

BAD TO WORSE

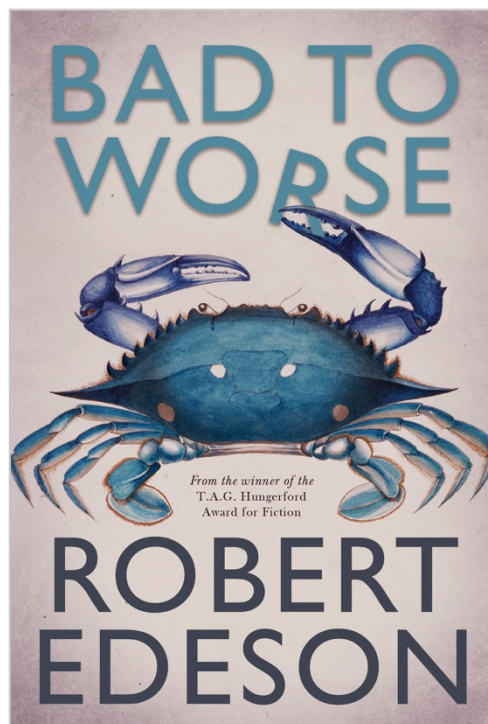
ROBERT EDESON

ABOUT THE BOOK

In this wonderfully eccentric sequel to *The Weaver Fish*, Richard Worse and his friends become embroiled in a series of events related to a century-old feud between the Worse and Mortiss families. Now, the beautiful but ruthless Regan Mortiss, along with her executive killer, Glimpse the prospector, and her witless half-brother codenamed Haberdash, will do whatever it takes to keep the Mortiss empire intact. No one leaps as nimbly from air crashes to religious philosophy, from mysterious hieroglyphs to mathematics, from a small frontier town in America to a cruise ship off the coast of Western Australia, as Robert Edeson. This is a novel where friendship and morality triumph over evil plots and cunning plans, in the most entertaining way possible.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the relationship of Magdalena Letterby to the novel's supposed author ABC Darian?
2. What is the relationship of the characters themselves to Darian?
3. What is Richard Worse's occupation? How would you describe his moral code?
4. Why do you think part of the novel is set in the town of Dante? What references to Dante Alighieri did you identify?
5. Do you feel better prepared to negotiate the Underworld after reading *Bad to Worse*?
6. In what way do the components of this book subvert the genres of fiction and non-fiction?
7. What do you see as the relationship between the story proper and the endnotes?
8. What are some of the philosophies that underscore this tale of goodies and baddies?
9. In what ways does this book contain political ideas? How would you describe the book's attitude towards organised religion? What are the bigger questions Edeson is prompting us to think about?
10. This book delves into many spheres, including mathematics, linguistics, natural history and biology, geology, anthropology, photography, espionage and data hacking, physics, *Erscheinenvolk*, religion, and philosophy. What would be your own favourite area of study from the world of Edeson, and why?
11. Do you see any connection between the drama played out in the Medallion Caves and Plato's Allegory of the Cave? See in particular chapter 24 (Simile of the Cave) and the Satroit poem on p.194 ('We are servants of the lighthouse ...') What does Worse mean when he observes: 'We are all responsible for a truthful world'?



12. What is the importance of intuition, as articulated by Worse's good friend Sigrid Blitt?
13. What is the importance of friendship in this novel?
14. What does the book's title mean?
15. Why are the following characters so named: Regan, Duran, Leeshem, Sam Burlinger?
16. Powers of two are a recurring numerical motif. How does this function in the text? How does pi function in the text?
17. Explain the following index entries: wolf sighted here?; log spiral needed here?; sesqui; benzene; Isobel rules, OK?; Carpasian cloak; remorseless day draws near.
18. Consider how the following ideas enter the text: Inheritance; Vengeance; Loyalty; *Trace humaine*; Infinity.
19. 'You say the art is lost. / I say, art embraces loss for absolution.' (p.182) What is the importance of poetry and art as a human expression? What is the function of the limerick in this novel?
20. What do the lines from the poem mean: 'We are stopped before the crossing fears / that words were better made in paint / and paint in words' (p.156)?
21. Why are interpreters 'the poets of art and loss' (p. 201)? What is gained and lost in this novel?
22. Look around. Can you identify Luciferans in your reading group? In your family?

