

## WHAT ARE PEOPLE READING THESE DAYS?

Goroke is a township in western Victoria, not that far from the border with South Australia. In 2016 it had a population of nearly 300. Whether that qualifies it for the title of “one-horse-town” I am perhaps not yet “fair dinkum Aussie” enough to judge.<sup>1</sup> (Cheepie in Queensland had a population of one last time we drove through it...there was no-one home).

Why Goroke, you might ask?

The town was referred to in an e-mail from my old school friend, Cox T., who, as a retiring top medical scientist at Harvard Uni., self-evidently is interested in recipients of Nobel prizes. (Cox, like many others, despairs about Donald Trump who thinks he should be given the Nobel Peace Prize while actively setting out to destroy Harvard).

Below some of the article in the Paris Review referred to in the e-mail:

**From:** The Paris Review <newsletters@theparisreview.org>

**Subject:** What Are People Reading These Days?

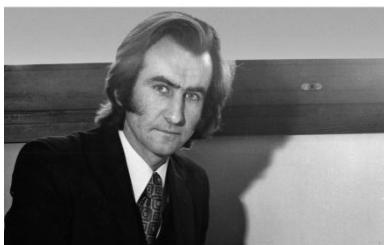
**Date:** February 25, 2025 at 11:35:55 EST

**To:** <terhorst@comcast.net>

Gerald Murnane, the story often goes, is a perennial favorite for the Nobel Prize who lives alone, hermit-like, in a town of three hundred people. But when Louis Klee went to Goroke, Australia, to visit the author of *The Plains and Barley Patch* at his home—“a single rectangular room,” Klee writes, “built out of massive slabs of Mount Gambier limestone”—Murnane was clear that he was by no means a recluse. “I’m busy and active during the day in the men’s shed.” (We at the *Review* were initially puzzled by this mention; the men’s shed is, it turns out, **a thing** in Australia.) He also plays a lot of golf, and makes beer, which he is more or less happy to share with visitors. But it is true that the great majority of Murnane’s time is spent in solitary activities: sometimes writing, but even more often maintaining the archive of manuscripts and personal effects that he keeps, under lock and key, in steel filing cabinets that take up the majority of his living space. Murnane’s life is, in this way, unusually well documented for future scholars. For now, readers who cannot make their way to Goroke for a guided tour will have to make do with our **Art of Fiction No. 266**, in which Murnane talks about his short-lived attempt to become a priest, his long struggle to find a publisher, and how he invented one of the most intricate imaginary games ever played, over decades (and no, this isn’t a metaphor for his novels).

### GERALD MURNANE

*The Art of Fiction No. 266*



“A fatal question—what are people reading these days? Never mind what people are reading these days. What should I be writing about is the fundamental question.”

“I had to grow up to learn that the realm, let’s call it, of poetry and fiction and horse racing and music was the utmost realm, that religion was just a man-made concept of a lower order.”

“My wife would occasionally say, ‘That’s an awful lot of effort for something that might never get published.’ She didn’t have to tell me that. I was thinking that all the time.”

[https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/8375/the-art-of-fiction-no-266-gerald-murnane?utm\\_source=The+Paris+Review+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=7bde90e0ba-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2024\\_08\\_16\\_05\\_23\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-660513641d-55602545&mc\\_cid=7bde90e0ba&mc\\_eid=ad9edb42b3](https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/8375/the-art-of-fiction-no-266-gerald-murnane?utm_source=The+Paris+Review+Newsletter&utm_campaign=7bde90e0ba-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_08_16_05_23_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-660513641d-55602545&mc_cid=7bde90e0ba&mc_eid=ad9edb42b3)

<sup>1</sup> As it turns out the term *one-horse-town* probably is more American in origin, but I learned it from my Australian mates when I first arrived here in the late fifties as a ‘New Australian’, being ‘culturally assimilated’ as was government policy then. The end of this process was that I now consider myself as a Dutch-born European living in an increasingly culturally diverse Australia which is currently struggling with an urgent, potentially catastrophic, global post-colonial existential identity crisis – think Trump.

I strongly recommend reading the full article and exploring the links provided! Despite the perils of AI (artificial intelligence) modern technology places a lot of worthwhile (if not essential) background information at your clickbait-prone fingertips, requiring at times considerable amounts of self-discipline.

Here are some examples of bits I copied of links I followed while writing this piece (and which slowed it down considerably, almost to the point of abandoning the project...). I clicked on Paul Genoni's articles and found interesting well written stuff on Murnane on the website of 'The Conversation' (<https://theconversation.com/profiles/paul-genoni-122133>):

"It (Murnane's book '*The Plains*') possesses the particular genius of provoking the reader into questioning their own perception of the world; of querying the "reality" outside our own consciousness, our own way of knowing, and of the time and place that we glibly accept and casually share with others."

([Paul Genoni](#) Associate Professor, Faculty of Media, Society and Culture, Curtin University)

I began to click wanting to find out more about that website and found:

**Ditch the algorithms for a more constructive inbox.** Typing that into the search engine produced:

"When you type a question into a search engine, the first result you see is probably an AI-generated answer sourced from the open web. There is every chance the answers presented by the algorithms that shape our contemporary reality are based on disinformation and misinformation. But here at The Conversation our articles are written by academics and edited by professional journalists."

