

Rebecca Gowers

Writer - Fiction and Non-fiction

Rebecca Gowers worked as a freelance journalist and reviewer for a wide range of newspapers and magazines, including the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, before doing graduate research at Oxford on the literature of Victorian police detectives. Her short story 'A Small Room' was published in NEW WRITING 4 in 1995. [THE SWAMP OF DEATH](#) was published in 2004.



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Publications

Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
THE TWISTED HEART 2010 UK: Canongate	<p>When Kit, a literature student who works five times too hard and doesn't care about the meaning of life, decides on a whim to go to a dance class, all she is really after is to lose herself in the steps. Can Joe, the shadowy figure she meets there, somehow draw her out into the real world? Or will she reject the tumult he represents, and instead retreat into the extremes of her imagination? Because Kit is about to stumble on a darkly absorbing mystery. What is the connection between the young Charles Dickens and the deranged slaughter of a prostitute known as The Countess?</p> <p>THE TWISTED HEART is a hugely enjoyable novel from one of Britain's finest young writers. It brilliantly combines startling new insights into the macabre side of one of the world's greatest writers with its own passionate fable exploring the insidious appeal of violence and the true nature of love.</p>

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WHEN TO WALK 2008 UK: Canongate	Ramble's husband Con has just left her, and an argumentative couple, the Shaws, have moved in downstairs. Through the garrulous Mrs Shaw, Ramble quickly begins to realise that her husband is up to something more than desertion. Her dotty grandmother Stella, who considers anything she disapproves of to be 'frightfully off', inadvertently spills family secrets. Trying in vain to write a magazine article on ice sculptures while avoiding the words 'frigid' and 'gelid', Ramble finds herself distracted by matters other than speculations as to the whereabouts of Con. WHEN TO WALK is a playful and funny novel, full of engaging asides and little disquisitions. It also marks the arrival of a distinctive new voice in British fiction.

Non-Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
THE SCOUNDREL HARRY LARKYNS 2019 Weidenfeld & Nicolson	<p>For over a century, a mysterious figure from 1870s California, going by the name of Major Harry Larkyns, has been written off as little more than a liar, seducer and cheat. And he is only remembered at all these days because he was shot dead by the magnificently strange photographer Eadweard Muybridge. A rural court would exonerate the unrepentant murderer, in contravention of all existing laws; and the conduct of the case has barely been questioned since. But was either the killer or the victim quite what he seemed? In the autumn of 2015, Rebecca Gowers uncovered the startling fact that Harry Larkins, lost brother of her own great-great-grandmother, Alice Larkins, was one and the same as the Harry Larkyns coldly executed by Eadweard Muybridge. Provoked by this into extensive researches, Gowers is now able to lay bare the long-concealed and extraordinary truth about this 'brilliant waif'.</p> <p>Part biography, part crime account, The Scoundrel Harry Larkyns shows how, after a catastrophic childhood, Harry grew up handsome, fragile, courageous, and a beguiling reprobate to boot. The exploits of his tragically short life would span three continents, and range from a stint as an adolescent army cadet in India, through a louche spell in Second Empire Paris, to his days as a Bohemian rogue in the American Wild West. He found himself behind bars more than once, won glory in battle, and, hardly less dangerously, had a fondness for chasing notorious women. But what would seal his fate was to fall in love with another man's wife.</p>

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HORRIBLE WORDS: A GUIDE TO THE MISUSE OF ENGLISH 2016 Particular Books	<p>A witty guide to the most reviled words in English, masquerading as advice on how and why you might want to use them.</p> <p>Nothing enflames the language grippers like a misplaced disinterested, an illogical irregardless, a hideous operationalisation. To a purist these are 'howlers' and 'non-words', fit only for scorn. But in their rush to condemn such terms, are the nay-sayers missing something?</p> <p>In this provocative and hugely entertaining book, Rebecca Gowers throws light on a vast array of horrible words, and shows how the diktats of the pedants are repeatedly based on misinformation, false reasoning and straight-up snobbery. The result is a brilliant work of history, a surreptitious introduction to linguistics, and a mischievous salute to the misusers of the language. It is also a bold manifesto that asserts our common rights over English, even as it questions the true nature of style.</p>
PLAIN WORDS: A GUIDE TO THE USE OF ENGLISH 2014 Particular Books	<p>When Sir Ernest Gowers first wrote Plain Words, it was intended simply as a guide to the proper use of English for the Civil Service. Within a year, however, its humour, charm and authority had made it a bestseller. Since then it has never been out of print.</p> <p>Six decades on, writer Rebecca Gowers has created a new edition of this now-classic work that both revises and celebrates her great-grandfather's original. Plain Words has been updated to reflect numerous changes in English usage, yet Sir Ernest's distinctive, witty voice is undimmed. And his message remains vital: our writing should be as clear and comprehensible as possible, avoiding superfluous words and clichés - from the jargon of 'commercialese' to the murky euphemisms of politicians.</p> <p>In a new preface, this edition draws on an extensive private archive, previously hidden away in family cupboards and attics, to tell the story behind a book that has become an institution: the essential guide to making yourself understood.</p>
THE SWAMP OF DEATH 2005 UK: Hamish Hamilton	<p>One hundred years ago an ancestor of Rebecca Gowers', Douglas Pelly, emigrated to Canada. Within a few days of arriving he found himself arrested on suspicion of murder. When Rebecca looked into this story it became more mysterious the deeper she went. The published narratives of the four principal protagonists - the confidence trickster who was eventually tried and hanged for the murder, the detective, the Toronto Mail reporter and the author's ancestor - contradicted one another to such an extent that clearly they were more than simply mendacious: they had been used as means to influence events to each writer's benefit. THE SWAMP OF DEATH is the story of an extraordinary murder; but it is also the story of another kind of treachery, that of stories themselves.</p>