[RADIO INTERVIEW] ALISON PILCROW OF UITA PRESS IN CONVERSATION WITH ABBESS MAGDALENA LETTERBY

Alison Pilcrow: *Today we discuss the latest, and what some speculate will be the last, literary sensation to arrive in our bookstores, the temporally luscious but spiritually wholesome Bad to Worse. As listeners will be aware, no one has claimed ownership of this work, but we are fortunate to have in the studio Magdalena Letterby, who worked closely by correspondence with its mystery author to bring the masterpiece to publication. Magdalena Letterby, welcome to this special religion edition of PAGETURNER.*

Magdalena Letterby: Thank you, Alison.

Ms Letterby, the identity of the author is the subject of intense speculation in literary, ecclesiastic and, I understand, now legal circles. Can you tell us who it is?

Not with certainty. My strong supposition is that he is ABC Darian, for which I give my arguments in the foreword of the book.

Yes, UITA has concluded similarly, based on documents that are currently with forensic investigators. But he has not outed himself, as it were?

No, but why would he? Whatever reasons he might have had for anonymity at the start, I think he would view them as vastly magnified by now—

Because of religious intolerance, I understand?

Yes, precisely. And other extreme bigotries. As his literary agent, I see the vile, threatening material now directed to him. I don't forward any, of course; the police Aphid Squad collect it.

Aphid Squad?

Oh. I didn't say that.

On our subject, religion, there are some who view Bad to Worse as a little, shall we say, disdainful of prophecy, if not the whole enterprise of global corporatized faith.

Oh yes. But that's a surface reading, Alison. There is, I agree, a veneer of irony, a trace of the satirical perhaps, regarding talking angels and the like, but only on claims that haven't been taken seriously since human thought matured in the Enlightenment. Underneath that veneer you find balanced argument, uncompromising logic, and a highly principled dissection of the history. Whatever else it might be, this book is a paean to reason and impartiality. It is, as someone said of Darian's previous work, a book of evidence, and I suggest no greater compliment could be given to the efforts and integrity of any historian. In consequence, where the reader detects or even suspects satirical intent, say, she can be confident of an impeccably researched and referenced case to motivate and justify it.

That is obvious from the extensive endnotes in the text. There's an astounding scholarship on display here.

Yes. The other thing to consider, Alison, is that people often imagine a sentiment, an authorial intent, when it's not actually present. These fantasies arise in readers from their own spiritual uncertainty, their own unacknowledged religious disappointment. It's a discomfort of the soul, Alison, within the mansions of the intellect. In theologians and clerics, it's the norm; I can tell you that from experience.

But many also find in this work a religious calling, a personal epiphany, or restoration of their shaken faith. Bad to Worse has been named by some a holy book.

That's not difficult to understand, Alison. It is a book of numinous wisdom—a 'new, new testament for humankind', I think someone described it. And it is a multilayered work, crafted to teach us by story, by parable, by example, as well as by reason. For any listeners who have not yet braved the stampeding queues to buy it, let me explain that the book follows the secular path, over just a few weeks, of an almost apostolic figure named Worse, a real person arisen from our barbarous masculine midst, but one conspicuously lacking the vices of ordinary men and clergy. He moves through the world an agent of incorruptible good, but his journey, his presence, somehow imports the beatific as well. I see him as the moralist of our age, possibly the most defining and accessible since the first century. So beneath any suggestion of the satirical, any disdain as you put it, and deeper even than the foundation of scholarly rigour that we just spoke about, Darian exhibits through Worse a profound and abiding spirituality that is evident to every person of genuine, untroubled faith.

Genuine?

Yes, genuine. Not coerced.

Not coerced?

Yes, self-discovered. Not imposed. Free-willed. Not patriarchal, for example.

