Donald Sinden (A Touch of the Memoirs)
Looking one day at the enormous nude statue of Achilles at Hyde Park Corner I heard a Londoner saying to a visitor, "No, no, dear-Big Ben is a clock."

Joseph Alsop
Auntie Bye had a tongue that could take the paint off a barn.

Erasmus
It is well known that among the blind the one-eyed man is king.

Charles Dickens
He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favor of two.

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Ballast is an acronym for Books Art Language Logic Ambiguity Science and Teaching, as well as a distant allusion to Blast, the short-lived publication founded during World War I by Wyndham Lewis, the Vorticist artist and writer. Ballast is mainly a pastiche of astonishing passages from books, magazines, diaries and other writings. Put differently, it is a journal devoted to wit, the contents of which are intended to be insightful, amusing or thought provoking.

The purposes of Ballast are educational, apolitical and noncommercial. It does not carry advertisements, nor is it supposed to be purchased or sold. It is published approximately every three months, beginning in the fall (more or less) and ending in the summer.

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Jean Cocteau [The artist] is a cat that walks by itself...[he or she] must walk along the dark side, and keep to the edge of the great main roads.
One of my funniest early memories: Mama had back trouble, and one winter night—we all slept in the same room where it was warm—Mama said to Daddy, "Grady, you have got to rub my back." Well, we didn't have electric lights, so Daddy got up in the dark and got a bottle of liniment and rubbed Mama down. And she said, "Oh, that's the best stuff." Then she went to sleep in about thirty minutes, saying, "That is the best liniment I've ever seen." When we got up the next morning, we saw Daddy had rubbed her down with O-Cedar furniture polish. I was about six or seven then.


Yiddish Proverb The tongue is the pen of the heart.

Mother gave me a cent with which to buy a banana. I returned from the corner Italian's with a ripe not too ripe yellow banana of prodigious size. "Here is a cent. Go and get another like it," said mother. I went. But I made the supreme mistake of bringing my first banana with me. I gave the Italian the penny and was about to help myself to a banana. "You already gotta one," said the Italian, pointing to the previous already paid-for banana in my own hand. Of course! But no amount of explanation could make it clear to him why I should have two bananas in my hands when I was paying only for one.

He [his father, a medical doctor] could seldom get anybody's name right, including those of people he treated, and in later years, when I was enlarging my circle of friends, he was not above telling me, "You had a telephone call from a Mr. Vaseline" — and I could interpret that as meaning Mr. Basil Dean, the producer. And my father had a most distinctive rechristening for Tallulah Bankhead; she was known to him as Tarara Buncombe in later years.

CEDRIC HARDWICKE

DOUGLAS JERROLD
Dogmatism is puppyism come to its full growth.

HIGHER RECOMMENDED

"Remember," wrote the British art critic John Ruskin in 1853, "that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless: peacocks and lilies for instance." When a peacock unfolds its plumage, the eyespots on its feathers form exact logarithmic spirals, like those in a daisy, a pinecone, and a sunflower. Twenty years later, Ruskin's remark inspired the Aesthetic Movement ("Art for art's sake"), of which the chief proponents were the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde and the American painter James A.M. Whistler. Wilde sometimes wore a sunflower in his lapel; and Whistler, as is documented in this thoroughly researched and richly illustrated volume (with 250 illustrations, nearly half in color), created an opulent dining room for London businessman Frederick Leyland, with peacocks as the main motif. Completed amid controversy in 1877, Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room was dismantled and sold after Leyland's death, and, in 1923, reconstructed in the U.S. at the Freer Gallery of Art, a branch of the Smithsonian Institution, where it remains on view. A key event in design history, it was restored physically in 1989 through 1992; and now this book restores it historically, thereby "dispelling some of the myths and misconceptions that had settled over the story like mantles of aging varnish." As a cultural biography, the book's greatest virtue is its breadth of focus: Just as Whistler's interior served as an elaborate setting for Leyland's Chinese porcelain collection, Merrill provides a rich wide factual setting for the Peacock Room.

