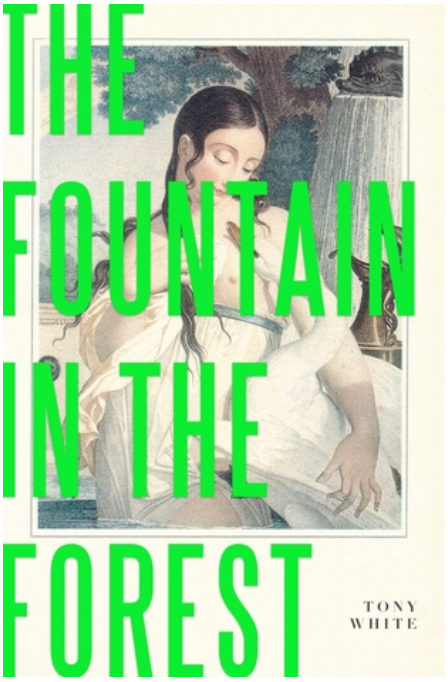

The Fountain in the Forest

Tony White

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The Fountain in the Forest Tony White
When a brutally murdered man is found hanging in a Covent Garden theatre, Detective Sergeant Rex King becomes obsessed with the case. Who is this anonymous corpse, and why has he been ritually mutilated? But as Rex explores the crime scene further, the mystery deepens, and he finds himself confronting his own secret history instead. Who, more importantly, is Rex King? Shifting between Holborn Police Station, an abandoned village in rural 1980s France, and the Battle of the Beanfield at Stonehenge, The Fountain in the Forest transforms the traditional crime narrative into something dizzyingly unique. At once an avant-garde linguistic experiment, thrilling police procedural, philosophical meditation on liberty, and counter-culture bildungsroman, this is an iconoclastic novel of unparalleled ambition.

The Fountain in the Forest Details

Date	:	Published January 4th 2018 by Faber & Faber
ISBN	:	
Author	:	Tony White
Format	:	Hardcover 310 pages
Genre	:	Fiction, Mystery, Crime, Novels

From Reader Review The Fountain in the Forest for online ebook

Titus Hjelm says

I'm slightly biased because I took Tony's writing workshop some years ago while he was visiting our school and think he's a great guy. Foxy-T was great, but demanding for a non-native speaker. Charlieunclenorfolktango was demanding for the same reason, but also because of its rather experimental style. The Fountain in the Forest retains the quirkiness and social commentary that I liked about the earlier work, but is much more approachable. The Oulipo-technique sometimes draws attention away from the story itself, but overall the narrative really rewards the reader by the end. Read it.

Liz Barnsley says

An extremely clever narrative and a very quirky storytelling style. Loved this one for all it's differences to my normal reads. Full review to follow.

Ian Mond says

Recently, Tim Lott wrote in The Guardian about the demise of literary fiction. He blamed writers eschewing a three-act structure and story for works of “elegant tedium”, shapeless things that promote voice above plot. Lott was offended by writers like Martin Amis, Jonathan Coe and Edna O’Brien actively denigrating story, which, in the words of O’Brien, was for silly boys.

Whether you agree with Lott or not as with all articles of this type it creates a binary based on a limited amount of examples while asking the reader to choose sides. You either support story-telling and conventional structures or you’re on the side of voice and experimentation. You certainly can’t be both. That’s bullshit, of course, as evidenced by Tony White’s The Fountain In The Forest which, literally, has a three-act structure and deep understanding of the “fundamentals of plot” (to quote Lott) while also being bold and experimental in how it delivers that story. It’s not just that White’s police procedural revolves around the French Republican calendar or that he decides to adopt a mandated vocabulary in the fashion of Georges Perec by featuring all the answers to the Guardian Quick Crossword in 1985 within the body of the novel, it’s also how he plays with the genre with a twist so brazen that, on its own, is a commentary on the police procedural. What’s remarkable is that these experimental flourishes don’t undermine what is a gripping, stunning read. The last of the Lott’s three-acts is as thrilling, page-turning and suspenseful as any pot-boiler anyone will read this year, brilliantly set up by the attention to detail, the little nudges and clues and the odd tangents of the first two acts.

This is a novel that takes its inspiration from the crime/mystery genre and Oulipo (look it up) and somehow brings the philosophies of Tim Lott and Martin Amis together. It’s about the story and about the voice. It’s about the conventional thrills of genre and the excitement of experimentation. The Fountain In The Forest has set a high bar for the rest of the novels I read this year.

