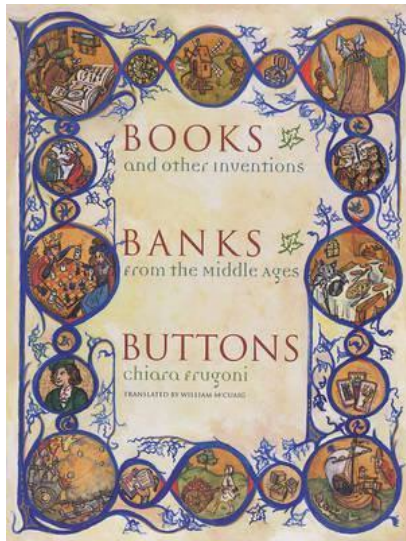


Featured Title

Books, Banks, Buttons, and Other Inventions From the Middle Ages

Chiara Frugoni Non Ficton 2003



Once regarded by historians as a period of intellectual stagnation, the Middle Ages were actually a time of extraordinary cultural and technological innovation. This entertaining romp through the inventions of the period tells the story of the first appearance of dozens of items and ideas of lasting significance.

From this misunderstood age we get our buttons, our underwear, and our trousers; we entertain ourselves with medieval playing cards, tarot cards, and chess. It was during the Middle Ages that domesticated cats first found their way into our houses, along with glazed windows, dining tables and chairs, and fireplaces.

Numerous labor-saving devices originated then as well, including the wheelbarrow, the windmill and watermill, and the effective use of the horse. War became more deadly with the introduction of gunpowder, while travel over water became less so thanks to

the compass and the rudder. Time itself emerged into recognizably modern form, with the advent of clocks—based on the escapement mechanism—that measured hours of equal length independent of the changing seasons. More cosmic notions of time developed as well, as the new realm of purgatory broke the traditional dichotomy of heaven and hell. Even Santa Claus first captured the imagination of children during the Middle Ages.

Ranging from the invention of eyeglasses (by a now-forgotten layperson who sought to keep his methods secret, the better to profit from them) to the creation of the fork (at first regarded as an instrument of diabolical perversion but embraced when it helped people handle another invention of the age, pasta), this beautifully illustrated volume is a fitting tribute to an era from which we still benefit today.

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

Book Review

Indiana University Scholar Works Journals

<https://scholarworks.iu.edu/>

Reviewed by Shana Worthen

"Medieval technology--isn't that a contradiction in terms?" quips another new acquaintance, yet again. My replies have always been restrained. What those situations really require, however, is a copy of Chiara Frugoni's *Books, Banks, Buttons, and Other Inventions from the Middle Ages*, an exuberant, accessible survey of a large number of medieval inventions, lavishly illustrated and whimsically written. The book's primary contribution to academic literature is to conveniently collect a multitude of strands which have not been gathered before. Its importance as a public relations tool should not be overlooked either...

The book, translated from the original Italian text by William McCuaig, explores a variety of medieval innovation, both objects and practices, over the course of six thematic chapters: Reading and Keeping the Books; Time for Pleasure and Time for Duty; Dressing and Undressing; And then Came the Fork; Making War; By Land and Sea. The first chapter may well have been the inspiration for the entire collection, as it comprises over a third of the volume. It encompasses everything from eyeglasses to the development of universities, covering banking, charitable foundations, and moveable type along the way.

The other five chapters are similarly inclusive within their broad themes. "By Land and Sea," for example, includes the wheelbarrow, the compass, and Santa Claus. When perusing this book, it is worth remembering that even the section headings within the chapters rarely reveal the full extent of the inventions listed under them.

Yet the book is not intended only for those ignorant of the technological wealth of this period; Frugoni tackles the challenge of explaining the historiography of the origin of eyeglasses, as well as providing copious endnotes with pointers to further bibliography on most of her subjects. She makes extensive use of descriptions and anecdotes written by medieval authors, such as Dante on the mechanical clock and compass, Jacques de Vitry on disorderly students in taverns, and Franco Sachetti on everything from mills to forks. Indeed, she usually defers to the descriptions written by medieval authors over those her own, one of the features which not only substantiates her arguments but gives the text a feeling of honesty....