CHINESE PROVERB
To talk much and get nowhere is to climb a tree to catch a fish.
During one Christmas holiday in London I was taken to a fancy dress ball at the Town Hall in Kensington and I went as a candle and candlestick. I was sixteen. I fashioned a white tubular arrangement out of cardboard to go on my head, and from crepe paper a yellow and blue candle-flame; also a wide white cardboard collar. I won the first prize, which was a large, brown, fiber suitcase. But it was a humiliating experience as so many people flicked their cigarettes into my collar and then said, "Sorry, thought you were an ashtray."


There was my art teacher, Mrs. Zable, who if we'd made a wonderful lino cut, would say, "Ooh, would you do some on material for me?" So you'd do your lino cut print all over some material and a week later she'd turn up in this badly made skirt with your lino cut print all over it.


**GRAHAM GREENE**

I remember distinctly the suddenness with which a key turned in a lock and I found I could read.

**THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH**

Cynicism is a small brass field-piece that eventually bursts and kills the artillery-man.

**VLADIMIR NABOKOV**

She took off one glove, stroked the bed table, and consulted the face of her finger.
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Jan Tschichold, The New Typography. Translated by Ruari McLean. Introduction by Robin Kinross. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). ISBN 0-520-07147-6. One year before the publication of the first German edition of this famous book, the Swiss-born typographer and book designer Jan Tschichold (pronounced Yohn CHICK-hold) gave a lecture in Munich with the same title. His lecture, an advertisement promised, will be illustrated by more than 100 slides, many in color, "and there will be no discussion afterwards." That terse statement, notes Ruari McLean, "seems to say something about the firmness of Tschichold's views" at age 25. Six years later, several months after Hitler became Chancellor, Tschichold was taken into "protective custody" for six weeks by the Nazis as part of a crackdown on bolshevist radicals. Soon after, emigrating first to Switzerland, then to England, he evolved from "a tireless promoter of modernism in typography," writes Robin Kinross, to "one of its most acute and sometimes acid critics." That may explain in part why the original version of this innovative and influential book (which the young Tschichold championed in 1928, then renounced in 1946 as too militaristic) was translated into English only recently. How wonderful to hold it now, with its famous black frontispiece opposite the title page, and to realize its verbal and visual effect on the authors of subsequent books on graphic design, such as Gyorgy Kepes, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Paul Rand. Among the charms of this paperbound edition are the elegance and appropriateness of the cover design (by Steve Renick), in which formal strategies that Tschichold celebrated (grid-based edge alignment, asymmetry, sans serif typefaces, primary colors) are applied in a quietly powerful way.

YIDDISH PROVERB
I've heard it before. That joke has a long beard.

RIGHT
He [an officer on a “dry” British ship during World War II] was a short round man with a “baby bottom” face, known as “Pinkie,” and in the absence of any branded alcohol, he mixed a cocktail called Pinkie’s Revenge. You must believe me when I tell you the ingredients: a base of brandy made in Cairo, rather more than a few drops of “bitters,” a splash of Eau de Cologne and, to provide a cloudiness like an egg nog, a dollop of Brylcream. It was lethal! It tasted innocuous enough, but I was warned that the effect would strike me about three hours later, so to be safe I retired to my cabin. I sat on my bunk happily reading when something seemed to hit me on the back of the head. I came to seventeen hours later in the heat of the Red Sea. I have never been so ill.


On waking this morning I thought how lovely it would be to have a tame bird again. There has been Percy, a South African grey parrot who lived with us for about twenty-five years, gave us a lot of laughs and painful nips, could recite about the first two lines of a Hamlet soliloquy—“O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! Is it not monstrous that this player here”—except that he substituted “parrot” for “player,” followed by gales of laughter; he also ripped sitting-room curtains to shreds.


STANLEY ELKIN A truth about art is the company it keeps with the slightly askew, the fly in that woodpile of symmetry.
The best way to educate the younger generation (as well as yourself) is not to rebuke them but patiently to practice all your life what you preach to others.

If Adolf Hitler came back [to the United States] and said “I will reduce taxes” he’d win by a landslide.

If her dress had pockets, my wife would look like a pool table.

