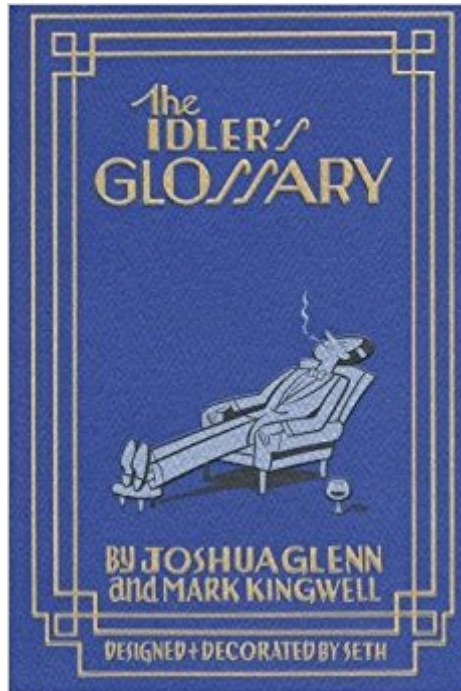




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The Idler's Glossary



Synopsis

"Dawdler." "Layabout." "Shit-heel." "Loser." For as long as mankind has had to work for a living, which is to say ever since the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, people who work have disparaged those who prefer not to. Mark Kingwell's introductory essay offers a playful defence of the idler as homo superior, while Joshua Glenn's glossary playfully explores the etymology and history of hundreds of idler-specific terms and phrases, while offering both a corrective to popular misconceptions about idling and a foundation for a new mode of thinking about working and not working. The Idler's Glossary is destined to become The Devil's Dictionary for the idling classes, necessary reading for any and all who wish to introduce more truly "free" time into their daily lives.

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"It fulminates most entertainingly against labour and industrial amusement, pays happy respect to its guiding spirits Lin Yutang and Henry Miller, gambols gaily in etymological thickets ("otiose" is drawn from the Latin for the noble concept of leisure), and poses crucial questions for further research ("whether snoozing is more akin to dozing or napping")." [The Guardian](#) "This delightful chapbook proffers a puckish twofer: a whimsically learned defense of indolence and flaneurship...and an engagingly etymological lexicon of loafing, past and present." [The Atlantic](#) "Mark Kingwell's splendidly informative, substantial introductory essay tells us much about the multifarious benefits that accrue to those who idle; it alone makes The

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Nigel Beale

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The best part of this little book should not be so; you do not expect and cannot expect that the prologue play that role. It is a thoughtful, deep piece of philosophy, but then, in what should be the core of the book, we have just a row of definitions that are sometimes funny, sometimes deep and many times neither of them. Even so is the kind of book you can revisit from time to time to read ...the prologue.

Mark Kingwell's short introduction is why you should get this book. The rest of the book I don't really get. It's a glossary of terms related to idling. It tries to be clever and amusing, but when you are writing a glossary, you are a bit constrained by how clever and amusing you can be. Again, I don't get it, so instead I'm going to talk about Kingwell's (standard-format, thank you) introduction.

1) One of Kingwell's tasks is to explain that there is a difference between not working and *failing* to work: "The slacker in effect combines procrastination and boredom into a single experience, under the rubric of evasion. Procrastination, like boredom, involves a stall between first-order desires and

second-order desires: both want to want to do something, but find they do not. They are stuck. The difference between them lies only in how they experience this stall, either as a burden of always putting things off (procrastination) or as a burden of not being excited (boredom). The idler, by contrast, experiences no conflict or stall between desires and desires about those desires. He understands that not working and failing to work are conditions that lie poles apart, and the genius of idling is not its avoidance of work but rather its construction of a value system entirely independent of work."

2) But what exactly does it even mean to "work"? The work-ethic condemnation of idleness as unproductive is familiar; it is rooted in the even older notion that morose idleness is sinful, an insult to God's grace. The shared idea in both secular and religious versions of the condemnation is that if one is not engaged in some useful occupation - if one is not working for gain of some sort, whether money or status or progress in the soul's journey - then one is committing a kind of failure: to self, to community, to supreme being, or to all three. The presuppositions of this view have been comprehensively dismantled by many philosophers by noting just how unfulfilling and stupid most work actually is. What, after all, is work? "Work is of two kinds," Bertrand Russell notes: "first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so. The first kind is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite extension: there are not only those who give orders, but those who give advice as to what orders should be given. Usually two opposite kinds of advice are given simultaneously by two organized bodies of men; this is called politics."

3) I loved this quote. Kingwell called this "the error of all advertising and most culture": "Contrary to received wisdom, there is no escape from the dismal condition of boredom via further stimulation of desire. Boredom is desire stalled, the "paradoxical wish for a desire" as Adam Phillips has phrased it; the stall is a signal that something has gone wrong with desire, perhaps something big that we need to confront but which under current conditions we cannot."

People are too busy these days, and people have always been too busy. Except for the idle. Regarded with disdain by most of society, An Idler's Glossary (available for free online as well, if your idleness has left you without \$) makes the case, and quite convincingly, that true idlers, not the lazy, and not the slackers, but true idlers are worthy of our respect and deserve to be emulated. You're surrounded by people who work too much. You probably work too much. Why? There is literally no reason. Stop working so much and have a good time. Or spend time with your family. Or your friends. If everyone was an idler everything would be great. Just read this and watch your free

time explode. "Oscar Wilde's infamous languidness was just a pose."

Fun, quirky little book. Tidbits like the etymology of the term "bum" - apparently, General Sherman troop hangers-on and from the German for drifter. Nice illustrations and a terrific introduction with references to boredom and philosophy (Schopenhauer/Aristotle's thoughts on the subject).

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