It was work that identified and distinguished our neighbors for me far more than religion. Nobody in the neighborhood had a beard or dressed in the antiquated Old World style or wore a skullcap either outdoors or in the houses I routinely floated through with my boyhood friends. The adults were no longer observer in the outward, recognizable ways, if they were seriously observing at all, and aside from older shopkeepers like the tailor and the kosher butcher—and the ailing or decrepit grandparents living of necessity with their adult offspring—hardly anyone in the vicinity spoke with an accent. By 1940 Jewish parents and their children at the southwestern corner of New Jersey's largest city talked to one another in an American English that sounded more like the language spoken in Arizona or Birmingham than like the dialects famously spoken across the Hudson by our Jewish counterparts in the five boroughs. Hebrew lettering was stenciled on the butcher shop window and engraved on the lintels of the small neighborhood synagogues, but nowhere else (other than at the cemetery) did one's eye chance to land on the alphabet of the prayer book rather than on the familiar letters of the native tongue employed all the time by practically everyone for every conceivable purpose, high or low. At the newsstand out front of the corner candy store, ten times more customers bought the Racing Form than the Yiddish daily, the Forvertz. Israel didn't yet exist, six million European Jews hadn't yet ceased to exist, and the local relevance of distant Palestine (under British mandate since the 1918 dissolution by the victorious Allies of the last far-flung provinces of the defunct Ottoman Empire) was a mystery to me. When a stranger who did wear a beard and who never once was seen hatless appeared every few months after dark to ask in broken English for the newspapers I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-header. Our homeland was America. Then the Republicans nominated Lindbergh and everything changed.

On Friday 25 October, exactly one week before the first body was discovered at the Dupayne Museum, Adam Dalgliesh visited the museum for the first time. The visit was fortuitous, the decision impulsive and he was later to look back on that afternoon as one of life's bizarre coincidences which, although occurring more frequently than reason would expect, never fail to surprise. He had left the Home Office building in Queen Anne's Gate at two-thirty after a long morning meeting only briefly interrupted by the usual break for brought-in sandwiches and indifferent coffee, and was walking the short distance back to his New Scotland Yard office. He was alone; that too was fortuitous. The police representation at the meeting had been strong and Dalgliesh would normally have left with the Assistant Commissioner, but one of the Under Secretaries in the Criminal Policy Department had asked him to look in at his office to discuss a query unrelated to the morning's business, and he walked unaccompanied. The meeting had produced the expected imposition of paperwork and as he cut through St. James's Park underground station into Broadway he debated whether to return to his office and risk an afternoon of interruptions or to take the papers home to his Thames-side flat and work in peace. There had been no smoking at the meeting but the room had seemed musty with spent breath and now he took pleasure in breathing fresh air, however briefly. It was a blustery day but unseasonably mild. The bunched clouds were tumbling across a blue sky of translucent blue and he could have imagined that this was spring except for the autumnal sea-tang of the river—surely half imagined—and the keenness of the buffeting wind as he came out of the station.

Seconds later he saw Conrad Ackroyd standing on the kerb at the corner of Dacre Street and glancing from left to right with that air of mingled anxiety and hope typical of a man waiting to hail a taxi. Almost immediately Ackroyd saw him and came towards him, both arms outstretched, his face beaming under a wide-brimmed hat. It was an encounter Dalgliesh couldn't now avoid and had no real wish to. Few people were unwilling to see Conrad Ackroyd. His perpetual good humour, his interest in the minutiae of life, his love of gossip and above all his apparent agelessness were reassuring. He looked exactly the same now as he had when Dalgliesh and he had first met decades earlier. It was difficult to think of Ackroyd succumbing to serious illness or facing personal tragedy while the news that he had died would have seemed to his friends a reversal of the natural order. Perhaps, thought Dalgliesh, that was the secret of his popularity; he gave his friends the comforting illusion that fate was beneficent.
Charles Lindbergh wins the presidential election against Roosevelt in 1940, then keeps the U.S. out of WW II. Then he instigates a series of "benevolent" social programs that isolate all the American Jews into strategically grouped targets. The young narrator observes helplessly as his beloved older brother is brainwashed into denying their Jewish heritage. Their decent and frightened parents are increasingly unable to protect the family from devastating changes. A gripping and chilling read.

