



Pages of the Past

CELEBRATING
HISTORICAL FICTION

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From the Editor

Hello and Happy Friday historical fiction lovers!

Even though it's Friday the 13th today, it's been such a doozy of a week in my personal life this week that I'm not even worried about the Friday the 13th aspect of the day. Not that I usually fret about that day anyway. I hope this finds you all safe, well, and happy in whatever part of the world you're in.

Tomorrow I'm going to be a guest on **The Historical Fiction Club** Facebook group. The group offers authors the chance to come in and takeover for the day. I'll be there with periodic posts throughout the day. There will be two posts offering two different giveaways. Come on over and check out it out. If you're not a member of the group – here's the link. They're a great group with a lot of active members and some truly magnificent authors. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/historicalfictionbookclub/>

And after this, the race is on with Thanksgiving coming up in the home stretch and Christmas right behind it. The next six weeks should be a frenzy of activity. I hop you're all able to fit in a bit of reading and relaxation.

Stay tuned for future issues –In the weeks ahead we have author interviews scheduled with Janet Oakley, Eileen Donovan, Angela Petch, Linore Burkard, Celia Martin, and a lot more!

Trisha

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A Zob, Zitella, and a Zawster Walked into a Bar...



Yes, I'm taking many liberties with today's 'Z' themed article. I'll have to admit, I was stumped. I'd been working my way through the alphabet and had a theme for each letter – until I got to 'Z'. I had nothing. Nada. Zilch. (Ah, there's a Z word. I could have gone with that.)

So, I did what any writer at a loss does. I went to google. Google - what historical fiction words begin with Z? Nothing useful showed up. I bemoaned the fact that I no longer own a print dictionary. How easy it would have been to pull a print volume off the shelf, open it at the back and run my finger down the columns of Z words until I found one that would suffice.

Next, I tried a search for 'List of Z words' and came up with pages and pages of odd and unusual words good for a Scrabble game. While they would score me some awesome points if I were in the middle of a competitive game, it wasn't very useful for what I was looking for.

Then I hit pay-dirt (pardon the cliché, which we aren't supposed to use) when I found this post from a few years ago.

40 Zesty Z-Words To Add To Your Vocabulary

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/70627/40-zesty-z-words-add-your-vocabulary>

The author, Paul Anthony Jones, shared that Z is "one of the least frequently used letters in the English language". I think many of us know this, especially if you've ever participated in the April A to Z Blog Challenge. He also wrote:

"It might be one of the least-frequently used letters in the English language (you can expect it to start less than 0.5% of the words in a standard dictionary), but the letter Z is responsible for some fantastic words, from zaptieh (that's a Turkish police officer) to zardozi (a type of embroidery using metallic thread), and from zambomba (a Spanish percussion instrument) to zalambdodont (a creature with V-shaped ridged molar teeth).

As great as those words are, they're not exactly the most useful of Z-words to drop into everyday conversation, depending of course on how many people with V-shaped molars you know."

But what I found intriguing, was how many of the forty words he used in his post could relate to the earlier time periods of many historical writers. Here are a few from his list of 40.

1. ZABERNISM

A German-origin word for the overuse or unnecessarily aggressive use of military power; to zabernize likewise is to oppress militarily. Both words are named for the town of Saverne in Alsace, eastern France, where a young cobbler was needlessly killed by a German soldier in 1912.

2. ZACK

An old southern English dialect word meaning “to walk hesitantly.”

7. ZARNDER

Popular in the early 1900s, a zarnder was a woman’s loose ringlet of hair worn over one shoulder. It derives from a slang corruption of the name of Queen Alexandra, the wife, and consort of King Edward VII, who popularized the style.

8. ZAWN

An isolated sandy inlet or cave in a coastal cliff is a zawn.

9. ZAWSTER

An old 18th-century word for a seamstress or dressmaker.

