

## Van der Leeuw Lezing 2024

### Life in the Tower of Story by David Mitchell

One storm-lashed morning last January, as wave after wave after wave exploded on the granite rocks at the end of my garden, an email appeared in my inbox with a soft warm *ping!* *Mmm*, I thought. *Who is this Arjen Dijkstra?* Could he be a ‘Dutch Prince’ hoping to send inherited funds into an Irish bank account where they might rest for a little while – for a 33% commission payable to myself, of course?

I clicked on the email to find out.

Mr Dijkstra was inviting me to deliver the Van der Leeuw Lecture this November. I didn’t see that coming. So I googled ‘Van der Leeuw Lezing’. Okay, it looked legit. More than legit, it looked Big League... which would mean preparation. I couldn’t just rock up with a ‘The Usual Rules Don’t Apply to Novelists’ attitude, read from a work-in-progress; and expect everyone to agree that this constituted a lecture. No no no. I’d have to sit down and marshal some ideas that couldn’t be gleaned from Wikipedia. I’d have to express those ideas with wit and verve. This was high-stakes stuff. Time-consuming, too. I’ve only written a couple of lectures in my life and they took me *ages...*

So I wrote my usual polite refusal. *‘Hugely honoured to be asked – unfortunately there are pre-existing commitments – no doubt you’ll find a stellar lecturer –’* and moved the cursor over SEND...

But then... Curiosity whispered in my ear. It said that writing this lecture could be the mind-gym I need to sort out my midlife mental Dad Bod. I shouldn’t run away from this opportunity for professional introspection. So I deleted my refusal and changed my response. *‘Dear Sir, thank you for your generous offer. I should be delighted to accept...’*

No sooner was the email written than Doubt hauled Curiosity from my ear canal. *“Who do you think you? Simon Schama? Malcolm Gladwell? You’re a grubby novelist and part-time screenwriter who takes on too many projects. Those no-nonsense Groningers will see through you in a heartbeat! AND you’ll have to wear a suit. You haven’t worn a suit for twenty years!”* How to clamber out of this indecision, Dear Reader? Eventually, I thought, *‘Let the good Mr Dijkstra decide. So I whipped off an email: Dear Arjen, thanks for your gracious offer, but the truth is, critical theory makes my eyes glaze over. I only read Ulysses during the pandemic after years of covertly implying that I had read it. I can’t line up the consonants in “Nietzsche” correctly without auto-spell. My ONLY specialist field of knowledge is writing and “being a writer.” Who would come out on a cold November night to hear me talk about that?’*

Arjen replied after a few minutes, *‘Dear David, I would.’*

My correspondent’s friendly enthusiasm gave me cold feet.

So I emailed him back: *‘But are you SURE? I can’t do a creative writing-style lecture. I can’t do an Art-of-the-Novel, or a State-of-the-Novel, or a Whither-the-Novel? style thing, either.... It’s a niche art form these days, anyway...’*

Arjen, who is an accomplished fisherman, replied, *‘If we thought you’d deliver that sort of lecture, we wouldn’t have invited you for the van der Leeuw in the first place.’*

I had met my match. My fate was sealed. And here I am.

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That introduction took the form of a story, with classic story elements. We have pathetic fallacy, linking weather with the emotional tone of me, the narrator. We have a narrative arc from indecision to resolution, via obstacles. A second character who influences the protagonist’s journey. Dialogue, metaphor and humour. I avoid lexical repetition. I enhance of dull fact with snazzier fictional elements. In reality, my invitation came in 2022; all the dialogue was made up; and I don’t have the sea at the end of my garden. I chose ‘January’ because a first line needs a

strong word. My fictional Arjen is craftier than the real-life man of integrity – but I really wanted that ‘fisherman’ joke, so truth had to make room, I’m afraid.

What actually IS a story? I have created lots professionally over the last 25 years, but I’ve never tried to define the thing – until now. In the age-old tradition of amateur lecture-writers, I resorted to Google. Here’s a definition from [Vocabulary.com](https://www.vocabulary.com):

‘A story is a narrative about people and events, usually including an interesting plot. A story can be fictional or true, and it can be written, read aloud, or made up on the spot.’