Another method of bringing the modern reader to these innovations is through imagery, depicted by medieval artists or, in a few cases, as recreated by modern museums. The book is a treasure trove of reproductions, with a hundred of them, many full page, all full color, scattered through the pages, as integral and expansive an argument on the importance of medieval innovation as the text itself. The depiction of a precariously perched windmill in Brueghel's "Procession to Cavalry" is an odd choice for the one illustration of windmills, given how common images of more probable post mills are.

According to an introductory note, McCuaig, the English translator, worked closely with Frugoni. The text clearly benefits from their collaboration; oddly technical translations occur only rarely. In at least one instance, I suspect that the Italian has misled the English: "the flow of time as measured by hourglasses filled with water" is a likely confusion of the meaning of the Italian *clessidra*, which can refer either to sandglasses (including hourglasses) or to water clocks. (86) The scrupulous translation of the multivalent phrase *monte di pieta* ("a 'mount' or 'heap' or 'fund' of 'piety' or 'pity'") is more typical. (55) I have only one regret in the way the translation was handled, a decision made by either the editor or the translator. Frugoni regularly mentions the medieval origins of modern Italian colloquial phrases; in the first chapter, a substantial portion of the book, the explanations remain intact, but the omission of the original Italian means that the explanations have no context. In the final two chapters, the Italian is retained in these cases. But these are quibbles.

Books, Banks, and Buttons was never intended to be a comprehensive guide to medieval inventions. It is a sampling of the period's riches, focusing especially on reading and writing-related developments. Above all, it is a survey, although by no means an exclusive one, of Italian contributions to medieval innovation. While objects which developed elsewhere are discussed (windmills, gunpowder), their origins are less likely to be mentioned than those originating in Italy. This focus, in primary sources (Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Sachetti), in art work, and in the etymology of phrases, reflects the audience for which it was originally intended. The Italian orientation of the book is not a real flaw, but it sometimes a limitation in the scope of discussion of particular objects. A few pages are devoted to gunpowder, but its Chinese origins are not mentioned. The windmill, which likely developed in Norman England, is only mentioned in passing as a continuing tourist attraction in the Netherlands.

A few points in the text proved frustrating for lack of citations. There is no bibliography provided for the discussion of Fibonacci and the beginning of the use of Arabic numerals in the West. That gloves were a medieval invention was a revelation to me, but no further details or notes were supplied to supplement that one intriguing mention.

In *Books, Banks, and Buttons*, Frugoni has brought together her extensive expertise in medieval artwork and daily life to create a lively, meandering narrative which visits a broad sampling of festivals, financial practices, book history highlights, and technologies along the way. The book will be useful for specialists and non-specialists alike, with its beautifully-reproduced images.

Featured Title

Factory 19: a Novel / Dennis Glover Fiction 2020



Hobart, 2022: a city with a declining population, in the grip of a dark recession. A rusty ship sails into the harbour and begins to unload its cargo on the site of the once famous but now abandoned Gallery of Future Art, known to the world as GoFA. One day the city's residents are awoken by a high-pitched sound no one has heard for two generations: a factory whistle. GoFA's owner, world-famous billionaire Dundas Faussett, is creating his most ambitious installation yet. He's going to defeat technology's dominance over our lives by establishing a new Year Zero: 1948. Those whose jobs have been destroyed by Amazon and Uber and Airbnb are invited to fight back in the only way that can possibly succeed: by living as if the internet had never been invented. The hold of Bezos, Musk, Zuckerberg and their ilk starts to loosen as the revolutionary example of Factory 19 spreads. Can nostalgia really defeat the future? Can the little people win back the world? We are about to find out.

Industry Reviews

<http://www.dennisglover.net/factory-19.html>

Jack Cameron Stanton, The Age, Saturday 30 January 2021

Factory 19 is a Swiftean satire for the modern technophobe. We need writers such as Glover who have the eloquence and imagination to interpret the world differently, who write novels that are intellectually robust and capture their political ambitions as fables.

Jack Callil, The Guardian, 27 November 2020

Tongue firmly in cheek, Glover draws readers into a pre-internet era of bustling industry, one cast in the lurid hues of Kodachrome and Technicolor. For those who feel increasingly alienated by the digital age, this may be your ticket off the mainland.

Frank Bongiorno, Australian Book Review, January 2021

Glover has the gift of creating a vivid world and making you care about its fate as well as that of the characters who inhabit it. There is no better Australian critic of the arrogance, mediocrity, and narcissism of modern political and economic élites, or of the deep store of ideological rubbish with which they ply their trade.

