

22nd February 2021

NOWNESS

“Below my window ... the blossom is out in full now ... I see it is the whitest, frothiest, blossomiest blossom that there ever could be ... Things are both more trivial than they ever were, and more important than they ever were ... But the ‘nowness’ of everything is absolutely wondrous.”

Dennis Potter, Interview with Melvin Bragg on Channel 4, 1994

Do you have a list of people to invite to your “fantasy dinner party”? One of my guests would be Sir Bernard Spilsbury, the doyen of expert witnesses in the medico-legal field in the early 20th century. I’ll reflect more on Spilsbury another time. But one part of his lasting influence on today’s forensic investigations was the invention, with Scotland Yard, of the “murder bag”, a forensic kit supplied to detectives, that contained gloves, tweezers, evidence bags, a magnifying glass, compass, ruler and swabs. Everything in that bag was important. Everything was there for a reason.

Throughout this past year, many of us have been doing a lot of thinking, trying to work out what’s important in life and what isn’t. What are the things we need to carry in our bag, and what are the things that just take up space? What really matters, and what doesn’t?

Dennis Potter, the renowned TV dramatist of the second half of the 20th century, was dying when he was interviewed by Melvin Bragg in 1994. Facing his death, he had a new awareness of things, and the quote above – which had a powerful effect on me at the time and does to this day – expressed what had become important to him. Potter could have claimed for himself success, recognition, breaking new ground, leaving an impressive legacy of work ... They could have been in his bag, and perhaps at one time they were. But in his “nowness”, in the face of mortality, what mattered was blossom in full bloom below his window, “the whitest, frothiest, blossomiest blossom that there ever could be.” What may once have been important, wasn’t anymore. What may have been trivial had a new significance. Life for a dying man was “absolutely wondrous”.

As *we* think through what really matters to us, let us hope that our “nowness of everything” can become equally wondrous.

A prayer for today

*Today, Lord, remind me of what’s important,
and let me dispense with the trivial from the bag I carry with me. Amen*

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