

## Books I Found On the Shelf of My End Table

*I May Not Be Totally Perfect, But Parts of Me Are Excellent*, by Ashleigh Brilliant. This man, history's only full-time professional epigrammist, is, well, Brilliant. (Another of his titles is, *We've Beem Through So Much Together, and Most of It Was Your Fault*). Original brief quips, each accompanied by a clever detailed line drawing. "Life Can Be So Tragic. You're Here Today and Here Tomorrow." "I Have Just Discovered the Truth, and Can't Understand Why Everybody Isn't Eager To Hear It."

*Their Houses*, by Meredith Sue Willis. Another demonstration of the journey this author has made from the close-to-home settings and subjects of the previous century. I've already devoured it, so I'll relocate it to some other stack. Temporarily, of course.

*Strength In What Remains*, by Tracy Kidder. I read this decades ago. Pretty good and certainly uplifting. *The Soul of a New Machine* is my favorite from this author, back in the early eighties. You know, fifteen years ago. Why is it here? I'll leave it on a table in the Yemeni coffee shop and somebody will pick it up.

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot. I'm about a third into this, and it lives up to all the hype. A story which ought to be known, delivered with just-right pacing and tone.

*Rainer Maria Rilke: Selected Poems*, edited by C. F. MacIntyre. I've had this slender volume since at least 1975, and it keeps showing up in whichever pile of books is nearest to my hand. (Also *William Butler Yeats: Selected Poems and Two Verse Plays*. It's not here. so it's probably beside my bed, or in the stack on the table saw, or . . .)

*The Bhagavad Gita*. Ditto the above.

*The Old Farmer's Almanac*, by Old Farmers. Delightful little essays, devilish puzzles, sunrise and sunset times, and info on what's happening in the night sky. If these darn clouds go away in the next week or so, I'll see brilliant Venus in the west early in the night, and especially brilliant Mars in the east. (The almanac's weather forecasts are just for fun.)

*The Illustrated Odyssey* by Homer. The excellent old Samuel Butler translation, in a cheap hardcover at Barnes and Noble. I translated this epic myself class long ago. Well, translated the first eight lines. It was second-semester Greek. A frustration with this printing: It's lavishly illustrated with paintings, but no clue as to who painted them.

*Nobody's Fool* by Richard Russo. I'm not one of the many superfans of Russo, but he's an accomplished writer, and this book kept me smiling and thinking, two of my favorite activities.

*King Lear*, by Shakespeare, New Folger Library Edition. I think I was looking up something or other in this once. Widely considered Shakespeare's greatest play, but not anybody's favorite because it's kind of a bummer.

*Best American Short Stories, 1993*, Louise Erdrich, guest editor. Katrina Kennison, series editor. I turn again and again to the dozen or so of these I own. Since 1978, it's been a thoughtfully edited and handsomely produced undertaking. Extra bonus for 1993: The first story is "The Idiot President." (It's not a prescient look at our times. It's the title of a play presented by the traveling troupe of characters who inhabit the story.)

*Holidays on Ice*, by David Sedaris. I appreciate smooth, elegant, savvy writing no matter the topic, and this guy always delivers for me. And these are essays I would gladly read from a lesser stylist.

*Foucault's Pendulum*. by Umberto Eco. There's too much to say. I will write a sort of review thingy after dealing with the last bits of the biography I've been editing for money, and offer the review to Meredith Sue to post if she thinks it worthy.

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### **Department of "Huh?"**

We already know that many of the words and phrases we use come from the works of William Shakespeare, like:

Wild Goose chase. For Goodness sake. Neither here nor there. Break the ice. Lie low.

Foregone conclusion. Dead as a doornail. Mum's the word—and dozens more.

According to a recent NYT story, *Saturday Night Live* has been another source of everyday discourse, including:

Never mind. Oh No! I must say. That's the ticket. Wouldn't be prudent. Sweater weather.

Wrong! Making copies. Superstar. Good times. Really?

