

TAIWAN

WRITER WHO PROVIDED KNIFE FOR MINISTER TO SELF-CASTRATE DIES



The death of the Taiwanese author and politician Li Ao at the age of 82 will likely see a global reduction in pages printed, such was the prodigious nature of his output. He published over 100 books, and when he died had just completed his fortieth volume of collected writings, well short of the 85 he was hoping to get done before death intervened. The world will also be the poorer for his style of attention-getting in the political arena, such as taking a knife and a dog chain into a parliamentary session in 2006 to make the point to the defence minister that the US was treating Taiwan like a guard dog. He called the minister a coward and offered him the knife to cut his own testicles off. In another parliamentary debate on American arms he put on a gas mask, set off tear gas and waved a stun gun around, causing panic. In yet another protest against American weapons purchases he employed yet another prop: a picture of himself as a younger man, naked.



AUSTRALIA

NOBEL CANDIDATE PROPS UP THE BAR – FROM THE OTHER SIDE



Since the Nobel committee decided to delay their decision to award a prize for Literature until next year while they focus on the more pressing matter of some of their members being sex pests, supporters of the Australian recluse Gerald Murnane may be getting restless. At 78, time is not in his favour for winning the award, but neither has it diminished his idiosyncratic ways. When a *New York Times* reporter travelled to his remote Australian outpost recently, Murnane handed him a piece of paper with three questions on it: “Are you at all interested in golf?”; “Are you at all interested in horse racing?”; and “What do you propose to do for lunch?” A symposium on his work was also held at his local golf club, during which, as the club’s barman, he tended bar during the lunch break.

JUST ONE THING...

Ever find you've ploughed through some immense volume, but can only recall a single detail six months later? Here are some from the editor's tiny mind (with apologies to the authors)

**Hammer of the Gods** by Stephen Davis

The blues guitarist Sonny Boy Williamson once set fire to his hotel room in Birmingham (west Midlands, not Alabama) when he tried to stew a rabbit in the kettle.

Gentleman Thief by Peter Scott

When burglars hear an alarm, they don't take it as a sign to leave immediately, but rather an indication of the beginning of a minimum period of time before the police could possibly arrive.

Centaur by Declan Murphy and Ami Rao

Jockey Declan Murphy was in such a bad way following a fall at Haydock that he was given the last rites and his obituary sent to press on the front page of the *Racing Post*. Doctors were preparing to switch off life support, but had to wait for his parents to arrive from Ireland to give their consent. Murphy's parents took the eight-hour ferry instead of the one-hour flight as his father had a phobia about flying. During the seven-hour delay, Murphy woke up.

Child 44 by Tom Rob Smith

Trains transporting prisoners during Stalin's time had some sort of device with sharp hooks hanging beneath the carriages to deter prisoners from breaking through the floor and dropping onto the tracks.

Stalin's Englishman by Andrew Lownie

When the flamboyant Guy Burgess defected to Russia in 1951 he had no intention of neglecting his wardrobe forever. Although he didn't emerge as resident in Moscow until 1956, he soon requested that friends send him pyjamas. He gave them a choice of two colours: either navy blue or white; and three fabrics: silk, nylon or terylene.

The Road to Jonestown by Jeff Guinn

The 1978 Jonestown massacre in Guyana, when more than 900 followers of “The Reverend” Jim Jones committed mass suicide by drinking a soft drink laced with poison, is the origin of the phrase “don't drink the Kool-Aid” to mean “don't unquestioningly swallow people's dangerous ideas.” Except the victims didn't drink Kool-Aid – they drank something called Flavor Aid. The press preferred Kool-Aid because it was better known.

Had a similar experience of only retaining a single detail from a book you've read? Send your own examples to info@strong-words.com.



BLOGTASTIC!

The Literary Edit
thelitedit.com

The Lit Edit's Lucy is originally from Sussex, but now lives “between Sydney, London and LA, which sounds far more glamorous than it is in reality.” The Literary Edit specializes in “all things bookish, and stylish travel with a literary twist.”

Why the need to share your obsession?

I've always had an inherent desire to share with others my love of books. It can turn me into something of a book bore at times, as truly there are few things I love more than talking about books.

Your blog has a bright and sunny feel. Do you favour positive and optimistic books?

Not at all, my favourite book is *A Little Life*, by Hanya Yanagihara, which is one of the most heartbreaking books I've ever read. The bright and sunny feel might be down to my apartment's proximity to Bondi Beach.

What makes a perfect travel book? Which are your favourites?

I adore rich and descriptive writing that transports a reader to a faraway land where they can see and smell the goings on around them. *Chocolat*, by Joanne Harris, is second to none when it comes to a vivid and evocative sense of place, but my favourite travel books are *Wild*, by Cheryl Strayed, *Shantaram*, by Gregory David Roberts, and *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac.

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I see it as my duty as a reader to support them in any way I can. Favourites include Hungerford Books, Kew Bookshop and Toppings Bookseller's in Bath. Knowledgeable and friendly booksellers, a great selection of books, and a warm and cosy atmosphere are essentials. I love the free tea and coffee you get at Topping's.

What is the definitive Lit Edit book?

It's got to be Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, the book that inspired me to start my blog in the first place. I loved it so much that when I saw it had a sticker on its front that said it was part of the BBC Big Read, I printed the list of 100 books and swore to finish them before my 30th. This blog started as a way to record those 100 books and has since evolved into something much, much bigger. I finished the final book from the list just two hours before the clock struck midnight on the eve of my 30th.