



Sometimes, even I run out of things to say. My husband will beg to differ, but it's true. Sometimes, I look around and just think, "eh," and wish to high heaven I didn't have a deadline dogging me.

This is one of those times. Oh, I have observations, alright. I always have observations. It's just that I can't seem to string them together in any coherent, meaningful fashion. As a writer, I see it as my job to make order from chaos. Harmony from discord. A casserole from cream-of-chicken soup, broccoli, and bread crumbs. Right now, the recipe's just not coming together.

And yet, there's still the matter of that pesky deadline.

So, let's consider this my Twitter column. I'm not sure I can limit my random thoughts to 140 characters, but I'm feeling fairly terse and tweet-y, so you never know. I warn you – these comments are completely unrelated. I think.

... First, a deeply fond – if somewhat sheepish – farewell to Bay Street Trading Co., which is closing its hallowed doors after 30-plus years. I would love to write a blazing Jeremiad about the death of the independent bookstore in America and how ill it doth bode for the future of Western Civilization, but I don't have a moral leg to stand on. For I, myself, am responsible for this sad phenomenon. Every time I bought a book from Barnes & Noble – or, more often, ordered one online from Amazon – I helped dig the grave in which cherished institutions like Bay Street Trading Co. now rest. I am heartily sorry for it, but that'll be cold comfort next time I walk past that wonderful old bookstore and find its doors locked. It hurts to think I'll never again wait for

hours in a line stretching down the street and around the block to get the latest Pat Conroy book signed. This is a real loss for Beaufort and our singular sense of place – just another step toward becoming Anywhere, USA. Goodbye, old friend. I know I left you first, but I will miss you. We all will.

... Speaking of goodbyes: I had the bittersweet joy and privilege of singing with my choir, last week, at the funeral of one of our town's greatest citizens, Helen Harvey. The service was splendid, with its "Holy, Holy, Holy" and its 23rd Psalm and its generations of weeping, smiling Beaufortians. The love in the sanctuary was a radiant, palpable thing, and so was the sorrow. We were all in it together, and it was beautiful. I remember thinking, 'If only we could be more like our funeral selves every day'...

... But most days, we're not, are we? Most days we forget how fragile and fleeting life is, and we squander our precious time strutting and fretting over things like... well, politics, for instance. Last week, in a fit of frustration, I posted these words on my Facebook page: *"Somewhere between total apathy and complete obsession lies a healthy approach to the insanity known as American Politics. Can someone help me get there, please?"*

A friend responded, "Politics is the new wrestling!" Did we really need a *new*

wrestling? Wasn't the old one childish and silly and shameless enough? As our political discourse grows ever more analogous to an outrageous, pugnacious, *fake*

sport I never enjoyed in the first place, I feel myself moving away from obsession toward the aforementioned apathy. A lot of smart, decent people I know tell me they feel the same way, which can't be good for the state of our union. I hate to trot out W.B. Yeats again, but those famous lines from "The Second Coming" (written in 1919) have been haunting me for a while now:

"The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

The poet's prescience gives me chills.

... And while we're on the subject of poets: I'm keeping my mind off politics – kind of – by immersing myself in rehearsals for "Twelfth Night," which Lowcountry Shakespeare is bringing to Waterfront Park the weekend of October 22 – 24, then, later, to USC in Bluffton. You'll hear more about that as the time draws nigh (do I sound Elizabethan?), but for now, let me just say that, when you're an amateur actor, The Bard is Hard

My cast mates and I are having a mental field day – and many, many laughs! – as we hack our way through the dense, rich forest of Shakespeare's marvelous language, getting comfy with words like "peascod" and "pilchard." We actors have to understand what we're saying or our audience won't have a chance. (Don't worry – we're getting there!) The real challenge is not so

much that the text is antiquated – most of it isn't – but that it's so darn brilliant on so many levels. (Shakespeare really

is

all he's cracked up to be

.

) The wordplay is simply astounding. The imagery is chewy and delicious enough to eat, the jokes are beyond clever, the double (and triple) entendres just traipse right by, the references – historical, mythological, musical, literary, religious, etc – are tossed off casually, but fast and furious, like bids from an auctioneer's mouth. What's truly mind-boggling – and very humbling – is the realization that, unlike us moderns, Shakespeare's audience – even the poor, unlettered groundlings – had no trouble grasping these plays in all their layered complexity. With all the strides we've made in the past 400 years, in terms of social justice and public education, you have to wonder...

what are we missing?

... Moving on, but still in the general category of literature: A last-minute press release just hit my inbox, bearing the good news that it's time, once again, for the Friends of the Beaufort County Library's Fall Book Sale! (Sept. 24-26) If there's an annual event I relish more than this one, it escapes me at the moment. The book sale, under the pavilion at Waterfront Park, embodies so much of what's great about life in Beaufort. You're there on the breezy, sweet-smelling waterfront; you can feel – and almost taste – the stealthy approach of autumn; you bump into all the friends you've missed during your shades-down, summer hibernation; you see dozens of cheerful volunteers (which is just so Beaufort), and you quietly glow with the knowledge that you're doing your own small part for a good cause.

Oh, and did I mention you're surrounded by books? Thousands and thousands of gorgeous, gently-used, dirt-cheap books. Does it get any better?

In a world gone mad – where preachers threaten to burn holy texts, and political pundits hold religious revivals, and, as another poet/prophet once put it, “ignorant armies clash by night” – it's comforting to know that some things, the *best* things, never change.

Now if we could only save Bay Street Trading Co....

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