Kate Frawley, Books and Publishing, 20 September 2020

Humorous, thought-provoking and entirely imaginable, Factory 19 is a fascinating commentary on where we may be headed.

ANZ LitLovers

It's very cleverly done, and the tension in the concluding chapters is all the more compelling for being so unexpected. I suspect this book might make a lively film...

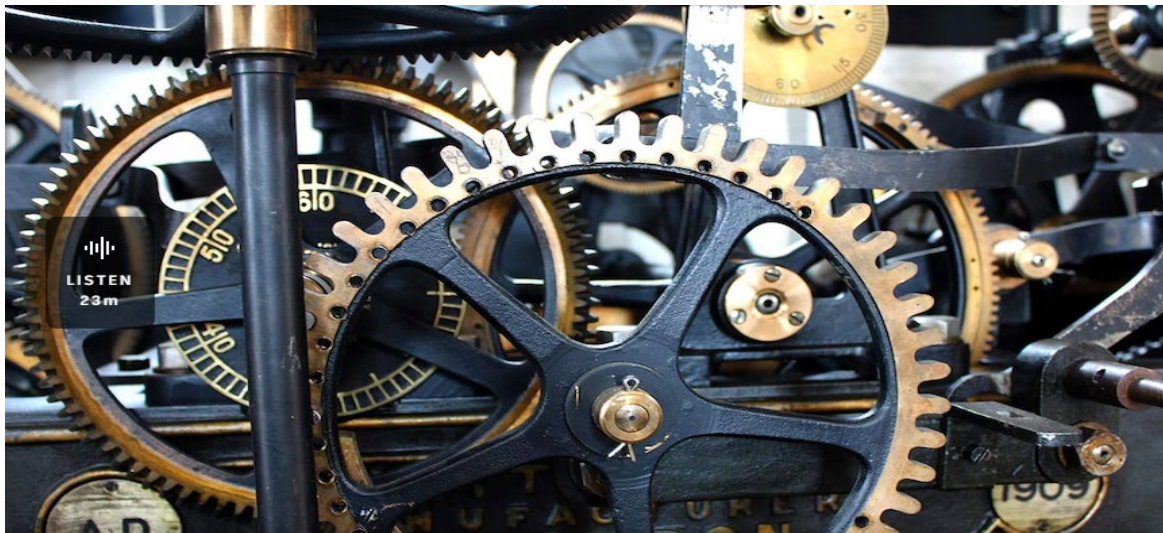
It's always refreshing to read a dystopian novel that isn't set in America! This is set in Australia, written by an Australian author and was a lot of fun to read! It's a clever satire about the problems of the digital economy and nostalgia for the way things used to be. It is 2024 and an Elon Musk type character called Dundas Fausset creates a community in Hobart, Tasmania - March 1948 (before the first mainframe computer was invented). Its a kind of utopia where everyone has a job in a factory and make tangible products with unions and pay and employment conditions which is in stark contrast to today's gig economy. However, as time progresses is 1948 the "perfect time" or is it the 1960's of social progression or the 1970's??? I enjoyed this book and thought the author did a clever job of covering serious issues in a satirical way. Because as we know no matter what era there are those that benefit and those that don't.....Toni

Absolutely brilliant book. Wonderfully written; gripping story; great themes; well drawn characters. Reminded me of earlier Max Barry - somewhat left leaning satire on nostalgia, capitalism & big business, but also willing to have a poke at environmentalism as well. And a real page turner. Definitely one of the best books I've read in 2020.....Gavan

Written in the same style of unadorned prose (but not quite with Orwell's economic word count), Glover's satire on nostalgia for the old economy might have the Occupy Movement in its sights, but it's also an unabashed critique of the way we have become trapped in the digital economy....Lisa

Author

Dennis Glover was educated at Monash and Cambridge universities and he has made a career as one of Australia's leading speechwriters and political commentators. His first novel, *The Last Man in Europe*, was published around the world in multiple editions and was nominated for several literary prizes, including the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. His second novel, *Factory 19*, was published in 2020, and his newest novel, *Thaw*, is forthcoming.



Dennis Glover is an Australian author, policy adviser and speechwriter who has written speeches for some of the nation's top politicians.

Indira Naidoo speaks to Dennis Glover about his latest book – and whether or not we really want to return to a previous, apparently simpler era.

