

EA follows →

Some dedications are honed for mischief. In his translation of the Arabian Nights in the late nineteenth century, Sir Richard Burton--the writer/explorer, not the memorable Welshman and actor--Sir Richard Burton took revenge on the curators of Oxford's Bodleian Library by dedicating to them the volume with "the rarest and raciest passages" from the manuscript they had refused to loan him.

Doig's Law of book dedications, which I check every so often against the bestseller list, is that the loftier the sales of a book, the more mundane its dedication is likely to be. I think I formulated this during a book season when Jacqueline Susann dedicated her latest ^{steamy story} to her mother and Charles Colson piously dedicated some lesson he'd learned out of a Watergate jail term to his father. Having thumbed through ^{recent} ~~the~~ bestsellers ~~of last Sunday's~~ ~~New York Times~~ ~~list~~ ~~in preparation for tonight,~~ I can report that my theory is still ^{today} ~~an occasional interesting blip~~ pretty much true, although with ~~some blips at either end~~ ~~and a sense~~ of magnificent satisfaction, ~~or at least magnificent something,~~ from Lee Iacocca, dedicating his latest to "the 6½ million people who

that good writer and good man Tony Hillerman graciously includes in ^{latest} his dedication his brother-in-law. By and large, though, best-sellerdom tends toward the tepid in dedications--the tamest part of something titled Memories of Midnight ^{surely} is Sidney Sheldon dedicating it simply "For Alexandra, with love"--and I think it's really a little disappointing that Donald Trump did not dedicate his book to himself.

If there is a single steady reward for the dedication-watcher, it is the frequency with which the genre produces gems of an expected rightness. Can anyone doubt that "J" would have dedicated The Sensuous Woman other than to "L.F., J.N., A.V.N."

and an

~~etc.? Or that the Watergate gush of books would bear a cargo~~

~~of contrite testimonials to the wives who stood by their indicted hubbies? Or that it would be an Englishman dreamily writing about about in the field of wildlife who could come up with the my own all-time favorite book who in nonpareil of dedications? (Jonathan Franklin, Two Owls at Eton: "To my mother, who bravely put up with my owls for many a long and troublesome day when I was absent.")~~

Professor
(Carlin)

~~It~~ that Colin Cherry, after dedicating the first edition of On Human Communication to "my dog Pym," would eventually dedicate the second edition to "all those human beings who enquired so kindly after my dog Pym" and then the fateful third edition, "to the memory of my dog Pym."

idiosyncratically

Or that it would be an Englishman ~~dreamily~~ writing about wildlife who could come up with my own all-time favorite dedication? Jonathan Franklin, in his book *Two Owls at Eton*, managed to remember to dedicate it to his mother-- "who bravely put up with my owls for many a long and troublesome day when I was absent."

The future seems secure. As long as there are mates to be
assauged, ^{critics to be fretted about,} ~~editors to be commemorated,~~ mothers to put up
with Etonian owls, the dedication will have its place in
literature. Right there beyond the title page, just where
young Ezra Pound assured a young woman all those years ago
that "This book is for Mary Moore of Trenton, if she wants it."

For my part, in my books so far, I've managed dedications to my wife Carol; to a gang of 18 friends who are writers and teachers in Missoula; to a friend who saved me from drowning; to my wife again--same wife; to my graduate school history professor who tried to show me the patterns on the land; and most recently in Ride With Me, Mariah Montana, to the ~~one time brief resident of Montana and now~~ writer Wallace Stegner--who simply seems to me, as I put it on that page of waiting space, "one in a century." With that dedication to the author who has fathered so many books about our western half of America, I simply ^{sincere} was saying what the dedication always has said: "Thanks, from me and my hundreds and hundreds of sentences in this book."

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~~mine, and Anne's to
and Clive's for "Eddie and June,"
and A.C.'s for
and Eda's to~~

we are all saying what the dedication always has said: "Thanks, from us and our hundreds and hundreds of sentences."