

An Occasional Publication of the Babbington Press

The Babbington Press and all its Publications are pieces of one fiction: *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observations of Peter Leroy.*

THE BABBINGTON REVIEW

Issue Number 4



My Blank Pages

**THERE WAS AN OLD TYPEWRITER** at my paternal grandparents' house, upstairs, in the bedroom that had been my father's. The typewriter fascinated me as a machine, an intricate assembly of interconnected parts, and I spent hours pushing its keys to try to figure out how the parts were linked and how the whole assemblage worked.

Click or tap here for the mobile version.

At right: a typewriter much like the one that was in my father's boyhood bedroom.



## My Blank Pages

Peter Leroy

THERE WAS AN OLD TYPEWRITER at my paternal grandparents' house, upstairs, in the bedroom that had been my father's. The typewriter fascinated me as a machine, an intricate assembly of interconnected parts, and I spent hours pushing its keys to try to figure out how the parts were linked and how the whole assemblage worked.

At first, I tried each key in turn, just to watch the way that pushing the key made the arm with the corresponding letter rise from the curved rank of arms and ultimately made the arm's hammerhead strike the ribbon, driving the ribbon against the paper, leaving its mark. It won't surprise you to learn that the letter I began with was:

pppppppppppp

"Peter!" It was my grandmother, calling from the foot of the stairs. Her voice, usually so deep

and calm, was shrill and urgent.  
"What?"  
"Stop playing with the typewriter!"  
"Playing with it? I'm not playing with it. I'm using it."  
"You're not using it. You're playing with it."  
"Sorry."  
"You may use it, but it's not a toy. Do you understand?"  
"Yes."

peterleroy  
PETERLEROYPETERLEROY  
Peter Leroy Peter Leroy

Now I felt that I was using the typewriter properly, and I felt that I was getting pretty good, at using a typewriter, and I was enjoying myself. I was having such a good time, and I was so absorbed in what I was doing, that I jumped like a frightened cat when my

# My Blank Pages

(continued)

grandmother, from directly behind me this time, said, “This is a waste of paper.”

A waste of paper? Really? I’d been thinking that I might take this sheet of paper downstairs to show the family how adept a typewriter user I’d become.

“You may use the typewriter as much as you want and as often as you want. You may use as much paper as you want—but you have to *use* the typewriter and the paper. Don’t abuse the typewriter and don’t waste the paper—and don’t use the *good* paper.”

She opened a drawer beside me and took out several sheets of flimsy yellow paper.

“Use this paper. These are second sheets. You’ve been using bond paper. Bond paper is expensive. Second sheets are cheap.”

All of this was a surprise to me. My grandmother had, in the past, encouraged me in everything I’d done, or tried to do, but her limiting me to cheap paper, to “second sheets,” felt like a reprimand, disparaging and disallowing the typing of my own name.

I sat there for a minute, while she stood behind me, wondering what it meant to *use* a typewriter rather than to *play* with it. My confusion must have shown in my posture, because after a moment she put a comforting hand on my shoulder and said, “Write

something.”

Write Something? Hadn’t I been doing that? Wasn’t my own name something?

“What?” I asked.

“Write a story,” she said, in a much gentler tone this time. She gave my shoulder a squeeze, and then she left me to the task that she’d imposed on me.

Write a story.

I looked at the second sheets she’d taken from the drawer. Was I supposed to fill them with a story? When she’d laid them there, they hadn’t seemed like many, but now, when they had to be filled with story, they were a tower. How was I ever going to fill them?

It took me a while to discover the obvious answer: plagiarism.

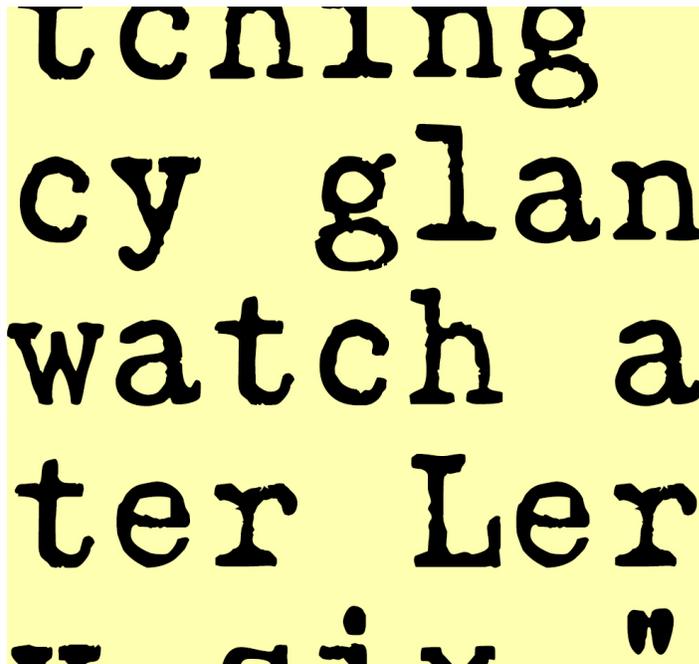
I didn’t know the word, and I’d never committed the act, but something in me knew that the easiest way to write a story would be to start with another story—one that I’d heard—or one that I’d read.