Perhaps that is a discussion for another occasion. You used the phrase 'almost apostolic' regarding Richard Worse. Are you suggesting a degree of sainthood here? Might we expect an act of prophecy in the coming days?

Goodness. It's far too early to know that. But I think we can speak of saintliness, if not sainthood, at this stage of our understanding.

Has he, for example, performed witnessed miracles?

Alison, let's not get carried away here. I know no more about him than you do; that is to say, what is described in this book and, before it, *The Weaver Fish*. His public profile is otherwise almost nonexistent, a sign of deep humility, I suspect. For the moment, though, the miraculous about him would seem to be invincibility in his dealings with evil. He doesn't appear to engage in prayer, I note.

Perhaps we can leave that judgement to the reader, and return to the text, to the theology itself. What do you make of the suggestion that the number of the Trinity might truly be pi? This is a revolutionary idea, is it not?

Well, I think all would agree that this is potentially the greatest advance in religious science, in our knowledge of God no less, since the time of Christ. What it would mean is that we have been neglectful of an undoubtedly important part of the Divine for two millennia. The implications of our ignorance are yet to be realized, I daresay.

How was it possible, that we mistook pi for three?

Well, Alison, in those days there was no accurate determination of pi as a number, and certainly its transcendental nature was not appreciated. It didn't occur to theologians that the Supreme Being might have fractional parts. Of course, in hindsight, it's perhaps obvious, given the ancient identification of the circular with infinitude and Divine perfection.

Do you think that Darian might know more than he's making public on this question?

Well, I shouldn't put much store on what Darian might know or not know. He is, after all, reporting history rather than making it. The knowledge you speak of rests with researchers, those involved in the avian linguistics programme, particularly in the Ferendes it would seem. As I understand it, the pi insights arose from their study of thriving behaviour in swints.

You are referring to the swint translation effort, and the liturgical nature of birdsong that seems to be emerging from those studies.

Yes. We have always suspected that swints are holy; in fact, the circumstantial evidence has been overwhelming but suppressed as heterodox. Now it appears they may be the original true prophet of God.

There have been other prophets too, though. You are not saying that we have been misinformed, or simply wrong, all these centuries?

No, no. I'm not suggesting that. As Darian makes clear from all the validation studies, we recognize St Ignorius, and before him, Princess Periphereaia. I expect the swints, when we can fully understand their language, will confirm for us the holiness of those two as well.

What implications—

—I'm sorry Alison. Having referred to her, I should correct myself regarding one point for your listeners. Princess Periphereaia, known as the Prophetess of Parsa, did in fact study the circle and evaluate pi to an astonishing level of precision. Unfortunately, this was not appreciated as a tribute to the Divine until scholars rediscovered her achievement in the Latin history *Cisalpinus*.

Extraordinary. What implications for our spiritual lives do you see from a swint—what shall we call it—Book of Revelations?

A *Gospel of the Swints* will be transforming, Alison. Once these sacred birds are intelligible to us, no person could sensibly ignore their primacy, their Divine authority, and the universality of their message. In that event, I foresee compassion and tolerance and harmony between peoples increasing, and at the same time the gullible mass of humanity declining.

Gullible mass?

Oh. I didn't say that.

Still on the text, another theological insight has been the identification of the Deity with the figure of Standing Giant. Was that a surprise to you?

Not really, Alison, once all the facts were marshaled by Darian—and I should say there was some impressive cross-disciplinary research on show there. As for his finding, one needs to realize there are levels of construct here—levels of attainment, of understanding; Standing Giant is what we might think of as the Lord Praxis, long thought of as God the Intervenor who steps into human affairs.

A powerful image. We owe a great debt to Monica Moreish for explaining First-Annulus geometry, and Standing Giant's gatekeeping role in the Underworld, do you agree?

Yes indeed. Some of that intelligence was very surprising, I do admit.

What can you tell us about Darian himself, his faith for example? Is he theist or atheist?