Gary Budden says

The Fountain in the Forest begins as a London crime novel and intriguing police procedural, before mutating into something very different, examining the ripple effects of key events across history: the past is never truly past.

Tying a slightly-fictionalised contemporary London to the brutal Battle of the Beanfield in 1985, a French commune of hippies, punks and idealists, the French Revolutionary Calendar, and back further in time taking in events from World War Two and Fascist Italy, this is a wonderful novel addressing police brutality, alternative culture, shifting identity across time, and history itself.

Also contains excellent descriptions of London cafe breakfasts. Top stuff.

Carole-Ann says

If this book is an example of "literary" crime writing, then you can keep it. It's so padded out with ridiculously long, rambling sentences, that I scanned through most of it rather than actually read it.

Essentially, the book is divided into 3 parts: first, current time, where DS Rex King discovers a body in the depths of a theatre; second, 30 years previous, where we find a young British teenager joining an ad hoc group of hippies/rebels in a remote village in Cote d'Azur; and thirdly, back to the present with the necessary look back at the 80's.

The occurrence of the **bold** type in certain words baffled me at first until I looked at the END for the authors notes. From then on, it just became ANNOYING. There is no reason, and NO advantage to use these words in the narrative. It became obvious that these LONG sentences including these words were (mostly) there 'for the sake of it' and didn't enhance the story at all.

Also, in the first part, the use of acronyms and slang for police departments involved in a crime, became overpowering. (But at least that was only in the first part!) There was a little 'muddying of the waters' too with the introduction of some of King's early reminiscences as a teen; and that of a "Death in Custody" case, of which he was in charge. The actual murder investigation took an early back seat.

The second part, in the village of the Title, seemed to belong to another story AND another person. The use of the French Revolutionary Calendar was inadequately explained, so I tried to figure out WHY USE IT IN THE FIRST PLACE? After finishing the book, I decided it was an affectation in trying to produce a literary work.

The third part was a mish-mash of 1 and 2; and if I thought it muddled or vague before, this time it certainly became (almost) incoherent. I did not understand why the Battle of the Beanfield was used; nor why there were so many mentions of the Miner's Strike but had nothing to do with the story unfolding. Perhaps if only to give an impression of the 80's themselves?? And jumping between then and now make me blink hard more than once!!

And I think that's why I didn't like it: there were too many NON-CONNECTED links or mentions of things which were not relevant. It's not a police-procedural at all; it's not even a straight-forward remembering of

times past; and the reasoning at the end for the murder, defies logic (IMHO).

As an attempt at *literary fiction* it's just reinforced my opinion that I'm good to leave it alone.

A good review from the Financial Times is here:
https://www.ft.com/content/1ea28a48-0...

Emma Curtis says

Loved this book. I didn't know what to expect when I picked it up, but was immediately drawn in. It's clever, surprising and beautifully written. A police procedural with a difference.

Todayiamadaisy says

I didn't enjoy this as much as I'd hoped. It's a literary crime novel in three parts: it begins in present-day London, where Detective Sergeant Rex King is investigating a murder while being investigated for his role in an old death in custody case; it moves to a commune in rural France in 1985; in the third part it moves back to present-day, with occasional flashbacks to tie it all together. There's a weirdly stilted quality to the writing, with some words bolded, which turns to be because the writer is using a mandated vocabulary (a list of answers to daily crossword puzzles); chapters are also named by dates of the French revolutionary calendar, which are sometimes also worked into the chapter itself too. So: it's interesting (it did not fall together the way I was expecting), it's busy, but it's not quite as clever as it thinks it is.

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emmabbooks says

Murder, Mystery, Literature

A brutally murdered man is found at a London Theatre. Solving the murder is just one of the themes of this beautifully written modern literature novel.

Set mostly in 1985 DS Rex King has not only a murder on his hands, but his friend has gone missing and work is not going as smoothly as he'd like. Policing techniques at that time are explored as King's murder investigation takes us through the streets of London and into the theatre world. Later the story takes us back to the 1970s to a group of hippies who are living in a commune in France, enjoying an idyllic life far away from the strikes and upheavals going on in the UK at this time.

A book to sit back and enjoy. The cover is so beautiful, I highly recommend getting hold of a paper copy, rather than an e-book. Each chapter contains some bold print words where the author has incorporated the solutions to the Guardian Quick Crosswords in March - April 1985; quite amusing and very clever.

