

THE BOOK I WISHED I HAD WRITTEN

I approached this Writing Prompt exercise with open mind. Just what would I choose?

I headed to my extensive library, now nicely rehoused in the “shed” and began to select favourite books.

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First up, *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh. An obvious choice and an inspiration of course of the dreamy spires of Oxford and a seat of learning thought too far for oneself, but nonetheless, perhaps beautifully wistful. Maybe, Dexter’s Inspector Morse books could be a good choice?

Next selection, the diaries of James Lees-Milne, and his exploits among the great houses and gentry of England in the premature days of National Trust preservation. What some people may not know is that my hero here was also an accomplished historian of all things Bath; but also, the Renaissance, Baroque and Harold Nicolson.

Harold Nicolson provides a useful link to the First World War, of which I have a deep interest in (the War I mean not Nicolson). During the First World War, one C E Montague, once a sub-editor of the Manchester Guardian, dyed his hair and joined up at the age of 47 serving as a subaltern on the front-line shuffling VIPs to and from the battlefields in Flanders et al. Why select C E Montague? Well, this unsung forgotten correspondent wrote a brilliant damnation of those responsible in strategically directing operations on the Western Front, which he reported as pure attrition – basically, the process of reducing something’s or someone’s strength or effectiveness through sustained attack or pressure – a policy that was inherently proved wrong time and time again as our gallant boys went to their deaths by going over the top at no surprise to the enemy.

C E Montague wrote his “damnation” during the war years and gathered the articles up into a single publication in 1922 called *Disenchantment*. C E Montague was the right man in the right place to confirm Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry (dismissed by the Military as insubordination during the war); but, also to suggest that the problems left

behind by the Treaty of Versailles was only stirring up trouble for the future. Within ten years of C E Montague's famous, now almost forgotten book, the Third Reich had started to gather pace and one Adolf Hitler was shortly to assume full power in a changing Germany.

The reason I believe I will choose C E Montague's *Disenchantment* is that my character is one of conforming and rarely rebelling against the establishment. But here was a man who started the campaign full of vigour and trust in our Generals, but as all correspondents should do, reported the truth and had no reason to blanket praise; or as we refer to this these days, "lip-service."

I have a first edition of C E Montague's book. It is well thumbed and I return to it frequently. It is written in a Victorian style, forthright language, more fitting for the latter echelons of the industrial revolution, but that said, it is a moving and often harrowing read.

Yep, C E Montague is my choice. By the way, he was the father of Aubrey Montague of *Chariots of Fire* fame!