Well that’s no good. It tells you a ‘story,’ is a ‘narrative’ or a ‘plot’: but if you ask what a ‘narrative’ or a ‘plot’ is, it will tell you its a story, and round and round you go. *‘If you want something done, you have to do it yourself’*:

‘A story is the description of a series of events that happens to one or more characters. Sometimes these events are causal, like toppling dominoes. Sometimes the story changes the character or characters in ways great or small. Sometimes they convey a message or moral to the reader, listener or viewer. Stories may purport to be true, like the story I read on *The Guardian* website this morning about a hurricane in Florida. Stories may be overt acts of fiction. Stories may be shameless lies, like Trump’s avowal that immigrants in Springfield were eating cats. Stories may be fiction, but pertain to the real world: like HBO’s *Succession*.’

That’s a broader definition than [vocabulary.com](https://www.vocabulary.com)’s, but I don’t think it’s broad enough. I’d like to include stories that never get acknowledged as stories; or even spoken aloud, and label these stories as ‘unlabelled stories’.

Unlabelled stories permeate our lives and our minds. Conversation is made of them. When someone asks, ‘So was that David Mitchell lecture worth going to?’ you’ll be answering not with an exact mimetic blow-by-blow account of the experience, but with a story with characters, a basic plot, this splendid location, a few ideas. It will be made of spoken language. You’ll jump about in time. You’ll forget most of what I say. You’ll misremember other parts. You’ll be turning this experiential event into a narrative event, from a few lines, to a few hundred words.

If you think my statement ‘Conversation is story’ is a punt, then my next statement is an even bigger one: both Identity and Memory are made of story. Let me explain myself, starting with identity.

How do we answer this lifelong question, “Who am I?” To others, we *can* answer by facts – name, date of birth, place of birth, job – but I don’t think we think of ourselves in these terms. Identity, I believe, is a constant inter-cranial chuntering of free-form stories about oneself. These stories spring, flow, merge, bifurcate, circle around, meander, vanish, go underground and pop up later when you’ve forgotten about them. They wax and wane in detail and intensity. They are prone to selective editing. They are relentless.

As for our own identities, so for other people’s. When I think of my parents, I think in words and images that might read something like this: “Mum’s called Jenny, she’s 87 now, but still sharp as a tack, thank Heavens. She reads books like most people breath oxygen. Recently she got her cataracts seen to. She was nervous as heck before she went to the clinic – private, thanks to 13 years of the Conservative government’s erosion of the NHS, I hope there’s a special place for Boris Johnson *et al* in Hell – but don’t let me digress. I phoned Mum when she had the eye-patch removed – it was one eye at a time – and she said, “Dave, it’s amazing, I haven’t seen this well since I was kid.” Really, that operation’s changed her life. She got her paints out again and now she’s doing this sequence of paintings of washing on washing lines and washing umbrellas in neighbours’ gardens. They’re the best things she’s ever painted. It’s like her final artistic gift to me: they’re a message saying, “Don’t stop making art until you die.” Cheers for that Mum. I hear you. She met my Dad at the Royal College of Art in London, this was the late 1950s/early 1960s before the Beatles, before the Swinging Sixties. Dad’s ninety this year. Wow. Ninety. He’s slowing down. He laughs when we meet: he says, ‘You’ve grown again!’ Meaning, he’s shrunk. He’s still driving. Just. Each time he drops me off at Malvern train station, we hug each other, look each other in the eye and we’re both thinking, “*This could be the last time.*” There’s no need to say it. We hear each other perfectly well.”

Story, right?

Those stories were mostly set in the past, which makes me wonder where identity stops and memory starts. Are they separate things, or are they parts of a single continuum? Is 'identity' just memories of oneself? I'm not quite sure: but I *am* sure memory is as story-based as identity. I have memorised the date on which my wife gave birth to our son, and the location, Cork Maternity Hospital. But other facts have faded away. What time; what the weather was doing; what the midwife's name was. The facts of the case have been absorbed by smooshed-together, intertwining story-lines...