This is a book to savour and think about. Only 300 pages, but it took me twice as long to read as a normal thriller of that length, because of the beautiful style of writing, and the occasional foray into Google to look up events and places mentioned.

Great for Book Clubs or studying. The plot is tidied up nicely, but there is plenty of material for discussion, and perhaps differences of opinion.

A 4* rating from me as I really enjoyed most of this book, but some of the middle section (in France) lost my attention a little. Certainly a pleasure to read (and hold) such a beautifully written book.

Tommi says

A mutilated, unidentified body hanging in a theater in central London, and a headstrong detective solving the case amidst bureaucracy; a group of young activists in a rural French village in the 1980s, eager to bring an abandoned bakery back to business. Out of these unlikely elements, Tony White has written *The Fountain in the Forest*, a detective thriller of unique caliber.

What makes *The Fountain in the Forest* peculiar in the sense that even the intelligentsia of the literary world have shown interest in it is that, despite being a crime novel, it takes a very postmodern approach to the genre. While several tropes of crime writing are present here, from the hard-boiled detective Rex, who is divorced, to his sudden new love interest, Susan, who he encounters at a café, from small clues to red herrings, the novel is palpably experimental in two senses.

The first noticeable feature anyone opening the book to its contents page will see are the curiously titled chapters in French, followed by an English translation, such as chapter nine: “Mandragore (Mandrake).” The chapters are named in accordance with what is called the The French Revolutionary (or Republican) Calendar that was the official calendar of the country in 1793–1806, “a non-hierarchical and secular system of ten-day weeks (or *décades*) in thirty-day months, without days of religious or royal significance,” as White explicates it in the preface, and continues:

In what became the dominant version of the Revolutionary Calendar, each day of the year also celebrated a different item of everyday rural live (although their precise distribution can vary), whether a herb, a foodstuff, a livestock animal, a tool or a utility: wild thyme, rhubarb, goat and beehive are just a handful of examples.

While the use of this calendar might make little sense for the first hundred pages of the novel, the reader can rest assured that it has a thematic connection to the storyline, which switches suddenly from contemporary London in part one to 1980s’ rural France in part two. There, in a small fictional town called La Fontaine-en-Forêt, lives a group of young activists who adhere to the long-abandoned calendar, in ways that evoke green values, if not, increasingly, activism:

They enjoyed the way that these names harked back to a simpler, pre-industrial way of life, as well as the basically irreligious and non-hierarchical structure that this implied, in contrast to the regular calendar with its saint’s days and Sabbaths, high days and holidays.

Besides this thematic connection, the chapter titles figure as sort of prompts of imagination for the author, who applies whatever rural item is the name of the day to the text of the novel. Mandragore, which I mentioned above, turns out to be the brand name of the potential murder weapon. Sometimes the connection seems more humorous than anything else, and I assume White has had a fun although challenging time trying to incorporate every item: in the “Thon (Tuna)” chapter, for instance, White offers Susan tuna steaks

for supper at his place, without a deeper meaning that at least I am aware of.

The second visible experimentation that White applies to his novel are the highlighted words, which in real life are answers to the Quick Crosswords in the *Guardian* magazine from 1985, each chapter utilizing every answer for one day's crossword, except every seventh chapter, because the *Guardian* did not come out on Sundays. Using mandated vocabulary might seem an even more artificial addition than the Republican Calendar, but it is, in fact, fascinating to follow how White fares. In some cases, he might manage to include several of the answers in one sentence, like here: "Later on, after he had awoken from a strange, ***Orlando*** -like nightmare full of **intimations** of **immortality** and in which a **spell** seemed to have been cast upon him or her by a mysterious French **nun**…" Sometimes, when the day's crossword offers words like "Norma," "Venus," "modesty," and "hyperactive," you can almost guess the resulting train of thought, as a boy called JJ daydreams about his friend Sylvie:

*If Sylvie had been **Norma** Jean herself, or if she had emerged from the sea and been borne, **Venus**-like – naked, and barely protecting her **modesty** – by fragrant winds on a great Vulval shell to some Arcadian shore, she could scarcely have appeared more beautiful to JJ than the already did. Nor could the connection between her beauty and his desire have been more profound. What was a nineteen-year-old boy with a **hyperactive** imagination who had been mistaken for a punk to do in this world of adults and – he wished – sexual possibility?*

The mandated vocabulary is also linked to the story in the way that Rex is often seen with the magazine next to him, eager to solve the daily puzzle. Moreover, the solving of puzzles is an obvious analogy to his career as a detective and the novel itself as crime fiction. Therefore, in interesting ways, the diegetic level is reflected in the type on the page.