As one gets older, it happens that in the morning one fails to remember the airplane trip to be taken in a few hours or the lecture scheduled for the afternoon. Memory does return in time, but the suspicion remains that in the end dying will consist in simply forgetting to live.
ROBERT FROST (Selected Letters) My poems—I should suppose everybody's poems—are all set to trip the reader head foremost into the boundless. Ever since infancy I have had the habit of leaving my blocks, carts, chairs and such like ordinaries where people would be pretty sure to fall forward over them in the dark. Forward, you understand, and in the dark.

My daddy never went shopping, but while my mother was sick, he had to take me to buy a bathing suit. I was four or five, and he bought me an adult size-fourteen bathing suit, a size which I have never worn my entire life.

When he got us home, Mother asked, "Why did you get her that bathing suit?"

He said, "That's the one she wanted."

Evidently he had said, "Pick out a bathing suit," and I had—a white two-piece. I can still remember it because you can't return a bathing suit, and every year I would try it on thinking that it might be the right size. It never was.

RANDALL JARRELL
Some poetry seems to have been written on typewriters by other typewriters.

MRS PATRICK CAMPBELL [to Noel Coward, after seeing the first performance of Private Lives] All your characters talk like typewriters, but I do quite like it when you do your little humming at the piano.

AKIO MORITA (Made in Japan) The Japanese constantly pare down and reduce the complexity of products and ideas to the barest minimum. They streamline the design, reduce the number of parts, and simplify the inner workings and parts. The influences of Zen and haiku poetry are often evident in the simplicity and utility of Japanese design.

JOHANNES BRAHMS If there is anyone here whom I have not insulted, I beg his pardon.

KURT VONNEGUT in a lecture at the University of Northern Iowa on 19 April 1999.

ABOVE
Face made entirely of letterforms by HEIDI KAUTZA (1999).
HIGHLY RECOMMENDED
Frank Gehry: Architecture in Motion. VHS color video. 45 minutes, 1994. (Produced by Robert Sherrin for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation / distributed by Films for the Humanities and Sciences, Box 2053, Princeton NJ 08543 @ 800/257-5126; website <www.films.com>). The title of this annotated conversation with Frank Gehry, a Canadian-born American architect, is a play on words. It alludes both to his lifelong interest in hockey (when visiting schools, he prefers to play hockey with students rather than to lecture) and to his increasingly prominent role (at age 69) as an aging enfant terrible of architecture. Born in Toronto, he worked during childhood in a family-owned hardware store, from which he developed an interest in simple construction methods and a wide range of common, inexpensive building materials.

His ad hoc, often brutish architectural style (described by critics as “Deconstructivist”) is reminiscent of anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’ definition (in The Savage Mind) of a bricoleur, a jack-of-all-trades who has few preconceptions and relies on unorthodox ways to make use of “whatever is at hand.” Gehry has applied the same approach less radically to furniture design, most notably in chairs made of corrugated cardboard and those of woven wooden strips (each of which is named for a hockey strategy). In this interesting and instructive film biography, there are excerpts from a critique with architectural students; visits to more than a dozen Gehry buildings (e.g., the Norton Residence, his own remodeled home in Santa Monica, the Walt Disney Concert Hall); and views inside the factory where his woven wood chairs are manufactured.

JANE YOLEN The moon is a sickle for pruning the stars.

DONALD SINDEN (A Touch of the Memoirs) [describing Frank Verral] A kind man of medium height and enormous strength, he had a decided paunch which he always claimed was “not a paunch but a hollow back.”
Exaggeration is to paint a snake and add legs.

Imagine, perhaps, an art form that is comprised 10% of music, 25% of architecture, 12% of drawing, 18% of shoemaking, 30% of painting and 5% of smell. What would it be like? How would it work? How would some of the specific art works appear? How would they function? How would the elements interact? This is a thought experiment that yields interesting results. Thoughts like this have given rise to some of the most interesting art works of our time.


TOVE DITLEVSEN (Early Spring)
Childhood is long and narrow like a coffin, and you can’t get out of it on your own.

SAMUEL BUTLER
Life is one long process of getting tired.

