

## Writing methods; from typewriter via computers to the pen.

In my method of writing, I have developed techniques which try to preserve the spontaneity. Perhaps the break-through was in the writing of **Individualism**. The idea is to let the 'muse' take one where one will try not to spend **any** attention to the recording medium. **Individualism** was partly typed on my old electric portable typewriter. But only partly. Many of the most important things were added with coloured (felt-tip) pens. This allowed spontaneity - and gave intrigue and pleasure to the typist, Mary Wraith. The work became a sort of collage - a rapid application of paint around certain central themes, with shading and amendments rapidly executed. The 'brush' and canvas are particularly important and I have found the tension between writing, typing and computing very productive.

Short reviews and articles can sometimes be typed into the computer. But more serious work, I find, needs to be written out in long-hand. For a while after **Individualism** I tried better **typing**, to speed up things. Thus **Justice** was typed on a n.I.B.M. and re-typed, a number of times. It worked, but an awful lot of energy was wasted in typing and re-writing. The result is that the book is only a partial success. There was too little **thought** and too much effort.

My next major book was **Marriage**. I tried typing this again and again and my filing cabinet has numerous lectures and drafts, all of them unsatisfactory. So finally, I sat down in the summer of 1986 and wrote the whole book, using my paper card system (the last book I wrote like that) by hand. Fortunately, Sarah was prepared to decipher my awful, miniscule, hand and to turn it into a typed text - no doubt cutting out a good deal on the way and unscrambling the logic, as my mother had done while I was away in Nepal and she was re-writing **Family Life of Ralph Josselin** for me in the Hebrides. I could, of course, have done it in due course myself. But teaching terms would have meant it took a number of years - and was less good. The writing in long-hand on sheets of paper with a pen means that **all** of one's attention goes on the **ideas**. Even with the best of computers and word-processors, part of one's attention is on the machine - fiddling with typing mistakes, worrying about losing the copy, trying to fit into decent-size paragraphs etc. etc.

I had thus moved from typing everything on an old typewriter, (**Witchcraft, Justice**), through a mixed mode of typing and hand-annotations (**Individualism**, to a certain extent **Culture**) to purely hand-written (**Marriage**) first drafts. (What happened later, once the ideas have crystallized, is slightly less important). Shorter articles of a different kind were increasingly written out by hand - and then re-typed.

The disadvantages of the pen is that it is **slower** (and requires someone or oneself to type the second draft). But this very slowness is perhaps an advantage. The **slowness** accommodates nicely the speed of one's thoughts and speed of writing. One is not tempted to try to keep up with one's hands/machine. It is a pleasant walk with one's companion (as Maitland's style was described), rather than a mad rush. Secondly, there is quite an **effort** in the writing. Each word **costs**. Thus one may be partially protected from that dangerous temptation to **prolixity**, which partially affects academics, and perhaps middle-aged male academics in particular. They are encouraged, through teaching, to like the sound of their own voices. Give them a word-processor and they can, like certain unnamed professors of sociology and anthropology, produce endless, fairly rapid, prose. Not exactly **worthless**, but not, **sub specie aeternitate**, adding greatly to the sum of human happiness.

The three actual writing techniques - all typed, mixed typing and annotation, all hand-written, has provided the basis for what seems to be an interesting development which occurred, without much thought, out of the situation I was faced with when writing **Savage Wars of Peace**, and which is different from all my previous techniques. I will briefly describe it here, both for the record and also because it will, no doubt, have influenced what I achieved, and failed to achieve.

It arose out of three pressures/opportunities. Firstly there was Penny - now used to my hand-writing, eager to help, a good typist. Secondly, there is the word-processor which makes it possible to modify, expand, contract and generally shape one's text in a way which has hitherto been impossible. Thirdly, there was my vast database of materials in the computer - facts, quotations, observations. How best to write using these three inter-secting advantages and covering a huge subject? (Another factor was the presence of the photo-copier Gerry had given me in 1993!).

The three previous solutions - all typed by me, was both inhibiting intellectually (given what I said about word processors) and wasted the help of Penny. All hand-written by me also wasted Penny to a certain extent and meant a boring process, which I **had** done with **Marriage**, of copying out endless quotations in long hand. This could be done, but was not the absolutely best use of my time. So how did I work/solve this problem?

