

From the novel: *The Wright Brothers: Flight is Possible*

1 The problem, as we have defined it, is one of lift. How is man to raise himself up off the ground and fly through the air like a bird? The problem is that man is not a bird. He does not have the power to lift himself aloft and fly through the air. The question is how to raise and sustain a man's weight above the ground? What shape of wing will carry him through the air?

2

How to attach an apparatus to the weight of man that will be such that the combined weight of the man and machine will be overcome by the lifting power of the apparatus? How to ensure that the wind on the wings that will be added to the man will lift him and carry him safely through the air?

3

What size shall these wings be? How long? How wide? How thick? What materials and fabric shall these wings be made of? What shape shall these wings have? Square or round? Flat or curved? All of these questions must be answered before anyone will ever be able to fly.

4

Thousands of years have passed with very meagre knowledge. Man has studied birds in flight for thousands of years. Very little has been added to our knowledge of the science of flight in all that time. Man has glided as a bird, but not very far. Man has measured his time in the air, so far, in seconds.

5

We believe that there is nothing that a bird can do that a man can't do as well. If we can learn more about the curve of the wings, we too can fly for hours. But what curve should the air-foil be? There are secrets in the winds. There are strange things that happen at certain heights and certain movements and certain speeds. The danger is that in creating a flying machine, a man might be designing a machine that will inevitably lead to his death. A grim thought perhaps, but wasn't Dr. Guillotine the eventual victim of his own ingenuity? Otto Lilienthal advanced the cause of human flight, but Otto Lilienthal's glider was the technical achievement that took his life. What was the cause of the sudden pitch forward and the fatal crash?

6

How to free mankind to fly? Lift and drag and velocity. Values, variables, constants. Developing a table of lift coefficients. Otto Lilienthal's numbers are unreliable. We must go back to where he started and begin again. Pushing past the point where the others have all gone wrong. Experimenting with a wind tunnel to find the ideal shape and size for human wings. What we know will eventually lift us into the air.

From the journal:

The Making of The Wright Brothers: Flight is Possible

1

I just had a great idea! The Wright Brothers as a novel. It would lend itself to cycles, though I'm not just sure what they'd be. It would be very positive – to me, they are true heroes. I first came across them when looking for a book on how to make a World War I flyer model for my novel, *Pinafore Park*. The first model in the book was for the Wright Flyer and that led to books about the Wrights and the imagery of my novel.

2

My theory is that my novels start with a collection of related images, all grouped around a topic. The writing of the novel is the figuring out of the pattern that these images all make.

3

The idea is that the two are one in character, and that their separation leads to problems, such as accidents, and anxieties, which their togetherness overcomes. This concept doesn't leave much room for the traditional expectations of the novels of character differentiation.

4

I want to record both my earliest thoughts and my vagueness about the major structural and thematic aspects of this novel before I complete my structural planning or have written any chapters. This earlier start in the recording process should make this journal a more complete record of the writing of a novel than my earlier journals have been.

5

In effect, everything in the novel needs to be written first, so that all other things can grow out of it; at the same time, everything also needs to be written last, so that it can grow out of everything else that has been written. Since this is impossible, the order of composition needs to be decided on. I am well aware that a novel is created organically, with new material feeding on what has already been established, and although the overall conception of the novel will not change, the deciding on the order of composition is important, as it is a matter of finding the best way to allow as many of the details of the novel as possible to arise up out of the novel itself

6

For some of the chapters I only have a one-word note. I have done this before in the planning stages and am quite comfortable with this part of the process. It is important to keep working back and forth between an overview – or helicopter view – of the novel, and a ground-level, detailed, view, and the one-word summaries of chapters help to keep the overview of the movement of the novel clear.

From the planning notebook:

Planning *The Wright Brothers: Flight is Possible*

1

This is the day – one hundred years ago today – that the Wright Brothers first flew. I watched & taped a couple of TV shows on them last night. I plan to make them the topic of my next novel. I think that it can be a beautiful lyrical novel with a lot of tension and the poetry of technology.

2

It is a fascinating challenge. It is a nice thought to realise that in six months, or so, I will be able to sit & read the novel that will answer the questions I am now asking. It is also pleasant to know that if I just keep reading about both topics – the Wrights and Greek myths – it will all gradually become apparent to me, and will all unfold quite logically. I have learned to enjoy the process whereby the largest questions of the future novel are considered & decided. Henry James seemed to be quite comfortable in that zone, where he had to consider the shape of the work of art – the structure, the point of view, the major characters, the themes, the beginning, middle & end, and so on, all of which must work together as a logical artistic unit.

3

Of course, flying itself is a metaphor. The hopes & fears are not just about physical flying, for the Greeks, all of mankind, or the Wright Brothers. You have:

a) the physical act of flying (hopes & fears)

b) the difficulties of having a perfect human relationship (hopes & fears), which is what appealed to me in the title. *Flight is Possible* refers to the possibility of a perfect human relationship: two or more people harmonizing for the pursuit of a positive outcome. Two people harmonising for their own good & for that of others.

c) All hopes & fears for all mankind. Will we work together to harness the forces of nature in order to do good for all of mankind (hope) or will we harness nature in order to do harm to all mankind, and with the pursuit of the control of these forces, destroy our relationships & drive us apart?

4

It is the various levels in the story, the shape of a novel & the title that have a mythical appeal for me. Wilbur & Orville are mankind, and when they work together, they can accomplish wonderful things that are of benefit to all. Apart, as they were physically (U.S. Army / France), the delicate balance in their relationship fails & “things fall apart”. It is the other side of [my novels] *Rain of Fire* & *Victoria Day*. It is the successful human endeavour that this novel will be about. Of course, it will have hints of the dangers of greater control over nature, but no more than hints. It will be a very positive novel.

5

The trick will be to build in enough suspense & temporary set-backs to make it all a fascinating narrative of scientific accomplishment & of human interaction. Wilbur & Orville were a successful couple – a successful human unit – an archetype for all human interaction for artistic, scientific & philosophical progress.