These two specific features of the novel suggest, and the blurb on the cover confirms, that *The Fountain in the Forest* is rooted in Oulipian writing, a style of literary experimentation based on constraints, dating back to 1960s' France, and whose most famous advocators were the likes of George Perec, who famously wrote a novel, *La disparition*, without once using the letter "e."

It is often acknowledged that restrictions feed creativity, and it is very much true here, considering what an original piece of writing *The Fountain in the Forest* turns out to be. It is a rather remarkable achievement when you keep in mind the constraints, or, perhaps, that is exactly why it excels. The story follows many conventions of the genre, and therefore does not belong to the kind of books I tend to read, and that is why I can neither be the best judge of them, but the experiments make the book matter much more, transcending the genre while simultaneously belonging to it on one level. (I don't want to go too deep into this year's Booker longlist, yet I can't help thinking how much more this novel achieves compared to Belinda Bauer's *Snap*). Furthermore, the novel is intellectually stimulating, yet never elitist. This is thanks to White's interesting mixing of a popular genre with a challenging style.

I am not completely comfortable with some of the sexual elements in the novel, although I suppose they are justifiable in the light of Rex's character: perhaps his raw, unconsidered sexual urges are a nod to the 80s, like the crosswords, to times long before the #MeToo movement, or maybe he's just a realistic character who we, as readers, are meant to be shocked about. Being the first book in a trilogy, only time will tell what happens on the date that Rex and Susan go on in the novel's last pages – assuming that the following volumes continue the same story. *The Fountain in the Forest* is definitely intriguing enough to entice me to read a second or even a third installment.

Written for the Helsinki Book Review.

Roy says

Literary crime to the max. Not the biggest fan of this genre as I'm really big on narrative. Very quirky and strange style. The bold words through me off a little. Very short but I guess as literary crime goes, probably the perfect length. Read this over a week in short bursts, so didnt grab my attention as other crime novels do.

Nadia Ghanem says

Thank you to Faber and Faber books for the free copy of this novel, given in exchange for a review on goodreads.
- - -

How do you feel about revenge? I love the idea of retribution, and of fate righting wrongs. There is a good dose of revenge in White's novel, and a few skeletons let loose out of Detective Rex King's closet.

The Fountain in the Forest is wonderfully creative in form (highly successfully so), and tremendouly cheeky in content.

I loved his experiment with form and the two challenges White explicitly set himself. First, each chapter contains a fixed set of words (in bold in the text) that are the answers to crosswords he used to love, and came across again during his research for this book. There are only about 20-or-so such words in each chapter, and so they do not affect the flow of the text, but after a time, one can see how the narrative has taken shape around them. The effect was sleek, and flawless. Second, White gives a clue to the mystery of this story through the titles of the chapters. The titles are the names of a day in the French revolutionary calendar, invented in 1793. A smooth and effective history lesson right there.

In terms of style, White is a lot of fun, I am always fond of play on registers and White goes up and down the vocabulary scale effotlessly from erudite to downright grimy (expect a well rounded number of piss, cock, fuck).

As for content, this novel is best approached as the mysterious story of Rex King who happens to work as a detective in London, rather than as a detective novel. Why? Because the story opens with detective Rex called to the scene of a murder, and after an introduction of who Rex is and what his team is about to deal with, White stops addressing the investigation or its progress.

Instead, post crime scene and intro, the novel goes off on a tangent, a good 30 years prior to present events, in a French village in which a small community of punk-anarchists has elected residence. It is once this story inside the story takes a turn (up to two thirds of the novel by then) that you will see Tony White pulling his tongue at you to reveal in a cheeky fashion what the tangent represents.

I greatly enjoyed discovering I had been taken on a ride. But my only warning to other readers is that I was glad I hadn't given up on this book by then, because I had thought of giving up on it a few times.

The reason is that I do not enjoy narratives driven by place-descriptions, unless they tie in with emotions,

and I couldn't find any here. I felt drowned and breathless several times in sentences only about a physical place (or a sexual fantasy, itself a physical place) that took my heart nowhere, least of all fast. These descriptions were often long sentences, up to one-and-a-half page at times (a well-known style of composition in French lit but not a success here). This slowed down the unfolding of the story considerably.