14. ZELOTYPIA

Derived from the Greek word for “to strike,” zelotypia is a 17th-century word for what we would now more likely call jealousy.

20. ZITELLA

Derived from Italian, zitella is a 17th-century word for a young girl or maiden.

22. ZNEESY

An 18th-century slang word for cold, frosty weather. No one is quite sure where it comes from, but it’s likely partly influenced by sneezy.

24. ZOB

Early 1900s slang for a fool or a simpleton.

28. ZOODIKERS

Zoodikers, zonkers, zoonsters, zooks and zookers are all old fashioned exclamations of surprise or amazement, popular from the mid-17th to late-19th centuries. They’re all descended from the earlier expression Gadzooks, which is itself a euphemistic corruption of “God’s hooks,” the nails used to secure Jesus to the cross.

34. ZUCHE

A 14th-century word for a tree stump.

37. ZWODDER

According to one 19th century dictionary, a zwodder is “a drowsy and stupid state of mind.” Monday morning, in other words.

While we’re on the subject of old words and phrases, one topic that arises in my writer’s group quite often is ‘was that word, or phrase, used then?’ As much as I bemoan how cell phones have taken over our lives and are so (too) prominent in social occasions, it does come in handy. Once the question is uttered, out pop the phones and within a minute or two someone has an answer.

For instance, in a 1920s story, I might have a character saying, “A penny for your thoughts.”

When questioned about my use of the phrase – which is a legitimate question, because I don’t really know myself – we found this. [The Phrase Finder](#), a UK based site, reveals:

“The first known use of it is by Sir Thomas More in *A Treatyce upon the last thynges*, circa 1535...

In such wise yt not wtoute som note & reproch of suche vagaraunte mind, other folk sodainly say to them: a peny for your thought.

...The expression became so well used that it was often shortened to 'a penny for them' or even just 'penny', as in H. G. Wells' novel *Love & Mr. Lewisham*, 1900:

‘Penny,’ she said after an interval. Lewisham started and looked up. ‘Eh?’.

It is less common in the 21st century and more used by the older generation than the young.”

And, as an aside, I am *thrilled* that I don’t have to read much text from the 1500s!

Another word that seems to come into question in groups is the use of the word ‘glasses’. [The Online Etymology Dictionary](#) says the use of glasses, or spectacles, is from the 1660s, derived from the plural of glass. What I thought was amusing was how the use of ‘sunglasses’ appeared much earlier than I would have thought. I would have thought sunglasses came into use about the 1950s or 1960s. Was I wrong! From about 1878, ‘sun-glasses’ were “glasses with darkened lenses to protect one’s eyes while observing the sun.” But they became popular for non-astronomy use from 1916.

And, ‘four-eyes’? Ah, I know that hated phrase. After getting glasses in the third grade, I heard that ugly named called in my direction too much for my liking. Imagine my surprise when I saw that this slang term first came into use around 1874!

Another interesting site is [A General Dictionary of Provincialisms](#) , written by William Holloway. Original publication date in 1840.

On that final note, I’ll leave you to ponder the zaniness of some of these zesty ‘Z’ words. I’m off to go figure out how to work a job into one of my short stories.



Author Spotlight: James Conroyd Martin



Welcome to Pages of the Past. We're excited to chat with you this week about historical fiction writing and the stories you tell. You have some fascinating stories. What drew you to want to write tales set in the past?

My first ambition was to learn screenwriting, so after college and a couple of years teaching high school, I packed up and left Chicago for Los Angeles. I promptly started taking screenwriting classes, but very soon thereafter I met a new friend who thought I would want to read his ancestor's diary with the notion of doing something with it. I had no such notion but read it out of courtesy. Well, the diary was like a *Gone with the Wind* set in Poland! I decided a book had to come first, and that set me on the path toward becoming a historical novelist. *Push Not the River* takes the diary from start to finish, so that when St. Martin's Press

wanted a sequel, I studied the period and kept the family saga going through two more novels. The Polish translation of the trilogy sold very well.