For those who happen to read this sometime in the distant future – like we might read now e.g. Seneca or Voltaire et al. – I am writing at the time Australia was the first to ban certain Social Media for teenagers under age 16, when finally serious questions are beginning to be addressed about the use of AI and its algorithms.

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However... now I want to capture, before they all too easily evaporate, some of my thoughts in response to three recent communications (WhatsApp's these days) I had from Cox:

(1) Daley, Remembering David Baltimore:

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.immuni.2025.10.023>

(2) I read some of your recent stuff...Boy, you can write

(3) With some trepidation, nay shyness, I send you a brief resume

They were clearly written to provoke a response:

-Undoubtedly Baltimore's obituary is a brilliant piece of writing.

-The reference to my writing flattery?

-His resume: brief and worthy of shyness? and/or an example of academic modesty?

Far be it from me to comment on the resume, it surely speaks for itself. Except for its introduction there is no need to reproduce it here as a net-search of Cornelis P. Terhorst will tell you all there is to know:

“People commonly believe that science travels in a more-or-less straight line from ignorance to knowledge by collecting facts about the world. However, throughout history scientists applied creative processes [combinatorial, exploratory, or transformational] to overthrow what they thought they knew and install a new paradigm, a way of looking at the world.”

I will restrict myself to the flattery allegation.

Upon re-reading my most recent “piece” (stukje, in Dutch) I too was impressed and felt I had “nailed” something there. And I admit that, even if I sometimes cringe when re-reading my writings, I nevertheless often have that feeling of satisfaction as they are usually written with a great deal of difficulty, and feedback is indeed rare as I, perhaps cowardly, shy away from self-promotion. So, it feels good to get praise from someone like Cox. (But “don’t look the gift-horse in the mouth” I hear my mother say).

It is now a week or so later and I finally forced myself to stop procrastinating and continue this “piece” (it is too hot to do anything outside...). Thinking about how to proceed I concluded that the issue was essentially about ‘bescheidenheid versus beschetenheid’ (modesty vs arrogance).

I asked Google-AI in Dutch about bescheidenheid and the difference between that and beschetenheid.

Google came up with: <https://www.psychologie.nl/artikel/bescheidenheid-wat-heb-je-eraan/> (bescheidenheid-how-useful-is-it)

The article is worth reading and google will translate it for you pretty well.

But it has difficulty with the word “bescheten” in its translation of its answer to the question about the difference: the “translator (AI generated) is too “polite” to use the word “shitty”, i.e. “full of shit”, or perhaps somewhat more politely “up-him/her/them-selv(e)s”! (schijten(verb), scheet(past), gescheten(past participle)).

Below is an AI generated answer in Dutch, and a pretty good one, I think. But the English translation makes no sense as “bescheten” does not at all mean “civilised”, but rather the opposite. Something like “full of shit” comes closer.

Wat is het verschil tussen bescheiden en bescheten?

Het verschil tussen "bescheiden" en "bescheten" is groot; het eerste is een positieve of neutrale eigenschap, terwijl het tweede een platte of negatieve term is. (*Here plat means vulgar, not "flat"*)

### Bescheiden

Dit woord heeft meerdere betekenissen, afhankelijk van hoe het wordt gebruikt:

- **Persoonlijke eigenschap:** Iemand die niet te hoog van zichzelf opgeeft, eenvoudig is en niet op de voorgrond hoeft te treden. Synoniemen zijn nederig, ingetogen of pretentieloos.
- **Omvang:** Iets wat klein of matig is, zoals een "bescheiden inkomen" of een "bescheiden woning".
- **Zelfstandig naamwoord (meervoud):** Schriftelijke stukken, officiële papieren of documenten (bijvoorbeeld: "de nodige bescheiden overleggen").

## Bescheten

Dit is een informeel en vaak plat woord dat letterlijk "ondergescheten" (*undershit*) betekent. In figuurlijke zin wordt het gebruikt om een negatieve situatie aan te duiden:

- **Bedrogen of teleurgesteld:** De uitdrukking "bescheten uitkomen" betekent dat iemand bedrogen is of dat iets heel anders (slechter) is afgelopen dan verwacht.
- **Waardeloos:** Het kan duiden op iets dat vruchtelos is of niets oplevert, zoals een "bescheten commissie".
- **Verwaand of bekakt:** In sommige regio's wordt het (ironisch) gebruikt voor iemand die zich erg deftig of gewichtig voordoet, maar dit eigenlijk niet is ("een bescheten sujet" "*an unscrupulous or shabby subject*").

**Samengevat:** Gebruik **bescheiden** als je iemand wilt complimenteren voor hun eenvoud, en pas op met **bescheten**, omdat dit als beledigend of zeer informeel wordt ervaren.

AI can make mistakes, so double-check responses

- ander woord voor bescheiden - synoniemen.net

bescheiden (bn) : eenvoudig, onopvallend, voorzichtig, niet opvallend, niet opdringerig, terughoudend, nederig, discreet, ingetoge...

For now I will stop here, but I intend to explore these words somewhat further as they seem particularly relevant in today's world.

DP

1 January 2026

PS. Oh Ja..."en wie de schoen past trekke hem aan!". **"If the shoe fits, wear it."**

In other words: Should I wear it? After all, it takes one to know one...