Here's a helping of memory story about my son being born. It was a quick labour – he came out screaming two hours after we arrived at the hospital in our little red VW... Time got bendy-wendy-timey-wimey both times my wife gave birth. It was an upstairs ward. We must have gone up in a lift. Our son came out *REALLY* pissed off, covered in amniotic fluid, blood, gunk... I remember the 'gyney' – as gynaecologists are affectionately known in Ireland – offering me the scissors to cut the umbilical cord. The first time I chickened out and declined. But the gyney had one of those magic resonant reality-altering English voices like Obi Wan Kenobi in the *Star Wars* film where he gets Luke through the roadblock by saying, "*You don't need to see his papers.*" So I obeyed. I took the scissors and cut that pale waxy tube and... *Snip*. I knew then I'd always be glad the gyney had insisted. Then the midwife placed our son on my exhausted wife's chest as she sat up. She said – I swear I'm not making this up – 'Hello, I've been expecting you.' Like a supervillain meeting James Bond. You know how relationships have 'peak love' moments when you just think "*Oh My God, I'm SO glad that Love rammed me together with YOU*"? That moment was one of those. If I can book the final thought I have when Death snuffs out my candle, can I book one of those, please?

I'm not saying that I recite these sentences to myself when I remember my son being born: but I do remember in narrative fragments that, if I wrote them down, would like this. Whatever memory is, it *isn't* a bank vault of little boxes each storing a single memories. For me, memory is more a sphere of meshes of narratives that we scan, cruise through and somehow are. I don't think it's too flaky to say, "We are made of stories." Humans exist as a plethora of adverbs: biologically; psychologically; politically; anthropologically; atomically; *and* – drum-roll – narratively. *Ker-chang!*

Time is ticking, and I still haven't referred to The Tower of Story in the title of this lecture. I'm invoking a song by Leonard Cohen. *Tower of Song* appears on his 1988 album, *I'm Your Man*. It is a stand-out gem not only in Cohen's bejewelled oeuvre, but in the oeuvre of songs about art in general, and songwriting in particular. For my lecture, *The Tower of Song* is a lucky mascot, an idea-bag and a basis for comparison. It imagines a tower inhabited by lonely songwriters, including Leonard Cohen. While thinking about this lecture I was living in tall hotels in various cities in Japan where I imagined a fiction writer's counterpart, the Tower of Story. I'd like to consider what Leonard says about life in *his* tower, and compare it with life in *my* tower. (I never met him but his songs evoke an intimacy that puts you on first name terms, so 'Leonard' it is.) How do you take up residence in the tower? The song offers us these lines:

I was born like this, I had no choice

I was born with the gift of a golden voice

And twenty-seven angels from the Great Beyond

They tied me to this table right here in the Tower of Song

Leonard is both joking about his own voice (which warrants many positive adjectives but *not* 'golden') and he's serious. Why *is* he a songwriter? Why am I a writer? Why do any of us do what we end up doing? Aptitude, discipline in honing that aptitude, luck, timing, resolve. Experience. Contingency. One thing leading to another. To map fully how these diverse factors interconnect would take forever, but for the time available I'll offer two reasons why I came to live in the Tower of Story: my world-building habit and my speech disfluency.

World-building is common in childhood but rarer in adulthood. It is time-consuming but fulfilling. It is easy to describe but mysterious to account for. To world-build, simply imagine a

world, the people who live there, and its terms and conditions of life. If you're a world-builder, this is an intense, deeply satisfying experience. Time seems to slow, like it does when you're gardening. It's hard to explain.

Me, I've been a world-builder since infancy. My first worlds were drawn on the paving stones of my grandmother's garden path with chalk. Houses, roads, garages. Then I made worlds of Lego. When I was a older, my Mum used to mount an A1 sheet of snow-white thick paper onto a heavy drawing board. I'd write the names of the lands and seas and mountains and forests; and add appendices compiling the populations ethnicities, languages, customs, diplomatic relations. There was no such thing as 'too much detail'. Across these maps I drew paths taken by the heroes of the stories I never wrote. Later I programmed games on my ZX Spectrum home computer that were both basic and BASIC. (Extra points for all who got that 1980s computer language pun). I view all these activities as precursors to textual world-building, which I began in earnest in my mid-twenties and which I still do now. All novels require world-building, even those set on your own street this year. All novels have a Where, a Who, a How do they live? By answering these questions, you're world building.

All writers are world-builders. Far fewer have speech disfluencies – AKA a stammer or a stutter. These days I am proud to count myself amongst their number. I have a few tricks up my sleeve that allow me to pass as fluent pretty well, unless I'm tired or my stammer *really* wants to do its thing. (The best trick was to stop trying to battle it, and declare an *entente cordial* instead but that's another lecture.) When I was a kid, these strategies were still in my future, and my only remedial method was word avoidance.