Your newest book, *Fortune's Child*, was released towards the end of 2019 and is garnering praise and acclaim. From what I read, this book had a long gestation period, from the time of your initial idea to the final culmination of a completed and published tale. Can you tell us about how *Fortune's Child* came into being?

I managed to acquire an agent who started to work with that diary-to-novel idea. She suggested I work on something new while we waited to hear back from possible publishers. I was taking an Art Appreciation course at the time and when we came to study the mosaics of Justinian and Theodora in Ravenna, the professor said, "I'm not a writer, but if I were, Theodora is the woman I would be writing about." Of course, that rang the bell.

What was there about Empress Theodora from the Basilica di San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy that fascinated you so much to make you want to research her and write her story?

The professor prompted me to look her up. I went down to the Hollywood Public Library and took out every book on Theodora, Justinian, and Constantinople I could find. (A week later the library burnt to the ground, so I was able to keep them longer than usual!) What I found out that mesmerized me was that Theodora could stand as an archetype for Eva Peron of Argentina. She was an actress, prostitute, mistress, wife of the empire's leader and a power behind the throne, who was both hated and loved. Oh, and like Eva, she died of cancer at a relatively young age.

***Fortune's Child* is listed as Book 1 of 2 about Empress Theodora. Does Book 2 have a working title yet? Are you working on that story? Can you tell us a bit about that one?**

Once I installed Stephen, a fictional character, in the story and his life played out side-by-side with Theodora's, I knew I had to write a sequel that would include key events occurring later in Theodora's life. I've just finished the first draft, tentatively called *Too Soon the Night*. One focus of the sequel is the

rebellion that Justinian and Theodora faced. At one point Justinian and his councilors were prepared to sail away from the city, but Theodora's courage and determination held them there to face and stare down the murderous mob, telling them that "purple makes the best shroud."

You also have a Poland Trilogy that includes: *Push Not the River*, *Against a Crimson Sky*, and *The Warsaw Conspiracy*. What is this series about?

Push Not the River is the book based on the Polish diary. It is a family saga based on young Countess Anna's diary written during the political upheaval in Poland at the time of the Third of May Constitution (1791). *Against a Crimson Sky* continues Anna's saga as Napoleon comes calling, implying independence from her neighbor's would follow if only Polish lancers would accompany him on his fateful 1812 march into Russia. Anna's family fights valiantly to hold on to a tenuous happiness, their country, and their very lives. Set against the November Rising (1830-31), *The Warsaw Conspiracy* depicts partitioned Poland's daring challenge to the Russian Empire. Illustrating the psyche of a people determined to reclaim independence in the face of monumental odds, the story features Anna's sons and their fates in love and war.

***The Boy Who Wanted Wings* is set around the 1683 Battle of Vienna. How did that evolve and make its way to the printed page?**

As I travelled about with the books, speaking and signing them at culture clubs, festival, libraries, and bookstores, people of Polish descent would often mention the Battle of Vienna and the legendary Polish hussars who saved the day and Christian Europe. So it seemed a natural progression once I was finished with the trilogy and was so steeped in Polish history. For a theme, I wanted to explore the idea of the outsider, "the other."

You consider yourself a hybrid author – having books with a traditional publisher and some that are self-published. What do you see as the benefits or downfalls between the two publishing venues?

The advantages of having one of the bigger publishing firms behind you include providing good editing, cover and text execution, access to reviews that inspire library purchases, possible foreign language translations, and some initial publicity. More and more, however, the author is expected to handle the publicity because after a few weeks, the publisher is off and on to their next list of releases.

When you see to your own publishing, you have full control. You can oversee the content, book covers, marketing, etc. But you must engage professionals as far as editing (content editors, line editors, copy editors, and proofreaders), cover specialists, and text formatters. One huge advantage is that your marketing can keep the book alive for years. And that you are not sharing royalties with agents or publishers. Consider that with e-books, a self-published author receives 70% from Amazon and other venues, whereas the big publishers pass on just 25% to the author even though there are no printing and postage charges.