There is a lot of enjoyment to be had from reading this novel, provided the reader has been forewarned about the novel's pace and its descriptive character. The big reveal at the end is delightful.

Marc Nash says

See, it is possible to write a genre book with high literary values which far from getting in the way of the plot, take it on to another level. A book about corruption of societal roles with responsibility, in this case two policemen from different countries embroiled in a battle to the death as to which is the more corrupt.

Taking in state undermining of Green movements, alternative lifestyles that corrupt the undercover officers who penetrate these communities and groups they're charged with destroying. Set against the backdrop of the 1980s, ironically echoing great revolutions from history such as the French which was so radical as to remake the calendar, naming months after rural and natural everyday things in a bid for true egalitarianism and no saint or hold days. But of course any contemporary would-be revolutionary is unaware of its history, so when such names are dusted off and used in the 80s, it's either ironically or as a completely empty gesture, an affectation or ornamental decoration.

The literary devices are the chapter headings after these revolutionary calendar names, most of which crop up in the body of the chapter, seamlessly embedded as part of the plot. But also an Oulipo element -the writer set himself the task of having to utilise all the words of the Guardian quick crossword for that day - what's called mandated writing' - and White helpfully bolds them so we know which words are from the crossword, but again, most blend in seamlessly (except for a couple used as names or nicknames).

A ripping detective thriller yarn in its own right, with a good dose of politics grounding it in relevance even to today, plus the more than garnish of the literary devices on top. Splendid stuff.

Thebooktrail says

Visit the locations in the novel my link text

Authorsonlocation Meet The author

This is a wonderfully unique, quirky and cheeky read. I say that as I’ve had to wait a while after reading it until I knew what I wanted to write. Why so tricky?

There are lots of hidden gems in this book. Quite uniquely, it’s a novel and plot driven by place. Yes please! and there are plenty of them. It’s like a mini history lesson – from the London theatres and streets to the hilltop towns and bayous of the Cote d’Azur. Each chapter title is the name of a day in the 1793 French revolutionary calendar.

The author plays a lot in this novel – is it a mystery, a crime novel or a historical one?Well, all of them and more. For language fans out there, the register in the novel slides down from one end of the scale to another producing music to your ears. Village dialect to the Queen’s English or should that be the tongue of revolutionary France?

The story is a puzzle, a pass the parcel kind of read – unwrap the next part and you’re never quite sure what to expect. Once the music of the text stops, the discovery is neat.

And that’s before you get to the individual words: there are words in bold dotted through the text. These are words which the author has collected from crosswords he used to do and the story as it progresses, winds around them like vines on a wall…

Vines around a fountain in a forest you might say.

Marcus Hobson says

There are a lot of surprises in this novel. Looks can be deceptive. Interesting facts about how the book is written will not emerge until the end.

We start in London's West End, where police are investigating a murder. A man has been found hanging among the scenery of a theatre. Detective Sergeant Rex King knows the man who paints the scenery, and he has disappeared. No-one knows who the corpse is. What follows is a lot of police procedure. At one point I got very bogged down with the acronyms. Not just the acronyms but the nick-names for the acronyms. Yes, they lend a certain authenticity, but I'm only going to be living inside this book for a few days and I'm going to struggle to remember them or need them ever again.

Progress on the case is slow. There are no leads. An internal investigation is looming, an old court case may get resurrected. Rex King goes back to the crime scene and finds a knife and some puzzling writing on the wall. Finally they have something to work with. Turns out the writing is something from the French Revolutionary Calendar, which measured time from Year 1 of the Revolution. Ten day weeks and thirty day months, where each day celebrated a different item of everyday rural life, herbs, foodstuff, livestock or tools all featured. There are thirty chapters in the book, starting with the 'Common Fumitory' and ending with the 'Hornbeam'.

Suddenly after thirteen chapters on the case, we switch away from London and to the South of France. Soon it become clear that we have moved back in time to the nineteen eighties. A young British lad called JJ joins a commune of hippies, intellectuals and artists up in the hills behind Nice. Now I am struggling to find any link whatsoever with what has happened in the first thirteen chapters. I am enjoying the story of life in southern France, so I go with the flow for ten chapters. Characters emerge and plot lines develop. JJ falls in love with a beautiful French girl.