People who stammer don't block on random words: we block on two or three fixed consonants that shift over time. As the name suggests, word-avoidance involves scanning every sentence you're about to say for risky consonants; and, when you find one, replacing that word with a synonym. If there isn't a synonym, you may need to abort that sentence and replace it with another, all in real time, and without the other person suspecting what you're up to. (If this sounds exhausting to you, I can assure you you're completely correct.)

To avoid the public mortification I would suffer by stammering at school, I had to develop linguistic muscles and dexterity that I wouldn't have otherwise acquired as early, or as well. In those years my stammer felt like a curse. Only later I came to think of it as a strange blessing. To get good at word-avoidance I learnt how to express a single idea or ask a question in many ways. By doing so, I learned about tone, nuance, lexical register. This never-ending crash course in applied linguistics made lifelong word-nerd of me. Word-nerdery to a writer is what good eyesight and steady hands are to a sharp-shooter. I might have become a writer without my stammer, but I wouldn't have become the writer I, in fact, am.

Meanwhile back in the Tower of Song, Leonard is singing:

Now I bid you farewell, I don't know when I'll be back

They're moving us tomorrow to that tower down the track

But you'll be hearing from me baby, long after I'm gone

I'll be speaking to you sweetly from a window in the Tower of Song

That third line, 'Long after I'm gone', speaks to me of how Art can *ever so slightly* cheat Death – Death being (I think) 'That [other] tower down the track'. Leonard is acknowledging that his songs will outlive him, and people will hear them – and therefore him – when he is no longer alive. I'm over-analysing a semi-joke here, but there's a macabre twist on this artistic immortality: you don't get to decide when you leave the Tower of Song. *Even when he's dead*, the songwriter is an inmate. The Tower of Song, too, is a Hotel California-type deal: once you're in, you're in for good. Not even Death gets you out.

For me, the Tower of Story has a similar inescapable feel. I'm not always sat writing at my desk at home or a Starbucks or in a Japanese hotel: but there's more to writing than writing. Reading is also writing. (If anyone here is walking the way of the writer, remember that last sentence above everything else: read, read, read.) Thinking about writing is also writing. In order to write, you need to be writing in this broad sense, even when you're not.

Most mornings my first thought is, 'What am I working on today?' Most nights, before I fall asleep, my final thought is, 'What do I need to work on tomorrow?' It sends me to sleep and increases my chances of dreaming an artistic freebie. It's like a day-porter and a night-watchman leaving Post It notes for each other.

*The Tower of Song's* alpha is its omega. The song opens and closes with the same verse, as if it's a closed loop.

Well, my friends are gone and my hair is grey

I ache in the places where I used to play

And I'm crazy for love but I'm not coming on

I'm just paying my rent every day in the Tower of Song

How do I 'pay my rent every day' in the Tower of Story?

By writing stories for a living. But how do you By manipulating the elements of fiction in ways that please you. I'd like to discuss and illustrate these elements – plot, character, ideas, language and structure – with a brief rewrite of a well-known story.

Ahem. [Clear throat: hard-boiled detective voice.]

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I can't explain it. My *body* knew The BB was on its way, even before my brain knew. When I looked out the window, the sun was losing power, like a bulb on a dimmer switch. Shadows swam over my yard, over the street outside.

I saw no sign of The BB. No surprises there. The BB is a hunter. He was watching me, standing on the doorstep, peering into the dark. I could *feel* him, almost. Licking his damn lips. Today was the day. The one I'd had nightmares about, ever since my brothers and I had left home.

Time to hit the Panic Button: so hit it I did. BAM.

As automated steel shutters trundled down my windows and doors, I ramped up the heat under my 'hot-tub' to MAX. The gas flames went 'whoosh!' as they ignited. All the way to Eleven. I leaned in, above the water, and peered up. I spied a small rectangle of daylight, three floors up. My plan had only a 50/50 chance of working, at best. But it was the best plan I had.

Only now did I call Porky and Bartholomew. Porky's phone was dead. I knew what that most likely meant. Porky's always on his phone. I'd grieve later, but for now I didn't have a second to lose. Hoping against hope, I called Bart. It rang – and rang, and rang, until I heard his voice on voicemail. I did not leave a message, but cut the call and looked for Bart's device on FIND MY PHONE.

Apparently, Bart's phone was circling my house. Just fifty yards out. I knew what that meant too. I was now an only child – unless Mum and Dad had gotten busy since showing me, Porky and Bart the door to the open road.

