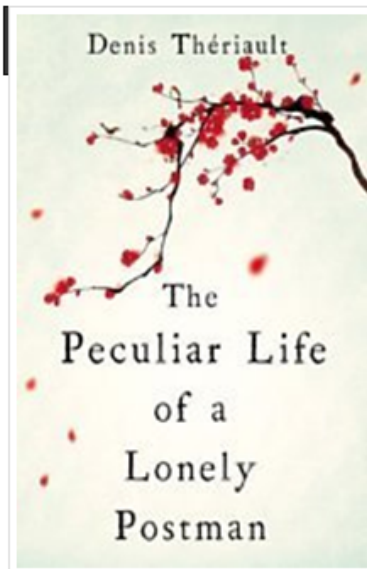


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Exclusive interview with Denis Theriault



The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman

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by Lucy Walton | 12 September 2014

In *The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman*, Bilodo lives a solitary daily life, routinely completing his post round every day and returning to his empty Montreal apartment. But he has found a way to break the cycle – Bilodo has taken to stealing people's mail, steaming open the envelopes and reading the letters inside.

And so it is he comes across Ségolène's letters. She is corresponding with Gaston, a master poet, and their letters are each composed of only three lines. They are writing each other haikus. The simplicity and elegance of their poems move Bilodo and he begins to fall in love with her.

But one day, out on his round, he witnesses a terrible and tragic accident. Just as Gaston is walking up to the post-box to mail his next haiku to Ségolène, he is hit by a car and dies on the side of the road. And so Bilodo makes an extraordinary decision – he will impersonate Gaston and continue to write to Ségolène under this guise. But how long can the deception continue for?

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How much is novel writing and screenwriting interchangeable for you?

These are very different writing techniques which are not interchangeable, but they can influence each other. Very consciously, I write my novels on the classical structure of a movie. The screenwriter is never very far behind the novelist, but he stays in the shadow. Writing for theatre, TV, movies or a novel is always writing, but the technique differs very much. The focus is not the same. When you write a play, essentially, you write dialogue, you tell the story of people who talk together. At the other end of the spectre, there is cinema, which is a medium of image and sound; when you write for cinema, you must think in terms of images, music and action; dialog is important but not essential – you could very well have a movie without a single spoken word. TV writing stands somewhere between these two. But writing a novel is a different experience. I consider it as “total writing”. In the same time, you are the play-writer, the actors, the director, the composer and the cameraman. And you must mix all these elements in a literary way, with a style that has to be yours and nobody else. For me, novel writing is the ultimate form storytelling.

Please tell us about the character of Bilodo.

Bilodo is an eminently modern character: he isolates himself in a personal bubble, takes refuge in the small virtual universe he has created; in this 21st century, I believe that there are many people who resemble him. Bilodo fears peoples, and love frightens him - he prefers to live in the wonderful imaginary world that he invented around Ségolène. He's a paradoxical being, pitiful and admirable at the same time. Bilodo is a dreamer, a kind of poetic warrior who will fight until death to preserve his ideal.

Where did your inspiration for the story come from?

The inspiration of what I write often comes from my dreams, but in this case it was different: the original idea of *The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman* came to me from a very concrete incident. A few years ago, while I was checking my mail, I noticed an envelope whose corner seemed partially unsealed, as if somebody had tried to open it, and that was what started the creative process. I immediately imagined an indiscreet factor who kept for himself certain personal letters and bring them back home, opening them with vapour and reading them with curiosity: Bilodo was born, and his story took rapid form in my mind.

The book has been compared to Julian Barnes and Haruki Murakami, so how does this make you feel?

Flattered, of course, to find myself in such an excellent company. And slightly embarrassed too; I must confess I have never read yet anything from Murakami, whom I know only by reputation - a gap which I intend to fill very soon. I have the highest esteem for Julian Barnes, this Master of contemporary literature. I am not sure that my style resembles his, but I certainly feel some kind of philosophical bond with this exceptional author. The reasons which make us compare an author with another always seemed strange to me. In some cases, there is obviously a common inspiration, but sometimes it is purely instinctive: a detail, a sentence, a simple word, and an association is created. Anyway, I will take these comparisons like a compliment, though perhaps a little too flattering.

Why do you think that the book needed a second wind after it was first published in 2008?

The market of the Canadian book is quite limited because of the crushing presence of our gigantic American neighbour. I was happy to learn that the novel would be published in the U.K. by Hesperus Press, and could thus join more readers. And I am delighted that we decided to keep the excellent English translation of Liedewij Hawke, a woman of talent, and also a friend. I do not want to compare the two books, but the new Hesperus version looks very attractive to me: the book is beautiful. If I were not the author, I would desire very much to read it.

What is next for you?

I am currently finishing a new manuscript. It is a novel which I started to write last year, not knowing yet that **The Peculiar Life of a Lonely Postman** would be published at Hesperus Press: in fact, it is the volume 2 of this story. It is the continuation of Bilodo's adventures, and more precisely those of Tania, the young waitress of the restaurant Madelinot in the first novel, who secretly loves our postman... But that is all I can say.

by Lucy Walton for www.femalefirst.co.uk

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