This was the first Philip Roth novel that I picked up, and I wanted to see what happened to them. The setting for the period lends this quiet dusty place more than a hint of its founder and the decision to found a murder room from nearly forgotten history. By contrast, the collecting ways of the Americans in the years between the two great wars makes it a little pocket of obscurity and obsession. The Dupayne Museum as a setting for crime provides a bit of both. Its focus on the years back to his own history and attempt to define which things are really important to him.

I first read this book in my school library, and a couple of years later, after constant borrowing and renewing, saw it on sale in a bookshop in Cornwall and decided to buy it. I wasn't disappointed. The chapters (or articles) aren't that long so don't get dull, and are guaranteed to either get you laughing, or thinking in a way you haven't before. I find the book invaluable at those times in the day when I haven't got long to do, or get into doing something big, or need some brief diversion from work or a task. I often find myself asking the question, "Where's the chapter with...?" as the stories Bill tells are so memorable. The book has certainly grown on my friends as well. If you have money to buy this, and you love comedy, then you can't go far wrong with this! A book to dip into when you need something to make you smile.

The writing of P.D. James is very fine and has a depth & maturity that few other mystery writers have. It is thoughtful and measured but highly suspenseful at the same time. It has that "interiority" that sense of place that has always been a hallmark of good English writing. There are also subtle criticisms of modern English society (and Western society as a whole) and its increasing lack of morality. This is a novel that comes from the pen of a believer (refreshing in itself). The quality and depth of this latest James offering is in sharp contrast to the action oriented American mystery - even the very best American mystery writers don't hold a candle to the great English ladies of mystery - James. Rendell, Christie,....

This is my second Bill Bryson book, and what a funny funny read it is. I can imagine that some readers will find his work a little repetitive - but thats the beauty of it for me. His books are like an old mate who you can go and have a chat with when you need abit of a laugh. This is different to his travel logs because they are reprints of articles he wrote for Night & Day magazine and are anecdotes of his life back in America. Some are belly laugh funny (trip to the supermaket for stodgy food) and some are much more thoughtful (his son moving away to college). The book could be finished in one sitting but I agree with the blur - try and savour over a number of days - even weeks - if you can. This really is a great funny book and one I will no doubt drop in and out of on a regular basis. If your a Billy boy fan then this is a must - if not I sincerely feel sorry for you!

The Murder Room returns to two of her favorite themes--history and obsession. The Dupayne Museum as a setting for crime provides a bit of both. Its focus on the years between the two great wars makes it a little pocket of nearly forgotten history. By contrast, the collecting ways of its founder and the decision to found a murder room from the period lend this quiet dusty place more than a hint of obsession. These two elements play out as well in all the characters: the obsession of a man who is determined to get back family mementos; the obsessive friendships that can develop between women; a son trying to leave his history behind; an unknown mother who holds her private and public histories tight to her chest. Even Dalgleish himself is not immune, as a new love makes him think back to his own history and attempt to define which things are really important to him.

Here's a fact for you. According to the latest "Abstract of the United States", every year more than 400,000 Americans suffer injuries involving beds, mattresses or pillows...That is more people than live in greater Coventry. That is almost 2,000 bed, mattress or pillow injuries a day. In the time it takes you to read this article, four Americans will somehow manage to be wounded by their bedding. Fans of Bill Bryson will know by now that this is the kind of completely useless information that gets him excited. In fact, you are unlikely to read anyone else who derives quite so much pleasure from meaningless statistics. If those statistics are about the USA (Bryson's homeland) or his adopted England—or even better, comparing one to the other—then he is in heaven. And it is not only the uselessness of the information that interests him, but also the fact that Americans spend millions of dollars and hours each year collecting such data together.