I poured myself a whisky and soda. On ice. Then I waited.

DING-DONG went the bell.

I pressed the COMM button and waited

'You know who it is,' said The BB. His voice cut like hungry winter. 'You know what I want.'

'As the Bard Jagger sang a long, long time ago,' I told him, '*You can't always get what you want.*'

The BB might have chuckled, once, deep in his belly. Then he got to work on my door. Charged it.

Punched it. Hurling stones. He'd have fired on with an RPG if he'd had the wherewithal to get on.

But my door held. Sure, I may be the runt of the litter, but I had the lion's share of the brains.

Unlike Porky and Bartholomew, RIP, I knew about building codes. My walls stood strong.

I checked the hot tub. Only 60 degrees. *Faster, damn it, faster.* I needed 95 degrees in time? I

looked on my surveillance screen – and saw The BB carrying my ladder to the corner of my house. There was nothing I could do to slow that son-of-a-bitch down. There was nothing I could do to make the water heat up faster. My fate was in the lap of the Gods...

I heard The BB's feet on the roof.

I heard him approach the chimney.

The thermometer said the water was up to 80 degrees. Not hot enough. I had to buy more time. I called up the dark space – 'You don't have to do this, BB.'

After a pause, the BB's voice found me. 'Oh but I do. Who amongst us is not a slave to Nature?' 'That's a CHOICE, BB. I chose to be more than the role Nature handed me. I chose to rise above that. To live like a man and not some animal. There's a better BB inside you. I know there is. Let him out.'

'Spoken like true prey,' said the BB. 'As your brothers discovered, I am the Apex Predator – and I have heard ENOUGH of your squealings!'

With that, The BB dropped down the chimney flue. When he hit the water, I was *right there* to slam on the lid. I'd spent many an hour practising the operation, and what can I say? Practise makes perfect. A vulpine roar filled sealed-in the hot-tub. The BB banged at the lid when the lid held fast. He knew it was pointless to beg for mercy. He knew he was getting none – any more than he had shown mercy to Porky and Bart as he had attacked their houses, both built of tragically inadequate building materials.

The Big Bad Wolf howled. And again. And again, weakly.

Then he howled no more.

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So, that's also a story. To save time I used one I guessed we are all familiar with from childhood. In case we have incognito visitors from a parallel universe where the story doesn't exist, that was the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs.

The events of the story of the story are the plot.

The characters are the eponymous pigs and the Big Bad Wolf.

The language is – obvs – the words used to tell the story. The descriptions. The dialogue. The interior monologue that the story is composed of. The reported thoughts.

Language also includes the elusive beastie known as 'style'. Here, I've gone for a hardboiled detective style. The idea of a pig speaking and thinking like Humphrey Bogart – or should that be 'Ham-phrey Bogart'? – struck me as kind of funny. Style is mysterious and subjective.

Structure is the arrangement of scenes. The traditional version of the tale goes A–B–C–D–E where 'A' is the three pigs leaving home; 'B' is the long section where the three pigs build their houses of straw, sticks and bricks; 'C' is the wolf wreaking doom on the first two pigs with his '*I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll BLOW your house down!*' line. 'D' is the repetition breaker – the stand-off with the brick house pig. 'E' is the End of the Tale, where justice is dealt and order is restored, though not the lives of the two pigs who were overly optimistic about their personal security in a dangerous world.

I monkeyed about with the structure for fun. Mine goes D–(an A/B/C back-flash mosaic)–E. This lets me hide the fact I've co-opted this universal tale for as long as possible – hopefully until the final scene. This is part of writing, too – controlling what information you're giving to your audience. Give enough clues, but not too many.

What are the themes? In the original version, the theme is the importance of planning, prudence and caution. While working on this story, I found a more covert theme: that of rising above your nature, your programming, your coding. Stories don't necessarily need a truckload of themes, but I find they need *some*. Like bread needs yeast, or a shot of tequila is just more fun with that layer of salt around the rim.

