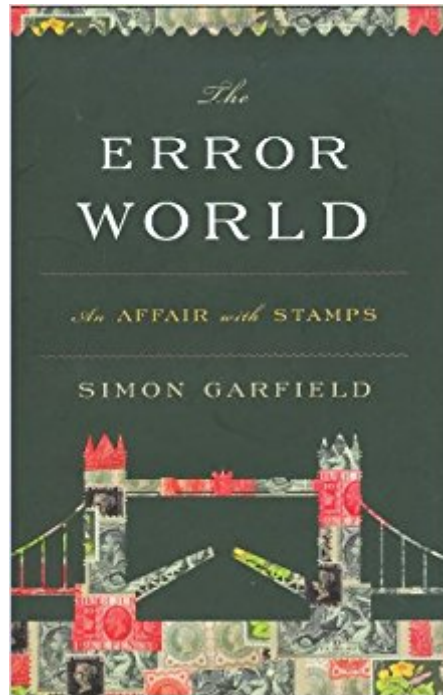




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The Error World: An Affair With Stamps



Synopsis

From the author of *Mauve*, an obsessively readable memoir that brings the mania for stamp collecting to life. From the Penny Red to the Blue Mauritius, generations of collectors have been drawn to the mystique of rare stamps. Once a widespread pastime of schoolboys, philately has increasingly become the province of older men obsessed with the shrewd investment, the once-in-a-lifetime find, the one elusive beauty that will complete a collection and satisfy an unquenchable thirst. As a boy, Simon Garfield collected errors—rare pigment misprints that create ghostly absences in certain stamps. When this passion reignited in his mid-forties, it consumed him. In the span of a couple of years he amassed a collection of errors worth upwards of forty thousand pounds, pursuing not only this secret passion, but a romantic one as his marriage disintegrated. In this unique memoir, Simon Garfield twines the story of his philatelic obsession with an honest and engrossing exploration of the rarities and absences that both limit and define us. The end result is a thoughtful, funny, and enticing meditation on the impulse to possess.

Book Information

Hardcover: 256 pages

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; 1st Edition edition (January 20, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0151013969

ISBN-13: 978-0151013968

Product Dimensions: 8.6 x 6.4 x 0.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.6 out of 5 stars 30 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,178,579 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #93 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Antiques & Collectibles > Stamps #1914 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Journalists #2475 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe > Great Britain

Customer Reviews

PRAISE FOR MAUVE"Garfield has surpassed himself with his new subject matter: *Mauve* elegantly relates the tale of Victorian chemist William Perkin who, in 1856, failed to make quinine from coal tar but discovered instead how to synthesize the colour purple. Fascinating stuff."
—*Esquire*"This engaging and airy history shows how the development of mauve, the first mass-produced artificial dye, ignited a 19th-century revolution . . . Garfield has inspired me to wear a bit of mauve this spring

to honour this inventive man."—The New York Times

SIMON GARFIELD is a feature writer at the Observer (London) and the author of nine works of nonfiction, including *Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color That Changed the World*, which was a New York Times Notable Book, and *The End of Innocence*, which won the Somerset Maugham Prize in 1995.

