

Knobs and knockers



Considering my important opinion-forming role, I am not the inveterate blog-hound that I ought to be, otherwise I wouldn't now be bringing you old news. Having very early on tired of Scott Pack and his circle of toadies, I missed this startling contribution from one Ben Johncock, back in August:

"Reading his [William Boot's] awesomely dull, old-man snooze-fest of a column (my favourite bit—'When [you've] been a Book Trade Commentator as long as I have . . .'), one can't help thinking that:

"A man in my position needs to feel that he's the full knob, rather than a bit of one"

- a) *The Bookseller* really should get some interesting people to write for it, and
- b) He's a bit of a knob . . .".

Of course irony, like fine wine, is wasted on the young, and if ever there was a case of the pot calling the pizzle black, this is it. But am I stung by this? Do I care if young Johncock thinks I am a bit of a knob? Well, a little bit. A man in my position needs to feel that he's the full knob, rather than a bit of one, and if a thrusting up-and-comer thinks otherwise, then I must raise my game. As to interesting people writing for *The Bookseller*, that's a matter for Messrs Denny and Rickett. All I can say is that I find us all pleasing enough.

But who is Johncock? What is he? A little desultory Googling leaves the seeker after truth with one conclusion: Gissing, thou shouldst be living at this hour. As a paradigm of the 21st-century Grub Streeter, Johncock will do very well. He has two websites, one for himself ("Welcome to the website of the writer Ben Johncock—full website coming soon") and one for his unfinished novel ("ben [sic] is currently holed up in a number of expensive italian [sic] cafes working feverishly on the final draft, which should be ready by new year [sic]"). Instead of wasting his talent on penny dreadfuls, he turns out Amazon reviews, album liner notes, blog responses, all cunningly calculated to turn up results on Google. He lives in Hampstead and has no visible means of support, apart from a wife. The novel's called *Titanium Soul*, by the way, and he will be bothering you with it at the London Book Fair. One feels that the battered carrier bag, the raddled overcoat and the soggy roll-ups, so beloved of the Johncocks of yore, will not be in evidence . . .

. . . But enough. Even after approximately 1,000 years of frontline book-trade knobbery, I am not yet ready for silence and snoozing—though *The Even Newer Grub Street* is a tempting idea. But when the time does come to pass on the baton, I can't think of a more deserving hand in which to slap it as I come thundering round the curve than that of young Johncock. Assuming he's not too busy with his novel, of course . . .

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