



Janet Malcolm | Notebook

Still Pictures, Janet Malcolm (2023). Hardcover. Started 022424. "We are each of us an endangered species. When we die, our species disappears with us. Nothing like us will ever exist again." (32) The book was a slow start for me, but once I began to read it as a kind of thematically-driven autobiography, I glided along. It also gave me several personal memories of my own that I may choose to write about. My Doug Hussey story and my first high school debate: "At the first trial, when [opposing attorney] Morgan tried to discredit my account of the interview and o the visit itself, I offered the Holbein exhibition as a corroborating event. Then something wonderful happened. Morgan fixed me with his Mr. Tulkinghorn gaze and said, 'Holbein is a photographer, isn't he, Mrs. Malcolm?' All my despair about the trial ... fell away ..." (145) My recent work identifying my most interesting 100 or so photos: Her husband, Gardner Botsford, "had plucked the picture from a pile of rejects on their way to the wastebasket. It had leaped out at him as an example of of an outstandingly terrible snapshot, one that had everything the matter with it. The couple had their backs to the camera; the tennis court showed a few white lines; there were undifferentiated shrubs and tres edging one side of the asphalt. That was all." (148) Completed 022624.

061621 : Passed away at 86

[NYT appreciation](#): "Janet Malcolm, a Writer Who Emphasized the Messiness of Life With Slyness and Precision"

| Malcolm liked to include long quotations from her subjects, allowing them to reveal (or betray) themselves in their own words instead of pinning them down with a crude paraphrase. Her method of stitching together quotes from various conversations to shape those monologues got her into trouble when she was [sued for libel](#) by the psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson for her article about him in *The New Yorker*, which later became the book "In the Freud Archives."

| "I have never found anything any artist has said about his work interesting," she wrote in a profile of the artist David Salle. Anything so rehearsed and polished could never be. When she wrote that the German photographer Thomas Struth "radiates decency and straightforwardness," you knew that something else was probably coming around the bend. / That profile of Struth eventually arrives at a moment of supreme discomfort: Struth makes a knowing reference to Proust and then, in response to Malcolm's insistent pressure, admits he has never read any Proust. Struth, "a sophisticated and practiced subject of interviews," later tried to explain himself, and Malcolm, for her part, "made reassuring noises," but the snag in his otherwise impeccable presentation was too useful: "I knew and he knew that my picture was already on the way to the darkroom of journalistic opportunism."

091719 | Tuesday: Started this notebook in Notes. Then to Bear. Now back to Notes with export from Bear. Also exported notes from Anton Chekhov's Stories.

Today I'm reading Malcolm on Susan Sontag from TNY. Sontag's diaries and Benjamin Moser's authorized bio, *Sontag: Her life and work*. "The solid literary achievement and spectacular worldly success that we associate with Sontag was, in Moser's telling, always shadowed by abject fear and insecurity, increasingly accompanied by the unattractive behavior that fear and insecurity engender. The dauntingly erudite, strikingly handsome woman who became a star of the New York intelligentsia when barely thirty, after publishing the essay "[Notes on Camp](#)," and who went on to produce book after book of [advanced criticism and fiction](#), is brought low in this biography. She emerges from it as a person more to be pitied than envied."

"Biographers often get fed up with their subjects, with whom they have

become grotesquely overfamiliar. We know no one in life the way biographers know their subjects."

| How many of us, who did not start out with Sontag's disadvantages, have taken the opportunity that she pounced on to engage with the world's best art and thought? While we watch reruns of "Law & Order," Sontag seemingly read every great book ever written. She seemed to know that the opportunity comes only once. She had preternatural energy (sometimes enhanced by speed). She didn't like to sleep.

Brought this over from Bear:

[The Book Refuge](#), by Janet Malcolm, The New Yorker, June 23, 2014. About the [Argosy Book Store](#) in NYC. (Reminded of the rare book store in Patriot Games.)

| The antiquarian book business is a funny business. The people it caters to are not exactly non-readers, but they do not buy books just to read them, or even, in some cases, to read them at all. They are interested primarily in things surrounding books: their bindings, covers, paper, typefaces, age, condition, whether they are first editions, if they are signed by the author and if he or she is famous rather than the obscure schlub it is the destiny of most writers to remain or become. An example of a desirable book at the high end of the spectrum might be a well-preserved limited first edition of "Ulysses." A lesser rarity is a signed copy of Ayn Rand's "The Fountainhead." The Argosy deals in both the most expensive rarities (it currently offers a copy of the abovementioned "Ulysses" for sixty-five thousand dollars) and the lesser rarities, along with mere secondhand books at various levels of value. The Internet has been a stimulus for this trade. It has made it easier for collectors to collect; they can find rare books more readily than they could when only dealers' catalogues were available. Thus, even though fewer people come to the shop itself today, sales have actually increased ...



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[Anton Chekhov Notebook.pdf](#)

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