Another reviewer of this book on USA - who gave the book three stars - asks a question of what "conceit" a person has to have to think their lives are interesting enough to write a memoir and have other people pay money to read it. It's a good question - very good, and thank you "Mendicant Pigeon" for asking it - and actually applies to any memoir, not just this one. Simon Garfield has written many interesting books about a variety of subjects - ranging from the color mauve to AIDS in Britain to attitudes in Britain during and after WW2 to his latest, a book on type fonts. He's a clever writer about subjects that are not of general interest but are of interest to a large enough subset of readers who have the coin to buy his books and the time to read them. Along the way, he managed in his personal life to lose three members of his family - parents and older brother in the span of a few years - and to marry, father two sons, and then have an affair and divorce his wife. During this busy time, he also collected stamps - off and on - and returned to his collecting ways during his marital problems. Okay, returning to Mendicant's question, is this the stuff of memoir? To me the answer is "yes", because this is Simon Garfield's memoir and he has addressed odd stuff before - though not in a personal way of a memoir. Memoirs are "sticky wickets", the author must know that most people don't much care about an author's life and attendant joys and woes. If it's a famous person - say Bill Clinton - there's more interest in the memoir because he's FAMOUS. (As an aside, as much as I liked Bill Clinton, I found his memoir one-big-yawn because he seemed to include everything with little editing. I like "editing"...) The best memoirs - to me, at least - are those by little-known people. We don't go into them with any preconceived notion of the person we're reading about. So, yes, I think Simon Garfield's memoir, *The Error World: An Affair about Stamps*, is a well-written read. If you care in the very least about the intricacies of stamp collecting - actually, about collecting anything - and don't mind reading about a man's mid-life crisis being told in the terms of stamp collecting, this is a book for you. If you don't care a bit about mid-life crises, then don't pick this book up. It's actually very easy. And thanks again, Mendicant, for asking...

An entertaining, well-written, non-fiction read for anyone who collects anything, but especially

postage stamps. Rare stamps (in particular, errors) could be considered extreme collecting, and this story is all about that. It is also an insightful self analysis about midlife.

Not sure how I came across this book but I quite enjoyed it. A somewhat eclectic collection of stories relating to stamp collecting and collecting in general. Provided some insight into my own collecting obsessions.

good

I collected stamps once and learned a lot about history, geography, and politics. As Simon Garfield would relate, I mounted my stamps inside one of those common albums, and learned about the politics of the individual country. It really sparked an interest in more things outside of the United States. At the time (60s to 80s), it was still OK to be a stamp collector. However, it is uncommon for popular people to be interested in this great hobby. It is less costly than coin collecting and very enjoyable. I enjoyed Mr. Garfield's take on stamp collecting and his obsession with collecting errors from the 1950-60s QEII era. In the end, he was not hurt financially by his hobby. I liked this book about my former hobby. It explains how other people have also enjoyed stamp collecting.

There's something deeply attractive about the world of stamp collecting. What other pastime combines the beauty of the finest stamps, the exoticism of distant lands, and the tangible history of letters and postcards sent many years ago between people long dead and forgotten? If this weren't enough reason to admire stamps and their collectors, then surely the derision the passion endures is the closing argument. One can almost feel the contempt of the .com dictators for it. They have little enough love for a public postal system so one can only imagine with delight their anger at the idea of cherishing stamps. In this book Simon Garfield, in a relaxing, journalistic tone, describes the world of stamps and stamp collecting: the history of the British, and then world, postal service; the invention of stamps by Rowland Hill; and Garfield's own early forays into collecting - collecting errors in his case - by visiting the stamp shops of the Strand in his native London. Garfield writes about the world's great collectors and their collections: Count Ferrary, who left a collection worth £402,965 in 1920s value, T.K. Tapling, Sir Gawaine Bailey, Michael Sefi, the keeper of Britain's Royal Philatelic Collection, Britain's King George V, and Sir Maxwell Joseph (whose collection sold in 1982 for over £1 million). He describes the world's great stamps - The Blue Mauritius, the Penny Black (a mint block of 24 sold for \$1 million in the late 1990s), the Alexandria Blue Boy, the

1868 1 cent Z Grill (the most expensive single stamp in the world at \$3 million), and the kircudbright cover of 1840 (Â Â£500,000) - and his own passion, the errors - the one Penny Red error (\$150,000), the upside down airplane (a block of which sold for \$42.5 million in 2002), and Garfield's own desire - the 1961 Parliamentary Conference Stamp missing the Queen. Garfield manages to intertwine his personal life story neatly and unobtrusively into the book, recounting, quite movingly, his parents' deaths and also meets those pre-requisites of modern publishing by including some half-assed philosophizing about 'the meaning of collecting' and a mini misery memoir about his divorce. But these latter points are small matters which shouldn't put an interested reader off what is a very interesting, entertaining, and light read.

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