Then everything happens, everything comes together in a rash of unexpected twists in the tale. I will say no

more, other than the fact I wasn't expecting any of it. Brilliant.

There are seven pages of Author's Notes at the end. From it we discover that not only is the Revolutionary Calendar following the course of a specific period of time, three months in 1985, but author Tony White has used something called a "mandated vocabulary". The most famous example of this I know is George Perec's novel called 'A Void' in which he does not use the letter e. This is always tinged with humour for me, as he goes to so much trouble to avoid the letter, but with his names on the front cover, title page and spine, there are in fact four e's for each repetition of his name. I also pity the translator, who has done a doubly heroic job to translate from the French to the English and still avoid the letter. In The Fountain in the Forest, White uses all the solution words from The Guardian Quick Crossword from each one of those days in 1985. I knew there was something going on with the words, as there were a few in bold in the text of each chapter, but as I rushed along with the plot I didn't pause to see if there was a link or reason for it. I'm glad I didn't try as I would never have discovered anything from a random sequence like that. I think there was only one occasion, where we spiralled off into a rabbit hole about Jean-Luc Picard and Star Trek, that I thought, why was that necessary?

A great story if you like your mysteries on multiple levels.

Paul Fulcher says

Update: Disappointingly absent from the Goldsmiths list - but very much worth reading:

Tony White's Fountain in the Forest, the first of a planned trilogy, is a quite extraordinary combination of a controlled Oulipian literary construct, page-turning detective thriller and a politically-charged piece of social history.

The story begins in the present day with the discovery of a violent death in the London theatreland, one where Detective Rex King (the doubly royal name chosen by the author quite deliberate) finds his best friend as at first the assumed victim, then the chief suspect. The first 10 chapters follow the investigations of King and his colleagues alongside the potential reopening of an old death-in-custody case at their Holborn police station, of a man arrested "for throwing an egg at some minor-league **banker** during the Occupy protests", and the imminent threat of an inspection of their procedures and record keeping.

The 2nd part, again 10 chapters, at first rather jarringly, takes us to a seemingly very different story, set in the mid 1980s, in a hippy commune in a fictitious village, in the stunning area around St Paul de Vence, near Nice.

the fictitious village is called La Fontaine en Forêt (The Fountain in the Forest):

see https://www.thebooktrail.com/authorso... for a booktrail.

and the third and final section of 10 chapters brings the two stories together and solves the mystery ... or with a trilogy planned does it?

Starting with the Oulipan, as that is what attracted me to the novel, White has constrained himself by the use of ‘mandated vocabulary.' Specifically, and in White's own Authors Notes:

> The Fountain in the Forest and the two novels that follow are mapped against a specific period in UK history: a brief interregnum of ninety days (or nine revolutionary weeks, according to Sylvain Maréchal’s decimal calendar) from the end of the UK Miners’ Strike on 3 March 1985 to the Battle of the Beanfield on 1 June. Each chapter is mapped against one day in 1985, converted into the French Revolutionary Calendar, but as well as being shot through with the daily symbols from the Revolutionary Calendar, The Fountain in the Forest also uses a **mandated vocabulary**, i.e. a predetermined list of words that must be incorporated into the text – namely, all of the solutions to the Guardian Quick Crossword from each of those same days in 1985.

Now I should acknowledge this is in an afterword, and sometimes with Oulipan novels (see my review of Sphinx) it can be ideal to start the book unaware of the constraint. Indeed, famously if perhaps apocryphally, some early reviews of the classic Oulipan work, Perec's La disparition failed to notice that it was written without the letter 'e', despite the clues such as the main character called Voyl (Vowl in the English translation, The Void). Here however, all of the publicity surrounding the book, such as the author's own crossword used to promote it, rather suggest one is expected to know in advance, and indeed the mandated words are highlighted in bold in the text as and when they occur.

As an example, the novel opens:

> Like any British policeman who had been brought up on the true-crime stories of the early twentieth century, Detective Sergeant Rex King recognised the jagged, hairy leaves and the sickly-looking yellowish and purple-veined five-pointed flowers immediately. It was **henbane** – Hyoscyamus niger – source of the deadly alkaloid scopolamine. This was the poison that, in 1910, the notorious ‘Doctor’ Hawley Harvey Crippen had used to kill Cora Turner

henbane being ones of the answers to the Guardian Quick Crossword No. 4649, from Monday 4 March 1985, the others being, in order of their appearance in the novel's text, cabinet, Emma, least, cavil, prosaic, indispensable, Gallup, reason, Tuesday, night-watchman, Banda, icicles, vinegar, spice, Mark Twain, Iliad, my type, aspect, wallpaper, thrill, ebb-tide, tea-shop, geyser, Eric and enemy.

