



## Hawwood Books Blog : November 2019

### Election Speak

If Dr. Johnson (not Boris) were alive today, he would have to seriously consider revising his dictionary. Perhaps current lexicographers are doing just that. It's impossible to listen to any political discussions without having to reconsider the meanings of certain words and phrases. Here are some examples:

- PLEDGE: a general suggestion or gesture towards a particular course of action
- PROMISE: a general suggestion or gesture towards a particular course of action
- MANIFESTO: pledges and promises
- REFERENDUM: a wishlist based on a PROMISE
- HAND ON HEART: trying desperately to explain e.g. why black is white
- WITH RESPECT: a phrase indicating extreme dismissiveness
- BORROWING: the idea of prudent loans to be repaid within ten or so generations
- PRUDENT: way out of control
- REAL CHANGE: replacing one flawed system with another; also, nostalgia
- HOMEOWNER: a rare species of homo sapiens laying claim to clods of Earth
- AUSTERITY: a kind of stingy affluence

There is, seriously, a depressingly intentional misuse of language during electioneering which, as one of the characters in *Professional Foul* by Tom Stoppard says, obscures truth as much as reveals it. I'm not sure you can get away with this in literature. Despite the cliché that truth is stranger than fiction, there is often more truth in fiction than reality. How can this be? Any novel worth its salt creates a world true to itself, and if it doesn't the reader feels cheated and the book fails. Truth is elusive, and sometimes shapeshifts depending on perspective. Writers have more time to consider it and seek for it, but during elections especially, it goes awol when it's most needed.