

**Fay Weldon** / *Daily Mail* / What book...

...are you reading now?

*A Time to be Born*, a novel by New York writer Dawn Powell, first published in 1942 (available on Amazon for 1p plus postage): funny, smart, but not bitter, cool and socially impassioned. I reckon Dawn Powell, though currently almost forgotten, is one of the great US novelists of the nineteenth century. She was born in 1896, and died in 1965 – but the writing simply doesn't age.

...would you take to a desert island?

*The Last Empire*, a book of collected essays by the late great Gore Vidal. So lively, knowledgeable and eloquently written it could be re-read time and time over. It was Vidal, in this book, who drew my attention to Dawn Powell. He was a fine literary critic as well as a most remarkably astute political analyst.

...first gave you the reading bug?

Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, read in 1939 when I was eight. I do not forget those threatening forests, those snowy peaks, the sense of good and evil. It made me realise what could be done with words. It turned me into a readaholic-writeaholic. Indeed, I've been searching all my life and still not found an alternative universe so powerful. When I do I'll let you know.

...left you cold?

I never say anything unpleasant about other writers. Anyone who's taken a work to completion deserves praise not blame. I suppose I could make an exception for the writings of Pelagius, who in around 400 AD, no doubt with good intentions, heretically denied the doctrine of original sin.

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***Why Will No-One Publish My Novel? A Handbook For The Rejected Writer* by Fay Weldon (Head of Zeus, £12) is out now.**