One more question for you – and it's one that most authors say they can't choose. If you had to pick one out of your books to be labeled as 'your favorite child', which one would it be and why?

I suppose I would have to choose the **two** that I started so long ago back in Hollywood: *Push Not the River*, based on the happenstance of meeting someone, and *Fortune's Child*, inspired by and art course and teacher. Both took a very long time to come to fruition. Both are favorites.

Thank you for joining us today, James. We appreciate your time. Please leave a few links where our readers can find you and your books and we'll go follow and friend you.



Links attached to each book. To view it on Amazon, click on each cover

You can find James Conroyd Martin here:

Website: <http://www.JamesCMartin.com>

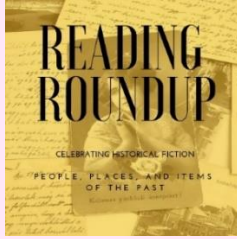
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AuthorMan/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/JConMartin>

BIO: James Conroyd Martin grew up in a suburb of Chicago and attended St. Ambrose and DePaul Universities. He managed to keep writing while teaching high school English, Speech, and Creative Writing for thirty years. Retired from teaching, Martin lives in Portland, Oregon, and writes full time. After publishing *Push Not the River*, a novel set in Poland and based on the diary of a friend's ancestor, three more novels with Poland as a background followed, along with a paranormal story, *Hologram: A Haunting*. His most recent novel, *Fortune's Child: A Novel of Empress Theodora*, is the first of a duology that brings to life an extraordinary woman of the sixth century. It has just won Chanticleer Book Reviews Grand Prize, Book of the Year 2019.

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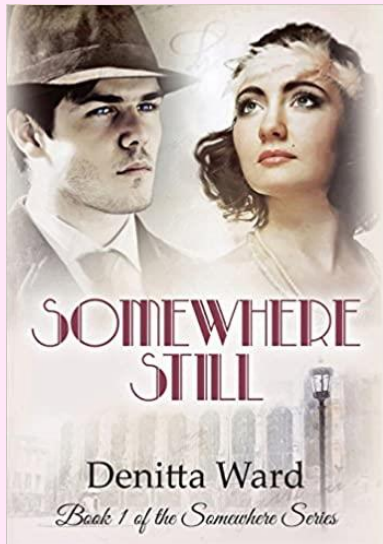
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The 1920s

Somewhere Still

Denitta Ward



From the day Jean Ball lands a job at the elegant Empire hotel, modeled on Kansas City's once-famed Baltimore Hotel, she quickly learns the secrets of the entitled class. Dazzled by a Roaring Twenties society on the cusp of radical change, this innocent young woman finds herself dancing, bobbing her hair, and falling for Elden Whitcomb, the handsome son of the wealthy hotel owner. The stakes rise when the Whitcombs' powerful secrets are revealed and loving Elden comes at a price - one that may be too high for Jean to pay.

Shattered and alone, Jean's in the battle of her life in a city alive with romance, smoky speakeasies, jazz music and scandal, but divided by race and class. With the help and encouragement of influential women, Jean may find what she has always needed, though her choices could echo through generations.

Denitta Ward uses historical sites and real events to explore Jean's transformation from an innocent young girl to a self-assured woman, making her way in a society in transition. Somewhere Still aims to give insight into 1920s Kansas City, a city on the cusp of significant change. During this time, the city's society women united to urge social advances, the jazz culture was born, baseball's famous Negro League was formed, and the city had a burgeoning Prohibition bootleg trade. Featured locations include Kansas City's Petticoat Lane, Swope Park, the Emily Bird Thayer Dry Goods Company, the Savoy Grill, and Wentworth Military Academy.

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