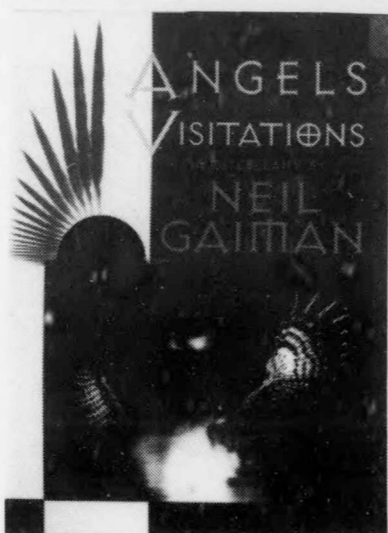


DISTRACTIONS

A Literary View



Angels and Visitations

Neil Gaiman

Judge this book by its cover. The cover art by Dave McKean is both whimsical and mysterious, presaging Neil Gaiman's charming works on the printed pages within. Just in case you don't know anything about Neil, here's a bit of info. Neil is best known for his award-winning comic series *Sandman*. Yes, he writes comic books, and he is damned good at it.

However, Neil is also damned good at the more traditional types of writing. He co-wrote the amazingly funny *Good Omens* with Terry Pratchett, and he also wrote the equally funny biography *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. His writing has appeared in anthologies. "Troll-Bridge" appeared in the adult fairy-tale compilation *Snow White, Blood Red*. "Murder Mysteries" (set in the *Sandman* universe, I do believe) was in the horror compilation *Midnight Graffiti*. Both of these books are in bookstores everywhere.

Angels and Visitations shows what else he can do. A miscellany of fiction, humour, non-fiction, poetry, and artwork, *Angels and Visitations* journeys from science fiction and fantasy shorts to detective stories and meticulously researched literary works. There is a story about a worldwide shortage of animals—it reads like a cross between C.S. Lewis' "on Vivisection" and Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." There is a postcard story about

the fiendish enforced slavery of a certain well-loved mythical figure. There's a prologue to someone else's book, and an odd and timely story on venereal disease. There's a poem about a computerized hell that reads like a cross between William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Kit Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. There's a disquieting allegory called "Mouse." There's a whole lot more, and it's all poignant, bitter-sweet, or rollickingly funny. It's all good. But are you going to get something out of *Angels and Visitations*? To quote "Prologue," "For that you gotta read the book."

Shantell Powell

A History Of Warfare

John Keegan

During the beginning of the school year I was trying to find a copy of John Keegan's *A History of Warfare*. I looked for a copy at both the Harriet Irving and Fredericton Public libraries. But, they were already taken out and there was waiting list for them. Luckily a few days later my friend Shan asked if I would do a book review for the *Brun* on *A History of Warfare*. I jumped at the opportunity, because, the publishing company would give me a free copy to read.

Well for those of you who have bought a copy of John Keegan's latest book, I have some bad news to tell you. Vintage Books now has a paperback edition of John Keegan's *A History of Warfare*. Its suggested retail price is only \$18.00, a lot less than the \$46.00. I would have to have paid for the hard bound edition. But, let me say, "that just because I got a free copy are my views are not in any way biased." I'm glad I saved \$18.00. It's not that John Keegan's latest book is bad, but, it was a bad book for me.

As a fourth year student of military history there was little that I found new or interesting. Yet those of you who are not inclined to the study of military history might find John Keegan insightful. By now there have been numerous reviews published in all sorts of journals and magazines. Right on the front cover

it says, "Astonishing . . . a masterwork." The *Montreal Gazette*. Keegan not only looks at the history of warfare but the anthropology of warfare. He does not try to address how people fight, so much as why and what has motivated—in particular, though not exclusively—Western Europeans to fight the way they have. Which was in stark contrast to some other societies. For contrast he describes the military systems of the Zulus, Samurai of Japan, Aztec, Mongols, Mamelukes, Chinese, and other cultures.