There’s surely too much literature in literature nowadays, and not enough of life. Life seems to have gone out of it because, perhaps, it has ceased being a vocation and has become a profession or a trade, the same as tooth-pulling or the baking of bread. We need our tooth-pullers and our bakers, mighty useful men both, but that’s no reason why they should be writing our books. Maxim Gorky, to be sure, was at one time a baker; on the merits of his bread we have no data; but it is certain that he had no call from God to bake bread, and he baked only that he might live to give bread of another kind to his fellow men: bread of the spirit.

I think the best speech I ever made was one to a Rotary Club which had asked me to discuss "Freedom of the Press" during Newspaper Week. I shall favor my readers with the entire speech herewith: "Mr. President. Gentlemen of the Rotary Club: There is no such thing as freedom of the press. I thank you." Then I sat down, to the consternation of the program chairman. Of course, I spoiled it all later by yielding to the urging of the president to go on and say something about it anyway, and I talked for a while about the nature of freedom and the controls to which the press is subject. It would have served me right and served me well for my smart-aleck "hamming" if the Rotarians had all walked out immediately after I had sat down, but they were so intrigued by the spectacle of a man who actually appeared not to want to make a speech that they stayed it out.

As medical officer to a battalion of local volunteers, he [his father] used to tell of seeing them off in their scarlet tunics to fight in the Boer War. The wife of one dashing bucko stood weeping at the railway station, inconsolable until the train pulled out. Then she turned to my father and through her tears exclaimed, “I hope I never set eyes on that bastard again.”

CEDRIC HARDWICKE
The Irreverent Memoirs of Sir Cedric Hardwicke

EDWARD HOAGLAND
Death tickled him in a gradual crescendo.

JOHN KEATS
My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk.

PHINEAS FLETCHER
Sleep’s but a short death; death’s but a longer sleep.

OTHER EXCELLENT BOOKS

Robert C. Harvey, Children of the Yellow Kid: The Evolution of the American Comic Strip (Seattle: Frye Art Museum / University of Washington Press, 1998). ISBN 0-295-97778-7. Curated, with helpful annotations, by a leading expert, this is a beautifully produced exhibition catalog of the original art for American comic strips since 1896. Especially wonderful is the reproduction of cartoon originals in full-color (not just as black and white line art), so that preliminary blue pencil drawings, glue stains, and pasted-over changes are all clearly visible.


Robin Landa
Thinking Creatively: New Ways to Unlock Your Visual Imagination
(Cincinnati OH: North Light Books, 1998). ISBN 0-89134-843-3. Designers are problem-solvers. While required to be creative, they nearly always have to work within restrictions imposed by others. Essentially, this is a book about how to think about and/or visualize graphic design problems in ways that result in a greater number of high quality solutions, more reliably and within a shorter time period. Written by a university design professor, the book features brief interviews with eleven designers and design teachers, hundreds of examples of graphic design solutions, and 44 exercises and work strategies that are likely to promote creative thinking.

John Keats
My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk.
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Ballast does not have a budget as such. For more than 12 years, it has operated at a financial loss. Such losses are currently offset by contributions from enlightened subscribers and generous deductions from the paycheck of the Subscription Schlemiel. If anyone is foolishly philanthropic (foolish because such gifts are surely not tax deductible), we will sometimes accept a check.

HAVELOCK ELLIS
Once at the age of twelve, she [his mother] took me to spend the day at the London Zoological Gardens. In the afternoon as we were walking side by side, along a gravelled path in a solitary part of the Gardens, she stood still, and soon I heard a very audible stream falling onto the ground. When she moved on I instinctively glanced behind at the pool on the path, and my mother, having evidently watched my movements, remarked shyly: "I did not mean for you to see that."

WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE
There on the farm I had only one great sor- row. To this day, across seventy years, I can hear the dying cry of my pig, my own little pig that I had reared, when they killed him to eat and he bled to death, and I hated everybody and went to the brook, stayed there all day, then sneaked to the barn and would not eat ever of his flesh. I can remember few sorrows in my life, no anguish so poignant as those that came the day they slaughtered my pig.

COVER