The first draft of **Savage Wars**, some ten thousand or so words was written out, long-hand, sitting at a table in Dent. (Incidentally this desk/Coat Faw has often been the place where, away even from the minor pressures and chores of Cambridge for a few days, things have either come together or fresh beginnings have been made). The beauty, walks, good food and relaxation makes it an excellent place for short bursts of constructive work. In the case of **Individualism** I remember it as the place where, towards the middle/end of the writing, I read some of the great thinkers - Marx, Weber, Adam Smith - and absorbed them into my story. It was where I wrote bits of **Culture of Capitalism** (for example the earlier version of the chapter on 'Nature') and early drafts of my Radcliffe-Brown lecture.

So it was not a bad place to sit down, in December 1993, to spend a couple of weeks over Christmas making a start on a new topic, in this case what I thought would be a short article on the comparison of the demography of Japan and England, which I knew were both similar and dissimilar. After writing this out by hand, I then used the word-processor to start to expand it. At that time I think I had a printer and printed out bits from various books on Japanese demography which I was using - and then re-typed them. So I was moving again toward the mode of doing it all myself - expanding the skeleton in the word-processor.

**In fact**, now that I check my drafts, I see that I have mis-remembered all this and got it wrong! I let this stand as an example of the dangers of **ex post facto** memories of what happened. **In fact** what happened was that I **wrote** a short, five-page draft called 'Population in England and Japan' by hand. This was written, according to the sheets, on 3.11.93, though this may not be right, since the next day (4th) we went up to Dent and I may have written it there. Anyway the main point is that I started with a brief hand-written version. This was re-typed into the computer and expanded at Dent on the computer, with the title, 'A Comparative Essay on the Population of Japan and England', with bits and pieces of later thoughts - about ten thousand words in length. Various further drafts, using a word-processor, elaborated on this so that by about the end of March 1994 I had **typed** a smallish book of about 80,000 words or so and consisting of 14 chapters. (All this will be more fully documented).

I now had a sort of net or framework, created by conventional typing methods - creating a set of questions. I then spent a good deal of time from April to July collecting a lot more data, from libraries, my books and particularly the Cambridge group. I needed to find the 'state of the art' among medical historians and also learn about medicine. But what is relevant is that by July, and with a sabbatical leave leading to departure to Nepal in October, I had three months to put the flesh on the typed bones, with masses of more data. What I did was an innovation for me - but bears some resemblance, on a larger scale, to **Individualism**, namely to develop a mixed typing/wiring method. This was a sort of scissors and paste, taking quotations, ideas and various leads. These were clipped onto large sheets of paper. What was interesting was that in the **process of writing**, many of my ideas emerged. The physical process of planning chapters and sections, of sorting slips and writing around them, developed in a way which allowed maximum flexibility, minimal effort etc. This was the most creative time, probably, and by the end of September, when we went to Nepal, I handed over to Penny a very greatly expanded version. It was now more than double its original length and split into 29 chapters, rather than the 18 or so in May.

The mixed method by hand and putting slips in place which I developed then - some coming from the database, others as xeroxes - which both illustrated and stimulated thoughts, was developed at this time. It meant that in 3 months one could do an **enormous** amount, both new writing but, more importantly, new **thoughts**. A framework is created through typing. One then reads/researches directed by this framework. A vast set of new data is generated. This is ordered in a preliminary way - which is what we took to Nepal and Gerry and Sarah read - and also the two Emikos read in relation to the fertility section.

This was annotated very heavily by hand (green and other inks) and in Nepal I re-ordered various sections, left out others. So when I returned from Nepal I re-edited this. Then there was another period of further gathering of data and the

same process on a smaller scale took place. In other ways I edited, **by hand**, the earlier version, and did some further chapters, often by hand - for instance a chapter on magic was written by hand. This expanded the book further to its maximum extent, about 300,000 words and 38 chapters. From then on it was a matter of refining, re-ordering, seeing where one had got, cutting. Whatever had been achieved had been done and the rest was refining and improving the central argument.

In sum, then, a number of different writing methods were employed. Some bits I typed in or edited. Others I wrote out fully by long-hand, others I used the new method of a kind of scissors and paste. The secret really is not to become obsessed with **one** method, and to use whatever makes one feel most comfortable and allows the mind to re-connect/dis-connect as it has to do. Anything that provides an obstacle to this, whether it is a computer screen, laziness, or whatever, should be avoided.