For those of you unfamiliar with John Keegan he continues to bash Clausewitzian theory and starts right on page xi. Clausewitz has perhaps had more of an influence on Western military thought and theory than any other theorist. Keegan has five chapters in his book, which progressively build up from the Stone-Age to our present day. In between each chapter are mini-chapters or interludes as he calls them while basing them on Clausewitzian theory. I think it would have been a better book if he did not spend so much time trying to refute Clausewitzian theories. He makes one point and contradiction throughout the book. Clausewitz was a product of his time and day and Clausewitz makes perfect military sense to Western Europeans but his ideas and theories are not necessarily congruent with others.

With the Cold War now apparently over the threat of Mutually Assured Destruction that apparently kept both sides from going to all out war is no longer over our heads. Yet, many of these proxy wars in places like Angola, and Cambodia continue. Other places like Afghanistan are now in a state of civil war because of the proxy war fought by Soviet troops and CIA sponsored Afghan rebels. Other places like Rwanda and Bosnia, which Keegan calls "tribal war", fuelled by hatred. While the weapons have changed, the fundamental task of war, to convince your enemy to quit, has not. What happens when both sides are determined to fight to the bitter end if need be, seems to be an issue the United Nations and John Keegan are both unable to resolve. War is endless contradiction and complication.

Tony M. Kenecy

The Wild is Always There: Canada Through The Eyes Of Foreign Writers

Edited by Greg Gatenby

Given that Christmas is fast-approaching, the inevitable (and often futile) search for the perfect gift for that hard-to-buy-for person surely cannot be far off either. Instead of a gaudy tie or a box of turtles, I think that your hard-to-buy-for friend might appreciate a good book. More specifically, *The Wild is Always There* looks to be one of those "can't miss" books. This anthology, published by Vintage Books, is a collection of writing about Canada by various distinguished foreign authors. Featuring work by Ernest Hemingway, Mark Twain, Willa Cather, Henry James, William Faulkner, Charles Dickens, Voltaire, Arthur Conan Doyle and many others; each individual excerpt is prefaced by an explanatory essay, by editor Greg Gatenby, which offers biographical information about the author and their connection to Canada.

As Gatenby notes in his introduction, most foreign authors who visited Canada, seemed to fall in love with our country's immense size and "tantalizing wilderness"; hence the anthology's title. Using a variety of sources, including poetry, fiction, diaries and letters, *The Wild is Always There* includes writings that date from the eighteenth century right through to the early twentieth century. Thus, the reader can acquire a greater appreciation of the time period within which Canada has hosted literary visitors.

One of the best things about this book is that each of the thirty-six constituent pieces stands on its own, therefore one need not digest the book in a single sitting to appreciate its flavour. In fact, many of the individual contributions offer fascinating glimpses of various distinct places and time periods; like Mark Twain's three-hour evening sleigh ride through the "narrow, crooked streets" of Montreal during a blistering snow storm; Willa Cather's falling in love with Grand Manan Island and ultimately having a cottage constructed there; or William Faulkner's (misguided) attempts to replace his southern drawl with an English accent so

as to increase his likelihood of qualifying for the Royal Air Force, during his six-month stay in Toronto. Such vignettes can clearly be savoured on their own intrinsic merits, without reference to other sections of the anthology.

One of the few authors in *The Wild is Always There* who actually never visited Canada, or North American for that matter, is the eighteenth century French philosophe Voltaire. As Gatenby notes, many Canadians are familiar with Voltaire's reference in *Candide* to the struggle between the French and English over the territory of New France: "You realize that these two countries have been fighting over a few acres of snow near Canada, and they are spending on this splendid struggle more than Canada itself is worth." However, what many do not know is that Voltaire wrote a work that he deemed to surpass *Candide* insofar as it was "infinitely more true to life", and that centered around a Canadian born Protagonist. *The Ingenu* composed at Voltaire's estate, Ferney, in 1767, tells the story of a French colonial infant who was orphaned and raised by Canadian Hurons. The ingenu eventually travels to Europe and Voltaire uses the young Canadian's innocence to devastating effect in exposing the hypocrisy and foolishness of various European customs. The fifteen page excerpt from *The Ingenu* included in *The Wild is Always There* is definitely a must read.

Ultimately this anthology of Canadiana is thoroughly entertaining and also educating. If you're looking for an excellent addition to your own bookshelf or someone else's, look no further.

Luke Peterson