I honestly don't know. We can't infer anything with certainty on that question from the text. Remember, Alison, Darian is not the originator here; when it comes to the theological advances presented in the book, he's quoting the experts, like Bystander and Kuklosian and the linguistics research community. Darian simply serves as a collator of evidence, as an historian is trained to be, and as a moderator of discussion, to some extent.

For listeners who have just joined, I am speaking to Abbess Magdalena Letterby about the literary sensation Bad to Worse. Ms Letterby, assuming, as we have all along, that ABC Darian is its author, you will remember that his previous work, The Weaver Fish, eluded conventional definition—many commentators described it as unclassifiable. How would you categorize Bad to Worse?

I'm not sure that classification is a feasible exercise here, either.

Let's start, then, by saying what it is not. It's not a novel, for example, is it?

No, it is definitely not a novel. What people too easily forget is that Darian is an eminent historian. There was a lot of nonsense spoken about *The Weaver Fish*, but in academic circles it was immediately recognized as a serious work of scholarship and an outstanding contribution to Ferende historiography. Darian does write with unconventional vividness at times, I accept, but he has no interest in fiction. I believe he would be genuinely distressed, as a professional historian, if *Bad to Worse* were mistaken for a novel. There's a huge amount of painstaking academic effort gone into producing that book, and it would be insulting in the extreme to label it some fluffy work of fiction thrown together as a creative writing exercise.

I wasn't meaning to suggest—

—The serious reader needs to do her own research, as have I, before offering a critique here. The accounts of the Mortiss vendetta, Worse's experience in Dante, the dreadful cave business, and so on, which Darian has couched in a narrative style to hold reader interest, using exact dialogue and so forth, are all factual. We know that's his obsession, Alison, the factual. But he's a stylist too. In that way he can make the factual, the history, immensely readable, immensely entertaining.

It is certainly entertaining. And I think no one has suggested that what he writes is anything other than an accurate account of true events. Of course, one of the evidential problems he faces is that people like Worse or his friend Sigrid Blitt, perhaps for their own reasons of privacy or modesty, don't step forward and say publicly, 'Yes, here I am. I exist, and what is written is what happened'.

Quite. That would silence the fictivists, very satisfactorily.

From what you say, I gather you undertook personal research to corroborate Darian's facts as well?

I did, Alison. I felt that was my responsibility if I were to have a role in enabling the work's publication. And, of course, to write its Foreword, which is generally taken to be an endorsement.

And a brilliant endorsement it is. Ms Letterby, we are running out of time. In the minutes we have left, is there anything you would like to add on the subject of Bad to Worse or its author?

We spoke earlier of Darian writing a book of evidence. That reflects the author's exacting professional ethic and commendable academic scrupulousness. But in terms of content, the material of the text, the brief biographic journey we undertake in the company of Worse, and the moral and practical worth we see that individual bring to the world, I would describe *Bad To Worse* as a book of conscience. That, I think, is how it is to be read, and why it will change the reader for the better.

A book of conscience. Praise indeed. Bad to Worse is available from all intelligent booksellers. Our guest today has been Abbess Magdalena Letterby, amanuensis ... may we say?

Yes. Or enabler, I think of myself more.

Enabler to the assumed author of Bad to Worse. Ms Letterby, thank you for sharing your insights into both the work and its authorship. Before we close, I must ask you something that listeners would hold unforgivable were I not to. Ms Letterby, are you, in fact, ABC Darian yourself? Are you the secret author of Bad to Worse?

Good Heavens no, Alison. I am quite incapable of writing something like that. I am not trained as an historian. I am no more likely to be the author than is—I don't know—Monsignor Papaduomo, for example.

Monsignor Papaduomo?

Oh. I didn't say that.

But, I distinctly—

—I'm sure that your audience would also like another question answered: Alison, might you, in fact, be ABC Darian yourself?

No, no. ... Perhaps on that note of mutual suspicion and denial, one not-Darian to another, we should end this special edition of PAGETURNER. Thank you again, Magdalena Letterby.



@FremantlePress



Sign up for enews



fremantlepress.com.au