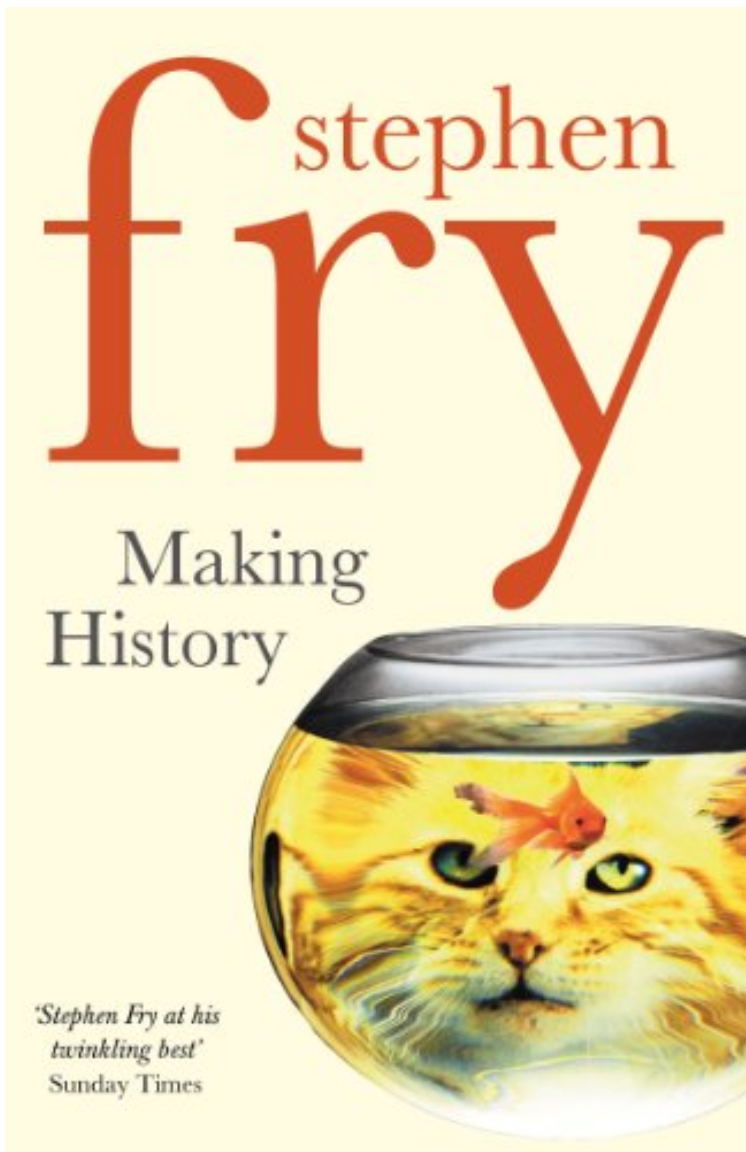


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# Making History



*Par Stephen Fry*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA novel of ideas comical, historical, frightening and unputdownable.Michael Young is a brilliant young history student whose life is changed when he meets Leo Zuckerman, an ageing physicist with a theory that can change worlds. Together they realise that they have the power to alter history and eradicate a great evil. But tinkering with timelines is more dangerous than they can imagine and nothing - past, present or future - will ever be the same again. Making History is funny, moving, romantic and told with Stephen Fry's characteristic skill and brilliance.ExtraitMAKING COFFEEIt starts with a dream . . .It starts with a dream. This story, which can start everywhere and nowhere like a circle, starts, for meand it is, after all, my story and no one elses, never could be anyone elses but mineit starts with a dream I dreamed

one night in May. The wildest kind of dream. Jane was in it, stiff and starchy as a hotel napkin. He was there too. I didnt recognize him of course. I hardly knew him then. Just an old man to nod to in the street or smile through a politely held library door. The dream rejuvenated him, transformed him from boneless, liverspotted old bearded into Mack Sennett barman with drooping black mustache tacked to a face hangdog long and white with undernourishment. His face, for all that. Not that I knew it then. In this dream he was in the lab with Jane: Janes lab, of course the dream was not prophetic enough to foretell the dimensions of his lab, which I only got to know later that is if the dream was prophetic at all, which it may well not have been. If you get me. This is going to be hard. Anyway, she was peering into a microscope and he was feeling her up from behind. He stroked between her thighs inside the long white coat. She was taking no notice, but I was outraged, outraged when the soft veef of hands rubbing nylon stopped and I knew that his fingers had reached the uppermost part of her long legs, the place where stocking ended and soft hot private flesh hot private flesh belonging to me began. Leave her alone! I called from some unseen directors corner, behind, as it were, the dreams camera. He gazed up at me with sad eyes that held me, as they always do, in the bright beam of their blue. Or always subsequently did, because I had, in my real waking life at that point, never so much as exchanged a single word with him. Wacht auf, he says. And I obey. Strong light of a May morning whitening the dirty cream of cruddy curtains that we meant to change months ago. Morning, babe, I murmur.