I was a great fan of the Larry Peters adventure stories, and I’d brought the latest one, *The Paperboy Always Knocks Twice on Payday*, with me. I’d been reading it in bed the night before. I brought it to the table, opened it to the place where I’d stopped reading, and laid a ruler across the pages to hold it open.

Near right: the P key, one of those that I abused



Far right: a portion of a second sheet with my typing, highly magnified (reconstructed from memory)





“Number 6: The Treacherous Waters in the Tidal Channel” from the series “Water”

Trouble had struck the Peters household. A fire of unknown origin had broken out in the building where their team of artisans fashioned the gewgaws and bric-a-brac that brought the Peterses bread, butter, and worldwide renown. The whole family was in a state of confusion and anxiety. Assembled in their spacious living room, they struggled to formulate a plan. I began typing.

"We're going in circles," moaned Mr. Peters. "We need a fresh point of view. We--"

He was interrupted by the sound of someone knocking at the door.

"That must be the boy with the newspaper," said Mrs. Peters. "We ought to give him a handsome tip. He's so dependable and courageous, daily rowing across the treacherous waters in the tidal channel that separates us from the mainland. Take him these coins, will you, Lucy?"

"Oh, all right," said Lucy, reluctant to leave the family at such a tense moment in their discussion, and equally reluctant to confront the newsboy, who always pestered her for a "date."

I stopped typing. My heart had begun to pound. I had seen an

opening, a way in. I took a breath, gathered my strength, and in a single bound I leaped across the treacherous waters and put myself in the paperboy's place.

"You're--you're not the usual paperboy," said Lucy, blushing a bit and stammering attractively.

"He quit," said the new boy, adding, with a wink, "He said he couldn't take it anymore."

"Was it because of the treacherous waters in the tidal channel that separates this island from the mainland?"

"He said it was because the gorgeous Lucy Peters wouldn't give him the time of day."

"Oh!" said Lucy.

"I'm Peter Leroy," said the new boy, handing Lucy the paper and flashing a winning smile.

With a fetching little giggle Lucy glanced at her wristwatch and said, "Well, Peter Leroy, it's two-thirty-six."

I stopped typing. I just sat there, looking at the second sheet, a little out of breath, stunned by what I'd done. I was in. I'd written myself into the world of Larry Peters, his intriguing family, and his sexy sister.

I wasn't a kid playing with a typewriter now. I'd become something

In one word he told me secret of success in mathematics: Plagiarize!

Plagiarize,

Let no one else's work evade your eyes,  
Remember why the good Lord made  
your eyes,

So don't shade your eyes,

But plagiarize, plagiarize, plagiarize . . .

Tom Lehrer, "Lobachevsky"

(Click or tap to hear Lehrer sing it.)

The question was, What to write about? . . . I had read that one writes because one has something to say. I could not see that I had anything to say except that I was alive.

V. S. Pritchett, *Midnight Oil*

**Sensational NEW PLAN**

Remington  
MODEL SEVEN

**New Remington  
NOISELESS PORTABLE**

Now you can own a brand new, latest model Remington de luxe Noiseless Portable for only 10¢ a day. This amazing typewriter has all the modern features of the big office machines. Standard keyboard, handset tabulator, composition keys, automatic ribbon reverse, two color ribbon shift, etc., PLUS the NOISELESS ACTION that types in a hushed whisper!

**ONLY  
10¢  
A DAY!**

**ENJOY 10 FULL DAYS TRIAL...FREE**

Try this great new Remington in your own home for 10 days. Use it as much as you like. See how convenient it is to type letters, memos, reports; how much pleasure you get from putting your spare time to profitable use. Earn extra money—develop your ideas—enter contests. You can write better—think better—spell better when you use your Remington. If you're not 100% delighted, return it AT OUR EXPENSE at the end of ten days. We pay transportation charges BOTH WAYS.

The man of genius is he and he alone who finds such joy in his art that he will work at it come hell or high water.

Stendhal, *The Life of Haydn*

(quoted by Sean B. Carroll in *Brave Genius*)

**ERIC KRAFT  
WHERE DO YOU STOP?**

"Luminously intelligent fun." Time Magazine

Click or tap to learn more.