Yeah, that's what I say, "Really?" Well, SNL is huge, and has been for a long time, so *Saturday Night Live* in a headline is a dependable click magnet.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/01/31/arts/television/-saturday-night-live-skit-catchphrases-quotes.html>

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### **Watch Your Language**

. . . large boulder the size of a small boulder is completely blocking eastbound lane of Highway 145 mm78 at Silverpick Road. Please use caution and . . .

- Sheriff of San Miguel County, Colorado

[I'm using "Silverpick Road" as the title of my next guitar tour.]

The hypothalamus plays a major role in the regulation of basic biological drives related to survival, including the so-called 'four Fs,': fighting, fleeing, feeding, and mating.

- *Human Physiology: from cells to systems.*

After Ruble was taken to the state police detachment, she 'produced a plethora of paraphernalia from her bra, a vial containing methamphetamine from her pants, a bag containing heroin from her bra and a digital scale in her bra,' according to the complaint.

- WOWK News

[I'm trying and failing to picture this. Maybe because I really do not want to.]

. . . the type of win that escaped WVU in recent weeks against the likes of Arizona State, Kansas State and TCU.

[Newspaper sports writers didn't grow up wanting to be writers. They wanted to be athletes. Trifles like grammar, usage, coherence, and deadlines mean nothing. Among the profession's multitudinous endemic sins is the use of "the likes of." It's a phrase they stick in once in a while. What does it mean? Subtract those three words and the sentence is perfectly clear, and shorter. (And I'm not going to go into "respectively," because if I get started I'll write more than you want to read. (If I haven't already.))]

. . . a confirmatory case of bird flu.

[Making a two-syllable word, "confirmed," into a five. I call this tendency extrasyllabificationism.]

The victim sustained serious injuries to both lower legs.

- WDTV News

[I know what it means—the lower portion of the legs—but for an instant my brain went elsewhere. (FYI: He was hit by a snowplow.)]

With one year of eligibility left, the Mountaineers are undoubtedly excited about the impact Weimer can make on their offense.

- *Dominion-Post*

[The Mountaineers have one year of eligibility left?]

The aircraft has a T-tail and is powered by two Garrett TFE731 turbofans mounted each side of the rear fuselage.

- *Wikipedia*

[The thing actually has two engines, one on each side. A quite common example of writing without thinking first.]

To better understand the area's seismic risks, Dr. Hough and her colleagues have been studying its faults, a difficult task as they lie buried under swampy sediments.

[Structurally, the two possible antecedents to “they” are equally valid, so it may be the unfortunate researchers who are buried under swampy sediment. A difficult task indeed.]

But DeepSeek’s engineers said they needed only about \$6 million in raw computing power to train their new system. That was roughly 10 times less than what Meta spent building its latest A.I. technology.

- NYT

[What might “ten times less” mean. I’m guessing it’s one tenth, a term which is clear to everyone, but I honestly do not know.]

*One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This.*

[Attention-commanding title from the Egyptian novelist Omar El-Akkad. If I saw this on a store shelf, I would certainly pick it up and read the jacket material.]

Language fails are fun in other people’s writing, but serious in your own. You need to be assiduously looking for them, beginning with the third or fourth revision of your completed manuscript. But you’ll miss some of them. That’s why there are editors. And another thing: An English teacher is NOT an editor. They might be an editor in addition to their teaching, but they also might be a lapidary artist in addition to their teaching. Get a real editor. Preferably me, but there are hundreds of good ones out there.

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I’ve now worked every *New York Times* Saturday and Sunday crossword puzzle in their archive, 1993-present. Still haven’t finished that Faulkner paper for Dr. Foster’s English 341 class, and he’s been dead 40 years.

Please share something, to help lower the spam-to-real messages ratio in my inbox. A list from your own stack of books, something you’re writing, an idea for something you might write some day. I’ll reply with some well-reasoned and insightful comments, and heartfelt encouragement.

**Danny Williams editorwv@hotmail.com**