Double Gloucester . . . my mother always said cheese dreams. But shes not there. Jane, that is, not my mother. My mother isnt there either as a matter of fact. Certainly not. It absolutely isnt that kind of story. Janes half of the bed is cold. I strain my ears for the hissing of the shower or the crack of teacups banged clumsily on the draining board. Everything Jane does, outside of work, she does clumsily. She has this habit of turning her head away from her hands, like a squeamish student nurse picking up a raw appendix. The hand holding a cigarette end, for instance, might stretch leftwards to an ashtray, while she will look off to the right, grinding the butt into a saucer, a book, a tablecloth, a plate of food. I have always found uncoordinated women, nearsighted women, long, gawky, awkward women, powerfully attractive. I have started to wake up now. The last granules of the dream fizz away and I am ready for the morning puzzle of self-reinvention. I stare at the ceiling and remember what there is to remember. We will leave me lying there for the moment, reassembling myself. I am not entirely sure that I am telling this story the right way round. I have said that it is like a circle, approachable from any point. It is also, like a circle, unapproachable from any point. History is my business. What a way to start . . . history isnt my business at all. I managed, at least, to stop myself from describing history as my trade, for which I reckon I can award myself some points. History is my passion, my calling. Or, to be more painfully truthful, it is my field of least incompetence. It is what, for the time being, I do. Had I the patience and the discipline I should have chosen literature. But, while I can read *Middlemarch* and *The Dunciad* or, I dont know, Julian Barnes or Jay McInerney say, as happily as anyone, I have this little region missing in my brain, that extra lobe that literature students possess as a matter of course, the lobe that allows them the detachment and the nerve to talk about books (texts they will say) as others might talk about the composition of a treaty or the structure of a cell. I can remember at school how we would read together in class an ode by Keats, a Shakespeare sonnet or a chapter of *Animal Farm*. I would tingle inside and want to sob, just at the words, at nothing more than the simple progression of sounds. But when it came to writing that thing called an essay, I flubbed and floundered. I could never discover where to start. How do you find the distance and the cool to write in an academically approved style about something that makes you spin, wobble and weep? I remember that child in the Dickens novel, *Hard Times* I think it is, the girl who had grown up with carnival people, spending her days with horses, tending them, feeding them, training them and loving them. Theres a scene where Gradgrind (it is *Hard Times*, Ive just looked it up) is showing off his school to a visitor and asks this girl to define horse and of course the poor scrap dries up completely, just stutters and fumbles and stares hopelessly in front of her like a moron. Girl number twenty unable to define a horse! Gradgrind says and turns with a great sneer to the smart little weasel, Bitzer, a cocksure street kid whos probably never dared so much as pat a horse in his life, gets a kick out of throwing stones at them I expect. This little runt stands up with a smirk and comes out pat with *Quadruped Graminivorous*. Forty teeth . . . and so on, to wild applause and admiration. Now girl number twenty you know what a horse is, says Gradgrind. Well, each time I was asked to write an essay at school, with a title like *Wordsworths Prelude is the Egotism without the Sublime: Discuss*, I felt, when I got back my paper marked E or F or whatever, as if I were the stuttering horse lover and the rest of the class, with their As and Bs, were the smart-arsed parroting runts who had lost their souls. You could only write successfully about books and poems and plays if you didnt care, really care, about them. Hysterical schoolboy wank, for sure,

an attitude compounded of nothing but egotism, vanity and cowardice. But how deeply felt. I went through all my school days convinced of this, that literary studies were no more than a series of autopsies performed by heartless technicians. Worse than autopsies: biopsies. Vivisection. Even movies, which I love more than anything, more than life itself, they even do it with movies these days. You cant talk about movies now without a methodology. Once they start offering courses, you know the field is dead. History, I found, was safer ground for me: I didnt love Rasputin or Talleyrand or Charles the Fifth or Kaiser Bill. Who could? A

historian has the pleasant luxury of being able to point out, from the safety of his desk, where Napoleon ballsed up, how this revolution might have been avoided, that dictator toppled or those battles won. I found I could be most marvelously dispassionate with history, where everyone, by definition, is truly dead. Up to a point. Which brings us round to the telling of this tale. As a historian I should be able to offer a good plain account of the events that took place on the . . . well, when did they take place? It is all highly debatable.