Broadcast 4 Dec 2020

Featured Title

Man-Made : How the Bias of the Past is Being Built into the Future

Tracey Spicer Non Fiction 2023



'Mum, I want a robot slave.'

Broadcaster Tracey Spicer had an epiphany when her young son uttered these six words. Suddenly, her life's work fighting inequality seemed futile. What's the point in agitating to change the present, if bigotry is being embedded into our futures?

And so began a quest to uncover who was responsible and hold them to account. Who is the ultimate villain? Big Tech, whose titans refuse to spend money to fix the problem? The world's politicians, who lack the will to legislate? Or should we all be walking into a hall of mirrors and taking a good, hard look at ourselves?

This is a deeply researched, illuminating and gripping ride into an uncertain future, culminating in a resounding call to action that will shake the tech sector to its foundations.

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

About the Author

Tracey Spicer AM is a multiple Walkley Award winning author, journalist and broadcaster who has anchored national programs for ABC TV and radio, Network Ten and Sky News.



The inaugural national convenor of *Women in Media*, Tracey is one of the most sought-after keynote speakers and emcees in Australia. In 2019 she was named the NSW Premier's Woman of the Year, accepted the Sydney Peace Prize alongside Tarana Burke for the *Me Too* movement, and won the national award for Excellence in Women's Leadership through Women & Leadership Australia.

In 2018, Tracey was chosen as one of the *Australian Financial Review's* 100 Women of Influence, winning the Social Enterprise and Not-For-Profit category. For her 30 years of media and charity work, Tracey has been awarded the Order of Australia.

Highlights of her outstanding career include writing, producing and presenting documentaries on women and girls in Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda, Papua New Guinea and India. She is an Ambassador for ActionAid, the Ethnic Business Awards and Purple Our World, and Patron of the Pancreatic Cancer Alliance.

Her first book, *The Good Girl Stripped Bare*, became a bestseller within weeks of publication, while her TEDx Talk, *The Lady Stripped Bare*, has attracted almost seven million views worldwide. Tracey's essays have appeared in dozens of books including *Women of Letters*, *She's Having a Laugh*, *Father Figures*, *Unbreakable*, and *Bewitched & Bedevilled: Women Write the Gillard Years*.

The ABC highlighted Tracey's #metoo work in the three part documentary series *Silent No More*, which featured the stories of hidden survivors..

Book Review:

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

Bianca

July 3, 2023

Man-Made: How the bias of the past is being built into the future by Tracey Spicer is a MUST-read book.

It's hard to organise my thoughts on this, as there's so much useful information, I guess I'll do my usual - I'll mention a few things that come into my head.

Like it or not, there's no escaping AI. It's already being used extensively, it's going to take over almost every aspect of our lives.

Spicer did a great job not going all alarmist (others may disagree) but also pointing out the many benefits. For instance, it's said that AI can mitigate about 5-10% of adverse effects of climate change. But, (there's always a but), AI has a huge footprint itself.

AI is bringing the 5th Industrial Revolution upon us. As with every revolution, there are winners and losers. If we are not being careful – and based on what I've been reading and the podcasts I've been listening to, we are not careful at all – we are going to be in trouble. And guess the people most affected in a negative way? Ding, ding, you've guessed it, it's women. If you are a woman and a person of colour, then you're doubly impacted. If you're a woman, a person of colour and forty-plus – congratulations, you "win" the best loser. Infuriating.

In case you don't know, artificial intelligence learns from and is based on existing patterns and big data. And when the data is incomplete or biased you've got "trash in, trash out" and the exponential amplification of the wrong. Given the pre-existing and ongoing bias and prejudice – thanks, Patriarchy! – it doesn't take a genius to see how the bias in science and AI is a big problem, well, for those negatively affected, which are "only" 50+% of the population. When you take into account that the majority of Tech people are white men - you get the idea.

Spicer gives plenty of examples in many fields, from medicine to human resources and hiring, to facial recognition and the many issues associated with it besides the privacy aspect, and even sex robots.

The conundrum – how to change the machines when they become our carers, feeders and shoppers and even company.

Tech dudes tend to create stuff to get ahead of others because it's all about profits they don't care about consequences. Unfortunately, governments are slow to act and even slower to legislate, and when they're in the pockets of big business ...

We have to ensure the AI future is humanistic, collaborative and intersectional. We need to train people in AI. We need a Human-Made AI.

I could write so much, about this book, but I'm short on time, so I'll encourage you to read it. It can be overwhelming and infuriating but I'd rather be informed than ignorant.