White (and the reader) has a lot of fun with his concept. He is no believer in the Chekhov's gun theory of drama, instead preferring red herrings: the **henblane** that begins the murder mystery is never mentioned again, a mysterious figure in plus-fours and riding a **penny-farthing** similarly (unless of course they are clues for parts II and III...).

Other times the words, which as White has observed create a 'time capsule' of the mid 80s provide an excuse for exposition for example on President Hastings Banda of Malawi, and others allow White to give Detective King a colourful vocabulary of his own invention, e.g. "it stood out like a platypus in a porn film"

The bolding of the words could perhaps be seen to spoil the fun of finding them, encouraging the opposite technique of reading the list of mandated words, included in the Author's Note, in advance of reading each chapter and anticipating what story might follow. As White himself observed in an interview in The Big Issue, "when words like “expectant”, “touch”, “erect” and “flagrante delicto” have to be used in a particular chapter, you know that love is in the air!"

However, the second Oulipan feature adequately fulfils any desire the reader has for detective work of their

own, as well as hinting towards the socio-political nature of the novel.

As mentioned in White's introduction above, his novel also draws on Sylvain Marechal's French Revolutionary Calendar, used by the French government from late 1793 to 1805, and for 18 days by the Paris Commune in 1871, and by certain counter-cultural movements ever since. White directs the reader to Sanja Perovic's The Calendar in Revolutionary France: Perceptions of Time in Literature, Culture, Politics for further details. She says there that:

> the story of the Republican calendar contains — in almost conceptually distilled form — the history of our own modern time schema, restoring to life the assumptions, hopes and blind spots about the human construction of value and meaning that remain with us today.

The community in La Fontaine en Forêt also adopt the calendar, and in particular it's way that each day of the year reflects a particular aspect of rural life.

> No one else had the **almanac**, but even if they had, no-one really understood the particular method Pythag used to calculate this. They just took his word for it, enjoying the seasonal tone and flavour of the plants and herbs, the agricultural tools and foodstuffs that were thus named. They enjoyed the way that these names harked back to a simpler, pre-industrial way of life, as well as the basically irreligious and non-hierarchical structure that this implied, in contrast to the regular calendar with its saints' days and Sabbaths, high days and holidays.

Each of the chapter's is named after one such day and the book then contains another piece of unrevealed mandated vocabulary, namely to include this within the chapter, but left for the reader to find. Some are used for character's names and others inserted similarly to the crossword answers; so, for example, the stream of thought containing the "**platypus** in a porn film" analogy also has, a few lines later, "as powerless as Popeye without his spinach", both in the Chapter Epinard / Spinach.

However in other places, and adding to the fun in finding them, White permits himself more flexibility and creativity than he allowed with the crossword answers, so that e.g. periwinkle becomes a reference to an iconic brand of mod clothing worn by the lead character.

As for the political aspects of the novel, well suffice it to say that alongside the sandwiching events of the end of the miner's strike, where confrontations between striking miners and police became increasingly hostile, and the Battle of the Beanfield, when police violently broke up a convoy of travellers attempting to reach Stonehenge to celebrate the Summer Solstice and also carried out the largest civilian mass arrest in British history outside of the Second World War, the novel also takes in John Stalker's shoot-to-kill enquiry, the Newbury bypass protests of 1996, Swampy et al, the sinking of the Greenpeace boat Rainbow Warrior by French secret services, counterterrorism operations against ETA, and the general topics of both of deaths in custody and police infiltration of civil protests groups (including groups campaigning for justice in relation to the aforementioned deaths). An eloquent and detailed review in 3am magazine provides much more context.

As a detective novel, I'm less well qualified to judge and it isn't my favourite genre (hence the 4 stars not 5), but it certainly, irrespective of the political and literary aspects, was an enjoyable read, with plenty of clues but also red herrings and twists, and although seemingly wrapped-up in this volume, in reality with plenty of intriguing loose ends left for the next part of the trilogy.

And overall - well if this doesn't make the Goldsmiths Prize list, then I will have a few **cross-words** with the judges.