When you become more familiar with the story you will understand the huge problems that confront me. A historian, someone said Burke, I think, if not Burke then Carlyle is a prophet looking backward. I cannot approach my story in that fashion. The puzzle that besets me is best expressed by the following statements. a: None of what follows ever happened b: All of what follows is entirely true Get your head round that one.

It means that it is my job to tell you the true story of what never happened. Perhaps thats a definition of fiction. I admit that this preamble must look rather tricky: I get as snortingly impatient as the next man when authors draw attention to their writerly techniques, and this sentence itself disappears even more deeply than most into the filthy elastic of its own narrative rectum, but theres nothing I can do about that. I saw a play the other week (plays are nothing to films, nothing. Theater is dead but sometimes I like to go and watch the corpse decompose) in which one of the characters said something like this, she said that the truth about things was like a bowl of fishhooks: you try to examine one little truth and the whole lot comes

out in a black and vicious bunch. I cant allow that to happen here. I have to do some unfastening and untangling, so that if the hooks do all come out in one go, they might at least emerge neatly linked, like a chain of paper clips. I feel then that I can confidently enough begin with this little series of connections: if it werent for a rotted clasp, an alphabetical adjacency and the predictably vile, thirst-making hangovers to which Alois was subject, then I would have nothing to tell you. So we may as well start at the point I have already claimed (and disclaimed) to be the beginning. There I lie, wondering like Keats, Was it a vision, or a

waking dream? Fled is that music, do I wake or sleep? Wondering too, why the Christ Jane isnt coiled warmly beside me. The clock tells me why. Its a quarter to nine. Shes never done this to me before. Never. I rush to the bathroom and rush out again, toothpaste dribbling down the corners of my mouth. Jane! I bubble. Jane, what the pants is going on? Its half-past nine! In the kitchen I snap on the kettle and frenzy around for coffee, sucking my peppermint fluoride lips in panic. An empty bag of Kenco and boxes and boxes and boxes of teas. Raspberry Rendezvous for Gods sake. Rendezvous? Orange Dazzler. Banana and Liquorice Dream. Nighttime Delight. Jesus, what is it with her? Every tea but tea tea. And not a bean or bag of coffee to be had. At the back of the cupboard . . . triumph, glory. Mwah! A big Aquafresh kiss for you, my darling.

Safeway Colombian Coffee, Fine Ground for Filters. All right! Back to the bedroom, hopping into cutoff denim. No time for boxers, no time for socks. Bare feet jammed into boat shoes, laces later. Into the kitchen again just as the kettle thumps itself off, bit of a hiss from so little water, but enough for a cup, easily enough for a cup. No! Oh damn it, no! No, no, no, no, no! Bitch. Sow. Cow. Angel. Double-bitch. Sweetness. Slag. Jane! Safeway Colombian Coffee, Fine Ground for Filters: Naturally Decaffeinated. Pants! Calm, Michael. Calm. Bleib ruhig, mein Sohn. I can keep it together. Im a graduate. A soon-to-be-doctored graduate. I wont be beaten by this. Not a little nonsense like this. Ha! Gotcha! Lightbulb-over-the-head, finger-snapping eureka, whos a clever boy? Yes . . . Those pills, those pep pills. Pro-Doz? No-Doz? Something like that.

Skidding into the bathroom, my brain half registers something. An important fact. Something amiss. Put it to one side. Time enough later. Where they go? Where they go? Here you are, you little buggers . . . yes, come to Mama . . . No-Doz. Stay alert. Ideal for exam revision, late nights, driving, etc. Each pill contains 50 mg caffeine. At the kitchen sideboard, like a London cokehead giggling in a nightclub toilet, I crush and grind and chop. The chunks of white pop and wink in the coffee mud as I pour the boiling water on. Safeway