NB: the cover was created using *Midjourney*, an AI image generator.

Featured Title

***This Fragile Earth* / Susannah Wise Fiction 2020**



What if the world stopped working? Not long from now, in a recognisable yet changed London, Signy and Matthew lead a dull, difficult life. They've only really stayed together for the sake of their six year old son, Jed. Then their phones stop working. They aren't able to pay for anything. Even the smart door to their flat won't open. Matthew assumes that this is just a momentary glitch but when the electricity and gas and water are cut off. It's clear that something is very wrong. London is no longer safe. People are going missing. Soldiers are on the streets.

And amidst all this, Signy is determined to escape. She's going to take Jed out of the city to the small village where she grew up. She'll do whatever it takes, if it means her son is safe. But she has no idea what other people will do when the world finally breaks.

Reviews:

<https://books.beledit.com/this-fragile-earth/>

This Fragile Earth is an interesting, readable novel that kept reminding me of the old dystopian/eco-novel *Earth Abides*, by George R. Stewart. The stories are totally different, but the tone of voice and the implicit plea to take care of our precious, fragile planet, are similar.

The story is believable (suspension-of-disbelief-believable, not realistic-scenario-believable) and the world-building is well done. The world is toxic, bees have been replaced by drones, many service providers (medical staff, police, etc.) replaced by robots. But in many ways the world is just as we know it. I like when futuristic novels are grounded in reality, and this novel does this well.

Signy is living in London with her partner, Matthew, and their young son, Jed. In a moment, the world begins to descend into chaos when all electricity, water supply and machines stop working (that bit is believable, and frightening!). With no money to buy food (cards don't work) and as people become desperate and violent, she and Jed head North (by bike) to go to her mother in the fictional hamlet of Warston.

It's a well written novel with action, anxiety, hope and plenty of heart, that keeps you gripped from the start. It's very impressive for a first novel. The eco theme comes across as genuinely heartfelt.

I've been addicted to dystopian novels since I was a teenager: I've read hundreds of them. After living through a pandemic now for more than a year and a half (and it's not going away any time soon), while watching the climate go out of control (as I write, rain is bucketing down, in July, in a country already ravaged by floods a couple of weeks ago), this whole dystopia stuff is beginning to seem way, way, waaaaayyyy too real.

Is it fixable?

<https://vonnibee.com/> My Review...

Beginning in London in the not too distant future machinery starts to fail. Everything is machine-based from water supplies and electricity to cars, computers, doctors and everything that makes everyday life easier.

Realising this may not be a glitch Signy with her son Jed decide to make the journey to her mother's house. Pollution is something that is more advanced than today, special glasses to protect eyes, safe drinking water is just the very basics that have to be taken into consideration. Transport is down, no cars, trams, buses just an old heavy bike is all that is available to Signy as she makes her journey. Leaving London behind.

This is a very atmospheric book and one that involves futuristic science. The author has used the extinction of bees as being one of the important factors in her futuristic world, this is coupled with a computer system that controls everything from planting and growing of food, medical advice and treatment, pretty much everything.

As Signy and Jed make their journey, the author gradually fills in what has happened and what could potentially be happening as things change. It is a chance to pose questions, delve into living conditions, explore the science of this changing world.

As much as I really enjoyed this story and I did find it addictive, I did find that Jed did start to grate on my nerves; a child who is incredibly clever and one who doesn't always have a sense of respect. While Signy does her best, I could feel her frustrations with the constant questions and felt the pressure building.

This is a book that I found interesting, there were some of the science things that I didn't understand, but sort of got the gist of. There is a moralistic thread in this story as we look at how today's environment is standing on a precipice. It is this that makes this sort of near-future story more believable. Advances in technology, reliance on machinery and gadgets all help to add an authentic feel.

This was a really good read, it is one for those who like atmospheric, slower-paced intriguing and thought-provoking reads. A dystopian novel set in the near future and one I would recommend reading.

About the Author

Susannah Wise is an actor and writer who grew up in London and the Midlands. The death of her father in 2015 was the catalyst for *This Fragile Earth*. His preoccupation with astronomy and the beauty of the night sky formed the jumping-off point for the story. Susannah studied at the Faber Academy, graduating in September 2018, during which time she wrote a second, more peculiar novel.

Both books have been longlisted for the Mslexia prize. She lives in London with her partner and son.