I've been using *The Three Little Pigs* to illustrate the elements of fiction, but all fictional narratives are made of these same elements. I'm a novelist more than a short story writer, but the same principles apply. Novels are stories smooshed together, sequentially or simultaneously. Or to put it another way, a novel is a short story that gets seriously out of hand. What are the long term effects of a life in the Tower of Story? Regarding his own state of mind as a resident in the Tower of Song, our friend Leonard has this to sing:

Now, you can say that I've grown bitter but of this you may be sure

The rich have got their channels in the bedrooms of the poor

And there's a mighty judgment coming, but I may be wrong

You see, you hear these funny voices in the Tower of Song

I love this verse, and they sound profound, even though their meaning is opaque. What has bitterness got to do with Orwellian surveillance in bedrooms? How can Leonard be so sure the coming judgement is mighty when he undercuts himself with that 'but I may be wrong.' The verse is a riddle that can't quite recall its own answer.

My guess is that the opacity of this verse is the point. Life as an artist has denuded Leonard of his certitude and left him psychologically unstable; slightly paranoid; somewhat anti-social; unsure of his own judgment; prone to second-guessing himself; a jangling bag of nerves, in fact; and liable to hear 'funny voices' which may or may not be, you know... actually there.

To those of us paying our rent in the Tower of Story, this all sounds familiar. The character traits – defects, perhaps – that Leonard describes with his deadpan delivery are both an occupational hazard *and* necessary. To drag a piece of fiction from your mind into reality you have to devote yourself to it, body and soul. You can't 'half-write'. You have to neglect your other responsibilities for the duration, or the process won't work. You have to become adept at giving shape and form to thoughts that fit into and develop your story. You need to get good at expressing those thoughts in words and phrase that will project them into the minds of others. You need clarity and precision but not so much that you cut out the reader or bury them under detail. You're constantly testing alternative ways of expressing something from a live, seething menu of alternatives. You need to see the world from the perspective of people who are different to you. You have to shape-shift. You must lose your singularity to become a plurality; you have to become your characters.

This professional detachment from reality imbeds and ingrains itself in you, long term. Removing yourself from this reality to the reality of your fictional world becomes less something you do, and more something you *are*. I can't help but regard my fellow humans, even ones I love, as stories and anecdotes in flesh-and-blood, talking form. When I meet new people, I'm hungry to understand them, and to hear them talk, and note *how* they talk. I'd like to say this is because I'm a curious person who wants to understand his fellow beings because doing so is a worthy end in its own right. Alas, that's not the whole truth. I'm harvesting. I'm harvesting iwaths. What is an 'iwath'? Spelt I-W-A-T-H, an iwath is a word I made up a few years ago. It's an acronym of 'I WAS THERE'. An iwath signifies a feature, a quirk, a characteristic of a person, place or phenomenon that can only be observed from direct observation – they can't dream it up, it doesn't qualify as an iwath if you read it online or in a book. (Because I say so.) A perfect iwath triggers a knowing nod; a throb of awe that someone has identified what you've often noticed but have never seen expressed before; and a sense of connection with a wider community who experience that iwath. A writer uses iwaths to endow fictional scenes with heightened plausibility and enable the suspension of disbelief. By way of example, an iwath I harvested in Holland one winter I was living in Wassenaar was that, if you cycle across a polder during a snowstorm, it doesn't matter how tightly elasticated the wrists of your coat may be, a snowflake is guaranteed to travel up your sleeve and melt in your armpit. Put that in a scene set in the Netherlands, and readers think, '*Wow, that can't be made up – this world is REALLY real – I'm going to believe EVERYTHING about it from now on...*' Here ends my explanation of the 'iwath' ladies and gentlemen. Now it's your word too.

I suggest that a writer is a professional iwath harvester. At funerals, during arguments with my wife, while listening to friends' problems with their kids, one part of me is present in the room reacting like a mature human should. (Or, in the case of the argument, like a mature human shouldn't) Another, analytical part of me is looking on thinking, "*Wow, people really cry snot through their noses when they grieve*" or "*Never noticed how her lips pull back over her teeth and the muscles around her mouth shiver when she's furious... Don't forget to put that in your notebook later.*" If this sounds parasitic or predatory – yes, it can be. But that's life in the Tower of Story. I don't think of myself as some doomed Romantic outsider. This is just the price of admission. There's even a positive flip-side: the Writer's Consolation. No matter how awful an awful experience might be, the Writer's Consolation says, 'I know it's bad, but at least you can write about it now. So come on, get to work – where are the iwaths here?'

Thank you for coming out of your many towers, for crossing the professional distance between us, and for spending a little time with me, on my guided tour of my Tower of Story. I hope you found things that are different between my tower and yours, and maybe a few things that are much the same. Have a safe trip home.  
Hartelijk dank namens Leonard en mij.