Colombian Coffee, Fine Ground for Filters: Unnaturally Recaffeinated. Now thats coffee. A tad bitter perhaps, but real coffee, not Strawberry Soother or Nettle n Chamomile tisane. And you say I have no gumption, Jane hun? Ha! Wait till I tell you about this tonight. I outdid Paul Newman in Harper. All he did was recycle an old filter paper, yeah? A quarter to ten. Teaching at eleven. No panic. I stalk comfortably now, mug in hand into the spare room, quite in charge. Bloody showed her. The Apple is cold. A nannying

humming nag no more. Who knows when I may condescend to turn you on again, Maccie Thatcher? And there, on the desk, neatly squared, magnificently, obscenely thick, Das Meisterwerk itself. I keep my distance, just craning forward; we cannot allow even the tiniest drop of recaf to stain the glorious title page. FROM BRUNAU TO VIENNA: THE ROOTS OF POWER MICHAEL YOUNG, MA, M PHIL Way-hey! Four years. Four years and two hundred thousand words. Theres that bastard keyboard, so plastically dumb, so comically vacuous. QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM 1234567890 Nothing else to choose from. Just those ten numbers and twenty-six letters permuted into two hundred thousand words, a comma here and a semicolon there. Yet for a sixth of my life, a whole sixth of my life, by big beautiful Buddha, that keyboard clawed at me like cancer. Fiff-ha-hoo! Bit of a stretch and theres the morning workout. I sigh with pleasure and drift back to the kitchen. The 150 mg of caffeine has hit the ground running and breasted the blood-brain barrier with arms upraised. I am now awake. Pumpingly A-wake. Yes, I am now awake. Awake to everything. Awake to What Was Wrong in the bathroom. Awake to a piece of paper leaning up between the heel of last nights cheese and the empty wine bottle in the center of the kitchen table. Awake to the reason that at eight on the tit I was not, as I should have been, awake. Lets face it, Pup. Its not working. Ill call back for the rest of my things later today. Well sort out how much I owe you for the car. Congratulations on your thesis. Think about it for a while and youll know Im right. J. Even as I feel myself go through the necessary shock, rage and howls, a part of me registers relief, does instantly register relief, or if not relief an awareness certainly that this elegant little note accesses a smaller and less significant proportion of my emotions than have done the earlier absence of coffee or the possibility that I might have been allowed to oversleep or most especially now, the casual, the arrogant assumption that my car shall go to her. The explosion of fury, then, is mostly for forms sake, a kind of compliment to Jane in fact. The hurling of the wine bottle the wine bottle, the celebratory wine bottle, the wine bottle I had so carefully chosen at Oddbins the night before, the Chateaufeuf du Pape that I had worked toward for a sixth part of my whole life is a gesture therefore, a necessary theatrical acknowledgment that the ending of our three years together has earned at least some noise and some spectacle. When she returns for her things she will spy the elegant curved streak of rusty sediment along the kitchen wall and her big feet will crunch on the glass and she will derive some satisfaction from believing that I cared and that will be that. JaneMichael have ceased to be and now there is Jane and there is Michael and Michael is, at last, Somebody. Somebody, as Lennon would have it, in his own Write. So. In the study, picking up the Meisterwerk, weighing it in my hands, ready to push it delicately into my briefcase, I suddenly goggle, with Roger Rabbit starting eyes to the accompaniment of a loud klaxon, at a small speck on the title page: it has erupted from nowhere like an old surfies melanoma, just in the short time I was in the kitchen hurling wine bottles. Its not a spot of coffee, I am sure of that, perhaps just a flaw in the paper that only the strong May sunlight can expose. No time to boot up the computer and reprint, so I snatch a bottle of Liquid Paper, touch the tip of the brush to this naughty little freckle and blow gently. Holding the paper by the edges I go outside and hold it against the sun. It is enough. Twill serve. There by the telegraph pole is the space where the Renault should be. You bitch! Oh dear. Bad move. Sorry! Little delivery girl veers and races away, thrust over the handlebars remembering every terrible story she ever glimpsed on the front of the newspapers she daily dumps onto the doormats. Telling mummy on you. Oh dear. Better give her time or shell think Im following and that wont do. I dont know why we have to have a newspaper delivery in the first place. Jane is a newspaper junkie, thats the fact of the matter. We even get the Cambridge Evening News delivered. Every afternoon. I mean, please. I turn and wheel out the bicycle from the passageway. The ticking of the wheels pleases me. Hell, I am young. I am free. My teeth are clean. In my noble old school briefcase there nestles a future. Nestles the future. The sun shines. To hell with everything else. Revue de presse "Stephen Fry at his twinkling best" (Sunday Times) "His best novel yet ... an extravagant, deeply questioning work of science fiction" (GQ) "A sci-fi comedy that is also a time-travel thriller, constantly topical and always surprising... packed with the author's personal enthusiasm and hatreds, the former red-hot and the latter icy-black" (Literary ) "A powerful imaginative pull that keeps the pages turning while the tea goes cold and the cat gets the goldfish" (The Independent) "A sprightly and entertaining read" (Daily Telegraph)